

OPENING TIMES



The FREE CAMRA Regional Magazine covering Stockport; Central, East & South Manchester; Tameside; N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield

CHESHIRE RING NEW BEARTOWN PUB – OPEN AT LAST!

THE CHESHIRE RING in Hyde finally opened its doors on Friday 26 September with the official opening the following day.

Delays with the legal processes had held up the opening of this latest addition to the Beartown Brewery estate for some months but it is fair to say that the wait has certainly been worthwhile. The pub itself has a honourable history as an outlet for cask ales with at one time over 20 handpumps on the bar. This large number of beers brought quality problems in its wake and for many years it had been something of a backwater until Beartown came on the scene.

Guest beers will also feature as Beartown arranges 'swaps' with other micros – Duncan is looking forward to RCH beers being available shortly. The range is completed by traditional cider and perry – it is hoped that both will be available and stored in the cellar to ensure cool pints. Food will become available in stages as trade increases and in common with the rest of the operation, the emphasis will be on quality using only freshly cooked ingredients. A large blackboard in the main



As we featured in June's Opening Times, the tenants are Duncan and Rachel Ward who come to the pub with an enviable record of running good pubs and selling fine beers and wines (the wine cellar at the Cheshire Ring will also be something special, we hear). They have been joined in the operation by newly recruited beer enthusiast bar manager Stephen Wyllie and our photograph shows the team behind the bar at the newly opened pub.



Of the pub itself, a surprising amount of the original layout and fittings remain intact, with particular noteworthy tiling on both walls and entrance corridor floor. There are two rooms to the left, a pool room at the back and a large no-smoking room at the front. The main bar counter serves large right-hand room (part of which is also no-smoking) and currently boasts six handpumps dispensing the Beartown range along with the quality draught and bottle foreign beers that are part and parcel of the Beartown operation.

Decorated in a traditional and comfortable style, the Cheshire Ring should be a smash hit – it's certainly the best thing to hit Hyde since Geoff Oliver opened the Sportsman. The pub is on Manchester Road close to the junction with Clark Way. It's only a short walk from Hyde town centre, bus 201 from Manchester runs past the door and Hyde Central station is only a couple of minute's walk away – so you've no excuse not to pay it a visit.

room will give details of beers and food which becomes available. To date it has been available at lunchtimes and Saturday evening – reports are that the Friday lunch-time trade has been brisk.

CIDER & PERRY MONTH



Members of the Campaign for Real Ale this month launched a campaign to boost the market for real ciders and perries from Britain's largely unknown independent producers. National Cider Month began on 1 October and the consumer group is calling for pub owners to offer their customers a real cider or perry during the month.

Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns and Communications said, "It's a matter of choice. The biggest two cider producers have about 90% of the market while over one hundred independent producers share the remaining 10%. CAMRA wants to see more real ciders on sale in local pubs and is calling on pub companies to make it a policy to allow their pub tenants to stock at least one real cider or perry throughout the month of October."

CAMRA believes this will lead to a greater knowledge and appreciation of real cider amongst drinkers weaned on the usual mass-produced national brands.

Mike Benner added, "Real ciders and perries are a natural living product made using nothing more than fruit and water. It is the different methods and varieties of fruit which give each one a unique and distinctive taste and aroma which cannot possibly be matched by the bland pasteurized national ciders."

"We want people to be able to try a real cider or perry in their local pub. We think they'll be bowled over by how good they taste and urge the landlord to stock them on a regular basis. Small producers can't compete with the huge national producers and it's up to consumers to demand the real thing in their local."

CAMRA locally has arranged for a wider than usual range of ciders and perries to be available in the four Stockport outlets that regularly stock them – see details of our 'Cider Circuit' inside on pages 16 & 17.

October's OPENING TIMES

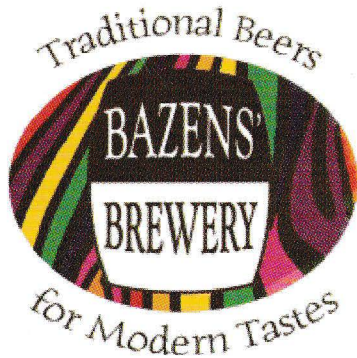
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CAMRA
CAMPAIGN
FOR REAL ALE
STOCKPORT AND
SOUTH MANCHESTER
BRANCH

6,600 CIRCULATED
THIS MONTH

CAMRA 2004 GOOD BEER GUIDE - OUT NOW - PAGE 5



FlatbaC 4.2% (Beer of the Festival, Stockport, 2003)
 Esd 4.4% (Sept/Oct) Freshers' Special 5.5%
 Blue Bullet 4.5% Black Pig Mild 3.6%
 (Bronze Award for Mild, Champion Beer of Britain, 2003)
 Pacific Bitter 3.8% Best 4.3% (New recipe)

Regular outlets include
 The King's Arms, The Albert Vaults & The Crescent, Salford,
 The Trackside, Bury, Waters Green & The Sun Inn, Macclesfield,
 Corbieres, The Marble Arch, Knott Bar & Bar Centro, Manchester,
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For more info, please see www.bazensbrewery.co.uk, phone
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PUB OF THE MONTH OCTOBER 2003

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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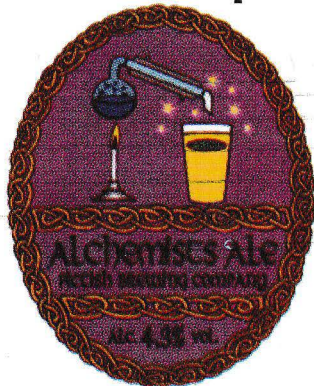
The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for October 2003 will be presented to the Old Star Inn on High Street, Cheadle.

The fortunes of the Old Star in Cheadle changed last November with the arrival of Mary Nastari and her partner Tony Hughes. Mary had previously worked as an assistant manager in the Victoria in Withington where she had tuned her management skills under the exacting eye of Edgar Ambrose. The Old Star is Mary and Tony's first pub; in which they had chosen a pub that was badly in need of improvement and much hard work. In need of immediate attention was the cellar, which was thoroughly cleaned with particular attention being paid to the beer lines to ensure that good beer; from now on, would be guaranteed. These changes marked the start of a continuing programme of improvements; which have included the re-painting and decorating of the pub, new carpets, improved lighting, new beer engines and new beer lines, and the extension of the pub into the old kitchen. Whilst we are on the list of improvements made, not let us forget the re-siting of the lamppost that the council inadvertently positioned almost directly outside the entrance to the pub. Thankfully, common sense eventually prevailed and the lamppost has been moved, albeit after much tortuous negotiation. Impressive though these changes are, they are in themselves not enough to merit a pub of the month award. The extra ingredient that singles out the Old Star as a winner is the way in which Mary and Tony have hauled the pub up to become one of the very best locals' pubs in the area. Special attractions such as the race day out to Haydock park; the pensioners Christmas party, live entertainment and a particularly warm and very friendly welcome have seen customers return to the pub in droves. Add to this the huge improvement in the beer quality and range of beers sold, and you are on to a winner. Mary told Opening Times that in less than twelve months both beer sales and turnover have doubled. Speaking of beer, the Old Star now sells Hydes Light, Bitter, and Hydes seasonal craft ales in superb condition. In every respect, this is a pub that is much improved, and that the award of CAMRA pub of the month is well deserved. So why not join CAMRA to celebrate this richly deserved award which will be presented to Mary and Tony on Thursday 30th



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www.pictish-brewing.co.uk

The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.

IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

For over a decade, October has been a special month for cider lovers. Thanks to the environmental group Common Ground, Apple Day has become a national success, with events all over the country that, in most cases, have allowed the public a rare glimpse of traditional cider and perry.

What's interesting about Apple Day is that it isn't a PR-driven pseudo-event backed by promotional millions, but a genuine coming together of ordinary people who have found something real to celebrate. Now CAMRA has named October its own Cider Month. It's a great opportunity not just to promote a product but to proclaim a whole way of life that is free from hype, artificiality, and manipulation. For what could be more honest than real cider or perry? You pick your fruit; you mill it; you press it and you ferment the juice. It's as simple as that. While some have suggested that CAMRA should abandon its cider and perry campaigning, locally we have always been strong supporters of these most traditional of products. And by so, doing we have demonstrated that there is demand for real cider and perry in perhaps the most unlikely locations. Stockport is a long way from the West Country, cider's traditional heartland, and yet we have four pubs regularly stocking traditional draught cider and perry, we boast the only cidemaker in the north west, and the ratio of cider to beer sales at Stockport Beer Festival is perhaps the highest anywhere.

There is still much to do, in particular we need to persuade our local family brewers that they, too, could make real cider and perry available to those of their pubs that want it.

In the meantime, let's all work hard to make Cider Month a success and in particular, I hope that many OT readers will visit the pubs on our Cider Circuit, all currently flying the flag for tradition and quality. Out thanks go to all the participating pubs for supporting this initiative.

★ ★ ★ ★

This month, Opening Times spreads its wings again and we welcome new readers in the Trafford area. If you haven't seen Opening Times before, I hope you like what you see. If you don't, then please let us know. And please remember, news, views and articles are always welcome.

John Clarke

★ ★ ★ ★

Many of our readers and advertisers noticed a change to smoother paper in our last issue, and no doubt many of you will have noticed the introduction of colour on eight pages this month. (Sharper eyed readers will also be aware of new typefaces and masthead). Whilst we intend these changes to be permanent, it all depends on the continuing support and generosity of our advertisers. Let us know what you think. We will also be publishing later each month, at the end of the second full week, until January.

Paul Hutchings

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 234

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editors: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ (0161) 477 1973; Paul Hutchings, 8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport Cheshire, SK4 2NP. ☎ & Fax (0161) 432 8384. News, articles and letters welcome. All editorial items may be submitted in most popular WP formats or preferably ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!) or CD-R, or via e-mail to johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com Adverts or photos should be "hard copy" or in CorelDraw 3,5 or 7 (*.cdr) format or TIFF or EPS files (submit printed proofs for checking and ensure that any "include all fonts" options are on). All editorial items © CAMRA: may be reproduced if source acknowledged. All Advertising images are copyright the respective design sources (Largely CPPR, but all other copyrights and trademarks acknowledged).

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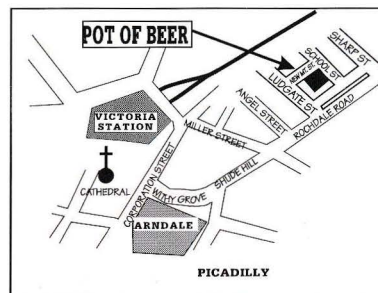


2002
Navy
Gold Medal

POT OF BEER

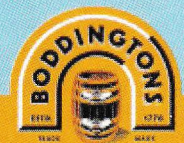
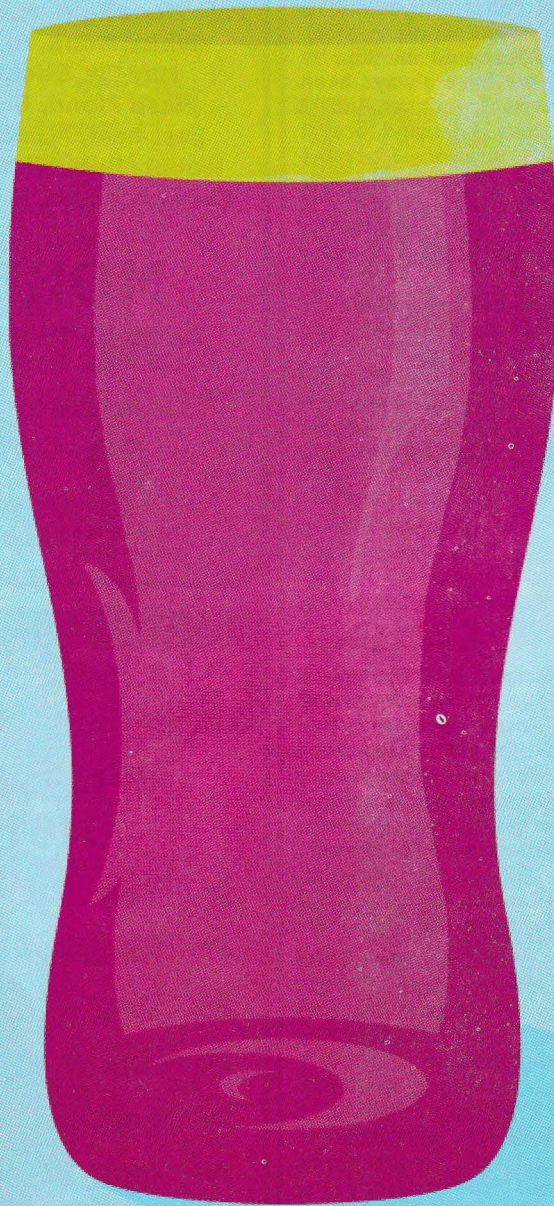
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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CIDER MAKER

SEIDR DAI'S DAVE MATTHEWS INVITES YOU TO JOIN HIM FOR A GOOD, HARD PANK.

8am Sunday morning, November. The alarm goes off. Think: 'Bloody stupid idea, this cidermaking'.

9am. Six or so friends and family arrive at my house in suburban Cardiff. With a collective hangover, we all think: 'Bloody stupid idea, this cidermaking'. But we all set off, nevertheless, in a rag-tag car convoy.

10am. Arrive at Oak Farm, with its ancient and tranquil orchard. More enthusiastic now, we descend upon one tree, and take it in turns to shake the apples off with an elongated hook called a 'panking pole'. The same old jokes are trotted out, 'you're a top panker', 'well panked', etc, etc. Points are scored for panking fruit that hits your 'friends' on the head. Sound fruit is hand-picked into buckets, and thence poured into net sacks.

11am. Time to refuel with coffee and choccy biscuits, which gives us a chance to take in the panorama of rural Monmouthshire, with its rolling hills and circling buzzards. Jennifer, the orchard owner, arrives on her quad bike. Apples and children are loaded into the trailer, and the squealing load is bumped and rattled up to the farmhouse. The fruit-human cargo is transferred to car boots, and we hit the road once more.

12 noon. Arrive at Broome Farm, where we are met by genial, smiling Mike and his extended family. Unload the fruit at the Pressing Shed, and then repair to the Old Orchard for lunch. Packed lunches are eaten on straw bales, and a bottle or two of last season's champagne-style perry is shared around.

1pm. Like a well-oiled machine (we wish!) the Seidr Dai crew take up their positions in the Pressing Shed. First the fruit is washed in a steel trough, and any dodgy apples are picked out and discarded. The mill is tractor-powered, so 'Larry the Loader' is started up, and apples poured into the hopper at the top of the mill are soon coming out of the bottom as gloriously sweet-smelling pulp. Next, the pulp is ladled onto the press, and wrapped in a porous cloth to make a flat, square parcel. Once a dozen or so layers are piled up, Larry again provides the muscle to power the hydraulic press, and apple juice pours out through the cloth, draining away into a line of waiting buckets. From the buckets into 7 gallon drums, which are stowed safely in the car boot. Watching the juice pour from the press is mesmeric, and a spare glass catches some for a quick taster. Clear and golden, rich in fermentable sugar, but with balancing tannin and acidity. Nectar indeed.

4pm. Finished at last, we sit knackered but happy in Mike's cider cellar. Our host pours samples of exquisite cider and perry from his rows of wooden barrels, and we murmur our appreciation. Walking to the cars the sunset sky is banded gold, orange and purple, and we think to ourselves: 'Bloody good idea, this cidermaking!'

Seidr Dai is one of eleven cidemaker members of the Welsh Cider Society. To find out more, see www.welshcider.co.uk

THE CIDER CIRCUIT

To celebrate CAMRA's Cider and Perry Month and also to mark **Apple Day on 21 October**, Stockport & South Manchester Branch are promoting the Stockport 'Town Centre Cider Circuit'.

Running from 18 to 26 October, the initiative aims to increase the range of ciders available in the town centre and also promote the product in general. The four participating pubs will feature promotional material including a fact sheet with 'Cider FAQs' as well as, in some cases, an enhanced range of ciders and perries available.

The participating pubs are:

- ★ **Crown, Heaton Lane** – one cask cider or perry available
- ★ **Navigation, Lancashire Hill** – up to five ciders and perries will be available for the Circuit
- ★ **Olde Vic, Chatham St, Edgeley** – the regular handpumped Westons will be joined by an additional cider and a perry
- ★ **Railway, Portwood** – the regular cider will be joined by an additional draught cider or perry along with a number of bottled ciders.

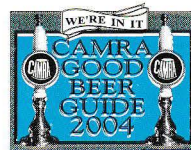
This means that during the week no less than eleven different draught ciders and perries will be available to try. If you are already a fan, then this is a treat not to be missed. If you are a novice, then this is the ideal time to try one of these superb traditional drinks.

Our thanks go to local cider maker and supplier John Reek for sourcing these additional ciders. If this year's event is a success then next year we will be aiming to make it bigger and better next time round.

OTHER LOCAL CIDER OUTLETS

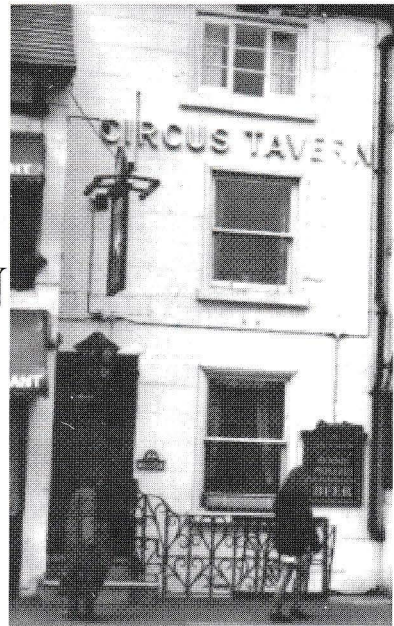
Apart from the four Stockport pubs mentioned above, there are a number of other pubs selling real cider and perry. These include:

- ★ **Stalybridge Station Buffet**
- ★ **Ramsays Bar, Burlington Road, Buxton** – two available with one always on handpump.
- ★ **Wye Bridge (Wetherspoons), Buxton** – Westons Old Rosie.
- ★ **Navigation, Buxworth** – Saxon Cider from West Yorkshire
- ★ **Globe, Glossop** – a new outlet where cider is selling well
- ★ **Cheshire Ring, Manchester Rd, Hyde** – this new Beartown pub will have both a cider and a perry available
- ★ **Sportsman, Mottram Rd, Hyde** – usually has a guest cider available
- ★ **Marble Arch, Rochdale Rd, Manchester** – one real cider usually available
- ★ **Pot Of Beer, New Mount Street, Manchester** – one guest cider, often Moles Black Rat, available.
- ★ **The Knott, Deansgate, Manchester** – always has one and often two real ciders available
- ★ **White Hart, Market St, Mottram** – a changing guest cider
- ★ **Waters Green, Macclesfield** – usually has a guest cider available



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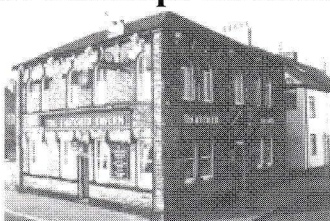


**A CRACKING PINT OF TETLEYS
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STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA
PUB OF THE MONTH - SEPTEMBER 2003

THATCHED TAVERN

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**NEW TENANTS
DUNCAN &
LENNETTE
SHENTON
Welcome All**

**BODDINGTONS BITTER,
TETLEY BITTER
& DARK MILD IN CASK**



THEAKSTONS BUY BACK MASHAM BREWERY



The big news this month, of course, has to be Theakstons. Unbelievably, one of the most famous names in British brewing is to return to family ownership almost 20 years after it lost its independence. The 176-year old Theakston's brewery in Masham, North Yorkshire, was taken over in 1984 by Matthew Brown of Blackburn, which in turn was sold to Scottish & Newcastle. One member of the founding dynasty, Paul Theakston, split off in 1992 to found the highly successful Black Sheep Brewery which continues to operate just across the road from the old family firm.

But others stayed put – and now brothers Simon, Nick, Tim and Edward Theakston, great-great grandsons of the founder, and Colin Wood, a former MD of Theakston's are to buy back the brewery. The deal, set to be completed early this month, will see S&N keep a minority shareholding, and continue to distribute the company's portfolio of cask ales. It will also continue to brew Theakstons beers in Newcastle, although neither side is saying how long that arrangement would last.

While CAMRA has welcomed the creation of a new force in independent brewing, it says this must throw more doubts on ScotCo's long-term commitment to the sector. Brewing Industry Campaigns Director John Holland welcomed the deal but sounded a note of caution: "Perhaps of most importance, this sell-off means that ScotCo is abandoning a major cask brand and we must question even more its commitment to the future of real ale as a mainstream product."

FAMILY FAVOURITES

The local family brewers also have some new beers out this month, the latest in their seasonal ranges.

The current seasonal from Robinson's is Cooper's Bell, a 4% session beer, back for the third time. Next month will see the return of another favourite, Robin Bitter, a 4.5% full-bodied beer that has been one of the more successful of the company's seasonals. Last month also saw the start of the annual Old Tom season – this classic barley wine will now be with us until next May.



Lees current seasonal is Razzmatazz, a 4.4% beer brewed with a mixture of British and American hops. Unusually, it's a dark beer with complex liquorice and chocolate notes from a generous use of chocolate malt. It really is very good indeed and arguably the best of Lees 2003 crop of seasonals. Next month, though, sees the return of another favourite, Plum Pudding, a 4.8% rich, dark beer brewed with a hint of fruit – an excellent beer for the festive season. Check out both these beers in outlets such as Rain Bar in the City Centre and the Lloyds Hotel in Chorlton. Hydes have gone all fruity, too. The current craft ale, Kirkin Fruity is a 4.5% beer



with the addition of raspberries, and has been very well-received. Next month brings the last in the 'Fine Beers in the Making' series of craft ales. Rompers Rein at 5% promises to be a treat with a combination of roast barley, black malts and hints of fruit and spice. Look out for it in pubs such as the Nursery, Heaton Norris and the Victoria, Withington.



After a short delay caused by problems with the pumpclip design, Holts new seasonal beer is out the third week of this month. Patersons is named after James Ralston Paterson, the founder of the Paterson research laboratory at Christie's Hospital, and will be on sale in many of Holts pubs. For every pint sold, 20p will be donated to the hospital. The 4% beer is brewed with Challenger hops, a touch of honey and has a reddish hue.

NEW MICROS

Stockport's new Three Rivers Brewery has suffered a set-back in that the proposed premises in Offerton have fallen through. The good news is that a new site has been found in Reddish but this unforeseen hitch has set plans back a few weeks and the





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18th Annual Rag Beer Festival

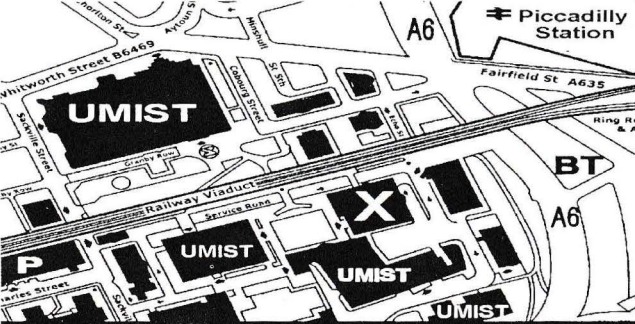
Weds 22nd - Sat 25th October
Open 4pm till 2am every day

50 Cask ales, milds and porters plus a selection of cider, perry and imported lagers.

Entry only £3 and includes commemorative pint glass. Re entry on other nights just £1.

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£1 off entry with this advert or CAMRA membership card

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beers are now unlikely to be available until early November. But still they come. By the time you read this, the new Millstone Brewery in Mossley will be in production. The first two beers are planned to be Three Shires, a 4% light, hoppy beer, and Millstone Edge, a 4.5% fuller-bodied, copper-coloured brew. Look for a full report on this new venture in next month's Opening Times.

MORE MICRO NEWS

As usual here is our monthly round-up from some of the local micros. The usual apologies for those we couldn't contact this time.

Phoenix – the work on the Heywood brewery is almost complete (so OT will be paying a visit in time for next month's issue). There are several new beers out this month including Last Leaf (4.5%), Firecracker (4.7%), Rip Rap (4.1%) – this was superb when tried last year, Spooky Brew (4.7%) and Uncle Fester (4.5%). Look out for all of these at the Crown, Heaton lane with its dedicated Phoenix pump (as well as dedicated Bank Top, Whim and Pictish pumps).



Pictish – last month saw a new beer from Pictish. Black Shiver was a 6% stout and was, frankly, gob-smackingly good. It's all gone now, and brewer Richard Sutton doesn't know when he'll be brewing it again. Fear not, though – he's currently brewing Samhain, his 5% dry stout and this will be followed up by the welcome return of Pictish Porter for the winter. The standard special this month is Alchemists Ale, a 4.3% straw-coloured beer with the familiar Pictish hop-attack in the finish.



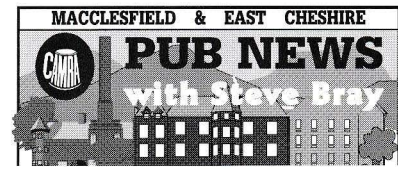
Ramsbottom Brewery – has a new beer out soon to mark the brewery's first anniversary. Brewer Paul Robinson hasn't thought of a name yet but tells us that it will be a 4.2% light, straw-coloured beer brewed with a combination of Fuggles, Challenger, Cascade and Mount Hood hop varieties.

Leyden – demand for Brendan Leyden's beers is such that he has had to buy a new 5-barrel fermenter and extend the copper to double the brewery's capacity. A new honey beers is in the pipeline, too. Nangreave Nectar will be a about 4.5% and should be out by the time you read this.



Bazens – the new monthly special is going to be called £sd (pounds, shilling and pence which has some relation to scales/Libra). It will be available from Monday 13th October. The single hop this time is Brewers' Gold and it will be 4.4%. Also, the Freshers' Special is available again until January and such has been the popularity of Blue Bullet this 4.5% beer will now be brewed on a regular basis. Finally, the new recipe Best Bitter (4.3% instead of 4.5%) is available now. Richard Bazens has changed the recipe to one based on Holt Plant & Deakin's Entire, which he used to brew in the Midlands. The first batch has gone down really well, we are told.

Boggart Hole Clough – this month's special is Sunlight a 3.6% light pale ale with hints of rye and lemon citrus. The next brew of the powerful Rocket Fuel is also in the pipeline, with a projected strength of 15%!.



To start we'd just like to wish a speedy recovery to Barry Gilpin of the Queens in Bollington, who has been taken seriously ill and is hospital at the time of writing, and to John Lythaby who has broken his ankle and is stuck in a hospital on the Isle of Man.

The Ship at Wincle had a successful beer festival over the August Bank Holiday weekend, was voted Pub Of The Season and now has Black Cat Mild on all the time. The St Dunstan's in Langley has recently changed hands and has been redecorated. It is also selling guest beers - Roosters on a recent visit.

Beartown Brewery has now moved and the grand opening of the new brewery is to be held late October.

The Railway in Handforth is reportedly changing hands soon, although this did not appear as a vacancy on Robinson's web site so we can only assume that they already have someone in mind to take it over.

The Redway Tavern, Kerridge saga continues - a further planning permission application has been submitted to convert it into 2 dwellings, with 'a wild flower meadow' in place of the car park.



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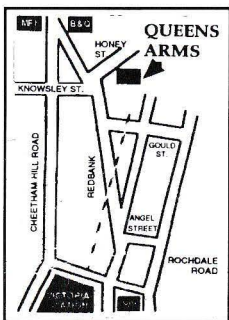
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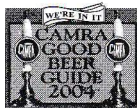
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STAGGER

with Karen Wainwright & Mark McConachie

CHEADLE HULME

The starting point of the stagger was the **Kenilworth** on Cheadle Road, a Scottish and Newcastle John Barras branded pub. Dating back to the 50's, it is a family dining estate pub with a varied food menu. It is very large pub, "v" shaped, plushly furnished with mellow lighting and very comfortable surroundings with a pool playing area to one end. It also sports a no smoking area. The two beers on, both being declared as excellent, were Jennings Cross Buttock and Everards Equinox. The licensee here keeps his beer extremely well. The Kenilworth was considered an excellent start to the stagger. On an amusing note one of our party on a previous occasion asked for a pint of Bass but was served a pint of Labatts as the bar staff miss heard him! He only realised this after tasting it and promptly returned it!

Next on the itinerary was the **Hesketh Tavern** on Hulme Hall Road. Named after the Hesketh family, and an ex Watneys Pub, it is a twin gabled property with two large raised drinking areas front and rear. It was fairly quiet in here at 8.15pm. The beers on offer were Theakstons Best Bitter, John Smith's and a guest beer, Jennings Cross Buttock. The latter being "fairly good" but was not on as excellent a form as at the Kenilworth. The John Smiths though was very poor, smelling strongly of vinegar. When one of our party took it back, rather than replace it willingly, he was informed by the bar staff "That's how it is meant to smell" - not a good exercise in customer relations! No one sampled the Theakstons.

We then continued to the **Church Inn** on Ravenoak Road. This was the August 2003 Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA pub of the month. An excellent pub with a mixed clientele. It was extremely busy and the fact that we were only just able to grab some seats in the vault is a testament to its popularity. Beers were from the

Robinson's range: - Best Bitter, Hatters Mild & Old Stockport. All on good form especially the mild. Externally the building looks just like a country cottage. It is low ceilinged, very cosy, with wood panelled front bar rooms. There is an excellent food menu and the back room, which doubles up as "Edwardo's Restaurant", serves food until 8pm daily. Earlier finishing time on a Sunday.

Next pub directly across the road was the **Governors House**, formerly the Ravenoak hotel. A large country house type building set in its own grounds. This is the only Hardy & Hanson's outlet in the Stockport area, acquired by them in late 2000. It was extremely busy almost full to bursting point. We were glad to be able to make use of one of several attractive outdoor drinking areas. Internally much use has been made of dark wood, panelling, and screens. Extremely tastefully furnished. There is a very popular food menu served till 9pm apart from Sunday's when there is a carvery served until approximately 7pm. The beer was Hardy & Hansons Olde Trip, Kimberley Classic, & Boddingtons. The Boddingtons wasn't sampled. Both the Olde Trip and Classic were on good form. The school uniform-style outfits worn by the female bar staff certainly captured the attention of some of our party...

After the males in the party had calmed down we headed up to the **Cheadle Hulme**. The pub is situated next to Cheadle Hulme Station. Having suffered from a fallow period following the opening of the Kings Hall a Wetherspoons pub just down the road it now seems to have found it's feet again. The mixed clientele was described as "an eclectic crowd from pool playing youngsters to grizzled war veteran mild drinkers"! I wonder if the mild drinkers in our gathering could identify with that description? The beers were Holts Bitter and Holts Mild. Both scored well. Two members of the party rating the Mild as excellent. Internal decoration is very Laura Ashley. The food menu is good and varied.

The next pub on the stagger was to have been the **Kings Hall**. (J D Wetherspoons). However an advance recce discovered that it was ten deep at the bar and only had two real ales available despite advertising delights such as Ringwood Forty Niner, Courage Directors, Green King Abbot Ale, Spitfire and Boddingtons Bitter. Possibly the crowds had drunk it dry but either way it was decided it would not be worth the effort to visit here.

From here the party bifurcated the conclusion of the stagger. Some went on to the **Conway** on Turves Road. Previously this was a very below average pub. However since its acquisition by Hydes in 2002 and under its present management the pub has come on by leaps and bounds. The large, open-plan pub is due for major refurbishment shortly. It has recently run a well-received mini beer festival and there is a very friendly atmosphere with clientele of all ages. The offerings here were Hyde's Bitter and their current seasonal ale, Firkin Fruity. The Firkin Fruity was on excellent form and was a superb beer to end the stagger with.

The other half of the stagger went onto the **March Hare** on Mill Lane, just off Ladybrook Road via a handy footpath that runs parallel to the railway line. This takes you past horses grazing placidly and also gives you a good view of Seven Arches viaduct; this latter piece of architecture now features in new lamppost adornments that herald the beginning of the village. When you get to the March Hare (formerly the Old Mill), you can easily imagine yourself being in the country as it so peaceful, with the only sounds being the occasional passing train and the burble of running water from the adjacent Ladybrook stream. The pub is very much in the style of 'posh rustic' with a strong emphasis upon food, it isn't in the 'family dining' bracket, however. It is definitely more staid and a class above the type of venue where raucous children make a nuisance of themselves. The kitchen had closed as the hour was well past ten, so there were only a few people remaining. Boddies bitter and Draught Bass were the liquid offerings; all of us plumped for the Bass which we found to be quite agreeable. Settling ourselves at a large round table, we could admire the pleasant and comfortable surroundings that the Hare offered. We had thought of ending the crawl at the Cross Keys but time was against us.



Steve, Johanne, Molly & sometimes Jess welcome you to

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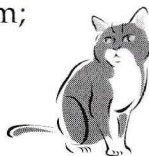
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BELGIAN BEERS

Belgium is famous for producing some of the world's finest and most idiosyncratic beers, many of which are also extremely strong. For our second round of tasting, we chose some of the better-known Belgian brews which are available in local supermarkets. As before, the beers were all tasted blind, with only the person who bought them knowing what they were in advance.

Beer 1 - Leffe Brune 6.5% ABV (£3.00, 75 cl)

A fairly dark beer, with the typical strong carbonation of Belgian top-fermenting ales, although this one was not bottle-conditioned. A toffee smell, leading to a rich flavour with caramel notes and a hint of banana, and a dry aftertaste. Although a pleasant beer, this was felt to be a little lacking in body and not really drinking its strength.

Beer 2 - Hoegarden Grand Cru 8.7% ABV (£1.60, 33 cl)

A pale and intentionally cloudy beer. A complex mix of flavours, with a distinctly sweetish, fruity character, including hints of orange, apricot and candied peel, and some spicy notes, but also much hoppier than the first beer with an underlying dryness. It had a noticeable "alcohol kick" but was surprisingly drinkable for its strength. This is the "big brother" of the familiar Hoegarden wheat beer, and like all the remaining beers was bottle-conditioned. An excellent beer that was highly thought of by all the panel.

Beer 3 - Liefmans Kriek 6.0% ABV (£2.29, 37.5 cl)

A dark beer with a distinctive, reddish hue. The strong cherry fruit aroma was initially offputting to some, but in fact in this brew the cherries are used as part of the fermentable material rather than simply used as flavouring, and it is hard to imagine anything further from cherryade. Based on Liefmans Goudenband brown ale, it has an underlying sourness which is offset by the refreshing tartness of the fruit. This was very well liked by some of the tasters, although others felt it was a beer they would perhaps respect more than enjoy. The "Best Before" date on the bottle was an impressive End of 2013 - obviously a beer for laying down.

Beer 4 - Chimay Premièrè 7.0% ABV (£3.59, 75 cl)

A mid-brown beer with a large head and very strong natural carbonation. It had a more subtle flavour, rich and malty, with a hint of bitterness and astringency coming through. Again this impressed all of the panel. This beer - brewed by a Trappist monastery - is basically the same as Chimay Red which is available in 33 cl bottles, but the secondary fermentation in a bigger bottle is believed to impart a different character to it.

Beer 5 - Westmalle Dubbel 7.0% ABV (£1.49, 33 cl)

Another Trappist beer, very dark, with a particularly dense and rocky head. It had a malty, almost chewy mouthfeel, with hints of spice and a long, dry finish. "A beer to be respected" was one comment made. This was thought to be the most complex beer tasted so far and was very highly rated by all of the panel.

Beer 6 - Duvel 8.5% ABV (£1.40, 33 cl)

"Duvel" is Flemish for "Devil". This beer was lager pale, with another impressive head. However, the flavour was quite unlike any lager, with a strong hop character balanced by fruity notes including bananas and peardrops. The high alcohol content was more noticeable than in some of the darker beers. Another complex and impressive beer.

Thus ended a very enjoyable evening's sampling, although with so many strong beers it was perhaps a rather rich diet. Don't imagine that we had more than a small part of each bottle each, though, otherwise we would have ended up under the table! The beer of the night was undoubtedly the Westmalle Dubbel, with all the others apart from the slightly disappointing Leffe Brune being highly rated, although the Liefmans Kriek was maybe something of an acquired taste. If you've never sampled the delights of Belgian beer, why not give it a try - and don't forget that these beers are available in many local free houses and specialist beer pubs as well as in the off-trade.

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 234:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Butler, Phil Levison, Peter Edwardson, Mark McConachie, Stuart Ballantyne, Frank Wood, Steve Bray, John Tune, Dave Platt, Karen Wainwright, Robin Wignall, Paul Formby, Rhys Jones, Dave Hallows, Dave Platt.

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