

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



LOCALS FUME OVER SMOKING BAN COMMUNITY PUBS HIT HARDEST



A pint, a cigarette and a packet of crisps? The options in a 'smoking' pub would turn the clock back 40 years

Community pubs will face the stark choice of tearing up their food menus or alienating regulars by banning smoking if new rules on smoking in England come into force.

Health Secretary John Reid has set out plans that could see smoking stubbed out in the vast majority of English pubs by 2008.

THE LASS O'GOWRIE RUNS OUT OF GAS!

TIME may well have been called on one of the most traditional features of a famous Manchester pub. The gas mantles that light both the bar area and most of the main public room of the Lass O'Gowrie have been turned off on the orders of new owners Greene King, and they look set to stay off permanently. Citing public safety issues they have in the short term been replaced by garish, intrusive and wholly inappropriate spotlights. Customers and staff are perplexed. Greene King have generally a fine record in Manchester, refurbishing pubs sensitively and majoring on real ale, but this is clearly blinkered thinking. The risk of customer interference is clearly very marginal (it hasn't happened in 150 years!) and either a modification to the switches or simply raising the lights a foot or so higher would seem to solve the problem. In their defence they did at least check the gas system in the first place, but a little thinking out-of-the-box could solve this. Come on chaps, think again.



His White Paper on public health, published last month, would allow smoking only in pubs that do not serve food and in private clubs. And as part of efforts to protect staff, smoking at the bar would be prohibited everywhere.

But CAMRA fears the proposals will turn many community pubs into smoking dens and force others to close. Chief Executive Mike Benner said: "While it's clear that smoke in pubs needs to be managed, these proposals threaten to split the trade, creating smoke-free eateries for the middle classes and smoking dens for everyone else."

"The problem is that committed smokers may well switch to small community pubs which don't serve food, and the resulting fag may alienate other parts of the community. It's quite possible that small local pubs that rely on beer sales rather than food will tear up their menus to make sure their smoking regulars are not driven away."

"It's the small community local which is likely to bear the brunt of these proposals should they become law. We would like the Government to carry out a full impact assessment and ensure that support is in place to prevent closures of this essential community amenity."

"In many pubs there is a simple solution. Where there are two or more entirely separate rooms, smoking could be allowed in one, while rooms where food is served could be smoke-free."

CAMRA's fears were shared by the Federation of Licensed Victuallers chief executive Tony Payne, who says the proposals will be the death knell for many rural and community pubs. He wants the industry to unite to fight legislation which he believes will see many pubs boarded up and their licensees stuck with long leases. "Customers will have nowhere to go," he said. "Many towns and villages will become ghost towns as their pubs close."

The proposals are in a wide-ranging Government White Paper on public health, *Choosing Health*. The Scottish Executive is seeking a total ban on smoking in public places in Scotland by April 2006.

This article first appeared in What's Brewing, the national newspapers of CAMRA.



A MERRY CHRISTMAS... AND HAPPY NEW YEAR !

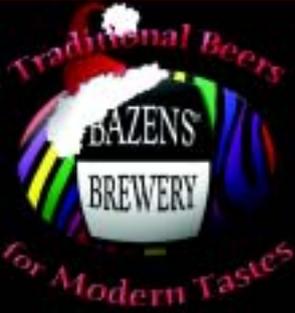
To all our readers, advertisers, contributors, and (not least) the beasts of burden... our distributors from the editors of Opening Times

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7,000 CIRCULATED THIS MONTH



Santa's Reinbeer 4.3% (Dec)
 Wass Ale 4.5% (Dec/Jan) Blue Bullet 4.5%
 Knoll St Porter 5.2% (Nov-Feb)
 Flatbac 4.2% (Beer of the Festival, Stockport, 2003
 e BIA Bronze Medal Winner 2004) eXSB 5.5%
 Black Pig Mild 3.6% (Bronze Award for Mild,
 Champion Beer of Britain, 2003)
 Pacific Bitter 3.8% Zebra Best Bitter 4.3%

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PUB OF THE MONTH DECEMBER

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

2004



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month December 2004 is the Rising Sun, Hazel Grove.

Situated on the junction of the Buxton and Macclesfield roads, the Rising Sun was for many years a pretty dull Wilson's pub. Recently, though, it has turned the corner with a positive slant towards real ale. This is down to current licensee Dave Prunty, a long time real ale enthusiast, who over the last 12 months has steadily revitalised the choice of ales in this pleasant air-conditioned pub. Wilson's beers having disappeared many years ago, the staple beer is John Smiths Cask, always on form here, and this is complemented by three regularly changing guest ales - and not the 'usual suspects' either, but often interesting micro-brewery products, with local Three Rivers beers making regular appearances. There's a good food offer, too. Breakfasts are served from 7.30am Monday to Friday and there's a lunchtime menu. A soon to be introduced innovation will be Dave's suggestion of which ale he recommends with your chosen meal. Despite having a large number of pubs, most of which serve real ale, there has never been a great deal of choice in Hazel Grove and this wider selection of beers makes for a welcome change in the village - they are certainly appreciated by the wide range of customers who use the pub. Dave's initiative and commitment is to be congratulated and makes the Rising Sun a worthy winner of our final Pub of the Month award for 2004. The presentation will be made to Dave and Jeanette on the evening of **Tuesday 21 December**, getting the Christmas celebrations off to a welcome and early start. **DM**
The Rising Sun is easily accessible by public transport. Hazel Grove station is about a 10-minute walk away, and the pub is right by the terminus of the 192 bus route.

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 248

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 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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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

Make no mistake – it’s a ban, but by another name. The get-out clause – that customers can smoke in pubs that don’t serve food – is for most pubs no get-out at all. Food has become so vital that even pubs that are at heart boozers need the extra margin to remain viable. With masterful irony, the Health Secretary calls his White Paper “Choosing Health.” But his notion of choice is Hobson’s choice – that is, no choice. This is deliberate. The Government (or at least the Health Department) secretly wants a ban: but it doesn’t dare impose one for fear of the tabloid press. So some clever little policy wonk has come up with a way of getting one by stealth. CAMRA, admittedly, is divided over the issue. But even the most committed anti would concede that real choice, where feasible, should be on offer. And in most pubs it is feasible. Few would not lend themselves to having a corner walled off where addicts can poison themselves in peace. After all, most pubs were originally built that way; reconversion to a multi-room layout could easily be phased in during the normal cycle of refurbishment. But this is not about choice. The very fact that food has been selected as the can/can’t criterion proves it. Logically, the health of staff should be the main consideration, so smoking might well be allowed in rooms without counters, but not in rooms where staff had to be present. There’s no logic to the idea that smoking should be banned in all parts of a premises if food is available in one part; there’s even less logic to leaving staff in pubs where food isn’t served totally unprotected. CAMRA’s policy – that smoking should be at the licensee’s discretion, but effectively segregated from staff and non-smokers – is sensible, fair and achievable. It preserves the freedom of smokers to mummify their lungs but protects non-smokers and staff. It enables licensees to get on with making a living. It frees pubcos for the worry of what to do when a quarter of their customers are summarily evicted. It prevents the segregation of the licensed trade into smoke-free quasi-restaurants and smoking dens. It’s one that both the industry and public, smokers or non-smokers, can unite behind. And it’s a challenge to the Government: do you really want choice... or not?

John Clarke

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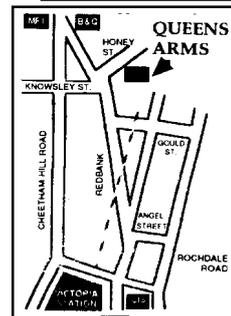
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WOLVES GRAB BURTONWOOD



As we went to press, it was announced that Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries had made an agreed takeover bid for Burtonwood.

It should be made clear, because there has been some confusion here, that the bid only involves the 480 pubs owned what could be called the Burtonwood PubCo. The company sold its minority stake in the brewing operation, Thomas Hardy Burtonwood, this summer and so, in principle, the brewing operation should be unaffected by this.

We say in principle, because Thomas Hardy Burtonwood does produce all of the Burtonwood beers and if these are discontinued it will leave a large hole in the brewery's operations. At present the future of the Burtonwood estate, less than half of which sells real ale, is unclear – will it operate semi-independently or will it be entirely absorbed into the Wolves & Dudley operations? Burtonwood is poorly represented in the *Opening Times* area with just a handful of pubs – such as the Bulls Head in the City Centre and Bishop Blaize in Stockport – and even fewer selling cask beer.

MAGNET ON THE MOVE

The Thomas Hardy Burtonwood operation has received one boost, though. As part of the national brewers' increasing disengagement from quality cask beer, or rather any cask beer, Scottish Courage has announced that it is to contract our production of John Smith's Magnet to Burtonwood in 2005. This is all part of the plans to close the Tyne Brewery and transfer production of Theakston's Best Bitter to Tadcaster, home of John Smiths. The transfer of Magnet, arguably the best beer to come out of the Tadcaster brewery, will free up capacity to accommodate the Theakston beers.

FAMILY FAVOURITES

Next month we hope to preview the 2005 seasonal beer programmes of all the local family brewers. In the meantime look out for:

Robinson's – the ever-popular Robin Bitter is now on sale. The malty but dry 4.5 per cent ABV beer has now become an established seasonal favourite. Enigma (4.7%) should be back next month. Many local pubs such as Stockport's Arden Arms and Swan With Two Necks will have this.

JW Lees – the current seasonal is Crackerjack (4.7%), a pale beer with a hint of spice. A good beer but perhaps not the best November/December seasonal Lees have produced. Rain Bar in the City Centre and the Lloyds Hotel in Chorlton will have this.

Hydes – the 5% Seventh Heaven, a dark and spicy beer has been getting rave reviews and is certainly a fine beer. Many local Hydes' pubs will have this – try the Nursery, Heaton Norris.



MICRO MAGIC

Time prevented much of a ring round this time. We hope to make amends by a mega round up in the January issue.

Pictish – look out for another brew of Whiteout, a 6% hoppy, clear wheat beer. This will only be the second time this has been produced. The Christmas special, Rudolph's Rocket Fuel (7.3%) was due out in mid-December. The official December seasonal is the 4.7% Winter Solstice, an amber coloured beer with a good floral hoppiness.

Phoenix – as ever the always reliable Phoenix Brewery has a range of festival specials available. The wonderful Phoenix Porter (5%) is now out, alongside Golden Glow (6.5%) and the powerful Humbug (7%). Of a more sessionable strength is Christmas Kiss at a hoppy 4.5%. **Greenfield** – two seasonal beers are out this month. Rudolph's Tipple (5%) is slightly different to last year's brew, being lighter in colour and with the addition of some honey and spice. Look out, too, for Celebration at 4%. This is a light golden beer with a very strong Cascade hop character throughout.



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Bank Top – now incorporated as a limited company, the new seasonal Santa's Claws (5%) is now out. BankTop continue to pick up prizes for their beers. Gold Digger won Beer of the Festival at Southport Beer Festival while Port O'Call has picked up similar awards from the Solihull and Newton Abbot beer festivals. The brewery continues to expand with a 12th fermenter on order.



Facer's - has a one-off for Christmas called 'Never Christmas'. The beer is golden coloured, 4%ABV with small amounts of sultanas, ginger and cinnamon added to the copper to give a hint of these Christmassy flavours in the palate. The name comes from the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe – "She (the White Witch) has made an enchantment over the whole country so that it is always winter here and never Christmas." Dave Facer will also be brewing a one-off for New Year - this, like last year's 'Resolution', will be a 5.5% version of Landslide but unlike last year the casks will be dry-hopped. He will try to think of a new name, but if the inspiration doesn't come, look out for it under the name 'Resolution Two'!

Bazens's - the Knoll St Porter is selling fast and warming up customers throughout the North West. They are bottling this in the New Year ready for the Winter Ales Festival where it (and the 5.5% eXSB) will be available in bottles and from cask. The 4.3% Santa's Reinbeer has been brewed and will be available from the beginning of December. The 4.5% Wass Ale will be on sale from the middle of December. (This is their New Year beer but they are brewing it a bit earlier this year due to demand.)



Beartown – believe it or not, Beartown celebrate their 10th anniversary this month! To celebrate the superb hoppy 6.8% Grizzly Bear will be back. We hope to mark this milestone with an in-depth look at Beartown next month.



MILLSTONE 1ST BIRTHDAY

Nick Boughton and Jon Hunt's Millstone Brewery in Mossley celebrated its first anniversary with a celebration at the brewery on 20th October.

A large gathering of friends, family, publicans, brewers and general Millstone fans joined Nick and Jon to mark what has been a remarkable 12 months. During that time the brewery has gained an enviable reputation for quality with its range of pale, hoppy beers, three of which were available for sampling on the day. Constantly beating their targets, Millstone has enjoyed steady expansion and now brews 6-7 times a month, compared to the once a



fortnight at the start, with their beers going to something like 120-130 outlets. The regular range has now settled down as Windy Miller (3.8%), Three Shires (4%), Grainstorm (4.2%) and Millstone Edge (4.4%), with periodic seasonal and special beers produced. Some, such as Windy Miller, prove so popular that they become regular brews. The one dark(ish) beer produced is the 4.7% Christmas Ruby, which is available now. This, along with the other beers, is now being bottled at the brewery. This has proved a successful sideline for Millstone with the local Mossley Wholefoods selling the bottles in such quantity that there is a struggle to keep up with demand. Finally, the long-promised True Grit (5%) is now firmly promised for January. Mind you, they haven't said *which* January...

MARBLE RE-LAUNCH



At the beginning of December the Marble Arch held a relaunch party for the pub and the on site Marble Brewery. There was quite a gathering in the pub. Local licensees and brewers rubbed shoulders with regulars and CAMRA stalwarts from near and far, all celebrating another milestone in the life of what has become something of a local institution.



Both pub and brewery have been substantially refurbished. The pub has been refurbished and a new kitchen and servery installed in the back room which is now no-smoking at all times. Food from the new and very interesting menu is available until 8.00pm each day and the canapés and main meals served during the course of the celebration were typical of the high catering standards set at the pub – look out for a full food review early in the New Year.

The brewery has been substantially refurbished and looks very smart indeed with lots of white tiles and gleaming equipment. There have been some changes to the entirely organic beer range lately. Both Cloudy Marble and N/4 have been discontinued, to be replaced by the excellent and refreshing Marble Bitter (3.9%) which uses a complicated hop combination, including the citrusy Cascade variety. Brewer James Campbell and assistant brewer Phil produce a fine range of beer already – Manchester Bitter (4.2%), Ginger Marble (4.5% - and the best ginger beer made anywhere), Uncut Amber (4.7%), Lagonda IPA (5%) and Chocolate Heavy (5.5% - indulgently rich) – and this is set to expand with greater freedom to experiment and the first result of this is a new Port Stout. This 4.7% dry stout will have a bottle of organic port added to each 9-gallon cask, and is scheduled to be available at the pub from Christmas Eve. Dangerous.

Our thanks to Marble owner Jan Whitehead, brewers James and Phil and the whole Marble Arch team for both a great night and, well for just doing what you do so well.



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Quite a bit of news this month with some new faces, impending departures, openings and closures – it's all been pretty hectic, really.

DIDSBURY ROAD

There are some new faces at the **Four Heaton**s which is one of a small number of Hydes' pubs to transfer from management to tenancy. Chris and Zena Marlborough took over on 1 November at what is their first ever pub. They told me that having decided on a career change they contacted many local brewers and Hydes were the first to get back to them, and after viewing a number of pubs, they decided that the Four Heaton's was for them. They were attracted by the strong community atmosphere at the Four Heaton's and they have been playing to those strengths by running occasional karaoke sessions and quiz nights. Chris is a chef by trade and while he's sticking to basics at the moment – chips, sandwiches, chilli & rice, etc – he would like to try a more extensive food operation when he and Zena have properly settled in.

The beer's good, too. Chris has already had Cask Marque inspections and passed with flying colours and the quality has been rewarded by increased cask ale sales. Indeed he and Zena tell me that there has been a noticeable trend among some of the locals switching back from lager to bitter. Currently Hydes' Light and Bitter are on handpump although Chris is keen to try the seasonals to see how they go. I must say I was very impressed by all of this – the pub is certainly one to watch and I for one will be visiting more often.

While in the area I decided to check out the other Didsbury Road pubs. At the far end is the **Dog & Partridge** which had just reopened after a short period of closure. I've always enjoyed my visits to this pub before but tonight it was very quiet indeed. I do hope it manages to find its feet again. The sole handpumped offering is Boddington's Cask, or rather it should have been, but when I called it had run out.

Up the road is the **Griffin**, a famous local institution still going strong under very capable licensees. Holt's Mild and Bitter are the staples here although I did spot a poster advertising the Holt's seasonal 'Nuts & Holts' at £1.25 'while stocks last'. There was none on sale so I assume stocks are now exhausted.

Just up from the Griffin is the **Railway**, still selling no real ale. However from there it's not far to Robinson's **Crown**, a pub with good reputations on both the beer (Hatters and Unicorn on handpump) and food fronts. I see from the Robbies website, though, that the pub's tenancy is now available so I assume long serving licensee Peter Whitney is on the move.

OUT AND ABOUT

Up in Reddish, I am told that the **Railway** has reopened but no news yet of whether cask beer is on sale. My guess is that it won't be. Elsewhere in Reddish the **Grey Horse** was shut at the time of writing, and I'm told that a mammoth refurbishment is on the way. This has been a reliable outlet for Boddington's Cask so let's hope it's still on sale when the pub reopens.

In Heaton Chapel, the erstwhile **Chapel House** is now 'Conor's **Bar & Lounge**', an Irish theme bar selling, you guessed, no real ale. Further down the road the **Hope** remains one of the town's long standing keg-only pubs while the nearby **Silver Jubilee** is another pub with the tenancy advertised on Robinson's website. A wander around Edgeley in mid-November revealed the **Bow Garret** to be closed. I hear that it's been taken on by the same people who run the nearby **Gardeners Arms**, a very well run pub, so hopefully much-needed improvements are in the pipeline here. Whether that will extend to the reintroduction of real ale, I don't know. I say this because on the same night I popped into the Gardeners and was surprised to find no Boddington's Cask (the sole real ale) on sale. I hope this was just a glitch.

Of course the shock news in Edgeley was Dave and Sandra George announcing their retirement from the **Grapes**. They have been there 23 years, and Sandra has been in the trade 28. Their six months notice means that they will be leaving the pub next March, and I'm sure I'm not alone in saying that they will be both sorely missed and a very hard act to follow.

Atherton & Tyldesley Round Table

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STAGGER

with Dave Hanson

EAST MANCHESTER BUS STAGGER

Our wander around East Manchester started in a similar manner to Dylan Thomas's description of Llaeggub, dark, dripping and dank. The heavens opened up while I awaited a bus to take me up Ashton New Road in the direction of the **Strawberry Duck**. Things then got worse, the bus did not show up! Never mind, out comes the phone and I make contact with the remainder of the revellers. "Oh! There's only me here," comes the reply from my compatriot. 'Hmm!' I think, 'should we make this a virtual stagger, with both of us making our own way around East Manchester conversing via phone?' No we will meet up and do this properly.

The **Strawberry Duck** on Crabtree Lane, Clayton was our first port of call. This well known free house has changed hands recently and a few changes were noticed. If you were an East Enders fan, you could indulge your passion by watching it on a large screen TV in the large entertainments room, as you could on numerous regular size screen dotted around the bar area. No change to the beer range, which was restricted to a good pint of Holt's Bitter. Since we had many miles to cover and no minibus transportation a hasty move on to the next pub was made.

Thankfully the rain had abated, it was now only chucking it down rather than monsoon weather, on the way to the **Grove**! This is a solid traditional Holt's pub standing on Ashton New Road a few yards from the medieval splendour of Clayton Hall. It is reputed that the Royalist army was stationed at Clayton Hall before its attack on Manchester and Oliver Cromwell is said to have stayed there. The Grove is no less historic, there being a War Memorial in the wall of the vault.



you enter the large (and being made larger as this is penned) vault is to the left, with the much smaller lounge to the right. The bar is surrounded by a gloriously carved frieze. Being a Holt's pub the beers normally available are mild and bitter, though on our visit the mild was not on so we both drank the above average bitter.

On leaving the Grove, as the rain had stopped, we decided to scout around the immediate area for some real ale. We were to be disappointed! The **Sir Humphrey Cheetham** further along Ashton New Road was closed and boarded, while the **Derby** across the road only sold keg. Turning down Clayton Lane, we pressed our eager faces against the windows of the **Blue Moon**, no real ale available here. Further along we reached the **Bridge**, which we confirmed is also keg. Moving on towards Ashton Old Road we passed the closed and boarded **Fox Inn**. Things were looking bad, but an oasis in the form of the **Legh Arms** beckoned in the distance. Unfortunately the expedition leader chose to ignore the local knowledge of his guide. Result - we got lost within spitting distance of the pub. After five minutes of embarrassing backtracking along cul-de-sacs we tracked down the **Legh Arms**!

The **Legh Arms** is not an oasis; it's heaven! Three real ales greeted us on the bar, **Moorhouses Black Cat**, **Adnams Bitter** and **Greene King Abbot Ale**. I ordered the **Black Cat** with a little trepidation. Why you may ask?



The evening before David the landlord had asked what I thought of the **Black Cat**. It wasn't up to his usual excellent standard and he was worried. I agreed it hadn't got its usual fruity malty flavour. "That's it!" said David, "It only went on this evening, but its coming off and I will get onto **Moorhouses** in the morning". True to his word and much credit to **Moorhouses** who had rushed replacement casks down which we were sampling on the stagger. This was more like it, back to its excellent form. We then sampled the **Adnams Bitter**, which was also very good. The **Legh Arms** is an eclectic pub, with clientele and ambience which varies from lively families, through small groups quietly conversing to the pool and darts players. On the evening we called there was a karaoke session in the back room. When **City** are playing at home beware of passionate football supporters as it is only half a mile from both the stadium and the 'B of the Bang' sculpture.

Unfortunately all good things must come to an end and we dragged ourselves outside to catch a bus to our next destination. In a wild disregard of procedure, we decided to let the gods choose where that would be. We waited (but not with baited breath) to see which bus would come first, that to or from Manchester. The inbound bus won, so we alighted five minutes later outside the **Seven Stars**. The outside is a riot of ornamental tiles, complete with seven stars moulded into the fascia. Inside, this Holt's pub could do with a lick of paint and a spruce up. Only bitter on offer and was below average in quality. I do hope that Holts don't neglect this pub as the whole of the surrounding area is swathed in building sites and the **Seven Stars** is not their best advert.

Outside again and we hop onto a bus to be greeted by the same bus driver! "Having a pub crawl lads?" he enquires, "Where to now?". What a dilemma, should we try and squeeze in a couple of swift halves or settle for a leisurely pint. Time was pressing so we settled on a pint in the **Railway**, **Manshaw Lane**. Standing just off Ashton Old Road on the Ashton-under-Lyne boundary this Holt's house can be easily missed. That would be a big mistake. This multi-roomed pub has been opened out a little recently. It still retains two rooms to the front; the **Newsroom** to the left, complete with **Manchester log end dart board**; a no-smoking area to the right. There was a mature clientele in residence, giving the pub a relaxed comfortable atmosphere. Both Holt's **Mild** and **Bitter** were on offer, so we sampled the former. This was so good that our leisurely pint turned into two (and may have become three had not the bus home beckoned). The good news is that the **Railway** has been voted **Pub of the Month** for January - well deserved, I think.

Time and lack of transport limited the number of establishments we could visit on this brief evening visit. The impression given may be that the area is dominated by Holts. This is not true as **Taylor's**, **Robinson's** and **Boddingtons** (for the time being anyway!) are also available. However one thing that we cannot escape was the number of pubs that served keg, or worse still, were closed. For anybody prepared to explore, East Manchester can still offer an interesting stagger with a variety of drinking emporiums. This was what we found on a rainy evening in late October. Why not give it a go yourself and see if you have a similarly enjoyable experience.

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Fine Cask Boddingtons Bitter

ENTER THE DRAGON

Over the past year, beers from the new Copper Dragon Brewery have made regular appearances in the free trade, gaining an enviable reputation for consistency and excellence. Stockport's Crown, Heaton Lane, has a handpump dedicated to Copper Dragon beers and the Pack Horse in the town's Market Place also has a Copper Dragon beer as a permanent guest. A visit was clearly called for.

So it was that on 16 October a minibus of CAMRA members arrived at the brewery's premises, situated on an industrial estate just outside Skipton, North Yorkshire. Despite being veterans of many visits to micro breweries based in industrial units, jaws dropped at the sight of the gleaming stainless steel plant – clearly this was no ordinary micro. Copper Dragon is owned by Steve Taylor, a keen home brewer who had very definite ideas if how the ideal brewery should be run. Financial good fortune has enabled him to put these ideas into practice on a rather grand scale.

Copper Dragon Brewery was born in November 2002. With a new building in the town secured, construction started in December of that year in preparation for the arrival of the brewing plant in February 2003. Bavarian Breweries technology won the contract to build a German Style Brew house with conical fermenters and separate conditioning tanks along with the process control system that would grace any larger concern. The initial 10-barrel plant, costing a cool quarter of a million, has recently been augmented by a half million 30-barrel kit and the brewery now produces something in the region of 100 barrels a week sold to over 300 regular customers in a trading area stretching from the Yorkshire Dales down to the north Midlands. Over 90 per cent of sales are delivered direct to the pubs and even stillaged in the pub cellars by the Copper Dragon dray team.



The brewery is fully automated and Steve treated us to a fascinating tour of the plant showing us many unique innovations and telling us that there are already plans in hand to extend next door into another unit. After that, of course, it was sampling time.

There is a team of brewers at Copper Dragon and as with the equipment, no expense is

spared on the ingredients. This shows in the quality of the end product with five cask beers currently produced.

The Best Bitter (3.8%) is a refreshing amber coloured beer with a well-balanced malty and hoppy flavour, and makes an excellent mid-gravity session ale. Challenger IPA is 4.4% and is a full-bodied and fruity premium beer brewed in an old-fashioned style. More modern is Golden Pippin (3.9%) a light refreshing blonde ale brewed using a new variety of hop, creating a citrus fruit flavour. Originally brewed as a seasonal ale, Golden Pippin has become such a favourite it is now produced all year round. Scots 1816 (4.1%) is a very full-bodied beer with a good hop aroma and body. Last we were able to sample the new Black Gold (3.8%) a replacement for the Dark Ale. This is a wonderfully complex, pitch black mild full of roasty flavours.

There are plans for new beers and in a very interesting development, next year will see a Belgian brewer coming over to Copper Dragon. Such is the versatility of the brewing plant, this means that there will be experiments with Belgian-style beers.

Also in the pipeline is a chain of Copper Dragon pubs with plans for six a year for the foreseeable future. All will be traditional tenancies and tied to Copper Dragon, with the tenants having the right to sell one guest cask beer from what Steve terms 'craft breweries'. So, if you're really lucky, a Copper Dragon pub could be coming to a street near you. Now, there's a thing. Many thanks to Steve for a memorable brewery visit. **JC.** Some of the material for this article came from the brewery's website at <http://home.btconnect.com/copperdragon/pages/home.htm>.

CHRISTMAS IN PARADISE

After the excitement of Christmas, the week between Christmas and New Year can fall a bit flat. Help is at hand!

Go to Wrenbury and visit the Christmas beer festival at Paradise Brewery. The festival starts on Tuesday 28 December and runs until Thursday 30th, opening hours are 11-11 each day of the festival. Arriva Trains Wales will be running a normal weekday service to and from Wrenbury during the festival and the brewery is just a couple of minutes walk from Wrenbury Station. On Tuesday 28th, the 11.34 Piccadilly-Cardiff express will stop specially at Wrenbury. On the same day an express will stop at Wrenbury at 17.05 to return visitors to Wilmslow and Stockport. With a choice of 20 beers available from local breweries, John Wood and staff at Paradise can promise a friendly, welcoming festival with some unusual beers available. The Crewe & Shrewsbury Passengers Association and Paradise Brewery would like to thank Arriva Trains Wales for their co-operation in arranging the special stops on 28th.

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Bank at Sale, 70 School Road, Sale
Barsh, 65 High Street, Cheadle
Barton Arms, 2 Stableford, Worsley
Bishop Blaze, 708 Chester Road, Stretford
Boathouse, Ferry Road, Irlam
Bollin Fee, 6 Swan Street, Wilmslow
Bulls Head, 155-157 Broken Cross, Macclesfield
Bulls Head Hotel, 28 Buxton Road, High Lane
Calverts Court, St. Petersgate, Stockport
Church House Inn, Church Street, Bollington
Coach and Four, 69-71 Alderley Road, Wilmslow
Cotton Bale, 21 Market Street, Hyde
Cross Keys, Adswold Road, Cheadle Hulme
Crown, 81 High Street, Cheadle
Dog & Partridge, 665-7 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury
Duke of York, Stockport Road, Romiley
Eccles Cross, 13 Regent Road, Eccles
Farmers Arms, 209 Stockport Road, Stockport
Farmers Arms, Manchester Road, Swinton
Fletcher Moss, 1 Williams Street, Didsbury
Football, 35 Swinton Hall Road, Swinton
Four Heaton, 63 Didsbury Road, Heaton Norris
Friendship Inn, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield
Gateway, 882 Wilmslow Road, East Didsbury
Gothic Bar, 61 Church Road, Gatley
Governor's House, 43 Ravenoak Rd, Ch'dle Hulme
Great Central, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield
Hanging Gate, Higher Sutton, Macclesfield
Harbord Harbord, 17-21 Long Street, Middleton

Hare & Hounds, Dooley Lane, Marple
Harrys Bar, UMIST, Sackville St Manchester
High Grove, Silverdale Road, Gatley
J P Joule, Northenden Road, Sale
Jar Bar, SilkHouse, 4 Park Green, Macclesfield
John Gilbert, Worsley Brow, Worsley
Kings Hall, 13 Station Road, Cheadle Hulme
King's Ransom, Britannia Road, Sale
Lloyds No 1, The Printworks, Manchester
Loves Arms, 301 Hyde Road, Denton
Moon Under Water, Deansgate, Manchester
Oddfellows Arms, 73 Moor End Road, Stockport
Old Plough Hotel, 56 Green Lane, Sale
Old Wellington, 4 Cathedral Gates, Manchester
Osborne House, 32 Victory Street, Rusholme
Paramount, 33 Oxford Street, Manchester
Poachers Inn, 95 Ingersley Road, Bollington
Porters Ale House, Prince Roe Street, Macclesfield
Q Bar, 3-5 Market Street, Stalybridge
Rising Sun, 22 Queen Street, Manchester
Ryecroft, Turves Road, Cheadle Hulme
Sam's Chop House, Black Pool Fold, Manchester
Sedge Lynn, 21a Manchester Road, Chorlton
Society Rooms, Macclesfield Park La, Macclesfield
Society Rooms, Grosvenor Street, Stalybridge
Stalybridge Buffet Bar, Stalybridge Rail Station
Star Inn, 13 High Street, Cheadle
Tim Bobbin, 41 Flixton Road, Urmston
Victoria Hotel, 438 Wilmslow Road, Withington
Waterhouse, 67 Princess Street, Manchester
Wetherspoons, 47 Piccadilly, Manchester
White House, 1 Water Lane, Stalybridge
Wye Bridge Inn, Fairfield Road, Buxton



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A WALK ON THE DARKER SIDE

As it's the season to be jolly, and a long, cold winter has been forecast to boot, old ales can provide both a touch of seasonal merriment and insulation against the elements. Central heating for adults, you might say. Here's our guide to some of the classics, tracked down during a long afternoon's research.

MOONRAKER



Our search began in the City Centre and JW Lees' Rain Bar on Great Bridgewater Street. There aren't that many Lees pubs in the *Opening Times* area (shame!) and those selling Moonraker are even fewer in number – the Lloyds Hotel in Chorlton is another reliable outlet. Like the Lloyds, Rain Bar sells Moonraker all year round.

Having lined our stomachs with copious quantities of food, it was time to embark on our voyage of discovery. Lees' Moonraker has been around for a long time – the historians aren't sure but think it started out in the 1950s. The name is pre-James Bond and refers to a Middleton folk tale – local lads trying to rake the reflection of the moon from a pond. What they were actually doing was feigning barminess to fool the excise men who would otherwise have caught them recovering the contraband they had hidden in the pond.

The beer is a deep dark reddish-brown with a powerful spicy aroma. On the palate the taste was quite winy and vinous with strong hints of liquorice in the long finish. It's 7.5 per cent ABV and at Rain Bar retails at £1.57 per half. After that it was a bus to Didsbury for a rare treat.

WELCOME BACK

When Marston's was an independent company, the Royal Oak in Didsbury, run by the legendary Arthur Gosling, was one of their top pubs. Marston's lost their independence five years ago, falling to Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries, best known for their Banks's beers. However the Royal Oak, now in the capable hands of Rob Long, is going back to its Marston's roots with the current handpumped range comprising Marston's Bitter, Pedigree and, Lord be praised, Owd Roger.

Tradition has it that this famous strong ale was originally the house brew of the Royal Standard of England at Forty Green, Buckinghamshire, and was inherited by Marston's when they acquired the pub.

The famous old pub still trades but Owd Roger was one of the casualties of the Marston's takeover, being discontinued as a draught beer shortly afterwards.

Now it's back – possibly only temporarily but Rob has bought sufficient stocks to see the Royal Oak through to Christmas. Like Moonraker, the beer is very dark but there the likeness ends, as it's quite light-bodied for its strength and wasn't as 'chewy' as some of us remembered it. There's some sweetness to the taste and quite a lot of depth to the finish with the dangerous quaffability belying its 7.6 per cent ABV. It retails at £1.28 a half.

GRANDDADDY OF THEM ALL

Robinson's are Stockport's local family brewers, and one of the largest family brewing companies in the country. Readers won't need telling that they brew a wide range of beers these days, but the jewel in their crown must be Old Tom, available on draught from September to May, although some pubs stock up in the spring and sell it all year round.

Where to try it, though? The brewery tap, the Spread Eagle, sells it on electric pump (thus making the pub probably the only outlet in the UK for electrically pumped barley wine), and several pubs have it on handpump. But since tradition was our theme today, it had to be direct from the cask, stillaged on the vault bar counter in that most traditional of pubs, the Tiviot.

The earliest recipe for Old Tom comes from a brewers book dated 1 November 1899 and the beer is little changed since then, although the strength has been brought down from its original 10 per cent ABV to a more manageable 8.5 per cent. It's won a barrel-full of awards over the years and remains the classic of its style. Our sample was smooth, dry and vinous with distinct vintage port notes in the huge warming finish. Drinking its strength, this really is one for sipping. At the Tiviot it sells for £1.50 a half.

NEW-ISH KID ON THE BLOCK

The Crown on Heaton Lane is well-known for the huge choice of beers available, all on top form. Landlord Graham Mascord likes his



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strong beers and has a tradition of keeping back a specially matured cask of Old Tom to go on sale during Stockport Beer Festival. He usually has something potent on the bar during the winter months, and didn't disappoint today.



Thomas Sykes Ale is now produced by the Burton Bridge micro brewery based in Burton-on-Trent, although it's a beer with a bit of history behind it. It was first brewed by the now-closed Heritage Brewery, a working museum set up in the brewery vacated by Everards when they moved production back to Leicester. The venture was not a success but its flagship beer survives. Matured to perfection by Graham, the first sip knocked us back with its powerful assault on the palate. Many would retire hurt at that stage but persevere. Unlike our other samples this is a pale beer but rich and warming with malt whisky notes on the palate, and with enough hop bitterness to make it very drinkable. However at 10 per cent ABV it's a beer to treat with caution and respect. At the Crown it retailed at £1.55 a half.

BEST OF THE REST

Our plan was to also try **Hydes XXXX** but we were thwarted by the simple fact that they have sold out of it. Hydes' have something of a dilemma with this beer. Not being a micro like Burton Bridge, their minimum brew size is quite considerable and since XXXX, unlike Old Tom, Moonraker and Owd Roger, isn't bottled, it relies on draught sales for its survival. Hydes' seem cautious about the pubs they put it in, perhaps concerned at the effect of this 6.8 per cent ABV beer on unwary locals. Thus while it sells well enough in pubs like the Old Star in Cheadle and the Horse & Farrier in Gatley, more often than not part of the brew has to be poured away. Perhaps Hydes' should follow the example of Interbrew, for whom they will be brewing Boddingtons, and contract it out to one of our local micro brewers. It would certainly be shame if this beer disappeared, although you can appreciate Hydes' problems here.

Holt's also produce a strong(-ish) old ale, although for this category **Sixex** is a relatively modest 6 per cent ABV. Usually only available in bottle, it does occasionally appear on draught when it displays a woody dryness on the palate.

Not many of our micros produce beers of a strength to qualify for this category. Boggart Hole Clough produces the 9 per cent **Steaming Boggart** although this is more of a super strength bitter and is available all year round. Phoenix produce two - **Golden Glow**, a 6.5 per cent burnished gold, hoppy delight, and **Humbug**, a 7 per cent Christmas cracker, matured at the brewery for a month before being released. Pictish Brewery has the 7.3 per cent **Rudolph's Rocket Fuel** a pale-ish beer successfully combining the warming character of a true old ale with the trademark Pictish hoppiness. Dangerous and drinkable.

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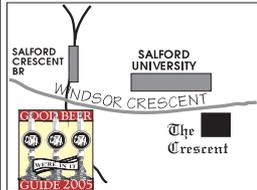
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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak, Macclesfield and Trafford & Hulme

Diary

December 2004

Friday 17th - The Famous Hillgate Stagger - the longest running event in any CAMRA Branch calendar so let's make this year a good 'un! Meet 7.00pm Queens Head (Turners Valuts), Underbank; 8.30 Bishop Blaize, Lower Hillgate.

Tuesday 21st - Pub of the Month presentation to the Rising Sun, Hazel Grove. **NB - change of date.**

Saturday 8th January - Branch Anniversary Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. 7.30pm onwards. Buffet, Great raffle and (with luck!) guest speaker. Book with John Clarke on 0161 477 1973.

Thursday 13th - Branch Meeting: Waldorf, Gore Street (off Piccadilly), Manchester City Centre. Starts 8.00pm. **NB - Pub of the Year will be chosen at this meeting.**

The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:

Saturday 11th - Branch Christmas Social: Cheshire Ring, Hyde. From 7.00pm.

Monday 13th - Branch Meeting: Friendship, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm.

Tuesday 28th - City Centre Social starting City Arms, Kennedy Street 12.00noon

Tuesday 4th January - Committee Meeting: Britons Protection, Hough Hill Rd, Stalybridge. Starts 8.00pm

Monday 17th - Branch Meeting: Station, Warrington St, Ashton. Starts 8.30pm.

December 2004

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following events:

Tuesday 28th - Christmas Social: Waters Green Tavern, Macclesfield. Starts 8.00pm.

Monday 10th January - Wilmslow Pub Crawl: King William 8.00pm; Swan 8.30, Bollin Fee 9.15, Coach & Four 10.00.

Monday 24th - **Advance Notice** - AGM and Campaigning Meeting: Beartown Tap, Congleton. Starts 8.00pm.

The Trafford & Hulme Branch covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester west of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the City Centre. They have advised us of the following events:

Thursday 16th - Hydes Xmas social, booking essential through Neil Worthington

Thursday 6th January - Branch Meeting: The Orange Tree, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm.

Thursday 13th - Chorlton Social: meet 8.00pm at the Beech.

Wednesday 19th - Pub of the Season presentation to the City Arms, Kennedy St, Manchester City Centre. From 8.00pm.

Greater Manchester Regional Event

Regional Meeting: Saturday 15th January 2005 at 12.30pm at Hare & Hounds, Shude Hill, City Centre

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HEALTH AND HYPOCRISY

In an attempt to combat concerns about binge drinking and excessive consumption, Britain's biggest brewer Scottish Courage has announced it is to label all its bottles and cans with the number of alcohol units they contain. They are also going to add health warnings stating recommended daily levels of consumption. Nobody can object to unit labelling, as it is simply giving consumers useful information. Many packaged drinks already have it. It is hard to imagine that twenty years ago few beers or wines even declared their percentage alcohol content. However, the point must be made that since they have started to do so, the average strength of drinks has tended to increase, rather undermining the suggestion that this will encourage a more health-conscious approach.

The recommended daily consumption levels – 2 to 3 units for women and 3 to 4 for men – are something else entirely. It is more than a little hypocritical for a brewer to quote these figures, as they know very well that the vast majority of the people in the average pub on a Friday night will be cheerfully ignoring them. If everybody stuck rigidly to this advice, it is likely that three-quarters of the pubs in the country would close and Scottish Courage's sales would fall off a cliff. It is also ludicrous to suggest that occasionally exceeding these figures is likely to have any adverse effect on health.

It is easy to dismiss such worries as doom-mongering, but there must be a serious concern that such limits will become cast in stone as a definition of a healthy lifestyle. Given the growing witchhunt against smokers by employers (even if they never smoke during working time), it is not difficult to imagine them in future seeking to discriminate against those "heavy drinkers" who may on occasion consume the life-threatening quantity of two pints of Unicorn (4.8 units) at one sitting.

THE MOON DROWNED

As I write, Wetherspoon's Moon Under Water on Deansgate, their first outlet in Manchester, is in the process of being transformed into a Lloyds No.1 Bar. Several others of their first-generation pubs are to suffer the same fate.

The Wetherspoon chain started out in London in the 1980s offering a refreshing antidote to the raucous theme pubs that were popular at the time. Their formula of real ale, all-day food, reasonable prices, comfortable seating and no TV or music attracted many people back into pubs who had been driven away. They were highly successful and not surprisingly decided to expand across the country from their initial base. But, in an attempt to appeal more to younger drinkers, the original formula was steadily whittled away, with benches replaced by posing tables, promotions increasingly dominated by shots and alcopops, and standards of customer service dropping. The Lloyds brand, with its loud music and restricted beer range, was an even more blatant attempt to pander to the youth market. In the process, what had made the chain distinctive was largely lost.

One of the biggest causes of business failure is straying too far from what made you a success in the first place, and recently Wetherspoon's have issued profit warnings while takeover talk swirled around them. You do have to wonder how long they will survive before being snapped up by one of the other big operators.

Curmudgeon Online: www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk

5 Years Ago
by Phil Levison **DECEMBER '99**

It had come as a relief to see the headline "End of the Shambles Shambles!". As long ago as the previous April, both the Wellington and Sinclairs had been reported as "opening soon", but since then there had been problems requiring remedial work. Then came a dispute among the contractors, and work had ground to a halt. Opening date had been moved to June, then July, and then the end of summer. But they had opened at last. The structure of the Wellington had been described as "largely the original", but with a changed internal layout, and Draught Bass was available. This had been priced on a "national" basis at £1.90, so not exactly cheap. Externally Sinclairs was largely new, but retaining much of the old layout, and many of the original features, including the marble bar top. The full range of Sam Smith's excellent bottles was available, the Old Brewery Bitter was on good form at the very fair price of £1.24, and the pub felt little different. *(Its just been refurbished again!)*

★★★★★

"Marston's Mayhem" was another eye-catching headline. It was just 12 months since Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries had launched a take-over bid for Marston's, but the effects on consumer choice were already being felt. Bateman's Mild had gone from Marston's pubs, and Owd Roger barley wine was no longer a draught ale. There were plans afoot to axe mainstream Marston's Bitter, and with little or no consultation with licensees, who then had to try and persuade their customers to drink Banks's Bitter instead.

★★★★★

Curmudgeon had a reference to the forthcoming Millennium celebrations – he said that pedants all over the world would be keen to point out during the coming weeks that 2,000 years would not be completed until the end of the year 2000, since there had been no year zero in the calendar. This would give an opportunity for a double celebration, but the true curmudgeon would see it as a golden opportunity to cast a dampener on things for two years in a row.

★★★★★

Manchester was host to CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival and Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition in January 2000. The festival had moved to Manchester the previous year, from its original home in Glasgow, and had been a runaway success, with beer running out by 7.00pm on the Saturday night. There was to be a much bigger beer order in 2000 to make sure it didn't run out so early again. *(It returns in 2005 after a two year hiatus).* On the pub front generally, there was very little going on, in contrast with the run up to the previous Christmas when there had been a frenzy of activity to report. The main news this time of course was the reopening of the Shambles pubs in their new location – the general opinion appeared to have been that a reasonable job had been done, even if it had taken a long time to finally come to fruition.



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At the Romper in Marple Ridge, Copper Dragon beers seem to have been a regular feature during November, though this brewery's beers seem to be getting represented regularly in the Branch area, another regular outlet being The Gloveworks in Glossop.

Out in Kettlethulme, Wadworth 6X and Storm Windgather continue to feature regularly in what is now the village's lone pub. **The Bike & Hound in Hyde appears to have discontinued its real ale phase as none has been seen for quite some time now. However the reopening date for the Queens in Hyde (to be a Holt's house), is 12 December.**

There's another change of landlord at the Lamp in Hadfield, where Derek Wellings has taken over. Up the road at the top of Brosscroft, at the Victoria Inn, landlord of several months now, Dave Garnett, from Marple, has a novel way of making savings on the cabaret - he does it himself. A former professional singer on the club circuit and local football manager, he was in good form when I looked in on the last Saturday of November when the Thwaites bitter (the only cask ale), was on good form.

Further up, in Padfield at the Peels Arms, another recent licensee change, the pub is developing in the food aspect, and still keeping a range of Marstons Pedigree and Theakstons Bitter with a guest beer usually available.

Shaws beers continue to sell well around the High Peak Branch area and their new beer Santa's Ale, a 4.4% dark coloured bitter is currently doing the rounds.

Good reports this month of the quality of beer in the Cotton Bale in Hyde, the local Wetherspoons house, that usually stocks a good range of guests, unlike several recent visits into their pub on Piccadilly and the Lloyds no.1 in the Printworks, where despite pumpclips suggesting a reasonable range of beers, the staff say there is no real ale on, and they insist when pressed, that they are not allowed to turn clips round without permission from the manager! They must get a bit fed up of having to repeat this answer as it seems a common occurrence in these two particular pubs of late.

Geoff Johnson adds: following speculation earlier in the year it is expected that the JW Lees keg-only Millpond in Stalybridge town centre will finally get its handpumps in the new year once an extension to the cellar has been carried out.

Lynne and Arnold Bunting are leaving the Stamford Arms on Huddersfield Road, Heyheads (on the Stalybridge/Mossley border) after 18 years. Over the years Arnold has provided hundreds of well-kept guest beers in this somewhat remote outpost. New owners from December are Thwaites who are looking for a tenant. At the moment the one beer on offer is Bomber which, with Arnold still at the helm, was on good form when I called. The Church, at Mossley, formerly free of tie, is now also a Thwaites house.

Finally, I have unsubstantiated reports that The Station in Ashton-under-Lyne (John Hesketh's former pub) is to share the premises with an Indian curry house following their re-location from the Sycamore in Stalybridge!

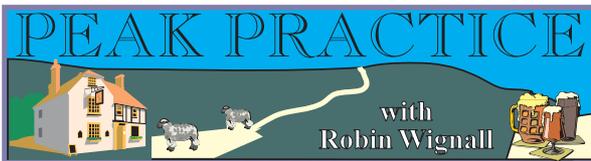
WITCHWOOD NEWS

TheWitchwood, Old Street, Ashton, is running a beer festival right the way through December - roughly 70 beers in total with some really great winter warmers and old ales in there. "I do love my winter beers!" says the Witchwood's Pauline Town.

The pub still has the Cask Club still every Thursday - and the Cask Club Christmas Party is in December with a "Beer Brainiacs" (charity quiz) to win a selection pack of bottled beers on Thursday 9th December. Also through December they are launching a new promotion called The Sunday Sesh - afternoon promo with different offers throughout the day - they thought it would be a nice touch to include a promotion just for CAMRA members too, so right through on Sundays throughout December anyone showing us their membership card can claim a Camra Christmas Club card. The basic idea is that if you collect stamps with each pint of cask bought, for every 5 you buy over the month you can claim any beer on the bar for your sixth at half price, and completed cards can be entered into a free prize draw to be drawn on Sunday 2 January with a hamper of bottled beers for the prize (a dozen bottle of beers including some of the speciality imported beers they stock - quite a nice prize if you win it) If people like this one they are already looking at a January Sales version to extend it into next year....

14





Picking up from last month's item on the Shady Oak at Fernilee, it is good to see this recently re-opened pub continuing to thrive. A chat with new landlord Mike Nelson, confirmed that prior to reopening there had been a total redecoration from a previously garish colour scheme. Extension was made into an adjoining cottage and the bar area was enlarged.

Mike, who has over 10 years of experience of pubs and hotels in Manchester City Centre, runs the Shady Oak as a genuine free house. He is pleased with the way food has taken off since reopening. He also keeps a decent pint of cask beer. Shady Oak (4.2%) is the house beer from Coach House. On my most recent visit this was accompanied by Robinson's Cumbria way and Coach House Innkeepers. All sell at £1.90. I tried the first two on that visit and they were on form.

The Shady Oak stands on the old Long Hill road from Whaley Bridge to Buxton, and whilst the hamlet of Fernilee provides some local trade, the pub obviously depends on road traffic. It can be reached by public transport during the daytime. The 61 bus connects New Mills, Whaley Bridge and Buxton (it actually starts/finishes in Glossop) and runs every two hours. There are even three buses (61A) each way during opening hours on Sunday. Try to get there if you can, as a visit will be rewarded.

STORM BREWING

Again updating from last month, there is further news about AB 150, Storm Brewery's anniversary beer for Arighi Bianchi, the Macclesfield furnishers. The Good Beer Guide-listed Bull at Kettleshulme, and Railway View at Macclesfield have both been selling it whilst the Bull's Head at Foolow has gone through at least eight casks, and the Barley Mow at Kirk Ireton, in the south of the Peak District has had a delivery. These and other village pubs need visitors as well as locals, and you will be supporting a good local micro brewery as well.

Another village pub worth looking up is the Beehive at Combs, a mile off the Whaley Bridge-Chapel-en-le-Frith road, but nearer to the latter. This was once a Wilson's house but is now free from tie. Dark wood screens have replaced walls as evidence of a multi-roomed pub, and there remains a separate vault, and a room for private parties. There is an emphasis on dining, and a lunchtime visit

was rewarded with good quality midday fare. Historical local photos are around the walls, whilst assorted artefacts of brass, copper and ceramic have been collected. Boddington's Bitter sells at £2, Draught Bass at £2.20 and Taylor's Landlord is available. The beers tried were on good form. A mile walk from the 199 bus route at the Hanging Gate at Cockyard is worth the effort and again supports a good village pub and rural gem.

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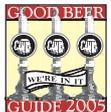
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The theme of this month's Panel was British beers with either unusual flavours, ingredients or both. The varied expertise of British brewers means that this author has tasted some delights and some real 'dogs dinners' of beers in the past. They don't seem to have the subtlety of, say, their Belgian or Dutch counterparts. That said, we would only find out by experimenting, so here goes...

★★★★★

Beer One really set the scene when presented, our nostrils were assailed by the pungency of a Peach Melba yoghurt or even ripe apricots. This element was very much carried through into the taste of the beer too. Quite spritzy, yet reasonably dry with an 'Alka-Seltzer' aftertaste; neither cloying nor hoppy. The colour was described as orange with a hint of tan shoe polish. Allowing the beer to lose some of its fizz and to settle down somewhat, did nothing for the finish; to be frank, not many of us found this beer to be pleasant. A glorious introduction, but somewhat of a let-down really. A guess at the strength yielded 4 to 4.5% for what turned out to be Badger Brewery's award-winning Golden Glory at 4.5%. The peachy taste and aroma came from extract of peach blossom in the ingredients; however, the panel was divided between this one being rather nasty and others finding it quite reasonable if nowt special.

★★★★★

Beer Two was a tad lighter in colour than the first beer. It started with a very faint aroma - a soft, sweetness of warm orange; perhaps due to the level of carbonation, it was really difficult to discern a lot. The taste was less dry and had less of a mouthfeel than in the first beer. We were struggling to find much to say about this one; could be quite a good quaffer, served cool on a warm day. The beer was Bateman's Combined Harvest (4.7%) - apparently a multi-grained grist recipe of barley, wheat, rye and oat malts combined.

★★★★★

With Beer Three, some of us discerned honey on the nose, others did not. Whether the honey was Greek, Mexican or British, God knows! We found it to be slightly disappointing on the taste - thinnish, very short, and lacking bitterness. However, one of our number was able to detect an entire jarful of honey aroma AND bitterness in the finish! Goes to show how different we all are. The beer was Holt's Humdinger (3.5% Honey beer) - the verdict of most of us was that it was thin and forgettable.

★★★★★

Beer Four issued forth a powerful aroma of chocolate, possibly demerara, or rum and raisin; chocolate sauce from one of those squeeze bottles, even! The taste was initially dry, akin to cocoa powder; it was not as sweet as one might fear in a ruby-black beer reeking of chocolate. The cocoa note was a constant throughout the taste, with little being detected within the swallow however. We were impressed by the chocolateness of it all (a "one-trick pony" as one of our party stated), but one-dimensional really. Styling itself as an "Ebony-coloured lager", it is crafted using deep-roasted malts only and no chocolate is actually used within the production it states upon the label of this 4.5% Meantime Brewing, Chocolate Meantime Beer.

★★★★★

Beer Five brought forth such words as gingery, ginger-bread and ground-ginger such was it redolence! Our Beer Buyer and host said "No, that cannot be, we have no beers containing that ingredient tonight". Light gold to brown in colour, the taste delivered green fruits - gooseberries, say. Astringent with a hint of sourness, and very little by way of discernible hop character. We were unimpressed by this offering. When it was revealed to be Heather Ales Fraoch (5%) it explained a good deal of the mystery and confusion. This beer, to my knowledge, does not use hops to bitter the beer; instead the brewers use Sweet Gale (or Bog Myrtle) and heather to achieve their aim. Unusual.

★★★★★

Another beer to give off an initial pungency was Beer Six. Pear drops (the sweets), Fruit Salad chews, even hints of apple, perhaps candy-sugar; then suddenly a blast of dry banana chips assailed you. Surely it

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had to be something like Charles Wells Banana Bread Beer (5.2%), and indeed, it was! Some of the party enjoyed its equivalent available in cask form some years ago, but to recognise it as the same beer took us some time as that initial aroma of dried banana was so intense. We allowed it to stand some time, but even in the finish, the banana did dominate somewhat. For folk who revel in Imperial measures, this comes in a pint bottle. A brief moment of silliness then broke through the usually staid and sedate party with a chorus of the theme song from "Banana Splits" - "La la la, Lal-a-la la, La la la, Lal-a-la la. One Banana, Two Banana, Three Banana, Four...".

★★★★★

Almost all bananaed-out, we took on Beer Seven, our final beer. A fruity sourness was detected in the aroma; a somewhat strange, lifting aroma. It was difficult for us to fathom what exactly was going on - a real puzzler, a true odd-ball of a beer! Then, as it warmed in the glass, it became peculiarly unpleasant, much to the disenchantment of the group. A poor finish to the tasting from the 6.6% Innis & Gunn, Oak Aged Beer.

To sum things up. To pick one enjoyable beer it would be the Batemans - we chose this as being the 'interesting' one. Consensus was that we disliked the beers we sampled, unfortunate, but there it is. It may have been that the tastes of the panel, made up primarily of cask ale drinkers, was unaccustomed to such unusual tastes. MM.



PUB NEWS

The Queens Hotel in Macc, is still undergoing quite a refurbishment by Holts, as our correspondent passed the bar area had changed and the interior was unrecognisable. The name of the pub is also to change, we hear.

News of a great real ale gain in Macclesfield. The Brewers Arms on Bridge Street has been taken over by Graham and Michelle Emery who are rapidly turning this former keg-only pub into a real ale oasis. Three cask ales are available, all taken from the Enterprise Inns guest list. The permanent beer is Caledonian Deuchars IPA supplemented by two changing guest beers. For December the guests will be Springhead Brewery Fallen Angel (4.5%) and Wychwood Festive Spirits (5%) with the possibility of Orkney Dark Island making an appearance over the Christmas period. Graham tells us that the real ales are going from strength to strength at the expense of the keg beers. That's the sort of news we like to hear!

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MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

Only a few bits and pieces this month – there seems to be a bit of a pre-Christmas lull on the local pub scene.

HILARY STEP

It was a few months ago I reported on the opening of the Hilary Step in Whalley Range and I thought I'd pop back and see how things were progressing now it's bedded in. I spoke to owner Rob Goater who told me that everything has been going very well since the bar opened. It can be quiet early in the week but subsequently it gets very busy. He now has permission for outside drinking on the patio at the front of the pub but is having some problems with the enclosed beer garden at the back – hopefully these will be resolved by the time good weather arrives next year. Of course the Hilary Step made news as one of the few totally non-smoking pubs or bars in the city and I asked Rob if that has presented him with any problems. He was pleased to say there had been none at all with a lot of his regulars keen to support the non-smoking environment. Those new customer who do accidentally light up are invariably apologetic when the house rules are explained to them.

There is an interesting range of beers available including German wheat beers and pils on draught and a small range of bottles. There are also four on handpump. The regulars are Thwaites Thoroughbred and Bomber along with two guests, often from Phoenix Brewery. Quality has always been good when I've called and the Hilary Step also won the 'Best Ale' award in the recent Chorlton Food & Drink Awards. Well worth a visit if you've not yet called.

ANCOATS OUTING

Is Ancoats the new Castlefield? There's certainly a lot of money going into the area but on the pub and beer front, well...

A pre-CAMRA pub guide to Manchester published in 1975 described 28 pubs in Ancoats (plus half a dozen more on Oldham Road). Few remain. The corner of Oldham Road and Great Ancoats street is dominated by the long-closed Crown & Kettle but further up Oldham Road one pub does survive. This is the Cheshire Cheese, a wonderful piece of the old Manchester pub scene. Supremely shabby with a friendly and relaxed atmosphere, only let down by the total absence of real ale – don't let the bank of handpumps, complete with clips, fool you.

Elsewhere, the Edinburgh Castle on Blossom Street is a relatively recent casualty and is now closed and boarded. Still standing are the long-closed Smiths Arms ('The Hammer') on Sheratt Street – a great Tetley pub in its day, and the Cross Keys on Jersey Street. As the area improves and is repopulated it would be good to think that there is at least a faint chance these could reopen. The Shamrock on Bengal Street still seems to thrive but is keg-only, as is the Bank of England on Pollard Street.

Great Ancoats Street itself is a testimony to this decline. The Land O'Cakes has just closed after a disastrous conversion to the café bar styled Lord Attersbury, and with it has gone the handpumped Holt's Bitter. The Cotton Tree, the Ancoates and the Waltzing Weasel have all also gone. Even a new bar, Refuel, is now closed and for sale – perhaps this was a little before its time.

So what's left? Thank God for the White House. A great survivor, free house and Good Beer Guide regular with Holt's Bitter as the permanent beer and a changing guest, Phoenix Arizona when I called. This really is an oasis in the desert. And of course, from there it's just a short walk to the Jolly Angler on Great Ducie Street. Another wonderful survivor with a great atmosphere and top-notch Hydes' Bitter.

BITS & PIECES

Just a few snippets now. On Deansgate the Pig & Porcupine is closed and shuttered. This is a pub that has struggled to find an identity for some time and to be honest I wasn't surprised to see it closed. On a happier note, there has been a real ale gain in the form of the Bank on Mosley Street with Greene King IPA, Abbot and Old Speckled Hen all reported as having been available on handpump. In West Didsbury the Four In Hand on Lapwing Lane is currently closed, apparently for a major refurbishment.

Lastly, I owe an apology to the Station in Didsbury. I said last time that price of the lease had been reduced – not so, it seems that the higher price in the first trade ad was a printing error. I'm happy to put the record straight here.



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membership offer on page 16

Local CAMRA AWARD



Camra member Graeme Wood presents Julie and Barney Donaghy of the Kingsway Levenshulme with their November Pub of the Month Award, and below the recent successful Manchester Rag Beer Festival held at Manchester University Northern Campus (UMIST as was) before the beer ran out on Friday - meaning the festival couldn't open on the Saturday!





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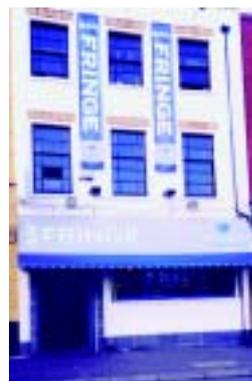
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HUMBUG!

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