

APRIL 2009



Opening

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

COVERING THE CITIES OF MANCHESTER & SALFORD, STOCKPORT, TAMESIDE, TRAFFORD, N.E. CHESHIRE & MACCLESFIELD

Local Pubs Week

A Celebration of Stockport's Pubs

A recent article in the *Manchester Evening News* complained that Stockport is "the largest town in the country that hasn't been colonised by the branded bar chains". The author seemed to think this was a bad thing. We believe it is something to celebrate



It is very easy to be complacent but, for those who appreciate what goes to make a good pub, Stockport town centre is the envy of towns across the UK boasting as it does a stunning array of traditional locals. This includes two that have made it to the shortlist for National Pub of Year in recent years. While acknowledging the sterling efforts of the tourism development staff at the Council, CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, locally is questioning why this unique selling point for the town has not been more fully exploited and why in contrast to Manchester city centre the town centre seems in many respects to give up the ghost after dark.



John Sutcliffe, the Campaign's local Public Affairs Officer told *Opening Times* 'It's time to bring the life back into the town centre in the evenings before its decline is terminal. The time to act is now; we cannot wait for the multi million pound town centre plan to become reality if it ever does. Given Stockport's incredible range of pubs and choice of quality cask beers at very reasonable prices the town could

very well be marketed as Britain's Capital of Cask'.



To promote Stockport's town centre pubs and to illustrate the opportunity being missed the Campaign will be holding an extended week of action starting on 17th April with a stagger in the south of the town centre and finishing at the Pub of the Year celebrations on 25th April at the Arden Arms on Millgate. This local pubs week will also include the start of the Magic Mild challenge on 18th April, a multi pub mild social on 20th April – with a stop outside the now sadly closed historic Three Shires on Underbank for photos – and the Pub of the Month on 23rd April. For more details of venues and times go to page 18. Everybody is welcome at all these events whether CAMRA members or not!



We are now on the home straight for the 23rd Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. Once again sponsored by the Stockport Express, the Festival will take place at Edgeley Park from 28-30 May. The beer and cider orders are being finalised and we are pleased to announce that Marble Brewery have once again agreed to brew this year's Festival Special beer. There is a preview of the entertainment on page 11.



The Mild Challenge is back this year – with a new name and a greater spread of pubs. Thanks also to our new sponsor, Stephenson's catering supplies. Prizes include t-shirts, polo shirts and a visit to Hydes Brewery. Marble Brewery has also kindly agreed to let us offer the chance for one winner to be "brewer for a day". Just pick up a card from a participating pub. Full details on page 15.

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THE Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for April 2009 is the Alexandra on Northgate Road in Edgeley.

This imposing building was built in 1911 and has remained largely unspoiled since then. Indeed so well preserved is most of the interior that the pub has gained a place on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors.

As you enter the pub there is a half tiled hall-cum-drinking lobby with five rooms off. To the right is a large lounge complete with original fixed seating and fireplace and to the left is the traditional vault, again with its original seating still in situ.

At the back of the pub is another lounge, again with original fireplace, and to the left a snug behind a partially glazed wall, and again complete with original seating and fireplace. Down a corridor is the former billiard room now given over to pool but still complete with a stained glass ceiling panel. There is another impressive stained glass window halfway up the stairs.

The only really new features are the bar fittings (and even here the old outdoor department remains intact but boarded up). Another new innovation is the impressive outdoor smoking area cum beer garden.

All of this heritage had become a little careworn over the years but just over three years ago the pub was taken over by Paul and Emma Grimes who have slowly redecorated and restored the pub. 15 months ago they took a step back and, while they remain the tenants, the pub has since been very successfully run by Paul's mum, Sue.

This is the first pub that Sue has run on a permanent basis and she has really risen to the challenge. The Alexandra is a suburban community pub with a loyal band of regulars – it's the type of pub that the doom mongers will tell you has no future. However in the skilful hands of people like Paul, Emma and Sue it is clear that the Alexandra has plenty of life left in it yet. As this is what is known as a "wet led" pub it is of course important that the beer is well kept and the handpumped Robinsons Unicorn and seasonal beer are always in fine form.

This well deserved award will be presented on Thursday 23 April, from 8pm, as part of our Local Pubs Week celebrations. This is fitting as the Alex is in many ways a classic local pub – get along early for what should be an excellent night. **JC**



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COMMENT, NOTES & CONTENTS

Opening Times – Comment

This month we are running Local Pubs Week, a national CAMRA initiative which can be given a local slant. There are many fine pubs in central Stockport and the town has so far avoided “chain bar blight”. When other CAMRA branches come to Stockport they are always pleasantly surprised at the concentration of good pubs in such a small area.

However, the town does seem to be backwards in coming forwards about this. It’s difficult to know why this is but we hope that our initiatives (to be followed up in May with the publication of the brand new Stockport Pub Guide) will galvanise a few people into action. Our local Stockport readers can help by patronising more town centre pubs more often.

Opening Times - Information

Opening Times is produced by the Stockport & South Manchester Branch of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. Additional material is supplied by the High Peak & NE Cheshire, Trafford & Hulme, North Manchester and Macclesfield & E Cheshire Branches. The views expressed are not necessarily those of CAMRA either locally or nationally. 7,000 copies a month are printed by Phil Powell Printing of Failsworth. All articles copyright CAMRA unless otherwise stated.

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Postal subscriptions are available at £6 for 12 issues (make cheques payable to *Opening Times*). Apply to John Tune, 4 Sandown Rd, Cheadle Heath, Stockport, SK3 0JF.

Trading Standards – problems in pubs should normally be resolved by a quiet word with the licensee. However sometimes it may be necessary to take it further. These are the local contacts:

Stockport	0845 644 4301	Trafford	0161 9122274
Manchester	0161 234 1555	Derbyshire	08456 058058
Salford	0161 925 1346	Cheshire	0845 1132500
Tameside	0161 342 8355		

Copy Date for the May issue is Saturday 11th April

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High Peak PUB NEWS

WITH FRANK WOOD

The **Roe Cross** at Mottram was the venue for High Peak CAMRA's monthly Branch meeting in March and with Shaw's Bitter, Thwaites Wainwright, Marble J P Best and Phoenix Arizona on offer that night, it is certainly the best choice of beers in the area at the moment. The Shaw's Bitter is to a new formulation, a lighter coloured version than the former beer of the same name, and it is selling well in the normal outlets.

Down in Mottram village, the **White Hart** is a shadow of its former days when Geoff Oliver owned it before he sold it on to J W Lees. There was no real ale on offer early that night and recent reports are that J W Lees Bitter is the only beer normally on offer. At the **Junction**, no real ale there either, with Robinsons beers available only on fons.

The **Gardeners Arms** on Astley Street Dukinfield seems lost. The pub signs recently were removed (Robinsons) and Pugh & Co. auctioneers signs are up on display instead.

However in Stalybridge, a gain, with the **Wharf Tavern** selling real ale again. Wells & Youngs Bombardier was spotted recently on sale.

Through February and early March the **Rock Tavern** on the Marple Road from Charlesworth remained shut as did the **Nags Head** on Charlestown Road, Glossop. The **Grey Mare** in Charlesworth is open but up for sale.

Planning permission has been granted by Tameside Borough Council, to turn the **Junction Inn** at Mottram traffic lights, a conservation area, into 4 terraced houses, each with three bedrooms.

The architect cited the smoking ban, credit crunch and licensing law changes as the reasons for its demise. It was felt by Robinsons Brewery, the owners, that there was no way that the pub could be saved. Permission was also granted for 8 further houses on the pubs car park.

Mike Wawiorko adds Following a walk in Lyme Park we stopped for lunch at the **Boars Head** in Higher Poynton for lunch and found good food at a reasonable price with well kept ales to wash it down. We chose the soup and sandwich offer for £5.95 and thoroughly enjoyed the freshly made mushroom soup, sandwich, good size portion of chips and salad. There's a choice of three cask ales. The Boars Head can be found by the Nelson Pit visitor centre by the former Higher Poynton railway station. It is handily placed for the Macclesfield canal, hiking in the hills, cycling or walking the Middlewood Way or following a visit to the nearby Anson Engine Museum.

In the Peak a couple of Cheshire pubs at Kettleshulme well worth a visit are the **Swan**, with a good reputation for its food and choice of ales from independent breweries and the **Bulls Head**. They form a good base for a hike up to Windgather rocks and Shining Tor with an hourly bus daytime Monday to Saturday between Macclesfield and Whaley Bridge.



Energetic Erica Lindop has wasted no time in making her mark on the **Rising Moon** at Matley. Erica, from Newton, has attracted new customers by putting her previous background as an interior designer to good use. She explains: "It's all about presentation and attention to

detail. Having worked here behind the bar for the past 12 months I built up some good ideas to make a real difference, so when I had the chance to take over as licensee I seized the opportunity and put my plans into action." Our photograph shows Erica (centre) and her mother Susan (right) receiving their training certificates from Veronica Robinson.

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Robin Wignall's monthly round-up on the Peak Pub Scene

Once again a local history society meeting produced some gems of information about pub history. In Buxton Spring Gardens there was a Shakespeare Hotel from 1711-1926. The site was eventually occupied by Woolworth's, now closed of course, whilst the stables at the rear of the hotel became the Shakespeare Garage. The Hardwick Hotel was lost in the building of the shopping precinct. The Eagle, on the Market Place, now a Hydes house, was the Devonshire for over a century until the 1930's, but from 1592 until the 19th century there had been the Eagle and Child on the site. Wetherspoon's Wye Vale House had been the Midland Hotel, and as such is likely to have been a railway hotel.

There is more on pub history at Furness Vale Local History Society on Tues. 5 May at 7.30 p.m. A talk entitled *All Cakes and Ale*, presents a history of the English inn through inn signs. Visitors are welcome. Admission is £1 to non-society members, and includes refreshments. A Hydes beer is available in the club bar afterwards. I gather that non-members can access this. There is also real ale to be had at the **Soldier Dick** and the **Crossings**, both a minute's walk away from the club, in the village centre. The **Crossings** gave a chance to try Robinson's Trouble and Strife in early March.

Still on pub history, up at the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee, some of the pub's history can be seen on menus, place mats and leaflets. Old photographs show the Shady Oak as a Clarke's house. Clarke's was the Reddish brewery bought and closed by Boddington's in 1963. Boddington's ownership of the Shady Oak also shows in photographs. With the demise of Boddington's as first a brewer and then a pub owner, there was a chequered history for the pub, including periods of closure, until it was bought by Jennings of Cockermouth. This was surely their most southerly pub. This ownership was brief as Jennings was bought out by Marston's, although the Shady Oak is still badged Jennings. The current beer range reflects this duality with Marston's Bitter and Pedigree, and Jennings Cumberland and Sneaklifter available.

A recent visit to the **Navigation** at Buxworth found two guest beers, both from Howard Town at Glossop. Longdendale Lights and Monk's Gold were both in good form.

The **Fox** at Brook Bottom is well worth a visit for good Robinson's Hatters and Unicorn. It is not the easiest pub to find, a short walk uphill from Strines Station, a longer walk from Strines P.O. bus stop, or a drive along the narrow lane from New Mills..

At the **Old Hall** at Whitehough, where dining has extended into the room with a minstrel gallery, recent guest beers have included Hornbeam Lemon Blossom, refreshingly pale and hoppy, Storm Silk of Amnesia and Copper Dragon Best Bitter. This Skipton brew was in very good form.

The Kings Arms in Chapel en le Frith had no real ale on a recent visit, which was my first call for a couple of years. There had at that time been real ale available, Black Sheep Bitter if I recall rightly, but perhaps that was a brief flirtation with cask conditioned beer.

The **Fallow Deer** just off the by-pass on the edge of Chapel en le Frith seems to have had a busy start since opening in December. Food sales were probably helped by a voucher for £5 off on the back of Morrison's till receipts in Chapel. Regular beers are Pedigree and Jennings Cumberland. The third hand pump is for guest beers from elsewhere in the Marston's brewing empire. Wychwood Dirty Tackle was available when I called.

Finally a bit of good news as the **White Hart** in Whaley Bridge has re-opened. A glance through the window shows three hand pumps with pump clips. More next time.

*Steve, Johanne & Molly
welcome you to*

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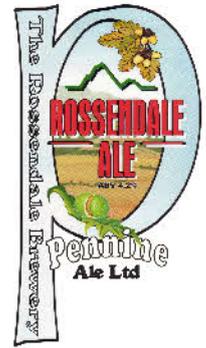
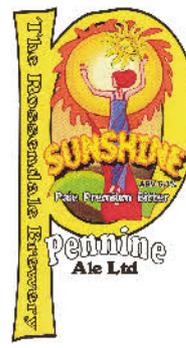
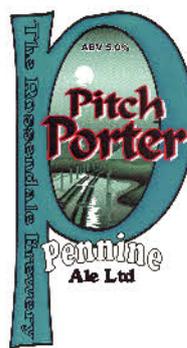
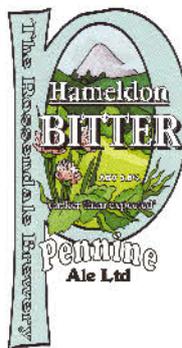
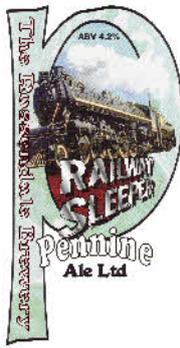
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Stagger

King Street West with Paul Felton

We started the evening in the **Florist** on Shaw Heath, almost opposite the bottom of Longshut Lane West, and the first of four Robinsons pubs en route. It has a large, quite impressive exterior; and the inside is divided into a



lobby and five separate drinking areas in a semi circle around the bar, the 'doors' to all of which possess comparatively tame examples of the infamous Robinsons arch – it would be nice if any future refurbishment could get rid of the arches. Now run by the same people that run the

Armoury (see below), it's been turned around somewhat over the past couple of years by its current licensees. The standard two Robinsons beers were available, Hatters mild and Unicorn best bitter, and both were pretty good.

The **Grapes** is at the top of Castle Street, and Robinsons again. Much smaller than the Florist, it's a two room local that has been smartened up recently. The vault has a pool table, and the lounge is festooned with numerous sporting plaques and cups. Again, Hatters and Unicorn were the choices; and again, both were good, if not quite up to the standard set by the Florist. One word of warning: on the way to the toilets at the back of the lounge, there is a cunningly disguised slope which can catch out the unwary. Or perhaps we'd just been drinking.



Across the road to the **Armoury** on the corner of Shaw Heath and Greek Street. There are three rooms here, wood panelled lounge, vault and back room (formerly for darts). The separate lobby in the vault has been lost, creating a larger room and more space

for the darts board, but losing a little in character. The back room has art deco uprighters and swags and tails on the curtains, which seemed a little incongruous. Never mind: this is being a little over-critical of a good, well-run pub. Four beers were available, the ubiquitous Hatters and Unicorn, but also Double Hop and Old Tom (though no one was brave enough to try the latter this early in the evening). Again, all the beers were pretty good.

There were once four other pubs in this area which served cask beer. Of these, the Swan on Shaw Heath, Bluebell on King Street West and Church on Moseley Street are all closed, some long since; and the Greyhound on Bowdon Street is keg.

So it was on to the **Olde Vic** on Chatham Street. This is a small building which externally has perhaps seen better days. Internally it's one room in a B shape: it's good to see that the small stage in front of the fire which seemed to take up too much of the floor area had gone since my last visit, though whether

this is a permanent or temporary development I do not know. As most will know, it's a free house, usually with something from Millstone, and often something from Hydes. On this night there were four beers available, two from Millstone including Olde Vic, the latest in a series of beers named after some of their outlets, plus the latest Hydes seasonal and UXB from Beer Works;



there was also Ross-on-Wye Discovery Blend cider. All of us drank the Millstone Olde Vic, and one enthusiastic soul also had a half of UXB: both easily kept up the high standard of beer thus far in the evening.

Then it was past the former Tom Thumbs to the **Comfortable Gill**, down the hill on the corner of King Street West and Wood Street. The attractive double doors lead into a very constricted entrance; the bar is immediately in front when you enter, with little room to move. It's a dark U-shaped interior, with a pool room back left. The Comfy Gill styles itself as Stockport's premier karaoke venue; but there wasn't much custom, although credit where it's due, some of the karaoke singers could actually sing! The only beer available was thought to be Theakstons XB, though this is in some doubt as it came out of a handpump with a Black Bull clip. Whatever it was, it wasn't bad: while it was probably the least good beer of the night (to use "worst" might be unfair) this says more about the good quality available elsewhere than any particular failing at the Comfy Gill.

The **Pineapple** on Heaton Lane was the fourth and final Robinsons pub of the night, and the initial impression was favourable if only for the stained glass in the entrance lobby and front windows (and anyone who knows the writer's architectural tastes will know of his liking for stained glass, and indeed for arches, though by choice the latter would be Romanesque or Gothic, rather than Robinsons ...). There's a small room front left, divided from the remainder of the pub above waist level by a wrought iron frame which I expected to be long gone. The larger main room on the left is decorated with a myriad of plates on the wall. As well as the standard Hatters and Unicorn, a first sighting was made of both Cumbrian Way and the current seasonal, Trouble & Strife; yet again, all beers were good, with the seasonal causing one of our number to go into raptures.

Most readers will know the **Crown** on Heaton Lane, recently a finalist in CAMRA's national pub of the year competition, so there's almost little



point in a long description. Compact, five different drinking areas including the often-crowded space in front of the bar, more beers that you can shake a stick at, a must-visit for visitors to the town. Oh, and the beer was good, too!

I think these days this must count as one of the better staggers. Short walks, some very goods pubs, and basically good beer everywhere we went. Can't ask for too much more than that. Didn't rain, either.



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Reaching for the Revolver

THE past couple of years have seen an unprecedented range of pressures on the pub trade in the shape of the credit crunch, the smoking ban, a 20% increase in beer duty, a torrent of questionable "health advice" about drinking and now the threat of a mandatory code of practice which is likely to cost pubs hundreds of millions of pounds. Most of these factors are either the direct responsibility of government or have been exacerbated by their actions. So it was quite astonishing to hear the Home Office minister in charge of licensing policy, Alan Campbell, admit that he couldn't remember the last time he had been in a pub, while Trade minister Angela Eagle denied any government responsibility and said it was all down to "shifting consumer tastes". Another minister, Caroline Flint, could not understand why people went to pubs just to drink

This really does underline how out of touch with the concerns of ordinary people the government are. They give no indication of understanding why people should want to visit pubs or showing the slightest degree of sympathy for the plight of the licensed trade. They seem to see pubs as a kind of health hazard, scenes of fighting and binge-drinking and purveyors of unhealthy, fatty food, and totally fail to appreciate that most pub customers are entirely responsible and most pubs are friendly, trouble-free places that play an important role in community life. Given this attitude, it is perhaps wishful thinking that the beleaguered pub trade will manage to wring any meaningful concessions out of the current administration, so don't expect the wave of closures to abate any time soon. In the words of Jonathan Neame, chairman of Shepherd Neame, "for other industries the government reached for the chequebook, but for pubs, Labour has reached for the revolver".

A Bunch of Fakers

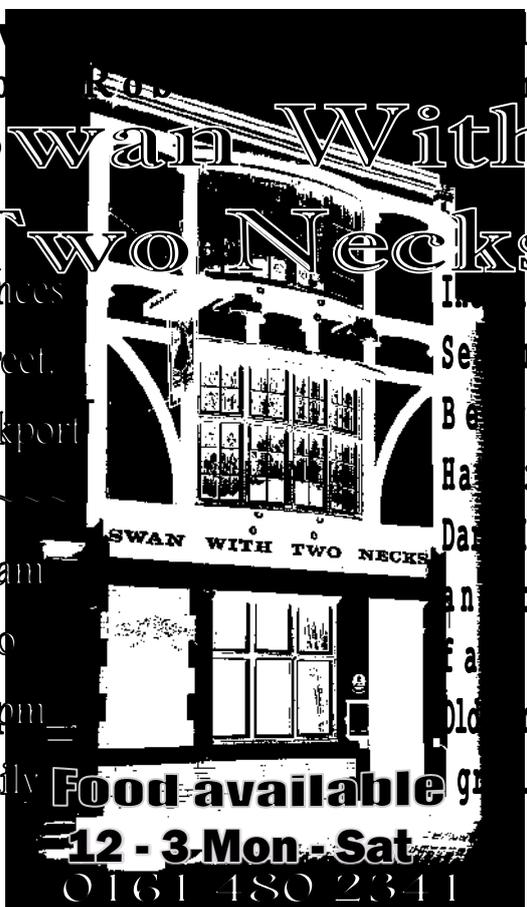
IF you mention the word "charity", most people will automatically think of an organisation funded by public donations and existing to help the sick and needy. But in recent years, another form of charity has grown up, which is largely funded by government grants, and is essentially a lobbying group rather than one that actually helps anyone. They may claim to be independent of government, but in reality any opposition they display is merely to egg government on to impose ever tighter restrictions in favour of their particular hobbyhorse. Such bodies have justifiably been dubbed "Fake Charities".

One of the worst examples is Alcohol Concern. Far from devoting their efforts to helping the unfortunate victims of the disease of alcoholism, their primary purpose is to campaign in favour of every proposed curb on drinking and drinkers going. For this objective, they derive well over half their income from the government. In 2007/08, their total income was £903,000. £515,000, or 57%, of this came directly from the government, with a mere £4,991, about half of one percent, coming from public donations.

If they had to resort to rattling collection boxes in the street in favour of banning happy hours, closing pubs and jacking up alcohol taxes, I wonder how much response they would get. Yet the government are happy to spend taxpayers' money in funding bodies like this whose primary aim is restricting things people enjoy.

Curmudgeon Online: www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk
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# Macclesfield PUB NEWS

**W**E HAVE plenty of good news in Macclesfield, writes *Mike Wawioro*. After some months being closed, the **Bate Hall** in the heart of the shopping area on Chestergate has reopened offering two Marstons ales plus a guest. On Park Lane, close to town, the former Ivy House is thriving as the **Last Orders** with a couple of ever changing real ales at reasonable prices. On my visits the Locale Macclesfield's Storm has been in cracking form.

In the outskirts, two former deserts have been offering cask for the first time in a good while. At Broken Cross, the **Pack Horse** is serving one ale from the Punch Finest list. Landlord Paul explained he has installed new lines and we found Shepherd Neame Canterbury Jack in good condition. We've also found Titanic, Mordue and an excellent Newman's Red Castle Cream. The branch is due to visit the Pack Horse along with the **Bulls Head** (Boddingtons plus two guests) and **Cock** at Henbury (Robinsons) in a wander during March. On the Moss, the **Golden Lion** has been putting a toe in the market with Bombardier

The **Crown** on Bond Street has been under new management for a few months and is offering three cask ales, with cracking good Bass, regular Tetley mild and a guest. The landlord is very enthusiastic about his ales and the Crown is well worth a visit. A traditional back street local, the **Crompton Road Tavern**, has completed its internal renovation and is thriving with a couple of real ales. The tavern has been thoroughly redecorated and reupholstered, but keeps its traditional feel with four separate inside areas.

During winter a traditional local the **Dolphin** up Windmill Street has been serving Robinsons Old Tom in perfect condition. There's also Unicorn, Hatters and the seasonal Robinsons brew. The Dolphin is a stalwart in the Macclesfield bar skittles league. Another Robinsons house, the **Flower Pot** at Congleton Road crossroads near the Learning Zone, has added a seasonal brew to the always excellent Unicorn. This a popular pub with all ages, from students through to mature diners, and children welcome to eat early evening. Main meals cost £8-9 and the children's menu has real food, not just the usual junk. As well as the lounge area, there's a games room with darts and pool and a large garden.

The **Railway View** seems to be a convert to real cider with one on the bar at the time of recent visits.

Things seem to be back to normal at the **Cock & Pheasant** in Bollington following the financial problems of the Orchid Pub Company. Storm beers are now permanently back on the bar.

## Wilmslow Update

**R**ECENT visits to the **Rifleman's** have seen an abundance of customers. The quiz nights are back on Thursdays and Sundays, while music nights are also on the agenda. Food is being introduced again, too. And as for the real ale, they currently have **six** cask ales – Boddington's, Theakston's, Ruddle's County, Deuchars IPA, Black Sheep and Old Speckled Hen. Well worth checking out.

There was general dismay when the **Unicorn** on Adlington Road closed without warning just before Christmas – one of the Orchid Group casualties. The pub reopened again in mid-January having reverted back to its previous owners, Spirit Group. The pub is now operating much as before except in one respect – no local beers. The pub used to be a haven in Wilmslow of Cheshire brewed ale, from Storm and Northern Brewers. Sadly from now on we'll only see beers from Spirit's standard list which includes none brewed closer than Liverpool. Those available on a recent visit were Black Sheep, Wells Bombardier and Taylor's Landlord.

## The Cheshire Ring Manchester Road, Hyde



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To mark the 25th Birthday Year of Opening Times we are commissioning a series of commemorative beers from local breweries, one per month (although one or two "extras" are also likely). Each month we will be featuring the brewery producing the beer and also tell you a bit about the beer itself. The fourth in the series comes from the Bollington Brewery. Check out the brewery's website at [www.bollingtonbrewing.co.uk](http://www.bollingtonbrewing.co.uk)

### About the Brewery

**B**OLLINGTON Brewery is the youngest brewery in the *Opening Times* area, having started to brew in July 2008. Owner and head brewer is Lee Wainwright, landlord of the nearby (just 150 feet away!) Vale Inn on Adlington Road. Having established the Vale as a multi-beer freehouse, brewing his own beers seemed to be a logical step for Lee, whose brewery has returned brewing to the Cheshire town 80 years after the closure of the old Heaver Brothers Brewery.



It was by chance that Lee met a former brewery owner at the Stowmarket beer festival and managed to get hold of an appropriate kit. The water in Bollington tends to be quite good for brewing and the yeast is originally from Edinburgh and is of high quality.

The brewing kit itself is currently a four-barrel plant, producing 16 casks if brewing takes place weekly – and there is capacity to increase to 60 casks each week.

The first beer, appropriately called First Brew (4.2% ABV) is still in production as Bollington Best. This is an excellent hoppy beer with a clean, crisp palate and a refreshing bitter aftertaste. It has however been joined by an impressively varied range of other beers, including:

**Bollington Nights (3.9%)** - This is a smooth traditional dark ale with a light flavour and aroma, but a definite bitterness.

**White Nancy (4.1%)** - a very pale bitter with a good hoppiness and light body. White Nancy is the famous folly on Kerridge Ridge overlooking Bollington.

**Wheat Nancy (4.3%)** - Golden, crisp bitter with a good balance of wheat to give some body and extra flavour

**Oat Mill Stout (5%)** - An Oatmeal Stout with a twist. A hoppy bitter taste keeps the sweetness in check and allows for a great dark beer.

### About the Beer

**O**UR *Opening Times* special is a 4.3% ABV beer described by the brewery as "a fresh spring time bitter, conjures up images of fresh flowers, new growth, early morning bird song and warm days to come".

It is a dark copper beer made with Maris Otter, Crystal and Pale Chocolate malts. There is an initial sweet flavour and aroma followed by a refreshing dry and slightly fruity aftertaste provided by the Sovereign and Fuggles hops used in the brew. A rounded and enjoyable beer.



**I** FINALLY managed to call into the **Red Bull** on Hillgate and have a word with the new team. When the newly refurbished pub opened it was under temporary management but it has now been let on a tenancy, which should ensure continuity and stability.

The team comprises Alex and Karen Wilson plus their business partner Mike Charlton. Alex is an old hand in the licensed trade but this is his first dedicated cask ale house – in the past he has been involved with well known venues such as Brasingmens in Alderley Edge where cask beers weren't part of the offer.



They are keen to make a success of the pub and my advice was to do the basic things well – well kept ales, top quality food, a smart and safe environment, and the rest would follow. I think I was preaching to the converted as this seems to be just what they are doing. Trade is on a pleasing upward trajectory and given the quality of the operation to date I'm not surprised.

The four cask ales are Hatters, Unicorn, Double Hop and the seasonal – quality has been high when I have been in.

There are a variety of promotions too – Wednesday night sees a pub quiz with a free curry for all entrants, there is live music from the Bourbon Street Preachers on Saturday nights and a Sunday Lunch Club (with live swing and blues from 4pm). There's also an "Early Doors Club" between 5pm and 7pm Mondays to Fridays with a pie and pint plus complimentary nibbles. The pub also produces a cheekily named newsletter, *The Bull Sheet* and there's an informative website at [www.redbullstockport.co.uk](http://www.redbullstockport.co.uk).

### More News from Around the Town

The gentle refurbishment at the **Swan With Two Necks**



(Princes Street) continues. Latest developments include the installation of new wooden hand pump handles and, more significantly, fitting new wooden panelling in the front room. This is a very classy job and finishes the room off a treat, making for a very cosy and welcoming feel. There's

a new chef, too (in typical *Opening Times* fashion, the former chef left just after we published our glowing food review) who is producing some really high quality food.

Elsewhere the cask ale range has changed at the **Bowling Green** on Charles Street. There are now two cask beers, Theakstons Best Bitter and XB but they are only available at weekends.

I rarely get down Newbridge Lane which is a shame as there are two excellent pubs down there. The **Park** has been selling Holts Bitter on hand pump for years. Nearby the **Midway** continues to impress. It majors on food these days but the beer drinker isn't overlooked. The beer range is now Jennings Cumberland Ale plus a changing guest such as Adnams Broadside. Worth a visit.

Finally in Hazel Grove, the **Robin Hood** is keg. The **Rising Sun** is also keg, although the managers there are only temporary so the next people may put cask back on. The **Bulls Head** is doing Courage Best, Greene King IPA, and Black Sheep bitter. They hope to get Hornbeam Bulls Head back on in future.

# FESTIVAL ENTERTAINMENT

## A run down of the bands appearing at this year's Beer Festival

As usual apart from the great range of beer, cider and perry, there will also be some great bands for you to enjoy in our separate music room. We've asked Festival Entertainment Manager Stuart Ballantyne to give us a taste of what's on offer this year....

### Thursday Night – The Curragh Sons

The festival opens with the return of one of the most popular Irish folk bands in the country, the Curragh Sons. Hardly 'new kids on the block', the Curragh Sons have been running in one form or another for thirty years, and have played their exciting brand of Irish and original material across the U.K. Ireland and beyond. The band's lead singer and bodhran player is Sean Wood who has been the mainstay of the band from the start and has played with all the big folk names out of Ireland, including The Pogues, The Wolfetones, and many more. They reckon the current line-up is the best yet – and we have to agree.



### Friday Night – The Soul Bandits

The Soul Bandits were formed in 1987 and have been playing on and off together ever since. They are one of the North-West's most popular bands, specialising in Stax, Atlantic and Motown songs. These songs include many classics from artists such as Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, and James Brown.

The Soul Bandits' music is above all fun, lively, dancing music played with a tight rhythm section supported by drums, lead guitar and bass guitar which are topped off with lead singer Graham's punchy vocals and harmonica. They play a heady mix of classic soul songs that will make you want to get up, dance and party.



### Saturday: A Festival of Manchester's Finest

This year's Saturday entertainment is an all-day showcase of some of the best local bands and musicians.

#### Pete Goode

Kicking off the Saturday lunchtime music session this year we have Pete Goode, a long standing local folk artist that plays regularly in the Stockport pub scene. Pete has played all over the UK, in the 80's as part of the popular folk duo Abalon and latterly as a solo artist. Make sure that you don't miss this opening set as it will bode you well for the rest of the entertainment over the day.

#### Ye Olde Vic Band

Next up on Saturday lunchtime is the Ye Olde Vic Band whose name is taken from a similarly named pub not a million miles away from the beer festival where the band is based. They promote themselves as playing traditional English style music which is 'the most danceable music in the world'.

#### YesSir!

Yes Sir was first around in the late 1970's emerging out of Victor Brox's Blues Train. They played together on and off with some great success until retiring from



the scene in 1986. The band was reformed in 2006 with a new two piece horn section and a new lead guitarist creating one of the most dynamic and entertaining line ups in the business.

Fans of blues music will not be disappointed as the band covers many of the classics blues anthems. As a seven piece band they certainly look the part dressed in their black suits and ties and they certainly know how to get the joint really rocking.

#### The Casual Ties

The Casual Ties modestly describe themselves as 'probably the best rock band in the world ever to come from the bit of Edgeley just across the road from Alexandra Park'. This description is far too modest as the band have been regular winners of the coveted Vasco de Gama prize for opening up new musical tour routes the length and breadth of the UK, Ireland and Germany.

Undoubtedly the Casual Ties are one of the most experienced professional rock bands in the North West and can be relied upon to pump out your favourite classic tracks at a feversome pace. The band has a wicked sense of humour, never taking themselves too seriously. Don't miss the Casual Ties – they are one of the best rock bands in the business

#### The Blues Blasters

The Blues Blasters are somewhat of an institution in Stockport playing sensational bar-room blues with a level of finesse quite unlike any other band.

Back once again at Stockport Beer and Cider Festival by popular demand, they will pump out some of the best Chicago blues you have ever heard. The band boasts that between them they have 150 years of gigging experience and this shows in their performances. What you get is a polished performance of superb musicianship featuring one of the tightest rhythm sections in the business but played in a relaxed, effortless way. At the same time the band exudes fun and it is obvious that the band are probably enjoying the gig just as much as you are.



#### The Words

The Words are causing a stir on the Manchester scene with a combination of clever lyrics, incredible music and a desire to perform and improve. Creating music which gets you humming along after your first listen and leaving you with a sense of contentment you had previously never thought possible.

Drawing on influences ranging from Oasis and the Kings of Leon to The Beatles and Elvis & combining the spirit of Indie with the passion a Rock band should have you mixing in the melodic sounds of Motown, The Words have managed to create a style of music which excites and entertains but also hits hard in all the right places.

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**W**ell, it seems to be beer festival time in the pubs of south Manchester. Too late for the last issue I learned of a beer festival being held at **Dulcimer**, Wilbraham Road, Chorlton, at the end of last month. It will have been and gone by the time you read this but I was planning to go down and get a couple of pictures.

Manager Will Pitcher certainly seems enthusiastic enough with 30 guest beers planned alongside five ciders or perries. I think Dulcimer could well be "one to watch".

The **Bulls Head** on London Road (opposite Piccadilly Station) is planning a mini beer festival for the 6 to 15 April. There will be eight additional beers spread across the handpumps – plans include Hook Norton Old Hooky, four Ringwood beers and Wychwood Hobgoblin.

The **Friendship** on Wilmslow Road in Fallowfield is planning a "Red Rose Beer Festival" for 23 to 26 April featuring local beers plus Hydes St Georges Bitter (4.3%).

However the big one is that planned for **Kro2** on Oxford Road over the Easter weekend. This will be featuring an incredible 60-plus different beers from a raft of local breweries

and as if that wasn't enough there will be 20 ciders and perries, sourced from John Reek of Merrylegs Cider (he's the man who supplies much of our cider and perry at Stockport Beer Festival so you know it'll be good stuff). This promises to be a real blast and is one not to miss.



## Opening and Closing

**N**ew Year, new broom they say. That was certainly true for two long-shut Ardwick pubs. The **Union** has reopened as the "Spicy Grill", a cafe-cum-restaurant,



whilst the **Park** will become a martial arts centre / gym. The latter will require considerable work as the place had been dreadfully vandalised (I was shown around by the new owner). Both of these were former Burtonwood houses. The **Kings**

**Head** is firmly shuttered still. It is owned by Network Rail.

Meanwhile the closed **Barleycorn** in West Didsbury has apparently been bought by Jim Ramsbottom, owner of Dukes 92 at Castlefield. I am told a quick refurbishment is planned prior to reopening. No news yet as to whether or not cask ale will feature.

## News and Reviews

I can report that the former Revise in Chorlton has re-opened as "**Elektrik**" (with a slightly dodgy tag line of PublicSocialCafeHouseBar"). But I am pleased to report it is definitely cask with three hand pumps. On my visit two had

clips but only one on - Thwaites Original. The turned round one looked like it could have been Wainwright. The Original was definitely in excellent form. It is certainly a Thwaites supplied outlet, with Warsteiner Lager and Stowford Press cider amongst others on the keg fonts. Two Thwaites supplied / dominated pubs next to each other does make me wonder if Elektrik is a new venture from the owners of Dulcimer?

I can't deny that the smell of new paint was off-putting and also looks like there is more work to do on the décor - the walls are crying out for some artwork. The main thing that they could certainly do with (and deserve) is some more custom - when we left at 10pm just one customer remained.

The rest of the bars on the same strip had plenty of custom. In my opinion, **The Bar** remains one of the stars of the Chorlton houses. On my last visit Marble Ginger & Manchester were joined by Phoenix Arizona, Pictish Brewers Gold & Abbeydale Devastation. The Manchester, Gold & Devastation were all very, very good.

I though I would try out the **Parrswood Hotel** (School Lane, Parrswood Road junction) since it has started selling real ale again. When I called there was Wells Bombardier on hand pump – in good condition if a bit over chilled for my taste, glasses topped up without asking, very reasonable £1.95 per pint. The pub is vast and even when half full it has a strange sort of non-atmosphere, but let us celebrate a pub returning to real ale. It also advertises a guest ale which was not on when I called. The pump clip, correctly turned round, said something like Hair Brained, I think.

### The Last Real Pub in Chorlton?

*Les Jones writes...*

There is a story, repeated in pubs and bars of Chorlton cum Hardy, that when legendary Californian Rock Band The Beach Boys played the Apollo last year they dropped in at The Beech in Chorlton for a couple of pints. Although this might appear unlikely The Bee Gees lived here, Quentin Crisp died here and Badly Drawn Boy Damon Gough still lives here.

I guess I have been going to the **Beech** on Beech Road, Chorlton at least once a week for around two years and on and off for around 30 years. I have always found the company, the staff and the range and quality of beers to be excellent.



My favourite is Taylor's Landlord, although their Best Bitter runs very close. I have also enjoyed a number of beers from the Dunham Massey Brewery.

The Beech is the last of its kind certainly in Chorlton. A pub that is small, friendly and comfortable, with the accent on providing good beer.

Just before Christmas the Beech was completely redecorated with new floors and upholstery. It has been carried out with sensitivity and it looks great.

I would ask anybody who ever visited the Beech to go again and enjoy excellent beer in an exceptional pub.

Did the Beach Boys drink at the Beech? Well maybe, maybe not, but I would swear I heard the ghostly echoes of harmony singing as I walked up Beech Road the other Wednesday!

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As usual you can also pre-purchase festival glasses at £2 each AND this year, we will be launching the brand new Stockport Pub Guide at the Festival. This is a full colour glossy guide which will be on sale at the Festival at £4.95, but if you pre-order, you can buy copies at just £4.50 each. The guide lists EVERY pub in the Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA area, so it's a MUST if you are a beer drinker!.

To discuss any of these options, email Alan Gent on [alan.gent@me.com](mailto:alan.gent@me.com) or ring Alan on 07798 571 354

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Following the success of last year's "Wild for Mild" we are once again running our popular Mild Challenge, this year dubbed "Mild Magic". We have stretched our wings even further this time to bring you a record 90 pubs promoting mild over Manchester, Salford, Tameside, Derbyshire and Trafford.

We have a brand new sponsor, too. Many thanks to Stephenson's Catering Supplies of 161 Buxton Road, Stockport. They have been supplying the catering trade since 1868 – check out their website at [www.stephensons.com](http://www.stephensons.com).

The previous Challenges have been a great success and if you haven't taken part before, try and have a go this time. It's fun and it's easy. It's also a chance to visit some new pubs,

try new beers and, of course, to win some great prizes.

The Challenge runs from Saturday 18 April to Sunday 17 May inclusive and offers everyone taking part the chance to win something. All completed entries will receive either a free entry ticket for the 2009 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival or, if you're a member of CAMRA, a voucher for two free pints of mild at the Festival.

We are also again featuring the **Mild Magic Extra** – visit a participating pub in 16 different areas, using the headings shown on the card, and you will win a special "Mild Magic" t-shirt

Enter the **Mild Magic Super** by getting stamps from 32 different pubs in 32 different areas you get a free "Mild Magic" polo shirt, and you will be entered into a prize draw to be "Brewer for the Day" at Manchester's Marble Brewery

To complete **Mild Magic Ultra**, send in cards containing a stamp from every participating pub, you will also receive a free, special-edition, embroidered Polo shirt, and again go into the "Brewer for the Day" draw. Otherwise, only one entry per person please

This year we are also especially grateful to Hydes for enabling us to offer an extra-special prize: every completed entry will go into a draw and the first 10 pulled out will win a visit to the brewery to see how their milds and other beers are brewed

This year we are again asking all participants to vote for their favourite pint of mild and the pub in which it was served – the winning pub will be presented with a 'Mild Champion' award in recognition of their efforts.



Too good to miss out on? Definitely! So, what do you have to do? It's easy...

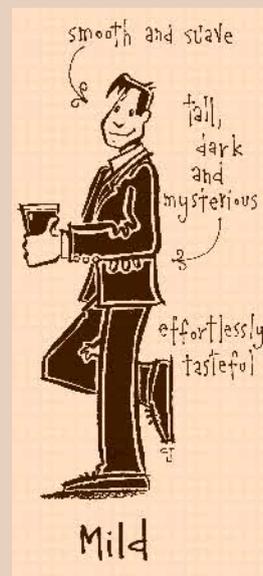
**First, get a card. All participating pubs have a stock or you can get one from the Mild Challenge address: 173 Shearwater Road, Offerton, Stockport, SK2 5XA**

When you buy a pint or a half of cask mild in one of the pubs taking part, ask the bar staff to stamp your card. Remember, though, you can only get one stamp from each pub.

**When you've filled the card (you'll need 16 different stamps from 16 different pubs) send it to the Mild Challenge address on the card and, after our closing date, we will send off your prizes.**

## MILD MAGIC – THE PUBS

**Bramhall:** Ladybrook Hotel; **Bridgemont:** Dog & Partridge; **Broadbottom:** Cheshire Cheese; **Buxworth:** Navigation; **Cheadle:** Crown, Old Star, Red Lion; **Cheadle Hulme:** Cheadle Hulme, Church Inn; **Chorlton:** Famous Trevor Arms, Pi; **Clayton:** Grove; **Compstall:** Northumberland Arms; **Denton:** Chapel House, Masons Arms; **Didsbury:** Fletcher Moss; **Disley:** White Lion; **Droylsden:** Halfway House; **Edgeley:** Grapes; **Fallowfield:** Friendship, Grand Central; **Furness Vale:** Crossings; **Gatley:** High Grove, Prince of Wales; **Glossop:** Norfolk; **Gorton:** Plough, Waggon & Horses; **Great Moor:** Crown, Travellers Call; **Hadfield:** Chieftain; **Hazel Grove West:** Grapes, Three Tunnes; **Heald Green:** Griffin; **Heaton Mersey:** Griffin, Crown; **Heaton Moor:** Crown; **Heaton Norris:** Silver Jubilee, Navigation, Nursery; **Heaviley Blossoms:** Hyde; **Queens, Cheshire Ring, Sportsman; Longsight:** New Victoria; **Manchester City Centre:** Marble Arch, Ape & Apple, Smithfield Hotel, Old Monkey, Waterhouse, Crown & Anchor, Bulls Head (London Road), Paramount; **Marple:** Hatters, Navigation; **Marple (Rose Hill):** Railway; **Mellor:** Royal Oak; **Moss Nook:** Tatton Arms; **New Mills:** Masons Arms; **Portwood:** Railway; **Reddish:** 3 Rivers Club, Thatched Tavern; **Romiley:** Friendship; **Rusholme:** Ford Madox Brown; **Sale:** Volunteer; **Salford:** Crescent, New Oxford; **Shaw Heath:** Armoury, Florist; **Stalybridge:** Station Buffet Bar; **Stockport Town Centre:** Arden Arms, Waterloo, Bakers Vaults, Calverts Court, Red Bull, Sun & Castle, Crown, Pineapple, Swan With Two Necks, White Lion; **Timperley:** Timperley Taverners Club; **Whaley Bridge:** Board Inn, Goyt Inn, Shepherds Arms, Cock Inn; **Withington:** Victoria; **Woodford:** Davenport Arms. See also article on page 16.



## MILD – WHO BREWS WHAT

**WHILE** the National Brewers seem to have virtually turned their backs on cask mild, our local companies still produce the real thing. Robinson's in fact still produce two milds and Hydes three! Here we give a run-down on some of the milds you can expect to find on this year's Challenge. In addition a number of pubs will be offering a variety of guest milds during the Challenge.

**3 Rivers Delta Dark** (4.8% ABV) – tasty dark mild brewed for May. **Beartown Ambeardextrous**(3.5%) – dark, rich and full flavoured. **Beartown Black Bear**(5%) – strong mild with roast and malt flavours and a mellow finish. **Cains Dark Mild**(3.2%) – smooth, dry and roasty. **Coach House Gunpowder Mild**(3.8%) – full bodied and roasty with a malty aroma and full finish. **Holt Mild**(3.2%) – very dark with complex taste. **Hydes Light/1863**(3.7%) – refreshing and fruity with a dry finish. **Hydes Mild**(3.5%) – dark and dry. **Hydes Owd Oak** (3.5%) – very dark mild with rich taste. **Jennings Dark Mild** (3.1%) – dark, malty and roasty. **Marble** (6%) – new strong mild being brewed for May. **Moorhouse's Black Cat**(3.4%) – dark and fruity with lingering taste. **Oakwell Old Tom** (3.4%) – dark and smooth **Robinson's Hatters** (3.2%) – refreshingly dry and malty. **Dark Hatters** (3.2%) – dark and fruity. **Tetley Dark Mild** (3.2%) – good session mild with fruity taste. **Titanic** (3.5%) – fruity and dry with a long bitter finish

## Mild Magic in Whaley Bridge

**S** EVEN pubs in the Whaley Bridge area have registered for Mild Magic, the Mild Challenge, in 2009. They will provide participants with a good trip out. These southernmost pubs on the Challenge are well worth a visit in their own right, with a range of good beers and welcoming hospitality. To avoid wasted journeys some information about opening / closing hours may be helpful.

**Dog & Partridge, Bridgemont.** Opens at 11.00 but has a 15.00 –17.00 close Mon-Thurs. though this can be flexible in favour of being open. Open all day Fri. Sat. Sun.

**Goyt Inn, Whaley Bridge.** 16.00 till late Mon.-Fri. 14.00 till late Sat. and Sun.

**Shepherds, Whaley Br.** 15.00 till late Mon-Fri. 12.00 Sat. and 14.00 Sun. till late.

**Cock Inn, Whaley Br.** open all day from about 11.00 till late.

**Board Inn, Horwich End.** Closed until 16.00 Mon-Fri. Open all day at week end.

**Crossings, Furness Vale.** 16.00 till late Mon.-Thurs. Fri., Sat. and Sun. 12.00 till late.

**Navigation Buxworth.** Open from late morning till late, daily.

**These times could of course vary.**

The Navigation (Buxworth ) and the Goyt make a welcome return to the Mild Challenge. The others have become regulars. Some of the pubs will be new pubs for some people. All the pubs will look forward to seeing new faces, and returning ones.

**Getting there.** Bus 199 from Stockport stops at Furness Vale, Bridgemont, Whaley Bridge Station, outside the Cock and then the Board. Half hourly service during the day, hourly in the evening and on Sunday. Trans Peak stops at Furness Vale, every 3 hours until soon after tea. The 61 links Whaley Bridge with Glossop, Hayfield, New Mills and Buxton, hourly during the daytime, every day. The 189/190 links Whaley with Buxworth, hourly until teatime, Mon.-Sat. Buxworth is a 15-20 minute walk from Whaley Bridge along the canal towpath or over Bings Road/Silk Hill.

## Local Pubs Week – Events Diary

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup> April** – Stockport South and Hillgate Stagger. An opportunity for a taster of the pubs on the south side of town. You can join us at 7.30pm at the Nelson, Wellington Road South or at 8.30pm at Little Jack Horners on Lord Street.

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup>** – A Multiple Mild Social starting at 7.30pm in the Pineapple, Heaton Lane. Try some of the best pubs in Stockport where cask mild is served.

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup>** – Our Pub of the Month presentation to the Alexandra, Northgate Road, Edgeley. A little out of the town centre. If you've not been before this provides the perfect excuse to visit this Edwardian gem which is on CAMRA's National Inventory of historic pub interiors. From 8pm onwards.

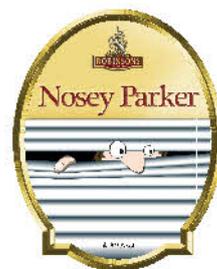
**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup>** – Presentation of our Local Pub of the Year Award to the Arden Arms on Millgate. This is a pub where many good things come together – historic interior, good food and great beer. From 8pm



### Family Brewers News

No new beers from all of our family brewers this month. However May will see new beers from both Robinson's, Hydes and Holts.

**Robinsons** – the beer for May and June will be Nosey Parker (3.8%). The brewery tasting notes describe this as a “traditional Harvest gold bitter with aromas of spicy hop and honey. An interesting and complex palate matched by fruity overtones and complemented by a dry roasted or nutty finish”



**Hydes** – here the beer for May and June will be Sacre Bleu (4.4%). This will be an amber ale with a spicy, zesty aroma. It will be a malty beer with a good citrus hop balance coming from Fuggles, Challenger and Styrian Goldings hops.

**Holts** – the new beer for April is Fifth Sense (5%). The brewery tasting notes describe this as a light refreshing premium ale with an intense flavour originating from the Styrian hop which gives a very distinct citrus aftertaste. “Light on the palate but rich in flavour this hoppy ale is a perfect accompaniment to most spicy food dishes”.

### Micro Brewery News

Lots of news from our local micro brewers. As ever apologies to those we were unable to contact this time.



**Boggart Hole Clough** – the big news here is that Boggart Brewery has acquired its first tied outlet. It's not your usual pub, though, as Boggart has bought the Paradise Brewery Bar in the Arndale Market. After some work on the bar-cum-market stall, it was scheduled to reopen as the Micro Bar sometime at the beginning of April – it should be trading by the time you read this. Plans for the drink offering are quite

extensive with four cask beers (two from Boggart and two unusual and ever changing guests), traditional cider, genuine lager and a range of bottled beers. More on this next time.

On the beer front, the Rum Porter (4.6%) has now joined the range as a regular beer. There will also be some new beers for April although recent efforts have been concentrated on getting the new bar ready for opening.

**Bank Top Brewery** – a new session beer has been introduced to replace the now discontinued Bikes & Trikes. This is Barley To Beer (3.6%) a pale, easy drinking beer brewed using Marynka hops. “Good for a sunny afternoon” says the brewery. It was in fact on sale at last month's Oldham Beer Festival and OT can confirm that it is a very tasty beer with a good hoppiness coming through in the finish.

**Howard Town Brewery** – a new beer to look out for is SDB or Strong Dark Beer (5.5%). It is similar to the company's Dark Peak but has been formulated as a chocolate stout. Also out are Dragon's Nest (4.7%), a dark amber beer similar

in style to the brewery's original Howard Town Bitter, and Hope (4.1%). This latter has been reformulated from its last appearance with a new hop grist. This will make it a "tick" for those who indulge in that sort of thing.

**Hornbeam Brewery** – Kevin Rothwell continues to experiment with new beers and recipes. There's always something interesting coming out of Hornbeam Brewery. This month look out for Polska Bitter (4.1%), a pale beer brewed using Polish hops, in particular the Lubelski and Marynka varieties. In May the excellent Malt Mountain Mild will be out again. There will almost certainly be a couple of other beers out, too.

**Phoenix** – currently on test is White Tornado "au pression", which we think means it's a cask beer chilled down and with a touch of gas on top. This is being trialled at Sand Bar (Grosvenor Street, All Saints) as a possible beer for summer. Cask White Tornado (4.3%) is now out again, two months early this year due to popular demand. Also out this month are St George's Flag (4.3%) and Resurrection (4.5%).

**Pictish Brewery** – Still producing an exceptional range of single hop beers. Pacific Gem (5.4%) was on the bar at Oldham Beer Festival and was wonderfully citrusy. The monthly special for April is one of the best of the Pictish monthly beers (in our opinion). This is Maelstrom (5%), described by the brewery as "a strong, pale golden coloured ale. Full malt flavours lead to an intensely bitter finish and powerful hop aroma".



**Marble Brewery** – the commissioning of the new brewery continues to make progress. Meanwhile new beers continue to appear. Experiments with 1425 (5.9%) continue with Version 3 out in late March. This was another hop spectacular brewed using Cascade, Ruwaka and Chinook varieties. There may well be a Version 4 out as well (and either v3 or v4 should be on the bar at Stockport Beer & Cider Festival). Given the success of these beers



1425 is to be given a proper name rather than just being badged after the brew number. Some interesting things are promised for later in the year. The excellent imperial stout, Decadence (8.5%) will be rebrewed and also in the pipeline is a barley wine that will be cask matured for several months before bottling. Christmas promises to be very festive this year!

**Millstone** – still running to stand still at Millstone. The last (we think) of the "pub name" series is now out. The Wellington (the actual pub is in Sheffield and is a famous free house, formerly called the Cask & Cutler). It's a 4% ABV beer brewed using First Gold and Nelson Sauvin hops, so expect lots of citrus grapefruit flavours.

**3 Rivers** – this year's Mild Magic challenge will be launched at the 3 Rivers Club on 18th April at 3pm. The brewery's Delta Dark mild (4.8%) will be available at the launch and in the local free trade. Well worth seeking out. Suitably Irish (5.6%) an excellent strong dry stout was also out last month. Head Brewer Mike Hitchen continues to experiment with beers and is considering a plum beer.



**Restaurante El Cuba Libre, at the Sportsman, Hyde.**

THE Sportsman on Mottram Road in Hyde has long been a fixture on the local real ale scene. It has been a favourite for over a decade during which it won the coveted Regional Pub of the Year Award for two consecutive years.



The pub is owned by Geoff Oliver and since Geoff's purchase of the Porter Brewing Co (now renamed Pennine Ales) it has been one of the brewery's three tied houses. There have been some hiccups along the way, though. Not least was the necessity for Geoff to take back direct management of the pub from his previous tenants, who seemed to be seriously running the pub down.

However it has now be redecorated and refreshed, and many former customers are now using the pub again. For many the main attraction is the range of cask beers on offer. The Pennine range is complemented by Plassey Bitter from North Wales (and a rare find for the area), changing guest beers and traditional cider.

However wander upstairs and there is another treat in store. Geoff's Cuban wife, Cangui, and her sister Belen have converted the former function room into a restaurant specialising in Cuban food, and notable Cuban tapas.

This cosy, 40 seater restaurant boasts a cocktail bar and projection TV screen showing Cuban images and DVD's of Cuban musicians with the sound set as low background music.

These, together with other Cuban memorabilia including full size Cuban flags and pictures of Ché Guevara, create a real Cuban atmosphere.



Something as unusual as this just had to be sampled and, accompanied by regular OT contributor Mark McConachie, I decided to give the menu a good workout. Thus we went for no less than seven tapas dishes plus some garlic bread – well with prices a reasonable £1.95 to £3.95 we weren't going to break the bank.

Everything was seriously good and it is difficult to pick out highlights. The roasted sweet potatoes with a spicy sauce topped with grated cheese were a pleasing combination of the sweet and savoury and along with the Yucca con Mojo Criollo (in effect light and crisp yucca chips) made for a great accompaniment to the meatier dishes.

The Albóndigas Picantes (Spicy meat balls in a rich, hot tomato sauce) were terrific and like everything else on the menu clearly "hecho en casa" (cooked and prepared on the premises). Also noteworthy were the Camarones a la Habanera (king prawns with cream chilli sauce & mild Cuban spices) and the Carne con Papas (mild flavoured Cuban stew with diced beef & potatoes). We were totally stuffed and had no room for dessert (the homemade cheesecake and the Pudin Cubana Con Salsa were mightily tempting though). The bill was a snip at £23.10.

The atmosphere is great, and the service is efficient and friendly. What more could you ask? Highly recommended. I will be back.

**Restaurante El Cuba Libre is open 6-10pm Wednesday to Saturday and 12-8 on Sundays. Book on 0161 368 5000.**



Here is our monthly round-up of what's happening in the local CAMRA branches. Members of all branches are of course very welcome to attend each others' events.

The **Stockport & South Manchester** branch covers Stockport Borough apart from Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley and Marple, plus that part of Manchester from the River Medlock in the north to the M56/Princess Parkway in the south-west. *Branch Contact – Pete Farrand 01625 425734*

**Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> April – Branch Meeting & AGM, Blossoms, Buxton Rd, Heaviley. All members please try and attend this important meeting.**

**Friday 17<sup>th</sup>** – Stockport South & Hillgate Stagger: meet 7.30pm Nelson, Wellington Rd Nth; 8.30 pm Little Jack Horner, Lord St.

**Saturday 18<sup>th</sup>** – Mild Magic Launch: 3 Rivers Club, Greg St, Reddish. Starts 3pm.

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup>** – Multiple Mild Social: starts 7.30pm, Pineapple, Heaton Lane.

**Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup>** – Pub of the Month presentation to the Alexandra, Northgate Rd., Edgeley. From 8pm.

**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup>** – Pub of the Year presentation to the Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. From 8pm.

The **High Peak & North East Cheshire** Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple, Tameside and Derbyshire from Glossop to Buxton. *Branch Contact – Mike Rose 07986 458517. [mikewrose@btinternet.com](mailto:mikewrose@btinternet.com)*

**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April** – Branch Meeting: Lantern Pike, Little Hayfield. Starts 8.30pm

The **Trafford & Hulme** Branch covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester West of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the City Centre. *Branch Contact – John Ison 0161 962 7976. Branch website: [www.thcamra.org.uk](http://www.thcamra.org.uk)*

**Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> April** – Spring Pub of the Season presentation to the Knott, Deansgate. 8pm

**Thursday 16<sup>th</sup>** – Altrincham Survey: 8pm King George, Moss Lane, 9pm Bridge, Moss Lane, 9.30pm Station, Stamford New Road.

**Thursday 30<sup>th</sup>** – Halebarns survey: 8pm Bulls Head, Wicker Lane, 9pm Corbens Carvery, Ashley Road.

**Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> May** – Branch Meeting: Railway, Ashley Rd, Hale. Starts 8pm.

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the **Macclesfield & East Cheshire** Branch covers a wide area from Knutsford to Congleton. *Branch Contact – Tony Icke 01625861833*

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup>** – Campaigning meeting & Spring Pub of the Season Award: Sutton Hall, Sutton. Starts 8pm

The **North Manchester** Branch covers The Northern Quarter and North East Manchester plus the City of Salford. *Branch Contact –*

*Dave Hallows 07983 944992. [davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk)*

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: New Oxford, Bexley Sq, Salford. Starts 8pm.

**Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup>** – City Crawl. Crown & Kettle, Oldham St, 8pm, Bar Fringe, 9pm, Smithfield, Swan St, 10pm

**Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup>** – Social: Ashton Arms, Clegg St, Oldham, 8pm

# It takes all sorts to campaign for real ale



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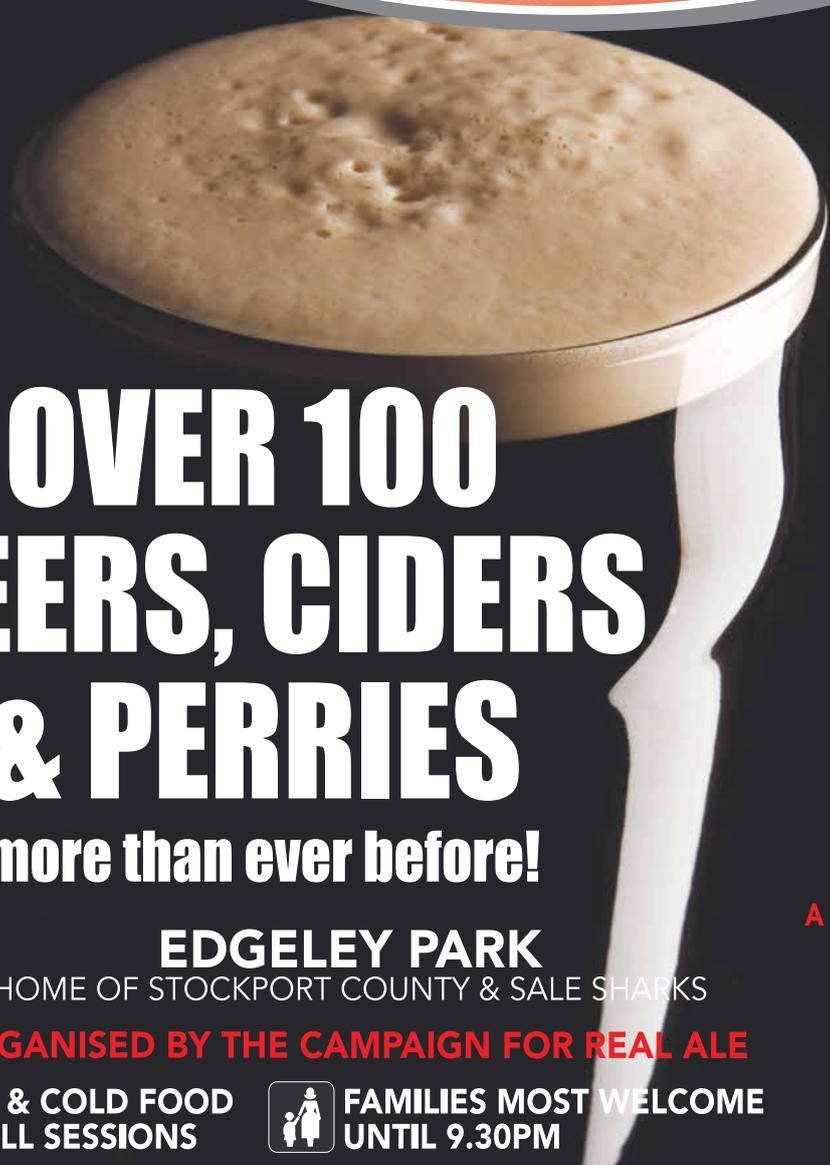
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