

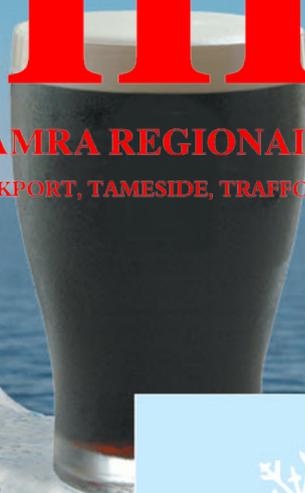
January 2010

Opening

TIMES

THE FREE CAMRA REGIONAL MAGAZINE

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



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- Saturday 23rd January 12.00 - 22.30
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The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for January has been won by the Cheshire Line Tavern off Manchester Road Cheadle. Margaret O'Brien sings its praises.



Sometimes described as Cheadle's Hidden Gem, the Cheshire Line Tavern is nestled away off busy Manchester Road between Cheadle and Parrswood. You would think you have arrived in the quiet of the countryside, being surrounded by trees and grass with squirrels and wildlife getting about their everyday lives. The occasional freight train still chugs along on the line at the rear of the pub.

The Cheshire Line Tavern is a former Victorian railway station, converted to a pub in 1986. The pub has seen many changes over the years and is now very much food led. But do not let this put off all you real ale drinkers. There is always a good offering of four cask ales. Banks's Bitter is the house beer and this is augmented by three changing guest beers from the extended Marston's group of breweries.

Landlord Malcolm Bird has a great passion for his beers, so you will always find it well kept. There is none of that smoothflow in this pub. As Malcolm says "only real beer is allowed in The Cheshire." No juke box, no pool table, no football, just a really nice relaxed atmosphere along with background music. A good old fashioned friendly service is assured by Nina, Malcolm and colleagues.

There is a long term offer of two rump steaks plus a bottle of wine for £16, served all day Monday to Saturday. A regular offer of two meals for £11 (wait until you try the steak and Guinness pie), is served Monday to Friday. Sunday is Carvery day with a huge choice of meats and vegetables, where 3 courses are on offer for £9.95.

To mark their achievement in receiving this award free hotpot is available to all who attend the presentation on the evening of Thursday 28 January.

Cheadle buses will get you to the pub from Stockport – get off near the George & Dragon and it is a 5 minute (or so) walk up Manchester Road to the pub. From other directions buses 44, 130 and X57 will drop you close by.



The Pub of the Month award is sponsored by Stephenson's, a local family firm that has been supplying the local pub and catering trade for over 140 years. Check out their advert on this page.

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Thursday 28th January 'Acoustic Jam' A night of music, mirth, singing & supping

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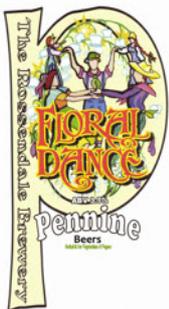
Happy New Year to everyone!

Opening Times Mon-Weds 4-11pm, Thurs-Sat 12-11pm, Sun 12-10:30pm

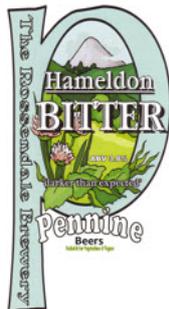
THE ROSSENDALE BREWERY



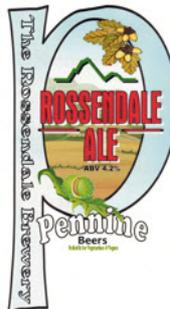
The Griffin Inn, 84-86, Hud Rake,
Haslingden, Rossendale, Lanc's BB4 5AF
Contact Geoff or Shane on: 01706 21 40 21



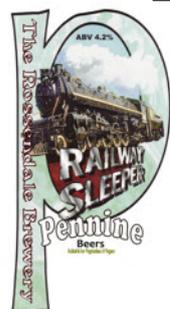
Floral Dance
3.6%
A pale and fruity session beer, with body that is more than a match for many stronger beers!



Hameldon Bitter
3.8%
An unusually dark traditional bitter, with a dry and assertive character that develops in the finish.



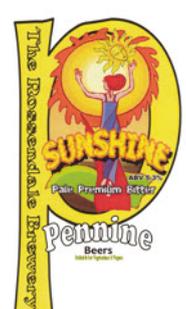
Rossendale Ale
4.2%
A malty aroma leads to a complex, malt dominated flavour, supported by a dry, increasingly bitter finish.



Railway Sleeper
4.2%
An amber, uniquely intense bitter and hoppy beer, still brewed with our Stockport drinkers in mind.



Pitch Porter
5%
A full bodied, rich beer with a slightly sweet, malty start, counter-balanced with sharp bitterness and an obvious roast



Sunshine
5.3%
A hoppy and bitter golden beer with a citrus character. The lingering finish is dry and spicy.

**Our ales can all be sampled at The Griffin, Haslingden;
The Railway, Portwood Stockport or The Sportsman, Hyde.**



Opening Times - Comment

This month all roads lead to the Sheridan Suite and CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival. It's a brand new venue and a short way out of Manchester City Centre so we really do need everyone to come along as usual and make the event another huge success.

In this issue we give a flavour of some of the beers on offer, and most importantly, show you how to get there and back. I hope that all our readers will make a special effort to come along this year.

Finally, in this month's Stockport Supping we report a string of closures and sell-offs, none of which sold cask beer. I know we keep banging on about this but the absence of cask does seem increasingly to be the hallmark of a failed pub.

Finally these words were typed on 1 January so all that remains is for me to wish all of our readers, advertisers, contributors and distributors a very happy and prosperous New Year.

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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Copy Date for the February issue is Friday 15 January

Contributors to this issue: John Clarke, John Tune, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Robin Wignall, Peter Edwardson, Mark McConachie, Andy Jenkinson, Dave Hallows, Frank Wood, Mike Rose, Margaret O'Brien, Jim Flynn, Peter Alexander, Graham Privett, Heather Airlie, Dave Burston, John Sutcliffe, Patrick Sudlow, Dave Sharpe

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National Winter Ales Festival

Where it is and how to get there

As you may know by now, this year we have had to move the National Winter Ales Festival, due to the closure of the New Century Hall.

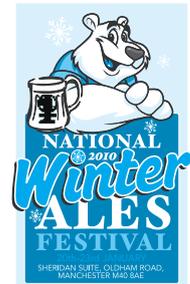
Our new location is a little further out of the City Centre at the Sheridan Suite, also known as "The Venue" on Oldham Road, close to (but just before) its major junction with Queens Road and Hulme Hall Lane. It's about a mile from the Northern Quarter pubs and can be walked from there in about 15-20 minutes.



Buses there and back

Luckily there are many bus services that will take you there and get you home again. For those travelling across Manchester the service 53 will drop you nearby on either Queens Road or Hulme Hall Lane from where it will be a short walk down Oldham Road (heading towards the City Centre).

Most people will be coming from the City Centre and just to complicate matters there are some major road works. Luckily we have full and up to the minute details of the services and their revised departure points.



During the period of the festival there are two major changes:

***Services 82, 83, 180, and 184** that normally operate from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Oldham Street stand A will operate from Stevenson Square Stand TE (these are the most frequent services to the Festival).

***Service 88** that normally operates from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Oldham Street stand B will operate from Church Street Stand CS.

***Services 24, 181 and 182** will operate from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Lever Street Stand F as normal.

The most frequent services between Manchester City Centre and the Festival site are services 82, 83, 180 and 184 which between them provide a bus about every 5 minutes until approximately 7.30pm then every 10 minutes. The last bus towards Manchester is about 11.45pm.

Cheap fares

Just as this issue of *Opening Times* went to press we were given news of a deal being arranged with **First Group**. From Wednesday 20th to Saturday 23rd there will be a specially discounted bus fare on all First services from the City Centre to Hulme Hall Lane (except the 82 night bus), with the normal single fare being reduced from £1.80 to £1. This will apply to all services so there will be no need to show a festival ticket or CAMRA membership card etc. Our thanks to **First Group** for arranging this. Now turn to page 18 for a taster of some of the beers...





REAL Ale gain....After much campaigning by both CAMRA members and real ale fans, **Glossop North End** football club relented to pressure recently and have installed a hand pulled beer in their clubhouse. It is from the local Howard Town Brewery and the Longendale Lights (3.9%) proved very popular in the first four games it was available, so fans are happy to keep the same beer. The first time was tentative, with only a firkin in the cellar. However, such did the word go round the fans, that the beer had been sold before the half time interval. Now a second firkin is there for a changeover when necessary.

Out and About

IN Dukinfield, the **Snipe** was "temporarily closed" when we walked past in mid-December and the **Lamb Inn** was closed with security grilles on it. The **Park Inn** appears to have changed its name to the River Bank, though it was not checked out as it did not sell real ale previously.

In Hyde, the **Cotton Bale** continues its great selection of real ales, 12 when I visited in mid-December. Manager Ben Plunket is taking real ale seriously and there have been very good reports from local members. With the **Cheshire Ring**, **Cotton Bale**, **Queens** and **Sportsman** all worth a visit, that's before mentioning the Robinsons pubs scattered round the town, Hyde is well worth an evening out these days.

In Old Glossop, the **Queens** had a fire in the upstairs kitchen, apparently starting from a freezer. This unfortunately meant that functions and parties booked for the Christmas period had to be cancelled. However, the downstairs kitchen remains open, so pub food will be served as usual until repairs are done. Also in Glossop, the **Corner Cupboard** on High Street West seems to have committed to cask ale. They have offered a guest beer now for several months. Lately it has been Thwaites Lancaster Bomber which has been a popular choice with the locals.

Winter Pub of the Season

HIGH PEAK Branch members gathered at the **Sportsman** in Strines (near Marple), on 4 December, to present Joe & Sue Stockton with their award of the Branch Winter Pub of the Season.

The couple have owned the free house for the past six years and have supported real ale in the pub since they arrived. With magnificent views into the wooded Goyt Valley and beyond, Northwards towards Mellor Moor, this Good Beer Guide regular entry was a popular choice. The pub has a comfortable traditional lounge, an open log fire and is handily placed for a 25 minute canal walk from Marple centre.

On the evening, Branch Chair Geoff Williamson made the presentation,

commenting about the pub's commitment to real ale and also to supporting local micro-breweries.. On the night, Thornbridge's Wild Swan & Jaipur were joined by beers from Pictish, Millstone and Phoenix.



Pictured – High Peak CAMRA Chairman Geoff Williamson (centre) presents the Pub of the Season Award to Joe and Sue Stockton alongside a mouth-watering array of cask ales.

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2002

Navy



2002

Wobbly Bob



2004

Wobbly Bob



The fate of Jennings beers, widely enjoyed in the Peak District, and the availability of Robinson's Old Tom are covered by *Robin Wignall* in this month's round-up of the Peak pub scene.

As I write, Marston's has announced a fall in profits for the year, although signs of an upturn give cause for optimism. The really good news is that the company reports a rise of 6% in sales of cask ale over the year. This is definitely a reason for cheer, both for the present and the future. To be fair to Marston's, not always my favourite concern, the company does promote cask ale, and it does push the beers from its smaller breweries, Jennings, Wychwood / Brakspear and Ringwood, as well as Marston's and Banks's of course.

The recent flooding at Jennings in Cockermouth naturally raises questions about the future of that brewery. In early December brewing had stopped, with rumour of resumption in the New Year. Since taking over at Jennings, Marston's has invested in and shown a commitment to its Cumbrian brewery. Let us hope that this continues, and that the present misfortune does not become a reason for closure.

At the **Shepherds** in Whaley Bridge, Banks's Original has replaced Jennings Mild. These are totally contrasting mild ales and in this case a replacement is not a replacement. Snecklifter is a favourite both at the Shepherds and at the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee. This beer is still being delivered though it is thought to be brewed elsewhere at the moment. Presumably these problems are being experienced in the many Marston's houses in the High Peak which take advantage of the availability of Jennings beers. Hopefully the New Year will see things back to normal.

The **Cock Inn** at Whaley Bridge is due for a refurbishment and remodel in the New Year. The bar will be redesigned, a fourth hand pump added, a conservatory added, catering facilities added, disabled toilets included, and some other areas remodelled. Lou and Mike are looking forward to the work taking place to give them an updated and upgraded pub. A December visit found Robinson's Mr. Scrooge in good form, and Old Tom stillaged behind the bar. At the Cock, Old Tom is bought in pins and sold in nips.

Still in the Robinson's estate, the **Red Lion** at High Lane re-opened in November, probably not too long after my previous snippet was written. No other update yet.

At the **Crossings** in Furness Vale, both Old Tom, a pin thereof for gravity dispense, and Mr. Scrooge were available in mid December. The expected fourth hand pump is now in use at the Crossings.

I understand that the **Navigation, Buxworth**, has changed hands and that the lease has been sold. More details on this next time. A brief December visit found amongst others, Robinson's Dizzy Blonde and Mr. Scrooge, and a very good pint of Howard Town Wren's Nest.

Some things carry on unchanged, such as the range and quality of beer at the **Old Hall** at Whitehough, Chinley. A December visit found Thornbridge Merrie, a spicy, herby 5.9% Christmas brew, and Flash Flood from Phoenix. If you were one of the hundreds who enjoyed the beer festival in September at the Old Hall, look out for the Winter Festival at the end of February.

October's *Inn Spire*, the magazine from CAMRA Chesterfield, included an article on a High Peak day trip. There were good reports on the **Sportsman**, Strines, the **Fox** at Brookbottom, New Mills, and the **Navigation** at Buxworth. Many readers can of course point visitors in the way of some other pubs in the area also worthy of a visit.

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Another World

As a new decade dawns, it is interesting to look at just how much the pub and beer scene has changed over the years. So here are a few points of the drinking and pub going experience of the start of the 80s that are very different from today:

- ★ Most pubs here in the North-West just served standard mild and bitter. Apart from the odd sighting of Pedigree or Draught Bass, there was nothing that could be called a premium beer.

- ★ Beer was often sold from unmarked handpumps. Electric beer dispense was commonplace, typically using diaphragm meters, which were generally unmarked too

- ★ Free houses were virtually unknown and there were no guest beers. It was just the regular products of the owning brewery. However across the board, there was a lot of choice, with substantial tied estates belonging to Border, Higsons, Burtonwood, Oldham Brewery, Boddingtons, Matthew Brown, Mitchells and Yates & Jackson that have now largely vanished from the face of the earth

- ★ But in many local areas there was a marked dearth of choice, in particular with large areas such as Warrington being dominated by Greenalls. It was considered a point worthy of note that in Macclesfield you could get beer from eight different breweries (Ansells, Bass, Boddingtons, Robinsons, Marstons, Greenalls, Tettleys and Wilsons)

- ★ Central Manchester was, surprisingly to the outside observer, virtually devoid of pubs tied to the local independent breweries – it didn't have a single Holts pub

- ★ Although there was a compulsory afternoon closure (around here, generally 3-5.30), most pubs stuck fairly closely to the standard permitted hours. Weekday lunchtime closure was very rare. Closing time was 10.30 pm Monday-Thursday, with 11 pm closing only on Friday and Saturday. Sunday lunchtime opening was a strict 12 noon – 2 pm, during which many pubs were packed

- ★ There was a lot more lunchtime drinking by office and factory workers

- ★ Middle-aged couples would just "go out for a drink" in the evening in a way they don't tend to now

- ★ There was much less food served in pubs, especially in the evenings. Many of today's high-profile country dining pubs did not serve evening meals at all. On the other hand, food was much more varied and there was more of a sense of experimentation with styles and formats. It had not yet settled into today's standardised "pub menu". For example, a number of pubs had extensive lunchtime buffets – something you never see nowadays

- ★ A lot of the bottom-end pubs were extremely scruffy in a way that is very rare now

- ★ There was a clear hierarchy amongst country pubs of "No coaches", "Coaches by appointment only" and "Coaches welcome"

In some respects the present-day drinking scene is far better than it was then, but in others it is much worse. And pubs in general are certainly a lot less busy than they were.

Curmudgeon Online:

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# Stagger

**A visit to some of the pubs in deepest suburban Stockport reveals a surprising amount of well-kept cask ales from a variety of breweries. Mark McConachie has the full story...**

**O**UR stagger for November was Heald Green and Cheadle Hulme North. Heald Green is a village at the western edge of Stockport borough with the Wythenshawe district of Peel Hall being its neighbour. Two pubs in the village are on keg beer only; they are the **Heald Green**, and the **Beech Tree**. Thus, we made our start in Joseph Holt's bright new palace, the **Griffin**. This is located at the busy junction of Finney Lane and Wilmslow Road.

I first made acquaintance with the Griffin nearly 20 years ago when I used it for lunches and after-work drinking when I worked for the now-gone Ferranti. Then, it



may have looked like many of the identikit Holts houses of that era, yet it always maintained a strong following with a very good evening trade. It is pleasing to say that trade is still as healthy today. It may now just seem to be distributed in a different way from all those years past, as there is now a fair percentage of business in food.

As the pub was bustling and lively, we got a table in the lounge next to a couple of old boys whom I recall from those far-off days. A good mix of customers drinking and eating; the dining area was doing well, whilst the vault was a tad quieter. Outside is a very extensive smoking terrace. All rooms are well presented, featuring smatterings of photos of old Heald Green. The refurbishment of a few years ago has not diminished the popularity of this modern-looking bar-restaurant. Indeed, it may have improved it. Beers on the night were Holt Mild, which scored well, and Holt Bitter which impressed us equally.

**Cheadle Royal** was our next call; this is about a half-mile north along Wilmslow Road set close to the David Lloyd sports centre. This is one of those modern "breeze-block sheds with a curved roof" affairs. The interior is far more appealing, with an emphasis and appeal to the family diner type of trade. Spying Jennings Cumberland on the bar, we put in our orders. We

were to be disappointed however that it ran out with the first two pulls of the handpump. They seemingly did not have any beer to change to. This was an unfortunate blip in what is normally a well-run pub. So, disappointed, we made our farewells to make the ten minute hike to the **Ryecroft** on Etchells Road.



This is a Hydes house that was modernised some years ago to appeal to the drinking and dining set of the area. An area admittedly, that has few pubs to supply it. It seemed successful at first, but there followed a more fallow period that was serious enough for Hydes to consider closing and selling the site. Happily, this did not come to pass. Modern in decor throughout the large lounge with raised and partitioned areas, and the sporty vault to the right of that. Custom was lively and busy at the bar when we called, but we had no problem being served

with our Hydes Original bitters (for this is the only cask beer on sale now). We all enjoyed this above-average Manchester brew.

A brisk walk brought us to **Cheadle Hulme Royal British Legion**. As we were led to believe this wonderfully renovated facility may soon close, we popped in to give it some support. Courage Directors went down well with our group. This is a fantastic community asset, so it would be sad to lose this splendid club for good. We wish it well.

On the home-straight now. A short way down Cheadle Road is the **Kenilworth**. This is a large house with a large island bar that serves the many areas that radiate from it. Many of the areas are raised with wooden balustrades surrounding them to add an intimate feel. A good sized crowd of people were in and this gave the place a welcome atmosphere. Recognising us, the licensee came over to our table for a chat about how things were going. He said that Black Sheep Bitter had been popular of late, with Taylor Landlord being a permanent beer. The other beer on the bar that night was Burton Bridge Ale; this and the Landlord scored equally well.

## Dining Pubs

**B**y-passing Cheadle Hulme centre, we made our way onto Ladybridge Road, then down Mill Lane to the **March Hare**. Primarily a dining house in recent years, yet of late

it has followed its Vintage Inns stable-mates by extending its cask ale range; on our visit three beers were on - Thwaites Bitter, Thwaites Bomber, and Rev'd James. Whilst, unusually, the Bomber went untried, the other two scored handsomely.



Beer festivals

happen from time-to-time throughout the year. The March Hare has a pleasing and cosy interior even though it is quite a large building. Many small spaces have been created by using rustic timber and other devices to break up the area. The use of varying shapes and designs of furniture adds to that homely nature. A well thought out outside decked area is pleasant in fine weather as it looks across the babbling Lady Brook and beyond to the fields where horses graze placidly.

Returning to Ladybridge Road we headed towards the Councillor Lane junction where lies the **Greyhound**. An imposing structure that sets a statement with its canted angle to the road junction. It has dabbled with Tetley Bitter in recent times, but tonight there was none to be had (*but see this month's Stockport Supping for news of changes here*). This may have been a one-off, but people-wise it was certainly loud and lively. As the **Cross Keys** (Hydes) was closed due to fire damage, and the **Malt Shovels** further down Councillor Lane has been steadfastly on keg beer for decades, we concluded the evening at the **Micker Brook** (next door to Lidl supermarket).

The Micker Brook is a fairly new pub, it opened in something like 1992 as I recall. This is another of the "family dining" type of pubs so beloved of modern designers. It tends to attract a different audience from that of the March Hare. Nonetheless, it is a pleasant environment in quite a large space; differing levels and blond wood screens provide a means of separation. Whilst we may have lost the Greyhound in terms of real ale, it is heartening to report that the Micker Brook is now once again selling cask products - on our visit Greene King IPA, and Black Sheep Bitter. Both were found acceptable, with the Black Sheep just having the edge. NB - Since writing this, the Cross Keys has reopened, which is good news for the area.

An interesting Stagger that overall had some very good beer and pleasant places to drink it in. All of the pubs reviewed here can be reached by Buses 368 or 369 from Stockport

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**A number of openings, closures, changes – plus a big hello to the town centre’s latest free houses dominate the news this month.**

**T**HE really bad news this month is the closure of the **Woolpack** on Brinksway. This is a truly sad loss as the pub was one of the first free houses in Stockport and has won a clutch of awards in the past, including a CAMRA Greater Manchester Pub of the Year Award.

However no number of awards could alleviate the damage done to the pub’s trade by a change of policy at the nearby Co-op Bank. This basically prevented their staff from lunchtime drinking and so the pub lost a huge proportion of its trade as a result – well, that’s what I’ve been told anyway.



The privately owned pub is now closed and boarded. I am told the owners are seeking a new tenant but in all honesty, given the pub’s location I think any operator would struggle to make a go of it in the present climate.

However as one door closes...

After three months of negotiations, Bryan and Gail Austin of **Little Jack Horners** on Wellington Street finally completed the purchase of their pub from Punch Group in December. This therefore becomes the town’s latest free house.

Changes to the beer range were immediate. The semi-regular beer is Black Sheep Best Bitter and this is joined by three ever changing guest beers sourced via Clarks of Wakefield. When I called these comprised three beers from Clarks themselves (Rams Revenge, Xmas Spice and the potent Christmas Cracker) although Bryan told me that he is trying a whole range of beers and his regulars seems to be taking to them all – turnover has been no problem so far.



There have also been changes at the pub – a welcoming and characterful multi-level building – with new upholstery to all the seats and to come brand new carpets. All is going well to date – well worth a visit.

**Other Closures and Sell-offs**

THERE are a string of other closures to report. The **Stockport Arms** on St Petersgate was closed as this was typed. It is up for sale freehold and can be yours for £225,000. Also closed and boarded is the **Town Hall Tavern** on Wellington Road South. To be honest I am surprised it lasted as long as it did since customers were always thin on the ground when I passed by.

Closed and “to let” is the **Peters Square Tavern**, formerly the Imperial, on St Petersgate, while still open but “to let” are the **Prince Albert** on Castle Street in Edgeley, and the **Bishop Blaize** on Hillgate. The latter has been on the market for months with no takers so you do have to wonder about its ultimate fate.

Of course, there is one common thread here – not one of these pubs sells or has sold, cask beer. Some have in the recent past, although the efforts to do so at the Peters Square Tavern always

seemed to me to be rather half-hearted, but some of the others seem to have almost set their faces against the very idea.

## Duke Of York Marches On

LICENSEE Neil Stocks has major plans for the **Duke of York** in Heaviley having recently taken over the running of the Robinson's house. Working closely with the brewery, major improvement work is planned at the popular community pub, which is also a listed building.



Early stages have already seen a new roof and windows fitted. While further work includes the refurbishment of six letting rooms - four of them en suite - together with improvements to the bar and public areas. In addition, Neil has plans to build a healthy trade for traditional pub food and a Sunday carvery when a new catering kitchen is installed.

Neil has great experience of managing bars and although he has been focusing on other ventures in recent years - including a café and sandwich shop - he is delighted to be back in the licensed trade.

"I have been a regular at the Duke of York for many years and knew it was just the kind of friendly pub that I would enjoy running. It's got a great customer base and - with all the work planned for next year - has the potential to be even more successful."

Three local football teams have already based themselves at the pub at Neil's invitation, further strengthening its standing in the community. *Our photograph shows Neil receiving his Licensee Training Certificate from Brewery Director Dennis Robinson.*

## More Openings and Refurbishments

AMONG the December reopenings were the **New Victorian** in Bramhall Village and arising like a phoenix from the ashes, the **Cross Keys** in Cheadle Hulme, with new tenants: Alison and Lee Weedall.

Alison has been at the nearby **Greyhound Hotel** for the last three years and has previously been at the Bishop Blaize and the former Golden Lion, both on Hillgate and in Runcorn. This Hydes pub has been pleasantly refurbished throughout the ground floor with a new bar, furniture and fittings. The beers are Hydes Original Bitter and Owd Oak Mild. There is a large undercover area at the rear. They may provide bar food from February or March.

As a consequence of Alison and Lee moving, the **Greyhound**, a Punch Tavern has been taken over by a new tenant: Paul Smith. Paul has had hotels in Halifax and intends to change the Tetley's to Black Sheep, possibly with another real ale as well. He has plans for a Cider Festival in 2010 and a Beer Festival the year after.

At the **New Victorian** (a more distinctive name on the web), Max Kalton the new tenant said that the place was packed on 11 December at the opening and the aim is to bring back a great pub to Bramhall Village.



This was originally the Victoria and then the Orange Tree but was bought from the Punch, Spirit Group by the north Manchester brewers J. W. Lees and serves their Bitter, premium bitter, Coronation Street and a seasonal; Christmas Cracker at the time of opening.

It has been pleasantly decorated in an obvious if somewhat unauthentic Victorian theme with portrait prints of worthy 19th century gentlemen. The beer prices range from £2.60 to £2.80 per pint. There is a typical British Inn menu with fresh home

cooked food being served until 9 p.m. on all weekdays, 10 p.m. on Sundays. Apart from outside seating at the rear, there is a well furnished, covered courtyard at the side. Opening times are 11-11 Monday to Wednesday, 11-12 Thursday and Friday, 10-12 on Saturday and 10-11 on Sunday.

## Griffin, Heaton Mersey

THIS famous pub has also undergone a revamp and I called in shortly after the work was completed. There have been no major structural changes, but a complete redecoration and refurbishment - and very smart it looks. All the bench seating has been reupholstered and the tables have been done up and numbered. The bar area looks unchanged but food is now available from 12 to 7 every day, and there's quite an extensive menu which looks like a Holts corporate job.



Structurally, the old (right hand) part is unchanged, but I think the doorway from the front middle room into the newer (left hand) part has been widened. The large room on the left has been broken up a bit by introducing a couple of screens. And that's all I could see.

As for screens of the other sort, the big pull-down TV screen seems to have gone, but there are new large plasma screens in the rooms that had TVs before. Only one of them was on when I called, in the big room, with sound down but subtitles on, but you can easily escape this if you want to in any of the four other rooms.

It looks as if the smokers' patio area at the back has had some work done on it too, with new lighting and perhaps heaters, but I didn't go out there. I could see the lights from the car park, though, and I don't remember being able to do that before. So, all in all, not a bad job, and quite a relief - it could have been a lot, lot worse!

Further down the road, I am wondering whether the **Dog and Partridge** has gone free of tie - if so, I guess they must be another who have bought the pub from the pub company, as they were selling Robinson's Unicorn at £1.75 a pint in mid-December.

## Full Shilling Finally Open

AFTER what seems to have been a very long period of refurbishment, the King's Head on Tiviot Dale, Stockport Town Centre, reopened as the **Full Shilling** in mid-December.

As expected the décor has many references to Ireland. It's clean and well lit which is an improvement on before but as well as a large screen showing sport at the far end, for some inexplicable reason to me (the pub is not so big that everyone couldn't see the large screen) it had three smaller screens showing the same match above the bar. When I was there the screens were showing a repeat of a football match from earlier in the day with the sound down and music was playing over the speakers.



There were a few customers in (none I could see drinking the cask) but it was Friday night. The beers were Hydes Original and their seasonal and Moorhouses Pride of Pendle. I tried the latter and it was OK. While this is a very welcome real ale gain, I'm just wondering whether the number of cask beers might be one too many at the moment, while trade picks up again.

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# Brewery NEWS

## New Seasonals

**T**HIS is the time of year that our local family brewers announce their seasonal beer programmes for the coming 12 months. So far we only have details of what **Robinsons** have planned. Mr Scrooge will be back next December but before then four very interesting (and well-presented) seasonal beers will be released.

There is no seasonal for January, but check out the brewery's Old Tom bar at the National Winter Ales Festival where the traditional strong ale will be joined on draught by its chocolate and ginger variants.

For February and March the beer is Dragon's Fire (3.9%) described as a "premium ruby red ale with a distinctive spicy / floral American hop aroma. This rich, full bodied, bitter beer has a predominately strong hop palate but also exhibits an interesting balance of biscuit malt and burnt toffee flavours" American Cascade hops are used here alongside the UK Target variety.



The football themed 4-4-2 is the beer for May and June. This 3.7% ABV beer is brewed using pils and wheat malts and uses Hallertau Mittelfruher and Saaz hops and promises "a rich array of sweet, malt and hoppy flavours complemented by a crisp dry finish".

July and August sees Buzzy Bee, a blonde summer ale at 3.5% ABV. This very pale beer will again be brewed using a combination of USA (Columbus) and UK (Northdown) hops to create a "sweet malt and honey palate perfectly balanced with citrus and sherbet flavours and a crisp dry finish"

The fourth new beer will be Battering Ram, a 4% premium dark ale out for October and November. Crystal and Pale Chocolate malts will be used with one hop variety – the American Bullion. This beer will have "a palate reminiscent of burnt coffee with a hint of blackcurrant and a robust after bitterness perfectly balanced by priming sweetness".

## Micro Magic

ONCE again our local micro brewers have been prolific in their production of new beers. Where to start?

**Marble Brewery** – as ever Port Stout (4.7%) was launched on Christmas Eve and was much enjoyed in the Marble Arch. This rich beer, which does indeed include port, is now an annual event in the Marble calendar. The beer is also available in bottle, as is any beer in the Marble portfolio.

Two very special beers were also launched in bottle last month. Decadance first appeared two years ago but this time around the imperial stout has had its ABV increased to 8.7% and is a rich but dangerously drinkable beer. Accompanying this was a brand new beer. Simply termed Marble Special, this is a mid-brown, hoppy yet complex barley wine weighing in at a hefty 10.7%. Despite the strength, this is again a very drinkable beer, its quaff-ability helped by the hugely appealing hoppy nose, an unusual but welcome characteristic in a British beer of this strength and style.

Later this month (or possibly in February) two Decadance variants will appear, again in bottle only. Decadance Kriek has lambic added to the cask and is also maturing over black cherries, while Decadance Frambozen has had raspberries added to the cask. We are told that early tastings show great promise.

**More Brewery News on page 14...**




- Amazing choice of rotating guest micro-brewery ales from Hornbeam, Three B's, Northern Brewing, Blakemere, H.B. Clark's, Copper Dragon and more!
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# Brewery News

Continued from page 13

More news from the local micro brewers. First some comings and goings...

**Three Rivers** – last month we reported on the demise of this Stockport micro and speculated whether a new concern might arise from the ashes. Unlikely, it seems, as we understand that all of the kit has been sold off and brewing will not be resuming on the site.

However on the plus side we can hopefully look forward to two forthcoming start-ups. One is the **Magnet** on Wellington Road North in Stockport where we anticipate brewing will start sometime in 2010. This year should hopefully also see beers emerging from the proposed in-house brewery at the **Horse & Jockey** in Chorlton.

Finally, the new **Buxton Brewery** is now settled into its new premises in the town (having previously brewed its beers elsewhere). The brewing plant has largely come from the former **Wild Walker** brewery in Derby, whose beers will now also be made at Buxton.

On to our established local brewers now...

**Boggart Hole Clough** – continue to successfully run Manchester's Micro Bar which is a welcome outlet for their beers, along with many guest ales. When we spoke to the brewery just after Christmas a new 4% pale and hoppy beer had been produced. No name yet.

**Pictish** – the brewery is so busy there was no opportunity to make a Christmas beer this year. We'll just have to settle for the excellent Pictish Porter, which is available for the winter months. A new single hop variety beer was out in late December. This used the New Zealand Rakau variety and came in at 4.2%. Brewer Richard Sutton told us that he will be sourcing some interesting new American hop varieties this year which should spawn a new range of single hop beers.



**Greenfield** – new beers are planned for 2010. These are tied to a recent project and the brewery is currently remaining tight-lipped. "Watch this space" is the message.

**Millstone** – another hugely busy brewery. So much so that they have almost hit the limits of the brewery's capacity and are considering a move to larger premises (although remaining in Mossley). The New Year will see the brewery revisit some of its original recipes so expect to see the revival of beers such as Millers Ale and Millstone Edge.

**Bollington** – very busy. The beer boxes (18 or 36 pint) and bottled beers are proving very successful. A recent beer was Gritstone (3.8%), a deep golden ale with a hoppy edge.

**Hornbeam Brewery** – another brewery approaching capacity. The December special (which you may see) was Battlecruiser, a pale and hoppy premium ale at 5.4%. New for January will be Winterlong (4.7%). This dark and hoppy brew was the first beer ever produced under the Hornbeam banner but has been tweaked somewhat since then. This year's version will use a different combination of hops – Challenger and Amarillo (last year it was Challenger and Galena).



**Shaws** - our lack of brewery news in recent months missed a significant event. Shaw's produced their first ever dark beer! Black Velvet was 3.7% with a rich body and fruity taste – if you are lucky you may still catch some in local pubs. Golden Globe (4.3%) remains the brewery's flagship beer and top seller. We are also deeply envious of brewer Neil Hay who will be off to "research" beer and brewing in both Singapore and New Zealand later this month.

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# Bruges Beer Festival 2009



**British or Belgian Beer Festivals – which are the best? Graham Privett went to Belgium to find out - (a dirty job but someone had to do it...)**

**A** FRIEND'S 40th coinciding with the Bruges Beer Festival? This was a no-brainer! So, eight hardy souls gathered in the Bulls Head opposite Piccadilly Station on a typically cold wet Friday in Manchester, ahead of a trip to determine which are better, British or Belgian beer festivals.

But what criteria could we use to judge? Five were agreed: heritage; venue; the festival guide; the beer; and the spectacle (beards, hats etc.).

The Bruges Beer Festival was founded in 2007, so this was only the third ever held, quaintly referred to as "the Tripel". First question, why has it taken Bruges so long to get a festival up and running?

Well, the festival is organised by the Bruges Autonomous Beer Tasters (BAB). A quick perusal of the pictures on their website [www.babbierproevers.be](http://www.babbierproevers.be) may provide some insight? We Brits are therefore definitely better at the heritage thing. **Brits 1 Belgians 0**

The festival was held in the historic rooms of the Belfry complex in the shadow of the breathtaking Halletoren, an 83 metre high tower that looks like it was created by a large group of unsupervised seven year olds with too many e-numbers in their bloodstream. Let's just say it looks a bit random.

In reality, these "rooms" are in fact magnificent huge medieval halls, including the Garemijn Hall, where culinary experts were constantly giving demonstrations of how to cook with beer, and what beers to drink with which food. The halls surrounded a vast open courtyard, where everyone was enjoying their chosen beer, in the unseasonably pleasant weather.

I thought that sitting in the Cheadle End at Edgeley Park watching the sun go down whilst supping a pint of 3 Rivers Old Disreputable couldn't be beaten, but even I, a Stockport County fanatic, couldn't argue that the venue for the Bruges Beer Festival could easily have been designed specifically for that purpose. **Brits 1 Belgians 1**

The Festival Guide was a hefty 83 pages, some of which was in English, and was very informative. The festival had more ales than a dyslexic champion bullfighter. 67 breweries were taking part, providing just short of 300 beers, some of which were created specifically for the festival. Unique authentic Belgian beers, including some fruit beers that were so dry you had to lever your mouth back open with a spoon in order to take a second mouthful.

Nothing to choose between the guide or the beers really, so let's call it **Brits 2 Belgians 2**

Each time you tried your next beer, the glass was exchanged for a clean one, with all stands having glass washing facilities, which I thought was a nice touch.



Also, beer mats aplenty. What's wrong with beer mats? That's right, nothing! Why is it that many British pubs, even I regret to note some real ale establishments, seem to be doing away with them? Don't get me started on that one!

The Brits were well represented at the festival. Many an accent was heard, scouse, cockney, Scottish, Welsh, and more. We even met drinkers from further afield, including a Canadian whose job it was to distribute a certain mass produced bottled American beer (I use the word lightly) across his homeland (he was quite rightly wracked with guilt), and a rather nice couple from Luxembourg. The visit to Bruges was part of this lady's therapy, which she was clearly badly in need of!



Anyway, what of beards and hats, how do we match up to the Belgians in this critical area? Well, I've seen many a good beard, and plenty of hats at the British festivals I've attended over the years, but, the way the Belgians combine their beards and hats is truly a sight to behold.

Some of the hats made you gasp in amazement, and many a beard turned many a head. Sorry guys, but the Belgians have us beaten hands down, so the final score was **Brits 2, Belgians 3**.

I have to say that the festival left me with more questions than answers really. Who are BAB, where were people getting that cheese, and where's my hotel?

I can't sign off without saying that a trip to Bruges is well worth the effort, festival or no festival, and if you do decide to go, the book *Around Bruges in 80 Beers* is a must buy. The book was excellent for identifying interesting bars to visit, not to mention what their opening times are.

My favourite was actually the last bar we visited on the day we left, called Fiore, surely one of the most bizarre drinking dens I have ever visited.

Getting to Bruges is easy enough. Whether flying or travelling by Eurostar, you need to get yourselves to Brussels, and then catch the train to Bruges, changing at Midi. One useful tip is that Midi is found at the southern station in Brussels, i.e. Zuid.

**John Clarke** adds: I have visited the Bruges Beer Festival every year since it started and can highly recommend it. As Graham says, the venue is spectacular and the beer range gets better each year. One highlight is the Trappist beer bar where all known Trappist beers are sold, including the highly regarded Wessvleteren beers. Many of the exhibitors increasingly offer bottles of their beers for sale, which means some real bargains can be snapped up.

The dates for the 2010 festival are Saturday and Sunday, 11 and 12 September. This is two months earlier than the last two festivals and takes it back to the same time as festival number one, when the crowds were able to take advantage of the good weather in the internal courtyard, as the picture below shows:





*beer and food/food and beer*

[www.marblebeers.com](http://www.marblebeers.com)

# Chorlton Challenge – the Return

With the explosion in cask ale outlets, Trafford & Hulme CAMRA's annual Chorlton survey has become something of an endurance exercise. Heather Airlie survived the challenge.

**T**HIS annual event is always worth a shot. Not limited to Chorlton, we have historically started in the **Hillary Step**, just over the border in Whalley Range. A fine ale house with five hand pumps, the only disappointment was the lack of a dark beer. It did have Abbeydale Brimstone, Greendale Northern Lights, Lancaster Amber, plus more regular beers from Phoenix and Thwaites.

With five hardy types gathered (notice the same number as hand pumps!), plus Ciderman, a quick step next door took us to **Jam Street Café**, notable by its hand pump serving Dunham Deer Beer, and very nice too. A bonus was the discovery of a snug downstairs. This cosy enclave would do very well for those either waiting for tables or post-brunch refreshment.

A bit of a walk down to Chorlton proper, we stopped off at **Iguana** for a tasty half of Bombardier. Although new to the real ale scene, there is no doubting the quality of the cellarman's labour.

A few doors down to **Pi** gave us the usual impeccable taste of Bank Top Flat Cap, plus Hornbeam Top Hop and Salamander Organ Grinder.....and Old

Rosie, a real cider. We also picked up another couple of surveyors to swell our numbers. A couple of doors down at the **Marble Beer House** we had a fine selection of both Marble beers, including the always excellent Stouter Stout, and guest beers including Millstone Twenty Five and a guest cider.

Another short hop took us to **Sedge Lynn** for a good selection of light and dark ales, too many to mention, but no complaints made, plus another couple of late comers to join the tour.

Great discussions were had over where to go next, but in the end **Dulcimer** won. Despite avoiding the Thwaites selection, we were all happy with the range on offer. We nipped next door to **Elektrik** only to find that the dark beer hadn't been put on yet. Oh Horror, but that was soon rectified. Again Hawshead Brodies Prime, with Liverpool Organic Bitter and Thwaites Wainwright gave us an excellent choice on fine form. Visiting every other one, we dipped into **The Nook** next and another Millstone Twenty Five, swiftly followed by **Oddest** and a selection from Golden Pippin,



Hornbeam, Northern Sole and Blakemore. About turn to **The Bar** and more Marble, plus Phoenix and Pictish beers, then **Abode** with its Hydes choice

We had a bit of a turn around at this point and headed up to the **Spread Eagle**. Despite its fine selection of Holt's bottled beers, we restrained ourselves to sampling the bitter, the mild not being available. Across the road to the **Lloyds** gave us a chance to sample the outgoing seasonal beer, Coronation Ale, before undertaking the long walk down to **Escape**. Luckily positioned by the pedestrian crossing from the bus station, the place was packed out due to a special DJ night. The sole pint of Black Sheep Bitter was on form as usual, and braced us for walking, very carefully, up to the **Beech** to find no real ale.

We took it in our stride and wobbled into the **Horse and Jockey**, which gave a choice of five ales. A short walk across the Green took us to the **Bowling Green** (pictured right).

Another choice of Landlord or Old Speckled Hen, before staggering off to finish in the **Famous Trevor Arms**. Kevin was expecting us, and had a couple of good ones from Timothy Taylor and Nethergate for the remaining four of the original Challengers and latecomers. If only we were in better shape to appreciate them! Ah well, next time.

For those who are a little daunted by the huge choice of pubs in Chorlton, hopefully this will give you the incentive to try them in small doses to really appreciate the differences and quality of ales available in such a compact area. Sweet supping.



## THE CITY PUB

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**We hope to add to the growing number of quality real ale pubs re-emerging in the Northern Quarter**

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**Other beers will include Durham, Purple Moose, Oakham, Phoenix, Coniston, Hawkshead and many more.**

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# National Winter Ales Festival

A brief taster...

ONE of the highlights of the National Winter Ales is the judging to arrive at the Champion Winter Beer of Britain. Last time round the winner was Attila, a pale barley wine from Oakham Ales based in Peterborough. Will the gold medal head north this year? The winner will be announced during the Festival's trade session on 20 January and we hope to bring you all of the results in next month's *Opening Times*.

While the competition beers have to be kept strictly under wraps, we are able to let you have a sneak preview of some of the beers that will be available during the festival.

Although it is a Winter Ales Festival, there are of course a whole range of beers available, covering all styles and strengths.

Two golden beers that will make good refreshers between the heavier winter brews will be **Abbeydale Deception** (4.2%) and **Acorn Brewery Northdown Blonde** (4%). Bollington Brewery will also be there – check out **Bollington Best** (4.2%) and **Oat Mill Stout** (5), the winner and runner-up in this year's Champion beer of Cheshire competition.



The award winning Coniston Brewery has three beers at the festival – including a very new **No.9 Barley Wine** (8.5%) – early reports are that this is a very impressive beer. Also at the higher end of the gravity range are Country Life Brewery's **Devonshire 10der** (10%) and **Critical Mass** (7.8%) from the Dark Star Brewery down in Sussex. We don't know much about Country Life but Dark Star beers are regulars in the local free trade and are invariably worth drinking.

Hawkshead are one of the best breweries in the Lake District and their **Organic Stout** (4.5%) will be worth seeking out. Similarly one of the best new breweries to start up in the West Midlands is Kinver Brewery and their take on a traditional IPA, **Khyber** (5.8%) will certainly merit sampling.

The new Limestone Brewery of Stone has also impressed and we can heartily recommend the hoppy **Foundation Stone** (4.5%) and stronger **Stone Faced** (5.4%). Marble Brewery will be there of course and **Pint** (3.9%) must be the ultimate refresher.

Don't miss out on the Otley Brewery beers – and they too have a new strong IPA at the festival – **Motley Brew** is a potent 7.5%. The new Peerless Brewery from the Wirral have the more easy drinking, golden **Triple Blond** (4.1%) and the stronger **IPA** (6%). Also from the Merseyside area check out the Wapping Brewery beers including the dark **Tabley Mild** (3.6%).

## Foreign Beers

Not much space and lots to choose from. Lambic lovers will be well catered for with gueuze and kriel from **3 Fonteinen**, **Oud Beersel** and **Cantillon**.

Staying with Belgium, check out the strong beers from the up and coming **Alvinne**, with the hoppy Gaspar (8%) perhaps the pick of the bunch. Another new brewery is **Brasserie de la Senne** whose beers are reliably good and we have the strong winter beer **Equinox**. Finally one of OT's favourite Belgian brewers is **Kerkom** so be sure to try their Winterkoninkskke.

On the Dutch front look out for beers from the increasingly well regarded **Emelisse**. Beers from **Jopen** usually impress (check out the 10% Winterbier) and don't miss the superb **SNAB** Ijsbok (9%) a regular award winner in the Netherlands.

## Excellent Selections of Cask Ales in Chorlton-on-Medlock

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# Woods and Trees

Is there anything truly new in brewing? Are British beers evolving? Peter Alexander is not so sure...



I WAS struck by something on the *Pencil & Spoon* blog\* and I've been thinking about it off and on ever since. It was a throwaway line in a discussion about beer glass sizes and I think it reflects something that I am rapidly becoming aware of and which dominates the thinking of the new wave of younger bloggers.

It was mentioned as a "given", a statement of fact. The line was this: "The nature of British beer is evolving and I think the vessels it is served in needs to evolve too." The question that arises in my mind is "How true is that statement?" No, not the one about different glass sizes, but the first part about the nature of British beer evolving. In what way is it evolving, if it is to any great extent?

I guess those that think there is a sea change, would put forward Thornbridge and Brew Dog as evidence that a different, more innovative way of doing things is emerging - evolving perhaps? Brew Dog is certainly a case in point, though I'd venture Thornbridge are in Brew Dog terms a little more conventional, while in overall terms, still nudging the more adventurous end of the spectrum. What about Marble, Outstanding, Phoenix or Pictish? Maybe Steel City or Mallinsons? There may be backers for a small number of others, but after that you start to struggle a bit. In numerical terms and even in influence, the evidence just isn't really there.

**Most of the brewers I mention are conventional enough. They are just lots better at making good beer and it is usually that which makes them stand out.**

"Aha" say you, "what about all these lovely strong bottled beers that are emerging?" Nothing new there I'm afraid. It is the return to bottling that has brought these stronger beers back, not an evolution or revolution in brewing. The rush to home drinking has recreated a market that always existed, but in a slightly different form. Once all breweries produced a barley wine and a strong or old beer, in recent times, usually as a chaser to more standard strength beers. Christmas versions weren't uncommon either.

## Tweaked

CHANGE the name from Blogg's Old to Blogg's Imperial Stout, bump up the abv and you've still only tweaked and renamed a strong beer, not created an evolutionary brewing step. Perception may be changing for some (more of that later), but it isn't really new.

So how could this evolving British beer scene be defined? The biggest change in British brewing in recent years (apart from hundreds of samey micros of course) has arguably been the emergence of "golden ales" and with them, the more generous use of hops, as well as the increasing use of foreign hop varieties. To a limited extent too there is a resurgence in strong dark beers, though the quality of some of these is doubtful. (You

can hide brewing faults and recipe disasters much easier in a dark beer and then sit back and smirk as the beer geeks call it complex or challenging.) Nonetheless those do provide welcome variety, but they are far from new in either concept or actuality.

Of course if you read Ron Pattinson's blog\*, you will know that in so many ways, beers like Imperial Stouts, are recreations of a lost brewing world; not innovation or evolution, but an adapted reclaim of the past; a lot of it, too, from within living memory. Those who try to be a little different, aren't doing much more than exploiting a niche, but a niche is what it is. What is different though is an expanded take home market, though that is still firmly mired in cheap lager. To make the evolution (if it exists) more firmly verifiable, that would have to change seismically too.

**Given the actual rarity in percentage terms and lack of general availability of these "new" beers, it won't be any time soon.**

## Evolving?

SO is British beer evolving to the extent that some claim, nay, assume? I rather doubt it. Too many seem to be looking at the British beer scene through the wrong end of the telescope, charmed and enchanted by what seems to be new and exciting. Drinking strange new beers matured in odd barrels, visiting progressive free houses and beer festivals can result in extrapolating that atypical experience and the enthusiasm it generates into something it probably isn't.

We should welcome the new niches that are being created (or rediscovered), but it shouldn't blind us to reality. Enthusiasm and bonhomie are marvellous. They can propel us forward. A shared outlook, buoyed up by beer, while infectious and enjoyable, can however mislead and cause feet to be less firmly placed on the ground than otherwise they might be.

**Though niches will certainly expand, British brewing remains solidly middle of the road and it is likely to continue that way for a long time to come.**

**Cutting edge and innovative? The bottles pictured at the top of this article are all over 20 years old. Is anything truly new under the sun on the beer scene?**

*Peter Alexander is the Chairman of Rochdale, Oldham and Bury CAMRA and writes a beer blog as "Tandleman". Check this out at <http://tandlemanbeerblog.blogspot.com/>*

*\*Mark Dredge's award winning Pencil and Spoon blog is at <http://pencilandspoon.blogspot.com/> and Ron Pattinson's blog can be found at <http://barclayperkins.blogspot.com/>*

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**See page 22**



## Reopenings and news of an unexpected cask ale gain are among the news this month.

At last I have space for some of the news that's been on ice for the past few months. First, though news of an unexpected, and potentially very exciting, cask ale gain.

### Real Ale in the City

**A** PUB that has had few – make that no – attractions for the cask ale drinker for years now is the **City** on Oldham Street in the Northern Quarter. Things are starting to change and if the new owner's plans come to fruition in a few years' time it will be another major venue on the Northern Quarter's cask ale scene.

In November 2008 the freehold of the City was bought by Phil Entwistle. His name may be unfamiliar to local drinkers. However he is a cask ale man through and through – as is demonstrated by the four major cask ale pubs he already has under his belt – the Victoria in Great Harwood, the Top Lock, Chorley; the Swan in Ulverston and the Spinners in Adlington. These pubs boast 34 handpumps between them, are multiple CAMRA award winners and regular Good Beer Guide entries.



With this background, why an unpromising pub like the City and why has it taken over 12 months for cask beer to put in an appearance? The pub's position in the Northern Quarter is the answer to the first question. The delay in introducing cask beer is down to the fact that for the first 12 months the pub was run by a lessee and it is only now that Phil has gained active control over the way the pub is to be run.

While some refurbishment is planned don't expect an overnight transformation, though, particularly on the beer front. Two cask beers were on sale in early December (Durham Magus and a house beer from Acorn Brewery) but this dropped to one for the holiday period (the Acorn brew). While a larger selection may be on offer for the National Winter Ales Festival weekend, turning the City into a dedicated cask ale outlet will be a long, hard slog. Phil is taking a long term view and expects that in five years' time it will be something akin to what the Top Lock is today, with plenty of beer thrown away in the early days.

That's the rub – the current customers (a lively but good-hearted crowd) don't drink cask but they are needed to keep the pub paying its way. However they largely disappear after about 8.30pm after which the pub is extremely quiet, especially on Fridays and Saturdays. In addition the staff are unused to cask and are unconvinced by Phil's plans.

So, what the City needs is for cask ale drinkers to go in and drink the stuff. Over to you folks.

### Bits and Pieces

LOTS of snippets now. First, the **Crown** Northenden, has apparently closed and reopened in recent weeks. For many years this was a classic Boddingtons house and is still an excellent down to earth boozier.

In Hulme, the **Platford** was boarded up in early November. This has since been joined by the **Bay Horse** in Longsight and the **Seven Stars** Ashton Old Road in Ardwick.

The former **Arch Bar** in Hulme is down for conversion to a 122 bedroom student accommodation while Hydes former **Osborne**

in Rusholme is the subject of a planning application for conversion into flats.

Edgar and Janice left the **Victoria** Withington suddenly in mid-November. This is very sad as they really have sorted the place out over the years and made it into the best pub in the area. In many years it got into the Good Beer Guide. Hydes have installed a temporary management team.

Nearby in Ladybarn the **Ladybarn** (ex Talbot) is being demolished, would have thought that someone could have made a go of it – it's in a prime position to attract passing trade. I've heard the plan is to replace it with a "ghastly" block of flats with retail units below (as if Ladybarn needs any more retail units – it can't even fill the ones it's got). Local worries are that it'll be something like a Tesco Express which will do even more damage to the other local shops. Just goes to show that the loss of a pub isn't just that – it can have knock-on effects which damage the local community even further.

I also noticed that the **Drop Inn** on the Fallowfield/Withington border is now called the **Ram and Shackle** to appeal apparently to the student market but still no real ale (the managers told me that the owners think it goes off too quickly!).

### Real Ale Gains

IN FALLOWFIELD the **Orange Grove** now has cask beer from Greene King. On my visit it had Abbot Ale and IPA with also Ruddles County and Old Speckled Hen pumpclips turned around. They seem to be promoting it with all cask beers £1.50 a pint on Mondays.

In All Saints I noticed that a blackboard outside "**The Pub**" (just to the left of **Sandbar**) mentioned "Cask Ales". Really? To my knowledge this establishment has only ever had keg beers. Looking through the windows I saw a handpump with a Pedigree pump clip. I braved the noisy crowd of TV football watchers to check this out. Three cask beers were listed – London Pride, Black Sheep and Pedigree – but the London Pride pump clip was turned around, and I saw no sign of Black Sheep. However, the Pedigree did exist, and I found it acceptably drinkable although not at its best. Cask beer is a brave move there given that real ale drinkers are likely to go next door, and we should praise "The Pub" for trying it, in the hope that the beer quality and range will improve.

### The Pub That Wouldn't Die

THE **Star Inn** on the Cliff, Higher Broughton, Salford reopened on 19 December after its sale by auction to its customers back in October. In about six weeks, a team of six directors and a growing number of shareholders (at last count 50!) with many old and new friends of this much-loved hidden gem have worked solidly to get the pub back into good and useable order. The tiny bar vault is much the same, but the bar area space is better utilised. The main bar front is original to the pub and two very rare back-to-wall handpumps are now back in use.

Beers have so far been supplied by the nearby Bazens' Brewery (Star Ale, 4% ABV, and Night Porter, 4.3% ABV) and Facer's, the North Wales brewery that used to share Bazens' premises. The beer was just £2 a pint for the first few weeks and has been flying out. Quality was excellent courtesy of newly installed manager Rick Haughton, formerly of the Crescent and Marble Arch. This is only the start, as the new owners have some exciting plans ahead for Salford's best open secret.

CAMRA North Manchester gave Margaret Fowler (Director) and Rick a very special branch award of a Golden Star – the inscription proudly states 'CAMRA North Manchester highly commends the customers of the Star Inn for their immense efforts in the purchase and reopening of the pub.....'



# CAMRA AWARDS GALLERY



The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month for June was the Nursery in Heaton Norris and, above left, CAMRA's John Clarke present landlord Simon Wetton with his certificate. On the same night the pub was also presented with a certificate marking 25 consecutive entries in the Good Beer Guide. Former licensee George Lindsay and Simon are pictured here receiving their award from John Clarke. Above right, George Archonodogeorge of the Circus Tavern in Manchester is seen receiving his July Pub of the Month Award from CAMRA's Mark McConachie (left).



The August Pub of the Month was the Blue Bell in Levenshulme and, above left, Julie Lee (left) and relief manager Danny Booker (right) are seen receiving their certificate from CAMRA's Margaret O'Brien. In September Pub of the Month was the Swan With Two Necks on Princes Street in Stockport – John Clarke is pictured presenting the award to Trigger and Pam Dean. The award stayed in Stockport for October, going to the Thatched House on Churchgate – Neil Furlong from CAMRA (centre) presents the award to Alex Hammond (left).

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## CAMRA Calling - What's On In The Local CAMRA Branches

**Stockport & South Manchester**  
Branch Contact: *Pete Farrand 01625 425734*  
[pete.farrand@googlemail.com](mailto:pete.farrand@googlemail.com)  
Branch website: [www.ssmcamra.org.uk](http://www.ssmcamra.org.uk)

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

**Macclesfield & East Cheshire**  
Branch Contact: *Tony Icke 01625 861833*  
[contact@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk](mailto:contact@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk)  
Branch website: [www.eastcheshirecamra.org.uk/](http://www.eastcheshirecamra.org.uk/)

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup>** – Hazel Grove Nth & Great Moor Stagger: meet 7.30pm Grove, London Rd, Hazel Grove; 8.30pm Travellers Call, Buxton Rd, Great Moor

**Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup>** – Presentation of Neil Richardson Trophy to the Queens Arms, Green Lane, Patricroft (by rail station). From 8pm.

**Monday 11<sup>th</sup>** – Good Beer Guide preliminary selection meeting: Broken Cross Club, nr. Bulls Head. Starts 8pm.

**Saturday 16<sup>th</sup>** – Annual Branch Meal; Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Buffet meal, raffle and quizzes. 7.30pm onward. Price £10 a head. Book with John Clarke on 0161 477 1973.

**Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup>** – Good Beer Guide 2011 short listing meeting: Black Lion, Blackfriars St, Salford. Starts 8pm

**Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Unicorn, Church St, City Centre. Starts 8pm.

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup>** – Winter Pub of the Season presentation: Old Ship, Macclesfield

**Monday 1 February** – Campaigning Meeting: Lion and Swan, Congleton. Starts 8pm

**Friday 28<sup>th</sup>** – Pub of the Month presentation to the Cheshire Line Tavern, Manchester Road,, Cheadle. From 8pm

**Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February** – Social: Star Inn, Back Hope St, The Cliff, Salford. From 8pm.

**High Peak & NE Cheshire**  
Branch Contact: *Mike Rose 07986 458517*  
[mikewrose@gmail.com](mailto:mikewrose@gmail.com)  
Branch website: [www.hpneccamra.org.uk/](http://www.hpneccamra.org.uk/)

**Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February** – Committee Meeting: Swan With Two Necks, Princes St, Stockport. **NB – Good Beer Guide 2011 pre-selections will be made – all welcome to attend and vote.** Start 8.15pm

**Trafford & Hulme**  
Branch Contact: *John Ison 0161 962 7976*  
Branch website: [www.thcamra.org.uk](http://www.thcamra.org.uk)

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup>** – Winter Pub of the Season presentation: Bulls Head, Cross St, Sale. From 8pm.

**Monday 11<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Crown, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm

**Thursday 21<sup>st</sup>** – Buxton Social: Ramsays Bar, Buckingham Hotel. Starts 8.30pm



**Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February** – Branch Meeting: venue tbc

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February** – Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Strines. Starts 8.30pm

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