



January 2011

Opening

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More Details – pages 9, 12 & 23



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The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for January is to be given to the Seven Oaks, at 5 Nicholas Street, Manchester City Centre. John Sutcliffe describes this unusual building and tells us why it has won this award.

WHILE the interior is much like that of many other public houses, the outside is by no means typical. Apparently a beautiful 20th Century interior was destroyed by the brewery in the early 1980's but apart from repainting the ironwork and adding floodlights, the exterior is unspoilt. Faced in white glazed faience blocks, it also has an iron tree climbing up the façade, echoing the name on the metal sign and topped by a small decorative ironwork balcony. In the late 1970's it was owned by Whitbread and was one of the last places in Manchester to sell Draught Bass. The building is now owned by Enterprise, so beers have to be from their list. On my last visit there were Cumberland, Hobgoblin, Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Black Sheep.



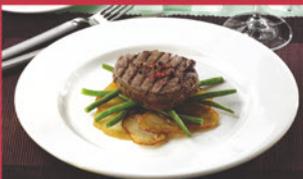
The lease was taken over by Patrick Smith a few years ago and he has gradually made improvements. The bench seating has been re-upholstered both downstairs and in the room above, and last autumn year, the old carpet was removed and a new timber floor laid. This is a real community pub in the centre of Manchester, opening not just for the lunchtime and early evening trade but serving the area close to Chinatown, the Chinese garden square and arch is just a little way along Nicholas Street. It caters for the workers from the restaurants, hotels and clubs and the railway and postal workers who often finish their shifts in the early hours of the morning when the rest of us are in bed. So why are we awarding the Pub of the Month to the Seven Oaks on the 18th January 2011? Well, it does have four hand pumps on the central bar, dispensing one permanent real cask ale and three rotating guest beers, but then again so do other pubs. However the Seven Oaks serves the community and is friendly and well run. It is because of the hard work and effort that that Patrick and his team have put in to make this a true city centre community local that this well deserved award is being presented.



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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COMMENT, NOTES & CONTENTS

Opening Times – Comment

This month all roads lead to the Sheridan Suite and CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival. The venue won many plaudits last year and is just a short distance from Manchester City Centre (see page 9 for transport details). Last year's event was a huge success and we hope to repeat that success this time around, particularly as this might be the last such event here in Manchester.

For the 2012 event we understand that Derby CAMRA has also bid to hold the festival and a decision on this is likely to be made in February. Thus, if this is to be Manchester's last National Winter Ales Festival let's make sure we go out on a high.

Finally the New Year was approaching as these words were typed so let me 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. 7,200 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 Saturday 15 January.

Contributors to this issue: John Clarke, John Tune, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Robin Wignall, Peter Edwardson, Frank Wood, Andy Jenkinson, Dave Hallows, Jim Flynn, Mike Rose, Mark McConachie, John Sutcliffe, Jerry Wicken, John O'Donnell, Beverley Gobbett, Tony Icke, Julian Hardstone, Neil Worthington.

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What's On

Your guide to CAMRA events across the region

Local CAMRA branches organise regular events in pubs across the region – members of other branches & general public are welcome to attend except some Branch business meetings (contact branch contact if in doubt). Organising branch in brackets.

January 2011

Saturday 15th - Branch Birthday Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. From 7.30. Cost £10 per head. Guest speaker, raffle and quiz. Book with John Clarke – 0161 477 1973 (SSM)

Tuesday 18th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Seven Oaks, Nicholas St, Manchester City Centre. From 8pm. (SSM)

Wednesday 19th – Saturday 22nd - National Winter Ales Festival: Sheridan Suite, Oldham Road, Manchester. See elsewhere in this issue for full details. (ALL)

Tuesday 25th - Pub of the Season Award and 40th Anniversary for Nancy being Landlady of the Peveril of the Peak, Manchester City Centre. 8pm onwards for this very special evening with Nancy and her sons. 40 years to the day, being in charge of this National Inventory pub. Please come along and support Nancy on this special evening (TRH)

Tuesday 25th – Winter Pub of the Season presentation to the Baths, Green St, Macclesfield (MEC)

Friday 28th – City Centre West Stagger: 7.30pm Lass O'Gowrie, Charles Street; 8.30 Fab Cafe, 109 Portland Street.(SSM)

February

Wednesday 2nd - Bank Top Brewery Visit, Bolton . Bookings only. £10 (inc beers & tour). Contact Ken Birch Tel: 0161 705 0202. Mobile : 07722741911. (NM)

Thursday 10th - Branch Social New Costello's Bar in Goose Green, Altrincham. This is the bar belonging to Dunham Massey Brewery. From 8pm. (TRH)

Monday 14th - February Branch Meeting and Spring Pub of the Season Award: Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar. Starts 8.30pm. (HPNC)

Your Local CAMRA Branches:

SSM: Stockport & South Manchester www.ssmcamra.org.uk
Contact: Mark McConachie 0161 429 9356, mark.mcconachie@o2.co.uk

NM – North Manchester www.northmanchestercamra.org.uk
Contact: Dave Hallows 07983 944992, davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk

HPNC – High Peak & North Cheshire www.hpneccamra.org.uk
Contact: Mike Rose 07986 458517. mikewrose@gmail.com

MEC – Macclesfield & East Cheshire www.eastcheshirecamra.org.uk
Contact Tony Icke 01625 861833, contact@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk

TRH – Trafford & Hulme www.thcamra.org.uk
Branch Contact: John Ison 0161 962 7976, enquiries@thcamra.org.uk

CAMRA Branch Business Meetings:

Thursday 13th January – The Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. **NB voting for Branch Pub of the Year and Cider Pub of the Year will be held at this meeting.** Starts 8pm (SSM)

Thursday 10th February – The Magnet, Wellington Road North, Stockport, **NB selections for Good Beer Guide 2012 will be made at this meeting.** Starts 8pm. (SSM)

Thursday 3rd February - Le Trappiste Belgian Bar, Shaw Street, Altrincham. We will be in the upstairs room. Starts 8pm. (TRH)

Wednesday 26th January - Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, M'cr City Centre. Starts 7.30pm. (NM)

Monday 14th February – held in conjunction with Pub of the Season award – see above. (HPNC)

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Roadhouse Blues

UNTIL recently, Stockport, outside the fringes of the town centre, had escaped fairly lightly from the tide of pub closures sweeping the country. However, in the past few months we have seen a surge of pubs going to the wall – the Bromale and the Greyhound in Adswold demolished, the Smithy in Cheadle Hulme in the process of conversion to who knows what, and the George on Mersey Square closing its doors “indefinitely”. Added to this, Hydes have put the Gateway just over the border in East Didsbury up for sale, claiming that they don’t see it as viable as a pub in the long-term. One factor that all of these have in common is that they were large, purpose built pubs from the 20th century, built between about 1930 and 1970.

This has raised eyebrows amongst some people, saying “but it was the only nearby pub for a large area of housing!” However, in reality, the idea that the typical pattern of pubgoing is that people come home from work, have their tea and then go out has always been somewhat wide of the mark, and applies even less now than it once did. It is noticeable that pubs in Manchester city centre, and on suburban drinking circuits like Chorlton and Didsbury, are doing much better than those in residential areas. Lots of nearby chimneypots is no guarantee of success for a pub.

Pubs like this have also fallen victim to social changes, with middle-aged and elderly people much less likely to go out to the local for a drink than they were twenty or thirty years ago, and new residents from ethnic minorities moving in who for cultural reasons are not going to be attracted to pubs. A further factor is that, compared with those that are part of a row of other buildings, pubs on large free-standing sites are much more attractive to developers looking to build new houses, flats or care homes.

The middle years of the last century were the great era of Planning, when it was believed that a scientifically designed environment could do much to advance human happiness. It was only later on that the downsides of this approach in terms of bleak and soulless places devoid of an individual human touch became apparent. This applied just as much to pubs as to other aspects of development. On paper, these new purpose-built pubs may have offered all the facilities customers wanted, but in practice they were often echoing, characterless barns. Even at the time, people often complained that the new, “improved” pubs were not a patch on the smaller, haphazard, homely ones they supplanted.

It is possible for inter-wars pubs built on a more modest scale to gain a more intimate and characterful feel – the Nursery in Heaton Norris is a good example – but these are very much the exception rather than the rule. With hindsight, it might have been better to allow smaller pubs to grow organically in areas of new housing, but that very much went against the spirit of the times. Some of these pubs have found a niche for themselves by using part of their surrounding land to add the increasingly popular lodge-type accommodation and concentrate on food – the Heald Green Hotel being a good example. But that isn’t a course open to all, especially those not situated on main roads.

Never greatly loved even at the best of times, the 20th century roadhouse and estate pubs have proved disproportionately vulnerable to the downturn in the pub trade in the past few years. As you travel around the country, it’s a depressingly common sign of the times to see these pubs, often impressive buildings in their own right on prominent corner sites, standing in a forlorn and derelict condition. And, sadly, the odds have to be that we’ll be seeing more of them in the coming years.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com

www.bollingtonbrewing.co.uk

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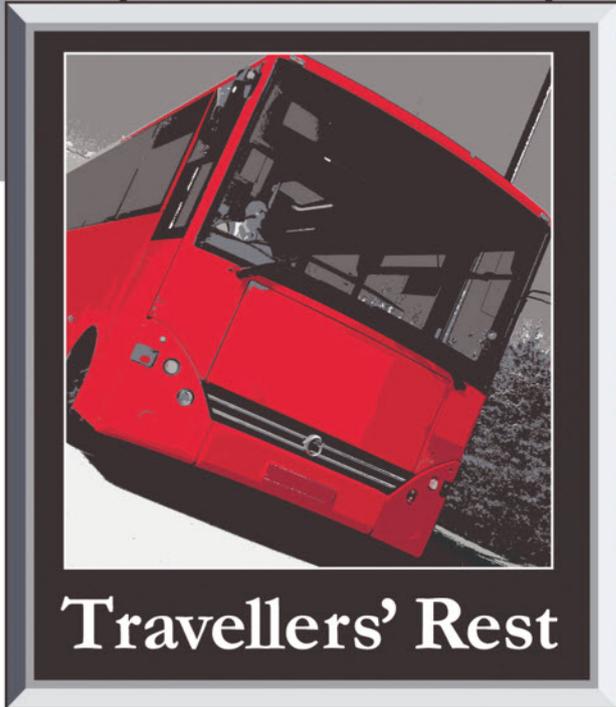
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The Castle – a reborn Manchester legend

The Castle on Oldham Street, Manchester City Centre was once as famous for its open to the elements loos as its range of Robinson's beers. However this legacy is now firmly confined to the past with the completion of a massive refurbishment by the pub's new owners, *Writes John O'Donnell.*



Visitors in recent months will have a feel for the level of work that has been carried out as the pub has traded on throughout its transformation.

The sheets of cardboard & wood that were put in place before opening every day to protect the ongoing work have now been removed to reveal a stunning decor. The traditional wallpapers have been restored, the ornate tiled flooring of the corridor has been reinstated with the help of specialist contractors flown from Germany and those infamous loos have given way to some of the finest decorated facilities in Manchester.



The biggest transformation is in the previously lost back room. Years of leaking roof had left the ceiling of this room rotten leaving the new management no choice but to pull it down. What they didn't expect was to find timbered beams holding up a spectacular Victorian skylight, albeit in a poor state of repair. Now painstakingly restored, the skylight is the highlight of the pub's new music room, which also features a stage built from reclaimed timbers and a

wealth of period furnishings.

The Castle's other traditional claim to fame has been to serve the full range of Robinson's beers including stocking Old Tom barley wine all year round. Robinson's expanded range in recent times means it's no longer possible to stock all the beers they produce, but there are still seven of them served at one time. Old Tom remains available year round, alongside Unicorn, Double Hop, Dark Hatters (to be replaced by Light Hatters in spring), Dizzy Blonde, Hartley's Cumbria Way and the current Robinson's seasonal. An eighth pump serves Weston's Traditional Scrumpy cider.

A range of traditional British pub food is served 12 - 4 every day, ranging from sandwiches to soups, stews and home made pies. Outside of main food service hours staff will be happy to serve up stews & pies if they are available in the kitchen (there are no frozen portions here - whatever is available has been made fresh that day).

The new music room hosts bands and/or DJs three or four nights a week. Tuesday is quiz night. Fridays and Saturdays are normally kept free of bands to make more room for customers. Such is the popularity of the pub on weekend evenings, they have found it necessary to appoint a concierge who advises potential customers of available seating and waiting times at the bar.

National Winter Ales Festival



Where it is and how to get there

ONCE again the National Winter Ales Festival will be held at last year's venue, 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. Last year the new venue won plaudits from many visitors, who found it remarkably easy to get to.



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. Luckily the major road works that caused a few problems last year are now behind us.



All of the following buses will get you to the festival

- **Services 82, 83, 180, and 184** operate from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Oldham Street stand A. These are the most frequent buses to the festival
- **Service 88** operates from Manchester Piccadilly Gardens/Oldham Street stand B
- **Services 24, 181 and 182** 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

Following our successful partnership last year, we have once again negotiated a travel concession with local operator First Group.



First Group. From Wednesday 19th to Saturday 22nd 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 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 12 for a taster of some of the beers...

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Dunham Massey Brewery's Fight Against the Beer Tie

DUNHAM Massey brewery is no different to any other micro brewery in this country in that they are finding it increasingly difficult to sell their excellent products to Landlords who genuinely wish to purchase them, due to the beer tie imposed by the pubco who owns the pub.

In their own personal fight to ensure that the customer gets the opportunity to partake in their products they have opened their own pub in Goose Green, Altrincham. Here you can choose from six different handpump beers, a full range of their bottles or for those of us with friends who still drink gassed lager, there is a choice of two. In case you feel able to convert these friends to real lager, John Costello, Head Brewer, has already done a brew of his own real lager which is currently sitting in his conditioning tanks. Hopefully, by the time this goes to publication it will be available on the bar so now it is over to you to go and try some.



The pub is being run by John's eldest son, Anthony who also happens to be a musician so keep your eye on their website by Googling Dunham Massey Brewing Co for music and open mic events. They are also intending to introduce a pie and a pint deal in the New Year.

So why not take a bus, tram or train journey to Altrincham interchange and a short walk will take you to Costello's Bar in Goose Green and help John and his sons in their fight against the beer tie to offer all of us their most excellent beers.

Costello's Bar, 18 Goose Green, Altrincham, WA14 1DW.

Trafford & Hulme Branch News

Breaking News from Trafford & Hulme. We are currently in negotiations with the MOSI (Museum of Science and Industry) to run a small beer festival in the Power Hall with all the engines still running and steam train rides available the weekend of 26th March 2011. Keep watching the T&H website for updated details.

Trafford & Hulme wish to thank Hydes brewery for once again allowing them to hold the branch Christmas party at the brewery. This year has seen Hydes brewing many more different beers than any previous year and having the opportunity to sample 8 of them on the same evening was a huge privilege which was very much appreciated by everyone who managed to attend the event. Cheers Hydes for your continued support of Trafford & Hulme branch and CAMRA.

North Manchester Pub Award



One of the top awards made by North Manchester CAMRA is the annual Neil Richardson Award, presented in the memory of the late editor of the North Manchester magazine *What's Doing*. The award always goes to a pub that exhibits the traditional qualities

that Neil admired so much. This year's winner is the Eagle on Collier Street, Salford, and the presentation was due to take place on 5 January.

Nancy Just Pips CAMRA to 40th Anniversary



On March 16 this year CAMRA will have been formed for 40 years but on January 25 Nancy Swannick will have been the Landlady of the *Peveril of the Peak* for 40 years, writes *Beverley Gobbett*.

This is an iconic Manchester pub which is also on the CAMRA National Inventory of historic pub interiors and in this case, exteriors as well. Everybody knows it by the fantastic display of tiles on the exterior and wonderful wood and glazing on the interior (*main bar pictured above – photo by Mick Slaughter LRPS*).



This pub was originally built around 1829 by the same man who built the Manchester to London stagecoach from which it takes its name. When it was first built it had two storeys of drinking rooms making six separate rooms but most of the upstairs was removed at the turn of the last century when it was re-built giving it the famous tiled exterior we all know and recognise today. It is also reported to be haunted by a local ghost.

Nancy Swannick and her family came to the pub in 1971 when it was clearly a Wilsons house. This picture (*copyright Manchester Libraries*) was taken in 1972 showing the roads still open around the pub. CAMRA and locals got



together in the late 1970's to fight the City council against demolishing the pub for a road widening scheme. It is now an Enterprise pub and as it is Grade II listed it has managed to remain in a small island surrounded by redevelopment. Fans of the ITV programme *Cracker* may have picked up that three episodes had filming which took place in the *Peveril of the Peak*.

Maurice, one of Nancy's sons now runs the cellar and a fine job he does of it too. This pub has appeared in the Good Beer guide from 1980 to 1987 and then 1990 to 2006 making no less than 25 times and is about to receive the Trafford & Hulme Winter Pub of the Season Award 2010 / 2011.

The local branch will be making a presentation to Nancy on Tuesday 25th January from 8pm to celebrate her outstanding service to us all and to Maurice for the Pub of the Season.

We hope that as many friends of the *Peveril of the Peak* will be able to attend and make this a very memorable evening for Nancy and her family.

You can find the pub at 127 Great Bridgewater Street, M1 5JQ.

Why not take this opportunity to join CAMRA as we celebrate 40 years? See form on page 22

Christmas Comes Early for Steven

Christmas came early for Steven Palmer of Great Moor, Stockport when Robinson's delivered a year's supply of beer to his door. The gift came as a thank you present after he participated in the brewer's consumer survey when they exhibited twelve of their cask beers at the Manchester Food and Drink Festival.

Like thousands of festival goers Steven, who is Assistant Director of Facilities at NHS Oldham, had nominated his favourite brand in Robinson's survey and prize draw competition. For his support he was rewarded with enough beer for every day of 2011 when brands manager John Robinson called at his house to make the presentation.

He said: "The timing couldn't have been better as festivities got underway. There is more than enough beer here for me and my wife Judith, so I shall be sharing some of it with our family and members of the maintenance team at work.

"I was on holiday in Goa, India when John Robinson phoned me with the good news, so this is a superb prize to come home to. It ties in very well with the fact that we had already bought our son Tom a gift pack of Robinson's beers when we visited their stand at the Food and Drink Festival. But another 365 bottles are very welcome."

Results of the consumer survey are helping to shape Robinson's future strategy. Reassuringly established brands in the brewer's portfolio were all well supported. While their relatively new Ginger Tom, which is a variant of their award winning Old Tom, showed itself to be a real favourite at the festival. In response to the survey Ginger Tom, which got Steven's vote, has now been added to the family brewers' range of six limited edition ales to be launched for 2011.

Pictured above – Steven (left) receives his beer from John Robinson who delivered the prize to his door

Local Pubs Week Update

As part of our Local Pubs Week promotion we devised five City Centre "Staggers" for the Visit Manchester website. This useful resource promotes events in and around Manchester, and is currently featuring the National Winter Ales Festival. The web address is:

<http://www.visitmanchester.com/articles/whats-on/national-winter-ales-festival-2011.aspx>.

There is a link from there to the Staggers (click on 'Discover Manchester's real ale pubs') and it seems they have been a great success. By the middle of December they had received 2,460 views, which Visit Manchester considers to be a pretty good outcome. Readers may also recall the Local Pubs Week photo competition. We must have made this a bit too hard as there were only a handful of entries. The lucky winner of the case of Lancaster Brewery beers (kindly sponsored by the Rising Sun on Queen Street in Manchester City Centre) was Steve Smith from north Manchester.



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 1872 Porter, a superb full-bodied porter made by Yorkshire's Elland Brewery.. Will the gold medal head this side of the Pennines this time, or will it be off down south?? The winner will be announced during the Festival's trade session on 19 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 **Ilkley Lotus IPA** (5.6%) and **Acorn Brewery Blonde** (4%). Bollington Brewery will also be there – check out **Bollington Nights** (3.9%) and **Oat Mill Stout** (5%), along with the new **Night Porter** (4.2%).

The award winning Fullers Brewery has five beers at the festival – including the new **Brewers Reserve No. 2** (8.2%) – early reports are that this is a very impressive beer, having been matured for a year in cognac casks. Also at the higher end of the gravity range are Liverpool Organic Brewery's **Imperial Russian Stout** and **Matron's Delight** (8%) a new imperial stout from Bury's Outstanding Brewery. This is a "joint production" by Outstanding's Dave Porter and Festival staffing officer Margaret Corlett.

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 East Midlands is Amber Ales and their take on a traditional IPA, **Imperial IPA** (6.5%) 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 **W90** (3.9%) must be one of the ultimate refreshers.

There will also be a good selection of British bottle conditioned beers (also known as "real ale in a bottle"). Durham Brewery make some fantastic beers and their imperial stout **Temptation** (10%) ages wonderfully. OT will certainly be seeking out two beers from the new Hardknott Brewery – **Dark Matter** (4.9%) and **Infra Red** (6.2%) are the names to look for.

Foreign Beers

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

Staying with Belgium, check out the excellent Houblon Chouffe, a new hoppy IPA from well regarded **Achouffe Brewery**. Originally a Christmas beer, but now available all year round, is the superb Avec les Bons Voeux from **Brasserie Dupont**, one of the most highly regarded Belgian brewers. Another highly regarded beer is **Urthel**, a Belgian company that brews across the border in the Netherlands. We have the new-ish Hop-it a powerful (9.5%) with a good smack of hops.

There will also be three draught Belgian beers – Achouffe Nilce Chouffe (10%), De Koninck Winter Koninck (6.5%) and the ultimate Belgian Christmas beer – Gouden Carolus Christmas (10.5%). Treat and drink with respect.



Stagger...

A CELEBRATION OF THE GREAT BRITISH BOOZER by Jerry Wicken

I've been on a good few staggers over the years through South Manchester and Stockport but Stockport North and Portwood comes pretty high on the list of successes. We covered seven pubs, none of which everybody liked but all of which *somebody* liked. Every pub had something to offer which was reflected in their busyness, and of course, all sold real ale. The fact that they were all within walking distance of each other but were very different from each other is a celebration of the uniqueness of pubs within the area. The beer quality was also (with a couple of small exceptions) very good and culminated in one of the finest ales I've had for some time. But more of that later. I'll start in the rather traditional way, at the beginning.



The **Park Inn** is in every sense a local's local. Once you have struggled your way through the smoking section i.e. the entrance, you are assaulted by an early Friday evening crowd, noisy and boisterous but good humoured, trying to make their voices heard above the mega decibel juke box and DJ. Away from the heart of the noise there is also a public bar with a pool table. The only real ale served is Holt's Bitter which merited a very good score from the half a dozen of us who started the stagger on a damp October evening.

Only a short walk down Newbridge Lane towards Stockport finds one of the many stark contrasts on this stagger, **The Midway**. This has gone through a few makeovers but is now a largely food oriented establishment, airy and modern, with a very tasty sounding menu. Although the restaurant part is at the rear of the pub, food was being served at any table. So, despite our group finding somewhere to sit we felt to some extent that we were expected to eat. In more clement weather, there is a garden and smoking area. There is also a small patio downstairs overlooking the River Goyt but its delights were hidden from us as there was no lighting. This again is really an area for better weather. Despite the pub's food bias two ales were on sale, Jennings Cumberland and Hobgoblin. Sadly the

Cumberland received poor reviews but the Hobgoblin was very decent.



Passing the boarded Old King, our next stop was the much celebrated **Railway**. One of our number remarked that it had always seemed a bit of a sad pub but this was certainly not the case this Friday. It was busy and jolly with a selection of draught ales to make grown men (and women) weep with pleasure. In addition there is a wide range of German, Belgian and 'World' beers by the bottle. There is a smoking area and garden to the side overlooking Great Portwood Street and unusual these days, a bar billiard table. We did not have time to try the Moorhouse Witchfinder General, the Pennine (Rossendale) Floral Dance or the Outstanding Red but we did sup the Summer Wine Brewery (from Holmsfirth) Dambuster's Dark Mild and Pictish Brewer's Gold (both good) and George Gale (aka Fuller's) Seafarer's (not bad); from the Outstanding Brewery - Blond, Standing Out and Sold Out and Pitch Porter from Pennine all of which were exceptional. If you think we were getting a bit greedy, our numbers had swelled to ten by this half-way meeting point. That this pub can keep such a vast range of beers in tip-top condition is a tribute indeed to the staff and management. In my opinion it is a must visit pub.



Dragging ourselves away our next stop a few doors away was the **Queens**. This quietish Robinson's house was pleasantly decorated with a good selection of old photos hanging on the walls and a choice of Hatters or Unicorn dispensed by electric pump. Overall, both beers scored average marks but the Unicorn caused the greatest debate with scores ranging from practically undrinkable to very good! I can only guess this was due either to a dislike of Robinson's ales or the comedown

experienced following the exceptional beers at the Railway.

Moving on we ventured into the **Full Shilling**. Sometime multi-aled and sometime key only, this now serves just one beer - Hydes Ringmaster which is one of Hydes Seasonal Ales. Although, looking a bit rundown from the outside, the pub was interesting inside, busy and had a good atmosphere. It also had a library with a copy of the 2009 Good Beer Guide. Those with greater local knowledge said the reduction in beer choice has had a positive impact on beer quality which was certainly above average. There was also a rare sighting - a tuneful karaoke. At least, it started that way but gradually deteriorated and hastened our departure across the road.



The **Tiviot** was not full but we received a warm welcome from the long standing landlord of more than 30 years. Another Robinson's pub, this offered the seasonal Battering Ram in addition to Hatter's and Unicorn. We all sampled the first named and it received very good to excellent scores across the board putting paid to my earlier theory of an anti-Robinson's bias. This is a traditional town centre local and certainly, on the basis of this one visit it deserves more custom.

The **Swan with Two Necks** was a fitting last port of call. Again Robinson's, it has a great old-fashioned layout, vault, comfy lounge with great wood panelling, a dining room to the rear with a tasty looking lunchtime menu and a friendly landlord. The quality of my notes seems to have a direct



relation to my enjoyment so further description will have to be left for others to discover. What I do remember is that the beer choice was Hatter's and Unicorn (both excellent) and Old Tom which despite serious competition was scored best beer of the night. For me, it was simply the best Old Tom I've tasted and one of my best ales in recent years! But you shouldn't just take my word for it.

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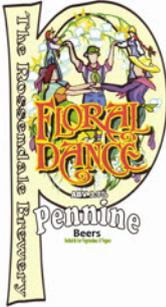
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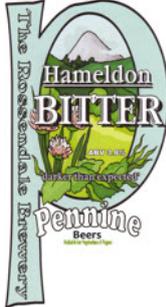
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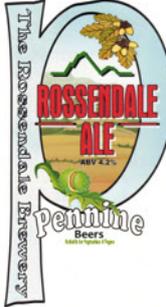
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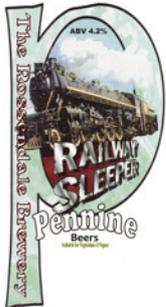
Floral Dance
3.6%
A pale and fruity session beer, with body that is more than a match for many stronger beers!



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



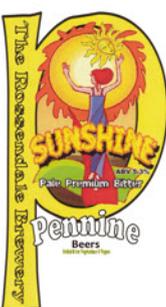
Rossendale Ale
4.2%
A malty aroma leads to a complex, malt dominated flavour, supported by a dry, increasingly bitter finish.



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 barley dominance.



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.

High Peak Pub Scene

Frank Wood with Pubs News from High Peak & North East Cheshire CAMRA plus Robin Wignall's monthly round-up of the Peak District Pub scene

High Peak Pub News With Frank Wood

AN announcement on High Peak Radio on the 7.00am news in mid December woke me up with a start. It was said the mill-yard complex just off Victoria Street, Glossop, that has had a chequered couple of years with companies going bust etc, has been bought out again and plans were for the complex to be opened by November 2011.

This may not seem to be a piece of news for this page, you may think. However, when the list of companies that have got on board was read out and **Wetherspoons** were named as one, I was a bit startled to say the least. I have long held the opinion that the town's pubs are quiet enough as it is, and a company such as Wetherspoons, who carry out extensive researches of an area before they go ahead with a site, would probably not consider Glossop for one of their outlets.

However, on checking this out more deeply, I heard from a good authority, that it is in fact correct. The site already has planning consent as originally an upmarket drinks bar was opening on the site. It will be interesting in the months ahead what develops in opposition to the proposals by other establishments in the town.

Glossop Labour Club's staple real ale for some years now has been Moorhouses Premier Bitter. However, occasional guests from Shaws and Howard Town are seen, particularly revolving round the fourth Thursday in the month when the ever popular Glossop Folk Train hits town on the 6.48pm from Manchester. The bands play on the train, spend a couple of hours in the Labour Club, then back for the 9.42pm from Glossop station to Manchester. It's a great atmosphere and well worth a trip up the line for the evening.

Hyde News

THE Village Hotel and Leisure Complex in Hyde, almost bordering in Dukinfield, wouldn't normally get a mention in these pages. However, on a recent visit, it was found that they have Black Sheep Bitter in the main public bar, though none in the function suite. So, if invited to a wedding or a family gathering, you can walk through to the bar and bring some real ale back with you

In Gee Cross, the **Queen Adelaide** has been re-furnished to a nice standard. However, unless their handpumps are hidden at the back of the bar, I saw none when I passed in early December just after opening time. However, round the corner, the **Lamb Inn** had Morland Speckled Hen, Taylor's Landlord and John Smith's Cask and was a nice welcoming pub after my walk over Werneth Low from Broadbottom in the snow. Across the road, the **Lamb** (Enterprise) is currently shut. The notice in the window said it all, the pub company had taken re-possession and it was advertised as "to let". A brief canal

walk to Hyde and walking down Market Street, it was a shame to see the **Crown**, a former Robinsons pub, closed for good. The **George** was on Great Norbury Street between the canal and the top of Market Street...yet a third Robinsons pub that shut a couple of years back.

Further down, the former **Church Inn** and **Cheshire Cheese**, both former notable Boddingtons houses up until the early nineties, were some kind of fun bar and an eating establishment in that order. The former **Clarendon** is now a Last Orders (no handpumps so I walked out again!) and the **Red Lion**, another former Robinsons pub near the bus station, is closed for good too. So to the **Cheshire Ring** for the afternoon and the presentation of the Opening Times Cider Trail. Good beer, good samples of cider and some excellent pork in cider with apple....with a hot kick to it, kept me entertained for the rest of a cold afternoon.

Around & About

IN Buxton, the **Bakers Arms**, shut for the past couple of years, has an application lodged with High Peak Council's Planning Department, to convert it into two dwellings. So another former Good Beer Guide entry looks as if it has bitten the dust forever.

Still getting glowing reports from the **Rising Sun** at Top Mossley. It appears that the pub is doing enough trade to support the six handpumps that are currently in use permanently on the bar. Also beers are available from small local breweries such as Millstone and Shaws.

The **Cask Tavern** at Poynton, on the very edge of our Branch area, was reported to have had four handpumped beers on the bar in recent weeks. A recent selection was St Austell Tribute, Wychwood Hobgoblin, Everards Tiger and Brains Reverend James.



Peak Practice

With Robin Wignall

IN all the doom and gloom pubs can still have their busy moments. A few weeks ago I called in the **Dog & Partridge** at Bridgemont after the pub had had a busy week end. Stocks were down to two real ales. Fortunately one was a very good pint of Bank Top Flat Cap. Other interesting and good beers which have recently been available include Kelham Island Pride of Sheffield and Cottage Duchess. The latter comes with a superb locomotive pump clip. There are often

six beers available at the Dog & Partridge including Abbot Ale, Black Sheep Bitter and Coach House Gunpowder Mild. This last is always worth a try and is usually my first pint when I visit.

The **Shepherd's** in Whaley Bridge continues to serve beers in good form from the Marston's brewing empire. Ringwood Boondoggle is badged as beer for 'lazy summer afternoons,' but made very good drinking into November. A further pick from an interesting range was Wychwood Dog's Bollocks. Never mind the name, this is a very good pale 5% brew.

Still in the Marston's estate, the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee had Brakspear's Oxford Gold in good form on a recent visit, a very quaffable brew.

Some pubs just carry on doing well, that which they are good at. The **Fox** at Brook Bottom lies at the end of a single track road from New Mills, or a walk up a reasonable track, apparently a former packhorse track, from Strines station. Good Robinson's Unicorn and Hatters are to be had and I understand that the food is well worth a try.

The **Cock** in Whaley Bridge re-opened in mid November with work successfully completed



after the hiccoughs noted in last month's column. A really good job has been done at the Cock. Although the actual bar area is smaller, only a disadvantage at very busy times, there is so much that is positive to report. The pub remains multi-roomed with four obvious areas. There is a high standard of decoration and refurbishing provides a high level of comfort. The kitchen is up and running with a chef in place. A full menu started at the end of November, and will be available at lunchtimes and evenings Wednesdays and Thursdays, all day Fridays and Saturdays and till 6.30 on Sundays. A bar snack menu will be available on Mondays and Tuesdays. On the beer front extra hand pumps are now available, with four beers to go at to start with. Hatters, Unicorn, Double Hop and the seasonal Battering Ram were available in late November.

By the end of November food was being served at the **Board** at the Horwich End end of Whaley Bridge, following work to upgrade the kitchen. No information on food yet, though a good pint of Unicorn was to be had when I called.

The **Castle** in Castleton was a dining venue for a small group of us in November. A lunchtime menu provided good eating. This was washed down with a choice from six beers, including Sharp's Doom Bar, Leeds Best and Harviestoun Bitter & Twisted. The Castle is worth a visit, though beer prices reflect its location in a tourist centre.



Pub News

A6 – Revisited

REMEMBER the A6 campaign? This first appeared in the March 2008 issue of *Opening Times* and has been mentioned from time to time since then. "Can we have an update?" asks a reader. Happy to oblige – but it's something of a mixed bag.



At the time there were just four cask pubs on the entire length of the A6 between Stockport's Mersey Square and Piccadilly Station. Those four – the **Midland**, Stockport; **Horseshoe**, Levenshulme; **New Victoria**, Longsight and the **Bulls Head**, London Road – remain true to the cask ale cause. Indeed the Bulls Head is now a regular in the Good Beer Guide.

But what of the others? At the time we suggested that turning to cask could be the key to long term survival. Far be it from us to say we told you so, but...

Starting in Stockport, the **George** in Mersey Square intermittently dabbled with cask but with no real conviction. Last month it closed "indefinitely" and is now a sorry sight.

Next we have a string of successes. The return of both the **Magnet** and the **Railway** to the cask ale fold has been well documented in these pages. The Railway now has up to four guest beers and the commitment of owner Ray Ford to the cask cause helped win his pub the local CAMRA 2010 Pub of the Year Award.



The Magnet has 14 changing guests and real cider as well. Having already gained a Pub of the Month award, it will be in the voting for the 2011 Pub of the Year.

After many years in the keg wilderness, the **Hope** now also sells cask in the form of well kept Draught Bass and further up the road the **Heaton Chapel Toby Carvery** sells cask beers – Thwaites we think last time OT called. So far so good. However thereafter it's a disaster zone. None of the remaining pubs have turned to cask. There has however been something approaching carnage.

Conor's Bar (formerly the Chapel House) is closed and shows no sign of reopening. Both the **Levenshulme** and the **Little Vic** have closed and reopened, with still no cask ale in

evidence. In Longsight the **Midway** has been converted to other use. Across the road the **Farmers Arms** is also closed with no reopening in prospect. A 2010 Stockport Beer Festival poster remains forlornly in the window. The **Springbank Tavern** has been demolished while the **Bay Horse** has been converted to other use and has been lost as a pub.

So of the 19 keg only pubs back in March 2008, four have converted to cask while no fewer than six have closed, some clearly for good.

As to the remaining nine – the Levenshulme, Fiddlers Green, M19, Hennigan's Bar, the Union, the Little Vic, the Gold Cup, the Apsley Cottage and the Church, they carry on oblivious to the growth of cask ale in the on-trade. We wonder how many will still be with us in another three years.



beer these days. Passing the site of the Crown to get to **CKs** (formerly Hickeys and the Gransmoor) things were a little livelier but still no real ale in sight; there was a kitchen in operation at the back of this very large pub, so things may be picking up. Next along would



have been the **Albion**, but that closed in February for conversion to two houses.

Meanwhile across the road on Abbey Hey Lane, the **Oddfellows** (ex Boddingtons) was quite busy, yet still no cask to be had. As the Halfway House is now a computer / white-goods shop, and the Concert Inn was demolished eighteen months ago, it was into the **Lord Raglan** I stepped. Busy and noisy, this place used to sell a nice drop of Holts, but for some time now chooses to sell keg products alone.

Disappointed, I left to head into Robinson's **Forrester's Arms** just a couple of doors down. I paused a while to study "The Dead Blow" sculpture outside the new superstore - 29 feet high, 35

feet wide, and weighing 15 tonnes, it depicts a giant steam hammer that aptly reflects



the area's now mostly gone, industrial past. The Forrester's are ticking over well and seems to be selling two Robinson's beers now - Unicorn and Dizzy Blonde, although the latter wasn't on that day. The Unicorn was on pretty good form, and I am sure sales will increase as the staff and surroundings are warm and welcoming.

I was going to end at the **Queen Anne**, but it was closed for redecoration that weekend, so I had a saunter

down Ogden Lane to see what Banks' **Royal Oak**, and the ex-Boddingtons **High Bank** were doing. The former is now no longer a pub, it appears to be business premises of some sort, whilst the High Bank was still trading, but doing keg beers only. So, out of the eight remaining pubs in Openshaw, a mere three sell cask beer. Interestingly, the beers they sell are **all** from local family-owned brewers.



Openshaw Update

FOLLOWING last month's look round the pubs of Ashton New Road, it is the Old Road's turn this month as we set our sights on Openshaw.

Whilst we saw that Clayton was undergoing major change with the building of Metrolink, Openshaw is seeing mammoth redevelopment around the Halfway House junction with Fairfield Road. All the buildings and even a large section of Old Lane have been replaced by a huge Morrisons supermarket, whilst further to the east between CKs and the Crown, buildings and streets have been extensively cleared to make way for over 400 new family homes.

So, what is left you may ask? Well, beginning at the **Railway** Manshaw Road, where I had a good chat, and a couple of good pints of Holts bitter, with Paul and Susan Robson who told me they have now done eight years there (I recall presenting them with a much-deserved Pub of the Month award some years ago).

Although they are doing quite well, they reckoned trade elsewhere was difficult with licensees facing high rents and decreasing patronage.

Those words may well have been borne out by my later findings on this Sunday lunchtime walk-about. The nearby **Grove** all but empty with a barmaid and a lone punter in this former Wilsons house; sad to say it only sells keg





Cheadle News

One or two Cheadle snippets. The **White Hart** has been rebranded as the White Hart Tavern. Three handpumps have been spotted on the bar but no news as to what they actually dispense.

Meanwhile we read that pub company **Dorbiere Ltd** has paid "£325,000 plus VAT" for the **George & Dragon** on the High Street. The article states that they hope to restore the pub to "its former glory" opening in March this year as a pub and hotel. Let's hope real ale will be restored as well!



Meanwhile at the **Crown** Karen and Alan Williams have been awarded the Best Tenanted Pub Award for the whole of the Hydes estate and were runners-up in Hydes best kept cellar awards. In order to celebrate these awards the brewery has brewed a special beer for the pub called Jewel in the Crown (4.5% ABV). The intention was to serve this beer from 1 January 2011 – when OT called on the bar were six hand pumps with two on Hydes Original plus Hydes Mild, Hydes Finest, the seasonal High Flyer and the new Hydes Plum Treat. Alan has also promised a seventh hand pump in the near future.

Macclesfield News

Not one to let the grass grow under her feet, Macclesfield's entrepreneurial Karen Cooper has seized the opportunity to take control of her future. Perhaps best known as the friendly face in a Park Lane pharmacy, Karen is now earning new recognition as licensee of the **George and Dragon**, in Sunderland Street.

Karen says: "It's not so much of a career change as another string to my bow and securing my future. This is a great opportunity to branch-out while I also establish a good work-life balance by working for myself."

"I had been looking for the right opportunity in Macclesfield for some time. I wanted a business with the scope to develop, and the opportunity to involve my family. Running a pub ticks all the boxes and with a team of well trained staff I also have the flexibility to manage my own hours."

Feedback is already positive and inquisitive new customers are now coming back for more. Karen says that it is very much a case of learning on the job but she is thoroughly

enjoying her new involvement with a vibrant community pub.



Above – Karen (centre) and staff member Valerie McLaughlin receive their training certificate from Dennis Robinson

Here and There

New management has taken over JW Lees's **Lloyds Hotel** in Chorlton. Matt & Mikal, two long-term staff at the pub took over the tenancy in mid November and have set about reviving the fortunes of this flagging pub. A new menu has been launched and the real ale offering improved to three. When OT called, Lees Bitter was joined by Coronation Street and the excellent Plum Pudding seasonal.

At the other end of Wilbraham Road, **Odest**, with six handpumps on offer, is now open until 1.30am on Friday & Saturday evenings.

In Sale, the **Steamhouse** (opposite the tram stop on the corner of Northenden Road & Broad Road) has become the first regular outlet in the Sale area for the local Dunham Massey Brewery. The bar will feature a permanent Dunham beer alongside one from Hydes and one of the most extensive selections of foreign bottled beers for miles around. Meanwhile, up to six Dunham Massey beers are now available at the brewery new tap - **Costello's** on Goose Green in Altrincham (see separate report)



The **Woodstock** (pictured above) on Barlow Moor Road in West Didsbury has inexplicably renamed itself as The Woodstock Arms. Five real ales are available with permanent offerings Sharp's Doom Bar & Black Sheep Bitter being joined by three guests. Nothing

much else has changed inside this predominately food led pub.

Altrincham's **Roebuck** is awaiting installation of a fourth handpump which will add Wells & Young's Bombardier to existing permanent ales Taylor's Landlord & Boddingtons Bitter - one pump will continue to host an ale from parent Enterprise Inn's guest list.

It looks like Flixton has lost **The Red Lion** for ever with reports received that planning permission has been granted to build a 52 bed care home on the site of the pub which was the subject of arson late last year.

Nichole Porisse has moved from the Good Beer Guide listed **Church Mossley** to the **Stamford Arms** in Heyheads on the border of Stalybridge and Mossley. The pub is the only one in the area and has been reopened following a refurbishment after being closed for some time. It is to be hoped that she gets the support from the local community that she deserves. Nichole will be majoring on cask beer as she did in the Church with beers from Thwaites and guest beers and will be putting on food lunch and tea times. If the beer is as good as it was in the Church the Stamford Arms will be well worth a visit

In Stockport the **Round House** on Belmont Way in Heaton Norris has been demolished while the nearby **Grey Horse** on Old Road is closed and boarded. Neither had sold cask beer for years.

Wythenshawe Latest

The recent cold weather seemed a good time to see what pubs remained in Woodhouse Park, Wythenshawe as I had heard of some closures, writes **Mark McConachie**.

Starting off at the western end of Portway, it was sad to see the **Happy Man** was now firmly boarded up. Named after a famed racehorse, this was once a busy Bass house. It closed in September, and it appears may well be purchased by the owners of nearby



shops and the Naval club for re-development. Things were altogether brighter at the still trading **Mountain Ash**, **Woodpecker**, **Red Beret**, **Portway**, and **Cornishway**. Meanwhile, an altogether sadder sight was the cleared land where once stood the **Talisman**, this is opposite the new sports centre on Portway. All that remains is the swinging pub sign (see photo above).

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Access all beers



Does the trend for more extreme beers help or hinder the growth of the beer market in general and the cask beer market in particular? Peter Alexander argues that accessibility is the way to go.

Accessibility. What's that then? Well the dictionary would say "the attribute of being easy to meet or deal with". "Accessible". Now hands up those that think (most) beer should be seen within those (reasonable) definitions.

Recently I had two beers at opposite ends of the approachability spectrum. First was the 3.5% pale, Citra hop infused swigger, **Hawkshead Windermere Pale**, then, a few minutes later in a different pub, the strong, 6.5% hop bomb, **Hoppiness** from **Moor Brewery**. In the **Angel** (Off Rochdale Road, Manchester), I was just beaten to the door by a group of six, three men with their female companions. They wanted to drink cask beer, so asked for tasters. I watched as they went through two or three. "Oooohs" and "aaahs" announced the result - **Hawkshead Windermere Pale** all round. I ordered it too, as it is rapidly becoming a favourite of mine.

In the **Marble Arch**, I had a pint of **Pint**. (As an aside, a gentleman beside me in the standing room only crush asked me what I was drinking. "Pint" quoth I. "I know" he said, "but which one?". Tedious explanations followed about arcane beer naming practice!)

I had however spotted that on the bar was **Moor Brewery Hoppiness**. Now this is 6.5% ABV. Not big by some standards, but a beer requiring caution and respect I'd say. By then I'd found a seat and nipped to the bar for a half. The first thing I'd say is that it was a very well made beer. It was clean, no obvious brewing faults and clear as a bell. But boy was it hard to drink. The sheer amount of big hops and obvious alcohol precluded anything but sipping and each sip required more effort than you should have to put into beer drinking. I'd struck up a conversation with two of my table companions. They were drinking cask, so I offered them a taste. I think it fair to say, neither liked it. So a very well made beer, but not very approachable on this very unscientific observation.

So why am I saying this? I suppose the background is recent items on beer blogs and in the trade press. I rather think this aspect (approachability) is related. Am I saying then that all beer should be 3.5% quaffers? Not at all, but I am saying that for most "ordinary" drinkers and for new ale drinkers, the attraction of drinking beer will be more slanted towards the weaker, easy drinking beer, than the other example I quote. Maybe that's obvious, but the need to reflect the likes and dislikes of the mainstream is sometimes overlooked in the search for the exotic or unusual. I'd contend that the gateway to a more diverse and appreciative view of beer is through better made beers that the ordinary punter can sup a fair bit of, understand and build upon.

To read some beer commentators though, you'd think ordinary people, ordinary drinking and pubs are so "yesterday". Not so I'd venture. You don't get the egalitarianism of the pub so easily in upmarket bars or from drinking at home, nor do you get the easy chat that can lead to tasting beers with strangers elsewhere. (I don't subscribe to the view either that pricing people out of certain types of beer is a good thing, but that's not for now.)

To spread the word about beer, (assuming one thinks there is a point to that) we need to increase the quality, range and diversity at the everyday level, as well as swooning with pleasure over big beers the

vast majority of us will never even come across and which, if we did, probably wouldn't like. Even for niche markets, to ensure sustainability, we need a better focus on "entry level" beer, for that is the gateway to all beer for most, whether that beer is consumed in the pub or at home.

Micro brewing is already challenging mainstream brewing and thinking very successfully now and is forcing change elsewhere. It looks possible too that smaller brewers will have the opportunity to sell their wares to a wider audience, as further pubs will become available as pub groups retrench and become smaller. Pubs aren't dead yet and those that survive will have pretty good prospects if allowed to do their own thing. (There are possibilities too in this for the niche by the way and though the big opportunities will always lie with the bulk of drinkers, I for one don't see why these things can't run side by side, rather than as separate posh beers bars on one hand and "bog standard" pubs on the other.)

So, summing up, while there is opportunity for all, ignore, or even worse disdain the majority at your peril. They are the niche drinkers of tomorrow and should be nurtured.

Most of what I say refers to pubs and bars. While soulless home drinking will increase, the need to nurture the majority applies there too, even though most are drinking Carling!

This article has been adapted from an article on Peter Alexander's "Tandleman" beer blog. Check it out at:

<http://tandlemanbeerblog.blogspot.com/>



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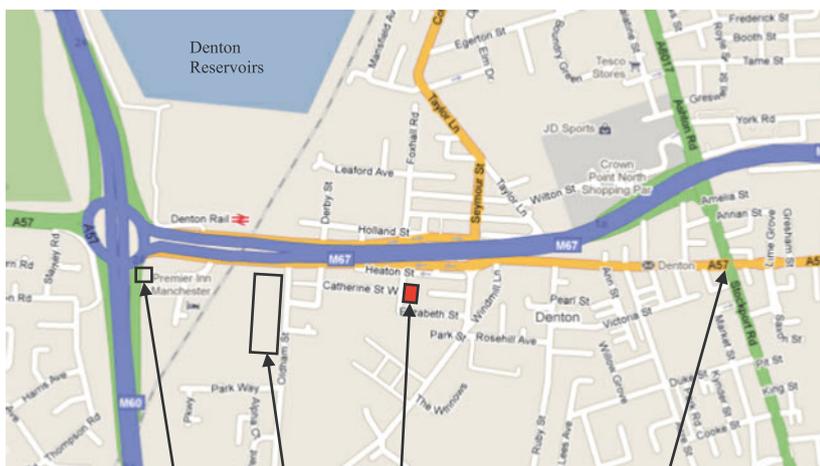
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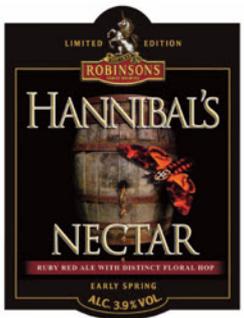
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Brewery News

New Seasonals

This 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 five very interesting (and well-presented) seasonal beers will be released.

For February and March the beer is Hannibal's Nectar (3.9%) described as a "Premium ruby red ale with 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 beer for April and May is a version of Ginger Tom. On its rare cask outings in the past this has been a strong 6% ABV beer. However this is a more accessible 4.3% and had an initial outing at the Robinsons Bar in Albert Square last October, as part of the Food & Drink Festival celebrations. Tasting like ginger pop this was a huge success and we expect that to be repeated here.

June and July sees the groan inducingly named Robinson's Crusoe (blame trade quality brewer Paul Crolla for that one) at 3.9%. This is a "light lager-style summer ale" and is described as being "brewed traditionally using a blend of pale barley and wheat malts" this will be a "crisp clean tasting beer with a fully bitter and citrus palate with a lingering green hop finish".

The autumn beer for August and September will be a reformulated version of Young Tom (4.2%) and is described as a "premium dark ale". Hopped with Goldings this beer will have a "sweet toffee and roasted malt palate".

Finally for October and November we can look forward to a stout, Black Beauty (4.3%). Described as a "rich and deeply satisfying beer" it will have a palate reminiscent of "burnt coffee and peppery hop and a robust after bitterness perfectly balanced by priming sweetness".

We think a "brewery to watch" in 2011 might well be **Hydes**. Not only do they have their regular craft ale range (of which more next month, we hope) but interesting things are coming out under the "Queens Brewery" range. Hydes Chocolate (4.3%) has been receiving rave reviews and now the next one up is "Old Amarillo". No details yet but if it (generously) uses Amarillo hops from the USA then we could be in for a treat. You might still

also be able to come across the Christmas special, Yule Be Back (4.5%). Back by popular demand, Yule Be Back "is a fruity robust ale with a slightly sweet after palate making it very moreish. This particular beer is a classic hearty winter ale that is appreciated by all who enjoy the pleasant bitterness of a craft beer".



Finally winter warmer lovers will be pleased to learn that the powerful XXXX (6.8%) will be back in the pubs this month.

On the Flightpath

The 22nd Bent & Bongs Beer Bash at the end of January has an aviation theme and 'Flightpath Ales' have been asked to let the festival serve up to four of their ales there.

A cask of the well received 'Tornado Ale' has been put aside for the festival. This ale has been served in various pubs around Greater Manchester and as far afield as the Huddersfield Star Inn beer festival.

Brian will now have the opportunity to brew two other beers for the Bent & Bongs festival. One will be a dark ale 'Black Buck'. This was the name of the operation the Vulcan aircraft flew to the Falkland Islands. The second will be a lighter beer called 'Cottesmore Ale'. This is named after the RAF station where the last Harrier aircraft flew from.

'Flightpath Ales' will continue to brew at Hornbeam Brewery until the Magnet Inn's brew kit finds a new home away from Sunderland. Hopefully this will be in March so 'Flightpath Ales' can move on from strength to strength.

Red Willow Brewery

The Macclesfield area seems to be specialising in breweries that appear as if from nowhere. Last month we reported on the launch of Bollington's previously unknown Happy Valley Brewery and now we bring news of a brewery in Macclesfield itself.



Toby McKenzie has spent the last 13 years commuting to his IT job in London, and still makes the journey three days a week. However a keen home brewing background (with a full mash 100 litre kit at one stage), a supportive wife and the wish to see more of his family led to the creation of the Red Willow Brewery which brewed its first beer on 26 November.

Sited in Sutton Mill (not far from the Railway View free house) the six barrel plant was installed by Elite Steel Fabrications and makes for an impressive sight. Equally impressive is the three month time span from the brewery's inception, through installation to brewing. This may be something of a record as many new start ups can be months and even years in the planning.

Talking to Toby it is clear that he isn't going to be a standard brown beer "mild and bitter" brewer. Oh no.

In the conditioning tank when OT called was Smokeless, a 4% smoked porter (and a beefier 5.2% version will have the addition of smoke chipotle chillis), while in the fermenter was Headless a 3.9% session beer very generously hopped with Centennial and Cascade hops from the USA. Out in the trade already is Directionless, a 4.1% pale beer hopped with more American varieties – Amarillo and Centennial.

You may have spotted a theme here. Toby is indeed something of a "hophead" and plans to make lots of pale beer using loads of "C hops" from the States – a large stock of the fashionable Citra hop is also in the brewery storeroom., waiting to go into Mirthless, a 4.1% pale brew. A nod to the brown beer market will be the 4.1% Feckless, hopped with Target, Goldings and Fuggles, and brewed with Fullers London Pride in mind.

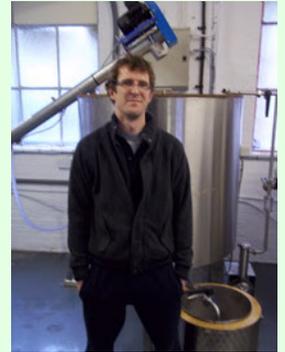
He's a big fan of the IPA style too, and has produced a "big" IPA on the American model, at 7.6% ABV and "massively hopped". To date this has been bottled only as has his 9.8% imperial stout.

Exciting times seem to be in prospect at Red Willow, and it's certainly a brewery we will be keeping an eye on. The brewery should be at full capacity by mid-January and direct deliveries should be restricted to about a 20 mile radius of Macclesfield. The brewery can be contacted on 07748 6380 21 or 01625 502315.

Shopping at Hornbeam

Denton's Hornbeam Brewer has opened an on-site shop. Open from 9 to 5 Mondays through Fridays, the shop will initially just sell Hornbeam's own bottled beers including Hornbeam Bitter which is to return primarily for bottling.

Look out for the new January Special – this is "Denton de Sol" a 4% ABV hoppy bitter made using Pacific Jade and Willamette hops.



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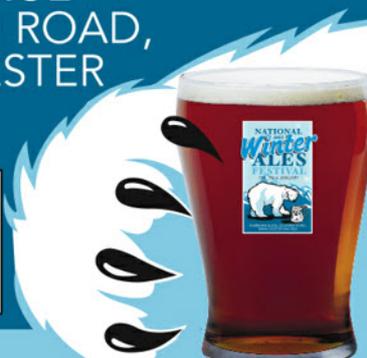
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