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What's On

Information, Notes and Local CAMRA Branch Events

Opening Times - Information

Opening Times is published 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. 7,350 copies a month are printed by Phil Powell Printing of Failsworth.

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Their telephone no. is 03454 04 05 06. To report a matter to Trading Standards go to:

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Disclaimer

We aim to ensure that the information in *Opening Times* is correct at the time of going to press. If we get something wrong then please get in touch (editorial contact details above) and we'll print a correction. Please also note the opinions expressed in *Opening Times* are not necessarily those of CAMRA either locally or nationally.

Copy Date for the February issue is Saturday 10th January

Contributors to this issue: John Clarke, Alan Gent, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Pete Farrand, Neil Worthington, Paul Felton, Robin Wignall, Peter Edwardson, Tom Lord, Caroline O'Donnell, John O'Donnell, Stewart Taylor, Jonathan Paylor, Heather Garlick, Mark McConachie

Distribution Manager – Janet Flynn

The events shown right are organised by CAMRA, but only those shown in black are restricted to CAMRA members, so why not come along and join your local branch in a celebration of pubs and beer (and cider).

Your Local CAMRA Contacts & Websites

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www.ssmcamra.co.uk

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Trafford & Hulme (T&H)

www.thcamra.org.uk

Contact: John O'Donnell 07879 880972; enquiries@thcamra.org.uk

Local CAMRA Events

Everyone welcome at these events

Saturday 10th January – Greater Manchester Branches Regional Meeting: the Deansgate, Deansgate, Manchester. Starts 1.00pm.

Wednesday 7th – Most Improved Pub Award: Lamb, 33 Regent Road, Eccles. Starts 7.30pm. (NM)

Thursday 8th – Branch Meeting and Winter Pub of the Season presentation: Beech, Chorlton. Starts 8.00pm. (T&H)

Saturday 10th – Branch Anniversary Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. From 7.30pm. Cost £10 per head. Buffet, raffle and quiz. Guest Tim Page, new CAMRA Chief Executive. Book with John Clarke (Chairman@ssmcamra.co.uk or call 0161 477 1973). (SSM)

Monday 12th – Cider Pub of the Year presentation to the Cheshire Ring, Manchester Road, Hyde (7.00pm) followed by Branch Meeting at Sportsman, Mottram Road, Hyde (8.00pm) including first Good Beer Guide allocation meeting. (HPNC)

Wednesday 14th – Branch Meeting: Salford Arms, Chapel Street, Salford. Includes shortlisting for 2016 Good Beer Guide. Starts 7.00pm. (NM)

Thursday 15th – Branch Meeting: Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heaviley. Starts 8.00pm. Includes Pub of the Year selection. (SSM)

Thursday 15th – Campaigning Meeting: Dog & Partridge, Bollington. Starts 8.00pm. (MEC)

Friday 16th – Best Newcomer presentation and Manchester Beer & Cider Festival Social: Stretford Sip Club, Barton Road, Stretford. From 8.00pm. All welcome. (T&H)

Tuesday 20th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Royal Oak, Cross Lane, Gorton. From 8.00pm. (SSM)

Friday 23rd – Branch Social at Manchester Beer & Cider Festival. From 2.00pm. (HPNC)

Wednesday 28th – Northern Quarter Pub Survey: Starts Angel, Angel Street 7.30pm. (NM)

Thursday 29th – Urmston Social: Starts Prairie Schooner Taphouse 8.00pm; Hophouse 8.45pm; Precinct bar (name TBC!) 9.30pm; Steamhouse 10.00pm. (T&H)

Thursday 29th – Winter Pub of the Season presentation to the Dog Inn, Peover Heath. Starts 8.00pm. (MEC)

Friday 30th – Heald Green & Cheadle Hulme North Stagger: Starts Griffin, Wilmslow Road 7.30pm; Kenilworth, Cheadle Road, 8.30pm. (SSM)

Wednesday 4th February – Monton Pub Survey: Blue Bell, Monton Green 7.30pm; Park Hotel 8.15; Maltdog 9.00pm. (NM)

Pub of the Month

The Royal Oak, Gorton



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for January is the Royal Oak on Cross Lane in Gorton. Dave Hanson has been along.

The Royal Oak is a good example of that much-endangered, and often overlooked, pub – a back street boozier which is the heart of its community.

Many years ago the Royal Oak was owned by Boddingtons, from where it passed eventually into the hands of Punch Taverns. Some five or so years ago the pub entered a period of changing landlords resulting in opening and closing on an almost monthly basis (or so it felt). Eventually the pub was closed and metal shutters went up all around. “That is it,” we all feared, because in the current financial climate a boarded-up pub rarely reopens in its former role.

Then along came Andy and Vanessa Williams who run the Strawberry Duck in Clayton. They were looking for another outlet and took on the Royal Oak. After some six to nine months of renovation the pub re-opened with the steady hands of Les Park and Lyn Crossthwaite at the helm. As soon as the doors opened, the locals returned. Now there is always something going on with darts and domino teams (both ladies’ and men’s), karaoke, open mic evenings and frequent live entertainment plus of course lively gossip and banter.

Real ale sales have been built up such that two-and-a-half handpulls can be supported. “How many?” I hear you say. Sharp’s Doom Bar and Tetley’s Dark Mild are the two permanents. The third accommodates rotating guest ales, often from Lancaster Brewery, on occasion as demand dictates.

The Royal Oak is not only about beer, but also about the locals and their community. You are always made to feel welcome, so why not come along around 8pm on Tuesday (note change of day) 20th January and experience the atmosphere.

Being a back street local, the Royal Oak is hidden from view “in the back streets” unless you know where to look. Buses 168, 169 and 171 pass the door. The 203 (plus 201 and 204 from Manchester) will drop you on Hyde Road from where it is a short walk.



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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Stagger

Edgeley with Peter Edwardson

On an unseasonably mild evening, October's Stagger took us to Edgeley, a district of Stockport that has seen more than its fair share of pub closures over the years. However, as we found, there's still plenty of good beer and good pubs to be enjoyed.



We started at the **Alexandra** on Northgate Road, a large redbrick Edwardian pub with an unspoilt multi-roomed layout that features on CAMRA's National Inventory of historic pub interiors. Renovation work by the current licensee has enhanced its appeal and revealed the original tiled floor in the lobby. For early evening, it was gratifyingly busy, with a cluster of drinkers around the bar, but we were able to find seats in the comfortable room to the right of the entrance. A Robinsons tied house, beers available were Unicorn, which was not tried, Trooper, which was above average, and 1892, which was a little better still.



Moving on to Castle Street, Edgeley's main shopping street, brought us to the **Prince Albert**, a street-corner pub that in the past has often been considered one of the also-rans of these Staggers. However, tonight it had a good atmosphere with again a throng of people around the bar. There's plenty of comfortable seating in the single-room interior, Stockport County memorabilia on the walls, and a rack of newspapers for customers to read. The only cask beer available was Marston's Pedigree, which was judged above average.

We then doubled back a short distance to the **Royal Oak** which was our half-way meeting point. It's a street-corner pub with an interior rambling around the central bar in a kind of U-shape, and also an attractive beer garden. In

past years, it has often impressed, but tonight it was somewhat disappointing. Although karaoke was being set up, there were very few customers, and it also seemed to have been repainted in an off-putting pastel green shade. In the absence of beer mats, our table was sticky with spilt beer. There were two real ales on the bar – Holt's Bitter, which was about average, and Thwaites Wainwright, which didn't impress at all, with the distinctive butterscotch off-flavour known as diacetyl.

We carried on down the length of Castle Street, where there is nothing more to interest the real ale drinker. The keg-only **Sir Robert Peel** and **Pineapple** were also largely devoid of customers, although the similarly cask-free **Jolly Crofter** was a bit busier. Right at the end is the former Grapes, once a classic down-to-earth two-roomed boozier which sadly fell victim to Robinsons' recent pub cull. It was converted to a coffee shop but, judging by the "For Sale" sign, that venture has fallen by the wayside too.



A right turn up Shaw Heath brought us to the **Florist**, a large three-storey pub dating from the middle of the 19th century that can be surprisingly difficult to spot from the pavement. The interior has been opened up a little but still retains five separate areas around the central bar, including a vault with pool table. There were a number of customers, mainly around the bar, but the pub as a whole was fairly quiet. The only real ale available was Robinsons Unicorn, which was pretty good, although most of us still ended up with distinctly short measures even after a top-up. I understand more Robinsons beers may be available at other times. We were greeted by a giant dog which was very well-behaved but which in appearance could easily have stood in for the Hound of the Baskervilles.

We doubled back to the **Armoury** overlooking the roundabout at the top of Greek Street. This has long been renowned as a classic street-corner local, but in recent years has received a well-judged refurbishment by Robinsons that has made it much smarter while retaining its fundamental character. The imitation etched windows are a particularly attractive feature,



and it also has an impressive outside drinking area at the rear. It was by far the busiest pub of the entire evening, and initially we struggled to get a seat, eventually finding somewhere in the rear room. There were five beers on the bar – 1892 was good, and the seasonal beer South Island very good indeed, while the one person who tried the Unicorn pronounced it excellent. Trooper and Dizzy Blonde were not tried. This pub is often considered the benchmark by which other Robinsons pubs are judged for beer quality, and on tonight's form it was easy to understand why.



Heading down King Street West brought us to our final destination, the **Olde Vic** on the corner of Chatham Street. This is a small free house that has recently received an external repainting to improve its formerly down-at-heel appearance. The single-room interior could be described as characterful and idiosyncratic, with an abundance of books and other assorted memorabilia. It was fairly busy, but not as much as the Armoury. It offers five ever-changing guest beers, generally from micro-breweries. Marble Pint was on excellent form, and probably qualified as the beer of the night, while Mallinson's White Rose and Hopcraft Day of the Lords were both very good, and Orkney Red McGregor judged good. Another Mallinson's beer, Columbus, was not tried. We reminisced about a previous Edgeley stagger back in 2007 where we had unexpectedly encountered the late celebrity chef Keith Floyd in the Olde Vic.

As always, these are only the impressions of a particular group of people on one specific night. Why not try the pubs for yourself and see what you think?

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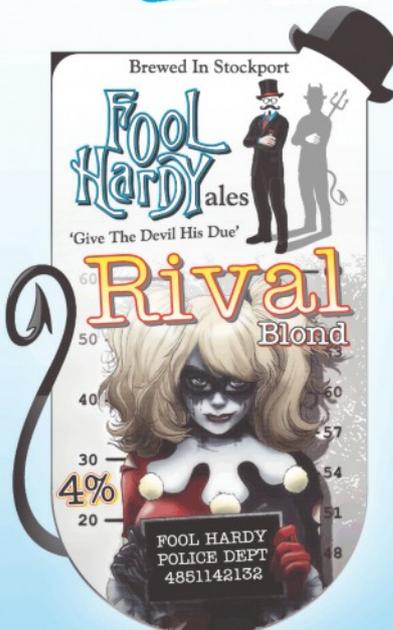
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Manchester Beer & Cider Festival

Bigger and Better – Craft Beer at its best

The beer list for next Month's Manchester Beer & Cider Festival is almost complete. Beer Manager John O'Donnell here presents a run down of what the festival's lucky visitors can expect.

The festival will feature over 400 craft beers at their very best - in cask conditioned form. Only at MBCF2015 will some of the country's longest established beers and breweries sit alongside beers from the leading lights of the "craft beer revolution". The likes of **Hopcraft**, **Moor** and **Weird Beard** will guarantee hops a-plenty while drinkers who like a more traditional pint will be able to enjoy best bitters from the likes of **Robinsons**, **Howard Town** and **Timothy Taylors** - including the current Champion Beer of Britain, Boltmaker.



With so many cask conditioned ales available, highlights will very much depend on personal taste, but there will be no shortage of rare, unusual and big-hitting beers. Leading the way for local breweries will be the ever popular **RedWillow** with their 6.5% Black IPA Soulless. Challenging them for the devotions of hop lovers will be a rare cask outing for the latest Holy Hoppin Hell!!, the ever-changing Double IPA series from London's **Weird Beard** which is normally reserved for the keg and bottle market.

Modern brewers are increasingly experimenting with different yeast strains to bring new flavours to British beer drinkers. One of the brewers leading the way in these styles is Caerphilly's **Celt Experience** and MBCF will have their newly released Home of the Fruitcakes (a strawberry and raspberry saison) a 6.0% fruit-laden delight. Another style which has been familiar to drinkers of foreign beers for many years but is increasingly being brewed in the UK is the sour beer made with wild yeasts. One good example of this style will be Wild Goose Chase from the aptly named **Wild Beer**.

With the festival taking place in the midst of winter, there will of course be lots of stouts and porters ranging in strength from 4% to 8.3%. Highlights at the lower end include Oatmeal Stout from Bury's **Brewsmith** and the current Champion Winter Beer Of Britain - **Dunham Massey's** 5.2% Dunham Porter. Those looking for more body will need to look no further than Annexation from Yorkshire's **Brass Castle**, an imperial stout weighing in at 8.3%. The festival has also managed to secure the very last cask of **Moorhouse's** very limited edition Black Cat Reserve, the 7% version of the classic Black Cat mild. This was a smooth, deceptively easy-drinking hit when given a limited cask release earlier in the year (having been designed for bottling) and can only have got better with months of maturation.

In contrast to the dark beers there will be a plethora of golden ales, including a return of the current Champion Beer Of The North West, Cumbrian Five Hop from **Hawkshead**. From Suffolk's **Dark Star** there will be two different versions of their top selling Hophead - the regular Cascade hopped version and a special edition Hophead Vic Secret made with a young Australian hop variety which has been gaining in popularity in its home country.

Collaborations and New Launches

Not content with lining up numerous beers which will make their first appearance anywhere at MBCF, we have been working with a number of breweries to brew new beers especially for the festival.

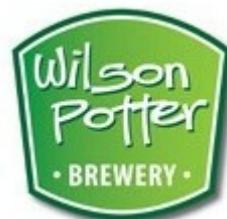
MBCF has again teamed up with Real Radio XS to produce a special festival ale which will be named by listeners to the classic rock station on 106.1 FM. This year, the beer will be produced by Horwich's **Blackedge** brewery with the station's Steve Berry heading to the recently expanded brewery to help out with the brew.



Early in the New Year, members of the festival team will be travelling to breweries around the region to join the brewers in special MBCF collaboration brews. One of the most exciting of these is a brew to be produced by MBCF and **Pictish Brewery** - one of the pioneers of the microbrewery revolution whose unashamed hop forward beers provided inspiration to brewers such as James Campbell (ex-Marble, now Cloudwater) and Colin Stronge (Buxton). The recipe was top secret as *Opening Times* went to press, but we'd put our money on there being a healthy dose of hops in the brew. An entirely different beer will be brewed in Bollington, Cheshire with MBCF travelling to **Happy Valley** brewery to brew a speciality stout. The final beer will be revealed when the festival opens, but the team were trialling various ideas with raspberries, almonds, vanilla and port in the mix.

A special series of collaborations will see brewers featured on the two groups of brewery bars collaborating with their neighbouring bar to make a new beer which will sit between the two. **Hawkshead Brewery** are travelling to Manchester to brew with **Marble Beers**; **Outstanding Beers** will make the shorter journey to Middleton to brew with **Wilson Potter** while the War of the Roses will be forgotten when Yorkshire's **Ilkley Brewery** crosses the Pennines to brew with **Blackjack's** Rob Hamilton.

All of these beers will make their debut at MBCF but they won't be alone in this. **Quantum Brewery** will be launching their brand new Imperial Buckwheat Stout (8.5%) at the event. The next beer in the TicketyFew series from Stalybridge's **TicketyBrew** will be a brand new Pale Ale making its first appearance at the Velodrome. **Greenmill Brewery** are brewing up a brand new raspberry-infused version of their Pot Black porter for the festival - no prizes for guessing the name - Raspberry Porter! Finally, Yorkshire's **Bridgehouse Brewery** has a brand new 6% Choc Cherry Stout which will be tasted in Manchester before it hits the bars of its home county.



More about Manchester Beer & Cider Festival on page 11

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Whats on?

Thursday 29 th January	6pm-11pm	Jerome	£5 admission* (£1 after 9pm)
Friday 30 th January	4pm-11pm	Juke Box Heroes	£7 admission* (£1 after 9pm)
Saturday 31 st January	12 noon-9pm	Chonkin Feckle Cracked Flag	£6 admission* (£1 after 7pm)

*£1 of for CAMRA members (proof required!)



Manchester Beer & Cider Festival

More beers than you can shake a mash paddle at

Followers of the *Opening Times Brewery News* page will be aware that Manchester is seeing an unprecedented growth in the number of new breweries and many of these fledgling enterprises will be found at MBCF.

At almost four months old by the time the festival comes around, Bury's **Silver Street Brewery** will almost be the granddaddy of the group. Two newcomers from Wigan, **Martland Mill** and **Hophurst**, have both got almost three months under their belts while Hyde's **Tweed** launched in November. Two of Stockport's premier real ale pubs now boast their own breweries with the Magnet's



Watts Brewing and the Crown's associated **Stockport Brewing Co** both taking their beers from their respective pubs to the bars of the Velodrome. The real youngsters of the family are Stockport's **Thirst Class Ales** and two breweries based in Ardwick, **Track Brewing Company** and **Alphabet Brew Co** - all three will have released their first beers in December.



Bières Sans Frontières

At this year's festival, the foreign beer bar really starts to come of age with an unprecedented range of draught and bottled European beers on offer. The resurgent Dutch beer scene is well represented - look in particular for beers from **De Molen** (highlight - Rhythm & Blues barrel aged barley wine), **Ramses** (highlight - Den Dorstige Tijger American-style IPA) and **De Prael** (highlight - Mary, a classic tripel) among others.

Beers from across the border Belgium are also well represented. Lambic lovers will want to check out traditional gueuzes from **3 Fonteinen**, **Boon** and **Oud Beersel**. Trappist beers will be there in abundance; and the famous **Gouden Carolus** Christmas ale will be available in bottle and on draught. Two Belgian-made IPAs will be worth contrasting - **Brasserie**



St Feuillien have their Belgian Coast IPA made in collaboration with California's Green Flash Brewery in addition to Green Flash's West Coast IPA itself which is now made under contract in Belgium to ensure its fresh hoppiness shines through.

This is in some ways just the tip of the iceberg. There will also be beers from Denmark (look out for Amager Bryghus), Spain, France, the USA and Italy. And of course there will be quality draught lagers from the Czech Republic where we will have extensive ranges from the Budvar and Bernard breweries. Whatever your taste in beer, Bières Sans Frontières will have something for you.

Finding your way around

Manchester Beer & Cider Festival has expanded across the whole of the Velodrome with bars both inside the track on the Velodrome floor and around it on the upper concourse.

On the concourse level, you will find two cask beer bars - Bar 1 featuring breweries beginning A & B and Bar 2 with breweries C - H. Joining them at this level will be the new Rest Of The World bar with beers from the

USA, Spain, France, Denmark and more, plus a new Cider Bar which will be featuring ciders and perries from northern producers. There will also be four brewery bars on the concourse - **Blackjack**, **Bridestones**, **Ilkley** and **Offbeat**. Food at this level will include the El Gringo Mexican Buffet, roast beef barm, hot pies and the Sapporo Sushi & Noodle bar.



Venture down to the Velodrome floor and you will find two more cask bars completing the alphabet and six more brewery bars - **Hawkshead**, **Marble Beers**, **Outstanding Beers**, **Wilson Potter**, **Brightside Brewery** and **Bollington**. The cider and perry bar here will offer over 40 ciders and perries from Somerset, Herefordshire and other traditional cider areas. The final bar at this level, **Bières Sans Frontières**, will offer beers from Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. Farmer John's will serve ploughman's lunches and you will also be able to play the festival games and visit the CAMRA Shop.

Special Metrolink Offer

Metrolink's partnership with CAMRA is now in its second year! Following on from the success of last year's link-up there is once again a £1 discount off entry to the Manchester Beer & Cider Festival for Metrolink ticket & pass holders. So why not travel responsibly, save yourself some money and catch Metrolink to the Velodrome?



Getting there

The National Cycling Centre is right next to the Velopark Metrolink stop on the Ashton line. Getting there from the city centre couldn't be easier, and takes around 15 minutes. Trams run straight from the city centre to the Velopark every 12 minutes, from the St Peter's Square, Piccadilly Gardens and Piccadilly stops. Passengers travelling from north of the city on the Bury or Oldham and Rochdale lines just need to get off at Market Street and walk across to Piccadilly Gardens for connecting Ashton line services to the Velopark stop.

Passengers using the Altrincham, East Didsbury or Airport lines can change at Cornbrook for connecting Ashton line services to the Velopark, which run via Piccadilly train station. And if you travel on the Eccles line there's no need to change at all as services travel direct to the Velopark stop.

Tram Tickets

The price for an adult return ticket from city centre stops is **£3.00** and a child return ticket is **£1.40**. One day travelcards and family travelcards are also available to purchase from the ticket machines. Make sure you buy your ticket before travel from one of the ticket machines at all Metrolink stops, as you can't pay on board the tram. If you are travelling from a train station you can buy a Metrolink add-on ticket that includes travel by rail and Metrolink to the National Cycling Centre. Just ask for a Metrolink add-on when you get your ticket.



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Pennine



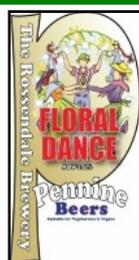
Pennine Ale (Rossendale) Ltd., 84-86, Hud Rake, Haslingden, Lanc's BB4 5AF

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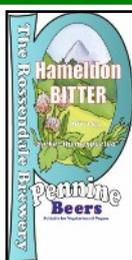
Contacts - Office: 0333 210 4021; Geoff: 07816 912 794; Robin: 07709 874 783

Meet our beers - Beer Tasting Notes



Floral Dance
3.8%

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.



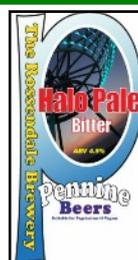
Glen Top Bitter
4.0%

A citrusy, full bodied pale beer. Intentionally not over hopped with quite a dry after taste.



Rossendale Ale
4.2%

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



Halo Pale
4.5%

A citrusy, pale ale brewed with Cascade aroma hops, finishing with a slightly bitter aftertaste.



Pitch Porter 5%

A full bodied rich beer with a slightly sweet, malty start, counter-balanced with sharp bitterness and obvious roast barley dominance.



Sunshine
5.3%

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

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further info!

All of our beers can be sampled at: -
The Griffin, 84-86, Hud Rake, Haslingden, Lancashire BB4 5AF (Brewery Tap) - 01706 21 40 21
The Sportsman, 57, Mottram Road, Hyde, Cheshire SK14 2NN - 0161 368 5000

www.rossendalebrewery.co.uk

All of our beers are suitable for Vegetarians & Vegans.

Heard at the Bar

Pub News covering Stockport, Manchester and beyond

Stretford News

It would seem real ale in Stretford is going from strength to strength. The **Stretford Sip Club** on Barton Road continues to grow in popularity and has extended its opening hours at the weekend to open from 2 - 11pm. Despite being in the suburbs and only nine months old, the Barton Road hideaway also gained a nomination as Best Bar in the annual City Life awards, up against entirely different operations including Marston's massive Bluu bar in the Northern Quarter and West Didsbury's fine dining and good drinking Volta. Also note that the Sip Club will be closed from 2nd to 9th January as landlady Heather Garlick takes a well-deserved holiday.

Meanwhile, over the road at the **Robin Hood**, real ale has returned amidst many other changes. The pub has undergone a transformation by way of a substantial refurbishment last month. Landlady Eileen Farrell has done away with the somewhat dated furnishings and brought the old building bang up to date. The large space has been split up to provide a family dining area, a more formal dining space and a sporting area. There is also a large function space which is available for hire.



Of particular interest to readers will be the introduction of three cask ales, available at all times. Priced between £2.90 and £3.10, the cask offering will be changed regularly, though at the time of writing the pump clips displayed Wells Bombardier, Greene King Rocking Rudolph and Sharp's Doom Bar. The pub has also implemented a more extensive food menu.

The history of the Robin Hood has been something of a mixed bag in recent years but Eileen is committed to turning it back into the family-focussed establishment it once was. Alongside all the regular sporting fixtures, she has introduced a range of events from Macmillan coffee mornings to kids' Halloween parties. Look out for the barbecues next summer; she's a dab hand at jerk chicken.

Chorlton

Unusually, there's not been a great deal of news from Chorlton's many bars of late, with most changes just being tinkering at the edges of well run bars. The biggest change of late has probably been the expansion of the **Beagle** on Manchester Road which, in an interesting

innovation, has almost entirely enclosed its outdoor patio in removable doors, bringing the outdoors indoors for the winter months.

City News



In the City Centre, the **Sawyers Arms** on Deansgate has re-opened after a major refurbishment. The pub was one of hundreds in the Orchid Pub Company which have been bought by Mitchells & Butlers and the first to be converted to their Nicholson's brand. Physically, there have not been any major structural changes to the pub, apart from the removal of the pizza oven which took over the rear of the pub during its last Orchid Pubs incarnation.

In keeping with the other Nicholson's pubs in the city, the **Bank** and the **Old Wellington**, the pub majors on real ale, with eight handpumps on the bar. When *Opening Times* called, four were available - Wells Bombardier, Brains Rev James, St Austell St Nicks and Jarrow Rivetcatcher. There were turned round clips for Sharp's Doom Bar and Nicholson's Pale Ale (brewed by St Austell). We plumped for the Jarrow which was in decent enough form, although we should have expected no less at a slightly eye-watering £4.05 a pint. The upstairs mezzanine balcony is marked as a "Dining Area" although on our visit on a busy Sunday afternoon, nobody was taking advantage. Sunday Roasts ranged from £8.95 to £10.95 while fish & chips and steak & ale pie were both on the menu at £10.95. The upstairs bar has three more handpumps although none were in use on our visit.

Round the corner at the **Gas Lamp** on Bridge Street (pictured top right), the range of beers available has expanded, including a doubling of the number of handpumps to four. The pumps, which were formerly relegated to the end of the bar, are now front and centre with two large blackboards flanking the bar, listing the now quite extensive cask, keg and bottled range. *Opening Times* called during a "Meet The Brewer" event with up-and-coming Kent microbrewery Pig & Porter so there were two of their beers on the pumps (and two more on keg) alongside two from First Chop Brewing Arm.



There are two major City Centre openings to look forward to in 2015. First up may be the **Piccadilly Tap** which will occupy the disused Leather Shop premises on the Station Approach. This is an initiative of the Bloomsbury Leisure Group which also operates pubs such as the Euston Tap in London that specialise in a wide range of bottled and draught beers (both cask and keg). Bloomsbury Leisure's John Dalton told *Insider Business* website, "our 25 taps will be a mixture of cask and keg, with a couple of taps especially for the up-and-coming local Manchester breweries. Manchester can look forward to a busy bar with affordable craft beers on tap. Though we will have a wide range, and will use our networks to bring the best beer in the UK, our view is, craft beer should be affordable. We stick with breweries who share this view - in other words there will no £6 one-third pints." If all goes to plan the Piccadilly Tap will be open at the end of February.



John Dalton's business partner is one Jamie Hawkworth and in a surprise move he is branching out into Manchester on his own account. Jamie has acquired the long-closed **Edinburgh Castle** on Blossom Street in Ancoats. Apparently £500,000 has been set aside for the refurbishment with work due to start next month. The plan is that the pub will reopen its doors in April. The closed pub is pictured above - brewery historians will be interested in the old Chesters Brewery signage that has been uncovered.

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PURPLE MOOSE

SNOWDONIA

3.6% £67.99

Refreshing pale ale brewed with pale and crystal malt with a delicate combination of Pioneer, Silesian Goldings and Lubelski hops.

WELLWOOD

MAD HATTER

3.9% £67.20

A red - brewed beer with malty and malty flavours throughout. Brewed with US Amarillo hops to give spicy and floral notes.

FUGGLE BUNNY

NEW BEGINNINGS

4.9% £72.50

Amber coloured, classic bitter with a sweet edge of honey and spice coming from dry hoppy after notes. Quality beer!

FUGGLE BUNNY

COTTON TAIL

4% £70.00

Lifting, fruity aromas of richness and citrus with a drizzle of fruit, due to the five varieties of hops..... Session quenching!

FUGGLE BUNNY

OH CRUMBS

3.8% £69.50

Amber coloured with hints of apricot and citrus. Sweet caramel and biscuity flavours gives this a distinctive finish.

HOWARD JOHN

WREN'S NEST

4.2% £66.50

A light refreshing beer, fruity with a grassy, local note.

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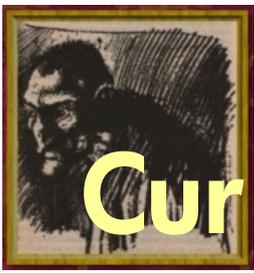
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Curmudgeon

Give Me Strength

Once it has emerged from the still, Scotch whisky is put into oak casks to mature for a minimum of three years, often much more. When it is ready for bottling, it has an alcoholic strength of around 60% ABV, but is typically watered down to 40% (sometimes a little higher) for public sale. Occasionally, limited edition bottlings are made of undiluted whiskies at cask strength, which are obviously much more expensive than the standard product, and are prized by connoisseurs.

I recently spotted that Jennings had sneakily reduced the strength of bottled Cumberland Ale from 4.7% to 4.0%, to bring it into line with the cask version, and now describe it on the bottle as "cask strength". Likewise, bottled Marston's Pedigree, from the same brewing group, which was increased from 4.5% to 5.0% and then reduced again, has "Brewed to cask strength" on the label. While this isn't untrue as such, it comes across as distinctly disingenuous, given that a cask strength whisky is much stronger than the norm, but a cask strength bottled beer seems to be one that is weaker than it used to be.

Needless to say, there's no price reduction, even though there's a saving of duty plus VAT of about 8p per bottle. There's nothing wrong as such with beers of 4% or less, but surely it would make sense to charge less than the 5% ones rather than having everything at the same price. And I wonder if we'll see the same happening with other beers like Bombardier, London Pride and Spitfire where the bottled version is currently significantly stronger than the cask.

No Pub for Old Men

A recent report by the International Longevity Centre highlighted the growing problem of social isolation amongst older men living alone. Men seem to find it more difficult to make and maintain social contacts than women, and many will have largely depended on their wives or partners for their social life and found themselves cut adrift when they died or divorced. The report predicts that the number of older men living alone in England will increase by 65% by 2030.

You might have thought pubs had a role to play in tackling this issue, but in fact things have gone the other way. A generation ago, it wasn't uncommon to see groups of old codgers in pubs, maybe playing a game of crib or doms, or just chewing the fat while nursing a pint of mild. But that wasn't seen as a very lucrative trade, nor something that conveyed the right image. So, many pubs were remodelled to appeal to a younger audience, with loud music, TV screens and uncomfortable posing tables, while others went all-out for the dining trade and made it clear that social drinkers, especially slow-spending ones, weren't really welcome. In recent years, many community locals have closed entirely, while others have taken the commercial decision to stop opening on weekday lunchtimes, which for many pensioners was their favoured drinking session.

Wetherspoon's are often mocked for the number of customers using mobility scooters, but surely this should be seen as a positive sign that they are actually providing a social haven for older people. In general, though, they are located in town centres, so don't act as local pubs near to where people live, and they also pose the problem for older customers of often having the toilets up or down a long flight of stairs.

The industry often claims that pubs play a vital role in communities, and in the best cases that's undoubtedly true. But maybe they need to live up to the hype and take a long, hard look at making their venues more pensioner-friendly.

Curmudgeon Online: curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com

(comments on these articles can be left on the website)

Meet the Brewer

Jay Krause of Quantum Brewery

In the first of a new series, Brendon Hall interviews local brewers. In this first instalment he catches up with Jay Krause of Stockport's Quantum Brewery.

- Hi Jay! What led you into starting your own brewery?

- A mixture of necessity and passion - my previous job was coming to an end and I got the opportunity to start up, and jumped straight in.

- Quantum is famous for its collaborations with other brewers - do you have anything lined up in the next few months?

- There are a couple of collaborations lined up, but nothing particularly concrete at the moment - there are always plans floating around with different brewers!

- You've had some pretty exotic ingredients in recent beers, do you actively seek to brew 'out of the ordinary' beers?

- What really interests me is different flavour combinations in beer, wine, cider, food - whatever - and using off-kilter ingredients is one way of finding them. In beer this can be through the use of different hops, malts, yeasts (something I'm very interested in) or different adjuncts. It's not a case of chucking in and seeing what happens, everything is considered beforehand. The rejected ideas pile is huge!

- Where do you see Quantum in five years time - bigger premises, more cask or keg? Is there a temptation to move away from Stockport for bigger premises?

- The ideal would be a permanent outlet for our beers, run by us. We toyed with the idea of a brewery tap located at the brewery but there isn't much room here and it's bitterly cold in winter, so we have our eye out for somewhere. We have no intention of leaving Stockport.

- When you aren't sampling your own beer, what's your favourite/most exciting brewer, locally, nationally or internationally that we should all be looking out for?

- A two-fold answer here. My favourite ever beer is Poperings Hommelbier, which I could drink all day and be happy. I think the most exciting brewery around right now is Buxton. Geoff, Colin, Denis and the team are smashing it at the moment. Drink all their beers!

The Quantum Brewing Co range of beers is available both in bottle from High Peak Beers in Stockport's Market Hall and on pump throughout the region. For more info see their website at <http://www.quantumbrewingcompany.co.uk/> and follow them on Twitter! @QuantumBC

Manchester City Centre Branch?

Following a long period of consultation with CAMRA members, a meeting concerning the viability of setting up a City Centre branch was held on Tuesday 25th November. A group of 13 members attended, including activists from the three branches that currently cover the city centre and including those who do and do not live within the city centre. Those present were tasked to come forward with a 'Business Plan' for the proposed branch and an initial organising committee meeting will now be held during the Manchester Beer & Cider Festival on Saturday 24th January at 2pm (free entry to CAMRA members). At this meeting we intend to discuss the development of the Business Plan which will eventually be presented to the Regional Director at the Regional Meeting in March 2015.

If you are a member who lives/works/drinks/socialises regularly in the city centre you may feel that this branch is for you - any member can join any branch that they wish. Those residing within the city centre (within the inner ring road) will automatically be assigned to the new branch if it is formed. We would like to hear from you if you are interested in becoming a member of this branch, especially if you do not reside within the city centre. If you possibly can, please do attend the meeting on 24th January at the Manchester Beer & Cider Festival at the Velodrome, alternatively email g_donning@yahoo.com or phone 0796 188 6696.

Griffin, Heald Green

Once an old Victorian pub, Holt's **Griffin** was demolished and rebuilt in the 1960s. Last year it had a major refurbishment and is now very much a 21st century local. *Opening Times* was invited down to have a look.

It is run by Lee Henson (pictured right) and his partner Sally Murray who arrived in February in anticipation of the imminent refurbishment with the new-look Griffin opening in October. It's been quite a transformation and although some have commented on the loss of the separate vault, it's all won the approval of the locals who still use the pub much as before.



Hailing from the East Midlands, Lee and Sally are not strangers to the pub trade, having entered the business when they took on Holt's Blue Bell in Whitefield. They were then offered the Griffin and, seeing the potential, jumped at the chance.

There is of course a major food operation here, running the whole gamut from bar snacks to full meals – all freshly prepared by head chef Wayne Ryder and his kitchen team. On Saturdays and Sundays the pub opens at 9.00am for breakfast (it's available until midday) while the main menu is available every day from 12 noon to 9.30pm. For the festive season the pub is offering roasted chestnuts and mulled wine.

There's plenty for the beer drinker, too (and this is very much a pub with food rather than the other way round) with five cask beers – three from the Holt's house range and two guests. An interesting range of bottled craft beers complements the draught selection.

New Comedy Clubs

Laugh off your winter blues as two new Comedy Clubs open in two of Stockport's cask ale pubs.

The **Griffin** on Didsbury Road, Heaton Mersey hosts 'Comedy at the Griffin' on Saturday February 7th with Comedy Store veteran Dave Williams topping the bill. Tickets are only £4 and can be purchased in advance at the bar from January onwards or just turn up on the night. Doors open at 7.30 with the show starting at 8.30. Meanwhile, the **Hare and Hounds** on Dooley Lane in Marple will be starting a comedy evening on Thursday 19th February with a full line-up of top circuit comedians. Tickets are £5 and again can be bought from the venue or just turn up. Again doors open at 7.30 with the show at 8.30.



Both comedy evenings will be running monthly and are a welcome addition to the Manchester comedy scene so get down and support them for a third of the price of going to the clubs in town.

Hophouse

The **Hophouse** is now open for business at 10 Higher Road, Urmston. Opening hours, for now, are 4.00pm to 11.00pm (midnight Friday and Saturday). They may open earlier at weekends and will definitely open earlier over the Christmas period (23rd Dec to 2nd Jan) but will be shut all day on Christmas Day. There were two cask ales (from Lancaster and Thwaites when *OT* called but they will vary) and assorted craft keg items.

Give it a try

For several years, health campaigners have been urging us to take part in "Dry January" and abstain from alcohol throughout the month. If that suits you, fair enough, but if too many people took them at their word it could deal a damaging blow to pubs which are often quiet anyway at this time of year.



In response to this, the *Publican's Morning Advertiser* newspaper has launched a "Try January" campaign. The aim is not to overdo it, but just to visit your local and try something different that is outside your comfort zone. So why not make January a month of discovery rather than sitting at home with a mug of coffee? And of course you'll find a huge variety of new and unusual brews at the Manchester Beer & Cider Festival.

Old Monkey

The **Old Monkey** on Portland Street in Manchester has increased its choice of cask ales from six beers to eight with the recent addition of two pumps for a seasonal beer from Bootleg, plus a guest beer. These join the mostly Holt's range of Mild, Bitter, IPA, Two Hoots and a seasonal, together with another guest beer. The guest ales change once a month, and the seasonal beers from Bootleg Brewing Co (brewed at the Holt's-owned Horse & Jockey, Chorlton-cum-Hardy) change with availability.



All this change is down to the energy of new-ish licensee, Stacy Saunders. She has come to the Monkey from the nearby Ape & Apple. The Monkey is set on two floors where the downstairs part is seldom anything less than abuzz with custom and is definitely the main engine of trade. There is fixed seating round the edges of the room, but this is mostly a standing drinking area. Meanwhile upstairs (which opens 12-6 Monday-Thursday, all day Friday and Saturday; closed Sunday) has its own bar, and serves food and drink in a more relaxed, comfortable and intimate environment.

On the second Sunday of the month, the upstairs room hosts comedians from the Trapdoor Comedy Club; these events cost roughly £5 a ticket. Food is served 12-6 daily; if you're a lover of pies, look for the home-made examples such as Two Hoots and Steak (the pub favourite says Stacy). The Monkey operates a loyalty card scheme (buy eight pints, get the ninth one free) in conjunction with the other two Holt's houses in the city - the **Ape & Apple** and **Crown & Anchor**. It's worth noting that this is one of the few Holt's pubs in Manchester and environs that still sells cask Holt Mild.

Cadishead Micro Pub

The author of the excellent Dimpled Mug blog (<http://dimpledmug.co.uk/>) is planning to open a micro pub in Cadishead. Good news for that part of the world we think.

Martin told us: I hope to run it according to the Micropub Association guidelines/principles: 'A Micropub is a small free house which listens to its customers, mainly serves cask ales, promotes conversation, shuns all forms of electronic entertainment and dabbles in traditional pub snacks.' It is as expected a small venue seating 23 at capacity. It will also have no bar as service will be from the cellar/cool room and beers will be on gravity too. He hopes to showcase the excellent beers that are available within Salford, Manchester, Cheshire and Lancashire - so plenty to choose from!

High Peak Pub Scene

Robin Wignall & Tom Lord with News and Views

Peak Practice

With Robin Wignall



A quick visit to Chapel-en-le-Frith recently gave a chance to get updates on a couple of interesting developments. The **Royal Oak** has been for some months now free of tie, when Marston's sold to the new owner. Marston's beers are still available, Bitter and one other from the long list from the Marston's breweries, Pile Driver, the Status Quo beer, being available when I called. Much more interesting were the handpumps devoted to beers from local breweries. When I called it was good to find Whaley Bridge Stoneheads, and Wincle Sir Philip, and both in good form. The two local beers change regularly, but then there is an increasing number of micro-breweries just a short drive away, most of which produce good ale. Food is also available at the Royal Oak, daily except Monday, and the aim is to serve home cooked food from locally produced ingredients.

My other call was to the **Rems Bar**. Just two handpumps here which was no change from my previous visit some time ago. Marston's Bitter is the staple fare whilst there is an ever-changing beer from the local brewing scene. Thornbridge Rattlesnake was well worth a try but at 6.5% needs treating with respect. Rems is an eating venue, but you are still welcome to call in for a beer which is a good recommendation.

Taking a snippet of news published in the Cheshire CAMRA Branches' *Out Inn Cheshire*, it is good to report the reopening of the **Rose & Crown** at Allgreave, on the A54 Buxton-Congleton road. This is a pub which must really depend on passing trade. Hopefully the new owners can make a go of what might seem to be a brave venture.

The customary trip to Belgium in October from the Railway on Portwood usually visits the Poperinge Bierfestival. A curio amongst all the fine beers from Flanders was a brew from a microbrewery in the south of Derbyshire. This was something of a disappointment and plans are afoot to ensure that a cask of quality beer

from the Stockport area becomes a part of next year's festival. More on this in a few months as the story unfolds.



A group of us had booked to dine at the **Shady Oak** at Fernilee, on the Long Hill Road between Whaley Bridge and Buxton. After a couple of hours of effort on the hills a good meal was anticipated. We were very pleased with what was served, with Wincle trout perhaps being the highlight. Incidentally the trout farm at Wincle is only yards away from the brewery. Two beers were available to slake the thirst, Marston's Pedigree and Wychwood Dog's Bollocks, both in good nick, but of course neither of them really driving beers. There is a case for having one beer with an ABV below 4.0%. That apart our group was made very welcome and we will doubtless return before too long.



By early December seasonal beers and ciders had begun to appear in our locals. Weston's Mulled Cider has been available for a few weeks in both the Robinsons estate and in Punch pubs. The **White Hart** and the **Railway** in Whaley Bridge have both served it. I found it all right for a taste but I couldn't eat a whole one. Other seasonal brews include Adnams Old Ale at the **Goyt** in Whaley Bridge and Derby Old Intentional at the **Soldier Dick** in Furness Vale. The **White Horse** at the Horwich End lights in Whaley Bridge has had an early cask of Wychwood Bah Humbug, whilst the **White Hart** sold Chas Wells A Good Stuffing. The **Drum & Monkey** (pictured above) has been selling Phoenix Wobbly Bob, whilst at

Buxworth W.M. Club an early seasonal brew was Looks Like Rain Dear from Storm.

As the weeks in November passed, the **Shepherds Arms** in Whaley Bridge served the range of beers from the latest Marston's beer festival list. Highlights included Oakham Inferno, Okell's Olaf, and Purity UBU from Warwickshire. This latest festival will doubtless have been accessed at the **Royal Oak** in High Lane and the **George** in Hayfield.

2015 is imminent as I write this piece, and there can be some optimism in the local beer scene in the High Peak. A greater range of beers, many from local micro-breweries, is available and this gives a prospect for a good new year.

High Peak Pub News With Tom Lord

We report the sad news of the demise of another local pub, the **Roe Cross** at Mottram Cutting. It is currently being converted into a Home and Garden store.

News from Mossley where Melia McCance has now taken over as landlady of the **Church Inn** on Stockport Road. This is her first pub tenancy. She is a local lass and has been one of the pub's regulars for some time. Live music is planned on the first Saturday of each month primarily from local artistes. We wish her well. Staying in Mossley the **Commercial's** additional handpumps are being put to good use, and recent beers augmenting the regular Millstone Tiger Rut and Stout have been beers from Adnams, Hop Back and Wychwood.

Some good news from Glossop is that Robinsons **Oakwood** has reopened following a good quality refurbishment to this Gothic-style Victorian corner pub, with the panoramic windows being retained. As previously, the pub will continue to



offer an eclectic mix of arts events including live music, art exhibitions and drama as well as a full range of Robinsons beers.

In Ashton it is reported that the owner of the excellent **Browton's Bottle Shop** on Fletcher Street is considering putting a real ale on sale in the shop alongside the wide range of interesting bottled beers available.

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New Faces

Several Stockport pubs have gained new faces at the helm recently. *Opening Times* paid three of them a visit.

First up is **Ye Olde Woolpack** on Brinksway which has bounced back from the dead yet again. Its latest reincarnation comes courtesy of experienced local pub operator Dennis Davies who has a string of successful pubs behind him.



The Woolpack reopened on Friday 12th December and when *OT* called was still a bit of a work-in-progress with the rather bare walls awaiting a promised collection of pictures. The pub has however benefited from new flooring and seating plus a general redecoration; it all looks very smart and clean. The kitchen is being worked on and food should be available from 5th January.

Three cask beers are available on handpump – Theakston's Best Bitter, Marston's Pedigree and Jennings Cumberland Ale. These will form the permanent range. Big-screen TV will be showing football, and karaoke will feature on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. The Woolpack is open from 12 noon to 1.00am every day.



On Heaton Lane long-serving licensee Eileen Lloyd retired from the **Pineapple** in early December, having worked at the pub for 34 years, the last 26 of them as landlady. She has been replaced as the tenant (and **not**, as rumour has it, a temporary manager) by another familiar face. Angie Stokes ran the Swan With Two Necks about seven

years ago and, after several years working for Sam Smiths, was approached by Robinsons to return to the fold and take on the Pineapple. It was all quite rushed with Angie and her husband Trev taking over on 9th December just two weeks after hearing from Robinsons.

They were still finding their feet when *OT* called but they have already started a lunchtime food operation (12 noon–2.30pm Monday to Saturday). It's no secret that trade had dropped at the Pineapple in recent years so Angie has reduced the beer range to Unicorn and Trooper to maintain quality. The range will extend as trade hopefully picks up again. If anyone is likely to make a go of the Pineapple it's Angie and Trev and we wish them every success.

Finally, at the **Blossoms** in Heaviley beer enthusiast John Goodhew has been replaced by like-minded Jerry Evans. Jerry took over on 11th November after having worked as assistant manager for John. He gained his passion for cask beers by working at Stockport's Calverts Court and is committed to the quality of his cask ales – so much so that he aims to mature his 18-gallon casks (for Unicorn and Double Hop) for up to 10 days before putting them on sale. The Blossoms of course sells the rest of the Robinsons range plus Old Rosie cider on handpump. Those wishing to sample a few beers can buy a tray of three different thirds for the price of a pint.



It's very much business as usual. Jerry is planning to extend the food offer with home-made pies, stews and casseroles. The chips are now home-made, too. There might be some additional entertainment, too, and a small bottled beer bar has been installed in the upstairs room.

Brewery News

One of the most eagerly anticipated brewery openings for 2015 is that of **Cloudwater Brew Co.** Based on Piccadilly Trading Estate (with a significant outpost on Sheffield Street – see below) this will be an important venture and features some familiar names – Paul Jones, James Campbell (ex-Marble Brewery), Al Wall (ex-Port Street Beer House) and Will France (ex- Port Street Beer House and Summer Wine Brewery).



You can follow progress through the website (cloudwaterbrew.co) and here we shamelessly reproduce extracts from a recent post which sets out the brewery's ethos.

“We are only going to produce seasonal beer, with four distinct line ups each year. Each season will see us work towards getting the very best out of local or seasonally available ingredients, hops that are fresh to the marketplace or that give us just the flavours we feel fit the most, and traditional styles and modern experiments that accord to our lifestyle at that time. Some beers may never be made again, whilst others may appear season after season, having been tweaked into shape.

“Each season we will work with a new artist, illustrator or designer to create packaging that is as fresh as the beer itself. We are starting with packaging designed by the wonderful team that created our logo, Textbook Studio.

“Please don't mistakenly think we are making a statement against core ranges. We know from previous experience, our friends in the industry, and publications that core range beers often make up over 50% of most successful breweries' outputs, and form a reliable brand that is a welcome sight. This is simply a statement of intent, of wanting to be ourselves, and to celebrate the seasonality that has revitalised British food and drink in the past decade. As we get closer to seeing our brewery fitted and commissioned we'll be back with news about our first seasonal line up, Spring 2015.

“We've just signed our second lease. This time for an archway on Sheffield Street, less than two minutes walk from our brewery. It's a little over 1700 sq ft, and will be used for something altogether different to our main brewery.

“Our processes in our brewery are centred around two main technical focuses – making the best possible home for our chosen yeast strain within the confines of our brewery pipe work and vessels, and creating an environment toxic to unwelcome bacteria outside of our brewery pipe work and vessels. In this way, as with nearly every other brewery that uses non porous fermenting vessels (made from stainless steel for example), we will look to set tight parameters so that we get just the flavours we planned, with few surprises.

“Ageing in wood is something we always planned to devote a generous amount of space to. Our original storage and shelving plan for the brewery includes space for 24 barrels in cold store and 36 at room temperature. With the archway now in our possession, we can now look to work with a total of up to 220 barrels across both units. Joy!

“Because we want to keep our brewery focussed and uncontaminated, and because we also love wild, funky flavours from barrel ageing and 100% brettanomyces fermented beers, we are going to run the barrel store in the archway as wild, and as funky as we desire. We will end up with complex beers which we'll either package as they are, or blend to our hearts' content with stock from our brewery.

“There's more. We are also hoping to open a bar in the front end of the unit, which will be devoted to the breadth and depth of fermentation. Natural wines, lambic beers, small plates of fermented food, and more (pending permissions coming through from licensing and planning). Wish us luck, and watch this space...”

More next time with a full round up from our local brewers.



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