

2019
Greater
Manchester
Magazine of the Year

OPENING TIMES

MAY & JUNE 2019 / FREE



**INSIDE: STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL -
PAGES 5, 9 & 15 / CAMRA AWARDS / PUB
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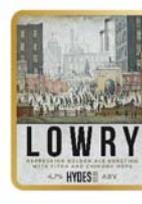
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Copy Date for the July/August issue is Monday 3 June

Contributors to this issue: John Clarke, Alan Gent, Dave Hanson, Peter Butler, Paul Felton, Dave Burston, Sue Lightfoot, Peter Edwardson, Tom Lord, Chris Morris, Stuart Ballantyne, Dave Carter, Lawrence Devaney, Mike Gilroy.

Distribution Manager – Janet Flynn

Front cover – Stockport Beer Festival 30 May to 1 June. Don't miss it!

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Stockport Beer Week 2019



Stockport Beer Week is back again for 2019 and will run from 19 to 29 September as part of National Cask Ale Week. It's a celebration of good pubs and beer in and around the centre of Stockport - and there are plenty of both to

choose from. There's also the opportunity to learn more about the pubs you are drinking in, the beers you are quaffing and the industry as a whole.

Our team of eager volunteers is now engaged in formulating a varied and interesting programme for your entertainment and drinking pleasure. There's still plenty of hard work to do but we can confirm that stand-up comedian James Dowdeswell (Extras, Russell Howard's Good News, Comedy Club Awards) will open the Week with his show "A Comedian Stands Up For Pubs - a Pub Manifesto". He was brought up in a pub, so he has some forthright views and amusing stories to tell. He will also be signing his book, *A Pub Manifesto*, on the night.

Also confirmed is a tasting of "Beer Styles through The Ages" by Annabel Smith, a Beer Sommelier and freelance beer trainer, consultant and writer. She was once Cask Marque's first female beer inspector working alongside the organisation's 49 male inspectors and was *Imbibe Magazine's* Educator of the Year in 2017. Also, Dave Porter, who installed the micro brewery at the Hope in Stockport, will tell us about some of his interesting experiences building and installing breweries around the world and then brewing using them.

Back for another year is the Ale Trail with prizes from Robinsons brewery and you can expect tap takeovers, meet the brewer events, heritage pub visits and walks and good music. We are working with the Council and Totally Stockport to help promote the town centre, so please put the dates in your diary and watch for updates on the website and in *Opening Times* as more events are added.

Silver for Madhatters Cider



The 2019 North of England Cider & Perry Competition was held at Manchester Beer & Cider Festival in January – and Stockport's **Madhatters Cider** picked up one of the gongs in the cider category.

Gold went to Ampleforth Abbey's Traditional Still, and the bronze award was won by Pure North's Deanhouse Vintage. However the silver award was won by Madhatters, with their Nine Holes. The certificate was presented to Madhatters' Gordon Battersby and Marysia Bossowski at the **Grove Alehouse** in Hazel Grove, where their cider can often be found on sale. Pictured above, Marysia and Gordon (left) receive their award from Greater Manchester's Cider Representative Mike Gilroy.

Robbies Rebrand



Robinsons have come in for quite a lot of criticism for the branding of Dizzy Blonde, with many commentators slating what was widely regarded as sexist imagery. This has prompted a significant rebrand for the beer, which remains one of the brewery's biggest sellers.

While stressing the recipe will remain unchanged, Robinsons went on to say, "Greater focus is now placed on the ingredients and beer style. The new pump clip prominently highlights the American Amarillo hop variety and the design has evolved to better reflect the historical context in which the original Dizzy Blonde concept was intended."

In addition to the new look, Robinsons have also launched a chilled version of the beer. Research has pointed to a general preference for cooler beers (and last year's Cask Report pointed to too much cask beer being served far too warm) so Chilled Dizzy will be served at a temperature of 8° (the same average temperature of a premium lager).

The new design was introduced at Robinsons Trade Show on 26 March and is now being rolled out across the tied estate.

Award for Opening Times



Here at *Opening Times* we were delighted to learn that we had been voted the 2019 CAMRA Greater Manchester Magazine of the Year (hence the rather mysterious rosette on last issue's front cover). Thanks to everyone who contributes to, publishes and advertises in *Opening Times* as without your support we couldn't produce it.

Editor John Clarke also paid tribute to those working behind the scenes – proof readers Paul Felton, Dave Burston and Sue Lightfoot and not least Distribution Manager Jan Flynn who ensures it reaches our team of distributors.

The award was presented at CAMRA's Greater Manchester Regional Meeting held at the **Wharf Tavern** in Stalybridge on 13 April. Editor John Clarke is pictured above (right) receiving the award from outgoing regional director Graham Donning.

Note – What's On has moved to page 21.



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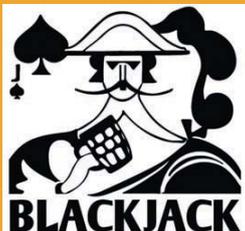
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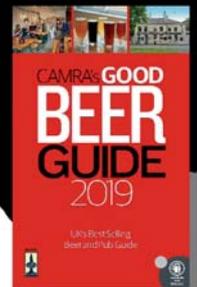
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Pubs of the Month

Stockport & South Manchester Winners for May and June



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for May 2019 has been won by the Royal Oak on Wilmslow Road in Didsbury. Stuart Ballantyne tells us why.

Over the last four years, since licensee Gary Tillman and senior barman Thomas Cowsill took over the pub, the turnover at the Royal Oak has increased by 10% year on year. Thomas told *Opening Times*, "We have not finished yet. So far this year turnover is up again, and we are on target to repeat this growth again this year."



So how have Gary and Tom done this in a very competitive market? The answer: "We concentrate on serving good beer at a fair price, we continue to serve our legendary cheese and pâté lunches, feature popular live sports on the TVs and use attentive, chatty staff to serve our customers. Marston's also helped us in September by an impressive refurbishment. The art of convivial conversation is very much alive in the Royal Oak. We serve our community well."

The Royal Oak sells a range of top-quality beers from the Marston's stable. Often these will include Saddle Tank, Pedigree, Banks's Sunbeam, Wainwright and others. All the beers turn over well and, because of Thomas's cellar skills a good pint is guaranteed.

Such is the friendly nature and broad appeal of the pub that it also now attracts a regular group of students who tend to stay there all evening, especially at weekends.

All in all, the Royal Oak is now a very well-run community pub that listens to its customers and sells them top quality beers and lunches at a fair price. That's a winning formula if ever there was one.

If you are a member of CAMRA don't forget to show your membership card at the bar to entitle you to a 10% discount on the price you pay for hand pumped beers.

So why not join CAMRA when we present the award to Gary and Thomas on Thursday 23 May when I am sure that great beer will be served, and the pub will be busy?



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for June is the Grove Alehouse on London Road in Hazel Grove. Mike Gilroy explains why it won the award.

After running the Grove Alehouse for two and a half years, Kevin and Tina Clarke sold the micropub to Angie and Scott Jepson last year. After a short period of closure, a grand re-opening on 4 August saw the pub packed with family and friends of the new owners. It's not looked back since, with trade increasing substantially over the past months.

There are five regularly changing cask beers on handpump, with the aim of having a variety of ales from both local brewers and those further afield. In addition, you will usually find a mixture of beer styles too, with a dark beer, a mild and a session bitter included in the mix.

Cider and perry lovers are also well catered for with three real ciders and perries available from the fridge. Again, these are sourced locally, with Stockport's Madhatters and Dunham Massey's Dunham Press being popular choices, and also from around the country too. It's a matter of pride that no artificially sweet fruit ciders are sold.

Angie and Scott have also worked hard to make the pub more of a community focus with the monthly 'cheese Sundays' proving very popular in this respect. They lay on cheese and biscuits but also invite customers to bring their own, a move which seems to bring people together and get them talking.

At the back of the pub is an enclosed beer garden and this is being upgraded for the summer months with refreshed paintwork and plenty of flowering plants. No doubt this will be put to good use on the presentation night, Thursday 27 June, when a full house is expected to see Angie and Scott receive this well-deserved award.

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 150 years. Check out their advert on the previous page.

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Stockport Beer & Cider Festival

Entertainment Preview



An essential part of Stockport Beer & Cider Festival (apart from the beer and cider of course) is the entertainment. Over the years we have featured many talented singers and musicians – and this year promises to be no exception. Once again our Entertainment Manager Anthony Meynell has put together a great selection of music to keep you entertained, and here's what you can look forward to. As usual the entertainment will be in the downstairs room housing Bar Nouveau (and details of some of the beers you'll find there are on page 15).

Thursday Night

Tonight we feature **Fred Loader & The Big Guns**, a superb south



Manchester Cult Folk, Americana, Blues, Country band founded by talented folk singer Fred Loader who has played with the likes of Richard Thompson and Donovan. He is joined by his son Rob and friends who add soaring harmonies, bass, mandolin, guitar and violin. They knock out obscure English and American Folk which is always popular accompanied by a drink.

Friday Afternoon and Night

Returning for their fifth year at Stockport Beer Festival are locally-based event organisers, **Leaf Promotions**. Since Leaf's first ever event in 2005, they have developed a reputation for fusing together the finest original musical talent from across all genres to create truly memorable gigs.



Leaf continues to strive to provide a platform for new bands and artists to get the attention they deserve, with a policy of giving opportunities to acts based on pure ability, not just how many people they can bring down to an event themselves. In turn, they've built a huge following in the areas where they currently run their nights, on the back of the quality of their acts. Leaf will be providing a mix of acoustic

artists and full bands during the mid and late sessions on the Friday this year, under the name of their regular event, the "Leaf Showcase". Here's to checking out the next generation of the region's unsigned talent! The full lineup will be announced nearer the time on their social media pages so go ahead and give them a like now!

Field Manual (pictured above), based in Macclesfield, will be bringing their Alt-Americana-inspired road-trip rock to the Beer Festival this

year. Influences include War on Drugs, Christopher Cross, Kurt Vile, Wilco, Ryan Adams, Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty. They will be headlining the Leaf promotions Showcase session on the Friday evening.

Saturday Afternoon



Now a regular sight and sound at early doors we welcome **Stockport Ukulele Players**, an informal group of ukulele enthusiasts who gather to sing and play together every week.

Saturday Early Evening

Formed in 2017, **Ten Million Suns** came together at Stockport's Viaduct rehearsal studios where Matt McDonagh (vocals) was introduced to future band members Peter Ressel (bass) and Andy Hawkshaw (guitar). The line-up was finally completed when drummer Liam Finnigan joined the band in January 2019. Playing songs from the likes of punk legends the Sex Pistols, The Clash, Undertones and indie icons Blur, Oasis and Pulp the band have crafted a sound that is both energetically raw and sophisticated.

The band is currently recording a demo which includes their own take on a couple of the 80s' most memorable classics. Ten Million Suns are set to explode onto the local live music scene and unleash a wave of sound that will captivate audiences and leave them wanting more.

Saturday Night

Back by popular demand after blowing us away at last year's beer festival, **Baked A La Ska** are the "heavy heavy sound" of Manchester, a super-charged 11-headed ska monster on a rampage through the dance floors of the UK leaving a trail of skanked-out bodies in their wake.

It's a band of assembled oddballs and pranksters brought together by keyboardist and wizard Mr John Ellis, fronted by an unholy trio of



singers: Frank "The Skank", Tommy Robot and Kuntri Ranks, who combine with the soft lilt and harmonica magic of Robin Sunflower. Baked A La Ska also features one

of the tightest rhythm sections in Manchester with the "chops to make you drop".

The band has released four acclaimed albums showcasing their trademark mix of spaced-out and spooky originals plus quirky covers that have been put through their ska machine.

Baked A La Ska are synonymous with legendary shows at Manchester's Band On The Wall and have performed riotous sets at the Kendal Calling, Matthew Street, Saddfest and Hungry Pigeon festivals. For more information visit www.bakedalaska.biz.

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What's Brewing

Brewery News from around the region



Glossop's **Howard Town Brewery** had a significant investment in new kit last year so *Opening Times* dropped by in April to have a look.



It all looks much the same from the outside – until you realise that the brewery now occupies a whole building rather than a relatively cramped unit at one end. Inside it's all change too. The 'old' brewery is still in situ, as is the small bar (and there's a planning application in place to set up a proper brewery tap here). Next door, though, is a big and shiny 24 hectolitre kit supplied by Italian makers Simatec. This is something of a UK showcase brewery for the company and the first brew went through on 3 November.

Fully Automated (almost)



Head Brewer, and co-owner with his wife Emma, Stuart Swann explained that the expansion was dictated by both a 25% increase in beer sales over the past year and also the limitations of the old kit – which, while good for traditional beer styles (and 99% of the brewery's output is presently cask), wasn't very adaptable for other types of beer. Now, however, Howard Town can brew "any beer style under the sun".

Whilst the brewery can now be fully automated, Stuart likes to keep control of many aspects of the process, so there's still a fair amount of manual intervention. The main change in the brewing operation



has been a switch to hop pellets (and so Super Fortress, which remains a whole hop brew for the time being, is the only beer still brewed on the old kit). This has made no difference to the beers.

Another change is that Howard Town now mills its own malt. Stuart told us that he'd owned a malt mill for four years but only

now was he able to bring it into use. This means that he can now control the quality of the milled grain rather than relying on bought-in, ready-milled malts.

The installation of a bigger cold store also means that the beers can have at least a week's maturation in cask before being sent out to the trade, a move which should increase consistency and quality across the range of pubs supplied.

Distant Hills

All this investment means that Stuart, along with second brewer Jack Dewison, can now start to make beers that appeal to markets outside Howard Town's core trade. This has taken a lot of thought as both Stuart and Emma know that Howard Town has a strong following for its range of very well-made British session ales and they didn't want to shake that confidence by a wholesale launch into the craft ale market. On the other hand there's clearly an opportunity for expansion here and so, in early May (probably by the time you read this), Howard Town will be launching its Distant Hills sub-brand.

An experimental beer under this label appeared at last year's Salford Independent Beer Festival but the first two proper beers are a 4.5% pilsner and a 5.2% grapefruit hefeweizen. The former is a properly matured lager brewed using a step mash and conforming to Germany's pure beer law, the *Reinheitsgebot*, while the second is another German-inspired beer with 60% wheat in the mash (which would have seriously clogged up the old brewing kit).

A third beer, a US-inspired West Coast Pale Ale, is also in the pipeline. These beers will be both kegged and canned so this is obviously something of a departure for Howard Town, although the commitment to quality and consistency remains as firm now as it has ever been.

These are clearly exciting times for a thriving local business which is certainly putting Glossop firmly on the beer lovers' map. We'll certainly raise a glass (of Howard Town beer, naturally) to that.

Burton Road Brewing

Twelve months ago we featured **Burton Road Brewing** in these pages, so a year later it's time for a catch up.

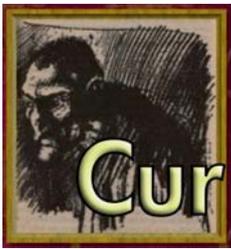
"2018 was a busy year of development for us," Burton Road's Boz Berry told us, "and one which saw our beer range grow from two to five. To our original pale ale (4.8% bottle, cask) and IPA (5.6% can, keg), we added another cask beer (Mosaic Pale Ale) and two can and keg beers (Citra Pale Ale 4.8%, Session IPA 4%)."



"Whilst still contract brewing at Moberley Brewhouse, we've recently made our first collaboration with Andrew O'Shea at Made of Stone Brewery in Bramhall. Look out for an exclusive cask of our Peach Milkshake IPA at Stockport Beer Festival."

"2019 sees another new beer release, pencilled in for the beginning of June. We anticipate that this will be followed by a few more new Burton Road brews before the year is out. The past 18 months of business have taught us a lot, and we look forward excitedly to the future with big plans to develop, grow and expand our horizons as a brewery."

So, lots to look forward to there – and keep an eye out for that special beer at Stockport Beer Festival.



Curmudgeon

The Squeezed Middle

The sale of Fuller's brewing interests to Asahi underlined the exposed position in which many of the established, medium-sized firms find themselves. As a mid-sized brewer, Fuller's said, it was being squeezed between the global giants and the 2,000 smaller brewers across the UK. The tax breaks given to microbrewers and the power of the big global drinks firms have left little space at the bar for those in the middle.

Progressive Beer Duty was introduced in 2002 by Gordon Brown with the aim of stimulating the number of small breweries in the UK. It has certainly succeeded in this objective, with over 2,000 now in operation. However, as with many such well-intentioned measures, it has had unintended consequences. The 50% duty relief on offer starts to be clawed back above an annual production of 5,000 hectolitres (3,055 barrels), and entirely disappears at 60,000 hl (36,661 barrels). Many of the established family brewers are above this figure, or only just below it. Fuller's, who were one of the biggest, were producing about 200,000 barrels a year.

In practice, some of the new small brewers have used the duty relief not to bolster the finances of their business, but to sell beer more cheaply, putting the established brewers at a severe price disadvantage. The overall market share of these small brewers is relatively small, and to the likes of AB InBev they are no more than a pinprick on an elephant's backside. But they have a much higher share of the market for cask beer in the free trade, and if you go in any pub that is able to buy beer on the open market it is likely that most of its cask lines are from microbreweries. Many of these beers are very good, but the main reason some of them are there is that they are cheap to buy.

The mid-sized brewers found that the general decline of on-trade beer consumption and the rise of lager greatly reduced the amount of beer they were producing from their own breweries. But, at the same time, the rise of upmarket dining provided an opportunity for some of the pubs in their tied estates, and many of them bought more as cast-offs from the debt-ridden pubcos. This essentially turned them into pubcos with an under-utilised brewery as a sideline. Fuller's reckoned that 85% of their profits came from their pubs and hotels, so it is perhaps understandable that they decided to concentrate on that part of their business and accept an attractive offer for the brewing side.

It's also debateable whether you can make such a clear distinction between the brewing and pub sides of the business, as to some extent they support each other. If you separate them, both will be diminished and their viability undermined. A brewery produces a unique, identifiable product that is recognisable to customers and may command a great deal of loyalty, but a pubco is, well, just another pubco, and in the long term that must make them more vulnerable to takeover. Fuller's stood out from the crowd because of both the high profile of their beers and the valuable redevelopment potential of their site. But the announcement of this deal will certainly have given many directors of family brewers cause for thought about their long-term future.

It's often the case that people attract warm tributes when they die while having a much more equivocal reputation during their lives, and it's hard to avoid the feeling that some of those shedding crocodile tears over the sale of Fuller's were happy a year before to dismiss London Pride as "boring brown beer". Maybe if we want to help the prospects of the family brewers, beer enthusiasts should give them a bit more love as upholders of a unique British tradition, rather than constantly chasing after the novel and trendy.

Curmudgeon Online: curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com

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Stagger

Hazel Grove with Jim Flynn



There can't be many places more convenient for the start of a Stagger than the **Rising Sun**, a minute's walk from the terminus of the 192. This very prominent coaching inn dates back to 1754 and while its impressive mock-Tudor exterior gives some hint of its past, I strongly suspect that can't be said for the interior. It's now a well-appointed, relaxing, largely open-plan pub, with an L-shaped bar and plenty of TVs to watch the sport. It's quite recently had a refurbishment: the colour scheme for the upholstery and the wooden panelling is now blue and grey. There were three beers available: Marston's 61 Deep, Bombardier and Wainwright. We tried the first two, finding them in good nick.



A new cocktail place called the **Tahiti Bar** (formerly the Grove) was promoting its opening night: we resisted the temptation and headed instead to the **Bullock Smithy**. Outside was quite an enticing garden area but the green-painted interior was beginning to look

somewhat worn and tired. There was a disco in one corner but nobody seemed to be paying it much attention; we sat in the opposite corner to sample our Greene King IPA, which, a little like the pub, was okay albeit disappointing.



Next, to **Lounge**, one of a string of small bars that have opened up on London Road. Some have disappeared but Lounge seems to be doing well and in recent times has put on cask beer. The L-shaped room is divided into two distinct sections. The back area has small round tables, giving it an

almost kitchen-diner feel, and on the walls are numerous pictures and an unusual display of old mobile phones. The front area, nearest the bar, is furnished with settees and was fully occupied. The licensee told us that he was selling a cask a week, and luckily for us he had just put on Wychwood Hobgoblin Gold, which we found to be on good form.

We passed two more bars - the **Boteega Lounge** (not open) and **O'Hare's** (formerly Huffy's, and keg) - before we arrived at Wetherspoon's **Wilfred Wood**, named after the area's Victoria Cross recipient. This large shop-like pub was absolutely rammed,

and it wouldn't be an exaggeration to suggest that there were more customers here than in all the other places we visited put together. In addition to the usual Ruddles and Abbot, numerous other beers were available, including Moberley Barn Buster, Moorhouse's Blonde Witch, Titanic Raspberry Wheat and Big Bog Swampy Premium Ruby Bitter, as well as a choice of ciders. We miraculously found some seats, and all our beers were in excellent condition.



Crossing the road, the **Horse and Jockey** turned out to be keg only, so it was back over the A6 again to the **Grapes**, where we were greeted by a karaoke with not the most talented singer on the mic, which caused two of our number to flee

to the next pub. The more resilient of us settled into one of the two cosy rooms adjoining the bar to sample the Unicorn and the Trooper, both of which were more than decent, and to contemplate that this was our first Robbies of the evening when at one time the Stagger involved drinking their beers in most pubs.



Next door is the **Three Tunnes**, another pub with a mock-Tudor exterior. A few years ago Robinsons refurbished it and opened it out, giving it a clean, airy ambience. Others may differ, but I consider that despite the less-cosy feel, and perhaps excessive number of TVs for sport, the place has definitely been improved and it's well worth a visit. The beer range is not bad either, with Unicorn, Dizzy Blonde, Cumbria Way and Trooper, all found to be a slight notch up from those at the Grapes.



Our final stop was the **Grove Alehouse**, Hazel Grove's micro-pub. Being a former shop, the place is relatively small, basically an L-shaped room with a bar in the right-hand corner and an outside drinking area to the rear. On arrival we were greeted by landlady Angie, who with her husband took over mid-2018. This was my first visit since then and I have to say I was impressed with the beer, both in terms of range and quality. Those available were Twisted Barrel Ekuannot, Poynton Hooker, Yeovil Hopkandi, Beartown Bungle and Thornbridge Rocky Road Lucaria, which was our beer of the night.

A great end to an interesting, very accessible Stagger, which is well worth a go; something that I couldn't have said a decade or more ago.

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Stockport Beer & Cider Festival

Festival Charity and Homebrew Competition



Planning is now well advanced for this year's Stockport Beer and Cider Festival. The venue is again Edgeley Park and this year's dates are 30 May to 1 June. Get those diaries and calendars noted!

Here we focus on the Festival Charity, **Stockport CP**, and also the homebrew competition which will bring you five of the brand new beers launched on Bar Nouveau.

About Stockport CP



So what exactly is Stockport CP? The charity's Event Planner Sonia Schofield explains.

Stockport Cerebral Palsy Society (Stockport CP) is a local parent/carer-led registered charity that has provided support to local disabled people since 1953. We are now in our 66th year supporting disabled children and adults to live as active and independent a life as possible through our range of projects and services. Our work spans Stockport, East Cheshire, Tameside, Trafford and Derbyshire.

At Stockport CP, we know that everyone is different, so we ensure that we put individuals' interests, strengths and needs at the heart of everything that we do. We achieve this by offering a range of services that include:

- One-to-one support in people's own homes and out in the community – our support workers provide care, practical help and companionship to people of all ages and with a wide range of disabilities.
- 24-hour residential care at Cheddle Lodge, our specialist home for adults with complex disabilities in Cheadle.
- Day services offering a wide range of stimulating, creative and skills development activities to around 60 disabled adults a day.
- Leisure groups for people aged 14+ that offer activities such as walking, horse riding, climbing, and a whole range of social activities offered across the week including evenings and weekends.
- A disability cycling club (Stockport Wheelers) that meets three times a week at Woodbank Park and is open to all abilities with a range of adapted bikes on offer.

Do you have a few hours to spare to volunteer for Stockport CP at the Beer & Cider Festival? We are looking for volunteers to work behind

the charity bar and to help sell raffle tickets and snacks at the event. It's a great experience and everyone who volunteered in 2018 really enjoyed it!

Contact Sonia on 0161 432 1248 or email events@stockportcp.co.uk if you would like to help.

Homebrew Competition

For the fourth year we have run a competition among local home brewers to find five beers for our popular Bar Nouveau. Entries were up slightly this year with 63 beers entered across five categories (mild, bitter, IPA, stout/porter and speciality) and the standard of the beers entered was again impressively high.



Judging (pictured in action here) took place at the **Hope Inn** on Wellington Road North in Stockport on 10 and 17 March. Many thanks to Martin Wood for letting us take over his Vault for two Sunday afternoons.

Thanks also to **Stockport Brewing, Blackjack Brewery, Marble Beers, Track Brewing** and **Torrside Brewing** for not only hosting the winners but also coming along on the judging days.



So, it's congratulations to the winners. Andy Pugh won the mild category with a good, straightforward dark mild brewed using Fuggles hops. This will be brewed at Stockport Brewing and Andy is pictured here (right) with Andy Pass from the brewery.

Alex Pembroke won the bitter category for the second year running. This time his winning brew was a 'pale English best bitter' hopped with Northdown and First Gold, and this will be brewed at Blackjack.

The speciality category was won by Peter Allan with a 'dandelion and burdock dunkelweizen' which really did taste of dandelion and burdock although this came solely from the malt and hops used. Torrside will be brewing this.

Serial winner Jonah Stancombe won two categories this year. In stout and porter he won with a milk vanilla stout, which will be brewed by Marble Beers, while his winning IPA was a hazy, New England IPA brewed using Galaxy, Citra, Mosaic and Columbus hops. This will be brewed at Track.

Not only do the winning home brewers get a brew day at their host breweries but we will again be presenting them all with certificates to mark their wins. All being well, these will be featured in the next issue of *Opening Times*.

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Pub Walks with Chris Morris

The Fox Inn, Brookbottom to New Mills

The Fox Inn, Brookbottom



Located in the quiet secluded hamlet of Brookbottom, this 18th century inn feels a world away from the hustle and bustle of modern life. With just a single narrow road leading to it, this hidden gem is pure escapism for pub goers, with peace and quiet all around - the only thing that hurries through

Brookbottom is the brook! Full of character and charm, everyone is given a warm welcome and muddy boots are welcome too. The traditional country pub interior features corner settles, copper-topped tables and a comforting open log fire. Reasonably priced pub food is also available. When I last visited, Wizard, Unicorn and a house beer, Fox Inn Ale, were available, all brewed by Robinsons. Opening times are 12-3pm on Monday; 12-3pm and 8-11pm Tuesday to Thursday; 12-11pm Friday and Saturday; 12-10pm on Sunday.

Bus & Train Information

The walk requires getting off the train at Strines and getting back on at New Mills Central. If travelling from central Stockport, this will require changing at Manchester Piccadilly. Purchase a return ticket to New Mills Central (not New Mills Newtown).

Services to Strines run every two hours on Monday to Saturday and every hour on Sunday. Return trains from New Mills Central run twice an hour on Monday to Saturday and once an hour on Sunday. For full timetable information visit www.northernrailway.co.uk. The 358 bus from Stockport can also be used for this walk. Get off the bus at Strines and walk along Station Road until you reach Strines Station. At the end of the walk, the bus back can be boarded at New Mills Bus Station.

The Walk

This is a moderate two-mile walk with quite a steep climb at the start. The OS Map is OL1 The Peak District (OS app also available).

Get off the train at Strines Station. Exit platform 2 at the end gate and take the stony track up the hill to the right. The track climbs for half a mile before arriving at a road at the top. Turn left at the road and the **Fox Inn** is just ahead.

After leaving the pub, retrace your steps and carry along the road up the hill. To your right are lovely views of The Cage and surrounding countryside. Just after a bench on your right, leave the road and follow a stony track to the right down a hill. The track then becomes a narrow road. Carry along down the hill until it joins a main road. Cross over and continue straight ahead along the road on the other side. After passing over the railway line, walk through the car park on your left and across to a path on the opposite side. This path then meanders down some steps to the River Goyt below.

At the river, take the path to the left. When the path forks, keep to the right, through a gate signed Mousley Bottom Local Nature Reserve, continuing with the river on your right. Keep right at another fork. The path leaves the river bank to the left briefly; take the right fork after this to stick close to the river again. The path then joins a wider track and you continue along here, again with the river on your right.

When the track passes between two houses and joins an unsurfaced road, turn right here and carry on up the hill until you reach New Mills Central Station on your left. The centre of New Mills can be found by continuing past the station to the top of the hill.

New Mills

There is much to see in this characterful mill town with many independent shops and cafes to seek out. The town sits above a natural rocky gorge known as The Torrs which has become a 'park under the town' and is highly recommended as it features the spectacular Millennium Walkway. A good selection of pubs can be found here too, all welcoming walkers.



A short walk along Market Street brings you to **Beer Shed**, an impressive micropub which opened in November 2016. It has an interesting layout in its long and narrow space. Up to four cask beers are available and these were from

Fyne Ales, Moor Brewery and Fool Hardy Ales when I last visited.



The **Masons Arms** is located on High Street at the far end of the town centre and is well worth seeking out. Stone floors, bespoke wooden furniture and a lovely log burner set the ideal post-walk scene. The beer range is excellent with cask beers from Storm, Stamps, Holts, Thwaites

and Robinsons when I called in.

The train back to Manchester Piccadilly, and then Stockport, can be boarded at New Mills Central station which was passed previously on the walk.





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Heard at the Bar

Pub News from Stockport, Manchester, Tameside and beyond

Recent Awards



Stockport & South Manchester branch has been busy presenting awards over the past couple of months. As we reported in the last issue, the branch's Pub of the Year award was won by the **Bakers Vaults** in Stockport Market Place. This local institution sells guest beers and traditional cider alongside the Robinsons

range. Good food and live entertainment, for which the pub has long been famous, complete the picture. In keeping with this, a newly formed ska band entertained a very full pub on the presentation night. Pictured here, the Bakers manager Luke Morgan (left) receives his certificate from local CAMRA chairman John Clarke.



Two Pub of the Month awards have also been presented since our last issue went to press. The February Pub of the Month was won by the **Magnet**, a popular free house on Wellington Road North. Salopian Brewery's Oracle is the one permanent fixture from a range of 14 cask

beers, with a further 12 keg beers completing the picture. Lesley and Lee Watts (front centre and rear left) and their team are pictured here with the award.



The Pub of the Month for March was the ever popular **Railway** on Avenue Street, Portwood. This is the fourth time that Sue and Vince have won this award, along with numerous other awards for Mild, Cider Pub of the Year (six times)

and clocking up 18 consecutive years in the national *Good Beer Guide*. No fewer than eight permanent cask beers are complemented by three guests (one of which is always a mild) and, of course, great cider and perry. Vince and Sue are pictured here receiving their award from CAMRA's John Clarke (right).

Pub Shorts

After some time operating purely as a restaurant, we understand that the **Gorton Mount** (Mount Road, Gorton) is once again functioning as a pub. There's no cask beer on sale but nonetheless it's good to have it back.

Following a refurbishment, the **Chestergate Tavern** (Mersey Square, Stockport) is once again selling what appears to be a changing cask beer. When *Opening Times* has called, both Robinsons Dizzy Blonde and a beer from Ossett Brewery have been seen on sale.



A major refurbishment of the **Royal Oak** (Stockport Road, Cheadle) is being planned by Robinsons. The planning application shows both the (barely used) vault and the room at the back left being incorporated into the main drinking area, while the room to the front left is retained as a separate snug. The Royal Oak has been something of a twilight pub for years now, and hasn't sold cask beer for some considerable time, so it's good to see Robinsons investing in it. Hopefully, real ale will make a return when the pub reopens (and let's also hope the new-look pub generates sufficient trade to keep it there).



In Didsbury, **Albert's Restaurant and Bar** (Barlow Moor Road) reopened in mid-March following a two-month refurbishment, which cost around £500,000 according to the *Manchester Evening News*. The layout remains unchanged but when OT called no cask

beer was available and the previous solitary handpump appeared to have vanished. However, a later call to the pub led to us being told that a cask ale would be back 'by the end of the month'. So it might well be there by the time you read this. Not a million miles away in West Didsbury, **Wine and Wallop** (Lapwing Lane) is now cashless and only takes card payments. This move has, we understand, been prompted by a number of break-ins at the pub.



Another pub in East Manchester appears to have bitten the dust. Reports reach us that the **Suburban** (Gorton Cross Street, Gorton), has closed its doors. This JW Lees pub does seem to have struggled in recent years and hadn't sold cask beer

since 2014. It ought to have potential so it would be good to think that any closure is temporary.

In Hyde, the **Cotton Bale** (Market Place) is selling an increasing range of guest beers including some from Wigan's Wily Fox Brewery (and at £1.95 a pint, to boot). In Ashton-under-Lyne, the Wetherspoons **Ash Tree** (Wellington Road) reopened in February after a reported £1.1 million refurbishment and expansion.

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What's On

Local CAMRA Branch Events, Information and News

Your Local CAMRA Contacts & Websites

Stockport & South Manchester (SSM)

www.ssmcamra.co.uk

Contact: John Abrams; johnabrams1111@yahoo.co.uk

High Peak, Tameside & NE Cheshire (HPNC)

www.highpeaktamesidenortheastcheshire.camra.org.uk

Contact: Tom Lord; jenni.lord@tiscali.co.uk

Macclesfield & East Cheshire (MEC)

www.eastcheshirecamra.org.uk

Contact: Rob Nicholson 07983 524102;

social@eastcheshirecamra.org.uk

Central Manchester (CMCR)

www.centralmanchester.camra.org.uk

Contact: Steve Davis; treasurer@centralmanchester.camra.org.uk

ALL welcome except CAMRA Members only

Local CAMRA Events – May

Saturday 4th – Pub of the Year Runner-up presentation to Ye Olde Vic, Chatham Street, Edgeley, SK3 9ED. From 8:00pm. (SSM)

Saturday 4th – Spring Pub of the Season presentation: Masons Arms, 57 High Street, New Mills, SK22 4BR. To be followed by a social around local pubs. Starts 1:30pm. (HPNEC)

Saturday 4th – May the 4th Beer With You Cantina Crawl: meet 12 noon at Grub, Mayfield Station, and then visit other Northern Quarter venues that have great kitchens and beers. (CMCR)

Thursday 9th – Branch Meeting: Blossoms, 2 Buxton Road, Heaviley, SK2 6NU. Starts 8:15pm. (SSM)

Monday 13th – Branch Meeting: Cheshire Ring, 72 Manchester Road, Hyde, SK14 2BJ. Starts 8:00pm. (HPNEC)

Thursday 16th – Thursday Social Crawl: meet 6-6.30pm Café Beermoth, Brown Street, M2 1DA, then visit other bars and pubs between there and Albert Square. (CMCR)

Friday 17th – Didsbury North Stagger: starts 7:30pm Botanist, 1d School Lane, M20, 6RD; 8:30 meeting point Station, 682 Wilmslow Road, M20 2DN; final pub Dog & Partridge, 667 Wilmslow Road. (SSM)

Sunday 19th – Post-Manchester 10K Stagger Social: meet 5:00pm Gas Lamp, 50A Bridge Street, M3 3BW, and then visit other pubs and bars in Spinningfields. All runners and non-runners welcome. (CMCR)

Thursday 23rd – Pub of the Month presentation to the Royal Oak, 729 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury, M20 6WF. From 8:00pm. (SSM)

Saturday 25th – Social at Runaway Brewery 5th Anniversary Party – more details to follow. (CMCR)

Local CAMRA Events – June

Saturday 1st – Dronfield Explorer and Beer Festival Day Trip: meet Piccadilly Station 10:30 for 10:43 Norwich train to Dronfield. (CMCR)

Monday 3rd – Branch Meeting: Port Street Beer House, 39-41 Port Street, M1 2EQ. Starts 6:30pm. (CMCR)

Saturday 8th – Branch AGM and Branch Meeting: Harewood Arms, 2 Market Street, Broadbottom, SK11 6AX. AGM starts at 2:00pm. Meetings will be followed by a social around Glossop pubs. (HPNEC)

Thursday 13th – Branch Meeting: Magnet, 51 Wellington Road North, Heaton Norris, SK4 1HU. Starts 8:15pm. (SSM)

Saturday 15th – Club of the Year presentation to War Memorial Club, 1 Station Road, Buxworth, SK23 7NJ. Meet 2:00pm at Old Hall Inn, Whitehough, SK23 6EJ, or 4:00pm at the club. Presentation will be followed by a social around Whaley Bridge pubs. (HPNEC)

Friday 21st – Cheadle Hulme North Stagger: starts 7:30pm P5, 47 Station Road, SK8 7AA; 8:30pm meeting point Kings Tap, 11-13 Station Road, SK8 5AF; final pub Cross Keys, 10 Adswood Road, SK8 5QA. (SSM)

Saturday 22nd – Social trip to Chorley. Travel details from Branch Website/Branch Contact. (HPNEC)

Saturday 22nd – Day Out in Chester. Details on Branch Website. (SSM)

Thursday 27th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Grove Alehouse, 145 London Road, Hazel Grove, SK7 4HH. From 8:00pm (SSM)

Social Media

Many of the local CAMRA branches have Facebook and Twitter accounts which you can follow:



Stockport & South Manchester:
www.facebook.com/SSMCAMRA

High Peak, Tameside & NE Cheshire:
www.facebook.com/HPTNECCAMRA

Macclesfield & East Cheshire (East Cheshire Pubs & Beer):
www.facebook.com/groups/897449270304045

Central Manchester:
www.facebook.com/groups/CentralManchesterCamra

Stockport & South Manchester: @SSMCAMRA

Macclesfield & East Cheshire: @MECCAMRA

Central Manchester: @MCRCentralCamra



CAMRA Discounts

A list of local pubs generously offering a discount to CAMRA members can be found online at www.ssmcamra.co.uk/discount.htm

The Waters Green

Local CAMRA Pub of the Season Winter '13

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Pub News Extra

More news from around the region

The Produce Hall



First things first, *Opening Times* wholly supports the regeneration of Stockport town centre in general and the Market Place in particular. The development of the Produce Hall is integral to this and its opening has been eagerly awaited.

In many respects it's a job well done. The building has been very skilfully refurbished and repurposed. To date it also seems to be getting a fair few bums on seats. On the down side there's been quite a bit of controversy about just how independent the food traders actually are (not very, it seems) and the quality of the food itself attracted a rather lukewarm review in the *Manchester Evening News*.



So, what about the beer (and cider)? It's clearly a major part of the offer here, as a large bar to some extent dominates the ground floor area, but to date the story seems to be one of missed opportunities and over-pricing.

The absence of cask beer is a big thumbs down, and points to a major misreading of the local beer market – every other neighbouring outlet offers cask which is in many ways a key part of the town's beer scene. It's also worth saying that similar, and highly successful, operations

in Altrincham and Manchester City Centre both sell significant quantities of cask beer.

To add insult to injury, the beer that is on sale (and to be fair an entertaining array of local keg beers has been sold) has been dogged by tales of overpricing. Indeed, with beers from Moberley Brewhouse on sale for something like 50% more than you'll pay next door (yes, next door!) at Project 53, and when Track Brewing's 3.8% Sonoma is £6 a pint, then the words "rip off" start to hang in the air.

Luckily, when *Opening Times* called just before Easter, prices seemed to have settled down a bit with a range of lagers retailing at around £4.50 a pint, although Thirst Class Ale's Hoppy Go Lucky was £5.20 for a 4.1% beer, so there's a way to go yet.

The Produce Hall deserves to succeed - indeed it needs to succeed – but something of a rethink is needed here if it's really going to win the hearts and minds (not to mention the money) of local beer drinkers.

Malt Disley

Lauren from **Malt Disley** (22 Market Street, Disley) has been in touch with details of forthcoming events. In particular, on Thursday 23 May there's a Meet the Brewer & Quiz Night with Beartown Brewery. This has been organised by the Beartown team and Lauren tells us she is quite excited to see what they have in store. Beartown has run a couple of these events in other pubs and they have been very well received. This will be held in the evening with a start time of 8:0pm.



On this same day, Lauren and a few other members of the Malt Disley team will be travelling to Beartown Brewery to collaborate on a beer to commemorate Malt Disley's second birthday. They did this last year with Poynton Brewery for their first birthday and brewed a golden bitter, 'Beer Necessities', which is now the house ale due to how popular it has been with the regulars. This year's beer will be launched at Malt Disley's birthday party on Saturday 29 June.

There will be lots of things going on that day, with a magic act in the afternoon and then live music in the evening by the very talented Liam Paul, who has performed at the pub's Acoustic Sunday Live Lounge, which happens on the last Sunday of every month, and has been well received.

Levenshulme Update

When the **Talleyrand** (1030 Stockport Road) in Levenshulme opened, the plan was to install cask beer at some point and that's now happened. In the week before Easter a handpump was duly installed and when *Opening Times* called a cask of Burton Road Pale Ale was settling in the cellar.



It would be good if the recently opened **Nordie** (1044 Stockport Road) followed suit as it's a very pleasant place to have a drink, the light and airy interior being complemented by some outdoor seating to the side. It's a project by Oddie McClintock and his partner

Megan Hyland – Oddie was formerly bar manager at the Pilcrow in the City Centre and has considerable experience of choosing and selling excellent beers (including cask). Thus far though, it's keg-only but even so the range is none too shabby with some excellent beers available. Worth a visit.

Award for Hope Inn

Just before we went to press came news that the **Hope Inn** (Wellington Road North, Stockport) has been voted best traditional pub in Greater Manchester for 2019 in the UK Enterprise Awards. Owner and brewer Martin Wood, (the pub is also home to Fool Hardy Ales), told *Opening Times*: "I hold this award close to my heart when so many pubs are closing". This is yet more recognition for Stockport's burgeoning pub scene and thoroughly well deserved.



Jenna and the Kings Tap Team would like to invite you to try our beers, served with pride!

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Sunday: 9am – Midnight

Please note, closing times may vary during winter

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