

September 2014



Opening

TIMES

THE FREE LOCAL CAMRA MAGAZINE

Covering the Cities of Manchester & Salford, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford, N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield

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Marble & Bank Top Win at Great British Beer Festival – full details on page 9

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What's On

Information, Notes and Local CAMRA Branch Events

Opening Times - Information

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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 October issue is Friday 12 September

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, Jerry Wicken, John Clegg, Jill Hasler, Steve Smith, Mark McConachie

Distribution Manager – Janet Flynn

Front Cover – brewers Matt Howgate (Marble) and Dave Sweeney (Bank Top) celebrated their wins at the Great British Beer Festival.

Distribution Manager – Janet Flynn

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www.thcamra.org.uk

Contact: John O'Donnell 0789 880972; enquiries@thcamra.org.uk

Local CAMRA Events

All welcome at these events

Monday 8th – Branch Meeting: Glossop Labour Club. Starts 8.00pm. (HPNC)

Wednesday 10th – Good Beer Guide 2015 launch night in Patricroft: Wangies, Liverpool Road 7.30pm; Bird in Hand 8.30pm; finish in Queen's Arms. (NM)

Thursday 11th – Branch Meeting including "Meet the Brewer" with Ilkley Brewery: Gateway, East Didsbury. Starts 8.15pm. (SSM)

Friday 12th – Saturday 14th – Heritage Weekend pub walks: see page 14, contact Robin Bence (trn@tesco.net) for details. (NM)

Wednesday 17th – Branch Meeting: Star Inn, Back Hope Street, Salford. Starts 7.30pm. (NM)

Friday 19th – Stockport Market Place Stagger: Calverts Court, St Petersgate 7.30pm; Boars Head, Vernon Street 8.30pm. (SSM)

Saturday 20th – Social at Old Hall Beer Festival, Chinley. From 1.00pm. (MEC)

Saturday 20th – Rail Crawl to Burscough Bridge. Catch 10.46 Northern Rail from Victoria. Details from contact. (NM)

Saturday 20th – Sale Stroll. A tour of all Sale's pubs. 12pm The Bridge (Dane Road), 4pm Waterfront, 6pm Vine. For full itinerary see website. (T&H)

Wednesday 24th – Cask Ale Week launch: bus tour of nine breweries. Details from contact. (NM)

Thursday 25th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Midland, Wellington Road North, Stockport, From 8.00pm. (SSM)

Friday 26th – Pub of the Season presentation to Stretford Sip Club, see page 9. From 8.00pm. (T&H)

Saturday 27th – Cheshire Pub of the Year presentation: Young Pretender, Congleton. Starts 1.00pm. (MEC)

Wednesday 1 October – Swinton Survey: Football (33 Swinton Hall Lane) 7.30pm; Royal Oak (536 Bolton Road) 8.15pm plus two others. (NM)

Saturday 4th – Chorlton Beer of the Festival presentation to Wilson Potter Brewery. From 1.00pm at brewery. (T&H)

Thursday 9th – Branch AGM: Briton's Protection, Great Bridgewater Street, Manchester. Starts 8.00pm. (T&H)

Pub of the Month

The Midland, Wellington Road North



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for September 2014 has been won by the Midland on Wellington Road North, Stockport. *John Clarke reports.*

The Midland is another local example of a thriving free house that escaped pub company ownership. Having moved from Whitbread to Enterprise Inns it was then purchased by Mark Hayter in July last year (prior to that he had been the pub's tenant for two years).

The most notable change has been in the beer range, although Mark has cleverly adopted the course of evolution rather than revolution. The semi-regular beer, Greene King IPA, has been joined by up to four guest ales – generally speaking the number increases towards the weekend. By largely keeping to the style of beers his regulars enjoy Mark also ensures the new beers enjoy healthy sales and so remain in good condition while they are available.

There's no food at the moment but live entertainment does feature with a live band performing every other Friday. There are two darts teams based here – a Premier League men's team plays on Tuesdays, while on Wednesday nights matches in the Stockport & District women's league take place.

The pub itself has been knocked around a bit over the years but still keeps much of its multi-roomed feel with three distinct areas. There's also some impressive tile work surviving from former times. The atmosphere is one of a genuine local, although one where the casual visitor is made welcome.

This is a success story that deserves celebration and it will get that when our award is presented on Thursday 25 September. However this will be more than a celebration – it will be a show of support. As we have reported, there is a planned road scheme, which in its present form, will involve the demolition of the pub (a cycle path will go through the front). It is still early days and we hope that these ridiculous and destructive proposals can be amended. A good turnout on the night will show that the pub's friends and supporters mean business.

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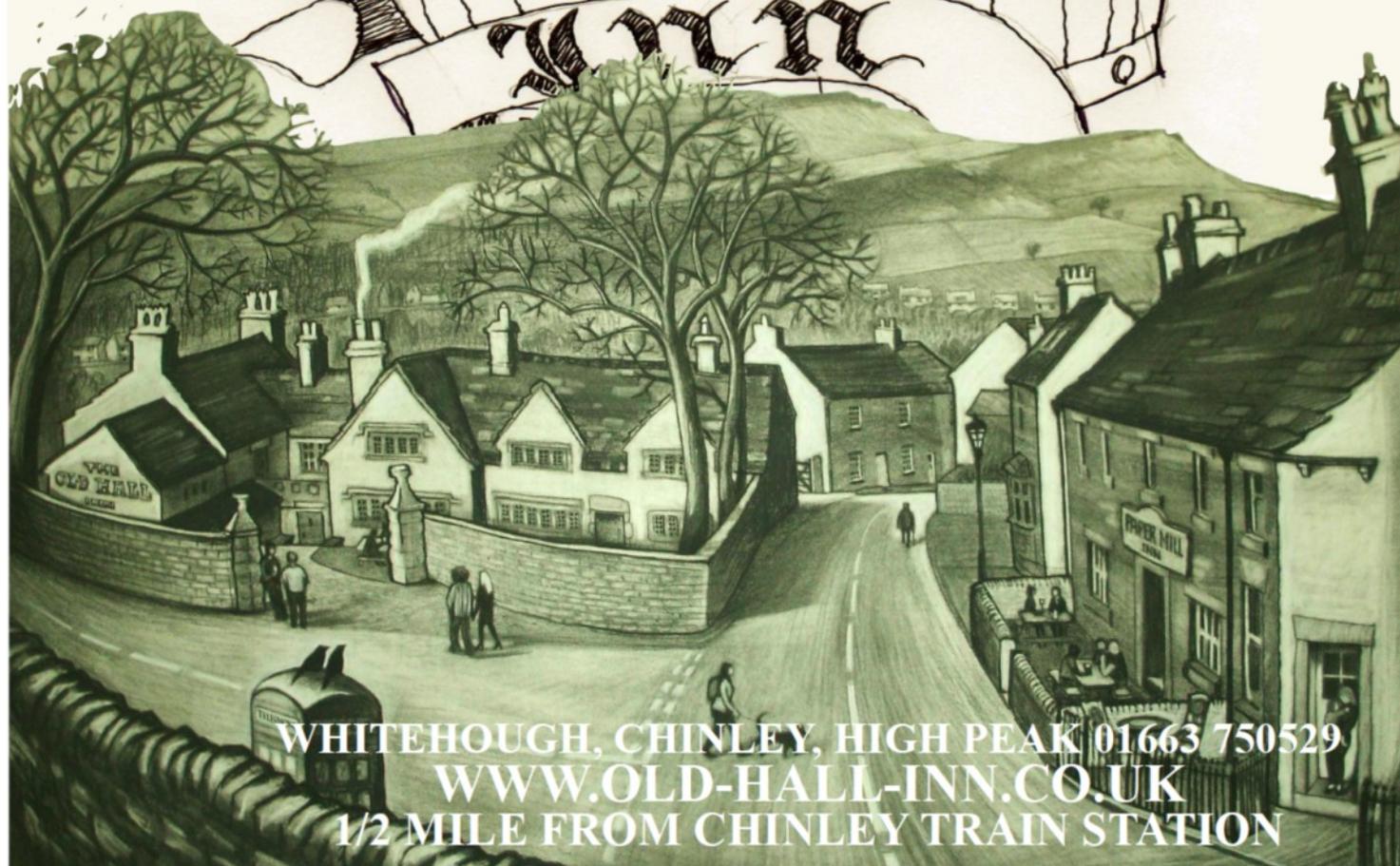
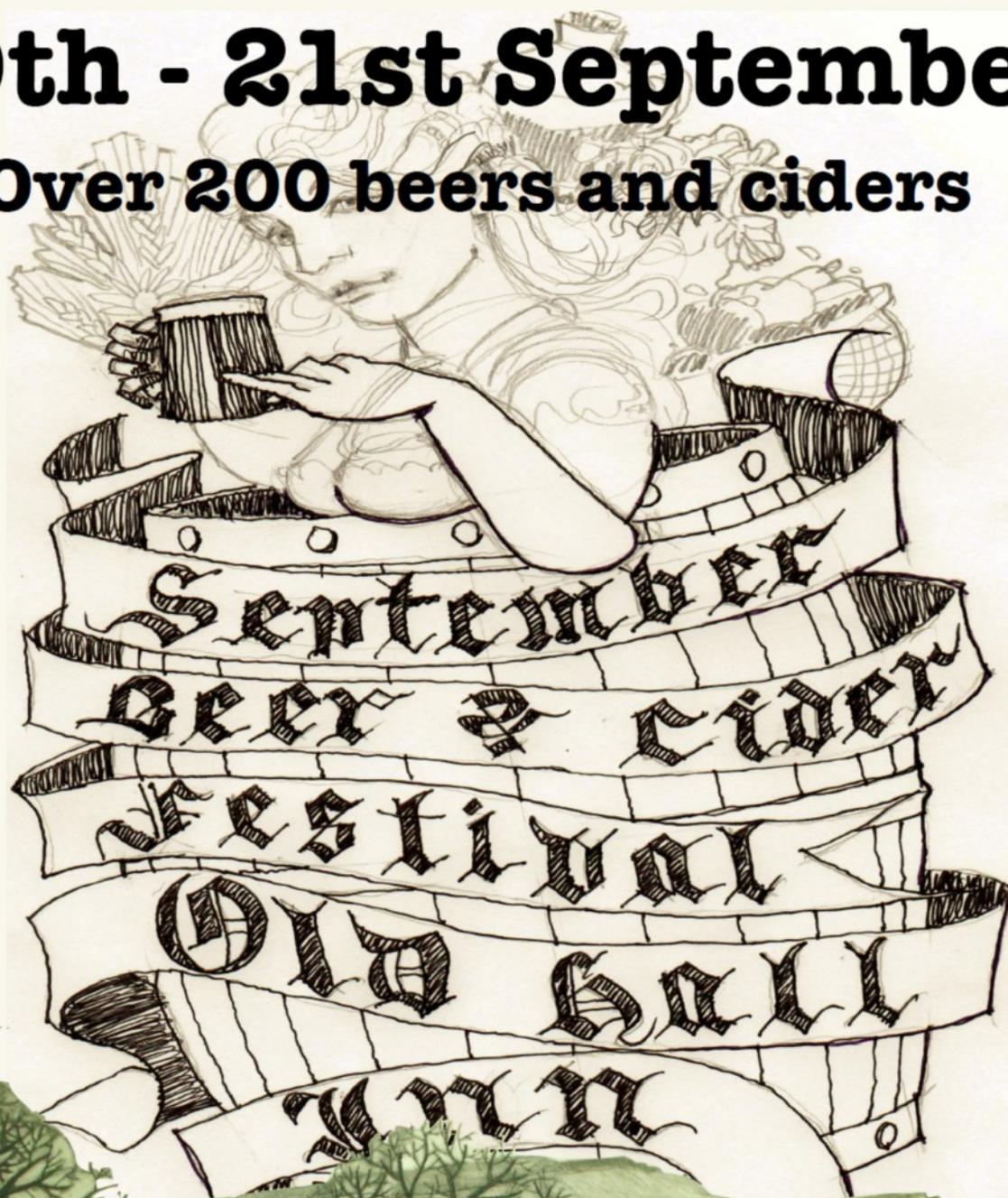
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Stagger

The Didsbury Triangle by Jerry Wicken



In my 25 years of living in this neighbourhood, I've seen the **Parrswood Hotel**, our first pub of the night, go through many incarnations. In the nineties it was bang opposite the Capitol Theatre, which was the home of Manchester Poly School of Theatre. During the intervals of particularly worthy productions we would repair to the Parrswood for a pint of Boddies before deciding whether another hour of Strindberg or another pint of Boddies was the best call. No contest!

Subsequently, the theatre was demolished and the pub had different owners, highs and lows and an inconsistent supply of real ale. As a result of all of these, visits to our nearest hostelry decreased so it was a very pleasant surprise to find the cavernous community local offering our eight staggerers a very good pint of Wychwood Goddess. I hope sincerely that good ale becomes a consistent feature of this popular local. It has a separate public bar as well as a beer garden in the back and outdoor undercover seating at the front. It serves good value food and has live events particularly at weekends.

Our next stop, **St Catherine's Social Club**, was only a few steps towards Didsbury. At 8 o'clock it was closed but a ring on the bell brought the friendly steward to the door. He was happy to let us in to try the three beers on offer. Sam Smith's Old Brewery Bitter is the club staple and on the night Robinson's Dizzy Blonde and Brain's Reverend James had recently been set up for the weekend crowd. All the beers were quite acceptable and we were very grateful that the Club opened especially for CAMRA.



Our halfway meeting point was Wetherspoons' **Milson Rhodes** towards the Didsbury end of School Lane. It seems to have been around for ages but in fact replaced the little lamented Pitcher and Piano only four years ago. The pub is busy every day and this Friday evening was no exception. I've found that sometimes the

number of staff on duty seem to struggle coping with the multitude of customers. No struggle with the beers though. The previous evening had seen one of the regular 'Meet the Brewer' events and Peerless was the brewery in focus. We were faced with several choices from the Wirral brewery including the highly rated Oatmeal Stout, Curveball Blonde and Viking Gold along with the untried Red Rocks and Full Whack. Of course the usual Wetherspoons staples of Ruddles Bitter and Greene King Abbot were available, but on the day there was also Robinson's Trooper which scored average marks and the untried Blakemere Cherry Baby and Thwaites Lancaster Bomber. A pretty good selection in a pub where I find the beers are usually in fine form.

Our happy band of staggerers gained one further member and our next stop then was the recently opened **Stoker's Arms** (previously O'Neills).

However, in the 75 metres from the Milson Rhodes, three of our team disappeared in the Didsbury Triangle only to re-emerge two hours later claiming abduction by aliens (or it might have been the doormen at the Stoker's Arms). Those of us cool enough to beat the doormen's scrutiny entered a very busy, very noisy bar which offered us Sharp's Doom Bar and Moorhouse's Pendle Witch, which were both acceptable without pulling up any trees. Three other seasonal beers were all 'off' but there were also several bottled beers available. I know there was general concern over beer prices and whilst pricey, neither real ale offering was more than £3.90 which passes muster in Didsbury.

Now on to a more traditional boozier in the shape of the **Station**. A long established Marston's house, it has a narrow bar in the front and a slightly extended room in rear. With all the change around, it would be easy to take this old favourite for granted. But in a long street with more bars than pubs and so many of these in fashion one week and yesterday's news the next it is important that we keep a constant. The Burton Bitter and Pedigree were both above average.

By chance we popped in to the previously ale-less **Slug and Lettuce** but to our surprise



two real ales were on offer. We eased past the doormen to find Greene King IPA and Wells and Young's Bombardier on decent form but served unusually in 14oz glasses. These were deemed half pints by the electronic tills and as such, very good value. There would have been a debate over whether this was noisier than the Stoker's Arms but it was too loud to hold a conversation. Nevertheless it's a welcome new cask ale outlet.



We were to have visited the **Nelson** and the **Art of Tea**, with a reputation for serving bottled conditioned ale, but time was a little short. The latter must wait for subsequent staggers but our lost trio had taken time to visit the Nelson and reported that the only real ale available, Jennings Cumberland Ale, received average marks. The Nelson is another traditional local and usually has two cask ale on tap.



Our final venue was the **Dog & Partridge** which for the last 20 years or so has been a great place for cask ale. It used, literally, to have sawdust on the floor, where you could unashamedly discard your free monkey nut shells. The sawdust has gone but the free monkey nuts survive and indeed thrived at this late stage of the evening. On this particular night the pub was unusually quiet, something which it is not if live sport is on the box. In addition to the regulars beers, Adnam's Bitter and Taylor's Landlord, absent customers would surely have enjoyed St Austell Tribute, Greenfield's Silver Owl and arguably the best beer of the night, Thornbridge Kipling.

There ended an entertaining Didsbury stagger which covered modern bars, old fashioned boozers and plenty in between. Certainly worth checking out!



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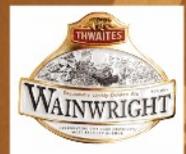
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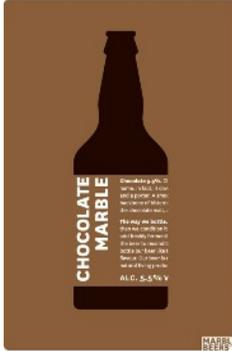
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Brewers Strike Gold

CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival is held in London every August. One of the highlights is the announcement of the winners in the Champion Beer of Britain competition. Winning either the overall competition or one of the categories can be a real boost for the breweries concerned.

In recent years brewers in the North West have largely missed out on the various awards but this time it was different with no fewer than four medals heading to brewers in or close to the *Opening Times* area – including two golds for “best in class”.

The 2014 champion “Real Ale in a Bottle” is **Marble Chocolate**. This is a real triumph for Head Brewer Matt Howgate and his team, especially as Matt only took over earlier this year. “I’m absolutely overwhelmed; it’s just fantastic news” Matt told OT. He was in fact away in the USA when the award was announced and at first believed the text message telling him of the win was a practical joke! The beer is a classic of its kind. At 5.5% it is brewed with an emphasis on chocolate malts to create the rich depth of flavour with coffee, chocolate and liquorice notes. In addition to bottles it is also available on cask and keg so any outlet can stock it should they wish.



The 2014 Champion Mild is **Bank Top Brewery's Dark Mild**. *Opening Times* has always ranked this as *the* definitive dark mild and it's pleasing to see it gaining national recognition. It's a 4% beer, tawny black in colour, with a rich, complex and satisfying taste with roast malt and liquorice notes. Head Brewer Dave Sweeney was also delighted with his win. “We’ve had some near misses before and as the awards were read out I was disappointed we didn’t win bronze and then missed out on silver. Then they announced the winner and I couldn’t quite believe what I’d heard”.



Both Matt and Dave told OT that they had both seen hugely increased orders for their winning beers – in fact Dave wondering how he was going to meet all the demand – which is great news for what is generally regarded as an endangered beer style.

The other local medallists are Macclesfield's **RedWillow Brewery** which won silver in the Best Bitter category for the excellent Directionless, an easy drinking 4.2% session ale brewed with Amarillo and Centennial hops. Crewe's **Offbeat Brewery** also won silver for Way Out Wheat in the Speciality Beers class. This is a 4.5% German-style wheat beer brewed with coriander and sweet orange peel. This beer is becoming a serial award winner – starting with bronze in the Stockport Beer Festival awards in 2011.



The overall Champion Beer of Britain is also a northern brew, but from the “wrong side” of the Pennines. Timothy Boltmaker from the Keighley brewery walked off with the honours. Oakham Citra was runner up while bronze went to Salopian Brewery's Darwin's Original.

Stretford Sip Club

Trafford & Hulme Autumn Pub of the Season

The Trafford & Hulme Branch Pub of The Season for Autumn 2014 is perhaps one of the most unusual “pubs” in the whole of the *Opening Times* area but one that has made an impression in just six months of trading. Located in former office space above an estate agent's office, the only sign of the Stretford Sip Club's existence is a hand painted wooden sign in the window adjacent to the anonymous door of the premises on the corner of Barton Road and Kingsway.



Step inside the door and assorted casks stacked under the stairs are the first clue to what lies above. Climbing to the top of the stairs and you may think you've been mistaken and you have entered into somebody's lounge complete with sofas and dining table - it's only when you venture to the rear room that you will find the bar complete with its two handpumps and well stocked fridge.

Opening in April 2014, the Sip Club was the realisation of the dream of landlady Heather Garlick, a born and bred Stretfordian who wanted to bring to her hometown the kind of place she would like to socialise at herself - a cosy and welcoming space offering only genuine quality beers and wines. How the Sip Club has embedded itself into the local area in such a short period of time is remarkable and testament to the vision and hard work of Heather and the band of family, friends and suppliers who have embraced what she set out to do.

Real ale has been at the heart of the dream from the start - initially the only beers available were from the cooled casks which sit atop the bar (no cellar here) and a small selection of bottles. If the Robin Hood pub over the road was to be believed, there was 'no demand for cask ale round here', but the Sip Club has proved that this to be the easy get out phrase that it usually is. The initial expectation of selling cask ale at weekends only quickly fell by the wayside, with demand requiring the casks be changed regularly and the two handpumps being in action all week long and on occasion a third ale being served by gravity from the bar top.

Localism is the key to almost everything the Sip Club does - almost all the cask ales sold are from local breweries, the bottled ale selection comes from Bury's Brightside brewery and bottled cider comes from the Moss Cider Project and Dunham Press.

As they say - "We don't believe in passing your hard earned cash over to faceless conglomerates but instead choose suppliers producing brilliant quality products that are a labour of love! We see our role as creating a community hub and hope to provide services not otherwise available in Stretford." It is an approach which has clearly touched a chord with the Stretford community as every event which is held in the Sip Club's function room is oversubscribed - from wine tastings to guest speakers at the Sunday Soap Box and the regular supper club evenings - they area all packed. "Hidden gem" is an overused phrase but it is rightly appropriate for the Sip Club. Even after six months, locals are still climbing those stairs for a curious look and discovering that the pub they've been yearning for is right in their midst.

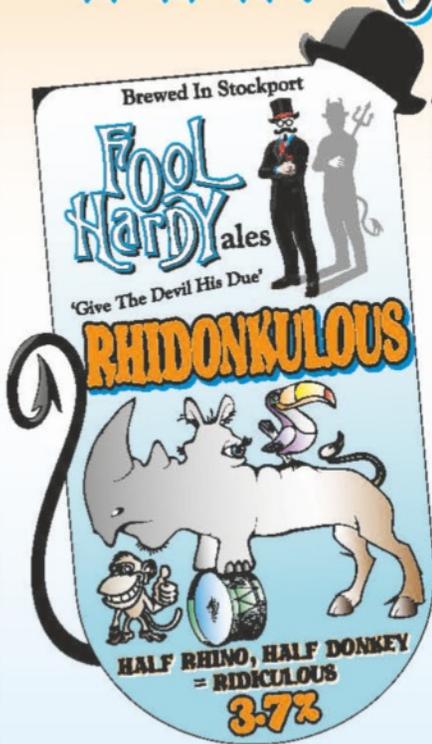
The presentation evening will be held of Friday 26th September from 8pm. All are welcome to come along to celebrate

Trafford & Hulme Summer Pub of the Season

The Trafford & Hulme Pub of the Season for Summer was the **Old Market Tavern** in Altrincham. CAMRA's John Ison (left) is seen here presenting the award to the OMT's John Glover.



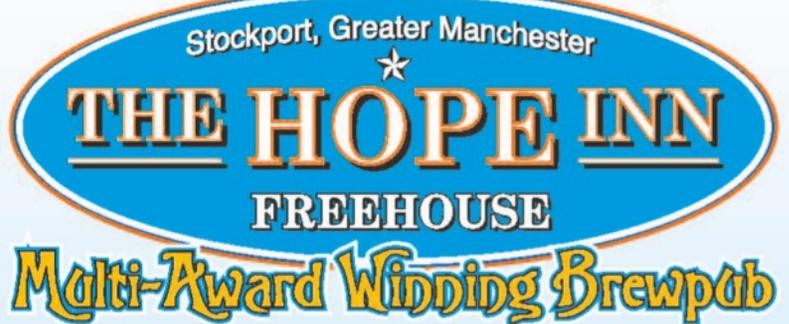
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Letter to the Editor

From: "Percy Thrower"

Re. the article in (August's *OT*) by Brendon Hall "Pub Gardens in Central Stockport" - none of the pubs mentioned from what I recollect have a beer garden, garden being the operative word. I have never been in the Armoury so I may well be mistaken. A **garden** is a planned space, usually outdoors, set aside for the display, cultivation, and enjoyment of plants and other forms of nature. The garden can incorporate both natural and man-made materials. Meanwhile, still in so called central Stockport nestling beneath arguably the best back drop in the region lies, yes you've guessed, the Crown. And guess what? There is around the back, a beer garden, not to mention several hanging baskets at the front and also the troughs acquired from SMBC and maintained and refilled with no financial help from the council.

The back garden has a new, recently-built smoking area made from natural resources and roofed with Brazillian slate. An abundance of plant life, fruit trees, several birds' nests, a cobbled court yard and a green house, not to mention the free range hens. Now that is what I call a garden. Why then was it overlooked and even the Bakers Vaults mentioned? But there was one fact: you can watch the hustle and bustle of the market place, well that must class as wild life. Again overlooked in favour of Robinsons and no credit where credit is due.

Oh dear – Brendon's article was intended as a brief over-view rather than a comprehensive list. However the Crown's beer garden is pretty impressive so say the least and is the result of much hard work. Apologies if any offence was inadvertently given – Ed.

The Unicorn, Dean Row

Everyone knows the Unicorn, don't they?, writes John Clegg. Out on the eastern edge of Wilmslow, it's a country pub but with easy access to local towns and villages. Even better, it has a good beer garden, ideal for summer, and is cosy on those blustery, cold winter evenings. In recent months it has gone from being run-of-the-mill, pubco "bog standard" back to a good, well-run local.

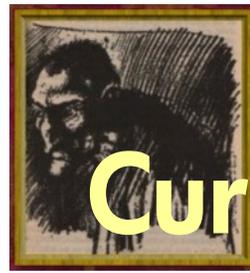


Gavin Tapping used to be assistant manager until three years ago and then was offered the chance to return, arriving back as manager late in 2013. Since then, his team has given the place a noticeable lift. Being a Chef & Brewer house, it's part of the Spirit Pub Company (possibly suffering from a faint whiff of Punch Tavern days of poor – or predictable at best – beer choice) but a recent, company-wide beer festival showed off a selection of ales not usually available in pubs like this.

The May festival saw such beers as Black Sheep Bighorn, Dark Star's Partridge, St Austell's Proper Job and York Brewery's Guzzler attract terrific interest. Then, one June morning, shortly after opening, Gavin received a visit from Cask Marque – and promptly received full marks for all four ales that were on dispense at the time. The pub proudly displays the certificate to prove it. Gavin is justly proud of his cellar-management – though he won't like me pointing this out.

Gavin is a keen supporter of locally-brewed ales and, through the SIBA scheme, RedWillow, Mobberley and Storm beers – among others – are regularly available. More everyday ales from the company list are available too but our local representatives shine here.

And the bad news? Well, Gavin's efforts are much appreciated by the company and he left in mid-August. He's off to the Blacksmith's Arms, Henbury. The Unicorn's new manager – Mary – comes fresh from the Axe & Cleaver, Dunham (also a Spirit Chef & Brewer). She plans to carry on the good work started by Gavin, in keeping a good representation of our local breweries.



Curmudgeon

Faith in the Future

We are often told that the British pub is in headlong decline, with a tidal wave of closures and pubgoing increasingly becoming irrelevant to the majority of people. However, our two largest British-owned brewers, Greene King and Marston's, are bucking this trend by opening large numbers of new-build pubs, which are generally pretty big establishments, not dinky little niche bars. They don't get the recognition they deserve, though, as they're family-oriented dining pubs located on retail and leisure parks, and thus far from the stereotype of community local or multi-beer alehouse. There's a good local example of this in Greene King's Flying Horse near Manchester Airport, opened last autumn, which must be the first new-build pub in Stockport and its immediate environs for over twenty years.

While these pubs cater for a different market than your average Wetherspoon's, they come off pretty well in a direct comparison. They often demonstrate a much higher standard of seating comfort and materials, and also beat Spoons hands down in areas such as providing natural light and toilets on the same level as the bar area.

And they're proving extremely successful, demonstrating that there are thousands of families across the country who, rather than cook and eat at home, prefer to go out for a meal once or twice a week. And it's the pub industry that's increasingly providing the kind of relaxed, informal atmosphere and value for money they're looking for. It's noticeable how busy these pubs can get around tea-time when much of the trade that traditional pubs once enjoyed has evaporated.

These family dining venues are a long way from my vision of the ideal pub, and aren't where I'd choose to go and read the paper on a Sunday lunchtime. But they certainly meet a demand and their success is undeniable. Surely it's a good thing for the future of the pub trade to get people visiting somewhere that is at least a vague approximation to a pub, and serves cask beer, rather than an establishment that bears no relation to one. Beer enthusiasts sneer at them at their peril.

Out of Place?

However, it's one thing to apply this format to a new-build site, but something else entirely to convert an existing pub, as Holt's are in the process of doing with the Cheadle Hulme. They have set up a new joint venture company called Touchwood Inns in conjunction with the people behind the Cloverleaf Pub Company, who built up an estate of new-build dining pubs in the North of England that they eventually sold to Greene King. The intention is to apply this formula to a mixture of new developments and current Holt's pubs.

I can't help thinking, though, that the Cheadle Hulme isn't the right location for this. In recent years, Cheadle Hulme has seen a number of new pub openings and has developed into something of a drinking circuit. Situated right next to the station, the Cheadle Hulme pub has a mixture of food and drink trade and surely it would have made more sense to try to tweak the balance between the two rather than imposing an overwhelmingly food-led formula that would be more at home on a leisure park. It's also in a prosperous area where this style of operation may seem rather cheap and cheerful.

While you can't blame Holt's for trying to develop the food trade in their pubs and get away from their traditional image as operators of no-frills boozers, their actions on this front sometimes seem to demonstrate an uncertain touch.

Curmudgeon Online: curmudgeoncolumns.blogspot.com

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High Peak Pub Scene

Robin Wignall & Tom Lord with News and Views

Peak Practice

With Robin Wignall

Carnival Day in Whaley Bridge at the end of June comes as a typical Peak District summer occasion. There is a Rose Queen and a procession, an art exhibition, a chance to see the completed Well Dressing, a fell race and other attractions for visitors and locals alike. It is a busy day for the pubs and with a couple of them installing extra bars there is a wider range of beers available than is usual.

At the **White Horse**, Wincle Waller was available as a guest. The **Drum & Monkey** had Storm Bosley Cloud, 4Ts Loaded, from Runcorn, and the new local brew, Rapa Nui from Whaley Bridge Brewery.



At the **White Hart**, a second bar was opened at garden level. This was to accommodate the beer festival postponed from July. The original planned date clashed with the Pub 6-a-side cricket competition held each year at Whaley Bridge Cricket Club. This is another part of the Peak District's continuing summer festival.

Mid July saw the Buxworth Olympics at **Buxworth War Memorial Club**. The outside sporting events were held on the village playing field. In the bar, Storm Desert Storm and Silk of Amnesia and Whaley Bridge Rapa Nui made for good drinking. The Storm Band played on the car park on a wet Saturday evening. Of course, also in Buxworth the **Navigation** is worth a call. A recent visit found a good range of Abbeydale beers and Hook Norton Lion, whilst a batch of Green Mill beers from Rochdale were waiting in the cellar.

At Furness Vale the **Soldier Dick** is a pub with a long history, some of which is documented on the interior walls. The licence was transferred, back in the mists of time, from the Posting House at Stoneheads on the top road from Disley to Whaley Bridge. A building, now a private house, still stands at the site of the Posting House and some of it could well be the historic original. When the turnpike road, what is now the A6, was built along the lower slopes of the Goyt Valley, the opening of the Soldier Dick gave travellers a good port of call. At one time it was a Gartside's house - which later became Bent's & Gartside's, and later still

because part of the Bass pub empire. With the demise of this chain, the eventual owners were Punch Taverns. Fortunately Punch sold the pub on free of tie to Mike Nelson who now runs a great pub with a good range of beers and decent food. Recently available was Thwaites Little Bewdy, a paler hoppier version of Wainwright — yes really! Brains SA Gold and Exmoor Gold were also on the bar.



The **Railway** (above) in Whaley Bridge is good for live music on Saturday evenings, whilst recently a Dutch duet played on Sunday teatime with Robinsons Unicorn, Trooper and Rosie's Pig to wet the whistle.

A recent call at the **Goyt** in Whaley Bridge found a blast from the past, Courage Best Bitter. These days it is brewed at Wells and Young's. Ilkley Mary Jane, a pale, hoppy 3.5% brew was a good refreshing brew, whilst Weetwood Cheshire Cat continues as a local favourite.

Over in Whitehough, Chinley, the **Old Hall** (see picture above right) does what it does well. Two beers from Phoenix, Pale Moonlight and



Black Bee Honey Porter, were accompanied by two from Beartown. Of course the best time to go to the Old Hall will be for the Festival there and across the road in the **Paper Mill** in September. Look out for the advert in OT for further information.

The original July plans for the beer festival at the **White Hart** in Whaley Bridge were somewhat restricted by the threat of Hurricane Bertha to the marquee which was to be a canopy for the downstairs bar. However, there was still a good choice of beer to be had inside the pub. A Saturday visit found Jarrow Rivet Catcher, a fine hoppy pale beer; Okells Aile, an impressive porter, smoky and peaty — almost a stout; and Backyard The Hoard, a decent bitter from Walsall. Two ciders were available, Thatcher's Heritage and Rosie's Pig. Beers to follow included Red Squirrel Hopfest and Keltok Magik. The live music on Saturday was welcome and there were certainly some interesting beers to sample over the following few days. This was a venture that deserved to succeed and, hopefully, will be repeated.

High Peak Pub News

With Tom Lord

In Stalybridge it is reported that the **Millpond** in Armentieres Square has closed. However the **Astley Arms** on Robinson Street has re-opened as a free house after being closed for six months. There is no real ale at present but watch this space.

Up in Mossley the **Friendship Inn** has also closed but there are still three other excellent real ale pubs within 250 yards, **The Best of Brass**, **Commercial** and the **Britannia**.

Over in Ashton the **Dog & Partridge** has been closed and the word is that it may become a restaurant. On Mossley Road the **Cottage Tavern** is currently up for sale, free of tie.

Out in Glossop, Howard Town brewery has a new brew out. Super Fortress (4.4%) is a brown, quite malty bitter-sweet ale. It is also reported that the **Moon and Sixpence** is to add another handpump which will be used for more local breweries' beers.



In Dukinfield on King Street the **Angel Inn** (pictured above) is providing a much needed good selection of real ale for the area. On my last visit York Guzzler, Green Mill Old Git and Thwaites Lancaster Bomber were available, together with cider on hand pump. This pub is well worth a visit: it's comfortable and friendly, and it's easily accessible on the 330 Stockport to Ashton bus route.

Macclesfield Pub of the Season

The Jolly Sailor, Macclesfield – Jill Hasler reports

Sunderland Street has become one of the 'go-to' real ale destinations in Macclesfield. With the Waters Green Tavern on Waters Green at one end, and the RedWillow bar on Park Green at the other, there are no fewer than seven other pubs between the two. However, the Jolly Sailor is often the busiest of the lot. This success was recently recognised when Macclesfield & East Cheshire CAMRA presented the pub with their Summer Pub of the Season award.

The Jolly has always had a loyal group of regulars, but since Glyn Naden took over four years ago he and his team have built a reputation for good beer and a friendly welcome. This has meant more and more people including this modest looking pub on their Sunderland Street outings, as well as recommending it to visitors to the town.

The pub has retained its separate drinking areas, decorated with a variety of objects and memorabilia - on our last visit some time was spent enjoying the Home Front war posters in the corridor. There is what I can only call an eclectically decorated outside drinking area, as well as a pair of rooms upstairs available to hire for meetings and parties, and which are also open for Sunday lunches. Being a Punch Taverns outlet restricts Glyn's beer choices, but on the night of the presentation a very good Castle Rock beer was on offer, as well as Everard's Tiger and Bass (and many claim he serves the best Bass in the area) - and these beers are not often available locally. In fact the Jolly Sailor sells Castle Rock's excellent Harvest Pale on a permanent basis and in May was awarded GEM status by the brewery.

The aforementioned regulars were out in force to celebrate the award with Glyn - it is great to see a pub packed full of people just wanting to show their appreciation of what he has achieved. He was even presented with an extra certificate, drawn by one of his regulars. He is pictured above (right) receiving the awards from CAMRA's Dave Hasler.

There was one dissenting voice - a mild complaint from a CAMRA member that on his usual Sunday night visit with friends, which he has been making for years, he often can no longer sit in his favourite corner! A victim of Glyn's success... but the complaint insists he will of course still continue to visit, as the pub is a real home from home. Make sure to include it in your next Macclesfield trip.



Howard Town Changes

Howard Town Brewery was established in 2005 and has been successfully trading in Glossop and beyond since then. In April this the year the two founding directors retired, selling the business to husband and wife team Stuart and Emma Swann (pictured above).



Stuart is the head brewer and salesman, and has been home brewing since his student days. He enters the commercial brewing industry with a background in biomedical sciences, NHS and pharmaceutical laboratories and tree work! The latter has been useful in creating two new solid oak bars for the brewery and event hire. Even more useful is the biomedical science degree. Stuart enthuses, "finally I am thoroughly enjoying putting my background in biology, chemistry and microbiology into good use". As he understands the science behind brewing Stuart can use this, combined with his fastidious attention to detail, to ensure the brews are consistent and taste even better than ever.

Emma is the assistant brewer, drayman, record keeper, voice of reason and general dogsbody! Her background is in outdoor education and play but her physical strength, garnered originally as a gymnastics coach, children's gardening teacher and play worker, enables Emma to deliver the beer and turn a few heads by being a woman in a male-dominated job. One landlord said, "I used to do what you're doing, delivering the beer, in those days it was done by two chaps, now it's just one strapping lass!" A programme of refurbishment has begun and plans are afoot to open the doors by the end of the year for brewery tours, open evenings as well as other exciting ideas.

North Manchester Events

This month North Manchester CAMRA is running two special events that will interest drinkers across the region.

From **Friday to Sunday September 12th to 14th**, there are walking tours of closed pubs. Not as daft as it seems, this is a contribution to Heritage Open Days weekend, the national event full of free things to do. There are two tours: one from the New Oxford, Bexley Square at 3.00pm visiting pubs, breweries and more; and the other looking at Ancoats starting from the Crown & Kettle, New Cross at 6.30pm. There's chance of decent ale before and after - well, they do finish in a live pub. More details on the Heritage Open Days website. Trips are free (pay for your own beer) and there's no need to book. Both tours will run daily, last about 90 minutes and cover about two miles.

On **Wednesday September 24th** there is a special event to celebrate the start of Cask Ale Week, the national celebration of real ale. This is a rapid tour of all nine breweries in the Branch area for nine photo ops (you might even sip the odd half). Bring your own glass and a camera! Holt's, Boggart, Hyde's, Seven Bro7hers, First Chop, Star, Runaway, Blackjack, and Marble are on the itinerary. Note this does not imply a full conducted tour round nine breweries! That wouldn't leave any time for a proper drink, would it? The bus will start from Stevenson Square at 6.00pm sharp, calling at each brewery as above, and finish in the Marble Arch shortly after 10.00pm. The cost of the tour will be £5 each, and there will be a collection during the evening for a nominated charity. You may join the tour at any of the brewery stops, but advance booking is essential and is restricted to CAMRA members only. Details from contact on page 4.

The beer range has for now continued as before but with a new addition, a 4.4% beer called Superfortress described by Stuart as "malty, toffee caramels with a fruity, grassy hoppiness". Look out for it in local outlets. For events at home you can buy bottles, bags in boxes and casks from the brewery door. You can even hire a single hand pump right through to a full event bar with staff. While the website receives an overhaul, brewery updates can be found on www.facebook.com/howardtownbrewery.

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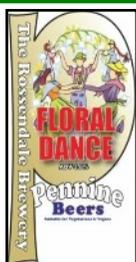
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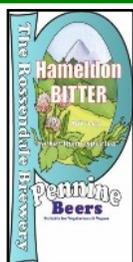
Contacts - Office: 0333 210 4021; Geoff: 07816 912 794; Robin: 07709 874 783

Meet our beers - Beer Tasting Notes



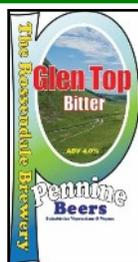
Floral Dance 3.8%

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

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Heard at the Bar

Pub News covering Stockport, Manchester and beyond

City News

Opening Times was extremely sorry to hear that landlord Steve Crook has left the **City Arms** in Kennedy Street. As we reported earlier in the year, Steve suffered a serious back injury which has seen him unable to work in the cellar since then. Unfortunately, his recovery from this injury has taken a lot longer than doctors originally predicted, which has ultimately led to his departure from the pub, where he has been for eight years, the latter four as manager. Perhaps it is fitting that one of the final accolades of his tenure was the pub being named Trafford & Hulme Branch Pub of The Year for 2014. In an unfortunate turn of events, shortly after Steve left the pub, Max Sheen who has been covering cellar duties during Steve's incapacitation also departed. A new manager has been appointed and has vowed to maintain the business as usual.



On Dale Street in the Northern Quarter, the re-opened **Allotment Bar** occupies the premises of a former clothes shop which in turn replaced the old Nickleby's pub – so it's almost come full circle. We say "almost" as Allotment is very different from the old Nickleby's.

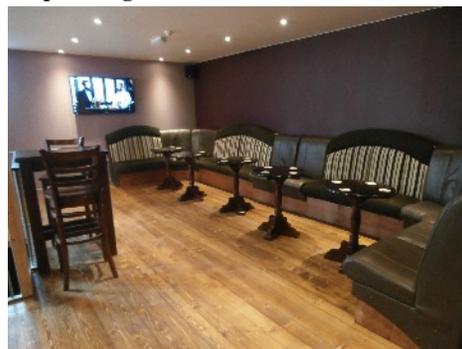


The theme inside has a rustic air, and a slightly unfinished look about it. It has been opened out with a central bar, divided into areas such as the 'Tool Shed' and things you will find inside include the likes of lampshades made from upturned buckets, watering cans, plant pots, a picket fence against one wall, a corrugated iron bar front and lots of other horticultural bits and pieces.

On the food and ale front, there are four handpulls for cask ales, on *OT's* visit these were Burscough Priory Gold, Moorhouse's Pride Of Pendle, Prospect Pioneer and Robinsons Dizzy Blonde. A wide and varied food menu is served from opening time until around 9.00pm.

Just as *Opening Times* went to press the **Smithfield** on Swan Street reopened after a long period of closure, and after several reported false starts. The co-owners are Paul Downes and John Roach, while the extensive

building work was carried out by Paul's brother John. The pub looks very different (see picture below) and is also notably bigger, having been extended into the building next door. It's still a work in progress but Paul and John were keen to get the place open as quickly as possible. Still to come are some finishing touches upstairs and the conversion of part of the cellar into a bar area which will be used for the pub's regular beer festivals.



There are nine handpumps on the bar and on opening night four of these were in operation dispensing Outstanding Blond, Millstone Vale Mill, Blackjack's Summer Pale Ale and Stout. The number of ales is expected to grow as trade increases. The pub is also to revert to its old name of the Smithfield Tavern and will have a formal re-launch this month.

Micro Pub for Urmston

An American and an Englishman are bringing their favourite beers from both countries to their joint venture, the **Prairie**



Schooner Taphouse in Urmston. Local real ales poured straight from the cask will be joined by American bottled beers for drinking on the premises or to take home. Robert MacRae, originally of Kansas, was introduced to English real ale 20 years ago by Christian McKie. Both are long-time CAMRA members and beer festival volunteers who have been inspired by the popularity of micro-pubs to convert retail premises in Urmston town centre into a drinking parlour and bottle shop.

Although specialising in real ale fresh from the cask, they will also offer bottled beers from near and far, a few wines and whiskies, plus traditional cider and perry. Everything will be made by independent producers. In the belief that it only takes good beer and good conversation to make a great pub, the Prairie Schooner will be free from loud music and sports TV, while food for now will be limited to classic pub snacks. Named after the covered wagons used by settlers to cross the American West, this pioneering venture is due to open early this month.

Stockport Shorts

From time to time *Opening Times* is asked – "is the **Olde Vic** closed?" We always answer, "no, it just looks that way". No longer – the pub has had a bright new coat of paint and new signage. Here's a picture of landlord Steve Brannan outside the new-look pub. The Vic also has a rather fine outdoor drinking area at the back. Five cask ales are usually on sale and quality is immaculate we find.



Mark Munro's slow but sure restoration of the historic features at the **Alexandra** (Northgate Road, Edgeley) continues and the latest development is the uncovering of the tiled floor in the hall and lobby area. *OT* has been calling into the Alex since the mid-1980s and can never remember seeing this rather splendid floor before. The Alexandra is already on CAMRA's National Inventory of Heritage Pubs and this certainly increases its status. Here's a picture of part of the tile work:



In Heald Green, the **Griffin** is due to close for a major refit and will re-open at the end of the month with a brand new look including pizza ovens, ice cream counter and deli counter. Activities will include live music, a quiz night, and open mic nights. More in due course.

More pub news on page 19

THE BEER SHOP

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Covering Altrincham, Manchester and beyond

Old Hall Festival



This month sees another major beer festival at the **Old Hall** at Whitehough, near Chinley – it's about a 10 minute walk from Chinley Station. It's also one of *OT's* favourite pub-based beer festivals. Well, in fact it's based at two pubs – both the Old Hall itself and the **Paper Mill** across the road. This year's event runs from 19th to 21st September and there will be over 200 real ales, ciders and perries to choose from (not all on at the same time) across both venues. There's a BBQ planned, live entertainment, and the popular folk train will be running to Chinley on the Saturday afternoon. It can get very busy and we like to go along on Friday afternoon when the pub is a little quieter and you can amble around and really soak up the atmosphere. Recommended.

Chorlton Update

August was a good month for the furniture salesmen of Chorlton with no fewer than three bars in the area undergoing makeovers. The first was **Oddest** on Wilbraham Road which has had new fixed seating installed outside, the inside floor stripped, a lick of fresh paint and some reworking of the internal oddities. New furniture inside has created a bit more space.



Next to see the decorators was the **Marble Beer House** which has been repainted throughout, had the bar reworked to include installation of a second display fridge (allowing them to increase their range of bottled beers), much needed refurbishment of the bathrooms and new furniture installed. The large table which used to dominate the front section of the pub has gone and has been replaced by a number of smaller tables and chairs which give a lot more flexibility for smaller groups.

The final entry in the triumvirate was **Elektrik** which has replaced all of its internal furniture. A series of fixed booths with seating for four have been installed down the left hand side and the rear of the bar with the "school canteen" tables and chairs which made up the rest of the seating having been replaced with rectangular

high tables and stools. Unfortunately, the refurbishment did not extend to the toilets which continue to let this otherwise well kept bar down.

Farmers Arms

And now for something completely different. Last month the **Farmers Arms** (Park Lane, Poynton) reopened after a 14-week closure and a substantial joint investment by Robinsons and business partners Martin Crank and Simon Hood. The change is dramatic.



As the brewery press release says: "With 10 square metres of wall mounted flowers, 2,900 multi-coloured butterflies and a life size floral cow, the Farmers Arms is anything but your run-of-the-mill village pub". There's certainly been a lot of money spent here and it is probably true to say there's nothing else like it in the Robinsons estate. Does it work though? It's very bright and light and clearly the focus is intended to be a major food operation and it's likely to become something of a destination venue for that alone. That's not to say drinkers will be unwelcome and four cask beers (Unicorn, Trooper, Dizzy Blonde and Citra) were available on opening night. In addition the drinking area is nicely split up into different areas, all very well appointed.

Comments on the local Poynton Forum have been very positive but others have wondered whether it's been perhaps a bit "over designed". Certainly some of the features look as though they will require heavy maintenance to keep them up to scratch. Time will tell we guess. It should be a success though and credit to all involved for daring to roll out something as different as this.

By the way the cow is called Ermintrude and here she is:



Pub & Brewery Shorts



We reported last month that the **Orange Tree** in Altrincham was due to re-open under the management of Chris Clish, licensee of Chorlton's Beech Inn. Prior to opening, plans for a major investment in the pub by owners Enterprise Inns were brought forward so that the planned refurbishment could take place before the pub re-opened. Although this delayed the planned mid-August opening, if all goes to plan, the pub should have re-opened by the time you read this.

Hornbeam Brewery

has redesigned its pumpclips – and very smart they look too. There's a picture of one here. Hornbeam has also teamed up with charity Forever Manchester to create two bottled beers with 10p from the sale of each bottle going to the charity. The first of these beers is B, a 4% honey beer, while the other is Forever Cloudy (a pun on the Mancunian weather) and is a hazy premium lime lager (using Kaffir Lime leaves) at 5.4%. Worth looking out for.



In Didsbury **Chalk Bar** has opened on Wilmslow Road. It's a modern bar-cum-eatery with separate areas for food and drinks and table service all round. Food is available for most of the day and cask beer is on sale too. When *OT* called the two handpumps were dispensing OK Thwaites Wainwright and rather tired Storm Beaufort Ale (both at £3.50 – not uncommon for this type of bar in this sort of location). There's half price house champagne on Saturday evenings though.

Congratulations to the **Coach & Four** in Wilmslow. This Hydes managed pub has recently been named the Best Managed Pub for the North West region in the Great British Pub Awards for 2014. The pub will now go forward to the national final with the results due out on 11th September.



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