

UNICORN



It's Time to Change



At the Bulkley Arms, Menai Bridge, Pryd Kearney and Nick Mount rose to the challenge and made ample outdoor preparation

The Company has left no stone unturned in the run up to the ban on smoking in enclosed public places, which means big changes for the pub trade.

Houses in Wales have been getting used to the new regime since 2nd April when they were hit by the rule, while for England the legislation kicks in from 6.00 am on Sunday 1st July.

Preparing for the ban has been a huge undertaking with financial repercussions both for the Company and its tenants, not the least of which has been the provision of smoking shelters. Thankfully most of that work is now well underway and the task ahead is to ensure that the changes work successfully in practice.

Robinson's own series of road shows earlier in the year spelt out what was required, and the *Smoking Solutions Guidance* document backed up the torrent of information that has flooded through the trade press.

The obvious requirements now are to ensure that all enclosed public places are smokefree, exterior provision for smokers is made and that the rules are followed.

The legislation will be enforced by local authorities but those in charge of premises where the law applies have a legal responsibility to ensure that they become and remain smokefree.

Tony Massey, District Manager for the Welsh estate, said: *"The initial feedback has been extremely positive on the whole. We have seen new customers and families venturing out, although it is fortunate that the good weather, Easter holiday and high proportion of our pubs that are food-led has been on the side of the Welsh houses."*

Checklist

- Make provision for customers to smoke outdoors
- Ensure indoor no-smoking signs are in place
- Train staff to understand the law and the nature of their responsibilities
- Remove all indoor ashtrays
- Remove any indoor smoking rooms
- Spring clean your premises
- Install the No Smoking entrance sign(s) provided free by the Company

Any further guidance required is available from the Tied Trade Department or John Dixon Associates on 0161 682 0964

As the smoking ban now gets underway across England, time will tell what effect it will have on Robinson's diverse estate and how the trade will change.

Rallying Round

The fighting spirit of licensee Yvonne Hallworth is helping her overcome the trauma of seeing the Davenport Arms, Woodford damaged by fire.

Having started in an upstairs room, the blaze had already taken hold by the time a customer raised the alarm.

As well as forcing a brief closure of the house, the fire destroyed many personal possessions and rendered the first-floor living quarters temporarily uninhabitable.

"It was a horrendous experience, very stressful," said Yvonne, whose family have run the pub for over 75 years.

She paid tribute, however, to the help she received from the Company in coping with the crisis.

"I rang Mr Paul who was at an exhibition in Manchester and he came straight over. He was absolutely brilliant - I couldn't have asked for more support."



Fast action kept the doors open for Yvonne Hallworth at the Davenport Arms

Electricians were quickly on site to ensure the pub's wiring was safe while building contractors worked to clear debris from outside.

Remarkably, Yvonne was able to open most of the house for business the next day although industrial cleaning was required the following week.

While Yvonne and 14-year old son Jack moved to live nearby with her mother, June, Senior Architectural Assistant Phillip Ingham organised a major repair programme for the pub.

The work will include new wiring, plumbing, plastering and decorating upstairs while the Company is also taking the opportunity to implement other maintenance and so keep disruption to a minimum.

Pint Size

Projecting a positive picture

A sincere thank you is owed to all the tenants who completed and returned the recent questionnaire. Consultants Elliott People worked with Robinson's on the survey which asked licensees about their dealings with all aspects of the Company.

Thanks also go to those who agreed to provide open and honest testimonials based on their experiences of being Robinson's tenants.

The 16 licensees from a broad cross-section of the estate, each with their individual take on the Company, have succinctly let their views be known.

Across the board the messages have portrayed a company that values trust and stability, has a short command chain and achieves success by working with its tenants towards a common goal.

The first three of the testimonials from The Plough at Whitegate, Queens Head at Hawkshead and the Glyn-y-Weddw, Llanbedrog will appear in the new information pack for prospective tenants and managers. Their messages provide an unbiased account of how the Company works and the values it applies.

It is intended that the remaining 13 testimonials will be used to support similar projects in the future.

Kath's back

Regulars at The Castle in Oldham Street, Manchester have given a unanimous thumbs up to the tribute that has been paid to Kath Smethurst following her sad death last August.



A tiled tribute to Kath Smethurst

Her son Damien has since taken on the tenancy but before Kath passed away she asked that her family should decide on what to do with her ashes after she had gone

Damien explained: "We weren't quite sure what to do at the time but one of our regulars, Mark Kennedy, who is a respected artist, asked if he could create a mosaic tribute to Mum and include her ashes in the grout."

Almost without hesitation the family agreed and the result is a four-foot high work of art that now takes pride of place behind the bar of The Castle.

"We were absolutely delighted with the likeness and wanted to thank Mark publicly so we contacted the Manchester Evening News. From there the story was picked up by the national media and I travelled down to London and gave an interview on ITV's This Morning show. It's a fitting tribute to Mum and just what she would have wanted."

Substantially Unaltered



Cliff Hodgkinson shows why the Bleeding Wolf has been recognised

Picture courtesy of the Congleton Chronicle

This year one more house in the estate has found its way onto the National Inventory of Historic Interiors which is compiled by the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA).

This time it was the turn of the Bleeding Wolf at Scholar Green to catch the eye of the compilers who were working on a new web-based edition of the listing. The site identifies just 250 of the UK's 60,000 pubs as having interiors of outstanding historical interest. The majority of other public houses have undergone significant alterations leaving the Bleeding Wolf as one of a small proportion to have retained their features of significance.

The inventory is split into two sections with Part One listing pubs with interiors that have remained largely unaltered since World War Two and also certain exceptional examples from the post-War era (up to 1976). Part Two identifies houses that, although altered, have exceptional rooms or features of national historical importance.

CAMRA says that, like each of the public houses listed on their site, the Bleeding Wolf should be cherished and preserved for future generations to enjoy.

The pub, built in 1934 and now kept by Cliff and Ann Hodgkinson, has been noted for its thatched roof and rendered white walls that give a clue as to what to expect inside. Exposed timbering and oak panelling feature strongly along with stone and ingle-nook fireplaces while detailing such as stained glass also indicates how ambitious Robinson's development was at this fine multi-roomed house.

Geoff Brandwood, who is the Historic Pubs Caseworker for CAMRA, told the *Unicorn* magazine: "It's a real challenge to find all the houses that need to be listed and very exciting when we find a house like the Bleeding Wolf. It's often not until somebody with local knowledge tips us off that we become aware of their existence."

At the Bleeding Wolf, Cliff said: "Passers-by can't miss the building and its obvious presence regularly attracts customers, the Japanese absolutely love it. We even had one American visitor who came in and immediately phoned home to tell them about it. The funny thing is they were asleep and had to be woken to hear the story, which was shared in a loud voice with everybody in the pub."

Of course the Bleeding Wolf is only the latest in a string of Robinson's houses to have been included in Part One of the inventory. The list also includes the Harrington Arms, Gawsworth; March Hare, Ashton-under-Lyne; Arden Arms, Millgate; Swan With Two Necks, Stockport; Black Horse, Preston; The Plough, Gorton; The Alexandra, Edgeley and the Holly Bush, Bollington.



At the Black Horse in Preston, a gem on the national Inventory, Sonya Walmsley takes care of the interior



The bow fronted bar is ornately tiled

There are more houses in Part Two and Geoff Brandwood is also in the process of compiling a Regional Inventory. The full listings can be found at www.heritagepubs.org.uk

It is a demonstration of the way the Company recognises its architectural gems that so many have been preserved and are now treasured for being so special.

Looking forwards after 50 years

A very special milestone was celebrated on 21st January as Mr Peter reached his 50th anniversary with the Company. Robinson's has come a long way since 1957, of course, and there was plenty of time to reflect on its achievements during an afternoon party organised by Doug Almond at the Fletchers Arms, Denton.

The pub was full almost to capacity as Doug, who has a long association with the Company and whose family currently runs the Fletchers Arms, had invited as many guests as could be accommodated. Some of those present had known Mr Peter since the day he started work at the Brewery, at a time when open fires heated the offices and a five-and-a-half-day week was the norm, while many others could remember him taking up the chairmanship on 10th February 1978.

In his speech, for which his secretary Sheila Ashton helped with meticulous research, Mr Peter highlighted some of the significant changes since 1957. At the time a pint of beer cost 1s 7d with a barrel at 381s. No doubt these seemed high prices at the time – if only things had stood still.

It is not, though, just the price of beer that has changed, but the nature of the Company. This was illustrated by the fact that in 1957 the estate consisted of 339 houses of which 265 remain today. There were also 90 off-licences within the estate.

While disposals have always featured in the nature of the business, acquisitions have also played their part, with Bell and Co having been purchased in

1949 and then Hartleys in 1982. Most recently a further 17 houses were acquired last year.



50 years - Doug Almond pays tribute to Mr Peter

The celebration included speeches from Doug Almond, Mike Jones of Batemans and Ian Nivan, who had been a tenant with Robinson's for many years. As is traditional on such occasions, the event was recorded for posterity in a photo album that was later presented to Mr Peter.

Perhaps the most significant part of the afternoon, though, was the tribute Ian Niven paid to the Chairman as being a 'caring, people's man'.

IT Delivering the right solution

A major three-year review of the Company's IT system has come to fruition.

Information Systems Manager Simon Burchill and Systems Support Analyst Simon Fuller have combined their efforts during the process which integrates the order, invoice and finance functions into a single software package.

Once the decision to replace the old BrewMaster system, which had previously been updated, had been taken, the process of identifying a suitable successor could begin.

As a member of the Independent Family Brewers of Britain, Robinson's were able to speak to other members about their IT systems and quickly identified Microsoft's 'Dynamics' as the preferred choice. Accountants Baker Tilley were also involved in the process to ensure its compatibility.

Simon Burchill explained: "With the suppliers, K3, we then set about holding a series of workshops for the 'user departments' within the Company. At that point we could hone the enhanced package to fit our unique requirements. Three phases were identified: Firstly replace the existing three main order processing and finance systems, secondly implement a new architects project-costing system and finally other new areas such as a bar-code stock-control system."

Phase one of the project eventually went live on 16th February proceeded by a series of training sessions, arranged by Miss Veronica.



Beyond the call of duty: Simon Burchill (R) and Simon Fuller delivered the right solution

Due to the sheer size of this first phase, it is a testament to all those who were involved, and in some cases worked beyond the call of duty, throughout the changeover.

TEAMWORK BUILDS SUCCESS

For the many sports fans throughout the Company, the past 12 months have brought some testing moments as the national cricket and football teams have repeatedly underperformed. It is a stark reminder, says Mr Peter, that, however much individual talent a side may possess, success only comes if everyone works towards a common aim.

Teamwork has been a major part of Robinson's philosophy over the years and happily the ethos remains as strong today as ever. The last year has seen directors, staff and tenants achieve their objectives in a variety of projects including the development of our brands and a major increase in production capacity at UPC.

Increased Volumes

Innovations regarding branding over the year have included the successful launch of Dark Smooth and the acquisition of the UK right for the trade name Oldham Bitter.

Following the national trend, sales of beer in the on-trade continued to fall back slightly but the purchase of new pubs and increased volumes brewed under contract has helped to keep the mash tuns full.

Potential

Volumes bottled under contract at UPC rose again driven by higher demand from existing customers and some new, large customers. Our view is that there is still further potential for us in the market for contract bottling and brewing and we continue to expand our facilities in order to exploit this.

Despite these and other achievements, we, like all teams, face stern opposition at times. Currently this is in the form of the very high cost of the Government's smoking ban which comes into force on 1st July. The impact on trade has yet to be seen but will, I'm afraid, be negative.

Nonetheless, the hard work of everyone associated with the Company has helped to bring about an increase in underlying profits (once the effect of the sale of a large amount of shares in Jennings brothers the previous year is discounted) providing a very solid foundation for the months ahead.

Once again my thanks and those of my fellow directors go to everyone who has helped produce another very satisfactory set of results.

BRINGING OUT THE BEST



A very high standard of finish has been delivered at The Albert by Phillip Ingham and the team

Commanding a prominent position in the centre of Bowness, The Albert has always been a bonus for our Lake District estate. This has been further enhanced following a major redevelopment of the property that has catapulted the business to its just position as the place to be seen.

The sympathetic scheme carried out by Phillip Ingham of the Architects department with design input from Neil Robinson-Stanier has just completed. The results are impressive, smart and tasteful, with design that has carefully considered the period of the property, traditional core values of service and our customer needs in a very competitive trade where expectations are high.

The alteration was carried out within the existing footprint of the building, involved major reconstruction and has increased trading space by around 30% for licensee David Reid. Having opened up public areas at first floor with its commanding views, opportunities have been further enhanced by a bespoke outdoor drinking and dining space.

The development of this scale carried out on site by Pochin Contractors has taken a lot of careful planning and project management by Phillip. Careful phasing of the work enabled trading to continue, whilst maintaining a high spec throughout. The programme for development has taken on three distinct phases.

'Enabling works', which cleared the first floor store rooms to form temporary toilets, marked the start of the job.

Phase one then got underway with the opportunity being taken to demolish a section of the old public bar and the remaining underutilised storage area above it.

A naturally slate roofed and rendered structure was then constructed as its replacement, which brought the first floor into public use with access via a new ornate oak staircase. Throughout this phase, which was completed before Easter, trading had continued in the other half of the property where a temporary bar had been installed.

Phase two followed and saw the same high standards of interior design and finishes reflected throughout the remaining public areas. All new

toilet facilities were installed along with oak beamed ceilings and natural state topped public bars.

At the end of the works the temporary partition wall was removed to unite the two halves of the building and a dumb-waiter has also been installed to efficiently connect the upper and lower public dining, lounge and drinking areas.

Meanwhile the new patio has been formed and a "patiola" canopy added to provide both summer shade and an attractive smoking shelter.

Finally, during a 12-day closure, all interior decoration was completed before the reopening at the end of May.

Dave Marshall and Mark Worsley, our own in house joinery team, manufactured bespoke traditional sliding sash windows to match originals sourced from archive photographs that meet the demands of a property that sits within a conservation area. Their craftsmanship have transformed the external elevations whilst bespoke doors and panelling complete the interior fit-out along with duties carried out by their colleagues Dave Robson and Dave Ritchie in the tiling of fireplaces and the plaster finishes. The final touches to the Albert were then carried out by Bob Burns, Kieron Britton and Steve Tweddell who put in first floor toilets, office, kitchen and laundry room.

The major development at The Albert is a success and a project that all who have had any involvement with should be very proud.

Team 2007 - on target



*Spearheading the efficiency drive:
(L-R) Simon Knox, Simon Wells and Dave Woods*

With UPC having continued to ramp up its operation in recent years, its reputation for providing a first class service has attracted valuable contract work from some of the best known brands in the industry.

Even after the implementation of new working hours last year, which enabled continuous production from 7:00am Monday to 11:00pm Thursday and then a single day shift on Friday, demand for the service was outstripping production, which at the time was handling the equivalent of 1,200 barrels per week.

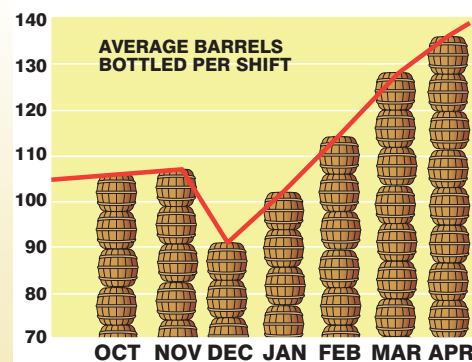
As a result, the Company embarked on a team initiative to build on what had already been

achieved and to further improve the plant's efficiency. The all encompassing appraisal was a huge undertaking which got underway last October and brought together planning, engineering, quality assurance and production, all of who fully embraced the philosophy.

Simon Knox and Simon Wells spearheaded the project which was named 'Team 2007' as Manager and Assistant Manager respectively. To support the initiative, experienced consultants T.A. Cook were invited to assist in the review. Dave Woods, of T.A. Cook, was seconded to Bredbury to help assess the existing processes and procedures and identify the strengths and weaknesses.

The clear intention was to grow the business to satisfy demand from new and existing customers which would in turn build a larger, more stable customer base. In addition, a safer, more secure and fulfilling role would be built for all involved.

Since starting in January it was agreed that we would work towards a goal of 2000 barrels per week by the end of the year and an interim target of 1800 barrels per week by July. By the end of April we had already achieved output performance equivalent to 1650 barrels per week, which is an excellent level of attainment in such a short period of time. Having demonstrated our ability to perform at this level the Company is now



in a position to lift its suspension on taking on more contract work, which will allow us to further develop an already strong market position. Consequently, the increased efficiency has to be sustainable and ongoing and not just limited to the 28 week period of the programme.

The key to the success has come from the introduction of enhanced processes and procedures, the utilisation of a more comprehensive management control and reporting system and most importantly, from the approach of our supervisors, operators, engineers and technicians.

We have already seen significant production improvements as a result of everyone's magnificent performance. This level of sustained effort can only result in the achievement of our 2000 barrels per week goal.

SPOTTING THE POTENTIAL



Peter Carton is on site at the Cheshire Cheese while Chris Stevenson puts the finishing touches to the garden

Bringing out the best in a business is often what determines its long-term performance. Spotting that potential early on and then running with the idea can also be the key to success.

That is exactly what has happened at the Cheshire Cheese at Longnor where Lynn Stevenson and husband Chris took on the tenancy in March 2004. From the outset the couple had wanted to convert the pub's existing stone built store and garage into guest accommodation and so approached the Company with a well thought out proposal for a joint investment.

Architect Peter Carton took on the project and has worked closely with Lynn and Chris throughout the design and build process.

The work got underway last autumn with John W Swindells Ltd carrying out the task to release the potential and develop four en suite letting rooms, one of which provides disabled access.

Externally the property has its own dedicated car park and small garden and Peter Carton has liaised closely with Peak National Parks to ensure that exacting conservation standards have been met. This came right down to the detail of using locally sourced and cut stone to refurbish the steps that lead up to the first-floor access.

Inside, the well-appointed rooms, which incorporate generous use of European oak and ash joinery, have been finished by Robinson's own painters while consultants John Dixon Associates provided the interior design.

Chris Stevenson said: *"From our point of view the whole process has been hassle free. We have had an input at every step in the process and been consulted on everything from the style of joinery to the finished interior."*

The work was completed at the end of May, in time for the summer tourist season. Ahead of completion Lynn and Chris had advertised their new accommodation on local websites and bookings were being taken even before the doors opened!

New warehouse increases capacity

Determination and a concerted effort has continued to see welcome expansion in the contract-packaging operations at UPC.

The introduction of a twilight shift and then a night shift added capacity which a reputation for delivering a first-class service demanded. In addition, the investment in tanks to add storage capacity and a pressure-sensitive labeller to remain at the forefront of packaging trends had served to build the business and help secure its future.

Once again UPC is now practically bursting at the seams as virtually every inch of the current warehouse is full to capacity and more space is needed.

The option of building on top of the existing structure was considered, but the costs proved prohibitive and so work on an additional warehouse on the UPC site has now begun.

Phase one will see the access road across the front of the original warehouse moved. This will allow the new structure to be built adjacent to the current warehouse. Cruickshank and Seward are the consultant architects for the project with Pochin working as the main contractors.

Once phase one, which includes the preparation of a load-bearing foundation, is complete, phase two will follow bringing the construction of the new warehouse facility.

The entire project will be completed in the autumn ahead of the capacity 'pinch point' during the busy run-up to Christmas.

The additional warehouse will significantly add to the bay racking for forklift access at UPC. This will not only take pressure off the existing service but also provide the opportunity to take in additional business from contract customers that until now has gone to third-party providers.



Work on the warehouse gets under way

Coach & Horses on Winning Track



Top performers: David and Lynn Cropper

A year-round commitment to the highest standards has seen David and Lynn Cropper of the Coach and Horses at Timbersbrook become the latest winners of the Stockport-based Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition.

The contest, now in its ninth year, once again put more than 350 houses under the microscope assessing all aspects of cellar, bar and beer quality. While standards across the estate were as high as ever, the couple's almost perfect score of 298 out of 300 deservedly earned them top spot.

After taking over the running of the pub four years ago, David and Lynn identified the competition as a way of focusing their efforts. They are previous winners of the most improved house award while

their disappointment at narrowly missing out on the final for the main prize last year acted as a spur this time round.

"I've been in the business a long time and never encountered anything like this with other companies," said David. "It gives you something to work towards and this success is a good way of recognising the efforts of ourselves and our staff."

In addition to the prestige, winning the contest has also had a positive effect on trade at the Coach & Horses, he added.

"It's something our customers have been very interested in and word soon gets around the area that there is a local pub with a good bar and cellar."

To mark their success, David and Lynn were presented with the coveted Unicorn Shield by Mr Oliver at a special ceremony at the house. They also received a barrel of Unicorn Bitter together with presentations from competition sponsors Chemisphere and Coors Brewers. In addition the Company arranged local PR to highlight the win and bring in much-valued business.

Pushing the Croppers all the way to the winning post, meanwhile, were Robert Frost at The Broadoak, Ashton-under-Lyne and Pete and Gail Brady of the Ye Olde Admiral Rodney, Prestbury who finished second and third respectively. Special mention also goes to Lynn Challender from the Bulls Head, Castleton which was named the most improved pub.

Moving on

After nearly 15 years service to the Company Tom O'Shea Brown is moving on to take up and develop new opportunities in the industry. The Board would like to thank him for his hard work on numerous building projects over the years and wish him every success for the future.

TOP TIPS

New to the trade, but having already made a real impact at the Fox and Pheasant at Armathwaite, Paul and Carol Jordan offer their advice on the age old conundrum of how to build and bring out the best in a team.

- The Fox and Pheasant is in a small, tight-knit community so we draw on personal recommendation and word of mouth whenever we need to recruit.
- The interview process and personal observation is important and can tell us much more about our staff than a reference.
- Trust and respect are essential and we stick to the principle of treating others the way we want them to treat us.
- During an induction session we explain to each new member of staff how we operate and how we would like them to contribute – we are then all singing off the same hymn sheet.
- When we make decisions we give reasons why and explain how they will impact on the business or our customers.
- Training is an ongoing process which enables our staff to develop and not a one-off chore.

- If we steer and guide individuals it is more targeted and productive than a formal team training session.
- Happiness is infectious and we recognise that if our staff are happy then our customers will be as well.

Before taking on the Fox and Pheasant, Paul and Carol had honed their management skills in other businesses which they had built themselves. Having lived and worked overseas for 18 years they returned to Britain in 2006 with a proven record of commercial success.



Bringing out the best - Paul and Carol Jordan

Taking on the Fox and Pheasant gave them the opportunity to establish themselves back in the United Kingdom and they have not looked back since. As a result of their dedication the dry-led house is now thriving.

ALL CHANGE

Ana McGoldrick took on the role of Tied Trade Secretary at the start of April and is now working as the first point of contact within the department. Her skill at organisation and multi-tasking is already being put to good use and proving its worth.

Meanwhile, Ana's predecessor, Joanne Boardman, who had been in the position for almost five years, has moved to UPC to become Office Administrator within the Engineering Department. This newly-created role, which allows Joanne to develop within the Company, follows the increased workload for the department as the demands of the expanding contract-bottling operation have increased.



Joanne Boardman (L) and Ana McGoldrick

Free trade trend continues



OB gets the seal of approval from the Mayor and Mayoress of Oldham

While every sale counts and every customer is valued by the free trade team, sustained long-term profit growth and a continuing upward volume trend will always be preferable to short-term, low-profit, one-off volume gains.

That pattern of lasting development is the welcome news from free trade as new accounts continue to be opened at a rate of one per week.

The two-pronged approach of building a first-class department while developing the brand portfolio is proving its merits and, in terms of barrelage, sales are up by 10% year-on-year.

Smooth kegged beers continue to provide the biggest growth area showing the considered decisions to take on the Wards and Oldham Bitter brands in addition to developing Robinson's own smooth products to have been correct.

As a consequence Andy Cussans and Walter Marshall have now been able to open over 50 direct supply Wards stockists in the South Yorkshire territory, of which 95% are still trading customers after 12 months. Similarly in Oldham, Sales Manager Ian Hoult and Danny Bates have secured 18 Oldham Bitter accounts since the launch of the smooth and cask product in November last year.

Having proved his ability, Danny has now been promoted to Business Development Manager.

Testament to the way in which the Company values and supports its free-trade clientele was the one-off seminar at UPC to help a select number of 'independent' customers prepare for the smoking ban.

In addition to the profitable direct supply business, continued national exposure for Robinson's brand portfolio through a national network of wholesalers including Waverley TBS, East West Ales, Adnams, Coors and Scottish & Newcastle is agreed for the rest of 2007. The tactical distribution includes this year's distinctively different seasonal beers, which have been very well received.

An important free trade coup this year was winning the account to put Oldham Bitter back in to the Queen Elizabeth Hall in Oldham. There were 400 guests packed into the venue the night that OB made its return and long may it take pride of place behind the bar.

Alan adds strength to the tied trade team



As the nature of the licensed trade continues to develop the decision to appoint an additional District Manager has been taken.

This will bring the number of DMs based in Stockport up to six with Derrick Story remaining focused on Cumbria. The additional appointment means that each DM will now have fewer houses within their territory and so be able to offer even more targeted support.

Alan Chapman is the person selected to join the team. Having held similar positions with a number of national operators, it is envisaged that, after a short induction period, he will 'hit the ground running'.

With 17 years experience in the industry, Alan has a clear understanding of the constant challenges that licensees face and a depth of knowledge to help meet those demands.

Originally from Marple Bridge and now living in Birch Vale, he is already familiar with the region and understands its defining characteristics. Alan's appointment should also bring additional experience to complement the diverse skill set within the Tied Trade Department as it moves forward with the industry.

Naturally inquisitive

Elaine Loxam's first job with Robinson's was as Manager of the Unicorn Shop. She took on the role in February 1999 following Ernie Pryor's retirement and held the position until the decision was taken to close the store 12 months later. Since then Elaine's natural inquisitiveness and willingness to 'get involved' has continued to make her a real asset to the Company.

What was it like working in the Unicorn Shop?

It could be very sociable at times and a grapevine for all the Company news - so I quickly got to know a lot of people. But commercially there was not enough trade to justify its existence. Since then customers have been able to make their purchases from reception and make collections direct from the stores.

What did you do next?

While I was at the shop I had also been kept busy by providing administrative support for the Managed House Department and the Architects, so I became more involved in those areas.

Are you still doing the same thing?

I am now the full-time Administrator for the Architects and I work particularly closely with Darren Molloy and Paul Kilkenny on the maintenance side of the operation. This involves me in

everything from liaising with contractors, keeping track of costs and processing invoices to being the first port of call when licensees phone in for our help.

What kind of calls do you get?

I am very aware that we usually get called when a licensee has a problem, so it is understandable that they can be a little tense. The nature of the problem can vary enormously but the biggest challenge is the weather, with obvious effects like storm damage. The largest single issue is usually summer heat which can create problems with the coolers. It's then all hands on deck to chase up the appropriate contractors to support the houses as quickly as possible.

Do you deal directly with the contractors yourself?

Yes for certain jobs, or it may be a case of talking to our own painters and joiners for work that is within an economical distance of the Brewery.

Why do you think that you are suited to this job?

I am naturally curious and I find that when I ask questions and show an interest then I tend to get drawn in. Although it is a very different role to working in the Unicorn Shop, it is still all about personal relationships and that is what gets things done.



Has there been a high point for you?

It is always good to know that I have helped somebody when they have had a problem and it is particularly satisfying when somebody says thank you. One licensee even sent me a bunch of flowers which I thoroughly appreciated.

And finally, what is your favourite tipple?

White wine, in good company in the Arden Arms, Millgate.

NEW FOCUS - NEW ROLES



Colin Dunn, Janet Humphries (L) and Margaret Holland take on new roles

New roles have been defined for Margaret Holland and Janet Humphries at UPC as they take on the posts of Laboratory Manager and Quality Auditor respectively. The change follows on from a reappraisal of the functions of production and quality.

In addition to his existing responsibilities for product quality, QA Manager Colin Dunn is now fully responsible for the Quality Systems at UPC and the Brewery.

Under the new arrangements, Margaret has been promoted

to take on front-line responsibility for work within the laboratory. Meanwhile Janet is assisting Colin with the Quality Systems with particular emphasis on the internal auditing processes that are essential for maintaining the Company's reputation for quality products.

The importance of Quality System is demonstrated by the achievement of a fifth annual quality certificate from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) for the bottling operations at UPC which paves the way to continue the valuable work of supplying bottle products to the supermarkets. Similarly, a licence from the Soil Association is the green stamp for the packaging of organic products.

Congratulations

Best wishes to Richard Dubelbeis and Angela Parker on their engagement. The couple had worked together for several years at the Old Brewery in Ulverston up until Angela's retirement as District Manager last year. We wish them all the best for the future and their wedding this summer.

Happy Retirement

Graham Simmons, a former manager and tenant of the Gardeners Arms, Wythenshawe retired in December of last year after an association of more than 18 years with the Company.

Engineering Supervisor Dave Ballam left in April after 25 years valued service while the following month saw drayman Sam Podmore take his well-earned retirement having been with us for 35 years.

We wish Graham, Dave and Sam all the best for the future.

Fond Farewell

We are very sorry to report the deaths of two former colleagues. Eric Evans, who worked in the bottling stores, retired in 1989 after 20 years with the Company. He sadly passed away on 22nd January.

It was also with great sadness that we heard that Alec Ayling had died on 15th March. A former manager of the Victoria Inn, Llanbedr, Alec was with the Company for 20 years until his retirement in 1992.

We would like to send our sincere condolences to the families and friends of both Eric and Alec.

The Show Must Go On



Robert Frost (L) welcomed back Peter Kinder, who had been at the first ever recording of Gardeners' Question Time

Having hosted the first ever edition of Radio 4's Gardeners' Question Time in 1947, the Broadoak Hotel, Ashton-under-Lyne was the intended venue for the 60th anniversary programme on 5th March.

Tenants Robert and Teresa Frost were asked to host the expert panel of gardeners, while an audience of 70 was invited to take part in the celebration broadcast.

A last-minute postponement of the programme, however, left Robert and Teresa with just days to either cancel the event or make alternative arrangements.

They decided that the show must go on and so, working with Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council, the Broadoak went ahead with its own question time session. Radio 4, meanwhile, interviewed Prince Charles for their show at another venue.

Robert said: "The council brought in their own expert panel to field the questions, with their Head Gardener, horticultural judges and the owner of the local garden centre doing an excellent job. The council even picked up the tab for the catering and we have since decided to make it a joint annual event. The ironic thing is that before the cancellation a plaque had already been laid outside the pub to commemorate the celebration broadcast!"

BREWING UP TALENT



Bringing on the talent: David Turnbull (centre), Steve Vernon, Jessica Coulson, Ross Millington and Becky Lyne prepare for the season ahead

As someone who spends his working life in the Brewery's fermenting room, Process Control Technician David Turnbull knows a thing or two about producing quality.

It's perhaps no surprise, therefore, that he is the man entrusted with nurturing some of Britain's most talented young athletes.

David has been a UK Athletics-qualified coach for the past 13 years, working with top runners on a one-to-one basis and

accompanying them to major tournaments around the world.

One of his current protégées, Becky Lyne, 24, hit the headlines last year when she won the bronze medal in the women's 800 metres at the European Championships in Gothenburg.

Originally from South Yorkshire, Becky moved to Edgeley so that she could train with David at Stockport Harriers Athletics Club in readiness for this year's World Championships in Japan and the 2008 Beijing Olympics.

David also coaches Steve Vernon and Jessica Coulson who ran in the European cross championships in Milan and the world cross championships in Kenya, along with Ross Millington who represented Great Britain in Portugal at the cross international.

David was himself a county standard runner in his younger days with one highlight being his second place in the 1984 Stockport Marathon.

Out and About

More the Merrier

An appeal for players in the last issue of the *Unicorn* magazine has helped to bring about a resumption of five-a-side football at Stockport's Power League sports complex.

Organisers plan to continue the matches over the summer and anyone interested in taking part should contact Mark Ritchie at the Brewery or Dave Holland at UPC.

Pastures New

After being based for more than 30 years at St Thomas' Park in Stockport, the bowls team has entered a new era by moving to The Crown at Great Moor. While the switch was prompted by a spate of vandalism at the local venue, it also enables the side to support one of Robinson's own houses.

To give players the chance to adjust to their new green, the annual singles handicap tournament was brought forward to the start of the season with club secretary Graham Bratley emerging as the winner.

Knock-out win

Following on from their ten-pin bowling league success, Bennett Verby 1 also clinched the team knock-out from the side who finished third in the table, Blue Birds.

The singles competition was dominated by Strike Force with Simon Sayers beating teammate Chris Davenport in the final while, in the scotch doubles, John Blane and Craig Booth from Blaze of Glory came out on top.

The 2007 season is now underway with last season's runners-up, The Incredibles, setting the pace.

Anyone interested in joining or entering a team can contact Phillip Ingham or Craig Booth at the Brewery.

No Ducks at The Grouse!



A fine turn out at The Grouse

While England's male cricketers may have endured a miserable winter, there is one team that definitely has the winning habit.

For The Grouse at Birch Vale is the reigning champion of a ladies cricket tournament held at nearby Hayfield. The side has the full backing of new tenants Paul Maney and Sue O'Hara who are thrilled with the friendly community-based atmosphere at what is their first pub.

When not preparing to defend their title later this summer, many of the cricketers also help raise the house's profile by organising a raft of events ranging from salsa dancing to Bonfire Night celebrations.

Sovereign on the Money

New horse Sovereign put in an excellent debut performance competing at the prestigious Shire Horse Spring Show at Peterborough.

The five-year-old, who joined the Company following the sad death of Sportsman last year, finished an impressive fifth out of 33 in the keenly-contested Gelding Class.

Less good news at the event came when the dray was slightly damaged. Thankfully, once back at the Brewery, the joiners were able to restore it to its former glory.