



Opening Times

No.20 STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRAS' PUB NEWSHEET DECEMBER 1985 FREE

WELCOME!

Whilst you will see that this is the 20th., Edition of "Opening Times", for many readers this will be the first time that they have had the opportunity of reading the newsheet, for this Edition sees our 're-launch' with new printing facilities and over double our previous circulation.

I take this opportunity of welcoming our new readers, and I hope they like what they read!

"Opening Times" is published and written on an entirely voluntary basis by members of the Stockport & South Manchester Branch of the Campaign for Real Ale. Whilst it is financed by revenue from our advertisers in no way are we beholden to any Brewery or Pub! In the past we have caused a stir on several issues and we shall continue to speak up for the beer drinker and to criticise where we feel it is needed. At the same time we hope to provide the pub goer with news and information about what is happening to and in the pubs in our area. We are always pleased to hear what our readers think, not just about "Opening Times" but also what they think about pubs and beer - do not hesitate to write at any time, the address is on the back page.

I also extend an invitation to anyone to come along to our Branch events which range from discussion meetings to Brewery trips, socials and outings to Beer Festivals and so on - why not even join the Campaign (Cheque for only £7 to CAMRA, 34, Alma Road, St. Albans, Herts, AL1 3EW - you get another monthly newspaper, plus cut-price products, free entry to Festivals etc!!!) we'd be delighted to welcome you!

Finally, thanks to all the members who have helped put the magazine together, to our printer for his assistance and to the pubs who have taken advertising which has enabled us to keep the publication a free one.

Advertising in "Opening Times" is cheap, and reaches well over a thousand pub goers - please contact me for details.

Meanwhile, CHEERS, and have a good read.

Humphrey Higgins,
Editor, 'Opening Times'.

Contributors: J.Clarke, H.Higgins, C.Brooks, R.Jones, P.Thompson. Graphics: J.Clarke, R.Sproson.

PUB OF THE MONTH

The Stockport & South Manchester Award for Pub of the Month in December has been won by the Bridgewater, Chestergate, Stockport.

The Bridgewater was formerly a Wilsons' pub which had been closed for some time before being bought by John Nagel and re-opening as a Free House earlier this year.

The pub serves excellent pints of handpumped Holts Mild and Bitter, Wilsons Bitter and Websters Green Label Mild - the Wilsons & Websters selling at the knock down price of only 63p a pint.

The Bridgewater also serves a good range of hot & cold food, all reasonably priced and available up until closing time.

There is also the additional attraction of regular live music on Wednesdays to Sundays.

The presentation of the award will be made on Thursday, December 19th., and a good 'do' is anticipated.

GEORGE

HEATON LANE.
STOCKPORT
OPPOSITE MERSEY SQUARE

TEL: 061-480 5996.

*Draught Bass
Higsons Mild
& Bitter*

SYKES

WINE BAR

STAGGER

A PUB CRAWL OF GATLEY AND NORTHENDEN.

A less well surveyed part of the Stockport & South Manchester Branch area, Gatley & Northenden provide an interesting variety of both pubs & beers, most of the latter being consistently good.

The crawl started at the Red Lion, Gatley, a Chesters House selling handpumped mild & bitter. A typical Whitbread conversion this (it used to have one of their silly names - the Bitter End) but with a too-loud juke-box (presumably the regulars prefer it like that). The mild at 71p was better thought of than the bitter (72p), which was only average. Next stop was Hydes Prince of Wales. This could really be a Country pub as it looks the part both outside and in, although to my mind the semi open plan interior seemed a bit characterless. The beer was well thought of however, both mild and bitter being equally good. Better value than the previous pub too at 64 & 69p respectively.

On to the Good Beer Guide listed Horse & Farrier (also Hydes) with again good mild & bitter (65 & 69p). This low-ceilinged multi-roomed pub really does ooze character, a fact which is obviously appreciated by the locals as it was busy at only 8 pm.

The 44 Bus stops near the Horse & Farrier and this will take you into Northenden where our first stop was the Jolly Carter, a Boddingtons house. This is basically a large open plan estate type pub which used to be the local of one of our party, who was of the opinion that it was 'dead' compared to her previous visits. Both mild and bitter were on sale (mild cheap at 63p) and both were good, the mild being particularly appreciated.

Next was the Church, a monumental and recently modernised Tetley pub. God knows what trouble they were expecting but there were no fewer than 8 (that's right, 8!!) bouncers on the door. "Is this a pub or a bouncers convention?" wondered one of our party after we'd get in. Not only must such overkill be costing a bomb in wages it really is off-putting to the passer-by who might have considered popping in for a pint. The modernisation has been done well and despite the usual masses of plastic vegetation is tasteful and comfortable. The mild was'n on (although on previous form has been

excellent) so we all tried the bitter (at 75p the dearest so far) of which opinions varied from good to pretty poor!

The next stop was the Tatten, a monumental Manor-House type pub managed by the Pennine Host Group selling Wilsons Beers. In due course Pennine Hosts will be 'renovating' the pub as is the intention with all pubs under their control and it is to be hoped that something will be done about the beer as well. This was the worst of the night with the bitter not even considered average and the first two pints of mild having been 'in the pipes' for some time and proving undrinkable. To be fair, the mild was OK after this although judging by the young clientele it's difficult to see much being sold.

Re-tracing our steps we called at the Boddingtons Crown. A real pub atmosphere here and packed to the doors. The mild was some of the best beer of the night, although opinions varied wildly on the bitter ranging from very good to poor. It's probably true to say that a wide range like this is more down to personal taste than the quality of the beer.

Finally, Greenalls Farmers Arms. Again a good pub atmosphere and agreement on both the mild and bitter which were generally agreed to be good.

The night had finished as well as it had started.

(Readers should note that the comments in the above are not intended to be a statement on the quality of the pubs or beer on all occasions, but is our opinion of both on the night of the crawl.)

John Clarke.

Ship Inn

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RUDDLES COUNTY

TAYLORS LANDLORD

and BITBURGER PILS

ON DRAUGHT.

OPEN MON-FRI 4-10; SAT 11-11; SUN 11-10.

REQUIEM FOR THE OAK

The Royal Oak on High Street, Stockport, closed its doors in November for 6 to 9 months for what will amount to a complete rebuilding after serious structural faults were found in the building. Initially it was hoped to avoid closure whilst remedial work was carried out but, sadly, this has not proved possible.

The Oak was unique in that it epitomised all that was good about the British Pub - individuality, character, atmosphere - the vast array of bric-a-brac festooned throughout the rooms and the corridor. Everything from hundreds of key-rings, a collection of Bank Notes and an Alladins Cave of Rocks (I think a bit of the moon was there) to the superb old brewery posters and mirror, and, of course, a consistently fine pint of Robinsons served by Eddie & Alwyn the archtypal licensees. Sadly if Robinsons remain true to form when it comes to pub refurbishments it is difficult to believe that the Oak will be anything other than a faint shadow of its former self when it finally re-opens.

I'm no architect, designer or Brewery Accountant, but I like pubs to be pubs. Do they all have to be open plan lounge look-alikes complete with flock wallpaper, regulation seating & tables, statutory fitted carpets with the statutory wall-lights & ale served from regulation square boxes affixed to the regulation bar? Why not build a pub that has a lounge, a snug and a good vault? Why not have one room where the juke-box does'nt kill the art of conversation whilst it shatters the ear-drums? Why not adorn the walls and ceilings with the Landlords' lifetime collection of oddments? Why not have a place for darts and Bar Billiards? Do that, and a bit more besides and you'll have a pub.

Humphrey Higgins.

WITHINGTON AIL HOUSE?

Just what is going on at the Withington Ale House, the Pennine Host pub in Withington? We reported some months ago that the beer dispensed from the 'barrels' behind the bar was perhaps not all it cracked up to be and recent visits have served only to confirm this view.

Lets deal with the method of dispense first. If you go into a pub & the beer comes out of a tap at the bottom of the barrel (Robbies Old Tom being a common example) you would probably think that not only was the beer traditional in every sense but also that it had actually come out of the barrel in question. NO - here it does'nt - if you look closely you can see a small pipe leading up to the 'tap' which seems to operate an electric switch and the beer in fact comes out of the cellar. OK, if it's just an electric pump serving cask beer, no harm done. Unfortunately the problem does'nt stop there.

The beer (Marstons Pedigree & Taylors Landlord on my visit) has had a distinctly untraditional fizz to it, and the Landlord looked like pea soup into the bargain. There are two possible reasons for this unpleasant gassy beer - either the barrels are'nt being tapped & vented properly (in which case an urgent lesson in cellarcraft is needed & the staff should be told that murky beer is not normally sold without as much as a 'would you like that changing?) or the beer is being served under pressure in which case a cynical deceit is being practised on the drinking public who are led to expect one thing and get another.

'Have you complained to the licensee?' you ask - We've done better by putting our worries to the Managing Director of Pennine. He says that as far as he is aware the beer is cask conditioned but he will look into it and let us know. Since then there has been a deafening silence. We will report future developments.

BOARS HEAD

MARKET PLACE, STOCKPORT.

NEXT TO ASDA & SAINSBURYS'.

SAMUEL SMITHS OLD BREWERY BITTER.

FOOD DAILY - LIVE MUSIC

MOST NIGHTS.



This Month Pub Grub visited the Royal Oak, Didsbury. This Marstons' Pub on the main road in Didsbury village has been deservedly popular for many years. There are numerous good points about the place - multi-roomed interior; nice old Bass signs & music-hall memorabilia (plus a lot more) within; fine old Taylors Eagle Brewery windows without.

The beer is always on fine form and there's a good prominent price list (mild 74p, bitter 76p, Pedigree 82p). What makes the pub stand out however is the astonishing value of the food, which, so far, is the best yet covered by this article. You'll see two signs pinned on the bar; 'soup 30p' & 'lunch £1.60p', but what a lunch! The menu is basically bread & cheese or bread & pate, but don't let that fool you - 'cheese' comes from a choice of 30+ varieties (the number changes all the time) & my portion consisted of about 1lb of Double Gloucester together with half a Granary loaf and butter! The range of cheese was from the ordinary to the exotic (cheese preserved in jars of oil, cheeses in vine leaves). The portions for all are equally generous, for example if you want Camembert you will be given one of those small round boxes you see in the supermarkets. If you don't want Granary bread, you can have French sticks.

Pate comes in equally huge portions & three varieties were available when I visited. Onions are free & there's a small charge for pickles. Coffee is also available. Fortunately 'doggy bags' are provided (I took home $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of my cheese!) although the less brave can have one portion between two.

In short, the place represents the First Division in value & quality and if you like good cheese and good ale it's a must.

Oh, you can even buy the empty pate bowls for 50p - even that's a bargain!

John Clarke.

Heard at a Camra Beer Festival: "This isn't a proper Beer Festival, you've no Stein Lager!"

SUPPORT YOUR FREE HOUSES

Readers of the Greater Manchester Beer Guide will realise that whilst we have a lot of good pubs in the area, we have relatively few Free Houses of any note.

I've been lucky enough to visit three recently. The first, the Cheshire Ring in Hyde, isn't in the Guide, because it's up for sale. The most recent deal seems to have fallen through; however, despite his obvious disappointment, Ken still maintains his regular Boddington's Bitter & Thwaites Mild & Bitter in excellent condition. He almost invariably has a guest beer on - varying from Taylors Landlord & Best to Theakstons Best - all have been excellent. Well worth a visit before he leaves.

The second, the Cemetery in Rochdale, had a wide selection, including Theakston's Old Peculier, all of which were reported as being in good condition. The pub itself was friendly, warm and busy, obviously with the turnover to cope with a fairly wide selection of real ales. A pleasant pub for a lunchtime or evening visit.

The last of the three pubs is the new one in Ashton, The Gamecock. As a TFC Pub, it is predictable, but still an innovation for the area. There is a wide and changing selection of beers, and the sandwiches have to be seen to be believed! The welcome is warm and you can always pick up your copy of 'Opening Times' if you've forgotten elsewhere!

None of the above mentioned pubs necessitate a second mortgage, so don't be put off by rumours of high prices!

It's a great pity we don't have more Free Houses, but as we have 'nt we must support the ones we have.

Carole Brooks.

Castlewood

(HOLE IN WALL)

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11-30 - 2-00

Function room available.

JENNINGS COMES TO TOWN

Jennings Bitter, from Cockermouth, Cumbria, is now on sale at the Midway, Newbridge Lane, Stockport and at the Old Vic, Edgeley. The introduction of this rare brew for the area is due to the trading agreement between Jennings and Tetleys who already supply their mild and bitter. Although it's early days yet, the beer is going well and provoking comment among the locals who either love it, or hate it. The Midway also provides another welcome outlet for Burtonwood Bitter in the Stockport area and a visit is recommended.

At the Old Vic the Jennings has replaced the poor selling Wilsons Bitter and it seems to be going well. The ocean of Wilsons in Edgeley continues to recede - now all we need is for Banks's to buy a pub off them!

GREEN WITH ENVY?

Websters Green Label Mild is now on sale at the Navigation, Lancashire Hill, bringing the Stockport outlets to four - the others being the Castlewood, the Egerton Arms and the Bridgewater. (If you know of any more, please let us know.)

As far as we know this is the only part of Greater Manchester to take the beer in cask form and the question arises, why? It seems the powers that be have decided that Stockport drinkers prefer a light mild (i.e. Robbies) as well as the usual dark form & Websters is presumably an attempt to attract Robbies mild fans into Wilsons pubs (though the Bridgewater is a Free House). Whether this succeeds remains to be seen as does whether there is sufficient demand at the pubs in question to sustain two milds - Wilsons mild is also available.

In the meantime it means more choice for the drinker and we wish every success to those pubs which have taken it on.

NO MILD!

Our earlier report that Sam Smiths mild was to make an appearance in Stockport seems to have been premature. In fact we learn that cask mild may not be introduced at all.

There are two reasons for this; firstly a continuing shortage of wooden casks (Sams won't use metal ones) and secondly the general low volume of mild sales. Two (keg) milds, dark and light, are currently produced, but together only account for about 10% of production & are brewed once a fortnight. There would have to be a wholesale withdrawal of the keg versions, which is unlikely to say the least, before cask became viable.

Sams have also produced another new beer, Museum Ale, a heavier, stronger version of Old Brewery Bitter. Despite the fact that it's available in Lincoln and Leeds the Brewery maintain it's on test market in the south-east only. It will not be made available in Greater Manchester.

IT'S A BOSTIN PINT!

October saw the launch of a new beer from Banks's- Hanson's Black Country Bitter. Not to be confused with standard Hansons Bitter, this is a new brew with a lowish Original Gravity of 1035.5, slightly weaker than Banks's Mild, though still stronger than Boddingtons Bitter! It will be priced between mild and bitter.

Banks's watchers tell us that a year or so ago they tried out a brew called PB, which was designed to be a lighter, cheaper alternative to the standard bitter. It never caught on, probably as it was similar in taste to the bitter. First impressions of Black Country Bitter are of something distinctly different, lacking its smoothness & Midlands sweetness.

MANCHESTER ARMS.

WELLINGTON ROAD SOUTH, STOCKPORT.

1984 CAMRA PUB OF THE YEAR!!

FINE ROBINSONS ALES.

PUB FOOD MONDAY TO SATURDAY 12 - 2-00

BRIDGEWATER

CHESTERGATE, STOCKPORT.

FREE HOUSE

WILSONS BITTER,

HOLTS MILD & BITTER,

WEBSTERS GREEN LABEL -

all handpumped.

HOT & COLD FOOD EVERY DAY

UP TO CLOSING TIME!

PUB NEWS

NEW FACES

A warm welcome to Martin & Sandra Gibbs, who took over the tenancy of the Manchester Arms, Wellington Road, Stockport on 12th., November. (1984 Pub of the Year)

This is Martin & Sandras' first pub and they are not planning any drastic alterations! They promise good lunchtime food, with a return to the once 'notorious' pork pies! Also continuing will be the accent on live music.

Meanwhile Ian & Dot Brookes have moved on from the Manchester Arms to the Bakers Vaults, in Stockports' Market Place. A quick foray into the transfer market has netted Ian the chef from the Crown, Hawk Green, Marple, an Egon Ronay recommended pub.

Live music is promised soon and the pub is open at 5-30 (believe it or not!!) Art buffs will be glad to know that the Charlie Shiels painting of 'Bakers Vaults & Characters' remains.

In Wythenshawe the building which used to be a pub opposite Sharston swimming baths is now up for sale with a licence.

The Cheshire Hunt, Hyde Road, Gorton, has now reopened as a Free House - but it only dispenses Sam Smiths Beers, Old Brewery Bitter is available on handpump.

Websters Yorkshire Bitter has now joined the Wilsons at the Hesketh, Cheadle Hulme. The mild remains keg.

The Coach & Horses, London Road, Manchester, has replaced the Ruddles Bitter with Ruddles County.

Work has now started on building the Banks's pub on the site of the old Grosvenor Garage on Burnage Lane.

The closure of the Royal Oak, High Street, Stockport, is reported elsewhere but this also means that the legendary bacon & black pudding barmes will disappear from the Town Centre. However, as we welcome Eddie & Alwyn Bradburn from the Oak to the Grapes in Hazel Grove they tell us that they will be available there. Even so, Saturday dinner in Stockport will never be the same!

1986 GOOD BBER GUIDE: WE ARE OFFERING OUR READERS THE CHANCE TO BUY THE NEW GUIDE P & P FREE!

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BRANCH DIARY...

Tuesday 3rd., December: 8pm - Open Committee Meeting, see contact for venue.

Tuesday 10th., Regional Christmas Social, Gamecock, Ashton, transport to be provided.

Thursday 12th., Branch Meeting & Xmas Socail, the Gateway, E.Didsbury

Thursday 19th., Pub of the Month, Bridgewater, Chestergate, Stockport.

Friday 20th., THE HILLGATE CRAWL: 7 pm, The Blssoms, then all points down to Stockport!!

Contact J.Clarke: 477 1973.

BAKERS VAULTS

PRESENTS.....

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E X P E C T A T I O N S

cert PG.

DIRECTED BY IAN & DOT BROOKES

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