

Opening Times



No.29

STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

SEPTEMBER 1986

A RUDDLING SHAME!

By Peter Edwardson.

Friday, 25th., July was Black Friday in the history of the Brewing Industry. On that day it was announced that Ruddles of Langham, Rutland, the famous independent Real Ale Brewer, had been taken over for £14.9 Million by Grand Metropolitan, owners of Watneys and Wilsons, and one of the "Big Six" national brewers.

In the mid-70s, Ruddles more than any other brewery epitomised the revival of Real Ale and the successful fight of CAMRA against the keg policies of the big brewers. In particular, Ruddles' strong premium bitter, County, achieved cult status. County was (and indeed still is) a fine beer, strong, dark, full-bodied and malty, full of flavour and character, the ideal antidote to the gassy kegs and insipid lagers being promoted by the national combines. Ruddles cultivated a quirky, independent image, insisting that they still belonged to the sadly defunct county of Rutland, and this, combined with the quality of their product, had gained them by 1976 a virtually national distribution in the free trade.

But they made a big mistake in selling off 35 of their 36 tied pubs to concentrate on the free trade and on selling bottled and canned beer in supermarkets and British Rail buffet cars. The pubs were mostly only low-turnover rural houses, but they would have given a secure foundation to Ruddles' trade if times became hard. As indeed they did. The free trade was more and more tied up by loans from the big brewers, and the take-home business became increasingly cut throat, with very low margins. Ruddles found themselves being squeezed.

In 1983 they signed an agreement with Grand Met to sell Ruddles County in Watneys pubs, as Watneys couldn't brew a decent premium bitter of their own. This foreshadowed the current takeover. By 1986, Watneys were taking up 25% of Ruddles' output, with most of the rest packaged beer. Ruddles County had gained a new image - as an ill-kept, murky sludge sold for £1.30 a pint in Watneys pubs in and around London.

Ruddles beers have never been widely available in Greater Manchester, but County has appeared as a guest beer at various free houses including the Crown and Anchor and the Marbles Arch; and the Romper, the up-market free house near Marple, currently sells County.

But ANY takeover is bad news for the drinker, holding out the prospect of less choice, especially when it gives one of the Big Six even more of a stranglehold on the market. It might be advisable to sample Ruddles' beers now, before Grand Met's Accountants turn them into bland shadows of their former selves. And, while Grand Met have given assurances that Ruddles' Brewery will stay open for the foreseeable future, its long-term prospects must be very doubtful. They were saying much the same last year about Wilsons' brewery at Newton Heath, and we all know what happened to that!

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A HAVEN IN THE SHOPPING PRECINCT!



HOLIDAY ALE

3. YORK

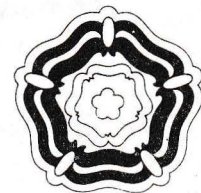
By Bernard Holland.

York is, without question, a special kind of place. Each age has made a positive contribution to York's quality and it is possible to soak up the atmosphere within quite a confined area of the City Walls. York is easily reached by train from Manchester Victoria (present Saver return £5.70) or by road via Leeds and the A64.

Three quarters of York's real ale pubs are to be found within or close to the City walls. A choice selection can be made within a tiny radius of the Minster itself, however the old city contains the heaviest concentration of tourist honeypots and drinkers inclined to claustrophobia might be advised to remain just outside of the walls where most of the 'locals' are situated. Distance is not a problem in York as the entire city can be crossed in 20 minutes walk, and I do advise people to walk, the car is an unwelcome hindrance in this city. I've chosen a selection of pubs to sample the choice of beer and incorporate some of the city's better architectural features. For further information, North Yorkshire Ale is available at the Tourist Office and many bookshops/pubs.

Starting from the station, turn right and over the bridge to Micklegate Bar. Just through is The Bar Hotel, a boisterous Tetleys pub, bitter only. Continue down Micklegate and you will come to Walker's Bar, Theakstons only tied house and with their usual range of beers in pleasant drinking surroundings. Turn right by St. Martins Church to The Acorn which is a quaint local, try the Strongarm, not available everywhere. Turn right outside this pub onto Bishophill along to Golden Ball, a pleasant street corner pub and a chance to sample hand-pumped John Smiths Bitter. Turn down Victor St. to the wall and on Nunnery Lane is Trafalgar Bay, a comfortable Sam Smiths house. Follow the walls around and you will see the Swan, a classic street corner boozier with good Tetleys on. Cross the river over Skeldergate Bridge, observe the Castle Museum on your left, worth a visit in the dry hours (£2 entrance, but worth it!) and round the corner on Fishergate is Masons Arms, a comfortable Bass pub. Continue up Fishergate, past the Light Horseman (also a good Bass pub) and five minutes later

turn right down Alma Terrace to Wellington, a gem of a pub, good Sams and worth the deviation. Retrace your steps to the wall, go under Fishergate Bar, turn right down Hope St. to the Brown Cow, Taylors only tied house in York and worth a visit. Go down Walmgate back towards town, you will pass the Spread Eagle, a free house and usually quite busy. Carry on towards town, just before the top of Foss Gate is the Blue Bell, a John Smiths pub with no real ale at the moment but totally inviolate, the best pub in York. Turn right at the top, along Stonegate to the Black Swan which is quite touristy but a nice old pub, ask for Bass not bitter! Continue over the Foss where you will see the John Bull, a free house with Malton Double Chance & Franklins, it's like stepping back to the fifties here. Go back over the bridge and skirt around the new Sainsburys development to the Brigadier Gerard, a new Sam Smiths pub which blends nicely into the Monkgate Street, why aren't all new pubs like this? Continue towards the Bar, so to speak, just before is the Bay Horse, a quiet Bass pub. Go through into Goodramgate, a pleasant street with a few choice pubs, among the best being the Royal Oak with Camerons & Everards.



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HOLIDAY ALE.

Follow the road around to the Minster. Close by the entrance is the York Arms, a comfortable Sams pub with a nice front bar. Along Petergate to Bootham Bar and onto the street of the same name is the Bootham Tavern, a Victorian Tetleys pub with a no-nonsense bar and bitter only. Across the road and down Marygate is a terrace pub, Minster Inn, an excellent little Bass house. Cross the foot-bridge at the bottom of Marygate and you are back towards the Station. The Railway museum is also close to here, and it's free!

I wouldn't recommend that you try all of the pubs in a day - but a weekend should be ample time - and you will have a chance to visit or see some of the City as well!

Cheers!

NEXT MONTH - IN TIME FOR THE 'LIGHTS' - HOLIDAY ALE VISITS BLACKPOOL.

MIND OUT!

A recent 'Minder' programme revolved round a character 'Oily Rag' who had spent the past few years in Spain. Upon his first drink in the Winchester Club he moaned "Londons' changed while I've been away, you can't get a pint of keg anywhere, it's all this Real Ale."

By the end of the show he discovered that his wife had divorced him, he was physically assaulted, lost all his money and was forced to flee the Country.

Let this be a lesson for Keg drinkers everywhere!

REAL ALE IN CENTRAL & SOUTH MANCHESTER - UPDATE NO. 6.

Bad news first this month - the loss of a Real Ale outlet. The Clarence in Rusholme has removed the handpump which used, though never on a totally reliable basis, to dispense Draught Bass. Wake up Bass - all the other Brewers serving Rusholme shift copious quantities of cask beer, so how come all your pubs are all fizz?

That apart, just a few changes of range to report. In the City Paddy's Goose now has Websters Bitter alongside Wilsons, while at the Royal George on Lever Street Wilsons Mild & Bitter, which vanished when the pub was Websterised, have reappeared on handpump. In Beswick the Travellers Call has added Tetley Bitter & in Clayton, Boddies at the Folkestone are now on handpump.

When in York enjoy a pint (or two) of Tetleys beers at

The Bar, Micklegate
The Bootham Tavern, Bootham Bar
The Brewers Arms, Tanner Row
The Coach & Horses, Micklegate
The Cygnet, Price Street
The Fox, a Joshua Tetley Heritage Inn,
Holgate Road
The Lion and Lamb, Blossom Street
The Locomotive, Watson Street
The Rose and Crown, a Joshua Tetley Brewpub,
home of Viking Ale, Lawrence Street
The Swan, a Joshua Tetley Heritage Inn,
Bishopgate Street



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STAGGER

STOCKPORT - TEN YEARS ON! - By Humphrey Higgins.

'Opening Times' was launched in 1984 - but it is not a new publication - for South Manchester CAMRA published 'Opening Times' for a short period from 1975. Among our souvenirs is a copy of the September 1976 edition, complete with a "Stagger" of Stockport. On the old adage that any excuse will do for a crawl of Stockport we re-traced the steps of the old pioneers to see what had changed. Enclosed is a facsimile of that epic crawl a decade ago - let's compare notes!

No 1 - the Crown, Heaton Lane - nothing has changed here, thank goodness, still a museum piece, still excellent Boddies Mild & Bitter on handpumps though now it's 67p & 70p!

Onto No. 2., the George - still like the Queen Mary (with the exception of the Wine Bar) though in the late '70s it was turned into a keg pub for a couple of years or so before returning to the fold. No Bass anymore and Boddingtons Mild is now available, still handpumps the Bitter (Boddies) is 70p, Higsons 72 & Mild 67 - but the quality can only be described as average. Into no. 3, the Manchester Arms, Robbies Mild & Bitter on handpumps at 69 & 73 - the pies are as notorious as ever, the juke-box fiends have multiplied and the beer was excellent! Unless you want a job in an office block that is up for sale delete no. 4 - for the Grove was closed over two years ago - and head for the Nelson Tavern - revamped in 1976 as

Nelsons Ale House and revamped again last year. A good job done by Pennine Hosts' standards but no real mild anymore and the ubiquitous Websters Bitter at 78, Wilsons at 76 - both average. Onto the Black Lion on Hillgate - no change in atmosphere here - still a sound, basic boozier - a good pint of Boddies Bitter at 67 but the mild is keg. Not everyone ventured into the next call, the Gladstone, where a somewhat frosty welcome was expected - still very quiet but decent Tetleys.

Robbies Brewery Tap, the Spread Eagle has changed beyond recognition - now it's the expected open-plan type pub, complete with the little electric boxes dispensing a decent pint of Robbies Bitter at 70 & mild at 67. Turners Vaults is next on the list - but was not covered as it is at the moment keg, pending the refurbishment to be carried out by new owners Sam Smiths. The advice of 10 years not to enter the White Lion is still valid, so take the route march to the Midway - still an enterprising Free House in Hunting Lodge style, the range being Pedigree (78), Thwaites, Jennings, Tetley, Burtonwood & Boddies Bitter all at 72 & Tetley Mild at 70p - all reported on good form.

You can still cross the River by the footbridge (but be quick, it's due to be demolished) and come to what has to be the last port of call in '86 as the Buck & Dog finally closed its doors for the last time on the 9th., August, the Old King is no longer spartan but its beers still merit a note - Bass Special Bitter & Stones at 70p and real Toby Light at 68 - all on handpump..

So ended an interesting & varied crawl, and just compare those prices!

RICHARD AND SUSAN GENDERS -

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GIBBS MEW BISHOPS TIPPLE, THEAKSTONS, PEDIGREE, COUNTY, LANDLORD, WARSTEINER, KONIG & BITBURGER PILS, SPATEN-MUNCHEN, OCCASIONAL BEERS FROM FULLERS, BRAKSPEARS, PINTS-POLYPINS-FIRKINS-BARRELS.

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By John Clarke.

Back to Stockport this month & a well known pub - the Griffin, Heaton Mersey. It came into Holts' hands in the '20s & has had a somewhat eventful history. In the late 70s CAMRA and other bodies fought successfully to spike Holts' plans to demolish the pub & replace it with a characterless modern building. Recently the mysterious disappearance of former licensee, Tony Bolton, winner of 3 CAMRA awards, brought the pub into the limelight. Things have now settled down & the pub is in the capable hands of Dave Woolstonecroft who is maintaining the beer's reputation for excellence.

The same unfortunately could not be said about the food on our visit, which proved a major disappointment. The menu is quite lengthy & ranges from soup at 50p to the 'Griffin Grill' at £1.70. There is a variety of dishes in the burger/sausage/egg & chips range which are priced from about 90p upwards. Goulash, Chili or Curry Chicken or beef is available with rice or chips at 1.65 & there's a wide range of sandwiches in the 60/70p range, plus 5p if you want them toasted. Lastly there's a daily special - on our visit Jumbo Crispy Cod Finger, chips & peas at £1.35.

Well, that's what is available - so what is it like? As I mentioned this was a let-down. I chose chicken curry & chips and another in the party tried the chili, also with chips. They looked pretty good - a large bowl of chili/curry & a good portion of chips. Unfortunately however both were of a souplike consistency, lacking in flavour & with very little meat, the chips (frozen) were OK but unexceptional. The third member of our group chose the grill & was deeply disappointed - once again there was what seemed an appetising plateful; however the egg was undercooked & the baco so well done as to be verging on the burnt. The sausage was pronounce OK but he had to leave his chips (a major event for this pig!)

People have been asking me why all the reviews in this column are glowing &

Cont. on Page 6.

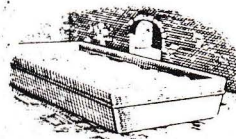
BRANCH DIARY...

SEPTEMBER.

- Mon. 8: 8-30pm Social: Shady Oak, Parnall (Tetley 'free').
- Thu. 10: Branch Meeting: 8pm Swan with Two Necks, Princes St., Stockport (Robinsons).
- Mon. 15: 8-30 pm Social: Romper (Red Lion), Pinfold Lane, Ringway (Boddingtons)
- Fri. 19: Higher Openshaw Stagger: 7pm Wrexham, Ashton Old Road, 8-30 Concert, Fairfield Rd
- Mon. 22: 8-30 pm Social, have reappeared Worsfold (Robinsons) Call has added Tetley Bitter &
- Wed. 24: Trip to Stone are now on handpump. Bulls Head, Heaton Lane, 5-40 Mauldeth, Kingsawy.
- Thu. 25: PUB OF THE MONTH: Strawberry Duck, Crabtree Lane, Clayton. Transport to be provided, phone for details.
- Mon. 29: 8-30 pm Social: Sir Robert Peel, Edgeley (Greenalls).

OCTOBER.

- Mon. 6: 8-30 pm Social: Whitworth, Rusholme (Marstons)
- Contacts: Business: Andy Cooper 0625 872641 (w) 477 2959 (H)
Socials: John Clarke: 831 7222 ext 307 (w) 477 1973 (h).



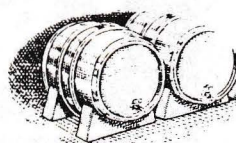
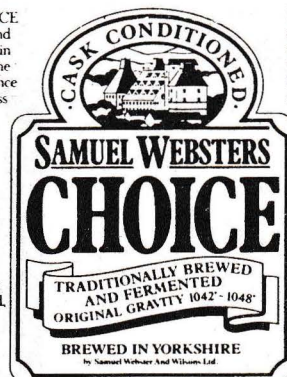
Samuel Websters CHOICE is traditionally brewed and fermented at The Fountain Head Brewery, Halifax, the home of brewing excellence since 1838, using a process that results in a smooth creamy beer boasting an Original Gravity of 1042 - 1048.

Available only as a Cask Conditioned, handpulled, traditional ale, Samuel Websters CHOICE is considerably stronger with a higher gravity than normal bitters, which is why it costs a little more.



Using the finest blend of carefully selected malt, hops and yeast strain unique to Websters, the traditional brewing process and natural spring water result in a wholesome full bodied flavour with all the characteristics you would expect from a top quality traditional bitter.

As you would expect from a brewery with traditions and experience spanning a century and a half, our attention to detail doesn't stop there. Samuel Websters CHOICE is available only in selected and approved outlets, whose high standards of linkeeping match our own.



MAKE IT YOURS

PUB GRUB - continued.

the answer is that there's some damn good food to be had in this area. It's there fore a double disappointment that the first negative review should feature so fine a pub as the Griffin, which for the moment can sadly only be recommended for its excellent beer.

Pub of the MONTH

The Pub of the Month for September is the Strawberry Duck, Crabtree Lane, Clayton.

Readers may remember the pub as the Crabtree under which name it traded for a long time, witnessing many changes in the area until Wilsons decided it was a no hope pub & closed it down. Fortunately there are people who don't automatically agree with what the big brewers say - and the result is that since last August the renamed Strawberry Duck has flourished as one of East Manchester's premier free houses enthusiastically run by licensees Julie & David. On sale are Wilsons Mild & Bitter & Holts Bitter, & they're always good. (David knows about Holts, having previously run the Waggon & Horses, Irlams O'th Height (Salford).

The award will be formally presented, in the pub, on Thursday, September 25th., when a good night out is assured.

To get there follow Ashton New Road & turn right onto Crabtree Lane (the Carlton Bingo Club is on the corner) Buses 189, 216 & 231-235 or limited stop 236/237, nearest stop Holts Halfway House just over the Droylsden boundary.

DON'T BE VAGUE!

The end of July saw the transformation of Greenalls former Woolpack, on Brinksway, Stockport, into the town's latest freehouse, 'The Hague.'

The pub is run by Chris Hague, formerly of the Olde Vic and he mysteriously tells us that his surname is 'partly the reason' for the pub's unusual name. A thorough re-decoration has certainly smartened the place up, one room being a traditional pub-type lounge, another resembling a Pennine Host Open House re-vamp and the Vault has also been retained. This demarcation seems to work well although one bar area is dominated by a television playing pop videos. If it had to have this machine perhaps it would be better in the back room where it would detract less from the pub and not disturb customers who would rather drink beer and talk.

Given the difficult location of the pub (there's virtually no car parking) the range of beers is somewhat uninspiring; currently available are Chesters Bitter, Cask Trophy, Tetley Mild, Bitter & Ind Coope Burton Ale, all on handpump, with a Marstons Beer on the way. We wish the Hague the best of luck and we'll keep you informed of any future developments.

CAMRA AT CASTLEFIELD

Who are these people who write 'Opening Times'? What's Camra all about? Why should I become a member of the Campaign?

The answers to these questions & many more can be found on our stall at the Castlefield Carnival on Saturday & Sunday, 13th., & 14th., September. We shall be recruiting members, selling beer guides & generally discussing the aims of the Campaign.

So come along & see us, bring the family, it's all free and there's street theatre, Boat trips, music, steam train rides & much more - see you there!

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STOCKPORTS' BEST JUKE-BOX!

MANCHESTER SHOWN UP

If you attended the Manchester Show in Platt Fields last month & fancied a pint of Mancunian Real Ale, then you'd have been sadly disappointed. The City Council sold the franchise to the highest bidder, Scottish & Newcastle Breweries & they were selling that well loved Manchester Brew Keg Scotch Bitter (there was no mild, of course).

Surely in the month when another Manchester brewery shut its gates for the last time the Council with the motto 'Defending Jobs-Improving Services' could have taken the opportunity at their premier outdoor event of the year to promote Manchester's traditional beers? Is it possible that the jobs of Hydes, Holts, Boddingtons workers and the traditional palates of Manchester's drinkers aren't that important to the City Fathers?

When are Councils and institutions such as G-MEX going to realise that one important way they can discharge their duty to safeguard the region's jobs and heritage is to promote local traditional brews other than tie themselves to the national combines who, as the recent Wilsons closure shows, have scant regard for either.

WHAT WE WANT IS WILSONS!

Readers may be aware that some Wilsons pubs (4 in all) have been converted into Samuel Websters houses. Naturally we were anxious to discover whether any such conversions were intended for the Stockport & South Manchester area. We are pleased to report that the Brewery have confirmed to us that no such conversions are planned. Whilst we are on the subject we report that 'ask for Wilsons' campaign has claimed its first victim in Stockport - Websters Green Label, which at one time threatened to displace the Wilsons Mild, has been withdrawn at the New Inn, Wellington Road as the mild drinkers have switched back to the Wilsons - and a first rate pint it is too!

CROSS KEYS

A piece of sad news - Les Jackson, licensee at the Cross Keys, Adswold, died suddenly last month. However the temporary landlord is Bob Smyth who, with his wife Doreen, was at the Victoria in Withington for 23 years. Now retired in Leeds they won a Pub of the Month Award & a place in the 1986 Good Beer Guide.

Old Ship Inn, Styal.

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WILSONS MILD & BITTER -

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Open 6 Days: Closed Sundays: Good Food Daily: Live Music 6 Nights.

Sam Smiths Real Ale: Tel: 480 3978



PUB NEWS!

The Station at Cheadle has proved so popular that Banks's have submitted plans for 79 extra car parking spaces.

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The Longsight at Belle Vue will soon lose licensee Barry Mycock as he is to take over the Crown in Sedgley, back in Banks's homeland. No news yet of a replacement, but whoever it is has a good act to follow.

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Richard Genders at the Bottle Stop off licence in Bramhall tells us that Bishops Tipple from Gibbs Mew (OG 1066) in Salisbury is becoming so popular it's in danger of outselling favourites Marstons Pedigree & Ruddles County.

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Banks's latest pub in Manchester, The Milestone on Burnage Lane, opened its doors with the usual fanfare of publicity last month. A full report in the next issue.

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Oldham Cask Bitter introduced two years ago in the Ladybrook in Bramhall has now gone, but the keg variety is available in the upstairs club room.

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London based Onymange Ltd., have applied for permission to convert the 1st & 2nd floors of 70, Portland St., Manchester (the building that houses the Beaujolais Bistro) into a pub. Plans are for two bars on the ground floor and another upstairs.

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Boddingtons plan alterations to the Old Garret in Central Manchester. Externally the pub is to have a more traditional appearance with etched windows and outside lamps. Interestingly the plans show that it is to be signed "Boddingtons-Oldham-Higsons". Is this to be a 'flagship' pub perhaps? Will it sell all three breweries traditional beers? Watch this space.

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We have just published the list of all Stockport Real Ale pubs and this can be obtained for 10p from many pubs in Stockport or from Jim Flynn, 13, Styal Ave., Reddish Stockport. If by post include an s.a.e.

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BAKERS VAULTS

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FRIDAY- LIVE GROUPS

SUNDAY- LIVE ENTERTAINMENT- FREE

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Contributors this Month: Jim Flynn, John Clarke, Peter Edmondson, Rhys Jones, Humphrey Higgins, Paul Thompson, Phil Levison.

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OPENING TIMES is produced by the Stockport & South Manchester branch of CAMRA. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the Campaign. Send your news to: S.H. Higgins, 48 Moorcroft Drive, Burnage M19 1WH