

Opening Times



STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA NOVEMBER '87

No. 43

Chesters GET'S THE CHOP!

By John Clarke.

Whitbread have announced the closure of their historic Salford Brewery in May 1988, bringing to an end over 125 years of brewing on the Cook Street site.

132 jobs will go in the closure - caused by "the trend in the market....towards lagers and packaged beers." Whitbread go on to say that - "Salford Brewery is not equipped to produce these products and we have other more modern breweries in the North of England with available capacity."

This is arguably absolute rubbish - not only is the so called trend to lager a product of Brewery advertising but Whitbread-Chesters have for long shown little enthusiasm for the traditional ale on which the prosperity of Manchester's other local breweries are based. At the height of the keg revolution in the early 70s Cook Street was the only Manchester Brewery to phase out cask beer. Commercial pressures forced its belated reintroduction in 1980 but from the start the lack of enthusiasm was plain for all to see - the insipid Chesters Bitter struggled to even be an average pint and the once famous 'fighting mild' was a shadow of its former self.

The future of these two beers, plus Salford Trophy (probably the best of the three beers), must ultimately hang in the balance although we are told that all three will be brewed elsewhere in the North (Sheffield and Castle Eden in Durham).

Apart from the Scottish & Newcastle joke lager-only plant in Moss Side, the Big Seven have now withdrawn from Manchester completely showing a callous disregard for both local jobs and local beers, to be sure if the old Threlfalls-Chesters combine hadn't sold out in 1967, closure would be the last thing on the cards. Once again CAMRA's message that Brewery takeover means brewery closure has been proved correct.

FOOTNOTE:- This will in fact be the second 'Chesters' Brewery to be axed - Chesters' original plant, in Ardwick, was closed in 1966 and subsequently demolished in 1968. An Industrial Estate now occupies the site.

At the same time they announced the Chesters closure Whitbread also announced that the Wethered Brewery in Marlow, Buckinghamshire is to shut too.

THE 1988 BEER DRINKERS BIBLE!!

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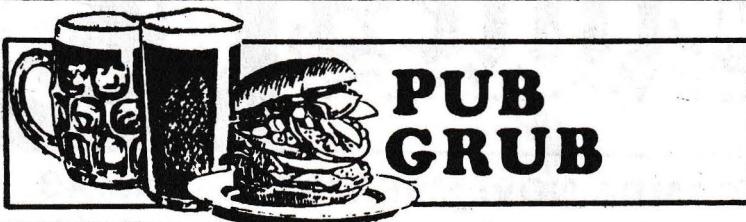
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SAMUEL WEBSTER



WILSONS



By John Clarke.

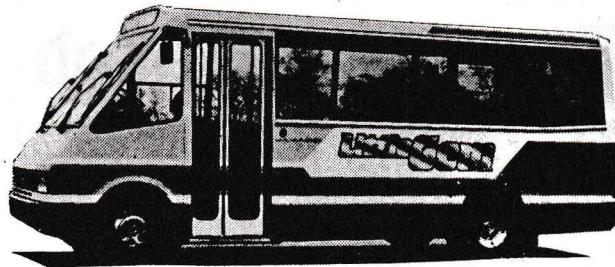
With thanks to last month's 'Guest Gourmet' for standing in, we go back to Stockport this time and the Royal Oak, High Street.

'Opening Times' had some pretty unkind words to say about this Robbies house when it re-opened last year and indeed it certainly seems to lack the character of its predecessor. Having said that however, the beer is usually pretty good (electric pumped Best Mild & Best Bitter accompanied by Old Tom in the winter) and the food is well up to scratch. The main menu offers standard pub fare, curry, chili, lasagne, hot pot etc., all of which is priced in the £1.30 - £1.50 region. A couple at the next table tried the home made steak pie with chips and salad at £1.50 - the quality looked good & the portions generous. Jacket spuds are available for the health conscious instead of chips. There are also sandwiches at 55p for ham or cheese through to 90p for prawn. Similarly salads as above or a ploughmans will set you back £1.50.

What really makes this place stand out however is the additional menu - genuine Indian Curries

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available either to eat in or out. On offer are such as Chicken Rogan Josh, Beef or Chicken Madras etc. These don't appear on the menu as they are shown on a sign in the lobby as you enter. The bar maid wasn't too sure whether they were on but a check with the kitchen cleared things up. Clearly then you have to ask but it's certainly worth the effort. Most readers will be familiar with Indian Restaurant Curries and this is what you get here, not the jazzed up vesta that many pubs dish up. The Rogan Josh was hot and tomatoey but without being overpowering. Good pieces of chicken as well made the curry alone filling - it came with a large portion of rice and chips however & I struggled to finish. The price? Well the notice says £2.50 but I was charged £1.99. Either way it's a bargain.

For the really greedy sweets are available and coffee can be had for 40p.

Despite concern about the perceived lack of character the quality of the beer and the price and quality of the food make the Royal Oak one not to miss next time you're shopping in Stockport.

ALE HOUSE BLUES.

Regular readers will recall the concern we have voiced over the dispense system used on some beers at Pennine Hosts' Withington Ale House, consisting of a fake wooden barrel with a free-flow switch where the tap should be. Recently this has been used to dispense a beer variously labelled as Ruddles Best Bitter or the stronger Ruddles County. The price (95p) indicates it's probably Ruddles County, and the tastebuds, while reluctantly concurring, are confused by the strong tang of carbon dioxide; either the beer is massively over-conditioned, implying poor cellar work, or it's keg masquerading as cask, implying economy with the truth. Either way avoid it.



CAMRA CALLING!

Again a varied programme this month - something for everyone we hope. WE kick off on **Monday 2nd** with a social at the **Bowling Green**, Grafton St., Chorlton-on-Medlock (like all Monday socials this starts at about 9pm). The following **Monday the 9th.**, sees a social at the **Church Inn**, Church Road, Cheadle Hulme. This is a full week as on **Tuesday 10th.**, we visit **Hydes Brewery** meeting at the Little Alex at 7pm & assembling at the Brewery gates at 7-30. There were one or two places remaining at the time of writing so phone for details. On **Thursday 12th.**, we have a Branch Meeting at the **Duke of Edinburgh**, Mill St., Bradford. Our guest speaker will be Jonathon Cope, the Assistant Brands Manager at Tetley-Walker, who promises us 'exciting news'!

Following the success of our Sunday Lunch at the Manor House in October we're having another go this month at the **Cleveland**, Wilson St., (off the A6) Ardwick. The lunchtime speciality is trad. Irish Music which we'll be following with a curry in Rusholme.

Monday 16th., sees a social at the **Oddfellows**, Abbey Hey Lane. Gorton & on **Friday 20th.**, it's Stagger time, this time round Bradford & Beswick starting at the **Britannia**, Rowsley St., at 7 & meeting at the **Duke of Edinburgh**, Mill St. at 8-30. On **Monday 28th.** we have a social at the **Rampant Lion**, Anson Road, Rusholme, followed on **Thursday 26th.**, by Pub of the Month at the **Blossoms**, Stockport. Finally we finish on **Monday 30th.**, with a social at the **Stockport Arms**, Petersgate, Stockport - a good refurbishment but is the mild keg? If you want more info. please phone me, John Clarke, on 061-831-7222 x 307 (day) or 061-477 1973 (night)

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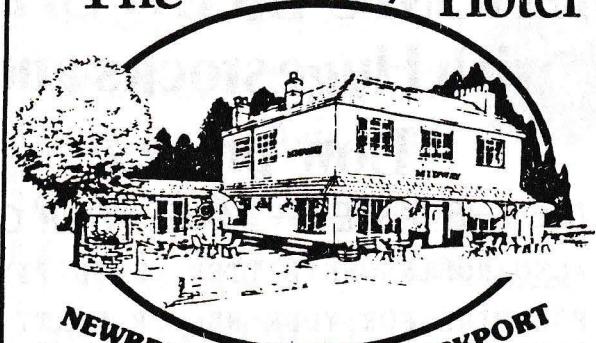
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STAGGER

DAWDLING IN DIDSBURY - By Rhys Jones.

A balmy September evening found a soon-swollen half-dozen local beer lovers sampling the pubs of Didsbury - a more leisurely assignment than some of our 'route marches', hence our title. As ever the opinions are ours and simply describe how we found things on that one night.

WE gathered in the **Parrswood** on School Lane. This is a large 1930s pub with separate entrances to lounge and vault - there's also a pool room. Plates decorate the walls, and a particulaly pleasing feature is the relief over the lounge entrance. Alterations are due soon and it's to be hoped they retain the feel of the often underated inter-war era of pub design. Beer on our visit was Boddingtons mild and bitter on electrics - both comfortably above average, with the mild just marginally preferred.

By contrast our next call, **Chesters Old Cock**, on Wilmslow Road, had already been thoroughly modernised in the standard 'national brewers up-market' style - acceptable enough if confined to one area, but just

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plain boring if, as here, every square foot of what is a large pub looks exactly the same. It seems popular though - so much so that, although it was not yet eight, the too-few bar staff were finding it difficult to maintain an adequate speed of service. Both mild and bitter were available on handpump (at the same price of 80p) - the mild was thought average, the bitter was rather less good.

Further into Didsbury village there were no service problems at Marstons Royal Oak, the legendary professionalism of whose staff surely rivals even Edinburghs' world famous Diggers! This one is well enough known, I trust, not to warrant detailed description but the Taylors Eagle Brewery windows are worth a look. As usual, the pub was extremely busy, but we managed to get seats outside. The beers are mild bitter and Pedigree, all on handpump. None of us drank the mild (Marstons mild, however well kept, is not generally regarded as in the front rank of the style.) My pint of Pedigree was on good form, but sadly (and I think exceptionally) the rest of the party, drinking the Burton ('Ordinary') Bitter, found their beer struggling to scrape an 'average' rating.

Across the road more of our party awaited us at - or rather outside - Greenalls Crown. This was modernised a couple of years ago, and seems to be settling down quite well - an individual treatment which still looks and feels like a pub. All the handpumps really are handpumps - not always the case with this brewery - and dispense the full range from Greenalls' Warrington Brewery. Both Mild & Bitter were above average, with the bitter marginally preferred, but the real star was the



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A HAVEN IN THE SHOPPING PRECINCT!



stronger Original Bitter, a very good pint which eventually turned out to top the ratings as best beer of the night.

A side street excursion now, to Hydes' **Albert** on William Street - again seats outside for those of us who appreciate the finer things in pub life, though the majority (hot house plants!) opted for indoors. Despite trying hard, with its film and theatrical photographs, this modernised pub somehow seems to lack individuality, but is for all that a perfectly good, popular and well-run local. Beer is mild & bitter on electrics and both were good.

Next to the **Nelson**, on Barlow Moor Road near the traffic lights. While the exterior tiling is pleasant enough, and there's a splendid brass nameplate in the entrance passage, it's best to turn a blind eye to the interior, ham-handedly modernised a few years back and featuring some of the most unrealistic plastic 'beams' you've ever seen. Only one real ale - handpumped Wilsons bitter - and it wasn't very good.

Across the road used to stand the OLD Grey Horse, but this has now undergone another change of name to emerge as **Squires**, one of the Grand Metropolitan Group's 'Open House' bars catering determinedly for the younger end of the market - so how come the first sound to greet our ears was a raucus impromptu rendition of 'Let's Go to San Francisco', a song whose appearance in 1968 we were the only people there old enough to remember? Still, we felt that given the restrictive market specification (for why shouldn't a pub attract all age groups?) a good job had been done - particularly praiseworthy was the clearing away of games machines into a separate area while one of our number felt the decor owed much to 1930s cinemas. The only real ale is handpumped Websters Bitter at a hefty 84p, which was judged to be just about average.

It's always a good idea to end a pub-crawl at a well-known favourite, and so we stepped the few yards to Marstons tiny and delightful **Station**. AS usual late

on, it was packed to the doors and beyond, but we managed to gain the bar and even, briefly, seats, before deciding the pavement was probably more fun anyway. It's a perennial pleasure to see this archtypal local in full swing, and copious amounts of beer were consumed, soaked up by the odd packet of pappadums. The mild was above average, the bitter was better still, but oddly on this occasion the Pedigree could only raise an 'average' rating (and it wasn't just me drinking it by this time!)

So ended a particularly interesting and enjoyable evenings' drinking. Those reputations that were slightly dented will surely recover, so well-known is their possessors' customary excellence, while it was encouraging to see one or two hitherto less-regarded rivals performing so well.

PS. Just before the Station, a small splinter group tried Greenalls' keg-only **Dog & Partridge** (I was put off by the noise, the smoke, and the absence of White Shield). They returned with reports of late 70s' decor which had not worn well. Perhaps Greenalls should take the Crown as a model if and when they decide to refurbish the pub.

HEARD AT THE BAR:

Licensee: "Boddingtons is no good in London, it doesn't travel well."

Customer: "The price they charge for it, it ought to travel first class."

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SUNDAYS - Return of the

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WEDNESDAYS

- John Brett &
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The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month for November is the **Blossoms Hotel**, at the junction of the A6 & Bramhall Lane, Heaviley.

This fine old pub has plenty of character, with many rooms to suit most people. In fact, it narrowly missed being selected as CAMRA Pub of the Year for 1986 by a single vote! There is also a private room available upstairs which has been

the venue in recent years for meetings of the local Greenpeace Supporters Group amongst others.

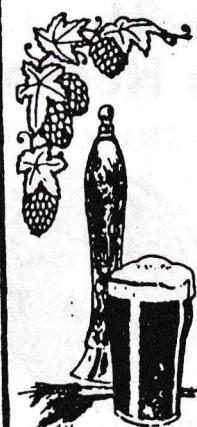
Robinsons Best Mild & Best Bitter are available on handpump, and these are complimented by an excellent pint of OLD Tom during the Winter months. A warm welcome is guaranteed from long-established landlady Barbara Mounkley and her two sons, Simon & Richard, so get yourself along there for the presentation night on **Thursday, November 26th.**

"OPENING TIMES" - WORKING FOR YOU! :

We commented recently on the surprising absence of lunchtime food at Pennine Hosts **Crown**, Stockport Road, Longsight. The powers that be evidently read 'O.T.' - for a notice on the pub door now states "Please do not bring in your own food - sandwiches are available at the bar."

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A CHRISTMAS CRESCENT!

We've already reported the re-opening of Chester's Old Brewery on Bell Crescent, Beswick, as the new and much improved Crescent, and as custom flows back to the place, so also the social club is prospering. They're offering a splendid package on Christmas Night - yes we do mean DEcember 25th! Local duo 'Lifestyle' will perform 50s & 60s numbers, there's a free raffle, fancy dress competition, free buffet and - from 9pm onwards FREE DRINKS!! (Not just beer - top shelf included)

All this is yours if - and only if - you buy a ticket in the pub - price £10, all proceeds to the social club. The closing date was November 6, but late applications will be accepted subject to availability. A Christmas to remember if only you can remember it!!

ALE & DARTS STARS!

A bastion of female domination fell to sexual equality at the start of the pub games season - the dartboard at the **Seven Stars**, Ashton Old Road. The pub has had an active, and successful, ladies darts team for some years, but this year saw the birth of a mens team, who play on Thursdays in the Ardwick League - log-end board. When approached a representative was quietly confident of reasonable results; however, the ladies' experience may still be telling, as by mid October they were still unbeaten, whereas the men had lost one of their early fixtures.

And the other success story at the Seven Stars is the beer - Holts' ales in good enough form to make a very deserved entry into the 1988 Good Beer Guide. When the '87 Guide was surveyed, Pat & Brian hadn't been there long enough for us to be certain of consistent beer quality to CAMRAs high standards; now they're well established, and we hope their listing in Britain's premier guide will bring them a variety of new customers

REAL ALE IN CENTRAL & SOUTH MANCHESTER - UPDATE 2.

Just like Mark Twain's, our obituary last month for the Travellers Call, West Gorton was premature. Hydes have re-opened the pub in quick time still with mild & bitter on electrics. On the other side of the coin the Rock, West Gorton seems permanently closed. Other closures are the Sherwood, Ardwick & Schnaps & the Weavers in the City centre. In each case closure is 'until further notice' - it's thought there may be an interested party eyeing up the Weavers. There's a real ale gain in the City - the Commercial, Liverpool Road now sells Wilsons & Websters Bitter on handpumps, though it's closed on Sunday lunch. Perhaps they should be reminded of the nearby museums which appear to attract multitudes on the Sabbath.

Finally some changes in beer range. The Why Not? in Bradford now also has Ind Coope Burton Ale on handpump; the Pomona, in Gorton has dropped Ruddles County due to lack of demand & the Horseshoe, Levenshulme has acquired - if that's the word - handpumped Websters Bitter. In the centre Branagans has added handpumped Youngers No. 3, and we're told the Burtonwood Mild in the Castle & Falcon is back on handpump. And very sadly, traditional cider is no longer sold at the Crown & Anchor on Hilton Street. Finally cask mild has been dropped from the Red Lion, Withington.



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WE'VE NOT ONLY GOT THE ANSWERS

WE'VE GOT THE QUESTIONS TOO

?????????????????????????????????????

GREENALLS GROW UP!

Better late than never, Greenalls have finally discovered the attractions of real ale. CAMRA's National Chairman, Jim Scanlon, recently attended a meeting with brewery big-wigs who stated

- * a 're-launch' of cask ale is planned.
- * all cask ale will be dispensed by handpumps.
- * cask beers will be re-named, the 'local' tag being reserved for tank & keg beers.
- * up to 5 new liveries are being designed for their pubs in new colours & with the Whitley name disappearing.

Sounds good doesn't it? Now all they need to do is stop serving keg via handpumps and keep Wem Brewery open - then they might gain some credibility.

NEWBODS & RIDLINGTONS?

Boddingtons have negotiated with Granada TV to use the 'Newton & Ridley' name for a new packaged beer to come out soon. Newton & Ridley's best known pub, the Rovers Return, sells nothing but keg of course - perhaps then it's not surprising that Boddies have also recently announced the introduction of a brewery conditioned version of their Bitter. Despite many criticisms from CAMRA over the years Boddies have always been able to claim that they were one of the few breweries in the county producing only traditional ales - no more!

The new version of Boddies is apparently only intended for the free trade, let's hope it stays there & that the pubs continue to guarantee at least one cask beer.



Real Mild has been replaced by keg at the **Plough**, Heaton Moor. However Jennings Bitter is still on sale, alongside Tetleys, although sales can't be helped by the pump being tucked away round the corner of the bar.

Holts continue to make progress with their new pub on Broom Lane, Levenshulme. To be called the **Sidings** a mid-December opening is the aim.

Change of licensee at Pennine Hosts' attractive **Church**, Ardwick Green. We say farewell to Gwyn & Margaret Davies, who've moved to the Inn of Good Hope, Salford and we welcome new incumbent

James Paterson.

The Hague, Brinksway, Stockport is boarded up following a visit from bailiffs sent in by Whitbread. The owner was apparently on the point of selling the pub to an unknown purchaser - Whitbread are now offering it to the highest bidder. It's difficult to see anyone making a go of it until (if?) the projected science park is built nearby.

Byard Thompson owner of the keg-only Byards Bar, Heaton Moor, has bought the former Midland Bank premises in Levenshulme which will open in mid December as "**Dicey Reillys**". Despite the unlikely name this is to operate as a real ale bar selling beers from Bass, Banks's, Boddingtons & Robinsons. More news when it opens.

A while ago we had cause to criticise the beer in the **Sherwood**, Claremont Road, Rusholme (though we did point out the new licensee had only just moved in). It's a pleasure to report that on a recent visit the handpumped Chesters was in fine form - we'd forgotten you could get such good beer from this soon-to-close brewery.

Boddies plans for the **Plymouth Grove**, include managers accomodation and, bizarrely, 8 bed-sits for students. The pub itself is in bad need of a revamp.

In an effort to compete with neighbouring clubs Boddies **Farmers Arms** in Brinnington is converting from electric pumps to handpumps and introducing Oldham Bitter alongside Boddies mild & bitter.

The new **Yates Wine Lodge** is due to open in Stockport in the not too distant future. For those not fancying a night on the "all-ins" cask beer from Wilsons will be available. **Wot - no Holts?**

The Pennine Hosts instant revamp Department looks set to descend on the **Fallowfield**. Permission has been applied for to instal a front entrance canopy and a conservatory at the rear.

Our recent report about the **Church**, Edgeley not

only caused some comment in the local press

("Robbies decent conversion shock"?) but was

slightly wrong in one respect - the Victorian

fire is in fact the original one taken out & re-

furbished. Old Tom is now available and trade is

well up following the improvements.

A new pub was due to open last month in the former Co-Op premises, Hyde Road, Gorton. Apparently there was some discussion as to a name the final choice rested between the Pig & Ball Bearing or the Elephant & Suspender Belt!! The former won the day and it's to be a disco fun pub after nine pm. More news next time.

Contributors to this edition: John Clarke, Jim Flynn, Rhys Jones, Alastair Walker, Peter Edwardson, Humphrey Higgins.

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OPENING TIMES

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