

DEMOLITION DERBY

WE enter the New Year at a time of great uncertainty on both the international and national fronts. No-one quite knows what the future will bring. One thing is certain, however, 1991 will see the finalisation of plans which threaten to cut a swathe through the pubs of East Manchester.

We have already highlighted the threat posed by the scheme to widen Hyde Road - this has already claimed one victim in the shape of Robinson's Horseshoe and at least a further six pubs (the Star, Nags Head, Travellers Call, Unicorn, Victoria and Cheshire Hunt) face demolition. Final plans are due to be presented to the City Council this month and we should then know if our representations to at least save the Coach & Horses and the Plough have been successful.

If this wasn't enough, just before Christmas the City Council published the tortuously named 'City of Manchester (Intermediate Ring Road Stage 2 - Pottery Lane to Oldham Road) Compulsory Purchase Order 1990'. The planning blight caused by this scheme has already led to the demolition of the Travellers Call on Ashton Old Road and the premature closure of the Railway on Pottery Lane) as reported last month). In addition there are a further five pubs named in the CPO - the Park, the Alexandra and the Duke of Edinburgh, all on Mill Street; the Grey Mare on Ashton Old Road

and the Star on Pottery Lane.

Whilst it is arguable that in one or two cases the CPOs will be no more than a mercy killing, some fine locals are threatened, the Duke of Edinburgh for example which, as reported in this month's Stagger is a fine Victorian pub starting to thrive again under the direction of a new, interested licensee.

The timing of the CPO also makes the closure of the Railway on Pottery Lane even more difficult to fathom. As the Order has only just been published, there seems to be no logical reason for the pub to have closed at that time and so missed out on the lucrative Christmas and New Year's trade. There is probably a lot more to that story than will ever see the light of day...

So, what is to be done? It is not too late to lodge objections to the CPO's. Objections must be made in writing to The Secretary of State for Transport, Northern Regional Office, Local Authorities Orders Section, Wellbar House, Gallowgate, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4TD before 18th January and should state the title of the order and the grounds of the objection.

CAMRA will certainly be lodging some objections to these orders but we will need your help. If your local is threatened and you want to do some thing about it - object now, and let us know.

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FRESH STRAWBERRY

THE Strawberry Duck in Clayton has undergone major alterations. A nervous Paul Bradley went along to see what had been done:

It was with some trepidation that I approached the Strawberry Duck. I had been a regular at the pub for the last six months and I had got used to the convivial atmosphere. The pub had a real community feel to it - would this have changed and spoilt the pub in any way?

As I walked through the door, I was hit by the unusual brightness of the pub (compared to what it used to be like), but after that I wasn't worried, no-one could fail to be impressed by the changes.

The bar itself has been extended into a complete L-shape and now boasts nine handpumps. There is some attractive new tiling behind the bar.

The most obvious change was the creation of a completely separate vault from what was previously just another drinking area. Moving the ladies toilet and the kitchen have also ensured that the new vault is bigger than the drinking area it replaces. The vault includes a clearly marked darts area, a welcome change on busy Tuesday and Thursday nights, I'm sure.

The main room has been enlarged by the building of a new extension, the centrepiece of which is a superb Lancashire range with a real coal fire. This complements the changes superbly and gives the pub a cosy feel. There is new seating, carpets, curtains and wallpaper all round, The original 'sewing' tables have been refurbished to match the new decor.

Before the changes were made the licensee, David McConville was concerned that the pub would lose its atmosphere in an attempt to attract more couples. He therefore took a very close hand in all the changes and the result is a pub that is a great credit to David, Julie and their staff who have worked hard to make the pub what it is today.

There has also been a positive change in the beer range with the introduction of Holts Mild (82p) to replace the Websters Green Label. There are now no Websters/Wilsons products in the pub.

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JANUARY

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| 6 | 13 | 20 | 27 | |
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PUB OF THE MONTH

THE Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for January 1991 goes to the **Pack Horse** on Stockport's Market Place.

The pub is probably one of the oldest in Stockport and in recent years had become something of a Cinderella - close to the thriving Market Place 'scene' but somehow not part of it. Things started to go right when the licence was taken by Pauline O'Sullivan whose husband Patrick runs the Gladstone on Hillgate. Although only arriving at the Pack Horse three years ago, Pauline has had considerable experience of the licenced trade as she and Patrick ran the now-demolished Egerton Arms off Brinksway for many years.

About 18 months ago the second improvement in the pub's fortunes took place when there was a major refurbishment carried out by the owners, Tetleys. This saw the two side rooms smartened up, the pool table removed and the bar area completely transformed with much use of natural wood and stained glass. Since then it hasn't looked back - although it remains quiet in the early part of the week a good weekend trade has now built up and the pub provides a welcome refuge for weary shoppers, attracted, no doubt, by the good value freshly cooked food as well as the well kept beers.

The beers available are Tetley Mild and Bitter plus the award winning Ind Coope Burton Ale. All of which will no doubt be enjoyed on the presentation night, Thursday, January 24th when all friends old and new are warmly invited.

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DIMMED STARS

THE Seven Stars (Holts) on Ashton Old Road (Ardwick or Beswick? Take your pick - it's just beyond the railway bridge if your'e coming out of town) reopened on 15th November. "Opening Times" had criticised the published plans for the renovation and extension, so we were anxious to see how it would turn out.

First impressions are favourable - the corridor to the inner doors retains its tiling, while the old timber and glass doors to both lounge and vault are still there. From there on, it very much depends on which room you go in. The vault is unaltered in layout and has essentially just been cleaned up - it's still a good basic Manchester tap-room, and an excellent job has been done here. The small "back room" introduced in the modest refit five or so years ago has been retained (a pleasant surprise), and should be less of a "dead zone" now that it houses the dartboard.

The lounge, though, is a different story. The large area of unbroken open space would be expected in a new pub, and it's quite tastefully furnished, but the contrast between this and the intimate corridor-plus-two-rooms layout that this side of the pub used to enjoy really does hurt. The old pub was, by the end, no classic, but it deserved a better fate than this. Praise, though, for the 'disabled' entrance to the lounge from the new rear car park.

But what of the beer? Early samplings show both mild and bitter to be on good form under the skilled care of new licensees Roy and Catherine Wagner. Though this is their first pub as licensees, Roy grew up in the licensed trade his parents having run many Threlfalls then Whitbread houses, mainly in Salford but finishing at the Brewers in Fallowfield, while Catherine has worked in Holts pubs for some 7 years. They both seem firmly committed to the tradition of good beer and good company in this justly popular pub - even though some of us do prefer to remember it the way it was.

[Editor's note - see also Letters on page 6]



FESTIVAL FEVER

A FEW Tetley pubs in the region held mini beer festivals towards the end of last year. Locally both the Shady Oak in Bramhall and the Plough in Heaton Moor took part. Robin Wignall went along to the Plough and sent us this report:

The mini beer festival held at the Plough in late November/early December was a success which manager Alan Parkinson hopes to repeat. Local interest was aroused by a rolling programme of two guest beers at a time which lasted into a third week.

Many of the beers were from the Allied stable, but most are not normally available in the Stockport area. These included Peter Walkers Best Bitter - much more taste than Warrington Tetleys, Benskins Best Bitter, brewed in Burton and a batch comfortably at the top end of its form, Arrolls 80/-, rare south of the border, Auld Reekie 90/- from an Allied malt extract home brew pub in Edinburgh, and Ind Coope Burton Ale, once a permanent feature in the Plough. Local independent beers available included Robinsons Best Bitter, now a regular guest anyway, Thwaites Bitter, Hydes Bitter, on handpump for a change as Hydes estate generally has electric pumps, and Jennings Bitter, again a regular guest beer. Boddingtons Bitter represented rival national brews.

The piece de resistance was Robinwood Old Fart. Even the lager drinkers could not resist this, and the first firkin lasted a Sunday lunch.

The only quibble about this successful and enjoyable experiment is Allied's pricing policy. £1.09 for a pint of Robinson's Best Bitter is over the top. It is to be hoped that Robinsons themselves don't get that sort of idea for a few years yet.

We understand that the festival at the Shady Oak was also a success and presumably Allied will be looking to repeat the experiment. Certainly one Tetley pub, the Bold Arms in Southport, has been running festivals for some time now - the last featured about 40 different beers.



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STAGGER

BY: ALAN SEAL

IT WAS Friday, October 26th when about 10 hardy souls forsook lusher pastures and ventured forth into one of the less well-visited parts of the Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA branch area.

Our first port of call was the **Britannia** on Rowsley Street. This friendly, compact little local was bought by Lees in the early 1980's when Greenalls decided it was unprofitable. Since then it has built up a good reputation for the quality of a beer which is not widely available in Stockport & South Manchester. The pub consists of lounge and vault separated by a central bar. There is an attractive wood and glass partition in the entrance and panelled seating in the vault. Lees Mild and Bitter are sold by handpump. On our visit only the bitter at 95p was sampled and was thought to be above average to good. The pub was quiet but it was only 7 o'clock. With some reluctance we tore ourselves away to stride out past derelict or semi-demolished buildings and to breathe in the toxic fumes issuing forth from Clayton Aniline.

The second pub of the route was the **Shakespeare**, nominally a 'free house' but with a large Chesters sign on the outside



of the large Victorian street-corner building. Inside it has been knocked through into one room with lounge and vault areas (just step off the carpet to change rooms). It was badly in need of redecoration and some kind of tidying up, the vault area being particularly spartan. Ear drums were assailed by a very loud juke box. The pub is a recent conversion to traditional beer and Chesters Mild (92p) and Boddies Bitter (96p) were sold on handpump. There was also a Stones Bitter clip on a handpump but it was 'not on'. The Chesters Mild was reckoned to be above average to good. There has been much criticism of the dubious practice of closing down breweries and brewing their beers elsewhere. Chesters, however, does seem to be the exception where the transfer has done no harm and in the case of the mild has possibly even improved the beer. It must also be said that the Cook Street products of the eighties bore little resemblance to the original beers brewed under Chesters name. Back to the pub and it should be mentioned that the Boddies was rated as only average.

Now on to the **Alexandra** on Mill Street, an ex-Wilsons pub which opened as a free house in the 1980's. At first an enterprising range of beers was tried but now only Tetley Bitter remains. At 86p, it was however one of the cheapest beers of the night. The pub is a fairly characterless open plan lounge with false beams. As to the beer, impressions varied from above average to poor with one or two detecting 'off tastes'.

Further down the street the handpump in the **Park** was once again disused so we backtracked, past the closed and decaying **Navigation** and made our way to the **Little Bradford** - a comfortable little pub which is re-establishing itself as a beer drinkers local after a few eccentric years as the Why Not. Despite its open-plan layout it has a traditional pub 'feel', particularly in the bar area on the right which is nostalgically adorned with photographs of the old Bradford Colliery which closed in 1962. There is also a rear games room. Beers on sale were Tetley Mild and Bitter at 96p and 99p plus Boddies Bitter at 95p. Both the mild and the Boddies were felt to be above average.

On next to a superb traditional pub in the shape of Tetley's **Duke of Edinburgh** on Mill Street. This is a large multi-roomed pub with high ceilings and etched glass windows. There is a long narrow vault, a cosy lounge, a rear games room plus an open drinking area around the bar. In recent years changes of licensee had seen a sad decline but the current landlord seems to be guiding the place in the right direction again and it does still retain a good traditional pub atmosphere. Only Tetley Bitter was on sale (97p) and was considered above average by the entire party.

The **Queen Victoria** on Grey Mare Lane was our next stop - a modern Chesters pub with Chesters Bitter the only traditional beer on sale - at £1.02 a pint!. This, remember, is for a beer with an og of 1033 - weaker than many breweries' milds and certainly with a lot less taste. In fairness, it must be said that the current licensees have done much to improve the place by smartening it up and introducing food. There is a large modern lounge (with loud live music on our visit) and a smaller comfortably furnished vault. The beer was very cold and thought to be below average.

We now managed to find our way through the housing estate to the **Honeycomb** - a modern estate pub which until recently was

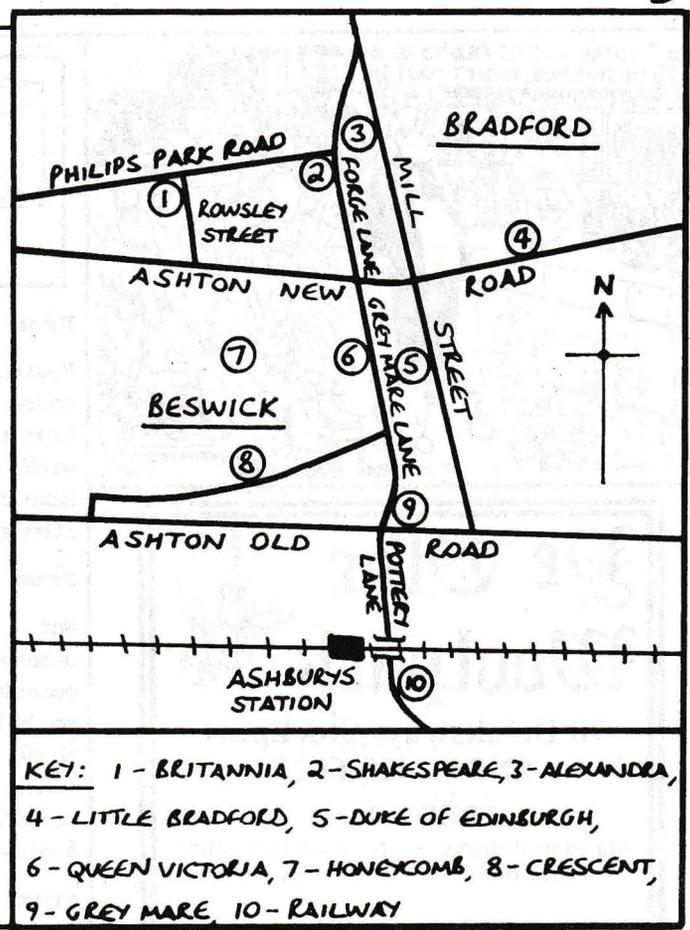
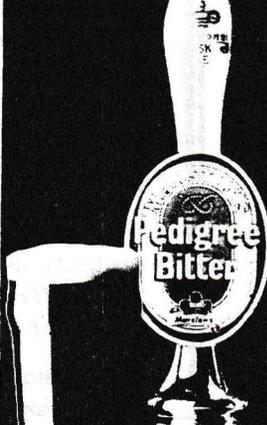
keg-only. John Smiths have now introduced their premium Magnet Bitter on handpump but judging by our visit it won't last very long. The landlord had to pull some off at 9.20pm - an ominous sign - and sure enough the beer appeared to be about to turn sour. Opinions varied - some of the party thought it was still OK while others thought it was already slightly off. The wisdom of introducing a premium bitter as the only traditional beer must be questioned - surely it would have been more sensible to try the 'ordinary' bitter first.

And ever onwards - this time to Chesters **Crescent** - a busy, thriving estate pub which once had a grisly reputation. Now, there is a large comfortable lounge and a vault with the accent strongly on pub games. Chesters Mild and Bitter and Boddies Bitter were on sale - both the mild and the Boddies were considered to be above average.

Our penultimate visit was to the **Grey Mare** - a large old Whitbread Chesters pub on the junction of Ashton Old Road and Grey Mare Lane, passing on the way the site of the recently demolished Travellers Call, at one time a Good Beer Guide entry. The Grey Mare is an ex-Threlfalls house with an austere white-tiled exterior. Internally, it has retained separate lounge, vault and games room but remains quite basic and sadly run-down. Chesters Mild and Whitbread Trophy were the beers at 94p and 97p respectively. The mild was above average but the Trophy was rated as below average to poor.

And so to the final resting place - the **Railway** on Pottery Lane. After so much unremarkable beer we were confronted by the usual large range of Thwaites Mild & Bitter, Holts Bitter, Theakstons XB & Old Peculier, Youngers Scotch Bitter & IPA plus Wadworths 6X, the night's guest beer. Traditional cider was also available. All the beer sampled were in generally good condition and so the evening ended on a high note. What a tragedy the closure of this pub in November has been for quality and choice in this part of the city.

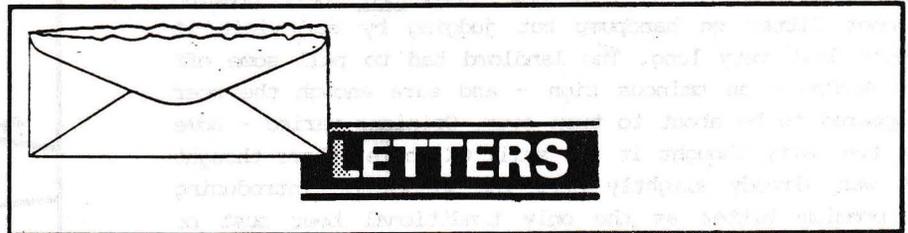
So, what conclusions can be drawn from our voyage of discovery? Well, firstly, it must be said that there are many licensees working hard in an attempt to make a go of pubs in what must be a difficult area. The quality of the beer from the National Brewers seemed to sum up what they are all about - most of it rated just above or below average with very little exciting us enough to be regarded as good. Certainly an interesting evening but as usual the beers from the independent brewers were the most highly regarded and with the exception of the Duke of Edinburgh there was sadly little about the pubs or the beers of the national companies to tempt us to make the journey too often. As ever of course, it must be borne in mind that there are the personal opinions of one group of drinkers on one particular night and as such cannot be considered a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers. As always, the best thing is to try them yourselves and see what you think.

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From Stewart Revell (CAMRA's Liaison Officer with Joseph Holt):

Regarding Opening Times No 79, November 1990 (rear page) "Pub News", there is an item on the Grafton. I understand that Peter Abell came from the Rosehill Tavern at Westhoughton and not the Red Lion at Prestwich as stated. On the latest Holts 'list' of their tied estate, his name is spelt with a ll (not just one as per the previous list). Your item gives the same spelling mistake. I do hope the above helps.

From Rhys P Jones:

While I know CAMRA has no set policy on the matter, I was a little uneasy at the ad for Karaoke (OT, December). As someone who has an occasional impromptu sing in some of the more tolerant pubs (they need to be), I wouldn't want to hear my voice artificially amplified, nor those of my fellow customers - unless I happened to be in Pavarotti's local. If the thing does become popular locally, perhaps you would consider printing a list of pubs that use it, so that they can be avoided.

From George Symes:

The Seven Stars in Ardwick recently reopened after considerable building alterations. My reaction on a subsequent visit was one of profound disappointment. The old pub had tremendous character, with a wealth of carved wood, etched glass and tiling. Now only a token couple of square yards remain of the former glory at the entrance. The pub designer will call it good sense: but I ask where is the sensitivity? Regardless of whether an extension was needed at all, I am depressed to see that the lounge is now comfortable, "nice" and almost totally devoid of character. None of the new features would be offensive to a first time visitor, but those who knew the pub of old will be aware of so much that has been lost.

I appreciate that the building needed repair, that the separate vault still exists and retains much of its atmosphere and that many of the regulars will appreciate the brighter, cleaner surroundings. I used to visit the Seven Stars for its great interior and great beer: now only the beer attracts. I'm told that Holts promised to re-use all the etched glass and panelling, but that looks like just another Brewery Promise. Only 6 out of 10 for artistic impression.

From Oscar Bloemfontein:

On a recent visit to the Grafton (some friends of mine took me there), the place was occupied 90% by students (not that that matters so much) and the JUKE BOX was full on (that does matter). We requested could it be turned down a bit so that we could speak to each other - they duly obliged - I suppose the students were not too happy with that!

Please come back Bruce Davenport - ASAP. Your "Stagger" hit on the Grafton would appear to be correct (sadly).

[editor's note - those on the "Stagger" found refuge in the vault from the entertainment in the lounge.]

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NEW BREW NEWS (1)

BRENDAN Dobbin's West Coast Brewery at the Kings Arms, Chorlton-on-Medlock, gained significant extra capacity just before Christmas with the installation of an additional 15-barrel capacity maturation vessel. At around the same time the new bottling plant came into use, located in an industrial unit in a converted mill on Hamilton Road, Longsight.

Late in the year, West Coast produced one of 1990's most interesting beers. Plunder Bitter (3.6% ABV) was a commemorative ale marking not the usual royal wedding or birth but the date 22nd November 1990 - the day Margaret Thatcher announced her withdrawal from the Conservative Party leadership contest, and hence her resignation as Prime Minister. Plunder is very much a product of Brendan's fertile sense of humour here's how he described it to our reporter:



"Suffused with blue dye, it has a good start but a bitter finish - it is very expensive, to repay the high interest. It's brewed from all-English raw materials, to retain sovereignty, but late-hopped with hops from Britain's offshore farm - New Zealand. No light comes from the black torches on the label."

As well as a run of 1000 bottles, many of which will no doubt end up on collectors' shelves, a limited quantity of Plunder Bitter was sold on draught at the Kings Arms during December.

NEW BREW NEWS (2)

NEXT month sees the closure of Greenalls' brewery in Warrington with the loss of 500 jobs. However, not all is doom and gloom as a new small brewery is set to rise from the ashes of the old.

The Coach House Brewing Company is being set up by four former Greenalls workers including head brewer Neil Chantrell, deputy head brewer Peter Booth and cask beer brewer David Bolton. It will be the first new brewery in Warrington for 150 years.

It will be a sizeable operation for a new concern with the capacity to brew 300 barrels a week. What has given the firm a boost however is an undertaking by Greenalls to take up to 2000 barrels a year of the new beers for their own pubs. This, together with a claimed contract to supply another northern pub chain (Boddington PubCo perhaps?) should get the new brewery off to a flying start when production commences in May.

With any luck, by the summer we might be seeing Coachman's Best Bitter and Innkeeper's Special Reserve in at least some of our local Greenalls pubs.



**THE CLASSIC
CASK
CONDITIONED
BITTER**



MANCHESTER MATTERS

BY RHYS JONES

FIRST of all, apologies to the **Millstone** in the City Centre which is still trading despite last month's report of its closure - sorry to have passed on incorrect information received in good faith. Another error also crept into last month's notes - the Chesters real ale at the **Royal Crown**, also in the Centre is (creditably) Mild, not Bitter. Still in the Centre, last month's report of Holt's acquisition of **Mr Chesters** can now be confirmed - it's believed that, despite introducing a clash of names in the Centre, the pub will revert to its old name of the Crown & Anchor, and we hope to see handpumped Holt's Mild and Bitter early in this New Year. Incidentally the other **Crown & Anchor**, the one Whitbread still own on Hilton Street, was selling Taylors Ram Tam in December - let's hope this marks a return to trying extra Taylors beers as well as the admittedly excellent Landlord.

More details, too, on the **Sandpiper** in Fallowfield. Renamed **Robinski's Wallet**, it's a full-blooded American theme bar drawing heavily on jazz and baseball for its decorative ideas - sounds appalling but, for this writer at least, it's done with sufficient style that is actually works. The handpumped real ales (not cheap but not rip-off) are Websters Bitter, Ruddles Bitter and County, and - for the discerning drinker - West Coast Brewery Best Bitter and Yakima Grande.

A new "pub" has opened on the Whitworth Street West side of Deansgate Railway Station. The **Duke of Bridgewater** is open till midnight on Wednesday and Thursday nights, and 1am Saturday morning; however it doesn't open Saturday lunchtime, or at all on Sundays unless

booked for a private function. The only real ale is handpumped Stones Bitter. A similar cafe bar, the **Conservatory** on Bank Street (which briefly housed the Old Bank Street Brewery - the space downstairs now accommodates an additional bar) now has handpumped Ruddles Bitter. On Oldham Street the re-opened **City** has Chesters Mild and Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. Outside the Centre, there are real ale gains at the **Crown** on Valance Close in Gorton (handpumped Boddingtons Bitter, with the former licensee of the Grey Mare in Beswick edging Gorton ever closer to 100% real ale status) and the **Wheatsheaf** at the corner of Stockport Road and Broom Lane in Levenshulme (Greenalls Bitter and Original on handpump).

Finally, a few beer changes. The **Strawberry Duck** in Clayton marked the opening of the pub's extension by chucking out its last Grand Met real ale - Websters Green Label - and putting in Holts Mild on handpump to stand alongside the bitter. In the City Centre, **Smithfields** is yet another Tetley pub with handpumped Robinsons Best Bitter, while the **Brunswick** has lost Websters Choice. The **White House** is now selling West Coast Brewery Guiltless Stout through a smart metal font using the same nitrogen/carbon dioxide dispense system as at the beer's Kings Arms home; while served this way it isn't real ale, the resulting texture does seem to suit an Irish Stout - try it both ways (the **Beer House** usually has it on handpump), and decide for yourself!

CAMERA CALLING

Not much room this month. The branch meeting is on 11th at the Kings Arms, Helmshaw Walk, Chorlton-on-Medlock, from 8.00pm onwards. The next night there is a minibus around East Manchester leaving the Pineapple, Heaton Lane at 7.00pm. Stagger is on 18th and covers West Didsbury and Withington - there is a 7.00pm start at the Barleycorn, Barlow Moor Road or join at 8.30 at the Victoria, Wilmslow Road. For more info phone Ian on 445 5979.

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The former Whitbread pub, the **Steam Engine** outside Ardwick station is now a cafe. In recent years it sold at first rancid cask beer, then keg, in one of the most unwelcoming pub atmospheres in Manchester, so can hardly be seen as much of a loss to the area's stock of pubs, especially as the fabric of the building seems to be being retained. In the old days it must have been one of the closest pubs to the original Chesters Brewery, which bought it in 1890.

Further to last month's report, Yuletide Ale (og 1080) at the **Kings Arms**, Chorlton-on-Medlock, eventually retailed at 80p per half.

The **Sun & Castle** on Hillgate in Stockport now has handpumped Robinson's Best Bitter alongside the Tetley Bitter and Dark Mild; it's hoped that the local brew

will find wider acceptance than the Jennings Bitter (a fine beer but so distinctive as to be not to everyone's taste) formerly sold here.

The **Railway** in North Reddish reopened before Christmas after a long awaited and much-needed refurbishment - for several years now the pub had been looking shabby with its dated 1970's style red plush decor, mirrors and fake plants. Although an inevitable improvement, the result can only be described as unoriginal and uninspiring. The bar has been moved to the centre of the pub which, with the exception of the front room is largely open-plan, with a vault area to the right of the bar. The beer range is now Chesters Mild and Bitter plus Boddingtons Bitter - with the latter at £1.04 a pint and a less than interesting pub in which to drink it, it remains to be seen whether many people make tracks for the Railway.

A belated mention for a welcome refurbishment at the **Tiviot**, Tiviot Dale, Stockport. The pub has been re-decorated throughout with new furniture in the lounge and dining room. The pub retains its multi-roomed layout but now has a more comfortable feel to it.

Following our report last month on developments at the old **Openshaw Inn** on Ashton Old Road, the building has indeed been repainted and refurbished. Sadly, though, it won't be reopening as a pub - the building is to let for use as offices and/or showrooms.

Boddingtons Bitter looks to have put in an appearance as a guest beer at another Stockport pub. On a recent

the **Wheatsheaf** on Higher Hillgate sported a handpump with a Boddies pumpclip, although this was turned round and the beer was not on at the time.

Boddingtons PubCo have reopened the **Railway** in Cheadle and re-named it the **Ashley**, presumably to reflect its new 'up-market' Henry's Table image. The pub is much what you would expect from this type of operation with most of the pub given over to eating. Despite Cheadle being quite a strong mild drinking area (with even the similarly food oriented Red Lion selling the stuff), none is available here. The two cask beers are Boddies Bitter and Marstons Pedigree. The Boddies is £1.10 a pint, God knows what they're charging for the Pedigree...

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Letters, articles etc are always welcome. Details of advertising rates and postal subs are available from the address below.

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