

APRIL 91

MERGER MANIA

AS THE ink dries on the agreement between GrandMet and Fosters for their pubs-for-breweries swap, rumours abound of yet another tie-up between two brewery giants, Whitbread and Allied Breweries, who trade locally as Tetley-Walker.

First the GrandMet-Fosters tie up. The two companies, who trade locally as Webster/Wilsons and John Smiths respectively have reached an agreement whereby Fosters will control 20% of the UK brewing industry and will quit running pubs. Grand Metropolitan will become the UK's biggest pub operator.

A pub owning company, jointly owned by both companies has been set up. The company, Intntrepreneur Estates, will own 8450 pubs. This comprises all 4910 former Foster's pubs and 3540 of GrandMet's outlets. Foster's has secured a deal to supply the Intntrepreneur estate for 7 years. GrandMet's remaining 990 pubs (mainly managed houses trading under the Chef & Brewer label) and a further 550 pubs leased from Intntrepreneur Estates, will be tied for 4 years.

The Office of Fair Trading has imposed some conditions, however. Of the 8450 pubs that will initially come under the Intntrepreneur banner, 1100 will be sold. A further 2470 pubs must be leased from the tie before November 1992. A restriction on the number of pubs in each licensing district has also been agreed. By November 1992 only 25% can be tied to Fosters and this reduces to 20% once the 4-year supply deal with GrandMet has expired. This could mean some big changes locally, particularly in Stockport Metro where something like 55 out of 230 pubs will initially be tied (that's about 24%).

Meanwhile Allied and Whitbread are hotly denying press reports of so-called 'Operation Pacific' which would see Whitbread take over some of Allied's brewing interests. Such a tie-up could give rise to a conglomerate with over 25% of the national beer market and it is therefore doubtful that the Monopolies Commission would allow such a deal to go through without stringent conditions attached.



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APRIL

	7	14	21	28...
1	8	15	22	29...
2	9	16	23	30...
3	10	17	24
4	11	18	25
5	12	19	26
6	13	20	27

PUB OF THE MONTH

THE Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for April 1991 has been won by the **Griffin**, Heald Green.

Situated on the corner of Finney Lane and Wilmslow Road, the Griffin outwardly gives the appearance of being just another estate-type pub, built in the 1960's. However appearances can be deceptive and certainly are in this case for inside is a comfortable and thriving local of a type that is becoming all too rare these days.

There are three separate rooms - a lively vault, comfortable lounge and quieter snug, all with their own atmosphere. All of this is in the capable hands of landlady Diane Elkington who has been running the pub for several years now. The beer is Joseph Holts Mild and Bitter, with all that that means for quality and value.

Made in recognition of Diane's hard work in maintaining this excellent local and its beer in fine condition, the award is well deserved and, some may say, long overdue. The presentation will be made on Thursday, 25th April when a good turnout from both CAMRA and locals is expected for what should be a great night out.

The pub is a short walk from Heald Green Station and is also on the 128 bus route from Manchester. From Stockport buses 310, 366, 368 and 369 are the best bets.



RED HERRING FOXES NEWSHOUNDS

SOME of our readers may have heard of a spoof motion proposed by the Norwich branch for CAMRA's AGM. It referred to the incredible idea of boycotting pubs with huntin', shootin' and fishin' names, or even beers served from handpumps with hunting scenes. This was, of course, a joke, although maybe not as funny or obvious as it might have been.

However, in best April Fool tradition, some of the press fell for it and published it as if it were true.

It is not true, and never was. CAMRA has no views on bloodsports, except for pursuing the Big Bad Wolves of the brewing industry. We hope no-one was misled by this silly story, and we pass on the apologies of the press barons for their gullibility.

COACH LATEST

WE reported in February on the scheme commissioned by CAMRA for the redevelopment of the London Road area of Manchester at the bottom of Piccadilly Station approach which would incorporate a restored Coach & Horses, the historic pub currently threatened by demolition.

We hoped that the scheme could be sold to the Central Manchester Development Corporation, who are responsible for the area, and it is pleasing to report that their response has so far been cautiously favourable. They comment in a letter that our report contained several "thought provoking ideas" and add that they would study it in depth before responding in full. As part of the continuing consultation process, a meeting has been arranged for 15th of this month between the Corporation and our architect, together with CAMRA. If possible, we'll let you have a report on this next time.

ON THE UP & UP

THE Budget certainly knocked drinkers for six, with combined effects of the duty increase and the VAT hike. The attitude of local brewers Robinsons is therefore to be applauded. They have announced that they hope to keep the retail price increases due to the new duty and VAT rates to only 4p on Bitter and Best Mild, 5p on Best Bitter and 8p on Old Tom. This apart, other brewers seem to be slapping on price increases like there was no tomorrow, Boddingtons for example, once one of the cheap beers in the country is now well past the £1 mark. Indeed, apart from the odd sprinkling of Holts pubs it will soon be well nigh impossible to get a pint for less than a pound in virtually any part of the Stockport & South Manchester branch area.

If you know of any pubs selling a particularly good-value pint, please let us know as we will be happy to print details. The address for letters is on the back page.



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KINGS NEWS

YOU no longer have to go to Chinatown to drink Yellow Mountain Beer, for in response to numerous requests, West Coast Brewery's bottled 4.5% ABV Chinese-style pilsner is now available at the Kings Arms, Chorlton-on-Medlock in whose cellars it is brewed. The imported Chinese hops give the beer a notably clean tasting character and at £1 for a 330ml bottle (significantly more than half a pint), it makes an interesting change from the ales and stouts for which the pub is perhaps more famous.

And there's been a change front of house at the Kings Arms with the arrival as tenant of Simon Finch, late of the Beer House in the City Centre, which after lengthy negotiations has finally been bought by local freehouse proprietor Graham Rawlinson. We wait with interest to see how the Kings evolves under Simon's direction, but the combination of one of Britain's leading small-scale brewers and one of Manchester's leading specialist licensees certainly ought to be a winner.

E. MANCHESTER BEEREX

AS we write, plans are being made for the first ever beer festival in East Manchester. Arrangements still have to be finalised, but we expect the festival will be held at Openshaw College over the last weekend in October. We would hope to have around 25 traditional beers for you to try, along with real cider. We also expect to be able to provide music and food. The festival would be held over the Friday evening, Saturday lunchtime and Saturday evening sessions.

We're sticking our necks out a bit, holding a festival on a new site like this, so we expect lots of support from you, the local drinkers. Those of you who have joined CAMRA, or are willing to join, could even help with the running of the festival itself. We will be happy to talk about our plans, and listen to your ideas at any of our branch do's. One idea we've already been given is to encourage pub social clubs and the like to arrange coaches to the venue.

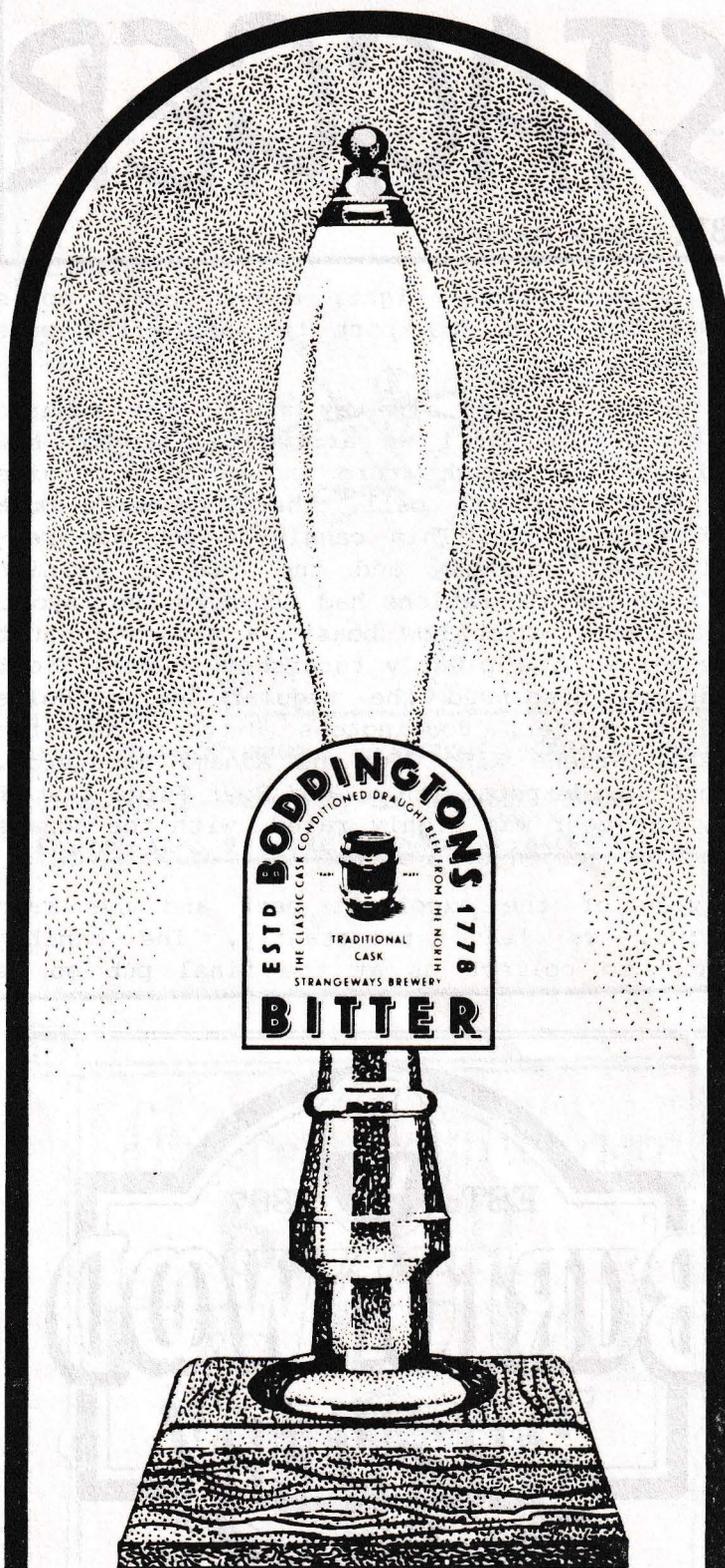
Keep looking for further announcements. Ideas and questions to George Symes on 429 6662.

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CASK
CONDITIONED
BITTER

STAGGER

BY: ROGER MAYHEW

ON A wet Friday night, eleven hardy souls set out from Stockport to sample the pubs of Clayton

Our minibus snaked its way around the suburbs of Manchester until we arrived at Ashton New Road. One more right turn and we were outside our first port of call, the **Strawberry Duck** on Crabtree Lane. This canalside pub has recently been enlarged and the general opinion was that the alterations had improved the layout of the pub, which now boasts a separate vault together with a plushly furnished lounge. Eight handpumps dispensed the regular beers (Holts Mild & Bitter, Boddingtons Bitter) and two guests, Greene King IPA and Adnams Broadside. As one would expect with a Good Beer Guide listed pub, the beer was highly rated, with the Adnams Broadside judged best of the lot.

In view of the excellent beer and the rain outside, we leave reluctantly. The minibus is due to collect us at the final pub so we

walk through a maze of narrow streets, turning left, then right and eventually arriving at the **Folkestone Hotel**, a large pub on Folkestone Road. Inside there are basically two rooms with a central bar above which is a rather tacky coloured glass Boddingtons sign. The mild is now keg so we sample the Boddingtons Bitter which is certainly pleasant enough. It's still early evening and the pub is almost deserted but hopefully trade will pick up later. A sign by the disco lights tells us that the pub is under new management.

Leaving, our navigator appears unsure of the route (ie lost) but after taking directions we proceed down a narrow alley and are soon back on the right track. However, disappointment is a notice on the door of the **New Inn** saying "closed until further notice". Undeterred, we cross into North Road and the **Clayton Arms**. However the barman advises us that the cask Tetley Bitter has temporarily run out. Is this down to heavy demand or poor stock control? We all troop out feeling, by now, far wetter outside than in.

However, an oasis is close at hand in the form of the **Grove** on Ashton New Road. The pub has two rooms, vault and lounge, and we enter the vault for a welcoming pint of Holts. Both the mild and the bitter are in excellent condition and we have a chance to dry off while we sup. A unique feature of this pub is a war memorial plaque on the vault wall, remembering those locals who died in the 1914-18 war. I wonder how much Holts Bitter was in 1914. Any offers?

A pleasant time spent, we are off again on our travels, but not too far. The **Church** stands on the corner of Clayton Lane and Croft Street. The interior seems oddly laid out with pool and darts rooms off the main area. The pub serves Bass Light and Stones Bitter at reasonable prices; opinions on the beer depend on personal taste with comments ranging from poor to excellent (I enjoyed mine - ed.).

Our next stop is just across the road on Clayton Lane itself. The **Bridge** is a typical small local with lounge and vault connected by a door at the end of the bar. The vault is traditional with darts and no frills, the lounge is comfortable with an unusual glass roof extension (rather hot in summer?). Unfortunately, the only cask beer available is Chesters Bitter which receives less than favourable comments and is a little more expensive than shown on the price list, which appears lost in a time warp.

We double back along Croft Street to the **Victoria**, a pub now run by Control Securities. It's a small, tidy pub with a horseshoe-shaped bar around which are seated a handful of customers. The cask beer is Tetley Bitter which is OK - our only complaint is the juke box which is

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very loud.

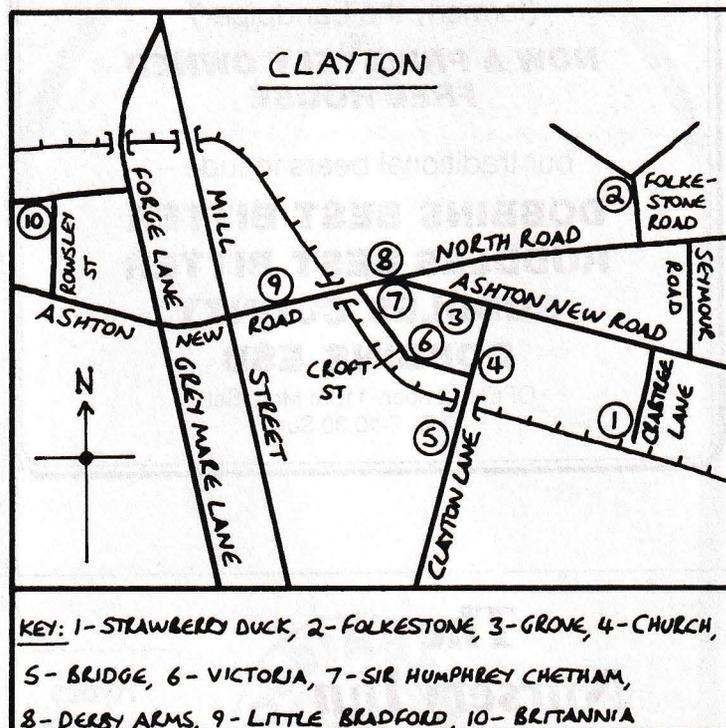
Proceeding along Ashton New Road, our next watering hole is the **Sir Humphrey Chetham**, a large pub full of boisterous people enjoying a Friday night drink. The pub has a vault along the front, mainly for pool, and a large lounge which is notable for the mosaic floor in the entrance. We try Chesters Mild and Whitbread Trophy, both of which are in fair condition. Chesters Bitter is also available but has no takers. We cross the road to the **Derby Arms**, which again is very busy in both rooms with apparently a slightly older clientele than the previous pub. Service is quick and the Boddingtons Bitter good.

Our penultimate stop involves a short walk (or should that be paddle, as the rain still lashes down) and, half-drowned, we arrive at the **Little Bradford**, a split level free house with a rear games room and which still manages to retain a local atmosphere, with pictures commemorating the Bradford Pit which closed in the 1960's. The bar also has an impressive collection of darts trophies. The beer range is Tetley Dark Mild, Chesters Mild and Bitter and Boddingtons Bitter. All the beers tasted are in good condition.

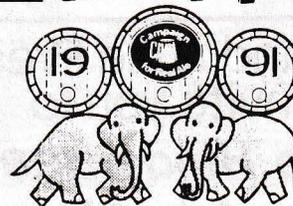
Our final destination is the **Britannia** on Rowsley Street, Beswick, a two-roomed pub with a central bar. Since being taken over by JW Lees, the pub has flourished and certainly has a local feel with several crib schools in full swing. The beers, both mild and bitter, are the best of the night and as we climb aboard our minibus for the return home we are reminded of that old saying "the best things in life are worth waiting for".

Our trip has taken us to a variety of pubs selling a variety of cask ales. It's not a fashionable area but there are many pubs here well worth a visit. Please also remember that this is an account of what our party found on one particular night and should not be taken as a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers - the answer, as ever, is to pay them a visit yourself and see what you think.

FOLLOWING the MMC investigation into the brewing industry, the national brewers have to dispose of, or free from tie, several thousand pubs. Some companies have already taken steps in this direction. Whitbread, however, supported by Allied Breweries, have attempted to lobby the government to get the November 1991 deadline for this operation extended. For once, the government has stood firm in the face of pressure from the brewers lobby and has refused point blank to consider any extension and the deadline stands.



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HIGSONS GONE

MANY Opening Times readers will recall the days when then George in Stockport's Mersey Square was a Higsons house, selling the distinctive products of the Merseyside brewery. 'Higsons' beers these days come from Whitbread's Sheffield plant and are a pale shadow of their former selves. The George, however maintained its link with the past and continued selling Higsons Bitter, and to this day is covered in signs advertising the fact. The beer, however, is no longer on sale. Let's hope that the Boddington PUBCo now remove the misleading signs before the trading standards people get involved...

THE RIGHT PRICE?

IT'S always interesting to get hold of a brewery price list, particularly if it's from Marstons, whose beers don't exactly come cheap locally.

Whilst it must be remembered that some pubs, particularly freehouses, may get their beer from an intermediary and so pay more, Marstons tied houses, and probably Whitbread pubs as well, will be paying the list price.

So, let's look at Pedigree. After the budget increases pubs will be paying £173.84 + VAT for a barrel, that's about £205 in total. A standard barrel contains 288 pints. Assuming that 8 pints are wasted, the net cost becomes just over 73p a pint. Pub mark ups are usually in the 35%-45% range. A 45% mark up gives about £1.06 a pint. Hmm...

FALCON FLIES

IN November's Opening Times we were pretty unkind about Banks's Falcon in Chorlton-on-Medlock. Not only did our Staggerers get some pretty ropey beer, there was marked reluctance to change it. Happily, it looks as though this was a one-off aberration. Banks's beers are normally noted for their consistency and a recent Sunday lunchtime visit found them on fine form.

NEW QUEENS

Although it is just outside our circulation area, mention should be made of the recent alterations and extension to the **Queens Arms**, Honey Street, Cheetham. This popular freehouse has now doubled in size with the result that the often excessive overcrowding is a thing of the past. The whole pub has been refurbished and is very pleasant and comfortable. The beer range has been revamped as well - out go the Theakston beers to be replaced by the full Batemans range. The mild was particularly impressive on a recent visit.

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MANCHESTER MATTERS

BY RHYS JONES

THE Flea & Firkin at All Saints (Chorlton-on-Medlock) has changed its traditional cider from Westons Old Rosie to Taunton (medium, I'd say) selling at a horrific £1.40 a pint - Old Rosie, which is just about 50% stronger than Taunton, sold for "only" 10p more. Your correspondent managed to bargain them down to the price of keg cider, still dear at £1.28 - see if you can do better! (All prices are pre-budget, by the way).

Still, at least the handpump does dispense a real cider, unlike that for Scrumpy Jack at the Peveril of the Peak in the City Centre, which joins the "list of shame" of pubs selling this cider in keg form on handpump. Other offenders just outside our core circulation area are the Bowling Green and the Jolly Sailor, both at Marple. The licensees are not chiefly to blame, for the stuff is in most cases being foisted on them by breweries, but they should be aware how much goodwill they are losing among discerning drinkers - expect to read more on this in "Opening Times" shortly.

Elsewhere in the City Centre, Daniel's, while retaining its name, is now supplied not by (Daniel) Thwaites but by Vaux, and offers hand-pumped Samson (worth catching the early evening happy hour), while the Dutton Arms behind Victoria Station is once more selling Hydes Extra Dark as its mild.

In Clayton, mild at the Folkestone is now keg, the Victoria is a Control Securities house selling handpumped Tetley Bitter, and the Sir Humphrey Chetham has gained handpumped Chesters Bitter. Finally, two recent Greenalls real ale gains, the Cotton Tree in Withington and



CAMRA CALLING!

ONCE again this month there is a variety of meetings and socials in prospect.

On **Thursday 11th** there is the Branch AGM which will be held at the Blossoms, Buxton Road (A6), Heaviley. All members should attend for the 8.00pm start.

On **Monday 15th** we have a two-way Gorton Social starting in the Angel, Wellington St. at 9.00pm and moving on to the Suburban on Gorton Cross St at 10.00. Later in that week, **Friday 19th**, is a Reddish Stagger starting at the Railway, Gorton Road at 7.00, or you can join at 8.30pm at the Thatched Tavern, Stanhope St.

Monday 22nd sees a Social at the Three Tunnes, London Road, Hazel Grove and on **Thursday 25th** we present our Pub of the Month award to the Griffin on Finney Lane/Wilmslow Road, Heald Green.

This is followed on **Saturday 27th** by an Awayday in West Yorkshire - the day will be spent in Hebden Bridge and the evening in Bradford. Either catch the 11.55 from Victoria and meet in the Fox & Goose, Hebden Bridge at 12.30 or catch the 18.50 from Victoria and meet in the Rams Revenge, Bradford at 20.00.

On **Monday 29th** there is a social in the Osborne House, Victory St, Rusholme. Like all Monday socials, this starts at 9.00pm.

the Old House at Home in Fallowfield, have gained handpumped Stones Bitter, though at the Old House this is at the expense of Greenalls Original.

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PUB NEWS



The **Railway**, Manshaw Road, Openshaw is due to be re-decorated as we go to press. We are told that no major changes are planned, but fancy curtains and external lighting have been mentioned. Let's hope Holts have the boldness of imagination to replace the magnificent old lamp which used to be such a notable feature of the exterior of this marvellous pub. The beer neds no changes at all - recent visits show the mild and bitter to be on excellent form.

Stones Bitter continues to make inroads in the Greenalls estate and is now also available at the **Victoria**, Offerton; the **Greyhound**, Cheadle Heath (where it has replaced the Davenport's Bitter, an increasingly familiar picture) and the **Sir Robert Peel** in Edgeley.

This latter must be one of the most improved pubs in the area at the present and is well worth a visit.

After over a year on the market, the **Imperial** in West Gorton has finally been sold. New licensees are Eric and Christine Crowther, who can claim a wealth of experience in the North West licensed trade. For most of this former Wilsons pub's life as a free-house, Boddingtons Bitter has been the only real ale, but Eric and Christine are likely to consider extending the range - watch this space.

The fate of too many pubs under the Control Securities banner has now befallen the **Pineapple** on Castle Street, Edgeley which is now closed and boarded up. It remains to be seen whether this pub ever re-opens. Don't hold your breath.

In Withington the **Waterloo** is once again under threat from yet another housing scheme proposed by the trust which owns the property (Grand Met simply lease it). Similar schemes have been dropped in the past, let's hope this meets a similar fate. Meanwhile there is still no sign of the long-planned refurbishment (and introduction of real ale) at John Smith's **Railway** on Lapwing Lane. Indeed, as this pub will now be under the wing of the newly formed Inntrepreneur Estates, who have to off-load over 1000 pubs, it could be a prime candidate for the chop. Let's hope not.

The **Shady Oak** in Bramhall is now selling Hydes Bitter. We are not yet sure whether this will be permanent or one of several rotating guest beers. Either way, it's a welcome addition to the area. Even more welcome

was the introductory offer in force just before we went to press - 80p a pint, no less.

The **Bulls Head** in Reddish (Bass) has finally abandoned the attempt to sell real ale and is once more all keg. This loss to real ale has been balanced by a gain - the **Wembley** in Adswold is back in the real ale fold once more with handpumped Stones Bitter.

The **New Inn** in Clayton, which we report as being closed in this month's Stagger, is now in fact on the market at £135,000. Reduced to clear is the **King William IV** in Chorlton-on-Medlock, where the asking price has been reduced to £85,000.

Contributors to this edition: John Clarke, Jim Flynn, Stuart Ballantyne, George Symes, Rhys Jones, Roger Mayhew, Peter Edwardson, Tony Wilkinson, Peter Soane, Phil Levison.

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Letter, articles and comments are always welcome. Details of advertising rates are available from the address below. Postal subscriptions £1.25 for six issues, make cheques payable to Opening Times.



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