

OPENING TIMES

CAMRA
FREE

No:
99

JULY 1992

Know What You Drink

Independents Month

By Andrew Sangster, reprinted from "Whats Brewing"

Beer drinkers should soon know what goes into their pints if proposals being considered in Brussels by the European Community become law.

After years of campaigning by CAMRA and other consumer bodies, alcoholic drinks may no longer be exempt from the standards applied to other foodstuffs.

If the proposal from the European Commission is approved by the Council of Ministers, brewers will have to publish a list of the ingredients in their beers by June 1994.

CAMRA Campaigns Manager Stephen Cox welcomed the news. He said the current law is perverse and needs changing.

"If you buy a packet of crisps they have the ingredients listed. So does a pint of low-alcohol beer or bottle of orange juice. Why are alcoholic drinks the exception?" he said.

He added that the UK drinks industry has been labelling draught and bottled low-alcohol drinks without trouble for several years.

"The proposals will cost virtually nothing for brewers to implement. They should be welcomed by brewers who claim to have nothing to hide," he said.

Ingredients labelling for alcoholic drinks was first tabled at the EC in 1979. Consumer groups have been dismayed at the delay in giving drinkers such necessary consumer information.

"There should be swift consultation about how the information can be presented in an understandable form and without excessive bureaucracy," said Cox.

The fight for ingredients listing is one of CAMRA's longest-running campaigns, first started back in 1974 when a submission was made to the Food Standards Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The FSC report was published in 1976 and recommended that prepacked beer should "bear a list of ingredients in descending order of proportion by weight."

But the Ministry of Agriculture refused to reform the labelling of beer.

This intransigence fuelled allegations that MAFF is in the pocket of producers.

"I hope the current proposals will not be subject to the same delaying tactics we have witnessed in the past. It will be totally unacceptable to have another messy compromise that favours the brewers," Stephen Cox said.

Each year, CAMRA dedicates July to celebrating the role of the Independent Brewery in our fine Brewing Tradition, indeed it was the buying up and closing down of these self same Independents to form the keg-orientated (now lager orientated) national brewing combines that was one of the main driving forces behind the foundation of CAMRA, 21 years ago. In the Manchester area we still have a fine local brewing tradition, represented by Robinsons, Hydes, Holts, Lees, and recently West Coast (Dobbins), Oak at Heywood, and the resurgence of the brew-pub traditions.

Apart from brewing high-quality real ales, local Independents also help keep the prices down. The CAMRA national prices survey reported inside this issue shows that once again the North West (and especially Manchester) is the cheapest area in the country for real ale. A comparison of the prices in a Whitbread or Tetley pub and those on offer in a Holts house will soon show the difference in approach of the locals and the national mega-brewers. The gradual drift of drinkers back from the glitz of the nationally-owned houses to the traditional local has also, in large part, accounted for the "special" 99p beers that are now offered in a range of nationally owned pubs. It should be pointed out, however, that these "specials" are generally specially weakened, to about 3% Alcohol by volume, and cannot be compared to the normal strength bitters brewed by the Independents.

So in July, support the Independents! For those of you thinking of joining CAMRA - which is the largest consumer pressure group in Europe, and has in Stockport & South Manchester possibly the most socially active branch in the country, during July there is a special reduction in Membership from - £10 to £8 as part of our Independents promotion. Fill in the form on the back of this issue and send it to the address given, marked "Independents Promotion" before July 31 to take advantage of this offer. (and don't forget to enclose the cheque for £8!!)

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PUB of the Month July

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
28	29	30	1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Thursday 23rd July sees the prestigious "Pub of the Month" plaque being presented to the Concert, Fairfield Road, Openshaw. The Concert was refurbished by the owners - the Boddington PubCo - some time ago, and we feared it could be ruined like so many other pubs. We were very pleasantly surprised to see the results however, the Concert has lost none of its character and has benefited from the redecoration.

Landlady Shirley Chorlton has arranged for the installation, at her own expense, of etched glass panels above the bar and in the windows. The central bar serves a number of separate rooms and the pub is justifiably popular with the locals.

In the writer's experience, the Boddies Bitter has been consistently good, and the Concert has recently received the accolade of being selected as an entry in the Good Beer Guide, CAMRA's Flagship publication.

East Manchester has traditionally been an area with little support for CAMRA, despite the number of excellent pubs. Perhaps some of Opening Times' avid readers who live in Gorton and Openshaw would like to join us in our celebration at the Concert and take some interest in what CAMRA is trying to do for the pub-users of Manchester. Those of us obliged to live and work elsewhere appreciate East Manchester's pubs; if you do, why not come along and talk to us?

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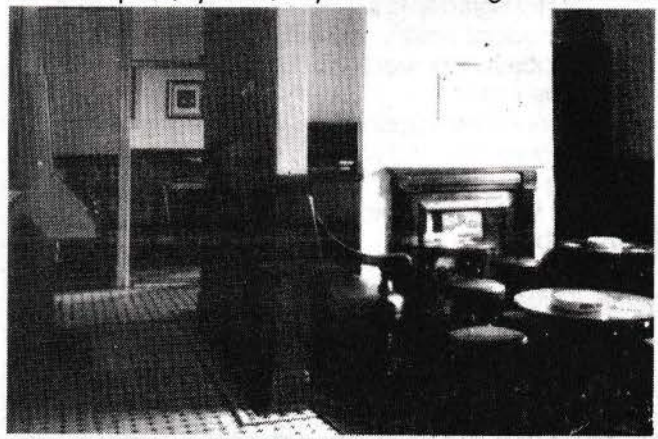
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MANCHESTER MATTERS

by Rhys Jones

The Queen Victoria in Beswick is closed following a petrol-bomb attack. While Whitbread are rumoured to be interested in re-opening the pub, cynics will reflect that pubs lost this way count just as much towards the national brewer's disposal targets as do those relinquished by more conventional means. It is at least gratifying to note that arrests have been made in connection with the attack on the pub.

The Hamlet in Gorton has been bought by Vaux - out goes the former Wilsons/Websters/Boddingtons range, along with keg Scrumpy Jack cider on handpump, to be replaced by handpumped Vaux Bitter and Samson. And Openshaw gains more independent beer too, as the High Bank and the Wrexham now sell Burtonwood, not Boddingtons Bitter following their acquisition by a Burtonwood-linked pub chain.

Real ale from Cardiff is now permanently on sale in the City Centre. Unfortunately, though, it's not Brains, but Worthington Best Bitter from Bass's Welsh Brewers subsidiary, which is now on handpump at the Unicorn. Elsewhere in the Centre, the Sportsman has gained handpumped Lees Mild, while the Bank has dropped Tetley Mild and Burton Ale but gained handpumped Cains Bitter. The Crown & Anchor has dropped Castle Eden Ale and Marstons Pedigree but gained Stockport-brewed "Hartleys" XB on handpump. (It also sells the Manchester Evening News - a useful service if you need to catch up on the day's events. Why don't more pubs do this?) The Shakespeare has re-opened after refurbishment in a plain style rather reminiscent of Pennine Hosts' "Ale Howes" of a few years back - handpumped beers are Websters Bitter. John Smiths Bitter and Courage Directors, which last has also made its appearance in two otherwise dissimilar Wilsons pubs, the Bridge Street Tavern and the Peveril of the Peak.

In Gorton the decline of the Wilson brand continues - the Lord Nelson has lost Wilsons Bitter, the Cotton Tree Wilsons Mild. The Vale Cottage has dropped Boddingtons Bitter and Ruddles County but gained, if that's the word, Websters Bitter.

Finally, following last month's news that Marston's were axing two milds, Banks' Mild seems now to be the house mild in our local Marston's pubs, including the Royal Oak and the Station in Didsbury, the Friendship in Gorton, and the Red Lion in Withington. Marstons do still brew a mild - the stronger Pedigree-based Merrie Monk - but I am not aware of any local outlets for this.

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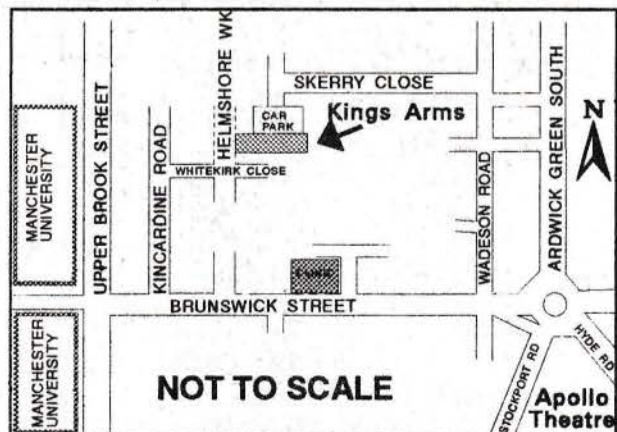
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As this OT was put together CAMRA announced the results of its national prices survey. Once again beer prices increased at well in excess of the rate of inflation. As usual the national brewers and their mouthpiece the Brewers Society are retfing their heads off, going so far as to say that prices have not increased by as much as our survey reveals. Well we all know better don't we?

What the survey reveals is that we in the North West enjoy some of the lowest beer prices in the country. The reason for this is simple - in this part of the world we have a high number of independent brewers who compete to keep prices down. Holts, Hydes, Lees, Robinsons, Oak, West Coast and even the Flea & Firkin all serve good quality ales of low prices. Holts ales are the cheapest generally available beers in the country but even they are undercut by the Flea & Firkin who were retailing their Full Mash Magical Mild at 75p a pint, very recently. This is the month when CAMRA celebrates Britain's Independent Breweries and the good news is it won't cost you much either!

Many readers of OT will occasionally have been served with a pint that was less than satisfactory. Sometimes the beer is so bad it just has to go back to the bar and in all fairness most licensees are only too happy to change beer that is obviously wrong. Once in a while however things don't run as smoothly as that and you can either be treated to loud assurances that the beer is in fact fine or, perhaps even worse be given some plainly ridiculous reason for its deplorable state.

A classic example of the latter is reported this month in our letters column (and at Stalybridge Station Buffet, of all places). As to the former, I had personal experience of this recently when, on returning Courage Directors which was frankly rancid, I was assured that not only was it acceptable but 'perfect'.

Why a minority of licensees and/or bar staff continue to insult the intelligence of their customers is hard to fathom. Suffice it to say that we shall continue to expose the offenders in these pages....

In the Editor's View

by John Clarke



By George...!

After several false starts, the Boddington PubCo have finally gone completely over the top with the George, Mersey Square, Stockport and have completed the transformation of what was once one of the finest 1930's pubs in the North of England into a typical piece of 1990's neo-Victorian kitsch.

Long-term users of the pub may remember the wealth of light oak fittings and the mirrored glass. In some respects the pub once resembled the state-rooms of a pre-war ocean liner - hardly surprising as the pub interior was reputedly designed by the same person who worked on the Queen Mary. Over the years the George was gradually opened out - the small vault was the first to go (it's now a kitchen) - and the character of the place slowly eroded. Now virtually all remnants have gone. A warning of what is to come is given outside by the ludicrous "Victorian" lamp and peculiar wooden awnings spoiling the clean pre-war lines of the pub's facade.

But inside! The decor looks like a wallpaper manufacturer's worst nightmare with (on our count) seven (count 'em, seven) different types of wallpaper vying for attention with seven different decorative borders. Add to that Victorian pediments stuck onto 1930's cornices and, to cap it all off, a huge fake fish hanging from the ceiling and the sheer stupidity of the whole concept is all too obvious.

The only good news is on the beer front with Boddingtons Bitter being joined by a regular guest beer, Thwaites Craftsman on our visit. This however is small consolation for the loss of what was once a truly great pub.

Letters for publication should be sent to:
The Editor, 'Opening Times'
45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport, SK3 9HD

Copy Deadline for contributions to the 100th (August) issue of Opening Times, is Thursday 23 July

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O PENING TIMES

LETTERS

From Geoff Johnson

Dear Sir,

Stalybridge Station Buffet

I am writing to you as a CAMRA member following a recent conversation with my working colleague and CAMRA stalwart, Peter Barnes.

On Saturday 14th June at about 8.15pm my brother and I made one of our frequent calls on our local 'shrine' the Stalybridge Station Buffet. We noted four beers on handpump as follows:- Coachmans bitter, John Smiths bitter and Wobbly Bob and Hopwood bitter from the Phoenix Brewery, Heywood. The tenant, Ken Redfeam was nowhere to be seen and what I presume to be a relief 'landlord' and 'landlady' presided behind the bar.

Whilst waiting to be served, we watched the 'landlady' pull a pint of Hopwood for a customer and the landlord a pint of John Smiths for another. Both pints were extremely cloudy in traditional 'rough scrumpy' fashion and refused to settle. (Meantime we ordered two halves of Coachmans bitter which was in excellent condition as is the usual case at this bar.)

After a few moments patient waiting the customer with the cloudy Hopwood asked if it could be changed. The lady behind the bar 'begrudgingly' took the beer off him and disappeared with the pint into the living quarters where mutterings could be heard.

Meanwhile, we overheard the 'landlord' advising the customer with the John Smiths that his beer was cloudy because of the effect of heat and in particular the OZONE LAYER!!

At this point the 'landlady' reappeared and said that in their opinion the Hopwood was fine and was cloudy simply because this brew is STRONGER than most bitters!!! Who is she kidding. The beer was eventually changed.

I would simply like to make a few points without casting doubt on Redfeam and his usually excellent beer.

a) Most drinkers will I think understand that beers sometimes have off days and can be cloudy. Many beers can be perfectly drinkable in this state, as indeed the Hopwood and Smiths may have been in this case.

b) Nevertheless, customers should have the right to request a change of product if they are not satisfied without being made to feel uncomfortable.

c) More important, I think we can all do without the kind of excuses being trotted out as above i.e. "Ozone Layer" and "Beer Strength" - these are plainly just laughable. I could not imagine Ken Redfeam using excuses of this kind - which nevertheless reflect badly on an establishment that CAMRA has fought so hard for.

I'm sorry the foregoing is a bit longwinded but this type of idiocy needs to be stamped out - perhaps a comment in "Opening Times" and "What's Doing" might be in order.

A couple of other thoughts from Stalybridge. The most consistent pint for some time has been in the "Old Fleece", between the station and the "White House" pub on Market Street. John Smiths and Boddingtons are on offer - the latter sold at a reduced price Monday - Thursday. In addition Chilli-con-Carne and garlic bread is available all day every day at £1.50.

I would also like to outline my suggestion for a good and slightly unusual pub crawl of Stalybridge. This concentrates exclusively on Huddersfield Road (B6175) and is a distance of approx 2 1/2 miles.

Start "Bulls Head" (Boddingtons) Knowl Street (corner of Huddersfield Road and Mottram Road).

Approx 3 minutes up Huddersfield Road, left hand side to "Church Inn" (Marston's)

Another 5 minutes to "Reindeer" (Wilson's) left hand side.

A steady walk of about 10 minutes to Millbrook Village to the "Royal Oak" (right hand side) Wilson's, Websters and guest beer. Avoid the keg "Commercial" unless you wish to view the unusual tap room (right hand side).

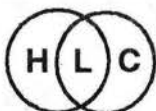
Up on the right (two minutes) to the "Hare & Hounds" - a free house which changes periodically but on my last visit was selling Ruddles.

Further again on the right (3 minutes) to the imposing "Church Inn" a former Boddingtons house now selling Theakstons beers as well as all-day food - which will no doubt be welcome by this point!

A walk of approx 10 minutes (past the keg "Buckton Castle" on the left) to the finishing point in Carrbrook - the "Stamford Arms", a country style pub next to the golf course selling a full range of Bass beers including excellent Draught Bass. Bar snacks are also available (left hand side of road).

Buses back to Stalybridge or to Hyde/Ashton/Mossley, run past the pub and stop almost outside.

I hope all the attached is of some use and maybe you would care to comment.



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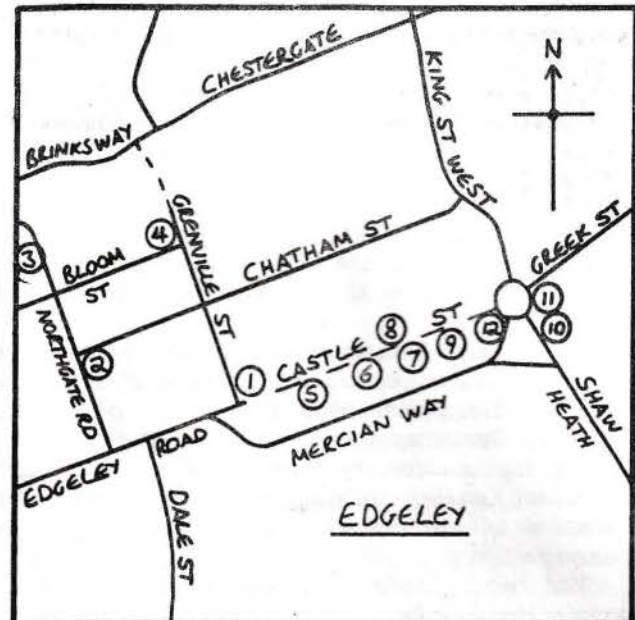
For our May stagger we visited pubs in the Castle Street area of Edgeley which we had last covered about three years ago. The many changes we found on the night gave an insight into the way the effects of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the brewing industry are actually working through on the ground.

There could be no better example of this than our starting point, the **Royal Oak** at the Western end of Castle street. This is a fairly ordinary street-corner pub, noteworthy mainly for the mock-Tudor decor inside. However, alongside the normal Grand Met beers - Wilsons Mild and Bitter, and Websters Bitter - it now has Holts Bitter as a guest, all four beers being dispensed by handpump. Not surprisingly, we all chose the Holts, which was generally agreed to be in excellent condition. A fine start to the evening, but we wondered whether we would find anything to match it later on.

Our next call was the **Alexandra** on Northgate Road, an impressive Edwardian red-brick Robinsons pub which, architecturally is without doubt the finest in Edgeley, with a multi-roomed interior featuring an impressive curved, panelled bar and superb tilework. The usual Best Mild and Best Bitter were available, unusually dispensed into brim-measure glasses through keg-type free-flow electric. Surely if pubs choose to use electric pumps they should combine it with metered dispense. The bitter was quite good, but the mild was at first undrinkable, and even after it was changed it was still fairly poor.

No problems about measures at the **Gardeners Arms** further down Northgate Road, where electric pumps are used to serve Wilsons and Websters Bitters and guest beer Holts Bitter into oversize glasses. Again we all plumped for the Holts (surprise, surprise) which turned out to be pretty good, although not quite as good as at the Royal Oak. This large inter-wars pub gave a good impression inside, comprising a roomy, comfortable lounge with extensive wood panelling, and also a smaller vault at the side, everything notably spic-and-span.

Doubling back up the hill we reached the **Hollywood**, an



KEY: 1-ROYAL OAK, 2-ALEXANDRA, 3-GARDENERS ARMS, 4-HOLLYWOOD, 5-PRINCE ALBERT, 6-SIR ROBERT PEEL, 7-WINDSOR CASTLE, 8-PINEAPPLE, 9-JOLY CROFTER, 10-SWAN, 11-ARMOURY, 12-GRAPES

even larger Grand Met pub tucked away in the heart of the residential area, which retains a revolving door in the main entrance. The interior still has much of its original character, with four big rooms and impressive high ceilings. Alongside the Wilsons Bitter we found John Smiths Bitter on handpump, one of an increasing number of examples of beers from the Courage breweries getting into Grand Met pubs. Everyone tried the John Smiths, which was generally rated fairly good.

We now returned to Castle Street, where we weren't tempted by the prospect of Wilsons Mild and Bitter in the Prince Albert, and instead carried on to the **Sir Robert Peel**. This two-roomed Greenalls pub has been much improved in recent years, and was certainly the busiest pub of those visited so far. The lounge sports a distinctive semi-circular bar and a tropical fish tank. Beers available were Greenalls Bitter, Stones Bitter, an unimaginative pseudo guest beer supplied through Greenalls, and a genuine guest, Coach House Bitter, from a new small brewery in Warrington recently started by

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ex-Greenalls employees. We all chose the Coach House, which was rated fairly good, although not perhaps quite as good as we might have expected.

Our next call was to the **Windsor Castle**, a large 1930's Grand Met pub which has undergone numerous changes over the past few years. The most recent metamorphosis has left it much more like a real pub, with a separate vault and a roomy, comfortable lounge featuring extensive wood panelling. There was an early 60's disco in progress in the lounge, but it didn't seem to be drawing many punters in. Unusually, none of the usual lacklustre Grand Met beers were on sale; instead the house beer was John Smiths Bitter, only available to Grand Met tenants for a couple of months, with Robinsons Best Bitter as a guest, both beers being of above average quality.

A few of the party called in at the **Jolly Crofter** - Wilsons and Boddingtons Bitters - while most of us crossed Castle Street to the **Pineapple**, a former Wilsons pub now owned by Scottish brewers Belhaven but, like all their pubs in the area, serving Tetleys beers, in this case Mild and Bitter on handpump. It's a small, rather basic pub with a youngish clientele. We were favourably impressed to find both beers above average.

The next pub offered potentially the most interesting drinking experience of the night. The **Swan** on Shaw Heath is a former Wilsons pub which has recently been bought by Sunderland-based independents Vaux, and offers all three of their beers, Vaux Bitter, Samson and Lorimers Best Scotch, on handpump. At their best these are characterful, high-quality brews, and so we were extremely disappointed to find all three markedly lacking in both body and flavour, and by a comfortable margin the worst beer of the night. The pub is pleasant enough, but the customers were fairly sparse even at 10 p.m. on a Friday night.

Almost next door to the Swan is the **Armoury**, a Robinsons pub which has recently lost its distinctive exterior tilework (for sound architectural reasons, not brewery vandalism), but retains its traditional, multi-roomed interior with lounge, vault, lobby and darts room at the back. Best Mild and Best Bitter are dispensed by electric pumps - the mild was very good, while the bitter, in my opinion, and that of several others present, was absolutely superb, everything that a good pint of Robbies should be. Not everyone was quite so enthusias-



tic, but it tied with the Holts at the Royal Oak for the best beer of the night.

For our final call we crossed back over Shaw Heath to the **Grapes** at the end of Castle Street. This is another Robinsons pub, a touch more basic and down-to-earth than the Armoury, always busy and with a reputation for serving some of the most consistently good beer in Stockport. Although the beer didn't quite reach the heights of that in the Armoury, the handpumped Best Mild and Best Bitter were both still pretty good and rounded off the evening very nicely.

So ended a fascinating evening's drinking in which, with the exception of the Robinsons pubs, in every pub visited we drank a beer which would not be available there 4 or 5 years ago. There's definitely more variety than there was, and, apart from the dismal showing of the Swan, the overall quality seems to have improved as well. Obviously, that's only the opinion of a group of CAMRA members on one particular night - why not try the pubs and see if you agree?

CAMRA Price Survey '92

Over the last year, the average cost of a pint of real ale has risen by over 8% from 120p to 130p according to the CAMRA pub prices survey, published this month. Since 1989 beer prices have risen 17% more than inflation, and 40% more than inflation since 1979. Once again the North West retains the cheapest beer (especially in Manchester) averaging 116p per pint against some 144p for London and the South East. Yorkshire was next cheapest at 118p per pint.

The regional differences are startling, once again, although prices rose least in London this year, probably due to the effects of the recession. Pub trade figures are drastically down on two years ago.

Once again, Joseph Holts came out as the best value normal strength bitter and mild from a major regional brewer, though of course special promotions may occasionally offer cheaper beer.

Strangely, Lager prices are comparatively high in the North West - the difference in price between bitter and lager being almost on a par with London (though the denizens of Yorkshire and the East Midlands - the Carling Black Label Capital of the World - get ripped off the most with a 22p differential). In the North West the average difference is 18p per pint. Lager costs the brewers about 1p a pint more than bitter to manufacture.

The survey is again highly critical of the pricing of low alcohol beers. They average 185p a pint - 57p more than the national bitter average price. This is despite low alcohol beers not attracting the 24p excise duty of normal bitter. This looks like a clear case of breweries exploiting careful drivers. Orange Juice apparently works out at a staggering 277p per pint. The report concludes with a note about price lists and opening hours displays (this later a particular bugbear in Stockport & Sth Mcr). Only 30% of pubs display their hours outside, which is not only scandalous (although there is no legal requirement) but also very bad marketing practice. Price lists are legally required, but this year only 71% of pubs were complying with the law properly - a modest but welcome improvement on the 64% in 1991.

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AT THE STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

By Chris Stone and Sue Tittensor

The last weekend in May marked the highlight in the social calendar for many real ale drinkers in Stockport and South Manchester - the sixth Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. With live entertainment at all five sessions what better place to sample a variety of exotic beers, ciders and perries, accompanied by some of the best live music in Manchester.

The first session, on Thursday evening kicked off with the welcome return of Ged Hone, this time accompanied by the Dixie Boys. The quartet, led by Ged, who has many years musical experience in many styles of jazz, is the premier ensemble for New Orleans and Dixieland jazz. The set features the whole spectrum of dixieland jazz and provided a great night's entertainment.

Rob Gray's Little Big Band has made a reputation for him throughout Manchester. If the name does not ring any bells, then the music definitely will, for Rob attracts crowds when he busks in Manchester City centre, most notably in St Annes Square. The lively one-man band features Rob on National Steel guitar, drums, harmonica and vocals and combines a mixture of folk/rock and blues. The set features numbers by Bob Dylan, Sonny Boy Williamson and blues one man band Jesse Fuller, who was one of Rob's major influences. The Friday lunchtime mixture of shoppers, businessmen and beer connoisseurs thoroughly enjoyed it.

Atlanta roots play at the Bulls Head in Stockport on alternate Tuesdays, and played to a packed house on Friday evening. The raucous blues/rock set received a well-deserved rapturous response from a very enthusiastic audience. Many of the numbers are self penned, but there were also covers such as Crossroads and Louie Louie. The atmosphere was brilliant and even the few sceptics who disapprove of music at beer festivals were converted, leaving the beer room to investigate.

Saturday afternoon saw a complete contrast in style and influence, for we were treated to a session of acoustic Irish music. A host of traditional instruments were played expertly; jigs and reels, hornpipes and ballads from banjo, guitar, penny

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whistle, bodhran, bazouki and fiddle. This session definitely appealed to the drinkers, who could relax while eating a curry or making the difficult decision as to which beer to try next!

The final session, Saturday evening, featured another of Stockport's most popular RnB bands - the Best Band, who can be seen at the Boars Head, Market Place, Stockport. Once again the music room was packed full, and by late evening there were people dancing and providing accompaniment on tambourines.

All in all, quite a variety of musical styles and tastes were catered for. We had a great time, we hope everyone else did. No photographs of the bands actually playing at the festival - photography and beer do not complement each other, unless it's a fuzzy-photo competition!

Beer Festival News

First a big thank-you to all of our readers who tuned up and made the Sixth Stockport Beer Festival such a success. Luckily this year the beer did last until closing time on the Saturday night but once again it was the cider and perry that led the sales, selling out completely by 9.30. Preliminary plans are already being laid for next year's event which should be the biggest ever.

Many of you voted in the beer or cider of the Festival competition and it was good to see the award for Beer of the Festival going to a local brew. The winner was West Coast Brewery with their Festival Special brew, Twin Towers Porter. We are looking to present brewer Brendan Dobbin with his award sometime this month.

Whilst the results for Beer of the Festival were very close, there were runaway winners in both the cider and perry classes. Cider of the Festival was that old favourite, Westons Special Vintage. The real surprise was in the perry class where the overall winner was Gwatkins Perry. Normally made by Herefordshire farmer Dennis Gwatkin for personal consumption, this was the first time this had been commercially available anywhere, apart from the occasional appearance in the village pub. Truly a remarkable achievement.

There were no all-correct answers to the "Name the Pub" competition at the Fest. The highest scores were obtained by separate answer sheets from Hazel Hanley and S.Hanley from Offerton. CAMRA membership is being organised for them.

For those who can recall the photographs the correct answers were: 1. Alexandra, Edgeley 2. Hope, Heaton Norris 3. George & Dragon, Gt.Moor/Hazel Grove 4. Swan with 2 Necks, Princess St 5. Cock, Hazel Grove 6. Victoria, Offerton 7. Thatched House, Churchgate 8. Travellers Call, Great Moor 9. Red Bull, Hillgate 10. Magnet, Wellington Road North. Another photo puzzle next year.

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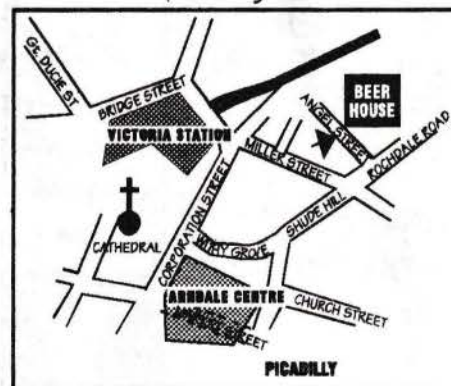
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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JULY 1987

We are often reminded of the sweeping changes that can take place in the comparatively short space of five years, but the front page item on Robinson's Brewery reads as true today as it did then, (except that Hartley's of Ulverston can no longer be described as a Lake District subsidiary because the brewery has recently closed.) To repeat the sentiments previously expressed - "In Robinson's we have an independent to be proud of, and with involvement from all the family they are destined to prosper for a long time to come."

Midway Murder was the heading of an item which referred to Stockport's first, and certainly its Premier Free House, falling into the clutches of one of the Big Seven brewers. The Midway on Newbridge Lane had become a tenanted house tied to Courage, and the awful prospect of Keg John Smith's was contemplated, but the outcome was not nearly as bad as feared - John Smith's yes, but cask conditioned, together with their Magnet Ale, and with Courage Directors they make up quite a formidable trio of brews that can be described as "rare for the area".

I wonder who can remember when a pub last **reduced** the price of its beer? But this had just happened at Holt's Junction, opposite Cheadle Hulme Station. A changeover from tenancy to management resulted in the Mild and Bitter being reduced to 61p. and 64p. (Current "managed" prices are 84p. and 89p., so it's something of a comforting thought that at this rate it should be "some time" before the magic "£1. a pint" has been broached.)

Finally, to show that things **do** change in five years -
"Heard at the bar (not in a Greenalls pub):

"Greenalls are independent, are they? Let's hope someone takes them over."

Watch out for a special look back at the first 100 issues of *OPENING TIMES* in our forthcoming century issue in August!

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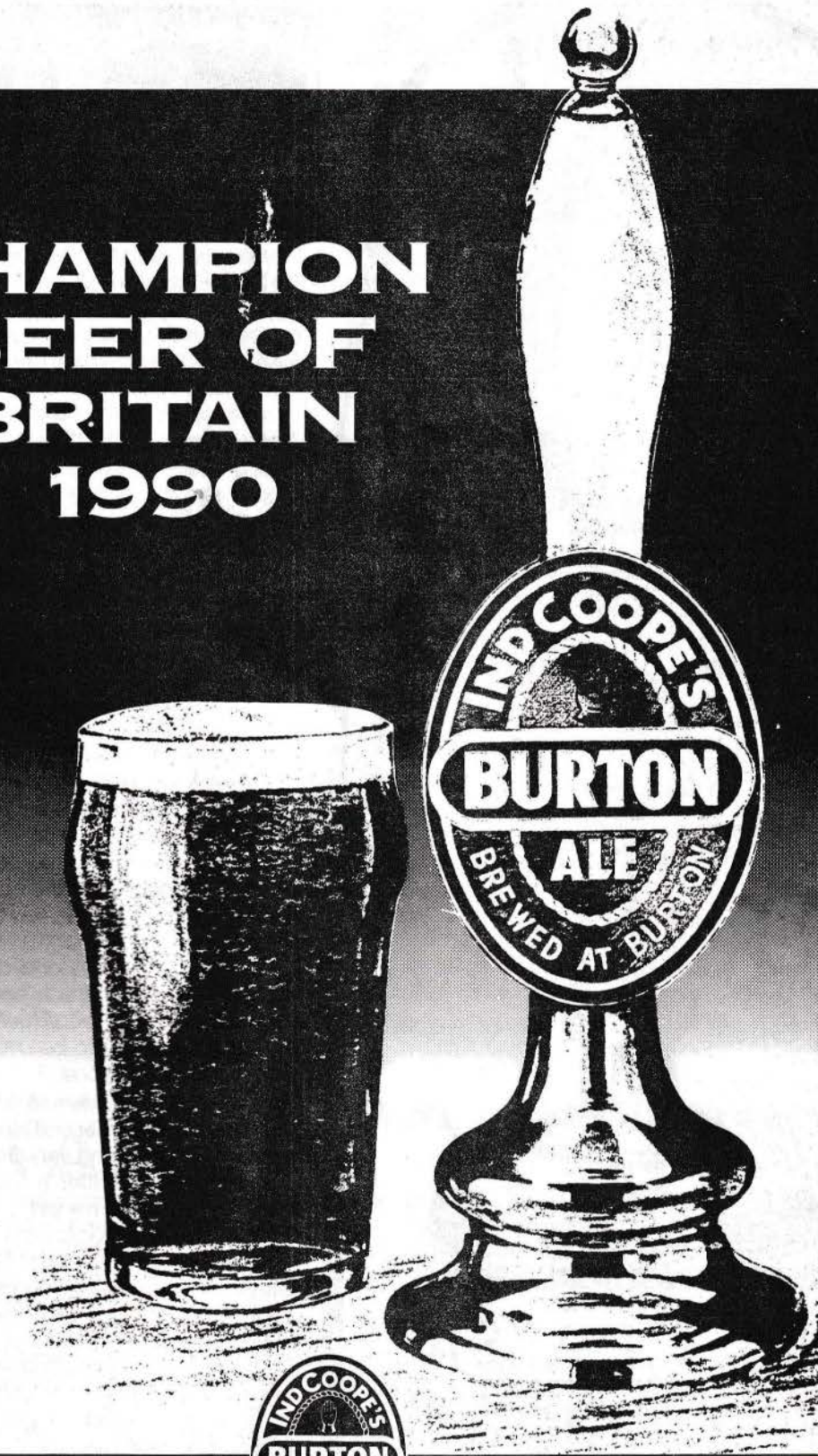
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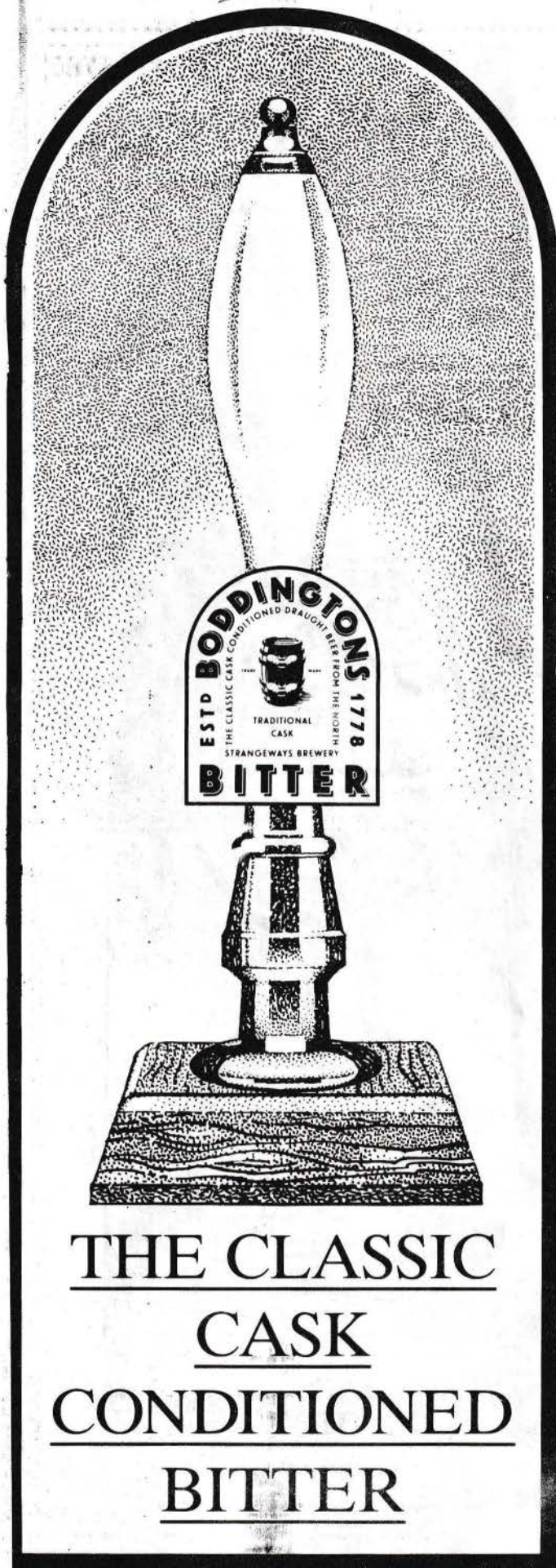


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**JULY
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Pub of the Month

Pub of the Month for July is the Sportsmans, Strines Rd, Strines, Marple. (Bus route 358 Stockport - Hayfield)(road B6101).

Records show that there has been a pub on this site since approximately 1805. From 1895 onwards the pub was owned by Showells Brewery of Hempshaw Lane, Stockport, and then since 1910 by Walker and Homfrays and finally into the ownership of Wilsons on the takeover of Walker and Homfrays.

One of the main assets of the pub is its location, with panoramic views, uncluttered by buildings, clean across the trees of the Goyt Valley and out over the hills up to Mellor Moor. There can be few pubs in the area with such a view. For most of the year the pub has an excellent display of flower tubs and hanging baskets. Alongside is a small terraced beer garden, a pleasant place to sit on a warm day with the view over to Mellor.

Inside, the pub has a comfortable lounge and a cosy traditional vault. The current cask-conditioned beers are Wilsons Bitter, Websters Bitter and Ruddles Bitter together with a guest beer which changes two or three times a week. One of the delights of drinking here is that you are never quite sure which guest beer you will find.

Examples have been Eldridge Pope (Dorchester) Shepherd Neame Spitfire (Kent) Dent Ales; Batemans (Wainfleet) Mansfield Bitter; Greene-King and Fullers and Wadworth 6X.

On the way are Elgoods (Wisbech), Youngs, Moorhouses and Trough Ale. Above the bar are the handpump clips of just a few of the beers served over the past months.

Catering is not forgotten and there is an excellent good value menu of snacks and meals available, with also a childrens menu, for this is essentially a family pub while retaining a definite 'local' feeling.

This is a pub not to be overlooked; it really does have something for everyone.

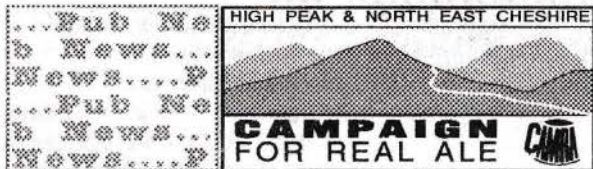
Late news: The Sportsman is about to loose its tie with Websters in November and landlord Ken is hoping it may be sooner, as he is selling very little Websters or Wilsons.

Mitchells best bitter is the 'regular' guest alongside Mitchells Fortress on my visit.

Beers on the blackboard for the near future include Trough Wild Boar and Festival, Elgoods Cambridge bitter and Greyhound, Shepherd Neame best bitter and Spitfire and Youngs Special plus others. The beers are well kept and the pub serves good home-made food.

The Sportsman is on Strines Road and a pleasant summers evening stroll at half an hour from Marple Station it is open from 12 - 3pm, and 6-11pm weekdays (normal Sunday hours)..

Remember that for July ONLY, to celebrate Independents Month, membership of CAMRA is reduced by 20%. Fill in the form on the back page, or find one of CAMRA's special INDEPENDENTS beer mats and send it with a remittance of £8 to the address for your area (N.Ches & High Peak or Stockport).



Tameside Canals Fest

If it's July it must be the beer tent at the Ashton Canals Festival. Well, time moves on and the Local Authority have got involved so it's the Tameside Canals Festival now. But some things never change.

The beer tent will be at the heart of the festival again - on the main site at Portland Basin - with another wide range of traditional beers and ciders.

The range of beers has again increased, with the unusual (Dobbins Ginger Beer) alongside the old faithful (Pendle Witches Brew). This year's list has, for example, a range from Brendan Dobbins West Coast Brewery (including Yakima Grand Porter and Pale Ale), Yates Bitter, Brakspears Special, Sarah Hughes Sedgeley Surprise, Holdens Mild, Mitchells ESB and Blue Anchor Spingo Special to name but a few. All in all, there will be 23 different beers available over the weekend. Add to this a fine collection of traditional ciders, good table wines (there's no accounting for taste!) and, with luck and a following wind, some Rauchbeir from Bavaria a good time can be had by all.

The festival opens on Friday 10th July and closes on the afternoon of Sunday 12th. The beer tent will be open as follows:

Friday: 7.00pm - 11.00pm

Saturday: 12.00 - 5.00pm, 7.30pm - 11.00pm

Sunday: 12.00 - 5.00pm (or whilst stocks last)

There is plenty to do apart from admiring the long boats and drinking beer - numerous arts and crafts stalls, childrens' entertainment in the afternoons and quality live music both in the evenings and the afternoon. Food is always available, so the ingredients are there for a great day or night. The site is clearly signposted and is close to the middle roundabout on the Ashton bypass. The car park can be reached from the bypass and the 330 bus from Stockport via Hyde provides a convenient service to and from - get off at Asda.

Out of Area...

Every so often we intend to feature a pub which is outside the Bredbury, Romiley, Marple area of High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch, in Tameside or Derbyshire.

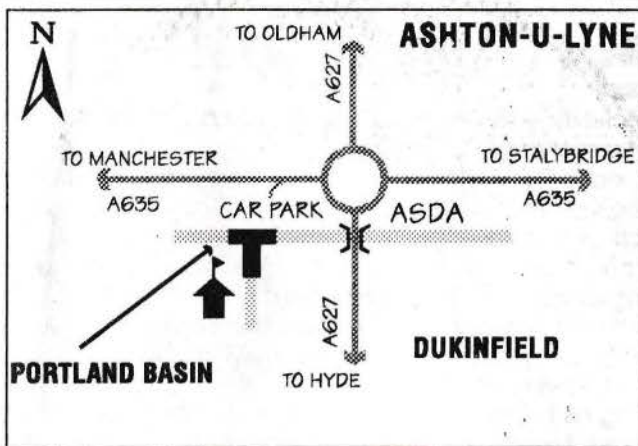
We kick off this series of short articles with a real gem; the Shepherds Arms in Whaley Bridge.

It is a Marstons pub with Mild, Best Bitter and Pedigree all on handpump, and is on Old Road in the centre of Whaley Bridge, just a short walk from the railway station up the A66 in the direction of Buxton.

The pub has been a regular consistent entry in the National Good Beer guide for many years. It is an excellent ageless local. The lounge is dimly lit and quiet, in stark contrast to the excellent vault with its stone-flagged floor, unvarnished tables, settle seats and stools. There is also a small beer garden.

The whole pub has a true local character and is often at its most welcoming on dark, cold winter nights as a great refuge from the worst of the Derbyshire weather.

This pub is truly well worth a visit. Next in the series - Glossop.



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CAMRA CALLING!

The social diary for July is again quite full with, hopefully, something for everyone.

Opening Times will be out a little later this month (we publish on the second Tuesday) so the first event to record is the monthly branch meeting on Thursday 9th at the Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. We start at 8.00pm approx. The following day we are running a minibus trip to the Buffet Bar at Stalybridge Station. The minibus will leave the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport at 7.30 pm and to book a place, phone Tracey on 061 456 6354.

The following day (!), branch stalwart Martyn Wysterk is celebrating his birthday with a pub crawl of Chorley, and all are welcome. Meeting place is the Queens Hotel, Chapel Street, Chorley at 12 noon, or the Crown, Chapel Street at 1.00pm. All Blackpool trains from Stockport and Manchester take you there.

On Monday 13th there is a two-way social in Gorton, starting at the Plough at 9.00pm - moving to the Waggon & Horses at 10. Both pubs are at the Reddish end of Hyde Road. Friday 17th sees our monthly Stagger and this time it's Didsbury, starting at the Gateway at 7.00pm and calling at the Crown, Wilmslow Road at 8.30. The next day, branch member Peter Soane has devised a day out walking and drinking in the Macclesfield area. The train to catch is the 11.30 from Piccadilly (11.38 from Stockport) - on arrival at Macclesfield we will be walking along the canal towpath to the Sutton and Langley area with one or two interesting pubs lined up on route.

On Monday 20th, the social is at the Gardeners Arms, Little Street, Offerton. Again this starts at 9.00pm. On Thursday 23rd it's Pub of the Month and, if there is sufficient interest, we will be running a minibus, leaving the Crown, Heaton Lane at 8.00pm. Again, phone Tracey to book a seat.

Monday 27th sees a social at the Red Lion, Wilmslow Road, Withington and on Saturday 1st August we are having an awayday to York. We aim to meet at Victoria Station at 9.15am although trains also run from Piccadilly. We will be meeting for lunch in the Spread Eagle, Walmgate at 1.00pm. Lastly, on Monday 3rd August there will be a social at the George & Dragon, Heaton Chapel, again starting at 9.00pm.

For details about any of the above or any other Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA activities, contact Tracey on 061 456 6354. Of course, if you live in the Bredbury, Marple, Romiley or Woodley areas, you fall in the High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch area. Their main event this month is the Tameside Canals Festival Beer Tent (see article elsewhere). In addition on Monday 13th there will be a branch meeting and social for beer tent helpers at the Talbot in Stalybridge - this starts at 8.30pm. On Thursday 23rd there will be a crawl of New Mills which will start at the Crescent, Market Street at 8.00pm. As usual, all are welcome. For more details about High Peak activities, contact Geoff Williamson on 0663 765634.



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"DO YOU THINK THE GRIFFIN IS STILL IN THE OLD STYLE?"

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editor: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ 477 1973 (home) 831 7222 x 3411 (wk). News, articles and letters welcome. All items © CAMRA: may be reproduced if source acknowledged.

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John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Rhys Jones, Phil Levison, Chris Stone, Sue Tittensor, Peter Soane, Tom Lord, Stuart Ballantyne, Peter Edwardson, Martyn Wysterk, Jim Flynn, Stuart Jamieson.

New Look For Olde Cock Griffin Extension

In late May, Whitbread unveiled the new-look Olde Cock in Didsbury, and it must be said that in terms of appearance and the philosophy behind the operation, there is much to commend.

The front of the pub is laid out in a multi-room/area fashion and it must be said that it works very well. The idea has apparently been to create a pub that not only doesn't look like just another big brewery refurbishment but also, with the eclectic range of chairs, tables and carpets gives the feel of a traditional tenancy rather than a big brewery managed house. If, as seems to be the case here, that means ditching the yards of 'designer junk' that festoons so many pubs these days, then that's all to the good although it's still difficult to escape the feeling that this is still the latest wheeze of some designer whiz-kid - albeit better than most such ideas.

At the back of the pub, an extension has been added and although some attempt has been made to break this area up, it does still seem rather cavernous and sits somewhat uneasily with the more intimate areas at the front. At the back however, there is a particularly good beer garden - just the job for a warm summer's evening.



Where the Olde Cock does come into its own, however, is in its range of beers and the attitude of managers Dave and Rita Monaghan. Although they have been in the trade for a good few years (including a stint at Toxteth Conservative Club - now, there's an interesting concept!) this is their first pub and it must be said that they certainly have the right idea of what is needed. Apart from selling the more or less standard Whitbread range of Boddingtons, Flowers, Pedigree and Chesters Mild, the pub will also be featuring up to three rotating guest beers and, here's the interesting bit. Dave has been given the go-ahead to obtain these from whomsoever he chooses. Thwaites is likely to be permanent (and was on fine form when OT visited) but the others should be constantly changing. An early supplier is likely to be local wholesalers, Coopers of Glossop, and Dave has also been pointed in the direction of Brendan Dobbin's West Coast Brewery. Four-pint jugs of ale are also available and seem to be very popular as, surprisingly has been the re-introduction of real mild after a gap of many years with sales currently a respectable 1 1/2 18 gallon containers a week.

Lunchtime food is available from 12-2 on Mondays to Saturdays and all day Sunday to 7.00pm.

The eagle-eyed will also note the dreaded Scrumpy Jack keg cider is also on sale, but through a keg font, as it always should be. We asked Dave about this, explaining that most pubs went for the fake handpull. "Why con people?" he replied. That just about says it all really, Dave and Rita deserve much success with the Olde Cock and at the moment they are certainly doing everything to achieve it.



The much needed extension to Holts' popular Griffin in Heaton Mersey is now open. As well as resurfacing (was there ever a surface?) the car park, seating for about fifty people, and slightly more standing space has been added to the pub in a single-storey extension, as previously reported in OT.

Perhaps the most surprising - and pleasing aspect of the development is the high quality of workmanship involved, of which Joseph Holts can be justifiably proud. Apart from a few minor quibbles about the slightly out of character roofline of the extension, I can express nothing but praise for the job.

Firstly there is a new, well laid out, 'D' shaped bar, connected through the wall to the original, with plenty of room behind. Secondly the locals have started to colonise the new part from the moment the pub opens - so it is a success in the eyes of the most important group - the customers.

Comfortable padded bench seating has been added around three sides of the new room, with a mixture of tables, stools and chairs. The decor is in keeping with Holts current style - muted earthy colours in somewhat flamboyant patterns, but the overall effect is really quite pleasing.

Of special merit is the attention to detail - especially in the bar woodwork and furniture. Holts have gone to quite extraordinary lengths to match the character and detail of the original bar in the 'older' part of the pub. Moulded and curved glass screens, and high quality mouldings and turnings lead to a very attractive overall effect, almost duplicating the look and feel of the older bar. Brass door fittings are all antique in feel, and proper sash windows with frosted glass effect have been put in - not only at the front but also on the side facing the car-park.

Furthermore, Holts have resisted the temptation to try to do too much to the older part of the pub. There has been some opening out, where the extension leads through into the older rooms on both sides of the bar, but the traditional character and multi-room feel of the original is maintained. The pub has been given a more upmarket feel. Whether one is entirely happy about this is very much a matter of individual taste, but it is certainly comfortable and welcoming. The best news is that the beer remains the cheapest in Stockport, and the Holts was certainly in fine form when I took the photos. In this case at least, Holts are to be congratulated on a job well done.





Pub-owning chain Paramount Inns have bought two of the local Boddington PubCo houses that were up for sale, and thanks to the Burtonwood connection (they have a stake in Paramount), that company's traditional bitter is now on sale at the Wrexham on Ashton Old Road and the High Bank on Ogden Lane, both in Openshaw.

Two new pubs are possibly in the pipeline in the Cheadle area. Despite fierce local opposition, Tetleys seem determined to convert a former video shop in the centre of the village into a new 'upmarket' pub. Virtually the entire village, including the rector and the Post Office, ganged up to protest about the pub (which would have no car park) and last week councillors turned down Tetley's planning application. Tetleys are now "reviewing" the situation.

The licensee from the Strawberry Duck in Clayton opened his latest venture on the 25th June when the Failsworth Arms, Ashton Road West, Failsworth (where else!) opened for business. Previously a free house with only John Smiths beers, the pub had in fact been closed for nine months but now looks set to succeed as the area's latest free house selling much the same range as the 'Duck', namely Holts Mild and Bitter, Boddies Bitter plus one guest beer.

Banks's Mild has replaced Mercian Mild at the Station, Didsbury (from Thursday 4th June). Selling at 11p it is 6p more expensive than the Mercian Mild it replaced. Station Mild drinkers are, not surprisingly, unhappy about this and have been told that this price has been forced on the pub by the brewery's area management. On my visit the (unusually) hand pumped Banks's Mild was on excellent form. When I enquired as to how it was selling I received an uncommitted reply 'alright'. What does this mean for the future of Marstons 'No.3 special Dark Mild' as sold exclusively at the Royal Oak?



The Waterloo (Stockport's) new landlord is Kevin Moores. Kevin, after a total of 17 years service was the head barman and is a first-class cellarman. He replaces Mavis and Stan Hodgkinson who retired after nine years in charge. So here's wishing Mavis and Stan a happy retirement and Kevin a happy and successful future.

At the Swinging Sporan in the City Centre, former head barman Cliff Thornton hopes to take over the licence.

Beers from the Flea and Firkin's in-pub brewery are now being distributed via the Oak Brewery of Heywood.

At Robinson's Plough in Gorton, we welcome Bob Voigt formerly of the Boddington Pub Company's Black Lion in Stockport. We wish Bob well in taking over one of the area's classic pubs, and promise him every support in preserving it from the depredations of the roadbuilders.

It is with regret that we have to report an impending change of licensee at Turners Vaults in Stockport. No news of the newcomers but they will certainly have a hard act to follow.

No sooner asked for than provided! The Squirrel at Chinley now selling draught perry - Richards from Congresbury near Bristol - in late May.

Unfortunately, The Park in Portwood is now selling "handpumped" keg Scrumpy Jack cider. Shame on it!

APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

I/We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale Limited, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Campaign.

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Chris Stone / Sue Tiffensor, 80 Bexhill Road, Davenport, Stockport, SK3 8UZ

those wishing to join CAMRA who live in the Marple, Bredbury, Woodley or Romiley areas, should write instead to:

Tom Lord, 5 Vernon Drive, Marple, SK6 6JH

