

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING TIMES

CAMRA
STILL
FREE

No:
105

JANUARY 1993

100+ Beers at Pub Festival (FLEA & FIRKIN) Jan 8 - 16

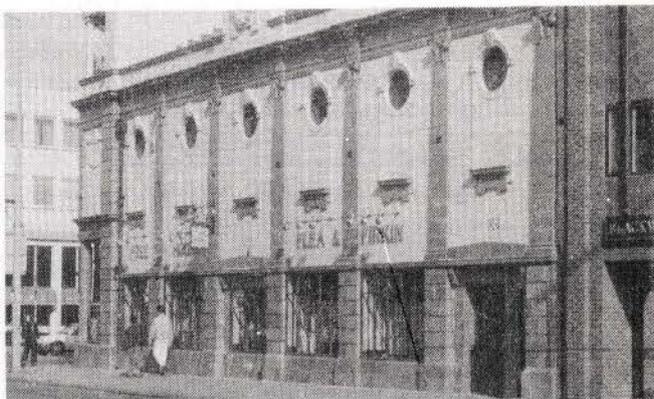
Friday January 8 sees the start of what promises to be the city of Manchester's biggest ever Beer Festival, and what is possibly the largest true in-pub Beer Fest ever seen on the British mainland. The event will be held at Manchester's Flea & Firkin, on the corner of Oxford Road and Grosvenor Street, and will run until Saturday 16th, unless all the ale is supped earlier.

This will be the fourth, and with about 130 beers, ciders and perries, by far the biggest, such venture promoted by Phil, since he became manager just over two years ago. The three previous festivals have effectively sold out over four and a half days, so this time it was decided to mount a larger, week-long affair.

Whilst this is not a CAMRA festival, but a profit-making venture sponsored by the pub-owners, Stockport & South Manchester Branch will be involved at the festival, and will have a campaigning stand there on at least some of the days. The beer prices will be roughly on a par with those at the upcoming CAMRA/Round Table 'Bent & Bongs' Festival at Atherton, at the end of January, and admission to the pub (where the festival is held) is free at all times, even though live music will be on most nights.

Although the beer list was 'finalised' months ago, the actual beers that arrive tend to vary slightly from those expected, and it is hoped that an accurate list will be found in the programme. Previous best-selling old favourites will be making a welcome return, but this time - forty or fifty new beers will be joining them.

The event runs all day, from 12 to 11, (except the Sunday), and tasty, filling and above all, cheap, hot food should be available throughout. A wide selection of traditional ciders



and perries will complement the tremendous variety of beers, so there should indeed be something for everyone. So come on down and help make this splendid experiment a tremendous success.

'Ale House' at Crown

Further to our brief report last month, we can now let you have a full update on the Boddington PubCo's plans for the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport.

As we speculated, the Crown is indeed to become a PubCo "Ale House" along the lines of the very successful Kings Arms on Bloom Street in Salford. Before this the pub will undergo a £30,000 refurbishment involving no structural alterations but a thorough redecoration inside and out together with the replacement of some of the furniture. Work is scheduled to start on the 11th January and should last for two to two and a half weeks. When complete the intention is to offer up to 12 different beers at busy times. The licensee will be CAMRA stalwart (and former CAMRA Greater Manchester Regional Director) Ken Birch, which should at least guarantee an interesting range of beers. Opening Times hopes to be (will be, ed) at the grand opening, so more next month.

We can also reveal that the PubCo will be looking at another two or three similar developments during 1993, including a possible one in the Trafford area - since the Trafford Metro does not at the moment have one real ale freehouse, this will be welcome news to drinkers in that area.

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PUB of the Month January

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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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						

The first Pub of the Month award for 1993 goes to one of Manchester's pleasantest pubs - the Union, Higher Ardwick. Slightly off the beaten track but very close to main routes, the Union has maintained a loyal following over the years. It's the sort of good honest local of which Wilsons once had scores spread across the city.

And Wilson's, of course, became the only problem about the pub. Particularly since the switch of brewing to Halifax, standards of brewing have been so inconsistent that, even when well kept - as it invariably was at the Union - the beer was likely to dissuade keen drinkers from visiting the pub. Manchester's beer drinkers rejoiced, then, when last year the Union became one of several Wilsons pubs to pass to Cheshire's Burtonwood Brewery. A very fine pint of mild or bitter can now be enjoyed from the Union's handpumps.

But the best of pubs, with the best of beer, needs one thing more - good licensees. In times when pubs seem to change licensees with the seasons, it's heartening to know that Gerry and Una Dolan have been at the Union for no less than 14 years. It's that sort of experience and continuity, sadly under-valued by the national brewers and pub chains, that makes a really good pub. Come and experience the great beer, great welcome and rather special atmosphere at the Union on Pub of the Month presentation night, Thursday January 28th. The pub is well served by buses (any Stockport Road or Hyde Road bus to the Apollo) and is some ten minutes walk from Piccadilly Station (leave via the Metrolink Station and onto London Rd).

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New Marstons Beers

For an increasing number of drinkers Marstons Pedigree, and even the re-launched Marstons Bitter, are fairly lacklustre shadows of their former selves, devotees of the Burton-on-Trent brewery will have some things to look forward to in 1993.

Starting from February 1st, no less than 8 new cask ales are to be introduced. Under the global name of "Head Brewer's Choice", the beers will be made available to 400 selected pubs supplied by Marstons.

The beers have been devised by Head Brewer Paul Bayley and a new beer will be made available every two weeks, and after all eight have been introduced, the four most popular will be repeated to complete a six-month cycle. The range covers everything from a low gravity Luncheon Ale at 2.5%ABV up to a Winter Warmer at 5.2%. The other beers making up the range are Chestnut Ale, Harvest Ale, Stout, Burton Pale Ale, Christmas Beer and Union Mild.

The brewery will provide a handpump plus a new pumpclip every two weeks together with full point of sale material.

The purpose of the exercise is not apparently just to provide drinkers with extra choice, but also to aid research and development with a view to producing a new beer permanently - company Managing Director David Gordon has said that he would be delighted if a new addition to the range can be found after the trial. Local pubs taking part in the trial include the Royal Oak in Didsbury and we will bring you news of the new beers as they appear.



DO NOT INCREASE BEER DUTY



- * Britain's beer drinkers pay **FOUR BILLION POUNDS** a year to the Government
- * British Beer Duty is the second highest in the European Community—**MORE THAN EIGHT TIMES** the minimum rate recommended by the EEC
- * Beer Duty and VAT amount to a third of the price of a pint
- * **ENOUGH IS ENOUGH**
FREEZE BEER DUTY
- * **SIGN CAMRA'S PETITION**

AT THE FLEA & FIRKIN

The Campaign for Real Ale has launched a national petition to Parliament, urging a freeze on beer duty in the 1993 Budget.

The petition highlights the extraordinary levels of tax paid by British beer drinkers, as British beer duty and VAT amount to a third of the price of a pint. This means that Beer drinkers pay over four billion pounds in tax to the Exchequer every year. Britain's beer tax is the second highest rate in the EEC - 25 times more than France, 11 times more than Germany and four times more than Belgium - in fact British beer duty is eight times more than the EEC's recommended minimum tax rate on beer.

"British beer drinkers pay enough tax as it is," said CAMRA Campaigns Manager Stephen Cox. "A further rise in beer duty will only push people out of pubs, and further hammer Britain's brewers."

"With the single market arriving in 1993, a traveller from Europe will be allowed to bring back 110 litres of beer per person per trip. That is 250 large cans of beer. Remember, British brewers pay 22 pence a pint more tax on their beer than French brewers do. Is this fair competition?"

"We are going to see massive imports of cheap, foreign, canned beer, undermining traditional draught beer drunk in pubs. The ever upward rise of beer duty has got to stop."

"It doesn't matter whether you drink real ale or lager, you should support CAMRA's campaign."

Local CAMRA members will be campaigning to get as many signatures on the petition as possible and to this end will be having a stall at the Flea & Firkin Beer Festival to enable local drinkers to register their views.

FROM THE TOP...

So, here we are in 1993, the year of the European Single Market, the Earth Summit in Manchester and also the year that the fate of the city's Olympic Bid is settled.

What do these mean for local drinkers? The advent of the Single Market, whilst welcome, could bring about unfair competition for our local brewers - from 1st January a traveller will be able to bring back 110 litres of beer for personal use and bring them back to Britain. That's about 250 large cans per person per trip. Beer is much cheaper overseas as it is much more lightly taxed - a flood of cheap canned foreign beer could undermine draught beer and British pubs. To make a start on redressing the balance CAMRA has launched a national petition of Parliament - we will be having a stall at the Flea & Firkin Beer Festival so do try and come along and put your name on the petition.

As for the Earth Summit, this will throw the city's "green" credentials under the spotlight and what we will be focussing on is how well they are preserving our public house heritage. Look for a major feature on this in the run up to the summit. Overshadowing all of this, though, is the fate of the Olympic Bid. The hype and hysteria will doubtless reach fever pitch as decision day looms in September. Behind all the hype is the harsh reality of the effect the bid will have on local people in East Manchester. Is the bid for planners and politicians or is it for the people? The answer to this question seems to be crystallising around the fate of the Little Bradford pub - will it come down, as the planners want, or will it stay up, as the local people want? This could become the cause celebre of 1993.

Clearly there is much campaigning to be done on many fronts in the next 12 months and Opening Times will be in the thick of it. But for the moment, all that remains for me to do is to wish all of our readers and advertisers a very happy and prosperous New Year.

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From David Thomas

I wonder if the pundits of CAMRA could enlighten me as to the destination of the overspill from handpumped beer.

We see it cascading down the sides of glasses and pots, carrying with it stale beer, cigarette ash and other contaminants, to be collected in trays which are periodically emptied into stainless steel or plastic buckets. These then disappear one knows not where.

When asked recently, a bar attendant gave me a knowing look and said 'trade secret'.

Friends of mine now largely drink keg bitter because of the suspect destination of dirty overspill. I am reluctant to take such a drastic step but probably would if I thought that slops were recycled in the cellar.

I believe that such a distasteful practice, if it exists, is illegal, and would welcome your expert knowledge on the subject.

(Editors note: Whilst no licensee would ever admit to recycling slops, the sad fact is that a lot of it goes on and indeed, always has, although the extent to what is recycled and where to varies from pub to pub, and to be fair many licensees do not indulge in the practice. If you are convinced that something is amiss at your local then a letter to the Environmental Health Dept. at the Town Hall may be called for. Hopefully, the introduction of oversized lined glasses for all handpumped beer by April 1994 should see a marked reduction in the amount of waste beer available for recycling. Oh, and your friends who have swapped to keg beer shouldn't feel too smug - it is perfectly feasible to recycle beer into kegs as well as casks.

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From Andy Wilson, licensee the Queens, Cheadle.

I wish to bring to your attention an error in your latest publication (OT, December).

At this time we regret to say that the Queens Arms has not been refurbished. The latest Robinsons refurbishment has taken place at the Printers Arms.

The Queens is still in its original style, selling good weekday lunches, fine Robinsons Best Mild and without question the finest example of ordinary bitter for miles around.

Your members will always receive a warm coal fire welcome.

One assumes that your article could simply have been a "Printers" error?

Editor's note: Groan! Yes indeed, I did of course mean the Printers. It seems that every time the Queens appears in these pages, we get something wrong. Apologies to Andy and Eunice and all at the Queens. Our initial thoughts on the Printers are on the next page.

Greenalls Change?

Greenalls have been rightly criticised in these pages for their apparent half-hearted approach to guest beers, despite being the self proclaimed largest free house chain in the country.

This is slowly starting to change with reports of increased penetration of the likes of Cains Bitter into their North West estate and now comes news of a tie up with London brewers Youngs.

Following a supply deal with the Wandsworth brewers, Youngs Bitter will be appearing in 50 Greenalls pubs and could extend further into the estate later in the year. Greenalls, without apparent irony, says it chose Youngs because it is one of the two truly local London beers produced by a family run brewery renowned for tradition and quality - just the type of company in fact that Greenalls have spent the best part of the last 20 years taking over and closing down!

However, better a late conversion than none at all and Greenalls now say that this deal underlines its commitment to provide drinkers with genuine choice in its pubs. It also seems that there are other supply deals in the pipeline, this time involving North West regional brewers.

The beer is only to go into pubs where trade is sufficient to sustain an extra cask beer and there is no intention that any existing beer in a pub will be displaced - the first pub to take it was the Saracens Head in Warrington and it remains to be seen whether any pubs in the Opening Times circulation area will be included. Lets hope one or two are - as Youngs is a fine bitter beer which should certainly appeal to local palates.

The Printers - Cheadle



Robinsons marathon programme of alterations to the Printers in Cheadle came to a close just before Christmas.

The old vault is now the toilets with the other room on the right at the entrance now serving as a, rather plush, vault. As for the rest of the pub, the bar has been turned through 90 degrees and now backs on to the left hand wall while the main body of the pub has been knocked through into a new conservatory at the rear, the latter also including a separate food counter.

In short the pub is largely unrecognisable but is it an improvement? Certainly landlady Phyllis is very enthusiastic as are many of the locals and it is certainly true that the old pub was, in parts, badly laid out with much congestion around the bar area. Perhaps it's the shock of the new but something does seem to jar - the use of light wood for pub fixtures and fittings is always debateable, as is the use of strongly patterned floral wallpaper which always seems to fade quickly. The wide open space in front of the bar seems just a bit too wide and open, and the mottled red panels on the bar front and some of the doorways should never have seen the light of day.

The pub is however gaining many new customers and it has to be said that the conservatory is a welcome addition. The Printers really needs to start regaining its character, luckily under the enthusiastic stewardship of Phyllis and her family this shouldn't be a problem.

'Corner Cupboard'

One of Stockport's classic locals always used to be the Crown or "Corner Cupboard" on Hillgate but since the departure of Bryan Cumston, whose family had run the pub since the turn of the century, its rudderless, but generally downward, drift was a sad sight.

Happily, that now looks set to change. Not only has the pub been bought by independent brewers Vaux, but there are new, and permanent, tenants in the shape of Debbie and Jack Parrott. Although this is their first pub, Debbie and Jack have considerable experience of the licensed trade - Jack was the steward at the Armoury Barracks for a long time.

No major changes are planned at the pub, not least due to the fact that the mainly older clientele wouldn't stand for any! The vault has been redecorated and early 1993 should see a smartening up of the lounge at the back. Two cask beers are available - Vaux Bitter and Thome Mild, both on handpump. When Opening Times has visited recently, the mild has been particularly good.

Many of the old locals are now starting to come back and the Crown looks on course for a new lease of life. Debbie and Jack have our best wishes for every success with the pub.



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Banks Spend £1M on Four in Hand

Friday 11 December saw the opening of the Four in Hand, the new Banks's pub at the corner of Palatine Road and Lapwing Lane in West Didsbury, on which the brewery are believed to have spent the best part of £1 million. It's an impressive conversion of an old Victorian mansion, bringing badly needed choice to a previously thinly-pubbed area of the city.

Outside there is a large car park and extensive outdoor drinking area. The spacious, high-ceilinged interior includes a main bar area, two rather more secluded sections opening off at different levels, one in a conservatory extension, and a separate wood-panelled dining area at a lower level towards the rear of the pub. The Four in Hand is designated a "Premier Pint and Platter" pub, with a food servery dispensing hot and cold meals lunchtimes and early evenings.

Banks's have clearly aimed for an upmarket image, with carpeting throughout, plush seating and extensive use of dark wood. Not original, but very appropriate and easy on the eye. Other brewers, such as Robinson's, would do well to look at the colour schemes and detailing here before contemplating any new refurbishment projects. There are two impressive Victorian fireplaces, possibly original to the house, with fairly realistic coal-effect gas fires. Full disabled access is provided to the main bar area, with ramps outside and a separate disabled toilet, although people in wheelchairs would not be able to



reach the sections opening off at different levels.

Four real ales are available - Banks's Mild (115p) and Bitter (121p) on electric pumps, and Cameron's Strongarm (132p) and Marstons Pedigree (143p) on handpumps. While not exactly cheap, the prices are very reasonable for Didsbury. All beers, including those on handpump, are dispensed into oversize glasses, ensuring a full pint - an example many of our other pubs will have to follow when this becomes mandatory in 1994. First impressions are that the beer is being kept in good condition, although as with any new pub there have been the inevitable teething troubles.

Considering the amount of money Banks's have spent on the place, it's perhaps a pity that they couldn't find room for a vault, and some may find the interior rather too open-plan, with a marked lack of seating within sight of the bar. Having said that, the Four in Hand is certainly well worth a visit and represents a major enhancement to the drinking scene in South Manchester.



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The campaigns to save the numerous pubs under threat in the Manchester area look set to move into top gear during 1993.

On Hyde Road, the threat to the Plough should become clearer with the launch of a public consultation exercise in the next few months - CAMRA will be aiming to play a full part in this. Meanwhile the petition to save the pub is in full swing.

Over at the Little Bradford, under threat from the Olympic development, we are awaiting the results of the competition to design the final scheme, after which it is hoped that negotiations with the developers will save the pub. The compulsory purchase order has now been published and CAMRA's objection has been lodged. The Pub of the Month award to the pub produced a good deal of publicity, although it was unfortunate that none of the Olympic Bid Committee were able to take up our invitation to be present on the night - they were in fact at the EC headquarters in Strasbourg at the time. Once again the CAMRA petition to save the pub is in full swing.

Last month we trailed the publication of further Olympic-related proposals that could threaten yet more of the city's pubs but as yet these have still to see the light of day. We do however believe that these are still in the pipeline - more news on this one when we have it.

Hogsheads!

How many Manchester breweries use hogsheads (54 gallon barrels)? One, you'll say - Joseph Holt. Well now it's two - for a small stock of the outsize casks has been acquired to serve West Coast beers at the King's Arms in Chorlton-on-Medlock. The cellar space is such that three hogsheads can be stillaged in the space previously used by three standard (36 gallon) barrels - so they can sell 50% more beer before the cask is exhausted. As pubs selling less characterful brews struggle to clear even 18 gallon casks within an acceptable timescale, this extraordinary news is testimony to the quality and popularity of Manchester's favourite small brewery.

In the City Centre, popular licensee Cliff Thornton is still hanging on at the Swinging Sporan and we are having a social there at the beginning of February to show our continuing support. Once again this is a pub where developments are expected in the near future.

Burtonwood Embark on Buying Spree

Local brewers Burtonwood went on a pre-Christmas shopping spree and purchased no less than 47 new pubs.

The pubs came from Tetley Walker (34) and Greenalls (13) and, unlike previous acquisitions which have seen the Cheshire brewery expand into new areas, these are all concentrated in the Manchester, Liverpool and Cheshire areas. The additions bring the company's tied estate up to about 440.

The company explained that the acquisitions were in line with its policy of steady expansion to get sufficient pubs to keep up the barrelage required to maintain volumes at the new brewhouse - investment in the brewery has topped \$7 million over the past few years.

We were hoping to provide a list of any local pubs included in the deal but Burtonwood were keeping mum until all had been assimilated into their estate which was due to start on 14th December - we can however reveal one local pub that has gone over - the Pack Horse on Stockport's Hillgate. Hopefully more details will be available next issue.



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STAGGER

Hillgate
with Paul Hutchings

It was decided some months ago that the annual (festive) Hillgate jaunt would go UP the Hill this year - ostensibly on the grounds that the pubs were less likely to lock us out (because they're full, not us!). So with a somewhat heavy heart I joined about 12 stalwarts at the Royal Oak on High Street, and promptly left them again to start at Turners Vaults (Queen's Head). But I digress...

The Royal Oak is a modernised, clean and well-run Robinsons pub just outside the mainstream town centre, and a few feet above Hillgate. Opened out, with a relatively distinct pool area, the pub is attractive and welcoming, and most found the Robinsons ok, the mild better than the bitter. To my taste it was slightly sour, so without delay I retraced my steps (in company) to 'do' Hillgate properly - from the start.

The Queens Head is a well known award-winning (CAMRA as well) Sam Smith's pub, almost directly beneath the market bridge. It is very small, always busy, and on this visit its fascinating multi-room layout was ignored as we headed straight for the bar. The pub was serving Museum Ale and Old Brewery Bitter. We tried the latter which was more than pleasant.

Across the road to Winters, a 'Brasserie' serving electrically pumped Tetleys. An 'interesting' building and decor. I couldn't help being reminded of a Mausoleum. Lively and noisy on the night (to be fair it was the last Friday before Xmas) with a trendy-ish crowd. The Tetleys was only average, which is a pity, because Winters deserves credit for trying real ale, at least.

Up to the Spreadingale. The Robinsons pub adjoining the Brewery. The doors

were shut when the main 'mob' had passed by. For us they were open. Inside the pub has changed a lot since I was first in, the bar is now on the opposite wall etc. It remains a lively, workers pub, opened-out, pool area, lounge areas and a small separate front room. It was populated on the night with a number of Brewery workers having a party. The Beer however... mild and bitter, maximum points. On this night the near-holy grail of the perfect pint lingered in this pub. My annual search for the perfect pint was over. It was here, I had seen the pint. It may of course, re-occur here at some time in the future, and it is the brewery pub, but this quality was utterly exceptional. I finally tore myself away, wondering why.

The Gladstone, usually thought of as a Tetley house was offering Burtonwood Bitter. In a slight hurry to try to catch everyone else up, the rearguard tried it, and it was perfectly pleasant. A traditional, locals multi-roomer, pots of atmosphere normally, but on this night very quiet. Perhaps due for redecoration in 1993.

Crossing Hillgate to the Red Bull, we caught most everyone up. This place is usually cited as the Robinsons Pub. Ultra-traditional, multi-roomed, real fires, busy. Good Beer. Well, mostly. The mild was felt to be only average, and though the Best bitter did better, it had to my mind an unpleasant sulphury foretaste. The Red Bull is a fine pub and usually does better - Robbys do their entertaining here.

Then across the road (and off Hillgate) down to the Waterloo. Again a traditional locals pub, again Robinsons, and very, very busy. Masses of atmosphere, good service. An excellently run establishment, with a comfortable, if packed front lounge. At Xmas its bound to be busier than one would like, so after a quick slurp, on, in a tearing hurry to the half-way meet-point. Best Bitter and Mild both above average.

This was the Boddington PubCo Black Lion, where we were anticipating the weekend guest beer... alas... not ready. It would have been Cain's Formidable Ale.

As it was the only real ale was Boddingtons Bitter. As Boddys goes it was actually quite good. The pub itself is a classic, long corridor to the back lounge and an excellent high-ceilinged front bar. The pictures were off the wall owing (we hope) to re-decoration. With the guest beer, an excellent pub.

Across to the Sun and Castle, a Tetleys pub that won an OT Pub Vandalism award four years back. Now, all dark wood and mock victoriana and etched/stained glass, with a long lounge and long public/pool room separated by a long, central bar. Overall, it has quite a pleasing effect, but what was ripped out was far, far better. All that was available was Tetley Bitter, and that, on this visit wasn't terribly good.

Less than a stone's throw away was Chester's Pack Horse. In many ways a lovely pub, with fine etched glass on a traditional corner site, but, oh! what a smoke-filled room. Boddingtons Bitter and Chesters Mild were on offer. The Mild was felt to be a bit green, and the bitter a touch sour, though average for Boddingtons. The Beer rather let a good pub down on this occasion.

Cross the road... time marching on... Burtonwoods Golden Lion. Opened out, round a central bar, with nice bar furniture and a good atmosphere. Only Burtonwood bitter was on, but it was pleasant enough. The pub would be better for a wider beer range, I think.

Upwards, ever upwards to the Crown (Vaux - see elsewhere this issue). The Thome mild was particularly good. Interesting layout, with a small lounge seating about 25. Nice pub.

Pausing for breath while there is a 100 yard or so interlude to Robinsons enormous Star & Garter. Big, opened-out, Robinsons down to the fake arch. Very serviceable well-run local, welcoming atmosphere, and retains a multi-room feel, despite the Brewery architects. Usual Robinsons range (Best Bitter, Mild). Both above average.

Passing Cottons, which at the time, seemed to serve no real ale, we come to

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the **Flying Dutchman** a Robinsons pub. Packed, opened-out single roomer. Small and friendly, very much a local in the best sense of the word. Excellent decorative order, and a homely atmosphere was provided by the low ceilings. The bitter (by now I had given in and was on pints) was well above average, the mild less good.

The **Royal Mortar** (Robinsons again) was so busy I could hardly move, but was served quickly, with a good pint. Another friendly small local. What more could one ask.

The penultimate stop, and closing time was looking close, was the **Wheatsheaf**, which Vaux have taken from Wilsons. The pub itself is unaltered, Vaux preferring to settle in and see what the clientele think before knocking the place to bits to suit a corporate image or idea. It is a very good policy. Vaux Samson, Wards Bitter, Boddingtons. The Samson was excellent, the place very well run.

Finally we ended up at the **Blossoms Hotel** on the A6. A familiar haunt and three-times winner of the Pub of the Month award. An excellent, busy, well run pub. Good Beer, Good Service, Great Atmosphere - but WHY OH WHY did Robinsons have to ruin what was one of their better refurbishes with a ghastly contiboard bar that looks like something out of Fawltly Towers Lounge. To put back the class that made the Blossoms stand out PLEASE build a **decentbar** out of **decentwood**, with PROPER BRASS FITTINGS. Are you **listening** Mr Robinson?

So that's it. Well done and dusted I retired to contemplate the last pint of the night. The views expressed were those of individuals who braved the whole route. It is utterly unfair to judge any pub on the last Friday before Christmas, so try Hillgate yourselves. It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it. Oh, are we going DOWN next year? Huh, wimps! Happy new year's staggering, and a special thank you to the customers of these pubs who showed a lot of forbearance towards a very large number of us that Friday.

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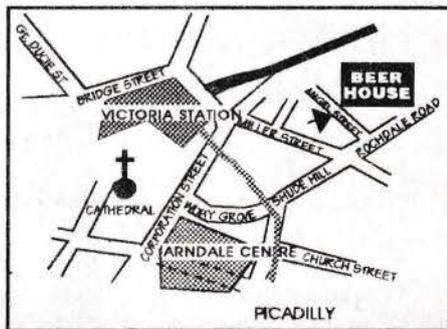
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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JANUARY '88

BUY IT - SHUT IT! Was the headline. 1987 was a disastrous year for the real ale drinker, and details were given of the brewery closures - Greenall Whitney to shut the Wern Brewery; Whitbread to shut Wethered's in Marlow, and Chester's in Salford; Greene King had shut Rayment's in Essex; Buckley's in Wales had gone under; Ma Pardoe's home brew pub had gone to Hoskins; and the year ended with the fall of Matthew Brown, who were taken over by Scottish and Newcastle after a fierce battle to remain independent.

1988 Promised to be little better - Elders with a stake of at least 5% in Greene King; New Zealander Ron Brierley with 6% of S & N; and the City believed that Grand Met. (owners of Websters/Wilsons) could be under threat from the USA. What hope was there for Oldham - the five year guarantee given by Boddingtons was coming to an end, and there had even been a threat for Boddingtons themselves. There was one more gloomy prospect - the Brew Pubs and Micro-Breweries, whose appearance had been like a breath of fresh air in the brewing industry, were going down like nine-pins.

Some better news - there was a Welcome to new readers of Opening Times, which was described as Greater Manchester's **biggest** pub newspaper. The print run had been increased to 1500, and the number of pubs and off-licenses taking the paper had increased to 80. (1993 figures are 4000 copies going to 152 outlets.)

Hyde's Gateway on Kingsway re-opened after extensive alterations, which seemed to go on for most of 1987. But it was always Hyde's habit to make major alterations with the pub remaining open. (Remember the Friendship in Fallowfield, and the Victorica, Withington.) The Gateway had managed to lose its pub atmosphere, but not for lack of money as the fittings were solid and expensive - and a revolving mirror ball lit by spotlights didn't seem to fit in with the image of a stongly traditional family brewery.

Other openings re/openings reported were : - Holt's Sidings, on Broom Lane - a brand new pub. The Swinging Sporan, Sackville Street, Manchester - re-opened with Younger's Scotch Bitter on handpumps. Alterations to another Holt's pub, the Waggon & Horses on Hyde Road, Gorton. Dicey Reillys was due to open on 16th January. The Hinds Head, Heaton Chapel opened on December 17th, on the site of the old Poco-a-Poco club. Finally, a brand new pub for Tetley - the Old Mill, just off Ladybridge Road, Cheadle Hulme.



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BED & BREAKFAST



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In Hyde some bad news. The Ten Houses, in the south end of town, which until recently had a reputation for exotic landlords and frequent changes of ownership, has for the last time changed hands. Belhaven have sold the pub to a small engineering works. This would seem to be the end of this old establishment as a public house as the place was virtually gutted before the new owners moved in.

The Talbot in Stalybridge, another pub with a chequered history, has recently re-opened. It's early days yet but expect more news in the near future.

Moving into Derbyshire, the Sycamore in Birch Vale which until recently had begun to regain a reputation as a beer pub and not, as in recent years, a food and kids haunt, has once again slipped away from beer to culinary delights. The pub is now owned by Mr and Mrs Clark - who also own the Pack Horse in Hayfield and the Hanging Gate above Macclesfield - who have placed the emphasis again on food.

In Broadbottom the Griffin has recently started having guest beers alongside the regulars Boddingtons Bitter and Chesters Mild. Also available is Gobble Gobble Bitter (named after a cobbled path in the village). This is a 1039 bitter which is a blend of Coach House beers.

Also in Broadbottom, the Shoulder of Mutton, a former Good Beer Guide pub, has been sold recently to the owners of the Wheatshaf in Old Glossop. There have been a number of changes and the future looks more secure than it has in recent years. Marstons Pedigree, Ruddles Bitter and Websters Yorkshire Bitter are on sale.

In Glossop, the Junction has been advertising the cheapest beer in town, Websters Yorkshire Bitter on sale for 99p. It may be the cheapest but I'd suggest that there will be better value for money gained at any number of pubs in Glossop serving beers from Breweries with more product integrity. The Crown springs to mind where Old Brewery Bitter is on sale for £1.03 and the stronger Museum Ale is also now regularly available.

Finally, a recent check-out of Hayfield revealed one or two pints of interest. The Sportsman was selling two cask ales - Thwaites Best Mild and Craftsman, but no bitter - though this was due to a post-Christmas shortage rather than a change in beer-stocking policy. The pub also sells keg Scrumpy Jack Cider on fake handpump. The re-opened Royal now has Websters Yorkshire Bitter and John Smiths Bitter on handpump, but the most interesting development was at the Good Beer Guide listed George which has replaced Burtonwood Forshaws Bitter with cask Burtonwood Top Hat, also on handpump. This latter is primarily a keg beer and its appearance in real form is unusual to say the least.

For details of High Peak activities your contact is Geoff Williamson on 0663 765634. Members of both branches are of course more than welcome to attend each others events.

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GORDON RILEY

🔊 CAMRA CALLING!

A fairly easy month with one or two interesting events - to help you recover gently from the Christmas blow-out.

On Monday 11th January there is a social at the Crown, Didsbury Road, Heaton Mersey - as with all Monday socials, this starts at 9.00pm. This is followed on Thursday 14th with the branch meeting - this time at the Victoria, Burnage Lane, Burnage. Easy to get to - the 197 bus from Stockport and the 169 from South Manchester will drop you at the door. An important meeting this, as not only do we have a guest speaker from the Boddington PubCo but we will also be voting on Pub of 1992.

On Sunday 17th we are having one of our popular lunch-time "Crawl and Curry" events. The crawl is very easy and can be joined at any stage - 12 noon at the Whitworth on Moss Lane East; 1.00pm at the Albert on Walmer Street, Rusholme and 2.00pm at the Osborne House on Victory Street. After this we will be moving onto one of the local curry houses for a meal.

On Monday 18th the social will be at the Old Garratt, Granby Row, Manchester City Centre and on Friday 22nd we are having a minibus pub crawl around the Bramhall area. The minibus will leave the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport at 7.00pm. Phone Social Secretaries Dawn and Duncan Geddes on 445 0872 to book a seat.

The social on Monday 25th will be at the Castlewood, Bridge Street Brow, Stockport and on Thursday 28th we present the Pub of the Month award to the Union in Ardwick (see p. 2).

Moving into February now and a quick mention of the first two Monday Socials for that month - on Monday 1st we will be having a campaigning social at the Swinging Sporan in Central Manchester and on 8th at the Crown on Hillgate, Stockport - now selling Vaux beers.

Phil ~~Levens~~'s Letter from Anglesey

Going back to 1985, there were 58 cask ale outlets on the Island - now, in 1992, there are 78. Just over half of that number come from what might be called Anglesey's Big 4 Breweries:- Burtonwood with 12, Greenalls (10), Lees (9) and Robinsons (11). Lees have increased their outlets from 6 to 9 since 1985, but the other three breweries have remained static. There used to be a total of 12 breweries supplying their products to the Island, and now there are 16. The "newcomers" are Boddingtons, Felinfoel, John Smiths and Theakstons.

This improved selection of beer has been totally eclipsed by the range available just across the Menai Strait at the Ffriddoedd Bar on the University campus - it makes its first appearance in the 1993 Good Beer Guide. One evening recently, they were serving Courage Directors, Ruddles County and Marstons Pedigree, all in fine condition. On stillage, awaiting their turn, were Theakstons XB, Youngers No.3, Felinfoel Double Dragon, Oak Porter, Wobbly Bob, and Son of a Bitch. Ansells Mild and Friary Meux Bitter are normally available during term-time, also Bulmers Traditional Cider (£1 a pint). There are also 30 plus malt whiskies, ranging in price from £1. to £1.20.

Back onto Anglesey for the final item. The local press carried a licensee application for Goldlocks, at Valley, near Holyhead - originally a hairdressers, it's now a corner shop. The applicants were Graham and Jean Smithies, described as licensees, of the Sidings, Broom Lane, Levenshulme. But they're not leaving the Sidings yet - this venture could be described as a "toe in the water."

If you live in the Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley or Marple areas you will fall in the area covered by the High Peak branch and on Monday 11th February they will be having a branch meeting at the Travellers Call in Bredbury. Aim to get there at 8.30pm.

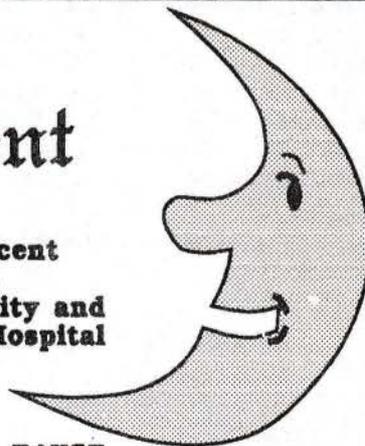
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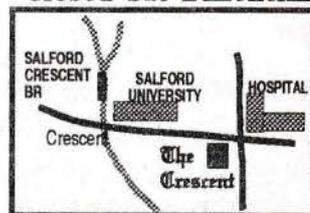


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MANCHESTER MATTERS

by Rhys Jones

First of all, profuse apologies to Lance Turner of the Britannia in Beswick, whom I unaccountably renamed Lance Gibbs in last month's column. I am happy to confirm that the Brit is not run by a test cricketer - sorry Lance!

To add to Banks's very welcome redevelopment of the Four in Hand in West Didsbury, covered more fully elsewhere, a further pre-Christmas real ale gain was the oddly named Cat's Park (formerly Archies) on Wakefield Street in the City Centre, with Tetley Bitter on handpump. However, there's a balancing real ale loss in the Centre as the Britannia near Newton Street Post Office now sells only keg beer. No prizes for guessing its owner - the lamentable Control securities.

Still in the City Centre, the Hat & Feathers now has an enhanced Whitbread range including guest beers, while a regular guest is also on the menu at the Waldorf, at the expense of Chesters Bitter and Marstons Pedigree - not much loss there. It also appears that Bensons is to be converted to a Whitbread "free house", presumably with a change of name, some time in the Spring. The Ducie Bridge and the Millstone have both gained John Smiths Bitter on handpump, the Lord Nelson has gained handpumped Websters Green Label, and finally in the Centre, the former Greens on York Street has reopened as Athenaeum, with Tetley Bitter, Inde Coope Burton Ale and Cains Bitter on handpump.

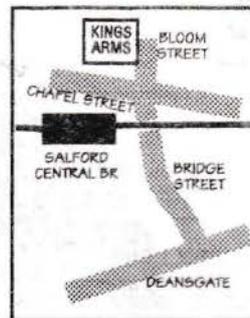
In Ancoats the Cheshire Cheese, now under new tenancy, has regular and reasonably priced guest beers (Coach House has featured), while in Ardwick the Kings Head has lost "Matthew Brown" Mild (from Nottingham!) and Youngers IPA but gained "Wilson's" Mild (from Halifax!), Websters Green Label, Courage Directors and Ruddles County, all on handpump. In Bradford, the "big" Bradford Hotel has gained Boddingtons Bitter on handpump to go with its Chesters Mild, and staying in East Manchester the Oddfellows in Openshaw now has a regular handpumped guest beer from the Boddingtons Guest Beer Club.

On to some late news now and the Star & Garter in the City Centre (Fairfield Street) has been bought by the licensee and serves Hydes Light, Boddingtons Bitter and Flowers IPA on handpump. The Bank in the City Centre has added handpumped Jennings Bitter following its refurbishment, and Dobbins Brewery Tap in Chorlton-on-Medlock now has the full range of West Coast Beers.

Finally, thanks to local CAMRA member Darren White for the info that there's now handpumped Jennings Bitter at the Vale Cottage in Gorton.

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BRANCH



The new managers have been appointed at the Old Mill, Cheadle Hulme after some considerable delay. John and Bev Yates hail from Manchester but arrive at the Old Mill from a busy pub in Epsom. John is a member of Allied Breweries' Guild of Master Cellermen and he intends to continue the guest beer policy - the next beer festival will be held in early - mid February.

At the Pomona on the Gorton/Reddish border, Jan and Andy Blackledge have taken over the tenancy. This is their first pub and they intend to introduce a guest beer to go alongside the Websters Bitter and Wilsons Mild on handpump. We wish them every success in this, their first pub - let's hope they can restore this potentially good local which has been left to lie fallow over the last few years.

As previously reported in OT, Bass have taken off the real ale in the Rudyard Hotel in Heaton Chapel - why then are they displaying a notice outside the entrance to the bar stating that handpumped traditional beers are sold? Even if Bass aren't prepared to offer their customers a choice of real ale, they could at least be honest about it.

As we reported last month, the Steelworks Tavern in Gorton was closed and up for sale. It has now apparently been sold subject to contract - more news when we have it.

The Prince of Wales in Openshaw is another keg Bass pub to have passed to Centric Inns.

The Stage in Ardwick, adjacent to the Apollo and closed for several months past, has reopened as the Parliament Club. Jim Mulvey is now well settled into the Swan on Shaw Heath. A redecoration of the pub is likely but the most obvious improvement to date is in the quality of the beer. The current range is Vaux Samson and Bitter plus an alternating third beer from either Vaux Double Maxim and Wards Bitter, all on handpump. All in all the pub looks set fair for a long overdue boost to its fortunes.

The beer range at the Castlewood in Stockport now seems to have settled down to Vaux Bitter and Samson plus Thorne Mild, all on handpump. The mild was very good on a recent visit.

Guest beers seem well established at the Black Lion on Hillgate, Stockport. Recent offerings have included Cains Formidable Ale and Morlands Old Speckled Hen.

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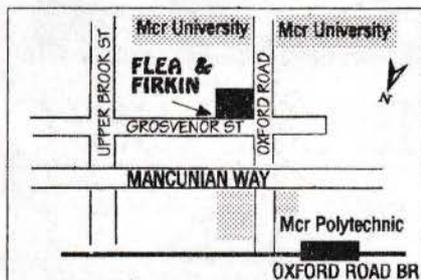
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