

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING CAMRA

No:
108

TIMES

APRIL 1993

STILL
FREE

End of The Line ?

By Tim Jones

The fate of Stalybridge Station Buffet, a drinking institution both locally and nationally, was hanging in the balance as we went to press.

Although functioning as a genuine station buffet, the facility at Stalybridge is run privately and over the years has gained a reputation for the variety and quality of cask beers sold there. It was over two years ago that we reported British Rail's plans to lease and redevelop the site and all that would mean for the future of the buffet and licensee Ken Redfern.

A well publicised campaign co-ordinated by the High Peak branch of CAMRA ended with the two parties agreeing to sit down and discuss how to resolve their differences and keep the bar open unchanged. The buildings were taken off the open market and all seemed well. Time passed and all seemed well, particularly as brewers Thwaites were reported as wishing to take an interest in the premises, but under terms that would enable it to function much the way it always had.

However, over the last six months things have started to go wrong. British Rail hiked up the rent to a level which a subsequent independent review found to be about £3500 over the odds. After subsequent to-ing and fro-ing it seemed that BR would accept the lower figure, but before they would release the lease to Ken Redfern, the arrears would have to be paid. That is, the arrears arising from a rent increase that has been agreed is too high! BR have also asked to see the books but seem incapable of deciding what figures they want to see, each change of mind taking a few weeks and each week the situation getting more desperate for the licensee. To add insult to injury, while these "negotiations" have been taking place BR have been only too happy to send round the bailiffs to collect the unpaid arrears.

Well, Ken has now had enough and the Buffet looked like closing at the end of March. As we went to press, Ken was planning to open up for a farewell bash for the long-standing folk club on Saturday 27th and that could be that. At the last minute, though, it seems that common sense may prevail and a meeting was scheduled for Friday 26th between BR, Thwaites, Ken Redfern and various legal gentlemen. Let's hope we get an eleventh-hour display of common sense, or all could be lost for this unique establishment.



Stockport Beer & Cider Festival '93

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STOCKPORT TOWN HALL

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PUB of the Month

April

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
				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	

The Stockport & South Manchester April Pub of the Month is the Romper on Pinfold Lane, Ringway. Situated on the far side of the airport, the Romper is a little oasis amidst the nearby urban sprawl of the M56 and the airport itself. Owned now by the Boddington PubCo, it was run by the Baguley family for 150 years until 1961 when it was sold to Boddingtons Brewery and for many years has been in the capable hands of tenant Harry Curran.

A few years ago it underwent a modernisation programme but still has a true country pub feel. The careful refurbishment retained the variety of rooms, original fireplaces, stone flagged floors and genuine beams, and considering its location, next to the airport, it retains a relaxed and peaceful atmosphere.

The pub is popular with a wide cross-section of locals who are attracted not only by the quality food but also the fine range of beers at keen prices. Harry was one of the first Boddington licensees to extend his beer range and now sells Boddies Mild (increasingly rare these days), Bitter, Theakstons Bitter, Draught Bass and an ever-changing guest beer.

A large garden at the rear makes the pub eminently suitable for a family outing in the summer months although it is doubtful that that will be much in use on the presentation night - Thursday 22nd April when a good turnout from both locals and CAMRA alike is expected when Harry receives this much-deserved award.

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Old Mill Festival

We hear that the beer festival at the Old Mill in Cheadle Hulme was a tremendous success with the beers having to be re-ordered halfway through the event and even so still running out before the scheduled end on 7th March.

If you were one of the visitors who wondered what the mystery beer "Rawhead Rex" was, then Opening Times can now reveal that it was in fact one of the Greenalls beers now brewed by Tetley at Warrington. The major difference was that this was the beer as brewed before its strength is reduced to the level that Greenalls require!

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. 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.

Design and Origination by Heatonian Publishing,
8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport SK4 2NP. 061 432 8384
Printed by Redvers Press Failsworth.

Contributors to this edition: John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Rhys Jones, Phil Levison, Ben Zwiernik, Stuart Jamieson, Jim Flynn, George Symes, Robin Wignall, Stuart Ballantyne, Paul Felton, Martin Wysztryk, Pete Soane, Tim Jones, Tom Lord, Tony Wilkinson, Paul Thompson and John Frank.

George & Dragon Hazel Grove

One of the latest Whitbread Cask Ale Houses to open is the George & Dragon, Hazel Grove, which opened its doors on the new look just as we went to press last month.

In its previous incarnation, the George & Dragon was very much aimed at the younger end of the market, selling a variety of lagers and decorated in the mirror and chrome style so popular with that type of pub in the 1980's. A change of image was therefore well overdue and the face that the pub now presents is a complete turnaround from what was there before.

Like the Brewers in Fallowfield, the decor has a rustic feel to it, although that perhaps works less well in a larger pub like the George. Nevertheless the pub is spacious and comfortable with a large drinking area around the bar and three separate seating areas to the left and right and also at the rear of the pub.

To succeed the pub needs to widen its clientele and on the opening night there were some doubts as to whether this would come about for, despite the wide range of beers on offer, about 75% of the people there were drinking either Boddies or Stella. Since then, however, a change has taken place and licensee Kevin Gallagher who has been there two and a half years, is more than happy with the way the pub is developing. In particular there has been a notable drift away from lager during the week, he tells us.

When we called the beers on sale included, apart from Boddies, Batemans Mild and Salem Porter, Wickwar Brand Oak Bitter, Adnams Extra, Fullers ESB and Cains Formidable Ale. The latter two were served from temperature controlled barrels stillaged behind the bar. No prices are displayed for the guest beers and this is something that ought to be put right. The prices in fact vary from the eminently reasonable (£1.12 for Batemans Mild), to expensive (£1.50 for the Adnams at 4%) and really quite cheap (Fullers at 5.5%ABV and also £1.50). No quibbles about the quality though, which was tip top, the Batemans and Fullers being particularly fine. Beer is also available in 4 pint jugs which will bring you a 5% discount.

Food also features, although not in an obtrusive way. A variety of meals are available seven days a week from 12-2 and starting this month Pie & Peas will be sold between 5 and 7pm on Mondays to Fridays.



Things are certainly moving in the right direction at the George & Dragon, which is now a real asset to the Hazel Grove drinking scene, and as we went to press an in-house beer festival was planned for the last weekend in March. Kevin has our best wishes for the venture and we will keep you posted of future developments.



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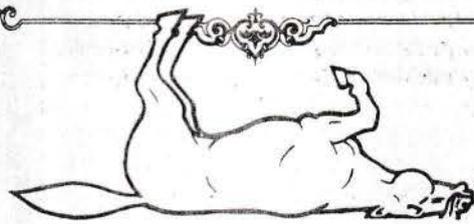
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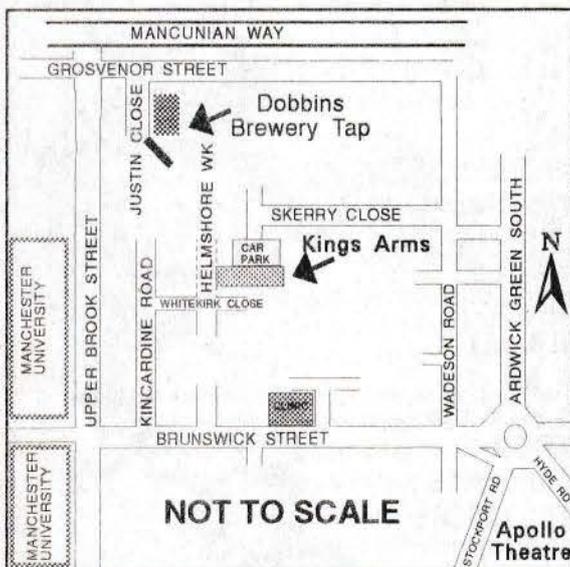
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW...

We lead this month with the latest in the long-running saga of Stalybridge Station Buffet. There had been so few developments on that front that many of us were lulled into a false sense of security. Now however, the problem is back with a vengeance.

Let us hope BR see sense and take up the offer from Thwaites to take over the lease, make improvements and establish Ken Redfern as manager - so enabling the Buffet to get back to its award winning best. In the present situation the interests of no-one are served, least of all the members of the public who regularly travel on British Rail, use the station and frequent the buffet bar.

Whilst it is perhaps fair to say that criticism could be levelled at both parties regarding their keenness to discuss the situation over the past two years, it seems to us that BR have over-ambitious plans for the buffet, plans they are having great difficulty fulfilling, and are not prepared to look at all the options fairly.

We want the buffet to serve good beer to rail travellers and the general public as it has done for years, British Rail seem only to want to maximise profit in the short-term at the expense of a fine and unique establishment.

The Tommy Ducks affair reported last month has aroused widespread disgust among many members of the public. Certainly, in my travels around local pubs of late, it seems to have been on everyone's lips. Good news then that the City Council are definitely going ahead with their plans to prosecute Greenalls over this. The bad news is that the fine will be no more than £2000 (indeed, as little as £1000 according to some).

This paltry figure is a travesty and the sooner the gaps in our planning laws that allow the likes of Greenalls to get away with this type of behaviour are blocked, the better.

**PLEASE NOTE EARLY COPY DATE
FOR MAY ISSUE
FRIDAY 16 APRIL**

OPENING TIMES

LETTERS

From: Martin Wystyrk

Dear Sir,

A quick Vincent Price impression - "Good Evening Ladies and Gentlemen. Welcome back to the Twitbread House of Horrors!"

Just when you thought the days of rough brickwork interiors with various objects embedded in the walls, such as lawnmowers, bog seats and even motorbikes were a bad and distant memory, a local pub re-opens as a "Tut n'Shiv", 8pm, Wednesday 10th March. The Chapel House, Heaton Chapel opened its doors as a rustic(!) theme pub selling Boddies and guest beers.

No, there were not any multi-levelled alcoves, shelves full of dusty old books or pieces of farm machinery hanging from the ceilings. Instead of bare brick, the walls have been plastered by Stevie Wonder and the ceiling consists of old wooden doors. The floor is all bare wooden planks. There are plenty of wooden beams on view with beer mats all over them. The other eye-catchers are the blackboards with multi-coloured chalk notices everywhere. If by now you are laughing so much you need the toilet then look no further than the "Laydiz" or "Jents". One last structural observation - when you enter the pub from the right hand door you are greeted by two steel acros holding up an archway. No, the builder didn't leave them behind, they are screwed to the floor and the ceiling. Another of the pub designer's Jolly Japes.

Now, on a more positive note, on to the beers. Ranging between £1.20 and £1.50, there are three banks of handpumps dispensing Boddies and four guest beers. My first choice was Whitbread Porter (from Castle Eden) which was absolutely excellent. Next, Batemans XXXB, again excellent. Mitchells Best Bitter was very good and Timothy Taylors Landlord was, unusually, only good.

Being an opening night the place was packed but the bar staff gave good service and waiting time was minimal. Jugs of beer can be purchased to save money on rounds and the landlord is hoping for a turnover to merit a weekly change of the guest ales.

Looking at the lunch menu, an exciting range of food, from Bury Black Pudding to Red Hot Chili, is available.

I'm not impressed by the decor, but the licensees Martin and Cathy have a good range of food and drink as well as good staff, so lots of luck for the future, it's always welcome to have a greater choice of brews.

There are a few Tut n'Shives in Yorkshire and quite a few opening on this side of the hills. If they are all like the Chapel House

then we are witnessing the arrival of Whitbread's "House of Horrors: The Next Generation"!

(Editor's note - My first reaction on visiting the pub was 'Oh God, this is horrible!' It really does seem that the old "House of Horrors" designers have been let out of the funny farm and unleashed on more of our pubs. However, where the Tut n'Shives differ from the old "House of Horror" pubs is in the range and quality of the beers, which so far has been impressive. They are, I suppose, real ale theme bars for the lager generation and if they succeed in generating greater interest in cask conditioned beers then that is to be applauded.)

From: G. Codling

Dear Sir,

I find myself in the unusual position of offering praise to Whitbread. The conversion of the Chapel House in Heaton Chapel is a welcome addition to the beer drinking scene, and the "Tut n'Shiv" will be a place to visit as much as the old Chapel House was a place to avoid. I would be interested to hear however what a Tut is. It's not Egyptian is it?

I popped in a few days after the revamped pub was opened and was favourably impressed, a choice of five traditional beers is a good sight on any bar, and the Whitbread Porter was one of the best beers I've had in a long time. Granted, not all was perfect. The decor is interesting, despite the ceiling looking like it was made up of the contents of a few builders skips. I had to ask for a top-up but this was delivered with a smile.

Two cheers for Whitbread?

From: George Symes

Dear Sir,

In common with many of the people I have spoken to in pubs in our area in the last few days, I am appalled at the actions of Greenall Whitley in demolishing Tommy Ducks. Their guilt is obvious in the 4am demolition of the pub, so hasty in fact that they didn't have time to remove the furniture.

I sense a universal revulsion for this kind of macho big business nastiness. May I suggest that through the pages of Opening Times you call on all drinkers of Greater Manchester to boycott Greenall's products. And the period of such a boycott? Well, Tommy Ducks has gone forever....

(Editors note - I, too, have detected almost universal disgust at Greenalls actions. If it has served any purpose, this sorry affair has exposed gaping holes in planning law, and until these are plugged the likes of Greenall will be able to get away with this sort of behaviour time and time again.)

STAGGER

with Paul Felton

Hazel Grove to Heaviley was the route march for our intrepid band of volunteers on the evening of 19 February; while a long walk was on the cards, this is still possibly the easiest stagger of all, as every pub we visited is on the main A6.

We met in the **Grove**, virtually opposite the Shopping Giant. It's a pub of contrast, because while the left hand side of the pub consists of a front games room and good back room, the right has been opened out in that familiar Robinsons way, leaving what at quiet times can be a rather characterless area which rather needs redecorating. All the same, it's a good pub, still managing to generate a good atmosphere. Both best mild and best bitter were available, at £1.10 and £1.14 respectively; both were okay without being spectacular.

We had intended visiting the George & Dragon, now transformed to a Whitbread Ale House; but its reopening had been postponed until the week after our stagger (not deliberate, surely?), so we took the opportunity to detour slightly to the south for an early evening visit to Robinsons' **Old Cock** (possibly the first time many of us had been in the place when we didn't have to fight our way in through hosts of customers!). This is a splendid multi-roomed pub, with pride of place going to the excellent room at front left, which is only accessible by circumnavigating the bar (and some ignorant customers). While the single sample of best mild was none too good, the best bitter at £1.14 was rather nice.

The **Anchor** began the long haul north. It's a single room pub, much altered (and not for the better) some years ago. There's a lot of nautical tat, and on the evening of our visit a rather strange musty smell which was not altogether pleasant. Again, the best mild was poor, though the best bitter was okay; what was remarkable was the massive differential between the two - while the bitter was an expensive £1.20, the mild was a very cheap £1. As a disco was just about to start when we left, we were quite glad to leave.

The **Woodman** is another Robbies pub which has been much knocked about. The older hands in the party remembered a time when it had much character and a number of small rooms; frankly, now it has neither, and like the Anchor did not detain us for long. Best Mild was £1.14, best bitter £1.18, and both were okay.

The **Crown** is a quite massive Robbies pub with an imposing exterior, again somewhat changed over the years. Here, however, the story was somewhat different. Despite some unsuitable arches in the front room, this is a good, characterful pub, its various high-ceilinged areas still well-defined, and boasting a fine screen in front of and leaded windows inside the gents. Both the best mild and the best bitter (the latter at a very competitive £1.13) were rather good.

The **Traveller's Call** further redressed the balance in favour of characterful Robbies pubs, possessing as it does a fine multi-roomed interior. But the most noticeable thing about the Traveller's is the remarkable number of bells which seem to fill each and every shelf available. No one tried the best mild here; the bitter, at a wondrous £1.09, was better than average.

Yet more Robinsons awaited us at the **Dog & Partridge**. This is another pub which was once multi-roomed; now it is multi-area'ed, for several walls have retained their bottom sections, only to have arches cut out of the top. At quieter times, it's an attractive pub in which to drink, with its choice of areas, wood panelling and low lighting; tonight it was packed, and so rather difficult to notice anything other than the lighting! Best mild (£1.03?) was average, best bitter £1.11) quite good.

Your writer confesses to having missed the **Duke of York**, though not by choice: the person I was walking (marching) with proceeded at such a pace that we somehow walked past without noticing, which was slightly embarrassing. I shall leave it to the editor to make some remarks about this pub. (The editor adds - this was a perfectly acceptable pub, still retaining much of its multi-roomed layout. Both Robinsons Best Mild and Best Bitter were well received by those of us who called in.)

The penultimate **Bamford Arms** was the sole non-Robinsons pub of the entire evening. It's a former Berni Inn which, while still a restaurant, has upgraded its bar to produce an entirely reasonable place in which to drink. Two beers were on sale: Boddingtons bitter, which was okay, and the rather uninspiring Flowers IPA, which (perhaps not surprisingly) no one tried.

Ye Olde Vic Chatham St.
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And so to our final port of call, the **Blossoms** in Heaviley. This place has been written about on numerous occasions in *Opening Times*: suffice it to say that it's a wonderful, unspoilt Robinsons pub, multi-roomed, friendly, a perennial Good Beer Guide entry and the recent recipient of the branch's Pub of the Year award for 1992. The beer (best mild, Best bitter and - for the brave or foolhardy - Old Tom), was excellent. If you haven't been there, why not?

As ever the comments in this article can be no more than a snapshot of both the pubs and their beers on one particular night and should not therefore be taken as a once and for all judgement on either. Why not try them out for yourself and see how much you (dis)agree.

T'Hut - Philips Sport & Social

It is nearly 2 years since real ale was introduced to Th'Ut for the first time and in that time sales have risen to 50% of all draught beer and lager with the rest being equally divided between keg bitter and lager.

Dispense is via 4 handpumps but only two are normally in use, and the beer is kept in a temperature controlled "cellar" with storage capacity for five 18-gallon barrels and two-three 9-gallon barrels. It is partly this storage capacity which has hindered the sales of cask bitter, but the preference for keg Stones over cask bitter (even Timothy Taylors Landlord at £1 a pint!) has limited the number of occasions when there have been sell-outs of cask.

The bulk of the sales are of Robinsons Best Mild in spite of the fact that the experts said it wouldn't sell. Drinkers in Hazel Grove are experts in good quality Robinsons mild and no filter back policy has produced it. This, coupled with the excellent support given by Robinsons themselves, in terms of service, quality and pricing policy, has led to the continuation of this real ale gain.

However, readers will know that the big brewers are always waiting to fight back and, true to form, Bass North stepped in with discounts on keg Stones and well advertised lagers. This is all good news to keg Stones drinkers who have described the product as superior to the likes of Fullers London Pride because it is colder, gassier and doesn't smell (what, no nasty aromas of malt and hops? Dear me - ed.) but it does chip away at the fabric of what CAMRA is trying to preserve. The fight goes on!

The Phillips Sport & Social Club is on Bramhall Moor Lane, Hazel Grove and is open to members only. Non-members can be admitted if accompanied by a member.

Kids in Pubs

Late last month Home Secretary Kenneth Clarke unveiled proposals which, if implemented, could see a move towards a much more Continental approach to the British drinking scene. Among the plans outlined in the House of Commons Statement were:

- ⊗ Children of all ages to be allowed into pubs up to 8pm if accompanied by an adult
- ⊗ Cafe-style bars to be allowed to sell drinks separately from meals
- ⊗ Magistrates will no longer be able to turn down licence applications on the grounds that a town or city already has enough pubs.

The proposals are subject to consultation and Mr Clarke said that whilst he was in favour, the Government had not finally made up its mind. Consultation ends in July but he stressed that "it will not be rushed". He also acknowledged that a crowded parliamentary timetable meant that it was unlikely that legislation to implement the changes would reach the statute book for two years.

Reaction has been mixed. The Brewers Society, representing the big brewers, was generally in favour of the relaxation of the rules as far as children were concerned, spokesman Robin Simpson saying "This is a very sensible and realistic move...children who are already allowed to run about in the pub garden in summer will now be able to come inside during the winter months and in periods of bad weather." He reserved judgement on the other issues raised.

The trade itself has reacted predictably to the other aspects, though, with many publicans perceiving a surplus of licensed outlets in many areas already. The alcohol study groups have also doubted the wisdom of admitting more children into pubs. Eric Appleby of Alcohol Concern said: "Before such a step is taken, pubs must become better and safer places that are suitable for children."

CAMRA has also broadly welcomed the proposals, Campaigns Manager Steve Cox explained: "Neither the Government nor CAMRA wants to allow children to drink alcohol. But making kids drink squash in the pub car park is one of the bizarre British rituals that really ought to be scrapped."

Straw polls of drinkers, however, have been much more critical. "A public house should be for adults, it's a grown-up environment" was a typical reaction. So what do you think? The pages of *Opening Times* are open to you. We'll print all letters received with a fiver to the best. Over to our readers.

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5 Years Ago

by Phil Lewison

APRIL '88

PRICE LISTS was the main front page item. Following a CAMRA survey that had revealed about a third of pubs had no price list, or an illegible one, Manchester Trading Standards had been alerted, and they carried out a survey of their own. They found that only 10% of the pubs they visited complied with the law regarding price lists AND spirit measure details. So they wrote to offending Licensees, local breweries, and the LVA - now we await the details of the next survey to see if there has been any improvement.

It was announced that a new Government ruling would force brewers and importers to declare the percentage alcohol by volume rather than the original gravity as at present. The Brewers Society said that many brewers already did this by giving the Original Gravity, but this figure can of course be misleading, as it gives the amount of fermentable material that **could** be turned into alcohol. Differing degrees of fermentation could produce a pint with an OG of say 1043, that was weaker than one with an OG of 1039.

There was an item headed SILLY STORY DEPARTMENT. It had been suggested that Holt's beers were cheap because they were subsidised by family trusts, and in particular by the Holt Radium Institute. This of course was absolute nonsense. The Holt family founded the Institute and **donated** large sums to it - to suggest that such an institute would **give** money to a brewery is ridiculous. Holt's beers are cheap for many reasons - no advertising hype, local independence, and not throwing a lot of money about tarding up the pubs.

Finally, a few snippets from the back page:- Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport being "re-vamped", and due to "re-open" soon. Junction, Cheadle Hulme - much needed refurbishment has been postponed due to a change in plans, including the addition of a restaurant.

The Golden Lion, (Yellow Cat) Hillgate, Stockport, has just had a change of licensee - the sixth in two years.



Bass

Tries Again

Bass have come in for a great deal of criticism in these pages over their half-hearted, and often non-existent, commitment to real ale. Their lack-lustre approach was illustrated last year by experiments with cask beer in two Reddish pubs, the Bulls Head and the Reddish Vale. In both pubs the biggest selling beer was keg Stones Bitter - a standard session beer at a standard price. No prizes then for guessing which beer was introduced in cask form - Draught Bass, a premium beer at a premium price and, despite some initial enthusiasm for the beer, its strength and price took their toll and it was soon withdrawn.

An experiment designed to fail? Well perhaps, but to their credit Bass are trying again and this time the approach seems much more sensible - but not before time as Reddish is an area where Bass's competitors all manage to sell real ale with seemingly few difficulties. Both the Reddish Vale and the Bulls Head are now selling Worthington Best Bitter on handpump at £1.18 a pint. Not only that but there is also a supporting promotion with a voucher system similar to those found in petrol stations. For each pint purchased, the customer gets a small voucher to stick on a card and when full the card can be sent off for goods from the "Worthington Best Bitter Collection".

According to the two pubs this is proving to be a success and we can only hope that the beer will continue when the promotion is withdrawn. Certainly these are steps in the right direction but until Bass show real commitment and perhaps try something similar in the Hope in Heaton Norris and their numerous pubs in Rusholme doubts are bound to remain. Only then will Opening Times be able to abandon its favourite headline - "Stuff this Great Bass"!

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ALE OF TWO CITIES '93

It's now three years since the inaugural edition of "Ale of Two Cities", CAMRA's guide to the real ale pubs of Manchester and Salford. It's been a time of immense upheaval in the world of pubs and brewing, so the appearance this month of the completely revised and updated edition is timely if not overdue.

The book follows the successful and much admired format of the first edition, listing all the real ale pubs but picking out the best 20% or so - as decided by the votes of local CAMRA members - for an extended write-up. While a good few old favourites remain from the first edition - the Lamb in Eccles, the Beer House in the City Centre, the Waggon & Horses in Gorton - there are many new selections (some of which, like the Old House at Home in Fallowfield, weren't even selling real ale when the first edition appeared), and all the information has been thoroughly checked and brought up to date. The areas into which Manchester and Salford are divided have been reviewed, with unwieldy areas such as Eccles and Worsley being broken up into their component parts for ease of use, and to meet two justified criticisms of the first edition, each "full entry" pub is located on a map, and there's a comprehensive index.

From Walkden to Wythenshawe, Blackley to Burnage, "Ale of Two Cities" is the book for the beer drinker. Priced at £4.99 (but only £3.50 to CAMRA members), it's available from



CAMRA, bookshops, and many of the featured pubs. It is hoped to print an independent review in the next issue of "Opening Times".



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**WE'RE
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1993
GOOD BEER
GUIDE**

OLD ALES

In the second of his occasional series, Pete Soane takes a look back at the old Openshaw Brewery of Gorton.

On Pottery Lane, Gorton stood, until recently, the Railway, a popular free house, sadly closed to make way for a road scheme. On its side the pub still carried the name of the Openshaw Brewery and indeed it was the brewery tap.

The company disappeared as long ago as 1957 just short of its centenary for it was in 1860 that William Wagster & Co operated the Openshaw Bridge Brewery on Tamworth Street, close to Ashton Old Road. The business changed hands in the 1870's and in 1883 the Openshaw Bridge Brewery Co Ltd was formed with capital of £5000.

In 1890 the company moved to the Victoria Brewery in West Gorton on the banks of the Combrook and dropped the word "Bridge" from the trading title - the Victoria Brewery itself possibly developed out of the Pine Apple Brewery operated by one Peter Clough in the 1860's.

In the decade following the move 50 barrels were produced from each brew and by 1897 127 pubs were tied to the brewery.

The brewery's products included best mild and bitter, Grade A Pale Ale, Openshaw Stout and also a "C" Ale. The origins of this beer, which seems to have been a local ale, are unclear. Groves & Whitnall also brewed a "C" Ale as did John Henry Lees of Moss Side and Wilsons of Newton Heath.

The Pollitt family had become involved with the brewery in 1888 and two members of the family, F Pollitt and H Pollitt, remained on the board in the 1950's. This decade saw the start of merger mania in the brewing industry and as long ago as 1942 two well known Sheffield brewers, Carter Milner & Bird and H Tomlinson Ltd had merged to form Hope & Anchor Breweries. The new company developed a voracious appetite and in 1957 Openshaw sold out to the rapidly expanding White Rose firm. Hope & Anchor were themselves shortly swallowed up in what today has become giant brewers Bass.

Brewing ceased shortly after takeover and the brewery was demolished in 1964. The site itself is covered by industrial buildings and a car park. The 1991 Openshaw Beer Festival was held at the nearby college.



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THE ALE-WIFE WAS CONNED

There is no actual evidence to show when ales were first brewed in England although circumstantial evidence tells us that this may have been as early as 55BC. It is clear that by the end of the ninth century Ale-houses existed in every town and village as well as along the 'old' Roman roads. Drunkenness was a great problem and so King Edgar (959-75), determined to curb this, attempted to close down many of the Ale-houses and limit each town and village to just one each.

A description of English Ale from a consignment shipped to the French Court in 1158 - it was "most wholesome, clear of all dregs, equalling wine in colour and surpassing it in flavour..." - gave Henry II the wonderful notion to tax it. The revenue raised went to fight the Saladin War and became known as the "Saladin Tithe".

It is clear from many records that exist that women were the predominant brewers (Ale-wives) and in 1189 they were forbidden "to brew by night with straw or stubble, but only with wood". In 1267 Henry III introduced the "Assize of Bread & Ale" Act which controlled the price and quality of the Ale-wives brew. Ale-conners were appointed in each area to check on the quality of the ales brewed. Some Conners wore leather breeches and to check the quality of the ale they would pour some onto a wooden stool and sit in it for about half-an-hour. If, when they came to stand up, they stuck to the stool they would condemn the ale because it had not fermented out properly. After each new brew the Ale-wife was obliged to draw the attention of the Ale-conner by erecting the branch of a tree outside her cottage - this became known as the 'Ale-stake'.

At the beginning of the 15th century hopped ale was being imported into Winchelsea from Flaunders and was very popular, these hopped ales became known as beer.

The Mystery of Ale Brewers was controlled as to price and

quality of the ales they brewed as well as being subject to local and national taxes. Beer Brewers, on the other hand, were not under such controls and some disreputable brewers were causing problems with low quality beers. To combat this the Beer Brewers petitioned the Mayor & Alderman of the City of London to form their own Mystery (a sort of trade federation). This was duly granted though prejudice against beer still existed amongst the Ale Brewers and in 1484 they petitioned against the use of hops and a fine of six shillings & eight pence was imposed on every barrel of ale which had been flavoured with hops. This prejudice against "that wicked and pernicious weed, hops" carried on for many years, until Flemish immigrants settled in Kent and planted hops were, of course, they still grow today.

The first licencing laws were introduced in 1495 but a more powerful Act was passed in 1552 which gave local JP's the power not only to licence Ale-houses but also to close them down. Prior to this an Act had been passed, in 1548, to control the making of malt thus establishing full price & quality control on ale and beer. After the dissolution of the monasteries the brewing of ale steadily moved away from the Ale-wives and Ale-houses as the monks had great brewing expertise. Some entrepreneur brewers utilised this skilled labour and sold their higher quality products to the Ale-houses and Taverns.

Acts of 1653 & 1880 imposed tax on home brewed beer and the tradition declined. The tax was lifted in 1963 because of the cost of collecting the duty.

With today's prices continually on the increase surely it's time to revive this tradition - BREW YOUR OWN BEER - NO CONNERS - NO DUTY - JUST QUALITY & FLAVOUR.



ARTICLE BY ERNEST SHORTSHILLING.

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ROMILEY Ramble

When asked for a good area to drink real ale in, Romiley does not readily spring to mind. Only the Duke of York has made it into the national good beer guide in recent years.

Was this really a fair reflection on the area? On a wet and windy February night our intrepid band of drinkers went to find out.

We started off in the **Cherry Tree** - this is a large multi-roomed John Smith pub on the corner of Compstall Road and Cherry Tree Lane. The pub looks rather imposing from the outside, the interior however is disappointing. With the exception of a good (well frequented) games room, the other areas seem to lack atmosphere. In all fairness, it was relatively early in the evening. John Smith bitter was the real ale on offer. It was considered to be reasonable but undistinguished by the party. (Magnet bitter would be a welcome addition here). We did not feel compelled to stay and left to the strains of the live band warming up for the evening.

Our next port of call was the **Stockdove** on Compstall Road. If you are under the age of twenty, fond of lager and loud piped music then the Stockdove is the place for you. None of us fell into any of these categories, nevertheless we decided to stay to sample Websters Yorkshire bitter (no other real ale was available). A strange thing happened here, all of us experienced a total failure of the tastebuds at the same time. Surely, this magnificent amber nectar from those wonderful brewers in Halifax could not be totally lacking in flavour! We stared despondently at the Polyfilla Tudor beams reflecting on our sad predicament. (Have any of your readers had similar experiences?).

We left puzzled, but with no regrets and made our way to the **Railway** on Stockport Road. This is a traditional Robinsons pub with small individual rooms of character. Obviously some modernisation has taken place in the past, however, the Railway has retained its own distinctive atmosphere. We sampled the bitter which was on good form. Nobody would have objected to staying here all night. Opposite the Railway is the Romiley Arms, a Whitbread pub which was closed for renovation. This pub has seen mixed fortunes during the past few years. It has great potential however, let's hope Whitbreads make the most of it when it re-opens.

Next we passed the Grey Horse, a keg beer only pub. No prizes for guessing which brewery. (Yes, of course it's Bass).

Just down the road is the **Friendship** a busy and thriving Robinsons pub. The decor is standard black beam and brass ornaments, with half pint pot chandeliers for good measure. Both the mild and bitter rated average on the night.

Our last visit of the evening was to the **Duke of York** a John Smith house. This pub has seen various changes of management recently, the pub itself however has not changed and retains its great character. Beyond doubt the most comfortable and pleasant pub of the evening. We sampled the Courage Directors bitter which was excellent on the night.

On balance this proved to be a fairly disappointing night. There seems to be a lot of unfulfilled potential in the area. Wake up Bass and Whitbread. **Recommended: The Railway and the Duke of York.** These were the impressions we gained during one evening and you may of course disagree with our findings. Why not try the pubs for yourself?

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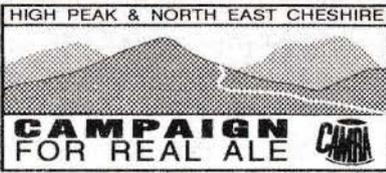
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More of the Squirrels. As readers of Opening Times will know, Drew Marsh was recently forced to leave the pub he had done much to revitalise, unable to pay increased rent. That, as they say, is history.

What is news is that the Squirrels is to be auctioned on 21.03.93. It appears in Longden and Cook's auction brochure as "vacant hotel, pub and restaurant" and when you read this The Squirrels may well be in new ownership.

It is sad (and frustrating) that the people who were instrumental in making the business a going concern were removed, just for the establishment to be sold a few short months later. Let's hope the new owners continue to realise the potential of the pub that Drew and Alison Marsh revealed, and also show a similar commitment to real ale. They have a hard act to follow.

As was reported recently, The Little Mill in Rowarth (a GBG listed pub) is to have a fully working water wheel fitted. The official opening (?) is to be on the weekend of the 3rd of March. Unfortunately, as a result of publishing dates this is already old news, but the wheel, not to mention the beer and food, will be well worth a visit.

Now, an early warning for what has become a regular annual event:

The Hare & Hounds in Simmondsly (GBG listed) is once again staging a mini beer festival. There will be various draught beers available as well as a good selection of British and foreign bottled beers. The dates - 19th and 20th June.

The Navigation in Buxworth has, for a number of months been free of tie and is currently serving Webster's Yorkshire Bitter (uh!), Taylor's Landlord (more like it) and a guest beer which recently has been from Caledonian Brewery.

A bit of club news now. Glossop Labour Club is currently serving Taylor's Bitter and Mitchell's Bitter on handpump. Also in Glossop, Whitfield Working Men's Club is also serving real ale with four beers from the Whitbread portfolio; Boddingtons Bitter, Castle Eden Ale, Porter and a guest beer. Finally in this brief visit to clubs, the Tintwistle Liberal Club is serving Hydes Bitter on handpump.

To finish this months pub news from High Peak, an interesting item of news from Ashton-U-Lyne. The New Inn on Mossley Road sells Holt's Bitter at 89p.. Cheaper than in a Holt's pub.

Refurb, Refurb...

As detailed on the letters page, the Chapel House in Heaton Chapel has been converted by Whitbread into a Cask Ale selling 'Tut 'n' Shive'. It beggars short description so you'd better see it for yourself. In Stockport, the While Lion has been given much the same treatment as The George & Dragon in Hazel Grove (see p.3), first impressions were very positive. 6 Handpumps, good condition beer, and the whole thing has a genuine 'pub' feel. Full review next month. As we went to press the PubCo George and Dragon in Heaton Chapel re-opened after refurb. Again, more next time.

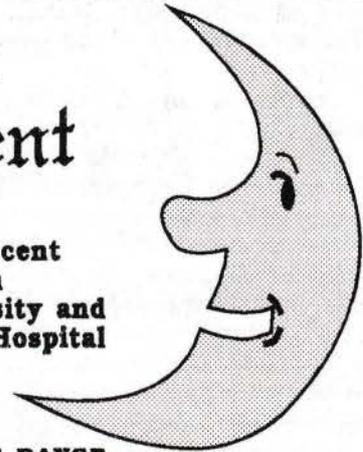
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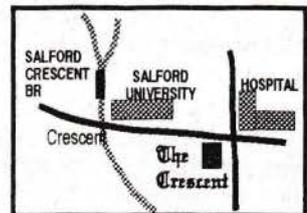


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CAMRA CALLING!

Again this month we have a wide variety of activities on offer, starting on Monday 5th with an informal social at the Moss Rose, Didsbury Road, Heaton Norris. In common with all Monday socials, this starts at 9.00pm.

That week also sees one of the more important events in the local CAMRA calendar - the Stockport & South Manchester branch AGM. This will be held on Thursday 8th April at the Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris at 8.00pm. All branch members should try and attend this important meeting.

The following Monday, 12th, the social will be at the Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. An ever popular Robinsons pub, this. The end of that week sees a minibus crawl with a difference. This is a "Pub Preservation" minibus trip around East Manchester looking at some of the pubs under threat, some which have been saved and some architectural gems, to boot. Naturally good beer will be enjoyed, too. For more details phone Dawn or Duncan on 445 0872.

The Pub Preservation tour is in fact just one of the events taking place over that weekend, which sees CAMRA's AGM and National Conference taking place at Salford University.

On Monday 19th, the social will be at the Printers Arms, Stockport Road, Cheadle - come along and see what you think of the new-look pub. On Thursday 22nd we present our Pub of the Month award to the Romper at Ringway and a minibus will be run - again phone Dawn and Duncan for details and to book a place.

The social on Monday 26th will be at the White Swan, Green Street, Fallowfield and the month winds up with a trip to Moorhouses Brewery in Burnley on Wednesday 28th. Once again phone Dawn and Duncan for details.

If you live in the Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley or Marple areas you fall under the High Peak and North East Cheshire Branch of CAMRA and they are holding their monthly meeting on Monday 19th April at the Railway, Dove Holes. Aim to get there for about 8.30pm. For more information about High Peak activities phone Geoff Williamson on 0663 765634. Members of both branches are of course welcome to attend each others events.

Refurb, Refurb... 2

As we reported last issue, the Barleycorn in West Didsbury has been refurbished. There are no major structural changes, apart that is, from the very welcome addition of ramps to facilitate disabled access to the pub. Inside there has been a general redecoration of the pub and upholstery, but apart from that, nothing too dramatic. The overall effect is rather fussy, but not unpleasant. What is new, though, is an addition to the beer range - Tetley's Dark Mild appears on handpump to accompany the Tetley bitter, Jennings Bitter and Burton ale previously available. The mild here had been keg for years so this is a welcome gain, particularly as sales are so far reported to be going well.

The downstairs music and games bar has not been touched. Look out for a beer festival here later in the year.

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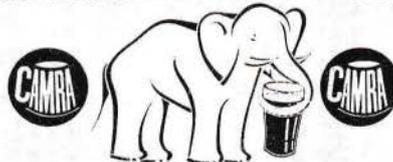
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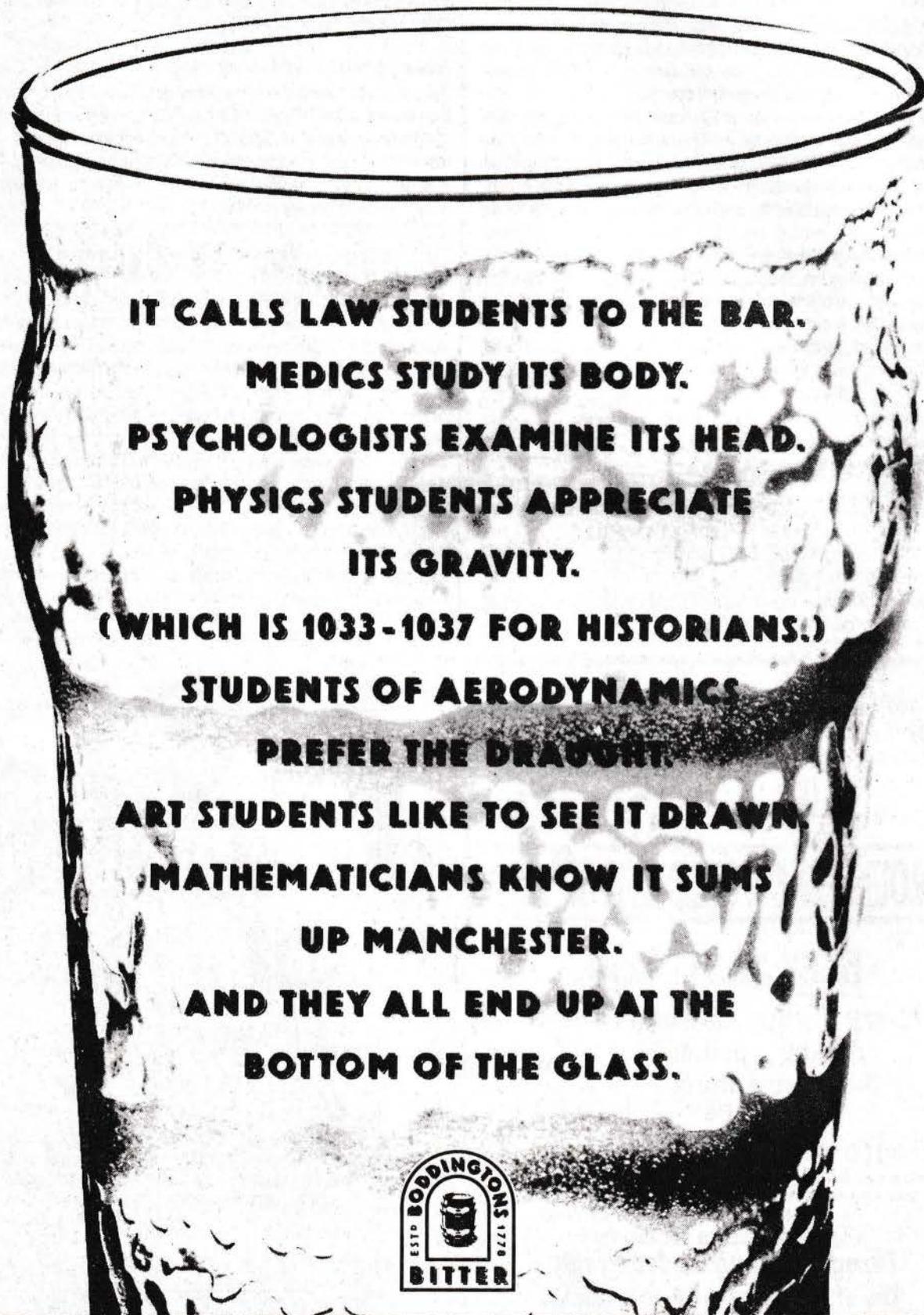


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MANCHESTER MATTERS

by Rhys Jones

Owing to pressure of work on "Ale of Two Cities" (see feature elsewhere), this column appears in severely restricted form this month, and omits a number of detailed changes - all of which will, of course, be picked up in the new edition which from next month becomes the "baseline" to which amendments notified are referred. (In other words, get your copy now!)

However, a few items demand immediate notice, and perhaps not surprisingly, all concern Taylors. In Gorton, the beerrange at the Vale Cottage has undergone a significant overhaul; Websters and Wilsons bitters remain, but are joined on handpump by Marstons Pedigree and Taylors Landlord. There's no more keg mild on fake "handpump", and this welcome and overdue improvement in range and quality means the beer now fully complements the pub's excellent standards of service, atmosphere, and not least food.

In the City Centre, Landlord should be on handpump at the Hat & Feathers on Mason Street, near the Beer House, by the time you read this. Mentioned in these pages before Christmas as a Whitbread "extended range" pub, the "Hat" is well worth a visit, not least for some very keen prices. Finally, at the Crown & Anchor on Hilton Street - a Whitbread "extended range" pub of many years' standing - Taylors Golden Best returns on handpump, after a gap of several years, to join its stablemate Landlord. A perfect lunchtime pint for workers still permitted that luxury. And talking of landlords, best wishes to the Crown & Anchor's former landlord, John Calaz, who has moved to Blackpool to take over yet another soon-to-open Whitbread conversion to a multiple beer house, this time serving eight beers.

More East Mcr. Pubs Under Threat

It seems that the Victoria on Hyde Road in West Gorton has not, as rumoured, been bought by the nearby hotel (now open - Keg Bass beers at £1.70 a pint!). However adjacent land bears a sign indicating it's been acquired as a development unit by Portergate - which is not, as you might think, a dark scandal involving a brewery, but a property company from Ashton-under-Lyne. It is thought that a petrol station may beckon when the road is finally widened.

Fortunately, the land bought by Portergate does not include the Imperial on Birch Street (as had been rumoured) but there is talk of the Victoria being flattened before the end of the year. This might well ensure the Imperial's long term future, since once Hyde Road is widened, the pub will be one of the very few in the neighbourhood; and if, as is also rumoured, Portergate's development involves major house building, the residents will surely need somewhere to drink.

As to the road scheme itself, further plans have now been produced and it looks as though work is now to go ahead, some 48 years after the proposals were first mooted. Work on the first phase between the intermediate ring road at Belle Vue and the City Centre is likely to start in October 1994. This will, sadly, mean the demolition of the superb Travellers Call but also seems to indicate a stay of execution for the Plough, also on Hyde Road, but further cut of the city. Readers will know that CAMRA has been in the forefront of efforts to save this pub and these will be continuing. The cost of the scheme to move the pub out of the line of the road may seem high at £500,000 but in fact represents less than 1% of the cost of the entire scheme.

REMEMBER MAY ISSUE COPY DATE - APRIL 16

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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



Festival Frolics

Stockport Beer & Cider Festival '93

The Regional Beer Festival Season continues in full swing,

Preparations for the Stockport Festival are well under way. There will be at least two (and probably three) ales unique to the festival, the most unusual of which will be featured in the next issue of Opening Times, which will carry full details of the festival. As usual there will be a mixture of Milds, Stouts & Porters, Bitters, Premium Bitters and a few very Strong Ales. There will be live entertainment on each evening of the festival, and we are holding entry, souvenir glass and beer prices to last years levels. No Budget increases here!

The Festival takes place from the evening of Thursday 3rd June to Saturday 5th, open lunchtime on Friday and Saturday, and each evening. Why not take the opportunity to join CAMRA now - and get into the Festival Free of Charge!

Additionally, you could take advantage of free admission (for members) to other local CAMRA festivals. This month sees the Regional (Great North Western) Festival in Bolton, April (21-24) - the largest of our Regional Events (though Stockport is catching up!) It takes place in the Sports Centre, Silverwell Street, Bolton - less than 40 minutes train ride from Stockport (only £2 on the train).

The 2nd Rhyd festival (advert page 3) follows the following Thursday, running until Saturday (Apr 29 - May 1), at which we are promised a taste of some unusual Welsh beers. Two other localish CAMRA festivals of note will follow in May - the first Winsford Heart of England festival, 6-7 May at the Civic Hall. (£3.50 entrance by ticket from Mark Enderby on 0925 602809), and the first Frodsham Beer Festival 28/9 May at Frodsham Community Centre (Fluin Lane, Frodsham) with a promised 25 new (less than one year old) breweries featured out of over 40 beers. This is five minutes walk from Frodsham Station. A 'spotters' delight! Entrance by advance ticket only (£2.50 - £1 discount on door to CAMRA members) from Matt Rowland (0928 33361) or selected Real Ale pubs in Manchester.

Two major Pub Festivals as well. The Beer House on Angel Street, Manchester (just off Rochdale Road) - having recently been refurbished, is holding 'Drumbo 2' with 70 plus ales, three draught Belgian beers, and an on-running Belgian Beer mini festival, from 7-10 April (finishing Easter Saturday). A number of these beers are guaranteed to be unusual. The Flea & Firkin (Grosvenor Street/Oxford Road, Manchester) is holding a festival of over 30 Premium Bitters (and Perries) from 30 April to May 3 (Spring Bank Holiday Monday).

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Refurb, Refurb... 3

Like many Whitbread pubs in the area, The Houldsworth in Reddish goes through regular refurbishments, none of which quite get it right - and its latest metamorphosis is no different.

The pub has now been divided into two distinct rooms - a lounge and a vault-cum-games room. The lounge hasn't really been changed significantly, but children are allowed in the raised area furthest from the bar. Indeed, with a children's menu and play area (complete with bouncy castle) in the new beer garden, the brewery are obviously courting the family.

Whilst taste abounds in the lounge, the same cannot be said of the vault. This is the area nearest the bar and at the far end there are two pool/half-size snooker tables in what was a disused storeroom. It's in the middle of the room that things go wrong with video games and a roll-away TV screen which, when rolled down, totally dominates the room (it would dominate Edgeley Park!).

The beers at present are Chesters Bitter and the ubiquitous Boddingtons Bitter, with the promise of guest beers to come as long as the prices can be kept down. It is sad to see there is no place for Chesters Mild amongst the handpumps.

Overall the refurb is an improvement, but why did they have to spoil it by importing the worst excesses of the electronic age?

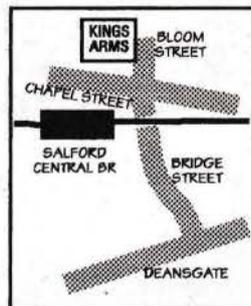
REGIONAL DIARY - APRIL

Regional Meeting Mon 5 April, Kings Arms, Chorlton on Medlock 8pm

Great North Western Beer & Cider Festival - Wed 21 - Sat 24th April, Sports Centre, Silverwell Street, Bolton

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13 HANDPUMPS

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GUEST BEERS & TRADITIONAL CIDERS



The Rising Sun in Hazel Grove has now added John Smiths Bitter to the range - in common with many other ex-Wilsons houses it must be said - the beer is on handpump and retails at £1.22 a pint.

Staying in Hazel Grove, we hear that the bowling green turf from the now closed Red Lion has been given by the developers of the site to the Royal Oak on Commercial Road. The Red Lion reputedly had one of the finest bowling greens in the area and it is welcome news that such a good home has been found for it.

Two more local Vaux acquisitions have come to light - Byrons on Great Portwood Street (beer range currently unknown) and the Horse & Jockey in Hazel Grove. The latter has retained the right to sell a guest beer, namely Holts Bitter. Indeed, so popular is this that the pub has been unable to sell any Vaux beers in a viable quantity and there is therefore the unusual sight of a pub signed as Wilsons, owned by Vaux and only selling Holts!

In Openshaw the Halfway House on Ashton Old Road remains boarded up - is this to be yet another victim of the blight that seems to be striking so many pubs in East Manchester? Closer to the City but still on the Old Road, the Wrexham has been recorded as selling Boddingtons Bitter at, wait for it, 85p a pint, and on a regular basis too. This would easily make it the cheapest pint in the city. Some sort of guest beer arrangement also seems to be in prospect at the Wrexham as we are told that Oak Wobbly Bob will be making an appearance at the pub.

Travel news now, all admittedly rather speculative at the moment. In the newly opened Terminal 2 at Manchester Airport Busby's Bar is reported to be selling real ale although this is as yet unconfirmed. Closer to the City Centre, the buffet at Piccadilly Station is being refurbished as Bonaparte's. We will let you know in due course whether the refurbishment includes the installation of real ale.

We hear that Banks's Gorton Arms in Gorton, hitherto a managed house, is to become tenanted, and indeed the new tenants may well be in residence by the time these words appear. Let's hope the element of personal commitment does the trick with an attractive and promising pub which has nevertheless struggled to find a settled clientele.

Over at the Greyhound in Edgeley, guest beers are now well and truly established. As we went to press both Morlands Old Speckled Hen and Preston Brewery's Atlas Strong were to be had, the latter a snip at £1.40 a pint for a 6.5% ABV beer. Regular beers are Boddies Bitter, the increasingly rare mild and Theakstons Best Bitter.



In Stockport we welcome new licensee Tony Barns who has taken over the tenancy of Tom Thumbs on King Street West, previously run as a managed house. Tony hails from Tameside but has spent the last 14 years running a pub in Whitechapel, London. He tells us that live acts will be a feature of the pub. News of in-house entertainment also at the Parrswood in Didsbury where Tuesday night will be alternately music and quiz nights. It is also possible that the pub will be holding a mini beer festival this month with up to 10 different beers available.

Kendlegate Wines of Edgeley now stock bottled ciders from Merrydown and Biddenden. Both are in the South-Eastern style, eschewing "proper" cider apples in favour of dessert fruit; while we hope they don't supplant the glass jars of Weston's the shop has stocked from the outset, they at least make an interesting novelty.

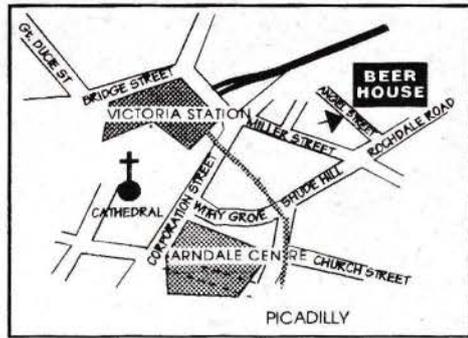
East Manchester's resemblance to a bombsite was heightened recently with the demolition of Whitbread's Park Inn outside Phillips Park. A keg-only pub for most of the last decade, the Park stood on the fringe of the Eastlands stadium site and was also due to become a victim of the Intermediate Relief Road.

A belated welcome to Debbie and Chris, who took over Hyde's Pineapple in Gorton in mid-November; coming from a pub in South Lancashire, they follow Geoff Turner who has taken on the Gateway in East Didsbury. While the move to the high-profile Gateway is without doubt a feather in Geoff's cap, locals reckon the beer in the Pineapple, consistently good in Geoff's day, is that bit better now - Opening Times is inclined to agree. (Barry and Sheila from the Gateway now have the well-thought-of Quarry Bank at Timperley.)

The Pineapple in Castle Street seems to be closed for good - despite its doubtful reputation in recent years, the pub was one of the very few terraced pubs left in the town, and it is a shame that no-one could apparently make a go of it.

Further down Castle Street, the Bobby Peel is to have a restaurant built on the back, which will mean that the food operation can largely be moved out of the pub proper. Licensee John Parkin has also taken over the nearby Prince Albert on an Intreprenuer lease. The coming months should see much needed refurbishment, inside and out, together with the introduction of a guest beer - probably Stones Bitter. Pub food along the lines of that currently available in the Bobby Peel is also likely to be introduced.

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