

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING

CAMRA
5300

No:
129

TIMES

JANUARY 1995

OVER
DISTRIBUTED

David 1, Goliath 0

after extra time...

Stockport licensees Alan and June Preston have done something which many of their fellow publicans up and down the country have been dreaming of. No, they haven't won the lottery, what they have done is take on, and effectively beat, one of the national brewers.

The brewery? Whitbread. The pub, the Hinds Head, Heaton Chapel, where Alan and June have been tenants for very nearly 7 years. Despite their success in building up the pub after an unpromising start under temporary licensees, into what is one of the most popular and best run establishments in the town, they have been locked in an increasingly bitter battle with the brewer for three and a half years (or half their tenancy), because the brewer wanted to force them out and install a manager. It seems they were just too successful and the brewery wanted an even bigger slice of the cake.

So how did Alan and June succeed when so many other licensees have failed. Firstly, Whitbread made a number of mistakes. There was the inconvenient fact that when the pub was built on the site of the largely unlamented Poco Poco club, in the teeth of determined local opposition, Whitbread promised the licensing authority that the pub would remain a traditional tenancy. Secondly, they failed to appreciate just how determined and persistent Alan would be.

In recognition of the ongoing struggle, Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA voted the Hind's Head Pub of the Month last April. Even we were surprised by the amount of publicity this generated for the cause, with the Prestons contacted by not only local press, but national daily and trade papers. Whilst asking the nationals to hold fire, because negotiations were still taking place - if in a haphazard way, Alan made sure that Whitbread were aware of the growing interest in the case. Whitbread were further embarrassed when their in-house newspaper, Whitbread News picked up



Alan and June Preston

the Pub Of The Month award (a rare event for Whitbread pubs), praising Alan's talents. Rumours of conflict between the operating divisions in the company started to surface.

Projected Court dates came and went, and the delays tested Alan's resolution, but he persevered, and after repeated disappointments, and intense negotiation, an agreement on a new lease, acceptable to all sides was reached and signed in late December. Whitbread have agreed to do a complete redecoration, and enlarge the cellar (which may eventually mean a second guest ale from an expanded list).

When Opening Times asked Alan how he felt, he replied simply, "Great!". He was especially keen to thank his customers, friends and associates, CAMRA and the press, locally and nationally and MP Anne Coffey for their support over the last three and a half years.

In April's Opening Times we said "yet another hard working licensee sacrificed on the altar of corporate greed". How pleasing it is to report that it was Whitbread senior management strapped to the altar, and that it is Alan and June who have a twenty year lease.



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PUB of the Month

JANUARY

We begin 1995's monthly pub awards in one of the area's most successful establishments, the ever-popular Red Lion in Withington. Expertly run by Kevin Connor together with his wife Janat (licensee in her own right of Rothwells in town) and ably assisted by Gary and the rest of the staff, the Red Lion is recognised as being one of the best pubs in Manchester and richly deserves this award.

The pub is one of the oldest (if not the oldest) in our area. A distinctive whitewashed building set back from Wilmslow Road with a famous L-shaped bowling green at the rear. The interior has low ceilings and real beams and is handsomely furnished in dark wood, leather and fabric upholstery and highly polished brass on the bar.

Over the years there have been extensions to the rear of the building thus giving the pub several well defined drinking areas. There is a vault, complete with dart board and telly (Telly is rarely used). A front bar, with old sepia prints of the locality leads to a comfortable lounge with broad tables and high backed leather bench seating.

Towards the rear of the pub is a much larger lounge with a raised seating area which in spite of the size of the room still manages to remain intimate. There is also a conservatory where families with children are welcome (up to 8.00) and in the summer you can sit outside amongst the hanging baskets and watch the bowls while the kids play on the climbing frame.

The full range of Marstons beers is on sale including Head Brewers Choice together with Banks's Mild, which are always in good nick, hence the Red Lion's inclusion in the 94 and 95 Good Beer Guide. The Red Lion is also renowned for its excellent food, for which there is an extensive and daily changing menu, Sunday lunch being particularly popular.

Because of the varied drinking environments and facilities, the pub attracts a healthy mixture of clientele. Kevin's insistence on not having a jukebox, the sound turned off on the fruit machine and only the lowest background music at lunchtimes means that people can enjoy a good pint and natter in pleasant surroundings with no noisy intrusions.

Here we have all the ingredients that go to making a good pub - good beer, good food and atmosphere - a pub to suit all tastes! To have built up and maintained this pub's fine reputation over the ten years that Kevin has been here has taken a lot of hard work and dedication, and we are therefore delighted to give the pub of the month award in recognition of the Red Lion's continuing success. Why not come along on the 25th and join in the celebration on what will be a wonderful night.



The Red Lion's interior changes from very old (the oldest parts are the front of the pub) to the very new conservatory built onto the rear adjoining the bowling green. The bulk of the pub is served from an enormous, single U-shaped bar (part of which is shown in the photograph), running from the vault right back into the rear lounge.

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OPENING TIMES JANUARY 1995

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JANUARY '90

In response to the previous month's report on the possible fate of the Briton's Protection, Tetley denied that they intended to build a hotel next to the pub, but a courtyard conservatory and some interior refurbishment were planned. They admitted that a manager would replace the existing tenants, because Tetley's duty to their shareholders in regard to the Briton's Protection, meant that they had to realise the "full retail value of its trading potential." Luckily, to date, nothing has changed.

Didsbury had been plagued by weekend violence, and local licensees had set up a Pubwatch scheme, so that pubs could notify one another when potential troublemakers were in the area. Much of the trouble was thought to stem from the clientele of Squires - although it had been a fun or theme pub for years, its latest incarnation as an "Open House" seemed to have attracted a particularly unruly element that was also affecting other pubs in the locality.

Conway's in Cheadle Hulme had been closed, whilst its "Open House" bright lights, chrome fittings and gaudy yellow paint were all removed. It had emerged with the appearance of a proper pub once more, with separate lounge and public bar. When it had first become an "Open House", many customers had been lost, and beer sales had plummeted, but that now it was the Conway once again, there were signs that the locals were coming back.

Sports in Edgeley was another of the disastrous "Open House" theme pubs that had seen the writing on the wall, and had been converted back to something like a genuine pub - it had also reverted to its original name, the Windsor Castle. Unfortunately, cask beer had been taken out with the conversion, and only keg beer was available.

The Stanley Arms on Newbridge Lane had opened as Stockport's latest free house. It had something of a chequered history - it was a run down Wilson's pub, then refurbishment produced Stockport's first Webster's house. Business was poor, and closure followed. A new owner was found, and then the pub was badly damaged by fire. Now that it had opened again, it looked like a very welcome addition to the Stockport pub scene, with Marstons, Theakstons, Tetley, and Matthew Brown available, and possibly guest beers later.

Reductions in the price of beer are fairly rare, but lobbying by the manager of the Boar's Head in Stockport Market Place has resulted in 10p off both Sam Smith's Mild and Bitter, so the Old Brewery Bitter was selling for 80p.

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW...

As we come to the end of another year it is customary to look back over the last 12 months and also to look forward to what the new year might bring.

1994 was characterised by continuing upheaval in the brewing industry with the accent firmly on the continuing threat to our pubs be it from cheap foreign imports (although the brewers did themselves no favours in this respect by continuing to impose above-inflation price rises) or a variety of development schemes. The pub stock in East Manchester continues to decline but on the bright side it is starting to look as though the Hyde Road scheme could be in for a major rethink which may save not only the listed Plough but also the Travellers Call. Statutory protection for more pubs was another feature of the year with CAMRA co-operating with English Heritage to formulate listing guidelines specifically aimed at public houses. The Alexandra in Edgeley was another pub to be protected as a result of this joint approach. Significantly the branch made no Pub Vandalism Awards this year although for me one of the highlights was the presentation of a Golden Bulldozer to Greenalls on the site of Tommy Ducks. It will be a long time before that particular act of vandalism is forgotten.

More pubs changed hands with Grand Met off-loading their Chef & Brewer operation to Scottish & Newcastle, the Magic Pub Co and Labbatts. S & N have already started a much-needed refurbishment programme with the pubs they took over - two are mentioned in this issue and we expect more to come in 1995. In particular we await with interest S&N's plans for such landmark pubs as the Chestergate Tavern and the Withington Ale House. Magic have been slow off the mark and attempts to make contact with the company have so far drawn a blank - in London they seem intent on renaming all their pubs the 'Rat & Carrot' (honest). We await developments with interest.

On the brewing side 1994 was a year of losses and gains. The biggest loss by far was that of West Coast Brewery, although expect Brendan Dobbin to surface again in 1995. We gained Frederics from Robinsons, although few local pubs seem to stock it - in central Stockport only the Blossoms and the Waterloo spring to mind. The Peak District breweries - Whim, Black Bull and Leatherbritches - all seem to be going from strength to strength and who can forget the stunning debut of Porters Brewery in Haslingden, virtually sweeping the board with the awards at Stockport Beer Festival. The festival itself had the best attendance ever and we are looking forward to our return to the Town Hall in June. Beer from the Millgate in Failsworth came on stream at the end of the year (reviewed next time) and February should see the Beartown Brewery in Congleton come on stream. The biggest upheaval of 1995 is likely to centre on Courage. The company's breweries will certainly have changed hands by this time next year - we believe Whitbread and Scottish & Newcastle are the likely buyers. This will clearly lead to more rationalisation and my prediction for 1995 is that we will see the closure of the Websters Brewery in Halifax with the possible axeing of most of its brands - look out for OT's Wilsons survey next month as well.

Cask Cider continued to struggle despite record sales at Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. Whitbread are making it available to their variety of cask ale houses but it seems to be promoted with such little enthusiasm that it is doubtful if this will remain the case. This sector continues to be dogged by the keg cider/fake handpump con. Scrumpy Jack has been joined by Arthur Moore's Cidermaster and 1995 promises Scrumpy Jack Old Hazy - a cloudy keg cider? It's up to the pubs whether they use these fake handpumps but they can expect no quarter here if they do.

Luckily throughout all the turmoil CAMRA and real ale continue to boom and that's worth drinking to - Happy New Year everyone.

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From : Rhys P Jones

Before letting off steam (Letters, December) over November's Hazel Grove "Stagger" article, Mr Peter Robinson would have been well advised, rather than draw attention to the startling fact that I had been drinking (not an unusual activity on a pub crawl), to read more carefully what I actually wrote.

He informs us solemnly that the arches in the White Hart "were formed many years ago", and that the seating "was done entirely by our licensee". I'm sure that on these matters he is correct in every particular. Unfortunately for his argument, however, my article offered no view on the age of the arches, nor on the division of responsibility for the seating as between the brewery and the licensee. As for his reference to the domestic quarters, this baffles me entirely, as this area of the pub, while of vital importance to the licensee, can be of no direct concern to customers. Had we attempted to inspect the living quarters, Mr Robinson - and the licensee - would indeed have had cause for complaint!

When it comes to the style of many Robinson's refurbishments, it's no secret that Mr Robinson's views and those of many CAMRA members (and others) are frequently at odds. I respect Mr Robinson's views whilst frequently disagreeing with them. I hope he will agree that, as a regular customer, I too have views that are worthy of respect - or are the days of "pay up, sup up, and shut up" not yet over at the Unicorn Brewery?

From : Richard Hough

There are few things that get on my wick more than incompetent bar staff. Inexperience is one factor (which can be tolerated) but a lack of training can be the case. Simple things such as how to pull a pint, or how to change a barrel, seem to be beyond the scope of some bar-tenders (and in no way am I generalising for it is only a tiny minority after all). But an incorrectly drawn pint can undo the work that should have been done in the cellar to ensure the beer is at its best.

Worryingly it seems to be most prevalent in the multi-ale pubs that are currently springing up around the place. And while it is by no means a common problem, the fact remains that the current boom in real ale could be undermined if care is not taken to ensure quality EVERY step of the way, from mash-tun to pint pot. We are, after all, talking about a living product that needs careful attention at all times.

STAGGER

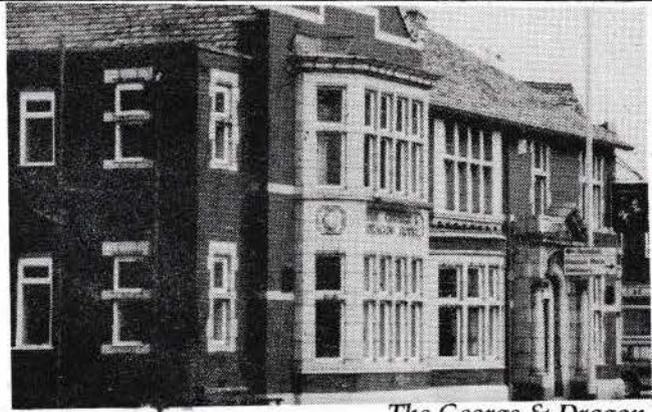
with Rob Lea

We began October's Stagger round the Heaton at the Tut'n'Shiv (formerly the Chapel House) in Heaton Chapel. This large Whitbread pub stands at the junction of Manchester Road and Wellington Road North. The interior is frankly ridiculous. Bare floorboards, rust-red Artex walls rising biliously to a ceiling distastefully clad with old doors seemingly retrieved from a builders skip. Add a loud juke-box, a pool table and a young clientele and you've got a pub that not everybody would feel comfortable in for a night's drinking. Of more interest, however, was the choice of beers on offer. As well as Boddingtons Bitter and Chesters Mild there was Taylors Landlord, Batemans XB, Burtonwood Top Hat, Jennings Snecklifter and the ubiquitous Old Speckled Hen from Morlands. The beers were judged to be in only average condition with Landlord and Top Hat getting the



The Chapel House 'Tut 'n Shiv'

best marks. The prices, whilst not being particularly competitive were not extortionate either considering the variety of beer on offer, with the mild at £1.22 and Landlord at £1.48 for example. We had hoped to try Whitbread's Chocolate Fuggles but unfortunately it was not ready. As we were leaving, a sign inviting comments on the service prompted one of our party to stay a little longer to discuss a short-changing error with one of the staff which was, in fairness, courteously resolved.



The George & Dragon

Just a short walk down Manchester Road brought us to the **George & Dragon**, another outlet for Whitbread beers. This Boddington PubCo house sold Boddington Mild and Bitter at £1.20 and £1.28 respectively. On Fridays the landlord usually adds a guest beer and on this occasion it was Flowers Original brewed by Whitbread at Cheltenham selling at £1.45. Opinions varied on the quality of the mild (which I thought was average and therefore par for Boddingtons), the bitter and the Flowers fared better receiving a 'satisfactory' from those drinking it. The pub itself is fairly big and largely open-plan but with defined drinking areas and a no-smoking area. The decor is comfortable with art nouveau lamps etc. We sat down in a room which usually had sporting photos and pictures on the walls but tonight they had disappeared along with the numerous trophies that used to grace the now bare trophy cabinet.

This gave the room a rather curious empty atmosphere. Pondering the possible causes for the memorabilia removal, we finished our drinks and headed half a mile up Heaton Moor Road to the **Plough** - a Carlsberg/Tetley pub. A pub much altered over recent years, the Plough is an attractive looking building from the front. The arched doorway leads into a front lounge with bare brick walls and an old Victorian fireplace.

The illuminated pictures help to brighten up the comfortable interior of dark wood and stained glass. Being a 'Tapster's Choice' pub, the draught beer selection is slightly larger than is usual in a Tetley pub. On offer was tetley, Robinsons and Jennings Bitter, Marstons Pedigree and Youngs Special. Most of our party went for the Youngs (£1.48), and while it was drinkable, we were disappointed to detect a yeasty tang to it. This was unfortunate and possibly highlights the problem of putting a perfectly good beer on sale too early and before it has had enough time to **condition** - not just 'drop bright' in the cellar. One of our number did return his pint of Youngs to the bar which was replaced without quibble. Both the Boddingtons and Tetley bitters (£1/35) were deemed to be average.

A few furrows away on the same road as the Plough, we came to the **Crown**. Oh goody, more Whitbread Boddingtons! This was the first pub of the night that had the feeling of a real 'local'. We entered by a side door into a small vault, simply furnished and with a dart board. There was a game on, and although we only numbered six or so, in that room we became a crowd, so we moved through to the main room on the other side. We found ourselves in a long room divided by an archway, again with a dart board, and again with no unnecessary furnishings or gimmicks, but we did get a seat. Generally speaking, everyone was satisfied with both the mild and bitter, selling at £1.20 and £1.28 respectively, there

is a small price differential between the main room and the vault. The pub was buzzing with conversation and seemed to be doing a brisk trade. We left via the front door, passing a small but very cosy looking lounge on the way out.

A half mile leg stretch further down Heaton Moor Road, and we arrived at the **Moor Top**. Oh dear, this Scottish & Newcastle pub was the saddest experience of the evening. An uninspiring open-plan layout and deteriorating decor, raised seating areas, but with lowered seats. Most of us gave Theakstons Best Bitter a try at £1.40, somebody tried the Ruddles Best Bitter at £1.46. We were served with as tired and insipid a liquid as ever came out of a hand pump, and it certainly did not deserve to be called beer. No-one even tried the Websters!

This pub needs turning round. S & N could do worse than to restore the walls to make a vault, reconsider the layout, decorate it and sort out the quality of the beer. It's not in a poor location, yet this was a Friday night and it was virtually empty. On the plus side, the pub was advertising live music on Thursday nights, and as one of us commented - "You could bring the other woman in here on the basis that you'd not meet anyone you knew."



The Nursery

From definitely the worst pub of the evening we walked three quarters of a mile down Green Lane to the **Nursery** - possibly the best pub of the evening. A friendly and very pleasant classic 1930's multiroomed pub, with wood paneling and stained glass motifs above the bar relating to either the beer or gardening. Hydes Mild (£1/16) and Bitter (£1.24) were in fine form.

Via an unlit pathway carpeted with fallen leaves, we made our way down to Didsbury Road and to the **Moss Rose** in Heaton Norris. An ugly looking building from the outside, the Moss Rose is not exactly the most ambient of pubs. It has a large long room, and a smaller room to the rear with a dart board. This is a locals pub, and as we entered they seemed to be enjoying the semi-live entertainment of a singer/guitarist with a backing track. We arrived just before the interval and after such a dark walk we all ordered Hydes Light at £1.18. This beer, very well balanced on a small scale, was enjoyed by everybody and judged to be good. One of our number (no stranger to controversy) went so far as to proclaim it as excellent. We rounded off the evening in the **Olde Woolpack** on Brinksway which is not in the Heaton, but it did see probably the most interesting pint of the night - Big Ben by Thwaites is usually only sold in bottle form. Here in draught form it was exceptionally good and made an excellent night cap. Cheers!

As ever, this report simply represents what one group of drinkers encountered on one particular night and shouldn't be taken as a once and for all judgement of either the pubs or the beers. Why not visit them yourself to see just how much you (dis)agree.

LETTERS OPENING TIMES

From : Mr and Mrs S M Rudolpher

As regular eaters at the Plough pub, we were amazed at your review of the Plough's food on page 10 of Opening Times, November '94.

Our favourite dish is the chicken curry, which you referred to as 'the boring option' and consisting of a 'thick brown sauce'. We have eaten curries in a wide range of restaurants, and can assure you that the Plough's is one of the very best.

From : The Staff of Thomas Marshall (International) Ltd
I was amazed to read in a recent copy of your magazine an article regarding a visit to the Plough Inn in Heaton Moor.

The article described the chicken curry served at the Plough as 'brown gravy with no meat' and myself and my colleagues who visit the Plough especially for this superb curry are absolutely gobsmacked.

The chicken curry served at this popular pub can in no way be described as short of meat and as for the sauce being like gravy, I would be interested to know what kind of gravy you put on your roast dinners!

I would just like you and your readers to know that these comments are outvoted by at least 12 hungry office workers and that we shall continue making that special journey in our lunch break just to enjoy this excellent curry and advise anyone passing the Plough to do the same.

Tom Thumb's

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Student Corner

With a plethora of new pubs springing up in student land, it still never ceases to amaze me that many students still stick to the same old routine of less-than-brilliant pubs which may serve (sometimes) poor and (usually) over-priced beer. Spirit promotions and 'two for the price of one' are all very well if you want to get hammered quickly, but wouldn't you rather enjoy your drink? After all, alcohol is an expensive commodity. Contrary to some people's belief, you can get smashed just drinking decent beer, and chances are you'll feel more reasonable the morning after. But decent beer should be savoured, too. We have been blessed with five senses to appreciate things. Use them! These are exciting times for the beer drinker; be part of it and don't get left behind. If you have any news or views please don't hesitate to contact me, Richard Hough, Student Liaison Officer for CAMRA, 91 Lowfield Road, Shaw Heath, Stockport, SK3 8JR.

Till then, happy quaffing. For those interested in decent beer CAMRA are running a special promotion night at the Flea & Firkin on 9th January. Students can join CAMRA for half price, a mere six quid a year. With a chance of some free beer on the night, make it a date, and add another facet to your no doubt already varied social life.

New Brew News

This month should see Snowdonia Brewery installed in its new home on a small industrial estate at Four Crosses, Montgomeryshire, just the right side of the Welsh/English border. Though this is some way from Snowdonia, the name seems likely to remain in order to avoid customer confusion. As well as being much closer to major markets, the new site will relieve proprietor Martin Barry of the responsibility of running the Bryn Arms pub at Gellilydan, the brewery's original home, for which a tenant is believed to have been found. Though pipped by Dyffryn Clwyd Brewery for the top spot in CAMRA's "Welsh Beer of the Year" award last year, Snowdonia's beers continue to enjoy a good reputation, and should become more widely available once the new site is up and running.

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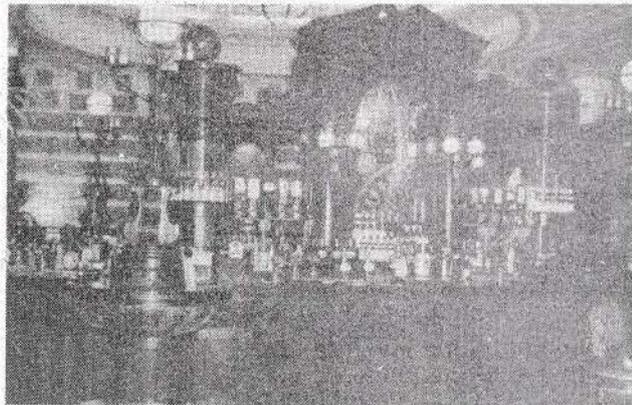
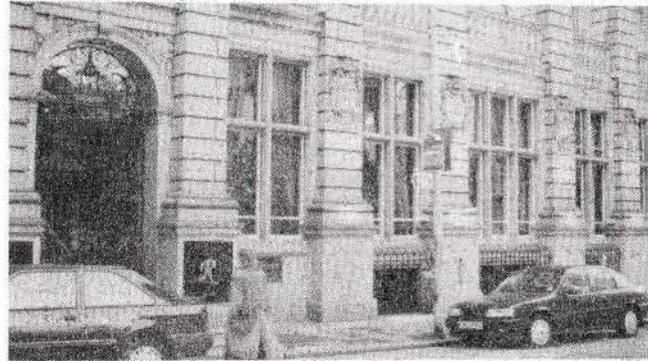
Rothwells - the place to eat, drink and be seen?

Anyone with eyes could scarcely have failed to notice the massive advertising campaign for what must surely be the flagship of the Marston's estate. Almost every other bus in town appeared to have the Rothwells name upon it during most of December. The advertising budget does seem fitting, however, when you consider that Marstons have spent £1.2M on acquiring and remodelling the place. Whether this is money wisely spent, I'm not sure, but it is certainly a sight to behold.

Sited at the top of King Street on Spring Gardens it presents a striking image with its gleaming white Portland stone facade which is tastefully lit at night to highlight the neo-classical features.

Prior to Marstons acquiring it, this was Barclays Bank. When built in 1872 it was the Lancashire & Yorkshire Bank and is now a Grade II listed building. The magnificence of the exterior is amply reflected inside too - from the original mosaic floor, the red granite Corinthian columns, the jasper and Pavonazza marble walls and the wonderful ceiling. This features two cupolas each with twelve panels; one dome depicts the sky and clouds and the other the signs of the zodiac. The whole decor theme appears to arise from the stars on the etched L&YB windows. Thus we have Zodiacal and planetary images aplenty and lots of stars in the carpet pattern.

And what of the fare? Weekdays it opens from 8.30 am for breakfasts. There's an extensive range of meals and snacks for both lunch and in the evenings. The beers are Banks' Mild, Marstons Bitter and Pedigree at £1.40, £1.50 and £1.65 respectively. Also on sale was one of the Head Brewer's Choice beers, Single Malt on opening night - and on very good form too!



Rothwells attractive layout

Comparisons between similar cafe-bar type establishments are bound to be made but I think that Rothwells is a cut above the others in quality and style. As to beer quality, the listed presence of Janat (sic) Connor who comes from the GBG listed Red Lion in Withington bodes well for the future.

The Rothwells name comes from the long closed Manchester brewery company of Rothwell & Co. acquired by Marstons in 1961.

Finally, is this the only pub with a portcullis in Manchester? An electric one too!

Off the Tracks?

Out of the Opening Times area but of interest to many of our readers will be the fate of the Railway, Broadheath, Altrincham.

Formerly owned by the Boddington PubCo, this Manchester Road pub has been sold to Peel Holdings, the developer responsible for the development of the Broadheath Industrial Estate. It's a traditional terraced pub and is unique in the Altrincham area with its small, compact traditional interior. There are no electronic machines and no TV and this allows the bar area, with its tiled floor, to be a centre for conversation. The vault has its own serving hatch to the bar and supports an angling club and all manner of pub games. The current licensee has introduced cask mild and a guest beer which has resulted in an increase in trade.

Unfortunately he has received his notice and departs on January 18th. Demolition and replacement by a fast-food outlet was originally planned but on discovering that the pub was a listed building (thanks to CAMRA), a change of plans has been forced. What is now in store for this classic pub? Disuse and dereliction, or sale to a Belhaven-style operator? Remember the hollow victory for pub campaigners with the Coach & Horses and the Castle & Falcon.

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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA



It was that time of year again. Like it or not the Christmas shopping had to be done but first there was time for a spot of lunch. Lateley I have received a number of good reports about H R Fletchers in Manchester and so this seemed like a good opportunity to give it a try. Fletchers can be found on St Mar ys Street (alongside Kendals) off Deansgate.

Fletchers has been in existence about twelve months and it is Bass's attempt to jump on the 'big six brewery alehouse' bandwagon. Although the pub has been converted from a shop, Bass have managed to create a pub probably closer to a genuine turn of the century alehouse than many of their rivals have done. The period low wattage lighting and purposely grubby looking walls provide an air of dinginess that makes it more believable than other pub conversions. Its a pity Bass spoil this image with cheap gimmicks like the toilet complete with cistern in one corner of the bar.

Being a Bass beer house, not suprisingly most of the beers on sale were from the Bass stable. These included Highgate Mild and Bitter, Hancocks HB, Highgate Old, Worthington Best Bitter, Draught Bass, and something mysteriously called Brew IX. I asked the manager "is this a new Bass beer?" to which he (jokingly) retorted "I'll kill her"! No doubt a lesson for bar staff in Roman numerals



would soon follow. Today's guest beers included Ruddles County, Old Hookey and Youngs Winter Walmer.

Of the beers we tried, Highgate Mild (£1-40), Highgate Bitter (£1-42), Hancocks HB and Youngs Winter Walmer (£1-60) were on good form. However the Highgate Old was on its last legs and noticeably sharp. I did find Fletchers pricing policy a little strange with Brew XI (3.9%) selling alongside Winter Walmer (5%) at £1-60. On Monday evenings between 7 and 11pm all cask beers are advertised at £1 a pint.

Today the pub was busy. Bar staff seemed unsure of who to serve next and so I was left with no choice but to have to resort to using my bar technique, honed after many years of queueing at various bars, to cut through the crowds. It seemed that I was not the only one to have heard about the food as most people were dining. Like the Woodstock in Didsbury, H R Fletchers also specialises in an unusual and varied range of pub food, although if my memory serves me correctly some of these unusual dishes are common to both pubs. Today's specials included Pan Fried Brie topped with almonds and toast £3-95, Mushrooms baked in stilton, beer and cream £3-95, Char grilled chicken in a light mustard sauce £4-50, Moussaka with garlic bread £3-50, and vegetarian pastitiso £3-75.

Other meals included Hot and spicy chicken casserole £3-50, lamb and mango curry £3-50 and Fletchers bacon and cheeseburger £3-25. Diners can also choose from a selection of hot baguettes (French bread rolls) with fillings from £2-75, and Fletchers clubs (sandwiches) from £2-25.



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Anvil Ales
Brewers of
Traditional
Cask
Beers
Always in
good taste

I ordered the mushrooms baked in stilton whilst my companion ordered the pan fried brie. After a longish wait our meals arrived, mine accompanied by a side salad and my partners with a bed of rice. Both meals were attractively presented and well cooked. I did find my dish a little rich but that is due to the nature of the dish rather than any any fault in the cooking. The Brie was also well received. The sauce was perhaps a little thin but again this was a rich, deceptively filling dish with chunks of melting Brie in a tasty sauce. My companion soon cleared his plate and pronounced the meal 'just the ticket'.

Our lunches today made a pleasant change to the more standard pub cuisine available in most pubs.

Bass must be well pleased with the popularity of H R Fletchers at lunchtime. If there are problems with the pub then it is because it is a victim of its own success. When OT visited staff were rushed off their feet. Food orders were coming in thick and fast and bar staff struggled to keep track of who had ordered what and when. I did wonder why Fletchers did not operate a simple raffle ticket system. When a customer orders a meal issue them with a raffle ticket. When the meal is ready shout out the number on the ticket. That way its fair and there should be no confusion. The high pile of dirty plates at the bar and the sticky table tops (no beer mats here) also point to inadequate staffing levels.

Food is served at Fletchers, Monday to Saturday between noon and 5pm. If you fancy something a little different from Chilli Con Carne or Chicken Curry it might be worth a try.



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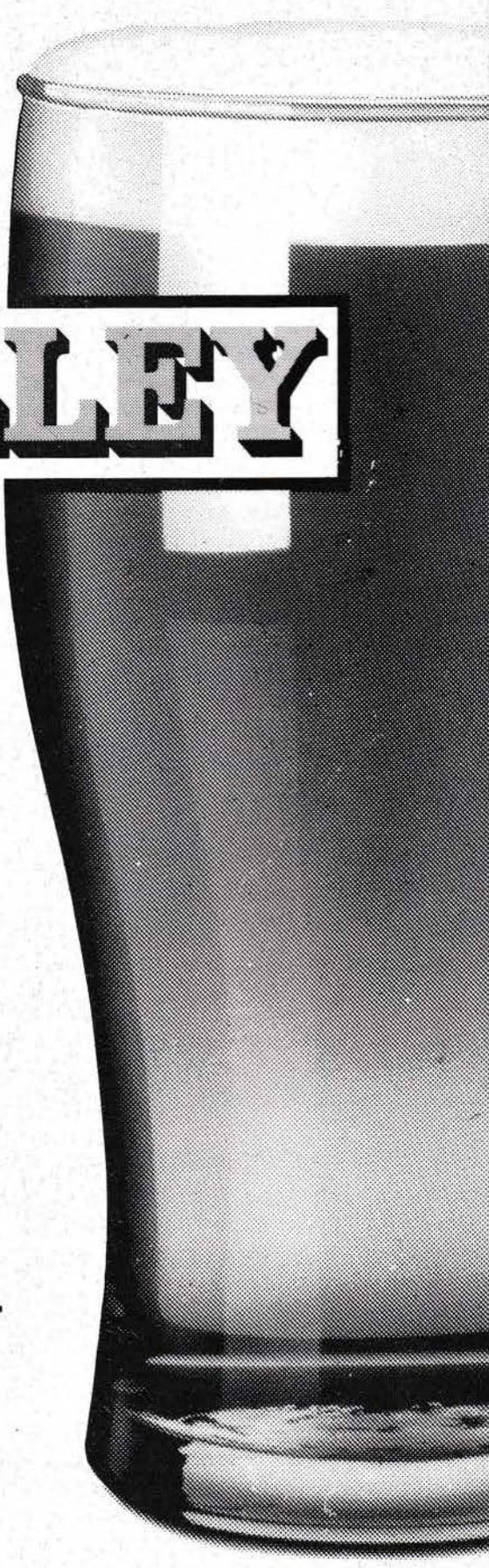
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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA



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Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak. Needless to say members of both branches are welcome at each other's events!

Diary	January 95	January 95
	<p>Monday 9th - Social, Flea & Firkin, Grosvenor St, Manchester. Starts 9.00pm</p> <p>Thursday 12th - Monthly branch meeting in the upstairs room, Bulls Head, Market Place, Stockport. Voting for 1994 Pub of the Year so please try and attend. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <p>Saturday 14th - Branch 21st Anniversary Social, Ladybridge Social Club, Cheadle Hulme. Buffet, Guest Speaker Commemorative Bottled Beer. Coach there and back. £12 a head - phone Jim Flynn on 432 1816 to book.</p> <p>Monday 16th - Social, Printers, Stockport Road, Cheadle (where the branch was founded). Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Friday 20th - Hyde Road Stagger. Start 7.00pm Longsight, Kirkmanshulme Lane. Meet 8.30, Suburban, Gorton Cross Street.</p> <p>Monday 23rd - Social, The Bar, Wilbraham Road, Chorlton. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Wednesday 25th - Pub of the Month, Red Lion, Withington. Note new date.</p> <p>Sunday 29th - Curry Crawl in Rusholme. 12 noon the Welcome; 1pm Osborne House; 2pm Albert. Curry to follow.</p>	<p>Monday 30th - Social, Bridge Inn, Georges Road, Heaton Norris. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Tuesday 31st - Committee Meeting, Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. Note this is for Good Beer Guide pre-selection. All members welcome to attend and vote. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <p>Monday 6th February - Social, Whitworth, Moss Lane East, Rusholme.</p> <p><i>High Peak branch cover Romiley, Marple, Bredbury, Woodley and all points north. They have notified OT of the following events:</i></p> <p>Saturday 14th - An afternoon/evening minibus trip to Buxton, surveying for the 1996(!) Good Beer Guide. For details phone Frank Wood on 0457 865426</p> <p>Monday 16th - Monthly branch meeting at the Nags Head, Glossop. Aim to get there by 8.30pm.</p> <p>Monday 23rd - Special committee meeting to discuss membership and recruitment. Royal Hotel, Hayfield 8.30pm.</p> <p>Friday 27th - Weekend trip to Glasgow (2 nights away). Contact Frank Wood for details.</p>

FORTHCOMING BEER FESTIVALS

Jan 26-28 Bent 'n Bongs (Atherton & Tyldesley) Formby Hall, High St. 50 beers inc 20 Winter Ales

Feb 16-18 Llandudno, Aberconwy Centre, Up to 50 beers inc N.Wales brews

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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

Winter Ales

Why don't you write about winter warmers? asked the man in the pub. Well, January and February are the coldest months of the year so this seems an opportune moment to look at the more powerful beers from our local brewers.

But first we should pause a moment and remember those that are no longer with us. It is over 10 years since Boddingtons discontinued their Strong Ale, a 1063 og winter warmer fondly remembered by many. A more recent loss is Hydes Anvil XXXX, at 8% it was in the same league as Old Tom and, for some, the preferred beer of the two. And of course Dobbins Old Soporific is no more. At 10%ABV this was a beer that certainly lived up to its name.

Luckily there is still plenty to choose from. Robinsons Old Tom has already been mentioned and this is perhaps the classic of its type available today. Find it on draught and you're in for a treat. CAMRA's Good Beer Guide couldn't put it better "the aroma is fruity and mouthwatering, the aftertaste is bittersweet, with an alcoholic kick."

John Willie Lees produce not one but two formidable ales during the winter months and both are rare. On draught you will find Moonraker (7.3%), a rich, sweet yet dangerously quaffable beer. It is only available in a handful of pubs and it is a mystery why this fine beer isn't made more widely available. If you find it, try it - you won't be disappointed. Lees other contender is Vintage Harvest Ale, brewed once a year in October/November from the new seasons barley malt and hops. At 11.5% it is an intense brew which still manages to avoid the cloying sweetness of

other beers of a similar strength. Rare as hens teeth, it is normally only available in bottle but as you read this there are two 18 gallon containers of it maturing in the brewery cellar for this year's Stockport Beer Festival. You have been warned.

Holts surprised everyone this year by making their bottled Sixex available on draught. The 'experiment' continues with the beer only available in six pubs (the Crown & Anchor on Cateaton Street in the City Centre is perhaps the most accessible for OT readers). Reaction seems to have been mixed with some pubs selling very little, it seems. Worth trying this year if only for its rarity value.

Oak Brewery in Heywood produce a fine range of beers including many special brews but the winter sees the welcome return of Humbug. A strong (6.5%), satisfying ale. Many freehouses, (notably the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport) feature Humbug regularly at this time of year.

Of the national brewers Carlsberg/Tetley produce Walkers Winter Warmer at their Warrington plant and this is much more widely available in the Tetley estate generally than was the case a few years ago. This is a 5.8%ABV beer brewed from November to February. A smooth, dark, sweet winter ale with a strong fruity flavour, it improves with age as the sweetness declines. "Dangerously drinkable", says the Good Beer Guide. Whitbread have treated us to Christmas Pudding Ale this year. A surprisingly light 5.5% beer flavoured with all manner of spices it is an unusual and welcome departure for this company. Reaction seems to have been mixed - it's a beer you will either love or hate. The other nationals don't really do anything special for this season and Bass, typically, have just axed their fine bottled No 1 Barley Wine.

Of the bigger regional brewers supplying the area the only one doing anything special for winter is Marstons. Their powerful (7.6%) Owd Roger barley wine has been around for years. Deeply winey and fruity it's a beer for sipping. Marstons have however produced two more seasonal beers this year in their commendable Head Brewer's Choice range. December saw the appropriately named Christmas Beer (4.8%) a very pale beer with a hoppy finish, not what you would expect from the name at all, but worth drinking nonetheless. January sees that replaced by Winter Warmer (5.2%) a dark, fruity and slightly sweet beer. Just the thing for the cold winter nights. With the notable exception of the Friendship in Gorton, most local Marstons houses now take the Head Brewers Choice beers - in particular those down the Wilmslow Road corridor.

Of course once you get into the free trade all manner of winter ales adorn the bars from micro-brewers far and wide. Look out for seasonal offerings from Porters at Haslingden and Whim at Hartington. Local agency Spencers is currently marketing "Wolstenholme Xmas Porter". This is a 5.5% beer and comes, we think, from Ryburn. Try it if you see it because it really is stunning.

Interest in seasonal beers is growing, and for the lover of winter ales this year has probably a greater number available nationally than ever before. As the cask ale revival gathers strength more brewers are seeking ever more unusual beers to gain a place on the freehouse bars. As someone says elsewhere in this issue, it's an exciting time to be a beer drinker. Drink and enjoy.

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Foreign News

Several members of the High Peak Branch recently visited Bratislava, in the Slovak Republic, and Vienna on a beer exploration/research trip. In other words a booze-up with a mission statement!

Bratislava revealed some interesting beer bars with a range of Slovak and Czech Republic beers (mostly unpronounceable). Plus points were the price of the beer, really cheap and generally very good with a few outstanding beers, minus points were the early closing hours and the erratic supply of the rarer beers.

A side trip to Brno in the Czech Republic led to the Starobrno Brewery Tap, a home brewery formerly part of a monastery. The bar was classified as Skupina IV, the lowest classification in the Czech Republic. It was as rough as a bear's arse, and bloody wonderful. A real experience!

VERDICT - an area definitely worth another trip including some lesser known areas of the Czech and Slovak Republics, (excluding Prague, which has been discovered and is currently being done to death). This is an area full of beer surprises.

Vienna has several home-brew cafes and all were visited. Good beers; high prices, but worth a visit to drink unusual beers in unusual surroundings, such as an office block basement! Generally Vienna is expensive. Bratislava is only about 50 miles away and well below half the cost. The motto is stay in Bratislava and commute to and from Vienna. There is a regular direct train link about 5 times per day.

A brief visit to Paris was also made with a lightning tour of as many of the specialist beer cafes as possible. Some were disappointing, others were good.

In general beers from Belgium, Germany, and the brewing regions of France were well represented, with some beers from deeper into Eastern Europe. The cost of these specialist beers, however, including French Bier de Garde styles is a serious drawback. Selectivity is the rule of the day. And, since in my view ordinary French beer isn't fit to be touched with a barge pole, take plenty of cash if you go drinking in Paris.

Notes were made of the beer cafes visited, and the locations (including one home-brew cafe; the beers were 'Marianne Blonde' and 'Marianne Brune').

If you intend to visit Paris, Vienna or Bratislava and need the information please contact T. Lord (427 7099).

Cheers, Sante, Prosit, Salut et al!

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RHYTHM and BOOZE

by Richard Hough

Review of the Year

Another one done and dusted. 1994 had its highs and lows, and musically some memorable bits. Kurt Cobain died, in familiar Rock'n'Roll circumstances: aged 27 and as a result of suicide. The Wonderstuff and Deacon Blue played their last, with subsequent best-ofs scooting up the charts. Madness said Cheerio (again) at Finsbury Park. The Rolling Stones (minus Bill) announced UK tour dates for 1995, ahem, one date in Sheffield, one in London. The two most eagerly-awaited albums of the year were good, but did they live up to the immense hype? The Beatles' BBC Sessions, and the Stone Roses' "Second Coming" were, either way, two of the best.

We had classic number ones from Doop(?) and Whigfield(?), while another of the best-selling singles was a cover-version, written in 10 minutes by Trogg Reg Presley. Talking of the old guard, Johnny Cash stole the show at Glastonbury, while the best of the bunch at the Phoenix Festival were ex-Velvet John Cale and Indie faves the Blue Aeroplanes. Across the Pond, the Americans indulged in a bit of mud-slinging at Woodstock II for their festival pleasure, and Michael and Lisa-Marie got hitched - for a while anyway.

Closer to home we saw Buxton host a successful Rhythm & Blues Festival at the end of October. A brace of O'Shea's opened in Manchester, and the "Capital of the North" was City of Drama 1994. Manchester's 100% Dance Music station, 'Kiss 102' started and 'Free Music North West', the essential guide to what's on and where, became established. The Boddington's Festival of Arts took place in September, one of the high points of which was Skelton Crew at the Flea & Firkin.

But the year began with C-Charge at Band on the Wall. The finest roots reggae at one of the best venues in Manchester. Both continue to flourish with BOTW continuing its policy of offering the best in non-main-stream music six nights a week: Cajun, reggae, latin, jazz, soul, and more. Get down!

For good solid rock, the Thatched House above Stockport Market Place is where to go. Since Ermmm...played there earlier this year the central bar has been moved to the far corner, to create a far more user-friendly pub. And the August Bank Holiday all-dayer proved to be a roaring success.

There is less roaring going on every Sunday at the Arden Arms in central Stockport. But it is still one of the most popular folk nights around, and worth a visit. Keen observers will recognise Pete Farrow in there from time to time after his "I taught Bob Dylan" performance at the Stockport Beer & Cider Festival in June. The Soul Brothers still play regularly across the North-West with their 'music from the Commitments'. After playing at the Bromale in Bramhall in Spring there was clamour for more live entertainment at the pub. One of the most popular performers has been John Birchall, the comedy hypnotist, who has appeared no less than three times in six months in '94.

The year was also a good one for tribute bands. Not merely cover version bands, but bands who look, sound, dress and act like their chosen heroes. One of the best is One Step Behind, the ultimate Madness tribute band. Their fine gig at the Witchwood in Ashton was one of many such acts at this deservedly popular free house and concert venue. The former owner, John Dyson, now runs the Beer Emporium in Oldham which offers a wide range of ales and folk nights on Tuesdays.

Back in Manchester, the Swinging Sporrán still does alternative/rock discos on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, although the details may change sometime soon. Cliff the landlord remains at loggerheads with various parties concerning his future, but the fact is he remains. We wish him well in his fight to stay. Across town is the Boardwalk, one of the better venues in Manchester, but still, unfortunately, keg. After Electrafixion played there in the summer they have gone from strength to strength. A slot on Pete Mitchells IQ show in Key 103 and a gig with the New Fast Automatic Daffodils at the Hop and Grape Bar of the University Union followed, and more recently the release of 'Zephyr' as a single.

Still in studentland, October's OT had reviews of the Jabez Clegg and Flea & Firkin. The Jabez continues to fob students off with pricey, poor quality beer, and still, astonishingly, remains megga popular. The Flea & Firkin, while still pricey, does have better quality products, and more interesting brews from its own brewery; these include the brutal, wicked, evil Sinful Stout at 5.3% ABV. One of the best bands to appear were Zenna, the remnants of Earthwood, with spectacular 'acoustic with attitude'.

The year ended in style with a super night at the Poynton Folk Centre. A fair bit was raised from the sale of CDs recorded on the night to help towards a much-needed refurbishment. There are hopes that next year will be even more successful [Toss the Feathers and the Houghton Weavers in one weekend in '94...] with a big thrash planned around Easter. But that's next year. 1994 was great, let's hope 1995 lives up to all expectations. I for one am sure it will.



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OPENING TIMES JANUARY 1995

CURMUDGEON



By now, most of you reading this will have bought at least one National Lottery ticket. A few might have won a tanner, but scarcely anyone more than that. To be honest, if you've got a pound and want a bit of fun, you'd be much better off buying a pint of Holts. And if you want your money to do some good, give it straight to the charity of your choice. Only a quarter of lottery receipts go to "good causes", and a lot of this goes on things like the Arts Council and the Millennium Fund which no one in their right mind would give their own money to. Only a meagre 5% goes to real charities.

It's also doubtful how much happiness the lottery will actually bring to those who win it. The track record of jackpot pools winners is very patchy, and for many of them it's brought such misery and problems that they feel they'd have been better off without it. Viv Nicholson wasn't an isolated example. Rather than sharing £5 million amongst three or four winners, why don't they split it up into 100 prizes of £50,000? If you won that, you could still have a good holiday, buy a new car, pay off half your mortgage and still have some left to put in the building society. But you wouldn't be tempted to give up your job and totally change your lifestyle, which is where all the problems start. That way the lottery would make a real difference to the lives of far more people.

Of course my attitude to the lottery isn't affected at all by the fact that I haven't won anything yet.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

A few weeks ago I was in a big country pub feeling a little peckish, but reluctant to spend six quid on a big elaborate meal that I didn't have the appetite for. A sandwich would

have been ideal, but the menu offered nothing remotely resembling one. It's very disappointing how so many pubs, which may serve excellent full meals, just don't do sandwiches, and how a lot of those that do just give you a boring choice of beef, ham or cheese. Yet when they are on the menu, soup and a sandwich is often the biggest seller. Surely there's an opportunity for some enterprising licensee to follow the lead of many excellent sandwich shops, and offer a really interesting choice of sandwiches with different sorts of bread and a wide range of imaginative fillings. If you know of any local pubs that do something out of the ordinary in the sandwich line, please let us know.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I've heard of pubs having different menus for lunchtime and evening, but I recently spotted the Victoria in Bramhall offering four different menus depending on what day of the week and what time of day it was! What does that achieve apart from confusion? Saying you can't have a scone if it's before three o'clock is hardly the way to encourage people to eat in pubs. Don't try to be too clever with "market segmentation" - keep it simple so your customers know exactly where they stand.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Excerpt from the recent Greater Manchester Police Authority Performance Review:

Indicator No. 14 (AC)

Number of road traffic incidents involving death or personal injury: **12,373**

The percentage of such accidents in which at least one driver tested positive for alcohol: **2% (276)**

Based on figures April 1993 - March 1994

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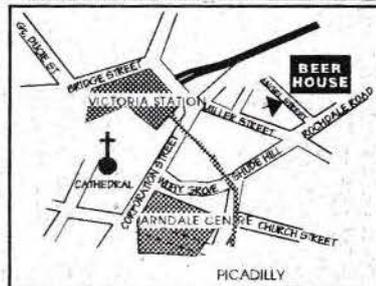
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CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE



Bits and pieces from around the area have been gleaned from various sources. Starting with a pub not known for real ale plaudits - the Jolly Sailor in Marple where a good pint of Hook Norton Old Hookey was found. Now this is not a usual haunt of the cognoscenti of Marple....could it be a reflection of the changing (worsening) beer scene in the area.

Nor far away in Romiley, it would appear that the **Grey Horse** has begun to have guest beers. On a recent visit Youngs Special was available - and in good condition. In Bredbury the **Rising Sun** has also started to have guests and Moorhouses Pendle Witches Brew has been spotted amongst others.

Hyde - the Werneth, Gee Cross - which serves Boddies Bitter and (very good) Oldham Mild on handpump has also added a 'guest pump' - Winter Royal was in residency at the time of the visit. the **King Bill** in Newton - the star of recent is it open, is it closed discussions is definitely **CLOSED** - but it has had an extension built!

Over in Denton - where the variety of breweries and brews has improved greatly - the **Masons Arms** (Robinsons) now sells the resurgent Old Stockport (aka ordinary) Bitter on handpump - with Hatters Mild and Best Bitter on electrics. Also, on Two Trees Lane, the little **Chapel House** is also serving Old Stockport. Note please that the branch will be having a crawl of Denton on 18th February.

It has also recently come to our attention that the licence for the **Bush** in Hyde is up for grabs and that **Jean and Brian Davies** are moving on. I would like to take this opportunity to wish them well in the future - which appears to be outside the licensed trade. They took over the Bush a little over 10 years ago and turned around what was a drab corner pub into a popular local which gained recognition in a number of Good Beer Guide entries over the years.

Frank Wood adds: the **Navigation** in Buxworth has begun selling real cider. Although only one 5-gallon container is on at any one time, the landlord tells me that it is popular with the locals and will be a permanent fixture. I prefer to stick to guest beers, and on my mid-November call Maclays Kanes Amber was in fine fettle.

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IN SHORT - A REAL PUB

WARRINGTON ST. ASHTON-U-LYNE NEXT TO BYPASS

A little late in being reported, but **Ian Grundy** of the **Hare & Hounds** at **Simmondley** has moved on, back home to Lancashire, but the good news is that a permanent guest beer will continue to be served at all times, alongside the **Tetleys Bitter, Mild and Burton Ale**.

On a recent visit to the **Vine** at **Birch Vale**, it was a pleasure to see it has been refurbished, recarpeted throughout and on the Sunday lunchtime we were in several families were already seated for meals, despite the pub having been open only 10 minutes.

The **Lantern Pike** near **Hayfield**, checked out twice recently had the usual **Timothy Taylor Landlord** on form on 4th December. In addition a premium strength guest beer is normally sold as well, on our visit **Mitchells Lancaster Bomber** was in fine condition. The pub is open all day, for meals, on Sundays.

The **Commercial** in **Hadfield** has been renamed the **Lamp** - the name locals have known it by for years. When the railway was opened over Woodhead in the 19th century, the workers used "The Red Lamp" for their evening pleasures - and used to drink there as well (no smut please - ed.) It has been refurbished, with the bar area made more appealing, and a guest beer is now sold alongside the locals favourite, **Boddingtons Bitter**. **Cains Formidable** and **Marstons Pedigree** have been the most popular so far.

In central **Glossop**, the **Trap**, opposite the market ground is currently closed and up for sale.

Lastly, **Opening Times** was dismayed to discover that the **Pineapple** in **Marple**, of all places, has succumbed to the keg-cider/fake-handpump scam - **Scrumpy Jack** was on sale a couple of weeks before Christmas. Let's hope that this otherwise fine pub sees sense and removes the offending device before too long.

The Jolly Sailor, Davenport

Scottish & Newcastle, the new owners of the **Jolly Sailor** in **Davenport**, have spent a lot of money refurbishing the place, to turn it into what is billed outside as "the pub for the discerning customer". Externally it's the same as before, an imposing red-brick building dating from the turn of the century; inside, although there's now plenty of plush seating and up-market bric-a-brac, it remains a cavernous one-room barn lacking any real character. A plus point is the provision of disabled access to the toilets.

Two real ales are available - **Theakstons Best Bitter** and **Courage Directors**. On our visit the **Theakstons** was expensive at £1.38 a pint and of no more than average quality. There's a big emphasis on food on the outside signboards, with menus on every table, but when we called at lunchtime there was hardly anyone eating and indeed only a scattering of people in at all.

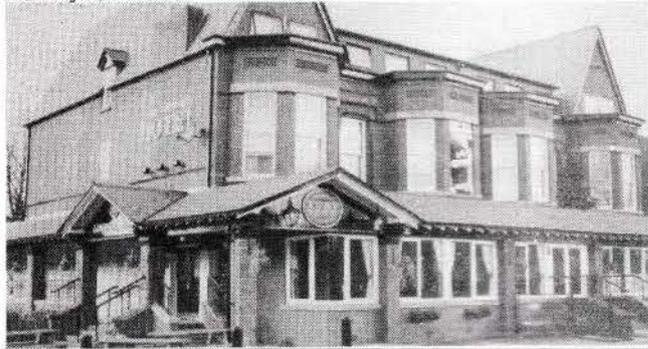
Overall, given the amount **S&N** must have spent, it seems like a missed opportunity - no guest beers of any kind, and surely they could have found room to put a vault back in. For many people round about it's the only pub within walking distance, and it's not somewhere you'd actively avoid, but it's hardly a pub the discerning customer would go much out of his or her way to visit.

Rudyard Goes Real - Again

On 13th December the Rudyard Hotel, Wellington Road North, Heaton Chapel, re-opened after a much-needed refit.

Gone is the fake Raj theme and in its place is something that can best be described as inoffensive, tasteful and safe. There are three bars but only one is open to the public (the others are for hotel guests and restaurant customers) and here dark wood abounds with the usual sprinkling of pictures and bric-a-brac. There are two handpumped beers - Worthington Best Bitter and Draught Bass at £1.40 and £1.56 respectively, high prices for the area but not unusual for hotels. In an effort to get the customers back the management have arranged quiz nights, theme nights etc but despite the pleasant atmosphere they are probably facing an uphill struggle to fill the place up, given its poor reputation prior to refurbishment. It is certainly essential that beer quality is maintained (it was fine when OT called) because over the last few years it became so bad that real ale was taken off.

Overall, the Rudyard is worth a visit if you want a meal and some cask ale to go with it but it is certainly not the place to make your local.



Duty Calls

After breathing a sigh of relief after Kenneth Clarke's 'first' budget in November, the licensed trade was left reeling at the penny a pint duty increase slapped on after the Government's VAT defeat.

Of course, it won't just be a penny. When it's worked through the system and the brewery and the pub have "protected their margins" we will be looking at perhaps 3-4 pence. Brewers say the main effect of the increase will be to speed up the projected loss of some 10,000 pubs by the year 2000. The Brewers Association projects a 0.6% drop in overall pub takings for every penny increase on duty. Even before the budget the Association had predicted a 2% decline in pub-trade from all causes including cross-border shopping.

It is also feared that small urban tenancies will feel the effects the most as many of them are already amongst the most marginal of pubs and can least afford to lose the custom. Their trade is heavily dependent on beer sales with little in the way of catering to fall back on.

Stuart Neame, vice-chairman of Kent brewers Shepherd Neame summed up: "Inner city pubs are now dangerously exposed. Four out of five pubs probably won't notice a drop in trade but the rest could lose 10% of their business and a shakeout is bound to come."

Parts of inner-city Manchester and Salford have already suffered catastrophic losses to their pub-stocks and if many more go under whole swathes of the inner cities could be left virtually pub less. Even relatively prosperous areas like Stockport are unlikely to be immune - certain parts of the town already seem to have a large number of pubs chasing a dwindling amount of trade. If a shakeout is on the way the next couple of years could well be crucial.

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Woods Walks

Glossop Real Ale Walkers had their pub spotting "dream" in December when, during a ramble around Mossley they came across the Colliers Arms at Broadcarr, a hamlet 15 minutes walk out of Mossley, nestled under the Hartshead Pike monument.

We had known of the pub and believed that landlord Charlie Mills had been there for 43 years. Not so, he's been there for 77! His father was landlord before him and Charlie was born at the pub, taking over as licensee in 1943 some 52 years ago.

The pub is delightfully ancient and poky. Nothing has altered for decades and it can be hard to know which are the public areas and which are the private ones. In fact there is only one public room with odd corners, very old bench seats, a fireplace and a piano. It must be one of the most unspoiled pubs in the North of England.

We sat down, Charlie mashed a pint pot of tea and joined us. He told us the pub was always run in conjunction with the family farm, the cowsheds being in the same building at the side of the pub. He was a player with Glossop Football Club from 1932-1939 when the war started, spending many seasons as captain and receiving a couple of trophies during his time there (although, despite a couple of near misses, never managing a league trophy).

The Colliers Arms is just off Broadcarr Lane, turning left onto it from the Ashton/Mossley road, only 300 yards before you reach the Billy Goat in Mossley. Of course there has to be a snag, and this centres round the beer. You

would think that a pub like this would be selling home-brew, dispensed by jug from the cellar, but no, the beer is from Bass and it's keg.

For proper Bass beers you need to call at the Hare & Hounds, Luzley, another interesting Bass house with a reasonable range of Bass beers on handpump along with Youngs Winter Warmer - you certainly need it up there.

Bulls Head

The Scottish & Newcastle refurbishment of the old Chef & Brewer estate now seems to be getting into its stride and in Hazel Grove the Bulls Head has had a thorough overhaul.

This was badly needed and the end result is most definitely an improvement although not perhaps to everyone's taste. The pub is still essentially one open-plan room although some attempt has been made to divide it up. The new decor has the accent firmly on plush with a lot of fancy light fittings and up-market bric-a-brac (most certainly **not** your usual truckload of Victorian tat here, thank you very much).

The clientele is still firmly anchored at the younger end of the market but amongst the array of lager fonts there are three cask beers available. Theakstons Bitter at £1.42 was reasonable if over-priced, John Smiths Bitter is presumably cheaper but God knows what they charge for Courage Directors. Bottles of Czech Budweiser Budvar were also spotted in the cool cabinet, for those who want to pose with a **decent** bottled beer.

Overall verdict: better than it was.



The logo for Newcastle Exhibition Premium Quality Ale is a stylized crest. At the top, the word "NEWCASTLE" is written in a semi-circle. Below it, "ESTD 1928" is written with a small illustration of a castle tower. The central part of the logo is a large, bold, serif font reading "EXHIBITION". At the bottom, "PREMIUM QUALITY ALE" is written in a smaller, bold, serif font. The entire logo is enclosed in a decorative border.

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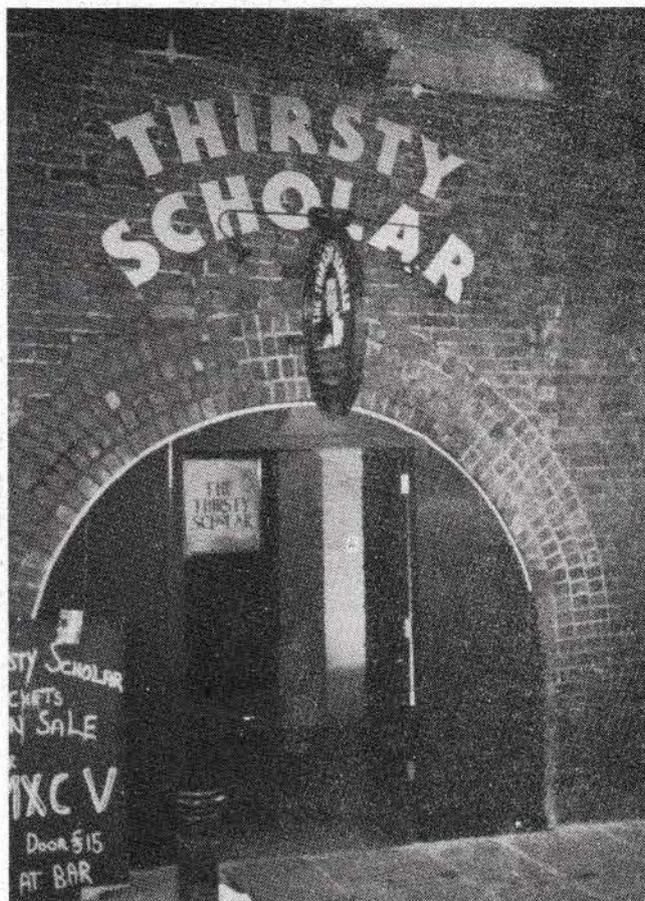
Thirsty Scholar

Undeterred by their failure to get planning permission for a pub conversion in Fallowfield, those canny operators behind Jabez Clegg and Joshua Brookes have leaped back into the fray with their third outlet, the appropriately named Thirsty Scholar.

The new pub is next to the Salisbury, just off Oxford Road in the City Centre, and occupies the railway arch that was formerly home to such unlamented enterprises as Cats Park and Archies. Unlike those, however, this is very much a traditional pub. There is an Irish theme underlying the decor but the overall impression is one of a good, solid, and largely gimmick-free, traditional bar. Lots of dark wood and the flagged floor emphasise this image and, we understand, this new outlet is most definitely not a 'beer hall' like its stablemates but rather is intended to be more 'staid'.

A sign outside proclaims, somewhat over-ambitiously, that the Thirsty Scholar sells the 'finest range' of traditional ales. When OT called there were three cask ales available - Boddies Bitter (£1.40), Marstons Pedigree (£1.65) and Whitbreads Winter Royal. Apparently the range is due to improve/expand in the New Year which should also see an upstairs room brought into use. This should serve as both a private function room and also an overflow should the main bar get too busy.

It's early days yet but all being well the thirsty Scholar should prove a useful addition to the local drinking scene. Worth a visit.



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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

By Irwell's Side - Stirrings in Salford

Poor, traduced Salford, Manchester's neglected twin, now has a couple of new freehouses to set against its long, lamented list of lost locals.

Formerly the Three Legs of Man, one of only two pubs ever to have been sold by Robinsons (the other, the Robin Hood in Moss Side, is slated for conversion to a church), the Cornerhouse on Greengate now boasts a perhaps over-ambitious range of 12 handpumped beers. Many of these are tedious stuff from such as Courage and Ruddles, but quality beers from the likes of Cains, Marston Moor, and Ryburn also feature. Worryingly, one of the handpumps dispenses John Smith's Chestnut Mild, hitherto only known in keg form - unless the pub has been chosen for an ultra-low-key launch of cask Chestnut Mild, this is a misleading practice which needs to cease. The pub retains much of its former interior layout, and the strikingly painted vaulted ceiling in the main room is particularly impressive.

However, a shortish walk out along the Chapel Street (A6) corridor will bring you to a much more worthwhile establishment. After an elephantine gestation, the Borough (historically Wilsons, then briefly Burtonwood) on Encombe Place has re-opened as the Dock & Pulpit. Under the same ownership as the nearby Crescent, the pub is independently managed by Steve and Evelyn Porter, a friendly and humorous couple who will be well known to many veterans of the Manchester and Salford real ale scene.

Regular cooking bitter "Matthew Brown Bitter" (now made by Scottish and Newcastle subsidiary Home of Nottingham) retails at 99p (and may be joined, sales permitting, by "Matthew Brown" mild); the other handpumps,

though, are occupied by anything from 2 to 4 guest beers, intelligently chosen to provide a spread of strengths and styles. When OT called, the guests were Judges Barristers Bitter, a fine 3.5% ABV session bitter from a Warwickshire micro, Freeminer Slaughter Porter and Fullers London Pride. There's also a regular cider or perry, different every fortnight, from the everchanging range of premier cider factor Jon Hallam - your correspondent enjoyed Goverd's and headed home happy!

The pub itself is in the process of being "re-Victorianised" and such matters as the shabby exterior, the formica tables, and the plastic chairs are on the shopping list to be dealt with (the furniture may well have been sorted by the time you read this); already the blackleaded range and the Judge's Chair from Warrington courthouse (50p to charity if you sit in it) preview the splendours to come. There's no television, no pool table, no jukebox, and no one-armed bandit - in fact the only entertainment (with the important exception of the conversation of customers and staff) is what Evelyn proudly describes as the "gas powered radio" (ask). Altogether, the Dock and Pulpit looks like one of the best things to happen to Salford for a fair while - go there! Opening hours are 12 - 11 Monday to Friday; on Saturday it's closed at lunchtime, opening at 7.30 in the evening; and on Sunday, while lunch is standard 12-3, again it doesn't open till 7.30 in the evening.

Over the Moon

The J D Weatherspoon organisation is coming to Manchester.

J D who? Weatherspoon's are a well known pub chain in London and the South East. Their trademark operation is the conversion of disused garages, cinemas and the like into large but essentially traditional pubs - no music, no-smoking areas and food all day. A range of traditional beers is also sold, usually Theakstons Bitter, XB, Youngers Scotch, Courage Directors and Wadworths 6X plus guests at the weekend. Value for money is also the catchword with at least one beer selling for 99p a pint and prices as low as 59p being reported. Frequent beer festivals are also held.

And where is all this going to take place. The old Cannon Cinema on Deansgate. Weatherspoons are spending a reported £1.7 million turning this into 'The Moon Under the Water' which should be open for business in June. The company are also on the look-out for other North West sites and Stockport has been specifically mentioned as a possible location.

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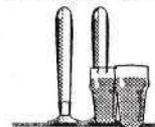
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MANCHESTER MATTERS



by Rhys Jones

First things first. I was very pleased and grateful to attend the opening of Marstons' flagship Rothwells, on Spring Gardens in the City Centre. It's a fine place and deserves to do well - the lavishly converted banking hall, with a zodiac theme, provides copious space for crowds complemented by adjacent seating areas. Handpumps

supply Banks's Mild, plus Marstons Bitter, Pedigree and the current Head Brewer's Choice beer, at prices which are a fair reflection of the surroundings (£1.40 Mild, £1.50 Bitter, £1.65 Pedigree). On opening night, Cllr Arnold Spencer, chair of the City Council's Environment and Planning Committee, waxed eloquent if prolix on how pleasant it had been to receive a planning application for a public house. This cannot, I suppose, be the same Councillor Spencer who assured a CAMRA delegation a couple of years back that he would do everything in his power to preserve the Little Bradford - a pub which, as regular readers will recall, was subsequently knocked down by the Council to make way for a (so far non-existent) shrubbery to serve a (so far non-existent) car park for the (so far non-existent) stadium to host Manchester's (so far non-existent) Olympic Games.

As you might expect, Rothwell's was not the City Centre's only pre-Christmas opening. The premises "underneath the arches" on Wakefield Street outside Oxford Road, previously known as Archies and then as Cat's Park, now go by the name of the Thirsty Scholar - and with a name like that, it comes as little surprise that this is the latest limb of the Jabez Clegg empire. More impressive, at least initially, than its stablemates, and a vast improvement on its former incarnations, this is a spartan but stylish student pub whose opening beers on handpump were

Marstons Bitter and Pedigree, and Boddingtons Bitter (other Whitbread beers have been seen there since). And, honest, the music inside isn't as deafening as it sounds from the street - there appear to be speakers mounted in the entrance!

Another planning conversion, this time of basement space in a canalside warehouse, is Metz on Brazil Street, but unfortunately it offers us no real ale or cider - an opportunity missed. (And if anyone knows why a Manchester bar should be named after a perfectly decent but unremarkable city in Eastern France, please write in).

Also in the City Centre, the Hare & Hounds has been selling interesting guest beers including some from microbreweries; the Grey Horse has switched to handpump dispense; the Crown & Anchor on Cateaton Street remains the only outlet in Central and South Manchester for handpumped Holts Sixex (and does not appear to observe the alleged ban on selling the stuff by the pint); while at the Crown & Anchor on Hilton Street, real cider was consistently unavailable on visits in the fortnight or so before Christmas - I do hope this will not turn out to have been a nine-day wonder.

In Hulme, I was heartened to see the mid-December reopening of the Grants Arms on Royce Road, where a good pint of handpumped Boddingtons Bitter and a friendly welcome can now be enjoyed. And finally, the Imperial in West Gorton has been selling "Wolstenholmes Ace" on handpump. As some readers may know, "Wolstenholmes" is not a brewery but an Openshaw-based distributor which commissions (or in some cases re-badges?) beers from microbreweries for sale under its own name. Now, I have not the slightest objection to any licensee selling the beers - they've generally been pretty good, and the Imperial's beer in particular is certainly well kept - but I do think it would be in Wolstenholmes' own interest, as well as the drinker's, to own up to who actually makes them. They're using highly reputable breweries - I believe, subject to correction, that Ace is from Ryburn - so I just don't understand what they think they have to hide.

**COPY DEADLINE FOR FEBRUARY ISSUE
THURSDAY 26 JANUARY**

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(OT129)

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I / We enclose remittance for individual/joint membership for one year: INDIVIDUAL £12 JOINT MEMBERSHIP £14

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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, where different terms will apply

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £6





At the Davenport Arms, Woodford, Robinsons Old Stockport Bitter has gone on sale for a trial run in place of Frederics, which, in common with many other outlets, has proved a slow seller. Licensee Yvonne Hallworth says that Old Stockport is going very well so far, and on a recent visit it was certainly in excellent condition.

Copperfield's Bar on Adswood Lane East, Cale Green, has seen sense and removed the fake handpump for keg Scrumpy Jack. It's worth a visit for the seven or so ales, all at competitive prices.

New faces at the Thatched House, Churchgate, Stockport where new licensees are Pauline and Amanda. The pub is now open much more regularly than of late.

The Comfortable Gill, King Street West, Stockport has been extended to add a pool room at the rear.

This month it's all change at a number of Holts pubs in the Opening Times area. Bryan and Veronica Armstrong are off to the Roebuck in Flixton after a four and a half year stint at the Cheadle Hulme. Bryan has run a tight ship at the Cheadle Hulme which has not been to everyone's taste (particularly lager louts) but the quality of the beer has been consistently good with the pub being listed in the Good Beer Guide for the last three years. Replacing Bryan and Veronica are Graham and Joan Smithies from the Sidings in Levenshulme.

Another Whitbread Ale House to take real cider is the George & Dragon, Hazel Grove. A pre-Christmas visit saw two tubs taking the place of the barrels of strong ales that used to be stillaged behind the bar. Despite this welcome move the George & Dragon is still running the Scrumpy Jack fake-handpump con. Indeed it's the fake handpump that greets visitors as they walk through the door - the real stuff is tucked away at the back. Discerning drinkers will still continue to think twice before visiting the place. It is also doubtful if cask cider has much of a future at this pub anyway. When OT called not only was no-one drinking it, there was no sign of the slightest attempt to promote it in any way.

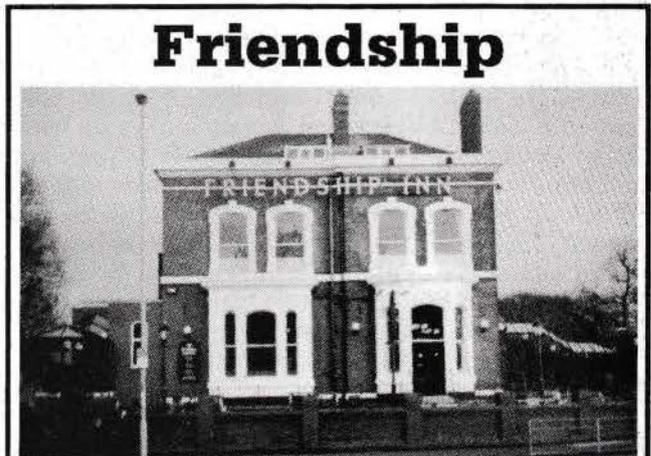
A pre-Christmas visit to the Vine in Cheadle found not just no Theakstons Bitter, but no spare handpump to put it on alongside Websters and John Smiths. All very puzzling given that the pub was acquired last year BY Scottish & Newcastle (makers of Theakstons) FROM Chef & Brewer (contractually tied to Websters and John Smiths). It makes you wonder whether the people who run the property side of national breweries ever talk to the people who distribute the beer....

The Plough, Heaton Moor has completed a unique double for the area, again winning a Tetley-Walker award for quality of service and customer care. The last award was reported in August OT. Still at the Plough, Tapster's Choice in November produced Allsopp's Winter Warmer, a 5.5% brew at £1.62. There were suggestions that this might be a Burton version of Walker's Winter Warmer. However, the long established Warrington Winter Warmer appeared in December (5.8% at £1.70) and was thought by the OT correspondent to be a

superior brew. Also in the Plough in December a 'house beer' appeared, believed to be brewed at Burton at 3.00%, designed to sell at £1. Are the brewery slowly getting the message about beer prices? Will they reduce the prices of big name brews?

Ye Olde Vic in Stockport has always been a pub to visit for an interesting range of beers, but now there are other attractions apart from the beer. For a start there is now a range of traditional pub games to be enjoyed. Shove Ha'penny and something called Shut the Box are available on request and landlady Kay Ord is hoping to introduce table skittles in the New Year. There is also live music - a string quartet (yes, really) plays every Wednesday night. Well worth a visit.

Good reports reach us about the Hesketh in Cheadle Hulme. Following its acquisition by Scottish & Newcastle this ex-Chef & Brewer house has undergone quite a revamp and serves excellent Theakstons Best Bitter and good food. A well-managed pub that's worth a visit, it is only a five minute walk from the Cheadle Hulme if you go up Mellor Road, opposite the Railway Station, along the passage to the right at the top of the road and along Swann Lane for 50 yards and there it is.



The flurry of activity on the Wilmslow Road corridor continues - the Jabberwocky Restaurant is now boarded up pending, we understand, conversion into a "Scruffy Murphy's" Irish theme bar while the neighbouring Queen of Hearts pub is set to become a (non-brewing) Firkin.

Even local brewers Hydes have got in on the act with a refurbishment of the Friendship although they have fortunately avoided gimmicks and gone for a more traditional effect. Basically the pub has just had a major internal redecoration with some additional work on the bar. The decor is traditional without being over-fussy, although outside it's a slightly different story as an array of glass and cast-iron canopies now greet the eye. Hydes Anvil Bitter and Light are available via electric pumps and the pub also sells a good range of value for money food at lunchtimes.

This part of town needs more smart traditional locals like the Friendship and Hydes are to be congratulated on a job well done.

*Incidentally, Hydes seem to be abandoning their insistence on electric pumps with handpulls recently installed in both the Albert in Didsbury and the Grey Horse in the City Centre. We understand that this is a conscious policy change on the part of the brewery.