

OPENING TIMES



No:
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APRIL 1995

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Giant Brewery Merger Threatens Turmoil

Another giant brewery merger looks to be on the cards. As we went to press speculation was rife that Scottish & Newcastle were to buy the breweries run by Courage. An announcement was thought to be imminent.

The move would create a combine controlling almost one third of the country's brewing capacity. Both companies have a strong local representation - Courage supply the Wilsons, Websters and John Smiths brands while S&N increased their profile with the purchase of the Chef & Brewer chain from Grand Met which brought them pubs such as the Chestergate Tavern and the Withington Ale House. The Chef & Brewer chain was, and largely still is, supplied by....Courage. It all fits nicely doesn't it?

Well not if you believe that further concentration in the industry will be bad for competition and lead to higher prices and less choice. It will also lead to fewer jobs. The merged company will have substantial excess capacity and breweries will be axed left, right and centre. Those in Halifax, Nottingham and London look particularly vulnerable. For these reasons CAMRA will oppose the move and press for a referral to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. Given the size of the new company such a referral is almost certain in any event and stringent conditions could be expected before the merger was cleared. Just what such conditions would be must be a matter of speculation - paradoxically despite having 30% of the market the new company would have surprisingly few pubs. Courage has none at all and S&N have about 3000 - veritable tiddlers in the national brewery stakes. This would seem to rule out a loosening of the tie as being an effective way of diluting the stranglehold S&N-Courage will have over the market.

Despite all the fine words that greet this merger increased efficiency, natural move, good for both companies - you can almost write the script yourself, only one thing is clear; the pub-going public will, as ever, come off worse.

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Stockport Beer Festival



Preparations for this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, once again sponsored by the Stockport Express Advertiser, are gathering speed and this month we take a look at what's planned on the entertainment front.

Festival Entertainments Manager Rob Lea tells us that he has tried to aim for a mix of old favourites and some acts new to the festival. "Like last year, the accent is on variety" he explained.

Thursday night sees the return of Harmony Hounds for the second year. Thursday is more of a drinker night and their pre-war dance sounds seem to complement this perfectly. Friday sees two new acts. At lunchtime we have the Otis Brass Quintet, a new outfit including two BBC Young Musician of the Year finalists in their number. Classic numbers and easy listening are promised, plus one or two surprises. For the busy Friday night we go Latin with Salsa Pa' Gozar, a 10-piece South-American style band.

On Saturday lunchtime back comes Pat Nash tinkling the ivories and repeating his success last year. Finally we go out with a bang on Saturday night with Joe le Taxi and the Zydeco Specials and their mixture of Cajun, Zydeco and RnB sounds.

It certainly sounds like something for everyone - don't miss it.



April's Pub of the Month is the Travellers Call on Hyde Road in West Gorton. This is not the first time the "Travs" has received this coveted award, for in May 1991 it was awarded to popular licensees Larry and Margaret Mason.

Sadly though, Larry and Margaret's tenure was cut short by ill health, and in August 1993 Helen and Tony Dunn arrived, to run their first pub (Tony had been in the drinks trade before - but it was milk!). With the aid of some high quality training from Hydes Brewery, they lost no time in learning the ropes, and the best tribute that can be paid to them is that very little at the Travellers Call seems to have changed. Good quality Hydes Mild and Bitter are sold from electric pumps to appreciative drinkers in the narrow front vault and quieter back room,

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PUB of the Month

APRIL

With little or nothing in the way of frills, the Travellers is the basic Manchester pub the way it used to be. There aren't many left like it - and the pub itself is threatened by the frequently postponed Hyde Road widening scheme.

The Travellers Call may be a small pub, but it's a great pub too. Join with us as we award Helen and Tony April's Pub of the Month award on Thursday April 27th - the presentation should take place around 9.30 or so, but the drinking will start considerably earlier!

Ups n Downs

Stockport's troubled Ups N Downs on Wellington Road reopened last month as the Upstairs Downstairs Bar and Grill.

There has been a concerted and successful attempt to rid the pub of its former image. The pool table has been replaced by restaurant chairs and tables and the loud jukebox has given way to sedate taped music. The whole place has been redecorated in a fresh bright style, although retention of some of the old fittings, notably the rough-hewn banister, looks out of place.

Custom was slack in the few days of opening before OT went to press - partly due perhaps to the absence of real ale. With cask beer one of the few growth areas in the licensed trade, Upstairs Downstairs inexplicably sells just keg beers from Bass. A switch to real ale really would signal a break with the past and attract more custom into the bargain. So, come on, take the plunge.

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WERE IN THE
GOOD BEER
GUIDE '95

Stockport Mild Challenge

Once again we have teamed up with the Stockport Express Advertiser to bring you another Stockport Mild Challenge. Last year's Challenge was a great success and if you didn't take part last time have a go this year. It's fun and it's easy. It's a chance to visit some new pubs and try some new beers.

The Challenge runs from 10th April to 14th May inclusive and gives you a chance to get free entry to Stockport Beer & Cider Festival (or free beer there if you're a member of CAMRA) plus entry into a prize draw. There are pewter tankards, sweatshirts and all sorts of prizes to be won. Are you up to the Challenge?

What YOU have to do
* Firstly get a card. If you picked up this copy of Opening Times

in Stockport there should be one in it. You can get one from any of the pubs taking part or write to the Mild Challenge address - 66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, SK4 5EG, enclosing a large SAE.

* When you buy a pint or a half in one of the pubs taking part ask the bar staff to stamp your card - remember, though, you can only get one stamp from each pub.

* When you've filled the card (you'll need 12 different stamps from 12 different pubs) then send it to the Mild Challenge address. This will give you automatic entry into the prize draw. If you want free entry to the Beer Festival don't forget to clip out the coupon and send that along with a stamped addressed envelope.

The following pubs are taking part:

BRAMHALL: Bromale, Shady Oak, Bramhall Wine Bar.
BREDBURY: Arden Arms, Horsfield Arms
BRINNINGTON: Farmers Arms
CHEADLE: Crown, Printers Arms, Queens Arms, Star Inn
CHEADLE HULME: Cheadle Hulme, Church, Cross Keys
COMPSTALL: Andrews Arms
EDGELEY: Church, Florist, Grapes, Greyhound, Prince Albert, Sir Robert Peel, Woolpack
GATLEY: High Grove, Prince of Wales
HAZEL GROVE: Cock, Grapes, Three Bears
HEALD GREEN: Griffin
HEATON CHAPEL: George & Dragon, Hinds Head, Tut'n'Shive

Happy Drinking!

This year we have introduced the Mild Challenge Extra. If you get your card stamped in 12 pubs in 12 different areas (using the headings shown in our list of participating pubs) then you will also win a special Mild Challenge T-shirt...

WHY MILD?

Mild is one of the great survivors of our brewing tradition. For too long dogged by a cloth-capped 'old man's drink' image, mild

has all but disappeared in many parts of the country. Yet more and more people are turning to the delights of this underrated drink. It's tasty, several pints won't make you fall over and it's good value, often notably cheaper than a pint of bitter.

Stockport still has a strong mild drinking tradition with many pubs still selling it. Just look at those on our list; they range from sedate country inns to boisterous town boozers. All these pubs, and more, sell mild. We think it's right to support this neglected part of our brewing tradition - and have a bit of fun at the same time. Those of you who already drink mild will know what a good drink it is. For those of you who don't, well,

this is the chance to find out what you've been missing.



HEATON MERSEY: Crown

HEATON NORRIS: Bridge Inn, Moss Rose, Nursery

HEAVILEY: Blossoms, Duke of York

HIGH LANE: Royal Oak

MARPLE: Pineapple, Travellers Call

MELLOR: Royal Oak

PORTWOOD: Coach & Horses, Queens

REDDISH: Thatched Tavern, Union

ROMILEY: Grey Horse

STOCKPORT: Arden Arms, Bakers Vaults, Crown, Crown, Manchester Arms, Pack Horse, Pineapple, Tiviot, Unity, Waterloo

STRINES: Sportsman

Full details of the pub locations and milds are printed on the challenge card.

GOOD LUCK!



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Unusually, our lead story this month is to a certain extent speculative. However we think that a statement announcing what will be the biggest concentration of market share in the history of the British brewing industry is imminent. It will be sold by the PR people as the best thing since sliced bread. We know better - there will be carnage as surplus brewing capacity is axed - and thought that for once we would get our retaliation in first.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

This month sees the launch of the Mild Challenge in conjunction with the Stockport Express Advertiser. Last year's event was a great success - if you didn't have a go last year make sure you don't miss out this time.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Lastly, eyebrows may be raised by some of Curmudgeon's comments this month. Let me reassure readers that CAMRA is and remains strictly non-political. So does Opening Times.

John Clarke

Awards Galore

A large turnout meant a packed pub when the Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year award was presented to the Queens Head on March 11th. Licensees Dave and Paula are pictured with their framed certificate.



29 local CAMRA members visited Robinsons on March 23rd and took the opportunity of presenting a certificate marking Old Tom's runner-up position in the Barley Wine class in CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain competition. Our picture shows Head Brewer Chris Hellin receiving his certificate from local branch Chairman John Clarke.

From : Brian Carey

I am currently taking a GCSE as a mature student in local history. As a special project I am researching the 'Pubs of Heaton Norris 1830-1920'.

If anybody can be of help with information, perhaps they would ring me on 432 9518.

From : Richard Hough

Does anyone know if pubs have official fire limits, and if so what are the guidelines? We all know that clubs operate on a one-out-one-in basis once their fire limit is reached, but some pubs (especially popular student pubs or Yates's Wine Lodges) seem to get very (sometimes uncomfortably) full, with apparently little or no restriction on numbers. While we don't want to see people being turned away from pubs, surely people's safety is of paramount importance?

From A Matthews of Matthews Walker Architecture, Stockport re - Pub of the Year 1994

I read with keen interest your article in Edition 130 about the refurbishment of the Queens Head in Stockport and its subsequent management.

My previous practice, Hubble Matthews Partnership, carried out the architectural work for the project and I am therefore surprised that this input was not mentioned in the article. My interest in the preservation and encouragement of convivial surroundings for the consumption of beer is felt from the heart and I can assure that the architectural input into the project had a very significant effect on the outcome. In my present practice we still try to bring our convictions to bear on this matter but the opportunities are very limited.

I would be interested to receive your comments as I feel the article does not present a realistic picture of the process of reclaiming this particular pub from a very long decline.

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STAGGER

with Stuart Ballantyne

Castle Street in Edgeley is too often overlooked by Stockport pub goers but it offers an interesting mix of both pubs and beers. I was pleased therefore that for this months Stagger OT was going to cover Edgeley and Shaw Heath starting at the Royal Oak at the junction of Castle Street and Grenville Street.

The Royal Oak is a large corner pub which presumably several years ago had separate rooms but now is more of a single room pub with central bar. What dates it is the (now awful) rough plasterwork that was fashionable in the 1970's and the dreadful and obviously artificial wooden beams that are everywhere. However at least we would be guaranteed a good pint, as this is an interpreneur pub selling Holts - or thats what we thought. Sadly we were wrong, with the pub presently up for sale and no doubt pressure being applied to improve the barrelage of the host beers, the only beers available where John Smiths Bitter and Wilsons Mild. Bitter was thought to be below average whilst the Mild was much better at just under good.



Walking up Castle Street brought us to the Prince Albert. This is a small corner locals pub and one which I think has improved over recent years since the bar was moved thus providing more room. At 7:30pm it was quite busy; I am sure



that these were genuine customers and not arsonists or passers by that had stopped to see the fire brigade put out the fire that moments earlier had been consuming Potts hardware shop opposite. Wilsons Bitter was average with the mild above average. On this visit nobody tried the John Smiths Bitter.

Our next stop was the Pineapple, a pub that has been struggling to survive for a long time now due to strong competition from other pubs along Castle Street. Open, then closed, and now open again, it is still fighting to find its niche. Tonight it was quiet, and when we arrived the staff outnumbered the customers by a factor of three to one (there was only one customer!). Although signed as a Wilsons pub, it now only sells Tetley beers, and of the bitter and the mild, only the bitter was on. Pineapple please note - if you dont sell mild then please turn the pump clip round to avoid us all asking for it! The pub seems to have no ambiance whatsoever, and from where I was sitting all I could see was a plain wall. Drinking in the Pineapple is a bit like drinking in a doctors waiting room or in a corridor, but without the added interest of health posters or copies of Womens Realm to read. Only the juke box playing Blur's 'Park Life' served to remind us that we were drinking in a pub. And of the bitter it was only considered to be average.

Next on to the Windsor Castle which due to a brief but heavy downpour now seemed to be surrounded by a moat. Using athletic dexterity we jumped the moat to seek refuge in the pub. For most of us "refuge" means a quiet pub but in the case of the Windsor Castle we were to be disappointed as a loud disco was in operation. The pub is huge and with only a handful of customers the disco was too loud so we sought refuge in the bar (which had no customers). On sale were Wilsons Mild, John Smiths Bitter, and Robinsons Best Bitter all of which were considered to be no better than average. With nothing to detain us we pressed on.



Backtracking slightly, we headed for our 8:30pm meeting point at the Sir Robert Peel. If you wondered where all the Edgeley drinkers were on a Friday night, then this is where you will find them. The pub was packed, so much so that we all had to stand. This seems to be Edgeleys community local with the bar hosting darts and pool matches, whilst the lounge catered for the pre club and locals trade. The advertised trip to the Norfolk Broads sounded interesting but unfortunately non of us would be able to go on it as it was full. The Bobby Peel is a Greenalls pub selling Greenalls Mild, Bitter, and Stones Bitter. All three beers were above average with the Stones gaining the highest marks of the night so far.

Continuing up Castle Street brought us to the Jolly Crofter, a recent aquisition by Vaux. This is a pub that for a long time had a poor reputation and was a local trouble spot, but now under its new owners it is much improved. At present it only sells one traditional beer in the form of Vaux Samson, but I am told that this may well shortly be joined by a new Vaux beer

called "Waggledance" which is made with honey and should be around 5 % in alcohol. The pub is clean and friendly and I suspect that the disappointingly low score of average for the Samson is more to do the fact that it is a sweetish heavy and malty beer rather than a dry hoppy beer (which is more akin to the taste of most NW drinkers).

Walking up to the top of Castle Street we arrived at the Grapes, the first of three Robinsons pubs we were to visit that evening. This is a basic but busy locals pub with a lounge, bar and pool table. Tonight the atmosphere was boisterous but in no way intimidating. For my taste the pub was too smokey, and no doubt this has contributed to the badly yellowing paintwork. In comparison with the pubs we had just left the Grapes stands out as badly in need of redecoration, and if not addressed soon this may lose them trade to their competitors. Although previously a Good Beer Guide pub, the quality of the beers has recently dipped slightly and this was reflected in the scores with both mild and bitter scoring between average and good.

Diagonally across Edgeley roundabout is the Armoury, another Robinsons pub and one that has been much less spoilt over the years than the Grapes. It still retains its three separate rooms with mostly original fittings and in terms of the fabric of the pub is probably one of the best in Edgeley (the other being the Alexandra). This pub has been in the same family now for many years and this shows in the intimacy of the pub and in its warm welcome. Obviously clean and well run, the pub is superbly traditional and so it was not surprisingly very busy on our visit. In terms of beer, the mild and bitter were both good (the best of the night so far) amply justifying its current Good Beer Guide entry.

Just a few yards away was our next port of call, the Swan on Shaw Heath. Despite its marvelous traditional exterior, the interior is a bit of a disappointment as it is now a one room pub with a central bar. Even though it was now 10:30 on a Friday night, the pub was virtually empty so our large group had no difficulty in finding a seat. In an attempt to appeal to someone (anyone?) the pub has tried a few gimmicks like the Irish signpost to B'eal Atha Bhearaigh, obviously with limited success. The Swan is a Vaux pub selling Samson, Mild and Wards Bitter each of which was thought to be average or just above average. What certainly lets the pub down is the deceptive and deplorable practice of selling keg Scrumpy Jack by fake hand pump - the Swan certainly won't make any friends in CAMRA until this method of dispense is changed.

Further down Shaw Heath we reached our final port of call, the Florist, a pub that has only recently changed hands. The new owners have revitalised the pub and it now seems to be a much more welcoming and appealing place. On our visit the refurbishment process was in progress with new toilets being built and the back room being replastered. Although a fine old pub, it was ruined some years ago by the removal of doors and the introduction of ugly archways. I do hope that the renovations will look to reinstate some of its original features. This is another locals pub and due to its large size it never seems to be that busy although I am sure this is deceptive. The Florist is another Robinsons pub and under its present owners the beer quality has improved noticeably over recent months. Tonight the bitter was good with the mild trailing behind only slightly but still considered to be above average.

And so endeth another stagger. Quite a mixed bag this month with a couple of outstanding pubs in the likes of Sir Robert Peel and the Armoury that are definitely worth a try, and one or two others that are perhaps not. As ever the comments made in this article are those of a small group of people on the night ... blah blah blah...

Off the Hook

One of the most noticeable declines within pubs over the last few years, and indeed one of the most lamented, has been the demise of coat-hooks, and more especially the disappearance of a proper coat-and-hat stand. Time was when every pub would have a place to hang your coat and hat, and leave your walking stick or umbrella, to be collected on your way out. Sadly this is such a rare sight nowadays that it is indeed a pleasant surprise to find any coats hanging up at all.

While it is no longer the norm for every gentleman to wear a hat, there is still a need for somewhere for people to put their coats. All too often we see coats stuffed under seats or, even worse, a pile of coats in the corner taking up two or three seats. Apart from getting in the way, it doesn't do the garments any good. They may get trodden on or sat upon and the treat of a beer spillage can loom large and wet. Contents of packets can be mislaid as people grab their coats at the end of the evening.

Of course, the hanging coats give the opportunistic thief a bigger temptation than he needs to delve into pockets and rummage for goodies. But when the whole pub (as in the case of the Woolpack in Stockport) takes care that no-one untoward goes near the coats, either by watching it or being near it, the threat of pickpockets is greatly reduced. And at the White House in Manchester, the hooks are so rarely needed, that using them may cause interest. Let's get back to civilised drinking, and bring back the coat-hook and hat-stand!

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Beartown Brews up a Treat

Brewing has returned to Congleton after a break of more than 100 years - the Beartown brewery commenced brewing in the middle of March and the first brew went on commercial sale on Friday 24th.

Opening Times paid Beartown a visit the very next day to get the low-down on this latest entrant to the micro-brewing scene.

The brewery is the brainchild of Ian Burns and Andy Millican who are at present running the brewery in their spare time. Both live locally although Andy hails from Yorkshire originally. In common with many of the new-wave of brewers, Beartown is the end result of many years of enthusiastic home-brewing, mainly on the part of Ian who takes the role of head brewer at Beartown and who has some 20 years home-brewing experience behind him.

The decision to set up commercially was taken late last year and was followed by the purchase of a local industrial unit, formerly used as a garage which meant a mammoth cleaning exercise before the 10-barrel capacity brewing plant could be installed. The plant itself is a very compact set-up and was installed by Ian, Andy and a variety of friends who willingly lent a hand.

The brewery's name is rooted in Congleton's local history. Apparently when the town was granted Borough status in 1272 the three main town officials were the mayor, the ale-taster and the bear warden whose job it was to provide bears for the local fairs and fetes. One year this unfortunate official has insufficient funds to buy the bear and so raided the town's bible fund, a scandal in those days and one which earned the town the 'Beartown' epithet.

Just one beer is currently produced - SB, a 1042/4.2% best bitter. Named after Samuel Bull, a local farmer, this is a superbly drinkable beer. It's brewed using Maris Otter malt with some crystal malt and, unusually, 10% wheat. This latter seems to add an undefinable yet definitely detectable extra dimension to the beer. The hop variety is Challenger and whole hops are used. Like many other of the more successful micro-brewers Ian hasn't tried to copy any other beer style but has simply set out to brew a beer that he like to drink himself. The result is an enormously satisfying full-bodied hoppy beer with a lingering hoppy aftertaste. It's one of those beers you will still be able to taste as you get back home from the pub.



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Andy Millican and Ian Burns toast their new brewery

It certainly went down a storm at its first outing at the Durham Ox in Congleton where the locals demolished a nine-gallon barrel in just one hour. About half a dozen other outlets are in the pipeline including the Station in Ashton.

Plans for future additions to the range are not yet definite although one distinct possibility is a 5.5% winter ale due to be called Th'Underback.

The intention is to keep deliveries local for the time being, although this is intended to encompass Stockport and Manchester. Beartown Brewery can be contacted on 01260 299964.

New Brew News

New beers come thick and fast these days, on draught and in bottle. The latest we hear of come from national or regional brewers, rather than the micros.

Whitbread are bringing out their latest 'Single Varietal Beer' - Scarlet Lady. These beers from Whitbread seem to be getting stranger and stranger. This one is flavoured with juniper berries and takes its inspiration from a traditional beer from rural Finland. Watch for it in the usual outlets - the Crown, Heaton Lane was taking delivery as we went to press.

Scottish & Newcastle, one of the more reticent brewers when it comes to new beers, are bringing out **two** new cask beers - McEwans Export and McEwans 90/-. No news yet of what these are like. Regional brewers Marstons, by contrast, have become very enterprising with their Head Brewer's Choice range of special beers. Some of these have found their way into bottle, the two latest being Burton Strong Pale Ale and Oyster Stout. The Pale Ale was first brewed in 1913 and comes in at a hefty 6.2%ABV, a more traditional strength for this type of beer. Oyster Stout is 4.5% and is the first of the bottled Head Brewer's Choice beers to be bottle conditioned. Let's hope more follow this most welcome development

Thumbs Up in Angel Meadow

Whilst the Beer House and the Marble Arch are well known drinkers pubs, hidden between the two is one of the now unsung gems of the Manchester drinking scene - the Harp & Shamrock on New Mount Street - you will see it set back just off Rochdale Road.



For many years this pub, nicknamed the 'Thumbs-up' was a national Good Beer Guide regular, 'the effort to find rewards the searcher' was the intriguing entry as at that time it was hidden away behind surrounding warehousing. The passage of time has seen the demolition of the nearby buildings and as the pub was revealed to the public gaze, so its reputation amongst local drinkers seemed to decline.

It still suffers from a relative lack of custom at times but the Harp & Shamrock is once again a pub worth making the effort to visit. The spiral of decline was halted in November 1993 with the arrival of Liz Bowman who came from an 11 month stint at the Gorton Arms, her first pub. The pub has been cleaned up and redecorated, the beer, Marstons Bitter and Pedigree, is first class, and trade has trebled since her arrival. The beer is complemented by simple yet good value lunchtime and early evening food - pies, toasties and soup are all 70p and on Friday lunchtimes these will be joined by the likes of Chicken Curry for £1.50.

Liz came to the pub as a temporary licensee but now looks set for a longer stay and Opening Times certainly wishes her well. The Angel Meadow area of the city once boasted many pubs like the Harp & Shamrock. Many have vanished and those that remain have found well-deserved prosperity as freehouses. Arguably the 'Thumbs Up' is the only old-style ale house remaining and deserves support. So, next time you're en route from the Marble to the Beer House, or vice versa, make that short detour and support a living example of Manchester's public house tradition - you certainly won't be disappointed.

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The Bar, Chorlton

Like it or not, we are part of Europe and all members of the EEC (at least for the time being until the next Government U turn). "Well so what" you might say, "it hardly effects me as I only drink British real ales". You may have a point, but the level of influence the European Community has on our lives and on our drinking habits is increasing all the time, and it is now significant.

Forget for a moment all the bad things that you have heard about Europe, such as European beer giants Heineken and others, and the grossly unfair difference in duty levels across Europe which have heavily penalised so many of our local breweries in favour of cheap European imported keg beers; but now consider for a moment some of the good things. Of these, the main one in recent years has been the widening availability of quality Belgian and German bottled conditioned beers which are now increasingly finding their way into some of the pubs and restaurants in our area.

One place that has taken advantage of this availability and offers a wide selection of such beers is "the Bar" at 533 Wilbraham Road (opposite Safeways) in Chorlton. It has only been open around six months and in that short space of time it has received a growing reputation for its beers and its



high quality but value for money meals. In short an ideal candidate for a Pub Grub review.

Dont be misled, whilst in essence it is a 'cafe bar' it also sells a couple of real ales as well. This may in part be due to the influence of Vance Debecheval, the owner, who also runs the Marble Arch in Manchester and Marble Arch World Beers. The two cask conditioned beers (which change regularly) that were on sale on our visit were Ruddles Bitter (£1-30) and Courage Directors (£1-65), the latter was in very good condition whilst I reserved judgement on the former as no one in our party tried it.

The Bar's menu is interesting if not the most extensive I have ever seen. Whilst its always nice to have a good choice of meals, by far the more important thing is the quality of the meals that are on offer. Todays menu included dishes such as all day breakfast £3-50, vegetarian fry up £3-00, sausage dinner (cumberland, garlic, or vegetarian sausages) with mash £3-00, vegetarian curry with couscous or baked potatoes or homemade chips £3-50, beef and vegetable stew in guinness with red cabbage and chips or mash £3-50, and chicken courgettes, with tomatoes, and onions in a jerk sauce £3-50. For anyone wanting something lighter, omelettes with 'todays' filling, salad and chips were available at £2-50, open sandwiches with chips at £2-50, and a childrens menu at £1-75. Daily specials, and extras such as garlic bread £1-00 and tea and coffee (both £0-80) are also on offer. For those that cannot make up their mind from such a list there is something called a 'hotch potch' available which I take it is a mix of the dishes available on the day.

For this review I was joined by two friends, neither of which, despite living very close, had visited the Bar before. "Id seen it, but not had the time or occasion to try it" seemed to be the excuse. In view of how busy 'the Bar' was (booking is recommended Friday and Saturday evenings) our meals were served quickly. We tried the beef (nice, good quality meat and sauce), the vegetarian curry which came with celery, onions, peppers and soya mince (excellent), and the chicken (very pleasant, good meat content with enough spices to constitute a mild curry).

And finally, we could not of course leave the Bar without trying trying a foreign beer (or two). There is an impressive range including Duvel, Chimay, DeTroch, Timmermans, Rochefort, Liefmans, and Hoegarden to mention just a few. Starting at around £1-85 and then going up, prices may seem high but it must be remembered that most of these beers start at more than double the strength of standard British beers and go up in strength. As an after dinner drink my Hoegarden Wit gave a most pleasant light and refreshing end to the meal and I can thoroughly recommend it (eat your heart out Jilly Goulden!). **SB**



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It's Grim Down South

You don't know how lucky you are. On a recent visit to Brighton, I encountered the following horror stories. In a Harvey's tied house in the middle of town their XX Mild (3.0%ABV) was on offer at a staggering £1.60 a pint. The prices went on and up from there and, while the beer was very good, £1.88 for Harvey's Porter (4.3%ABV) takes more than the Mickey. Harvey's is a respected independent brewer, around the same size as Hyde's [?]. The only reason for these astronomical prices can be greed, and without the presence of a keen under-cutter such as Holt's, who keep the lid on over-pricing, the local boys will keep on getting away with murder.

But more was to come. A 5.6%ABV guest beer was on offer in a Good Beer Guide listed free-house at a mere £1.95. Shell out for one round and that's your evening's spending done in a matter of minutes. Another GBG pub proudly advertised its guest beer as "Boddingtons Bitter, from Manchester in the North". Blimey, home-from-home I thought. Not that I would drink Boddies in Brighton. The price? £1.84. And it wasn't very good either. (I had a taste - 14pence worth).

The gold-plated, diamond-encrusted "high" light of the trip was at the Sanctuary cafe bar, where arty types meet for deep-and-meaningfuls. Bottled Budvar (the only half-decent beer on offer) cost an arm-and-leg (and your back teeth probably) £2.50. I had just the one bottle in over two hours. While it is well known that prices down south are higher than those up'ere in't North, the Brighton rip-off competes actively with central London (where cheap(ish) beer can be found).

I remember the days when you could get ten pints of Holts, and have enough change for a bag of chips on the way home, all for a tenner.....

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CAMRA CALLING!

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	April 95	April 95
	<p>Monday 10th - Social, Ye Olde Woolpack, Brinksway, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Thursday 13th - Monthly branch meeting and branch AGM. Upstairs room, the Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 8.00pm. All members should attend this important meeting.</p> <p>Friday 21st - Offerton Stagger. Start 7.00pm Golden Hind, Marple Road; meet 8.30pm Fingerpost, Hempshaw Lane.</p> <p>Monday 24th - Social, Sidings, Broom Lane, Levenshulme. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Thursday 27th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Travellers Call, Hyde Road (see article on page 2.)</p> <p>Saturday 29th - trip to Rhyl Beer Festival. Catch 10.17 train from Piccadilly.</p> <p>Sunday 30th - Sunday lunch social. Trad Irish music at the Ducie, Devas Street, (Behind the University) followed by a curry.</p>	<p>Monday 1st May - Social, Adswold Hotel, Adswold Lane West, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p><i>High Peak branch covers Romiley, Marple, Bredbury, Woodley and all points north. They have notified Opening Times of the following events:</i></p> <p>Monday 10th - Monthly branch meeting, Bowling Green Marple. Aim to get there by 8.30pm.</p> <p>Saturday 22nd - Stockport Hillgate crawl. Meet Blossoms, London Rd (A6) 8.00pm. Bowling Green, Charles Street 8.30pm.</p> <p>Saturday 30th - "Woods Walk". Meet New Mills Newton station at 9.45am, finish Navigation, Buxworth.</p> <p>Friday 12th May - advance notice of Wards brewery trip. Contact Frank Wood on 01457 865426.</p>

FORTHCOMING BEER FESTIVALS

May 12 - 13 Macclesfield Beer Festival, Macclesfield Rugby Club, Priory Lane, Macclesfield. Advance Tickets £5 (inc Glass, programme and one pint+ extra pint for CAMRA members. For ticket details see advert on page...

Apr 28 -30 Rhyl Beer Festival, Rhyl Town Hall, 45 Real ales from North Wales & South West England. Thurs, Fri, Sat 6 - 11 & 12 - 4 Fri & Sat



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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

13

RHYTHM and BOOZE

by Richard Hough

How was St Patrick's Day for you? No-one celebrates like the Irish, and this is certainly true at the two O'Shea's Irish pubs in Manchester. On the actual night I was elsewhere, but I managed to pop down just before and just after, for a couple of great nights out.

The first O'Shea's is the former Lancaster tavern on the corner of Whitworth Street and Princess Street. They have done wonders with this place, from being one of the most desperate to one of the most happening pubs in town, in a very short space of time. A fine horse-shoe bar serves a large, bare-board pub, and you can bet it'll be busy; even though there were at least half a dozen bar staff, service was still slow, there were THAT many people in!

A simple yet highly effective P.A. makes sure the whole place is aware of the live band, so don't go to O'Shea's for a quiet drink. Talking of which.....The only real ale on offer is Tetley Bitter, and while the beer itself is not too bad, a vicious swan-neck and super-tight sparkler knocked all the condition out of the beer. Be warned, it's a little pricey too.

The Guinness, though, is rather good. Like the other O'Shea's, it IS keg, but it IS closer to the Irish stuff than anywhere else in Manchester, it is pulled slowly, and has a shamrock shape in the head. Large heads were common, on both bitter

and Guinness, and this despite a top-up. The staff, though, look very smart in Guinness aprons and bow-ties.

Less smart, but with more about them, were the Wild Colonial Boys. With an average age of hmmm...they remained sitting down, yet they exuded a real stage presence. The assembled masses were expecting some fine music, and they were not to be disappointed. The band just came across SO well. Irish music such as this has been described by someone I know as "that twiddly-diddly, plinky-plonk stuff", but this simply does not do it justice. It is lively, get-up-and-dance tunes that had a heaving O'Shea's really rocking. Even the LV's red patent shoes couldn't outshine the music. The first set ended with the inevitable 'Whiskey in the Jar'.

The pub has played host to some big names on the Irish scene, but rarely has a night like this been seen. It just got fuller and fuller. A cover of the Pogues' 'Fairytale of New York' in the second set was well received, and the Boys were in their element. Six dead sound, down-to-earth blokes playing some of the finest Irish music. No word of a lie.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Having recovered from a riotous St Patrick's Day, things were a little calmer at O'Shea's II the following evening. The pub is situated on Chester Street (off Oxford Rd opposite the BBC) below a student hall of residence (a marketing ploy if ever....). It has only been open six months and opening night was one to remember: Ireland's finest, Stockton's Wing, provided the main entertainment, while the rather excellent Ban-shee played in a marquee outside. There was a live link-up with Manchester Irish Radio, Big Jack Charlton gave the pub his blessing and Curly from 'The Street' turned up. Six months later....

The only cask ale on the bar was Tetley Bitter, which wasn't too bad, (but it wasn't overwhelmingly good either). Ind Coope Burton Ale is usually on offer but apparently sold out last night. The Guinness, however, is on a par with that at the other O'Shea's, and subsequently some of the best you'll get in Manchester. But £1.84 for a 4.2% pint is, to say the least, a little steep. The service is friendly and efficient, and as smart as at the first one. The food, Irish of course, is good, with Oysters in Guinness particularly recommended.

The crowd was fairly thin, perhaps due to the excesses of last night, but perhaps because there is a lot of good Irish music to be had in Manchester at the moment; we were competing with the Palace in Levenshulme and St Brendan's Irish Centre to name but two. At O'Shea's II, Deolali, a six-piece combo, took to the stage, to rippled applause. The singer had great stage presence, but had minor problems hitting the high notes. The second song was dedicated to Saint Pat, and they were warming up nicely.



What is it with the Irish? Crude jokes about new pieces of equipment were followed with references to courgettes(!) They did their version of 'Going Down to Liverpool' with some aplomb. Toes tapped and heads nodded, and young and old all

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appreciated it. We all recognised most of the songs, where electric and acoustic were well mixed. "I'll Be There" included an infectious (obviously) plinky-plonk bit, while the following number started off well and finished in a frenzied blur. Then Madge and the 'resident dancers' got up and strutted their stuff to the Ukrainian-style ditty "Let's Dance". The banjo/ukulele player took the mike for a fast, lively version of 'The Irish Rover'. The party had started. A respite allowed us to the bar, and it was off again....

We wanted a stonker, and the Pogues' "Fiesta" did the job nicely, with many a 'whoop' and a 'wey'. A raucous "Whiskey in the Jar" followed later in the set, and the 'craic' carried on well after I left. These boys did it for fun, and they weren't the only ones to have a good time. Every night's March 17 down at O'Shea's if you want it. Go for the music and not the beer and you won't be disappointed.
Cead Mile Failte Agus Failte Romhat A Chairde, as they say in Ireland.

Courage Axe Historic Beer?

It looks as though Courage Brewing are to axe one of Britain's most historic beers - bottle-conditioned Imperial Russian Stout. When the organisers of CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival tried to order the beer for the August event, they were told "we no longer retail that". Confirmation was being sought as OT went to press, but with Courage rumoured to be split up between Whitbread and Scottish & Newcastle in the near future, the fear must be that this extraordinary beer, with a history dating back to Russian Empress Catherine the Great, has been sacrificed on the altar of corporate short-termism.

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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

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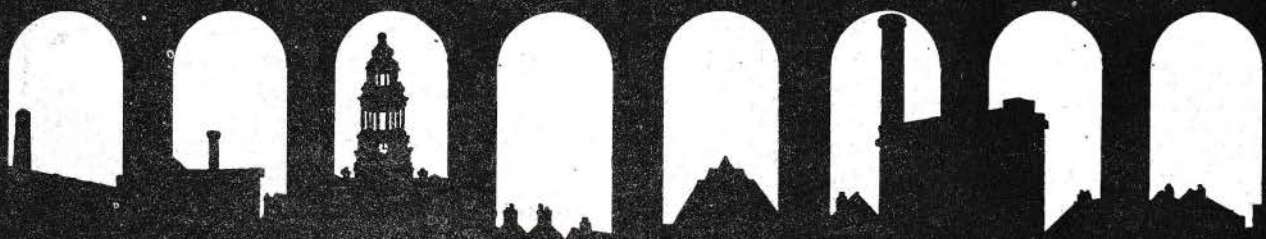
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CURMUDGEON



If you're planning to enjoy all-day Sunday drinking this summer, or indeed any Sunday drinking at all, steer well clear of the district of Dwyfor in north-west Wales, where you still can't drink legally in a pub at any time on a Sunday. Until 1961, all the pubs in Wales were closed on Sundays. In that year, a system of local referendums was introduced, held every seven years. The first round immediately opened the pubs in most of the country, and since then Sunday opening has progressively spread to all of Wales except for this one district.

In the name of deregulation, the government has said that the 1996 referendum will be the last, and if Dwyfor votes to stay dry on Sundays then (or indeed any other district chooses to go back to it), then it will stay dry for eternity. Isn't this one issue where a bit of high-handed action would be welcome, to sweep away this expensive and anachronistic system? The turnout in these referendums is generally very low, and it's a case of a small and fanatical minority trying to impose its narrow-minded Victorian values on the rest of the community.

Sunday closing in Wales has anyway always been a hypocritical business. Private clubs have been allowed to sell alcohol, and lock-ins in pubs have not been entirely unknown, so the locals have been able to get a drink if they wanted, but it's the tourists who suffer. Considering the degree to which the economy of Dwyfor depends on tourism, it's a shame they get such a grudging welcome. One can understand (but not condone) some residual resentment against the English, but when modern tourists in North Wales are just as likely to come from Holland, Germany and Denmark, are the Welsh not guilty of cutting off their nose to spite their face?

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

What was the political colour of the government that finally brought Sunday opening to Wales? The same as that of the only Chancellor since the war to actually reduce beer duty (in 1959). And the same as the party which brought you all-day opening and guest beers in the 1980s. That's right - unpalatable as it may be to many left-inclined members of CAMRA - it's the Conservatives, not Labour, who have introduced real reforms to improve the drinker's lot.

Historically, the left in British politics have supported the cause of "temperance", while the Right have defended the rights of the drinking public. It was the radical Liberal, Lloyd George, after all, who introduced licensing restrictions during the first World War. Fittingly, when he was raised to the peerage, he took the title Earl Lloyd George of Dwyfor. Even today, there is a strong residual prejudice on the Labour benches that the working man would be better off at home reading Fabian tracts than down the pub swilling ale.

It's very doubtful whether a Labour government during the 1980's would have shown the same enthusiasm as the Tories for liberalising licensing laws. Labour haven't exactly been very vocal on the need to reduce beer duty in Britain to save our brewing industry, and a majority of them voted against extending Sunday hours. And take any potential piece of future anti-drink legislation, from restricting alcohol advertising to bringing in even harsher laws against drink-driving, and it's impossible to imagine Labour taking a softer line than the Tories.

Anyone casting their vote purely on the basis of what it will do for the man or woman in the pub demonstrates a rather blinkered viewpoint. But if you do make that your yardstick for where to put your cross, there's only one way to go, and that's to the right.

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

MARCH '90

The front page brought good and bad news, concerning the battle to save two pubs which were in the way of the city's new Light Transit scheme. First the good news - the historic Coach & Horses had been reprieved after a year-long battle to save it from the bulldozers. But the bad news was that a serious fire had damaged the Castle & Falcon - but it had been weatherproofed and declared structurally sound.

There were two items about local brewers Hydes. The Victoria on Wilmslow Rd in Withington had been selected for the Pub of the Month award for April 1990. It was described as "one of the few genuine community locals in an area of the city which was more and more given over to 'style bars'." The other item was about guest beers - a few Hyde's pubs were taking Carlton lager, following an agreement with Warrington based Tetley Walker, and in return Hyde's Bitter was in two of Tetley's managed houses - the Bold Arms in Southport and, closer to home, the Manor House in Withington, where it was a welcome addition to the range. There was no information available as to whether the scheme would be extended to more pubs.

There was news of yet another of Grand Met's disastrous conversions being changed back into a proper pub. This was the "plastic American Bar" called Drakes, which had become the Golden Hind once again, with a traditional layout of lounge, snug, and vault/games room.

Stockport Labour Club reported a remarkable success with its changeover from keg beers to real ale, even though the Whitbread reps. did their best to dissuade them because of the risk of a "low turnover". The Club tried a few beers from the Whitbread stable, and finally settled on Thwaite's Bitter - although it was originally supplied by Whitbread, it could be obtained more cheaply direct from Thwaites, so the committee decided to sever the Whitbread tie. Further beers were being considered, and a mini beer festival was being planned for the Autumn.

Finally there was advance notification of two local beer festivals :- the 4th Great North Western Beer Festival, to be held at Bolton Sports & Exhibition Centre 9th - 13th May, with over 150 beers and ciders; - the 4th Stockport Beer Festival, to be held at the Masonic Guildhall 31st May - 2nd June, with over 50 beers.

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...Pub Ne b News... News...P ...Pub Ne b News... News...P	HIGH PEAK & NORTH EAST CHESHIRE WITH TIM JONES CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE 
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A fruitful month for pub news signals the end of winter hibernation of the local membership. Starting in Hyde, the Wellington on Manchester Road re-opened last month after being closed for some time. This former Whitbread pub is now a free house serving Burtonwood Bitter and Top Hat alongside the competitively priced Holts Bitter (£1.00) on handpump. It has been renovated but unaltered and comprises a lounge and vault separated by central bar. Those of you who are old enough will remember this pub was some 10ish years ago the entire tied estate of the short lived Failsworth Brewery and stands opposite the Whitegates which was one of the "select few" CAMRA owned pubs - and the least said about that particular venture the better.

In Audenshaw, **The Sun** at the junction of Shepley Road and Guide Lane has a single storey extension under construction. This, it would seem, includes a canopy area for al fresco boozing. Things are definitely looking up for the Sun since being taken over by Theakstons.

The **Spread Eagle** on Hatherlow has now re-opened (complete with Eagle silhouette painted in). The large front room has been smartened-up (it was always smart!) and the basic vault gentrified. However, the good news is that the small smoke-room at the front remains untouched and the beer range has increased to Boddingtons Mild and Bitter, Flowers IPA and one guest.

Back in Hyde, **The Queen Adelaide**, Gee Cross, a long time keg only pub has gone real. Hurrah! It is now selling Ruddles County on handpump. Also **The Cheshire Cheese** on Market Street has realised the error of its ways and is again serving Boddingtons Bitter in its traditional guise on handpump.

Up on High Lane two well-known watering holes are closed for refurb. The **Dog & Partridge** (Wilsons) is rumoured to be being converted into a Henry's Table (sigh!) and the **Red Lion** (Robbies) is undergoing a large extension - as if it's not big enough already - and is due to open as OT goes to press.

Some bad news. In Stalybridge **The Stop and Rest**, Kenworthy Street has become a Centric pub. Whilst it was serving keg Bass it is now serving er, Keg Centric! **The Friendship**, Melbourne Street is still a Centric house and whilst it boasts four handpumps none of them are connected up. Oh well.

Actually it's not all bad news. **The Buckton Castle**, Crosswood Drive is serving Worthington Best Bitter (though I feel this information has sneaked into "Pub News" under false pretences as it has had Worthies for quite a number of months).

Paul Lamb, recently managing the Star Inn Ale House, Glossop, on a temporary basis between managers, has got his own Bod.Co. Ale House, **The Union Vaults**, on Egerton Street, Chester. He moved early in March.

The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch Contact is Tim Jones (0161 371 9006 (h))

The Commercial Inn, Manor Park Rd, Glossop, has a new landlord. Malcolm Mohan, who has been steward for a few years now at Rose Green Working Mens Club across the road, has taken on the remaining 17 years of a 20 year lease whilst former popular manager Brian Greenwood has decided to retire from the trade and buy a house locally.

Up in Whitfield, Tony Stott has left the **Surrey Arms** after a three year stint there. Tony got the Surrey into the Good Beer Guide when he had a regular supply of varying guest beers on sale. However twelve months ago, when Boddingtons opened the Star as a cask ale house, the brewery limited his choice of beers severely and with a large range of beers in the vicinity, trade suffered. However, the good news is that Tony has taken over stewardship at **Whitfield Workers**, not a hundred yards away, and the general consensus in the town is that he is a good choice - and he will have the option of trying a guest beer.

We hear from a good source that the **Bulls Head** in Old Glossop is to get a place in the Good Food Guide after several recommendations.

Woods Walks

Glossop Real Ale Walkers (GRAW), partly comprising members of High Peak CAMRA, have embarked on their second year of walks reflecting on the activities of the first 12 months. Such pubs as the Colliers Arms near Hartshead Pike; the Little Mill, Rowarth; Sportsman at Strines; Bulls Head and Whiteley Nab in Glossop; Royal Hotel, Hayfield; Navigation at Buxworth and the Royal Oak at High Lane have all been visited. There are nine circular walks starting at the Quiet Woman in Earl Sterndale (we've still eight to do!). Canal walks have brought us to Marple, Disley and Stalybridge and an 11 day coast to coast walk took in pubs too numerous to mention.

Joint walks with other local members take place every eight weeks or so and they are mentioned in the Branch Diary column in Opening Times. Anyone wishing to join us on any particular week should phone Frank Wood on 01457 865426. We try and cover a variety of areas and suggestions for both routes and pubs are always welcome. A possible 25 mile Bank Holiday attempt at the Dark Peak Challenge Walk is pencilled in for Sunday May 7th as we embark on our second year.

Ken Mellor, landlord at the Quiet Woman Inn, Earl Sterndale, has embarked on an advertising campaign recently to try to boost trade, mentioning free range eggs, local cheese and famous Wardles pork pies being for sale on the bar. I spotted it in a local East Midlands free paper as well as picking one up in his pub off the bar recently. What he didn't mention in his plugs was the contents of a Marstons blackboard propped up outside the pub wall informing customers that he was selling manure at £1 a bag. That should really pull them in!

Incidentally, also at one of our classic pubs in the branch, Ken informed me that he is trying to encourage children by making it known that they can look around the outside where he has donkeys, Iron Age pigs, rabbits, hens, ducks, turkeys and geese. There is also parking available for touring caravans, caravettes and camping. Walks locally include Downhall Dale, the strenuous Chrome Hill (GRAW did it last month), High Edge, High Wheeldon, Hitter Hill and over the river Dove to Staffordshire and Hollinclough, Longnor, Newtown and Sheen. Finally and most significantly, the Quiet Woman Inn has been in the Good Beer Guide continually since 1976. A further point of interest for your diaries is early in June when the village holds its carnival, and the pub erects a beer tent on the green with a group on and a disco etc. Details from Ken on 01298 83211.



BEER BORES

The latest in our occasional series featuring the worst of the verbally challenged comes from Small Beer, the magazine of the Beer Lovers Club run by SIBA, the Small Independent Brewers Association. One of the breweries mentioned is Freeminer, which will be known to some OT readers as it was set up by ex-local brewers Chris Lewis of the Flea & Firkin and Don Burgess of West Coast. Don seems to have come over all mystic... "Don Burgess is currently experimenting with a new musical accompaniment to his fermenting process. The beer is already being treated to the strains of the Blues which gives 'a higher alpha-acid yield'....The latest batch however is being treated to a mixture of Blues, Cajun and Zydeco.

Whether this will interfere with the Ley lines upon which the brewery is situated remains to be seen. Don believes he is currently harnessing Druidic earth energies in the brewing process."

Like, far out, man...

Steam Fair at the Little Mill Inn

After last year's successful Steam Fair, the Little Mill Inn is running the event again. The dates are the weekend of May 13th and 14th.

Amongst the events there are vintage cars, a weird and wonderful collection of steam engines and you can take a second mortgage out for a helicopter ride.

There is an Old Time fair in the pub grounds and various stalls. Other entertainment is provided by the Stockport Morris Men and the Gorton Morris Men and also present is a brass band.

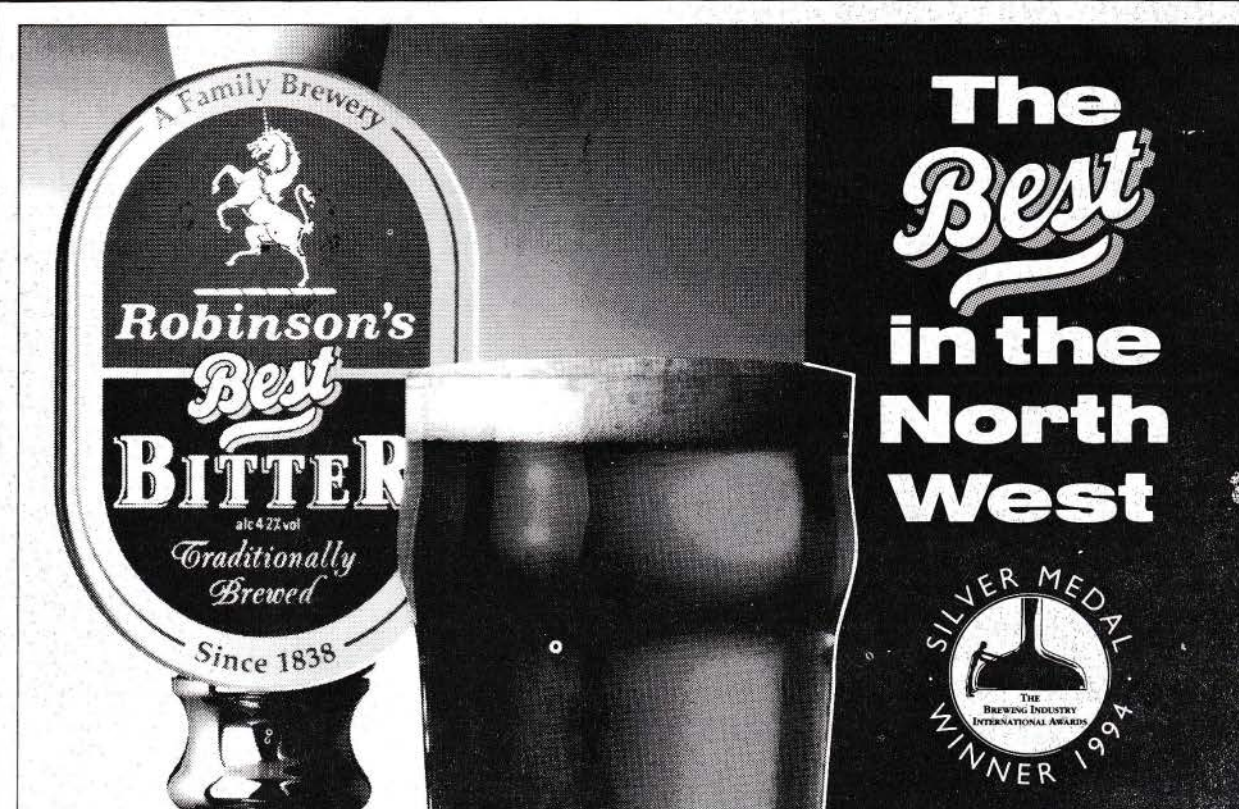
Chris Barnes runs a small farm by day and is an enthusiastic landlord by night, running a large, comfortable pub with good food all day and a good choice of beers, three from the Banks's stable, namely Banks's bitter, Hansons Black Country bitter and Camerons Strongarm as well as Marstons Pedigree and recently introduced ever-changing unusual guest beer; when I was there Shepherd Neame Bishops Finger was in fine form. All beers are on handpump Last year's Steam Fair was a huge success and this year's promises to be just as good.

Apart from the Steam Fair attractions, there is also a huge, fully working water-wheel that Chris Barnes had built and installed a few years ago.

All in all it is an event not to be missed.

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West Coast Ales - Chris Tucker goes drinking in San Francisco

If you are in a city in which a bar can proudly claim that it serves the coldest beer in town (Budweiser at 35 degrees F) then you might be justified in thinking you were in a city that does not normally value beer for its taste. Your opinion might be confirmed by the knowledge that, not content with Budweiser, Anheuser Busch have developed Budweiser LITE.

However, a week's stay in San Francisco made it clear that for a certain section of the population at least such an opinion is false. It is very evident that there are a number of small breweries in the USA producing a variety of different beers in a variety of different styles - lagers, ales, porters, wheat beers, white beers, stouts and fruit beers. In San Francisco there are at least 14 bars where a selection of these small breweries' beers can be tasted (at least in the August/September edition of the Celebrator Beer News - editorial written by Roger Protz).

I can make no claim to have visited even half of these but of the ones I did I particularly remember The Tornado at 547 Haight Street - described in the same Celebrator Beer News as 'A funky, no nonsense bar' and the Bierhaus on Broadway (373 Broadway). This bar, which doubles as a restaurant is a lighter, airier place than the Tornado, more open to the outside world and its bar staff were friendly enough to indulge the whims of a foreigner who asked that his beer be not served in a glass taken from the fridge.

The Bierhaus claims to have 30 different beers on tap. Clearly such a degree of choice indicates that these beers are not cask-conditioned. In fact here as in other bars, the



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few that are cask-conditioned are clearly labelled as such and are likely to be served through a handpump or from the cask. Each tap, whether cask or otherwise, has its own pump label and sometimes its own distinctive pump handle. The variety of heights, labels and angles of display present

you with such a confusion of choice that I can only believe that they were installed after the bar owner had tasted all that was to be sold the following day.

I also visited four brewpubs in the city. The most upmarket was Sankt Gallen (333 Bush Street) which is really a sushi restaurant (Cafe Pacifica) with a bar in front. Definitely not a place for the session drinker. I found their beers (a Pale Ale, an Amber Ale and a Dark Ale) too delicately flavoured to survive the chilling.

A drinker feels more at home at Gordon Biersch (2 Harrison Street) which describes itself as a Brewery Restaurant. It sits under the Bay Bridge (not far from the Old Post Office building which has some surprisingly socialist murals in its main wall). Its beers appealed to me more (Export, Marzen a n d Dunkles)...and I bought the T-shirt.



For beers more akin to the English style and places that are nearer in feel to a pub or a beer hall then you need to go to the San Francisco Brewery Company (155 Columbus Avenue - not far from the Bierhaus) and 20 Tank Brewery (316 11th Street). Both have fine wooden bars and two or three standard beers with an additional one or two that celebrate a particular event or try out a different beer style. The beers have a fuller flavour than the two other breweries and are also less chilled. As in many of the bars the food is also worth ordering - very tasty and in large quantities.

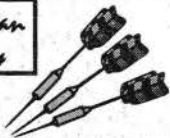
So, yes, San Francisco is a city worth visiting for itself alone but for a beer drinker it does have even further attractions.



Items intended for review should be sent to the Editor at the address on page 5.

Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



The 1995 Embassy Final, shown live on television, attracted 4.63 million viewers. It was the fifth most watched programme on BBC2 for the first week of the year. The audience was twice as large as that for the Oprah Winfrey Show on the same channel.

It was an improvement over the previous years final of more than a million viewers. And, significantly, was close to the figure for the 1993 final, the last before the so-called defection of the big names.

The situation was similar on Sky, who were showing the alternative World Championships, the WDC Proton Cars competition. Viewing figures for the satellite channels are difficult to interpret. After all, hundreds of viewers could be watching the same set in pubs and clubs. What we do know, though, is that only football returned higher figures on the sports channels.

Yet darts continue to be a bridesmaid at the wedding of other games as far as TV is concerned. It will probably be next year before the game returns to terrestrial television sets.

On a world wide basis the game is still growing, with much the same excitement we, in this country, experienced in the seventies and eighties.

Dutch postman Raymond Barneveld made his way to the finals by ferry. After finishing runner-up to Richie Burnett in the finals, KLM gave him a free VIP flight home. When he arrived at the airport over 1000 fans gave him a Beatles style welcome.

A dozen European TV crews were in evidence at Frimley Green. The growth in the game's popularity must raise the hackles of its critics. I just wish the BBC and Granada would take heed.

Next year's Embassy finals will be open to women for the first time. The top eight women in the BDO ranking list will be invited to the qualifying tournament. And those not invited will have the opportunity of qualifying via the County play-offs.

Realistically, it is doubtful whether this will have any great effect on the finals. Many top class male darters have never made the final rounds of the World Championship. Only, perhaps, Deta Hedman and Mandy Solomons would have an outside chance of qualifying.

Maybe it would have been fairer if the BDO had initiated a separate Women's World Championship. Women play an important role in darts at all levels, and I am sure that the interest is there for such a tournament.

To understand the commitment that many women give to the game let me tell the story of June Worsley. June, who runs the successful mixed team at Heaton Chapel's George & Dragon recently helped her side to a cup giant-killing act over Dilke Sports Club in the team knock-out.

Within 12 hours she was in labour in Stepping Hill, where she gave birth to baby Rhys. Congratulations to June and also to dad Mark.

Youth darts has been sadly neglected in the north for a good many years. However, Cheshire were able to put a team into the newly-formed "Association of Northern Darts Organisations" youth tournament at Bolton recently.

Other events are planned in Yorkshire, Northumberland, Staffordshire and, of course, Cheshire this spring and summer.

Cheshire manager Alan Roebuck is getting a side together to represent Stockport, and also Cheshire, of under-21's players of either sex. He can be contacted on 480 2372. Let's hope some budding champions of the future can be found.

THINKING

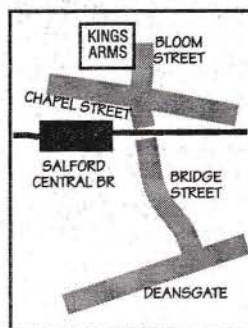
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The Dog & Partridge, Didsbury, was due to be selling beers from Orkney Brewery in the first week of April.

Following on from a recent OT article on IPA-style beers, the **Bottle Stop** in Bramhall will be offering Fullers IPA as its take-home draught beer in early April. While there you can also choose from an excellent range of British and foreign bottled beers, since the Bottle Stop is one of the best specialist off-licenses in the area. Well worth a visit.

For the duration of the Stockport Mild Challenge the Bromale in Bramhall will probably be offering Highgate Dark as a guest. It will retail at the current price of the keg Bass XXXX Mild, which it will replace for the 4 weeks. If things go well we could see a cask mild in the Brom permanently, which will be no bad thing.

Down at the **Archer** in Hazel Grove Jan and Dave recently celebrated 12 months at the pub. In that time they have turned it round from being one of the most troublesome spots to one of the most comfortable pubs in the Grove. Decent Robinsons Best Bitter and Hatters Mild are available and the transformed beer garden (open from Easter) is well worth checking out.

The refurbishment at the High Grove (Silverdale Road,

Gatley) completed (almost) to schedule, just in time to miss the deadline for the February issue of OT. The new decoration is low-key: pleasant and comfortable - just right for this estate pub. There's nothing flash or gimmicky: no "theme" or piles of bric-a-brac. The interior extensions (a darts area with a very vaultish feel, and a family room) are proving popular. The exterior is more attractive and welcoming, with better signage, new pitched roofs, a paved patio, and the promise of some landscaping and shrubbery. In summary, it is an all-round improvement, liked by the pub's customers.

Two central Stockport pubs are currently closed - the Gladstone as reported last month is still shut as is the Hole i'th'Wall where substantial building work is being carried out in the living quarters. No news yet as to when the pub will be re-opening.

At the Grey Horse, Old Road, Heaton Norris, Young's Bitter hasn't been sold for some weeks while at the nearby Ash on Manchester Road, Holts Bitter remains on sale, and reportedly in good condition, too.

Janet Whitehead from Marble Arch World Beers in Chorlton tells us that she has taken delivery of a pallet of bottle conditioned Luxters Barn Ale. That's 55 cases at 20 bottles a case. Naturally she is quite keen to shift as much as possible. If you want to order some phone Marble Arch World Beers on 881 9206.

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MANCHESTER MATTERS



by Rhys Jones

Sadly, real ale did not last long at Sam Smith's Blue Bell in Levenshulme, and the pub is once again keg only. With the brewery's keg products, which the regulars were used to, up against a lone handpump for Old Brewery Bitter, it was probably always an unequal struggle, but it's a shame to see a perfectly good pub lose its only real point of interest for the serious beer drinker.

Also in Levenshulme, the Polygon has gained handpumped OB Bitter (now brewed by Burtonwood under to contract to Whitbread, primarily for the former Oldham Brewery pubs of the Boddington Pub Company); the Horseshoe has lost its real mild; and Hennigans has gained handpumped Marstons Pedigree.

In Gorton, former Bass pub the Birch Arms (since the loss of the Railway, the closest former Openshaw Brewery pub to that brewery's site) now sells Ruddles Bitter, John Smiths Bitter, and Courage Directors on handpump. Despite the fairly standard beer range, the pub does seem to be enjoying a new lease of life, and all-day breakfasts are available till 10pm.

As foreshadowed last month, the Cafe Bar International at All Saints has re-emerged as McNally's, described as an "Irish Sports Bar", whose opening featured the now seemingly obligatory personal appearance by Jack Charlton. You may scoff, but the sporting theme has been well executed, with accoutrements from fishing flies to hurling sticks, and this is surely the most attractive incarnation the place has yet had. Beamish - for my money the best of the keg Irish stouts, and a drink I prefer to many nationally available real ales - is the drink of choice for many; the real ale range is unchanged, with Tetley Bitter and Ind Coope Burton Ale on handpump. In the same townland, Scruffy Murphy's on Grosvenor Street should open this month.

However, the conversion of Fallowfield's Queen of Hearts into a "Scruffy Firkin" (Scruffy Murphy's and Firkin side-by-side) may take a little longer; in late March, while the former Mock Turtle restaurant had been boarded up to 'allow work' to proceed, the Queen of Hearts pub itself was still open as normal.

Premium Dividend

The afternoon of Thursday 16th March saw a group of members of the CAMRA Investments Club descend on the Moss Side premises of local brewers Hydes Anvil - in which they have a small holding.

On arrival at the brewery the group were soon relaxing in the hospitality lounge where they were formally and warmly welcomed by joint managing director Adam Hyde. With the introductions complete the party were led into the brewery proper where Head Brewer Alan Mackie was 'on form' as he led the tout around his 'Hydes Anvil World Headquarters' domain with Adam Hyde and newly appointed second brewer Stewart Thompson (ex Boddingtons and Higsons) lending their support.

Arriving in the fermenting room those in the party with knowledge of Hydes Anvil were surprised and pleased to find the sole surviving and usually mothballed circular oak fermenter was back in service and arriving back in the lounge later all was revealed.

On the bar along with regular products, Mild, Light and Bitter, was a fourth beer. An 'experimental' brew, a 4.5%ABV premium bitter, the residue of which had been seen in the old fermenter, was offered for sampling. Brewed with the company's regular Maris Otter malt and hopped with Fuggles, the well-bittered brew, the first non-portfolio beer produced by Hydes Anvil for some years was well received by the visitors.

Settling down again in the lounge Adam Hyde revealed that negotiations were in progress in the hope of adding a further property to their estate of 61 tied houses (rumoured to be the Gardeners Arms in Burnage). He went on to stress that "come what may from the EC" the company remains "committed to brewing and to quality" - recently appointed Quality Manager Tony Phillips was also on hand. In further conversation Alan Mackie advised that "this is Manchester" where pub turnover means that "we are still able to turn out 75% of ale production in barrels (ie 36 gallon containers)", that all three regular beers are "definitely independent brews produced from their own worts" and Adam Hyde revealed that XXXX Winter Ale "could possibly" re-appear this year.

As the party subsequently thinned (some members had travelled from London and points south) but the hospitality endured, those remaining were joined by CAMRA founder member Graham Lees - a most appropriate arrival on the very day of the 24th Anniversary of the founding of the Campaign. An inspired choice of date for a most enjoyable and interesting visit.

*CAMRA members requiring further information about the Investment Club should contact Neil Kellett at Snow Kellett, St James Buildings, Oxford Street, Manchester, M1 6FN.

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