

OPENING TIMES



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No:
133

MAY 1995 - CAMRA NEWSLETTER OF THE YEAR

Arthur To Quit?

Exclusive - by Stuart Ballantyne

Arthur Gosling, almost legendary licensee of the Royal Oak in Didsbury, is set to retire in April next year.

Arthur will be 65 then but that isn't the sole reason for his departure. He is apparently under a lot of pressure from Marstons to go as they want to turn the pub over to management and also make some changes. One of the changes that is already being pressed on Arthur is for him to install two fruit machines. Despite the fact that one of the attractions of the Royal Oak is the absence of electronic games and machines (and notwithstanding that the pub gets so crowded it is difficult to see where they could sensibly go) the brewery seem more interested in potential weekly taking of £2000. Arthur, rightly, fears that such a move could destroy the atmosphere of the pub and has told Marstons that he doesn't want that sort of thing 'with all that bleeping and flashing' but, as he told OT, 'they are very insistent'.

Marstons are also exerting other pressures to encourage Arthur to go. Since the fire Marstons have increased the rent by something like 143% and it is now apparently well in excess of £100,000 pa. With the pub selling over 100 barrels a month, Marstons are desperate to get their hands on more of the take which just goes to show that corporate greed is not confined to the big national brewers.

It has to be said that in recent years Marstons have a very poor track record in this respect. It is, after all, not that long ago that tenants of several of their other local pubs (including the nearby Station) were forced out and replaced by managers. So come on Marstons, your tenants are your best asset, so don't abuse them!



We're Number One!



Opening Times scored a notable triumph at CAMRA's National Conference held last month in Wolverhampton. For the first time an award was made for CAMRA Newsletter of the Year and OT came first out of over 100+newsletters produced nation-wide. Our photo shows OT Editor John Clarke (right) and Production Editor Paul Hutchins with the certificate.

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PUB of the Month MAY

The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month award for May goes to the Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport.

The Florist isn't a newcomer to CAMRA awards, having previously been both Pub of the Month and having featured in the national Good Beer Guide. All this was under the long-term tenancy of Alan Stanway so when new licensees Mike and Betty Boylan arrived in July last year following Alan's retirement they had a hard act to follow. But follow it they did - and how.

The pub has gradually been transformed - new toilets, french windows leading to the beer garden and a sensible moving of the bar back to ease congestion. A food operation is in the pipeline and the upstairs function room has been revamped and brought back into use. Remarkably all this has been accomplished without compromising the intimate multi-roomed layout of the pub. There is now a pub-like "buzz" to the place which was previously lacking at times.

There has been success, too, on the beer front - consistently improved quality has been reflected in higher sales. Handpumps have been installed now the bar refurbishment is complete.

While Mike and Betty were previously stewards at the nearby Our Lady's Social Club, this was their first pub. The new life being experienced by the Florist is all down to their hard work - join us when we celebrate Mike and Betty's success and present our Pub of the Month award on Thursday 25th May.

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GUIDE '95

A Touch Of The O'irish

The boom in Irish bars gathers pace with no less than five, that's right *five*, opening in Manchester in the past month. As Rhys Jones reports in *Manchester Matters*, three are bandwagon jobs by the Magic Pub Co and are of little merit. The other two are a different matter, however.

'Scruffy Murphy's' is the name of what is to become a nation-wide chain of Irish pubs run by Allied Domeq Retail, who trade locally as the Tetley Pub Co. The first was opened in Edinburgh and has been a runaway success and now we have two. First off the mark on April 12 was the Fallowfield version, in the premises formerly occupied by the Mock Turtle Restaurant on Wilmslow Road (and adjacent to the soon-to-be-refurbished Queen of Hearts) followed a week later by a sister establishment in All Saints, this time in the old Harrison & Killey plumbers merchants opposite the Flea & Firkin on Grosvenor Street (and predicted by OT months ago...).

It has to be said that both are very impressive new pubs. Inside both are similar with old pine bars and a wealth of snugs and booths. There is generous and sensible use of leaded and frosted glass - particularly well thought out in the All Saints pub where partitions divide up the long bar counter. Bar floors (some wood and some tiled) and an eclectic mix of furniture completes the effect. Even the Irish bric-a-brac hasn't been totally overdone. Those who know - including OT's production editor Paul Hutchings, a long time aficionado of the Dublin scene - reckon they're a close enough approximation to the real thing. Outside the two pubs are quite different. The Fallowfield building is listed and has therefore kept its individuality (and a most impressive stained glass window) while All Saints features the standard Scruffy Murphy's 'Hollywood set' frontage of fake shop fronts which, it has to be said, gives an unnecessary, and inappropriate, gimmicky feel to the enterprise.



Fallowfield's Scruffy Murphys



The best snug in Manchester

Both feature food and entertainment. They share what seems to be a standard Scruffy Murphy's menu featuring a variety of Irish (Irish Stew, Boxy Pancakes) or mock-Irish (the 'Maggie Malone' sandwich including cockles and mussels...groan) dishes at reasonable prices. Full breakfast is served all day, as is coffee. None of this will break the bank - £3.95 seems to be top whack. Entertainment is again Irish - Fallowfield will feature it three nights weekly and in addition will be opening to midnight Thursday to Saturday. All Saints will doubtless be similar.


And what about the beer? This is probably not what you will go to Scruffy Murphy's for with Guinness and other Irish ales to the fore. Both serve handpumped Tetley Bitter, though, alongside an impressive range of Irish Whiskeys.

Apparently 17 of these are planned for the North West, split 50:50 between conversions of existing pubs (which may or may not be a good thing) and previously

unlicensed premises (which almost certainly will be)



The Irish shop fronts in Grosvenor Street



grub



EXTRA

An independent OT review squad descended on Scruffy Murphys in Grosvenor Street to test out the Irishness of the menu. The boxty (an oatmeal pancake filled with watercress stock based stew) was an excellent main course, and the (utterly unpronounceable - save to Irish speakers) potato and leek based soup with lightly toasted Irish soda bread was excellent. Ditto the pork and cabbage. Overall, quality, presentation and value are excellent - and I sneaked into the snug for a drop o' the black stuff while none of my snooty CAMRA friends were watching! Bear in mind though, that this is a student orientated pub, other 'Scruffys' out of student-land will have similar but more extensive menus and higher prices!



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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW

As you will see from our front page, Opening Times was the first ever winner of CAMRA's Newsletter of the Year competition. The award was presented at the Campaign's national conference in Wolverhampton and since I did not then have the chance to make a speech of thanks this seems the appropriate place to pay tribute to all those who help to make OT the success it is.

First must be our production editor, Paul Hutchings, who is responsible for our professional appearance closely followed by Susan Hutchings who has had the thankless task of typing reams of, sometimes indecipherable, copy into our DTP system. I am also lucky to have a team of regular and enthusiastic contributors - thanks are due to all, from those whose names appear every month to those who only write for us once in a while. Thanks also to our large team of distributors and last, but by no means least, thanks again to all our advertisers without whose support Opening Times could not function.

Brewing for Victory

While many of the country's micro brewers are planning special beers to mark the VE day commemorations, two of our local family brewers are also joining the fray.

Lees are producing 'VE Day Bitter' a 4.8% brew which will be made available to their tied estate and free trade around the VE Day holiday. This will retail at £1.45 a pint and £10 from each barrel sold will be donated to servicemen's charities.

The other contender comes from Hyde's. Victory Ale, 1045 og/4.5%ABV was rolled out into the tied estate on 24th April and promises to be a malty, distinctive beer, very different from Hydes bitter.

Deeply copper red in colour, it has a full body and a bitter-sweet finish. All in all, a very satisfying pint, with slight hop notes in the long aftertaste. Whilst the new beer will be made available to all of Hyde's pubs it will be receiving special promotion in ten where a handpump will be specially installed to dispense it, special pumpclips are also being produced. Over half of these are in the Opening Times area and include the Friendship, Fallowfield, Moss Rose and Nursery, Heaton Norris; Cross Keys, Adswold; High Grove, Gatley and the Victoria in Withington. This reflects the increasing trend to handpump dispense in the Hyde's estate. It is expected that Victory Ale could be the first of a series of seasonal beers from Hyde's which could also see the reintroduction of the much-missed XXXX strong ale.

* Readers last month may have been confused by our reference to Hyde's Anvil negotiating the purchase of the 'Gardeners Arms' in Burnage. There is of course no such pub - we meant the Farmers, of course. Hyde's have also confirmed that the pub has now been acquired although there will be some delay before it reopens due to essential repairs, which includes putting the roof back!



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The activities of the Magic Pub Co are starting to cause concern. When they first took over a number of former Chef & Brewer pubs their arrival on the scene was broadly welcomed, not least for their conversion of some long-standing keg outlets to real ale. Since then, however, they have started to inflict a series of tawdry themes on their estate - the various Hungry Horses are perhaps tolerable but their so-called 'Irish' pubs are real barrel scraping efforts. Attempts to make contact, by both CAMRA and the local press have drawn a blank - just what are they ashamed of? Looking at what they have done to some of their pubs that question answers itself. Paradoxically, the pubs this company now owns were once part of the Host Group whose similar attempts to inflict inappropriate themes on their pubs eventually came to grief. Who says lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place?

John Clarke

Cider Festival

The Brickhouse Country Hotel at Chipping near Preston is holding a cider and perry festival on Saturday 13th May, from noon to midnight. A range of 10 ciders and perries has been ordered from Jon Hallam, regular supplier to Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, and we are promised "real cider - real food - real music". Accommodation is available at the hotel or in local B&Bs, and for a daytime visit, Chipping is accessible by public transport (train to Clitheroe, then bus).

Further information: Brickhouse Hotel 01995 - 61316, Paul Meredith (festival organiser) 01524 - 63732, Public transport 01254 - 681120.

EDITORIAL AND ADVERTISING

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STAGGER

with Paul Felton

The wild and windy evening of March 17 saw our latest pub crawl, around Levenshulme in south Manchester. In terms of its pubs and the beer they serve, this area has been through considerable changes recently. On the previous occasion we had visited, the number of real ale pubs was less than double figures, and we reached the final port of call well before 10pm. Since then, no less than five pubs have converted to real ale, with another new premises being opened. Given the dauntingly high number of fifteen to choose from, we decided to miss out the northern four (Church, Farmer's Arms, Victoria and Midway, the latter two being recent converts to cask beer by the Magic Pub Co., the Victoria selling real ale for the first time in many years). It should also be mentioned at this point that it was St. Patrick's night, which meant some very full pubs and some rather cheap Guinness (almost value for money).

This still left us with eleven to go at, and we began at the **Wheatsheaf**, a large pink-painted Greenalls pub at the south end of the village, on the corner of the A6 and Broom Lane. It is actually a two-room pub, but as our trails through Levenshulme always begin here at 7pm, the lounge never seems to be open yet. The vault is very large and high-ceilinged, bar in the far left hand corner, pool table to the right. Only one beer was available, Greenalls bitter at £1.29; opinions of its quality ranged from average to rather good. Guinness was £1.25.

From there it was north along the A6 to the **Levenshulme**, an Intrepeneur pub selling Wilsons bitter at £1.30 (and Guinness at a ridiculous £1). It's split between a pool room on the left and a quite reasonably comfortable lounge on the right. Given the nature of the evening, an Irish 'disco' was in progress, though I'd never before associated Christy Moore's music with flashing lights. We did receive some strange looks from the DJ and bar staff, possibly as there were half a dozen or more of us drinking halves of bitter; the beer was average at best.

Fiddler's Green was absolutely packed to the gunwales; even the upstairs balcony area was busy. In quieter times this is a comfortable lounge bar, a far cry from an enormous

improvement on its previous incarnation a few years ago as Dacey O'Reilly's (though it was difficult to tell what the pub's decor looked like under wall to wall people). Guinness was again £1.25, and the sensible chose to drink it; the only cask beer on sale was Websters Yorkshire bitter, which was £1.26 and quite dismal.

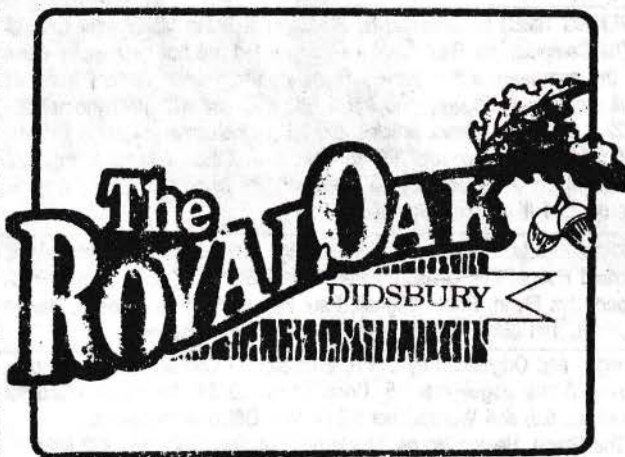
The **Pack Horse** is another considerably improved pub; it used to be one of the various 'Sports' pubs around the area (remember them?), as is still to be seen from its front doors. It has a large lounge on the right, with an area more like a vault on the left. Two beers were available, John Smiths bitter and as a guest Holts bitter. Not surprisingly, all chose the latter, at £1.10 a pint and it was quite good.



Next was Boddington Pub Co.'s **Union**, opposite Albert Road. Even before you enter the splendid brick and stone exterior catches the eye. This is an excellent, basic multi-room pub, generally unchanged for some years (except for a hidden-away pool area which I'm sure I don't remember from previous visits). It has leaded windows on the bar, some attractive tiling and even a small electric fire fixed to the bar ten feet off the ground. Two beers were available, Chesters mild at £1.20 and (of course) Boddingtons Bitter at £1.25; both were good. Well worth a visit.

We shall draw a veil over the **Railway** (Daly's bar), virtually opposite. Please understand that this is not in any way meant to be a comment on the intrinsic quality of the pub, but because the place was so damned crowded we could hardly make it through the front door and so gave up. Perhaps the mistake was trying to get in at 9pm, just as the 'Guinness 85p a pint' promotion was coming to an end.

Thankfully, 'twas but a short step to **Hennigan's**, the one new licensed premises on the crawl, belonging to the owner (?) of the Palace club next door. It was the first time that many of us had visited the pub; and given that it was difficult to gain a



true picture due to the overwhelming number of customers in not that large an area, it seemed to be rather impressive. Two beers were on sale, at very reasonable (giveaway?) prices (another St. Pat's special offer?): Boddingtons bitter was £1.10, Marstons Pedigree £1.30 (such was the advertised price at least, though one of our party was charged £1.35). The Pedigree was a new arrival (well, it hadn't been on sale the previous Monday). The Boddies was average, while the Pedigree drew some favourable responses (quite an achievement for it these days).

The **Horseshoe** on Chapel Street is a "Wilsons" pub, selling Wilsons and Websters bitter (the Wilsons mild has been lost). The comfortable furnishings of the lounge were negated by the loud music which emanated from its far end (band or disco I can't remember which) so we headed for the comparative shelter of the basic two-part vault (one for the pool table). Unsurprisingly, all tried the Wilsons, the comments on which ranged considerably but were at best average.

The next pub caused the number of places we intended to visit to be reduced by one. The **Blue Bell**, a Sam Smiths house on Cromwell Grove, a recent convert to real ale, had lost its hand pump and lapsed back into selling keg beer only, so we ventured on.

The **Polygon** is another Boddingtons Pub Co. house with a superb exterior, surpassing the Union if only in terms of scale (though its credibility is somewhat compromised by the 'joke' pub sign featuring a parrot, a cage and an escape). The actual floor space within the two room pub is perhaps less than you would expect from the outside, though the high ceilings do add an air of spaciousness. Two beers were on sale, Boddingtons Bitter at £1.22 and, much to our surprise, Oldham bitter (the brewing of which has recently been transferred to Burtonwood in Cheshire) at 98p! The landlord informed us that he had tried Chesters mild, but it had not sold too well, so he had managed to persuade the Pub Co. to let him try Oldham bitter at such a knock down price. It was going particularly well with the cost-conscious (and) older customers, and rather good it was too.

Our final resting place was the **Sidings** on Broom Lane, a Holts pub built in the late 1980's and now under new management as a result of considerable changes to the brewery's pubs in the area (new licensee at the Old Monkey; Old Monkey to Sidings; Sidings to Cheadle Hulme; Cheadle Hulme to Roebuck in Flixton; etc. etc) As seemingly ever, it was extremely busy, with hardly a seat to be had in either pleasant lounge or basic bar. Bitter was 99p, mild 96p; most drank the bitter, which was good.

And so ends another Stagger. The real ale scene in Levenshulme has certainly changed in recent years with most pubs now offering at least one cask beer though the quality of this, like the pubs, ranges from the pretty average to the very good indeed. However this article can only reflect what one group of drinkers found on one particular night and cannot therefore be taken as a once and for all judgement of either the pubs or their beers - as ever why not try them yourselves to see how much you (dis)agree.

Due to a gremlin in the works, last month's Stagger was the unedited version and contained one or two things it shouldn't. In particular the Swan on Shaw Heath was berated for selling keg Scrumpy Jack cider through a fake handpump. However, in common with many pubs, the Swan has for some time now abandoned the fake handpump for the acceptable 'sawn-off' version which is an obvious keg dispenser. The pub can accordingly be heartily recommended again. Apologies, and red faces, all round.

Burtonwood Buccaneer

Burtonwood Brewery are the latest entrants in the premium bitter stakes with the introduction of 'Buccaneer', a 5.2% cask bitter.

It was due to make its first public appearance at the National pub, Club and Leisure Show, held at London's Olympia in the first week of May. Paler than the other Burtonwood beers, it is described as 'beautifully mellow, full-bodied and full-flavoured' - well, that's what the brewery say at any rate, but then they would, wouldn't they. Hopefully we will have tried it before the next OT hits the streets - it was due to be made available to the trade from May 9th.

* Apart from **Buccaneer**, **Burtonwood** produce three other cask bitters - **Burtonwood Bitter** (3.8%), **Forshaws** (4%) and **Top Hat** (4.8%). They also brew **Chesters Bitter** for **Whitbread**.

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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From: Rhys P Jones:

While I share Curmudgeon's wish that all Welsh pubs should be legally entitled to open on Sundays after next year's referendum, he does his case no favours by coming on as the archetypal whinging English tourist. Let's be clear - pubs, and the rules that govern them, are primarily a matter for the locals, whether in Portwood or Porthmadog. And as for the clubs which Curmudgeon sees as a nose-thumbing retreat for the natives, many of these in fact developed as adjuncts to caravan sites and similar developments and were entirely devoted to serving tourists a legal (and almost invariably keg) pint.

I'm sorry if Curmudgeon detects some "residual resentment against the English". I imagine he has never been forbidden, on pain of dismissal, to use his native language to customers or colleagues. Yet this has been the experience of more than a few Welsh people employed by English-owned businesses - not in some distant Victorian hell-hole, but in the last 10 years. Dwyfor will not vote in 1996 - the vote will be organised on the basis of Wales's new unitary authorities, in this case a much larger unit spanning such places as Bangor, Corwen and Aberdyfi. Despite your columnist's "fanatical minority" jibe, no fatwas issue from chapel pulpits, and I am confident that Wales will take its place amongst European nations in allowing its people freedom of choice. Patronising interventions from outsiders will not help.

From Gordon Small, West Lincs. CAMRA:

I am writing as the Secretary of CAMRA West Lancashire Branch. I have been asked to write to you after the March 1995 edition of Opening Times was discussed at our last branch meeting.

The reason Opening Times was discussed was because of the review of the West Lincs Real Ale Guide. We were pleased to see the review, and thank you for the publicity that the review will give us - we need all the sales we can get.

The particular reason I was instructed to write to you was to correct the statement regarding the St Walburgess Beer Festival held last month. This beer festival was not a CAMRA event, and had no official association with West Lincs. Branch. The 1994 Beer Festival was a joint St Walburgess/CAMRA venture but this year's Beer Festival was organised solely by the church authorities. As you will appreciate a number of West

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Lancs. Branch members felt it important that this distinction should be made clear to the Stockport & South Manchester Branch. Finally, I must congratulate your branch on Opening Times - it's a remarkable achievement to produce something so substantial each month.

(Thanks are due to all our hardworking contributors - Ed.)

From Jim Flynn:

I read with concern the article in your April edition which appears to advocate that your readers should vote Conservative. CAMRA is a non-political organisation and although as a pressure group it is not to be criticised if a particular party's policies are campaigned against, to promote a political party over the others was at least insensitive and at worst an editorial blunder.

Perhaps the writer of the article should consider that the big brewers are amongst the biggest paymasters of the Tories and he who pays the piper normally calls the tune. Just remember the last 16 years have seen the price of beer rocket and ownership within the industry increasingly concentrated in fewer and fewer hands.

Let's get rid of the blue tint to Opening Times and continue to campaign against the rip-off being perpetrated by the big brewers. (As I stressed last month, Opening Times is and remains strictly non-political - ed.)

From Roy Bailey:

I picked up copies of the March and April issues of your deservedly prize-winning newsletter at the AGM in Wolverhampton, and I was naturally interested in your review of the video 'The Best of British - 30 Classic Great British Pubs'.

Despite the reviewer's closer inspection, the opening sequence was set in a pub. The location was the Pelican at Froxfield, just into Wiltshire on the A4 west of Hungerford. This particular pub, which dates back to the coaching era, has been messed about over the years, and we were sitting in one of the dining rooms. What appeared to be the kitchen behind us was, in fact, another smaller dining room.

The Pelican was chosen by the producers because it is very handy for their office, my home and Johnny Morris's home and because the licensee is Johnny's grandson. Like 99% of pubs in this area the Pelican serves real ale, including that from a small local brewery, Foxley, and the food is very good.

I enjoyed my visit to Boddington's Brewery during the making of the video and, although I don't normally drink the Boddies served in the south, I thought that the beer in their sample room was absolutely marvellous. As I am sure you are aware, although Boddington's Bitter is normally dispensed everywhere by swan-neck with a tight sparkler, when they assess

it for taste and quality at the brewery, they draw it straight from the cask. How very sensible!

I am Editor of our branch newsletter, 'Ullage' (some copies enclosed), and it is my intention that 'Opening Times' will be the runner-up in next year's competition!

From B K Lane, licensee The Crown, Hawk Green

Having been a member of CAMRA since 1985 I was very disappointed to read your article "The Marple Review" in the March issue which did not mention the Crown.

As the busiest pub in the area with a reputation for hand-pulled beers second to none, not to mention the most well-known pub in the area - where were we?

I now refer to your article "Vanishing Tap Room". As the Crown never fills up before 9.30pm even with a busy young trade like mine, waiters in the taproom or any area would not be viable.

I pride myself on service to the drinkers so much so that I have closed the restaurant in the evenings and opened all dining areas to the bar, unlike 9 of the 15 pubs mentioned, which are food orientated. I look forward to your reply.

Hungry Horse

Blink and you might have missed it! Over Easter the Farmers Arms in Cheadle Heath closed for a week re-opening as the Hungry Horse, another of the Magic Pubco pubs. In just a week the pub has been gutted and refurbished, and in its new guise is attempting to rid itself of its somewhat down market image.

The position of the bar and the lounge are now reversed with the original corner main entrance reinstated. It could be said that the number of new roof supporting pillars seem a little over the top, as are the number of mirrors, but the pub was badly in need of a facelift and almost anything is an improvement.

A more serious attempt at selling food seems to be being made with the introduction of a proper kitchen and food serving area. Whilst the food was not being served on my visit, the menu starts at around £3 for half a roast chicken, going up to £5.75 for "Simply Super Scampi". If four or more diners are eating together to celebrate a birthday then the Hungry Horse will throw in a free birthday cake.

The beer range is unchanged with Websters Green Label (89p), Boddingtons Bitter (130p) and Draught Bass (135p). With the change of image this is possibly an opportunity missed to introduce a more interesting beer range to make the pub worth crossing the road for. The other disappointment is the big screen TV which was blaring out on my visit and is out of step with the traditional farmhouse kitchen theme of the pub.

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Real Pub Food For All?

Pub food is big business nowadays, and many, if not most pubs would find it hard to survive without their food trade. So it's disappointing how so much of the writing about pub food deliberately ignores the majority of pub-goers.

There's a very definite strand of pub food writing, which is often found in the Sunday colour supplements and is best exemplified by Egon Ronay's pub guide. To its credit, it has a strong emphasis on "real" food and natural ingredients.

On the other hand, though, it shows a pronounced bias towards up-market rural "dining pubs", a lack of concern for value for money, a preference for elaborate recipe dishes over simple basics, and a contempt for anything that falls short of its self-imposed standards which often degenerates into rank snobbery.

There's a very fine dividing line between the claims of "we don't serve chips here" which are often recorded with approbation, and "we don't serve riff-raff here". Chips, if properly done, can be just as "real" as anything else, as indeed can burgers, which can be obtained freshly-made from the local butcher. The type of food should matter less than the way it's prepared.

In January last year, Stephen Cox, writing in CAMRA's newspaper "What's Brewing", accused the Egon Ronay Guide and Alisdair Aird's Good Pub Guide of seeing pubs not "as a useful part of everyday life, but a rare service used by travellers and holidaymakers. Nothing else could justify the persistent bias against pubs used by ordinary people and located in the areas where a great many people actually live and work." Quite.

Even so, why should CAMRA take an interest? Not, I think, as a defender of the past. The good old days of food at the inn are beyond anyone's living memory. If you look back to the 1950s, pub food was either non-existent or mediocre. The great upsurge has largely come within CAMRA's lifetime. CAMRA's interest in pub food should be as a modern consumer movement, in the same way as we look at improving disabled facilities and ending outdated licensing restrictions.

This, incidentally, is why it is wrong to expect pubs to provide nothing but "traditional British" cooking. It certainly has its place, but foreign and ethnic dishes have now become part of the regular diet of most people in the country, and have added much-needed colour and variety to what we eat. To expect pubs to stick to what has always been eaten in these islands is narrow-minded obscurantism. I've had superb, home-made curries, pizzas and Chinese dishes in pubs. Good food doesn't stop at beef in ale pie.

So how can CAMRA define an approach to food coverage which establishes a distinctive identity, that is inclusive rather than exclusive, yet sacrifices nothing in terms of quality?

The starting point must be an unequivocal declaration that real food is fresh food. It may be harder to look after and have a shorter shelf life, but, as with real ale, the results are worth the effort if you do it right. But always accentuate the

SPECIAL

Peter Edwardson presents a
**Manifesto for Good Pub Food while
Stuart Ballantyne Dines Out in style
at The Cheadle Hulme**

positive; don't let it descend into a witch-hunt against tinned peas and sachets of sauce.

Like keg beer on a bar, we should be prepared to tolerate a limited amount of processed food on a menu so long as it doesn't try to masquerade as something else. After all, virtually every pub in the Good Beer Guide serves keg beer or cider of some sort, and CAMRA would have got nowhere if it had only promoted pubs that didn't.

Recognise that most of us live and work in urban areas; positively aim to seek out the good food in urban pubs that the other guides ignore and hold it up as an example for others to follow. There shouldn't be the automatic assumption that to get a really good meal in a pub you normally have to drive out of town.

Show a constant, strong emphasis on value for money. As a simple yardstick, ignore anywhere you can't get a square meal of your featured dishes for around a fiver or less. There can be rare exceptions!

Finally, always show a preference for the simple and unadorned over the fancy and elaborate. Apply this both to the dishes themselves and the style of menus and presentation; informality is one of the most valued features of eating in pubs. Ironically, this informality is much more often achieved in the South of England than the North. There's still an assumption in much of the North that you haven't got a proper meal unless there's meat, potatoes and two veg on your plate, and that menus in pubs should as far as possible echo the format of those in restaurants.

Perhaps the single biggest trend on the pub scene at the moment is the development of managed house food chains by the big pub owners. Whitbread are leading the way with their £85m investment to create 2,500 jobs in Brewer's Fayre outlets. It's all too easy to dismiss these places as purveyors of keg food, produced in central kitchens to standardised menus, but they're too important a sector of the market to be written off as real food deserts. And how many don't serve real ale? Rather than giving up on them completely, wouldn't it be more constructive to work on them to allow managers to buy more produce locally and create more of their own dishes?

Nobody who really cares about pubs, as well as food, can afford to stay safe within the cosy confines of the "dining pubs" of the stockbroker belts and the National Parks, and look down their noses at the rest of the workaday world with its busy schedules and tight budgets. They must look at influencing pub cooks in practical and relevant ways to improve the quality of pub food wherever it is served.

The aspiration of "real ale in every pub" once seemed an idealistic pipedream, but in many parts of the country it's now true. What price "real food in every pub where food is served"?

PE

The Cheadle Hulme

In the mind of the majority of the North West drinking public, Joseph Holts still brings to mind the traditional back-street corner boozier or the fading Edwardian gem. No frills and packed with drinkers. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, but in the 1990s even that most traditional of Manchester's breweries is looking for the opportunity to make even more money and adding the lucrative restaurant trade to their business portfolio.

Any pub that can get the balance right, that is between offering drinks to the thirsty and meals to the hungry, has the potential to make a fortune. The **Cheadle Hulme** in Cheadle Hulme has for some time now rid itself of its former troubled reputation (as the Junction) and moved noticeably upmarket, the removal of the vault, the incorporation of a restaurant and firm management was the winning combination which pulled off the trick. As one of Holts flagship pubs the decor is smart and plush, although unmistakably Holts fairly open-plan, quality fittings and loud wallpaper. On entering the right hand side of the pub constitutes the public (i.e. non-restaurant) area while the restaurant and its reception are on the left. Holts were perhaps optimistic when they designed the pub - the bar area is frequently crowded while the restaurant is equally often under-used - tonight we had this almost to ourselves. This is a shame as the restaurant is both pleasant and comfortable with a varied and reasonably priced menu.

This is particularly true if you opt, as we did, for the three course 'Early Bird Special' at £6.95 available Monday-Saturday from 5.30-8.00pm. Starters on this included such as home-made mushroom soup, spicy chicken wings and pate; main courses featured Pork Dijonnais, grilled plaice, braised liver and vegetable bake amongst others while sweets featured gateau, ice cream or sweet of the day.

In addition there is an 'a la carte menu which is slightly more expensive but which offers a wider choice. Dishes which caught my eye included chicken with mushrooms and cream (£7.50), Cheadle Hulme Grill (£8.25), a choice of fish ranging from £7.25 to £8.50 and steaks ranging from an 8oz Sirloin at £8.95 to the 16oz 'Desperate Dan' at £11.95. The pub also features a very reasonably priced menu of bar meals, and so successfully caters for all pockets and appetites.

Relaxing with our aperitifs (well pints of Holts bitter actually - on good form and the usual give-away 99p) we were soon called to our table. We both went for the same starter - the mushroom soup. Thick and flavoursome this was about as far away from a packet as you are likely to get. Delicious and difficult to fault. For the main course I opted for the braised liver while my companion chose the pork. Both meals arrived with generous helpings of boiled and roast potatoes, carrots and green beans - the vegetables were perfectly cooked - crisp and flavoursome and not the stodgy mess that can sometimes be dished up. A real bonus to the meal.

Waist watching is usually the order of the day for OT's food writer and as a result I normally pass on the sweet. However as it was all-inclusive I was in no position to decline. 'Sweet of the Day' turned out to be a choice of six including chocolate cheesecake, individual pavlovas and passion cake. Between us we chose the latter - both were large in quantity, high in calories and absolutely delicious. An excellent way to finish a superb meal.

To sum up, the Cheadle Hulme offers high quality, freshly cooked meals at affordable prices. Not only that but you can wash the food down with an excellent pint of Holts. What more could you want? Recommended..

SB



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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!

May 95	May 95
<p>Thursday 11 Monthly branch meeting The Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heaviley (upstairs room). Starts 8.00pm.</p> <p>Monday 15 Social, The Orion, Burton Rd, Withington. Starts 9.00pm</p> <p>Friday 19 Stagger - minibus tour of Bramhall, Woodford and Ringway. Departs Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport, 7.00pm. Phone 477 1973 to book.</p> <p>Monday 22 Social, George & Dragon, Manchester Road, Heaton Chapel. Starts 9.00pm</p> <p>Thursday 25 Pub of the Month presentation to the Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport (see article on page 2)</p> <p>Sunday 28 Trip to Leatherbritches Brewery Beer Festival at Bentley Brook Hotel. Minibus departs Crown, Heaton Lane at 11.00am.</p>	<p>Thursday 1 - Saturday 3 June Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. Be there!</p> <p>Monday 5 Social, Old Monkey, Portland Street, Manchester. 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>Tuesday 9 Monthly branch meeting, Navigation, Buxworth. Aim to get there for 8.30.</p> <p>Saturday 10 June Hyde Pub Crawl - 8.00pm Whitegates, 8.30 Wellington. Contact Frank Wood on 01457 865426.</p> <p><i>Regional Event</i></p> <p>Wednesday 10 Regional Meeting, Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, Manchester. Starts 8.00pm</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).

May 26-27 Frodsham Beer Festival, Community Centre, Fluin La, Frodsham. 60 Beers & Ciders. Entertainment, Cost £3 per session: Fri 7-11, Sat 12-4 & 7-11 Sat. Details Dave Holt 01925 263580. 5 mins BR (Mcr - Chester)

June 1-3 Stockport Beer Festival, Town Hall.

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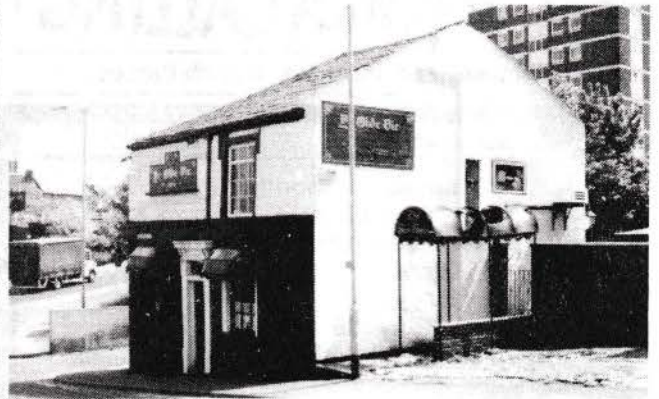
by Richard Hough

In an effort to shake off a (grossly misleading) reputation as a heathen reprobate, I thought I'd bring you some refined culture; we cater for all tastes in this column, you know.... A string quartet plays at Ye Olde Vic in Edgeley once every month. A what? Yes, you read it right, and I was a little taken aback when I first heard about it. A string quartet in a pub will never work, I thought. I couldn't wait to be proved wrong.

Ye Olde Vic is a small four-square pub tucked away behind Stockport rail station. It will be familiar to many local drinkers due to its trail-blazing status as the first genuine free-house in the area. More recently it has become a focus for 'tickers and scratchers' as new beers from micro-breweries and weird and wonderful ales from all over the country appear on the bar. But for me the attraction of the pub is the quality of the beer on offer; excellent is usually a by-word in the Vic.

The quartet had wind (musical pun intended) that I'd be in, and we were left speechless when they arrived in full evening dress. I hoped they'd sound as good as they looked, or indeed as good as the North Yorkshire Dry Hop tasted - one of the best beers to come from this particular stable. Live football was on television, but live music (and indeed common sense) won over.

After the briefest of tune-ups they began with the dreamy canon by Pachelbel: two violins, a viola and a cello in swirling harmony. While it may sound like pleasant back-ground music, the sound is so powerful



that it becomes the focus of attention, especially in a small pub such as the Vic. One problem is that there is relatively little stuff actually written or adapted for string quartets. But they pressed on with 'Charade' from Henri 'Pink Panther' Mancini, who sadly died earlier this year. The four appeared a little self-conscious to begin with, but soon loosened up, helped, no doubt, by the rather fine Bullmastiff Brindle.

It was a year ago that the first seeds were sown, when two of them went to the Vic for a drink after doing a show. The locals, and landlady Kay, encouraged them to 'give us a tune'; they obliged, and it snowballed from there. The quartet as they are now have been together since October last year, having seen a few line-up changes. Any string quartet will lean heavily on George Gershwin, and 'Embraceable You' was their first of his. This was followed by Mancini's arrangement of 'Moon River' recently covered by Morrissey of all people.

A brief interlude allowed us to sample Stockport's newest beer, the 3.6% ABV Richard Cobden's Bitter. It was thought to be a little thin; let's hope it improves as the brewery becomes established. George Gershwin's 'Swannie' was followed by 'Reggie's Theme' from the Thorn Birds, with some great staccato on the cello. There was virtually no interaction between the 'band' and the 'crowd', and they continued with Gershwin's 'A Foggy Day', and a Mancini tune from '10'.

The Taylors Landlord had not quite settled, so the final beer to try was Roosters Cream. Wow. What a beer! You'll love it or you'll hate it, but distinctive it truly is. In common with other Roosters' beers it is a pale golden colour, and easy drinking too (it weighs in at 4.7% ABV). But a (perhaps over-)powerful vanilla characteristic combined with the smooth 'creamy' feel can understandably put the unwary off.

Back then, to the music. By the time they'd done another couple from G.G. they had the whole pub's full attention. They were enchanting, and the bewitching music captivated us. They finished well with 'Air from Suite Number 3' by Bach; that's the Hamlet ad to you and me.

But the final word must go to Kay and John at Ye Olde Vic, for showing so much enterprise, firstly in an extended beer range, and secondly in pushing out the frontiers when it comes to live music. Be there on the second Wednesday of the month and you too might be pleasantly surprised.

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New Brewery News

More news about John Perkins' **Richard Cobdens Brewery**. The brewing equipment has been installed in the cellar of Peaches night-club on Hillgate and test brews are underway. Test brews so far include a premium bitter and a porter. While the porter hasn't yet been finalised (although it should have a ABV of 4%), the premium bitter looks to be approaching a launch. Indeed the first casks of 'Richard Cobdens Premier Bitter' were being sent to the Station at Ashton as we went to press. This was intended to be a 4.4% beer but this also came out at 4% so some modifications remain to be made.

Richard Cobdens Bitter continues to be brewed by Moorhouses in Burnley and this will remain the case until John is sure that it can be exactly replicated at Stockport. A transfer of this beer to Peaches isn't therefore likely until the end of the year.

Meanwhile at **Haslingden Porters Brewery** is set for expansion with the acquisition of a second tied house. This is the **Narrowboat** at Clayton-le-Moors ("Sorry it's even further from Stockport than Haslingden" says Dave Porter). The pub has been closed for two years and when it re-opens will revert to its original name of the **Albion**. The Albion will be managed by Paul Stanyer, known to many as a barman at the Crown, Heaton Lane, and will mirror the low prices charged at Porters' other pub, the **Griffin** in Haslingden. That means bitter at £1 a pint and Sunshine at £1.30. Speaking of Sunshine, Dave tells us that this is to be upped in strength to 5.3% to give it more 'umph'. Look out also for a new 5.6% beer from Porters in the near future.

Finally, the new **Beartown Brewery** seems to have got off to a flying start with the first brew rapidly selling out. Incidentally Beartown have renamed their SB 'Beartown Premium'. The beer was stillaged in the cellar of the Crown, Heaton Lane as we went to press.

Beer House Festival



The Beer House's recent West Country Festival was a great success, with the handpumped firkins lasting less than half an hour at one point. The mixture of gravity dispense upstairs, and rotating handpumps downstairs was well thought out. Pictured above are Idy & Sal with the well presented upstairs stillage (Camra Organisers take note!) and below the diminutive but welcome new Beer Garden, complete with wildlife, which will provide a pleasant smoke free atmosphere on summer evenings..



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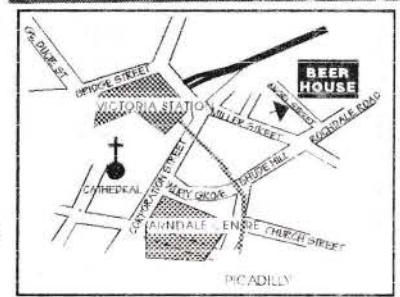
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That Outdoor Experience

I'm sorry to say, writes *Richard Hough*, that a few chairs on the pavement, or a bench in the car-park do not make a reasonable beer-garden. But there are some genuine beer-gardens in the area that make a summer-time pint that bit special. And a few feature that bastion of Englishness and the essence of what summer is all about - a well-kept bowling green.

While the thwack of leather on willow on a lazy afternoon on the village green, in the company of a few leisurely pints is the summer ideal for many people, Stockport and its environs do not easily lend themselves to such a large-scale pastime. The small number of bowling greens attached to pubs in the area are, however, well-used (when the sun pops from behind the clouds). And if the green is as well-kept as that at the Nursery, Heaton Norris, just imagine how good the beer will be...

Oddly enough neither local pub called the Bowling Green (one on Charles Street off Hillgate, the other in the middle of Marple) has a bowling green attached, although they probably did at one time. Greens can be found, though, at (with apologies to any I've overlooked):

1. The Cross Keys - a Hyde's house on the border of Cheadle Hulme and Adwood.
2. The Crown - a large Robinsons pub on the A6 in Great Moor
3. The Nursery - another Hyde's pub at the head of a cobbled street and a Good Beer Guide regular.
4. The Red Lion - a popular Marstons' house in Withington. A former landlord of the pub, Noel Burroughs, became national

bowls champion in the 1970s and the game is still taken as seriously there today.

5. The Royal Oak - a Robinsons pub on Commercial Road, Hazel Grove. The green was originally at the Red Lion on the A6 and when the pub was knocked down the turf was transferred to the Royal Oak.

6. The George in Compstall and the Friendship in Romiley - two more popular pubs in the rural part of Stockport.

While any beer garden is worth visiting, simply because the British summer is too short, pubs with bowling greens attached are, I feel, worth a special mention because of their rarity value. If anyone knows of any good beer gardens in the area please let me know (c/o the OT address) and we'll give you a mention.

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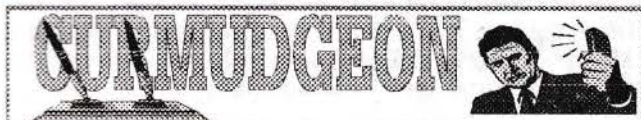
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NON-CAMRA MEMBERS WELCOME



While the government have grasped the nettle of all-day Sunday opening, they have chosen to do nothing about allowing pubs to open later at night, particularly on Fridays and Saturdays, claiming a lack of demand. Yet this is the period when many pubs really could expand their trade, and fight back against the competition.

It's always struck me as grossly unfair that pubs have to shut at 11, while nightclubs, which in general offer extortionate prices, poor beer, low standards of customer service and an unsavoury reputation for drugs and violence, can stay open until 2 or 3 in the morning. If people didn't have to bundle out of the pub at 11, many of them would probably be happier staying there rather than going to a club. It's also pretty certain that this would result in less trouble on the streets.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

If you were around in the Seventies you'll remember that dreadful vinyl upholstery in cars, which didn't breathe at all and stuck to your clothes as soon as the sun came out. Fortunately, consumer demand has now banished it to the dustbin of history, and even the cheapest car now comes with comfortable cloth seats.

Why is it, then, that we still have to put up with "leatherette" seating in pubs, which has exactly the same effect when the place is packed with sweaty bodies? I suppose you can tolerate it if it's been there for many years, but what on earth possesses pub designers to put it in new? Are they suggesting that the customers are likely to spill so much food and beer that the seats need a wipe-clean covering?

One of the worst local examples is in the Crown on Heaton Lane in Stockport, where perfectly good cloth was replaced with nasty vinyl when the place was done out as an alehouse a couple of years ago. The upholstery there is a particularly smooth and squashy variety and really does detract from a visit to what is, in most other respects, an excellent pub. Just up the road, in the Bridge Inn on Georges Road, 1960s vintage vinyl has recently given place to very smart cloth in the lounge, which improves the appearance and comfort of the place no end, and provides an excellent example for the Boddington PubCo to follow.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

From time to time, I've complained to friends about exorbitant food prices in some pubs, only to receive the reply "well, the prices may be high, but the portions are enormous". What, though, is the point in serving portions so big that they defeat a normal healthy appetite? The result is a lot of wasted food and a lot of overfaced diners. Pensioners in particular are likely to find 18-inch cod and bucketfuls of chips seriously offputting.

Big portions don't even necessarily represent a good deal, as the overheads which may make up over half the price of pub food are much the same whatever the size of the portion. Wouldn't it be better for these pubs to offer normal-sized portions at lower prices, but maybe keep the option of expensive monster meals for those who really do have the appetite to tackle them?

Heard at the Bar

CAMRA member in a Holt's pub:

C.M. Have you still got Sixex on draught?

Barmaid 'Pardon?'

C.M. 'Have you still got Sixex on draught?'

Barmaid 'Oh, Sorry, I thought you said 'Have you got Sex Act on draught.'

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

MAY '90

GO FOR GUESTS was the front page message for tenants of the Big 5 national brewers, who, from May 1st, had the right to stock a cask conditioned guest beer of their choice from whoever they chose. Some of the nationals had produced 'in-house' lists of "approved" guest beers, which they were willing to supply to their tenants, but most of these approved beers were not exactly an imaginative selection - tenants still had the right to choose a beer **IN ADDITION** to any "guest beer" they bought from the brewery list.

Grand Met. had no "in house" beers to offer, and ruled that their equipment could not be used to serve guests. Bass offered Tetley, Boddingtons and Robinsons, but also banned the use of their equipment to serve "non-approved" guests. Allied's lists were criticised for lack of imagination, and Whitbread's stuck to the cask beers they already produced (over 20). It looked as if the nationals were not exactly complying with the spirit of the new rules.

There were some critical comments about the alterations planned for Holt's Seven Stars on Ashton Old Road, a pub containing "a wealth of etched glass, mahogany and tile work". Adjoining buildings were to be demolished, and a new single storey extension built. Many of the pub's existing internal features would be swept away, and CAMRA had already objected to the planning application. Holt's were described as the custodians of many of Manchester's finest Victorian pubs, and doubts were expressed, in view of the Seven Stars plan, whether they were fit people to carry such a responsibility.

The Davenport Arms at Woodford, (locally known as the Thief's Neck) had started to sell Hartleys XB alongside the regular Robinson's Best Mild and Best Bitter. It was hoped that it would sell better there than it had in other local Robinson's pubs that had tried it. But it was being dispensed from a free-flow electric pump next to the other beers on hand pump, possibly leading some drinkers to believe it was a keg beer, although it was definitely 100% "real".

Finally, Cheadle's Red Lion was set to re-open on May 1st, following a major re-vamp by Playmaster Leisure. Forlorn hopes that it might still be a traditional local had been dashed by an advert in the local press for "chefs, waitresses and door supervisors" (that's bouncers to you and me.)

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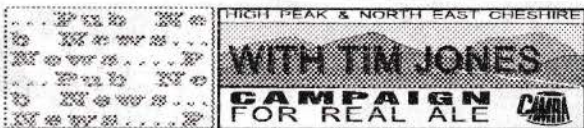
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More on the **Cheshire Cheese** (Hyde) saga. There is now available, on handpump, Boddingtons Bitter and Mild. The landlord wished me to clarify the matter after recent reports regarding keg bitter in this column.

On to other matters. In Stalybridge - the **Old Boars Head** (a long-time closed pub) has now been converted to offices. Not a surprising turn of events - but the permanent loss of a public house, however long it has been closed, is to be mourned.

In Audenshaw **Ye Olde Blue Pig** has changed into a rather garish horse of the hungry variety. These changes have been affecting other pubs in the OT area - the Magic Pub Co. is responsible and seems to be changing the orientation of the pubs towards food! Is the only available idea for the revitalisation of pubs to introduce food? Surely decently priced, well kept real ale would attract a large following, wouldn't it?

Over in the Marple area...the **Flowers**, Chisworth, has gained a new manager. Will this be the demise of the belly dancer? The **Rock Tavern** is now selling Theakstons beers - Mild, Best Bitter and Old Peculier.

Disley News

The **Rams Head** in Disley has been a poor pub for the last thirty years at least, writes Geoff Williamson. Under **Grand Met. ownership** the establishment struggled along never really fulfilling the potential of its location, size and facilities.

It went through a period of relative success as a food establishment under the "Berni Inn" banner, but since that fizzled out it has been a large pub looking for a direction (and some customers). Nothing much changed when the pub passed briefly to Scottish & Newcastle Breweries before the Magic Pub Co took it on some seven or eight months ago; even then little changed apart from the range of beer on offer - nothing, that is, until the end of March when the refurbishment bomb dropped on the unsuspecting small community of Disley.

Repainting the exterior cream and green over the original white with black wasn't so bad, it looked quite respectable. Plastering the outside of the building with new signs advertising the restaurant and bar upset many locals who didn't appreciate their beloved centre-piece being tampered with, but the last straw was the name, the old coaching inn known as the "Rams Head" for years was now to be called "THE HUNGRY HORSE".

Traditionalists in the village jammed local Council switchboards with their complaint calls, and local planning officers are investigating the objections to these changes to this listed building. Whatever happens the Magic Pub Co have certainly put the R.H./H.H. on the map again, and the external appearance in addition to the internal refurbishment, including revised bar layout and enlarged areas for drinkers are aimed at attracting new customers by creating a new image for the pub. In addition to the Websters Green Label Bitter, Boddingtons Bitter and Draught Bass currently on offer, Whitbread's Guest Beer List is to be added soon. We have seen many refurbishments, some have worked and some not and only time will tell whether the efforts at the Ram (Horse) have been worth it, but the pub has certainly been livelier recently and things can only get better after the last thirty years - we hope!

Down the road in Marple Bridge, the **Midland** has lost its Marstons Pedigree. This has been replaced by Flowers IPA - another beer from the Whitbread stable.

In Romiley, the **Spread Eagle** - recently refurbished - appears to have lost its guest beer. Oh, and by the way - I've been informed that it's not a Henry's Table. Meanwhile, over in Whaley Bridge, the **Jodrell Arms** appears to have taken a leaf out of the Bulls Head's book (or should that be menu). It now has an Indian restaurant upstairs - this is being run as a partnership between the pub and the curry providers.

Finally, in High Lane, the **Dog & Partridge** is now closed for a full refurbishment and will reopen as part of the Whitbread Brewers Fayre chain, no doubt to try and cash in on the popularity of the food-orientated, and recently enlarged, **Red Lion** up the road. We look forward to passing judgement on it when it finally reopens - as the Ravenous Rhinoceros, perhaps?

Record Breakers

Stalybridge already has one entry in the Guinness Book of Records with the longest pub name in the UK - 'The Old Thirteenth Cheshire Astley Volunteer Rifleman Corps Inn' and this is shortly to be joined by the shortest!

On 30th May there will be a reception at 'Q' on Market Street together with an official 'opening' of the pub. Guinness Book of Records editor Peter Matthews will be on hand to present the certificate marking the pub's inclusion in the book.

The licensee of 'The Old Thirteenth etc' will also be on hand and all manner of festivities are planned. The pub 'opens' its doors at 5 o'clock and a good night is in prospect (it has already been selected for the 1996 Good Beer Guide, so the quality of the beer is guaranteed).

THURS 4th - MON 8TH MAY

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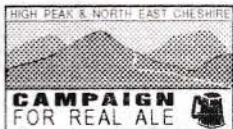
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High Peak Featured Pub MAY

This month the High Peak branch turns its attention to the Derbyshire part of its area to give deserved recognition to the *Bulls Head* in Old Glossop.

In a quiet backwater of Glossop, fifteen minutes walk from the centre, an old pub selling excellent Robinsons Ales seems very fitting. When you look more closely and find it also has a full menu of genuine Rusholme Indian food, then it really is worth closer scrutiny.

Steve and Thea Hakes took the pub over three years ago and achieved Good Beer Guide status in 1995. They ran the Jolly Crofter in Edgeley, Stockport, before moving to a pub in Oxford. However, when the Bulls Head became available they decided to put their own ideas into action. Contacting friends in Rusholme, they came to a franchise agreement where Steve and Thea run the bar and pub - but the kitchens are out of bounds. It works well. The pub's takings have gone from strength to strength and bookings are essential for food at weekends.

Indian food from the extensive menu is available every night from 6.30-10.30pm together with Sunday lunchtime although this will extend to all day when Sunday licensing reform comes through. An average meal works out at £5.50 and this includes



Old Glossop's Bulls Head

free papadums and sauces. Recently, a new balti menu was added with meals served in a genuine sizzling pot stood on a wooden platter. The only criticism people have is that it is too popular at times; perhaps the pub should be extended into the empty house the brewery owns next door. Of course real ale and curries go hand in hand so this is the ideal combination with Best Bitter (£1.28) and Old Stockport Bitter (£1.20) both available.

The pub is a pleasant walk through Manor Park from the town centre and is also handy for walkers on Doctors Gate, a four mile path that leads onto the Pennine Way near the Snake Summit.

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The **Railway** in North Reddish has had a refurbishment. Unfortunately Whitbread have, as usual, gone just one stage too far when it comes to taste - here, having completed a tasteful, easy on the eye redecoration they then have to stick large 3-D neon signs in the corners promoting their expensive lagers etc.

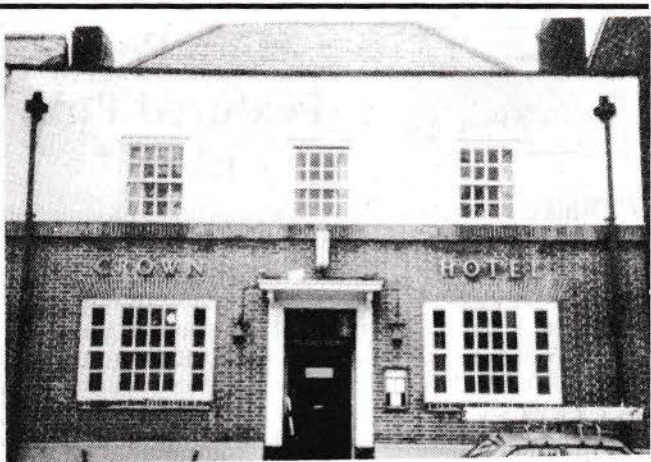
Meanwhile down in the centre of Reddish, the refurbishment of the vault in the *Grey Horse* has been completed. **Boddingtons PubCo** have not gone for anything garish but have made the room more comfortable and less cluttered than before.

Chris Goode after only a few months after taking over the **Midway** on Newbridge Lane, Stockport, has not only finished redecorating the pub but has extended the beer range. Alongside Boddies Bitter, Courage Directors, John Smiths Bitter and the excellent Magnet can be found a handpump selling Wilson's Mild. It is good to see that when many pubs are taking out cask mild, Chris has had the guts to give it a go - and him a southerner to boot!

Opening Times also has a serious rival at the **Midway** with the pub's social club producing a professional looking pub magazine. Altogether the **Midway** looks to be on the up again.

The **Cross Keys** on the Adswold/Cheadle Hulme border is due for a refurbishment in May. This is of course one of the pubs where the new Hyde's Anvil Victory Ale is to be sold via handpump.

A recent **Opening Times** (March 1995) article wondered about the availability of Boddingtons Mild in the area. A visit to Heaton Moor and Heaton Chapel will produce very positive answers. The *Crown* on Heaton Moor Road sells 3-4 eighteen-gallon barrels a week, whilst the *George & Dragon*, Heaton Chapel, after a brief dalliance with Chesters Mild, sells a couple of eighteens a week. In both pubs turnover is more than sufficient to ensure a consistently decent pint of Boddingtons Mild.



Also at the **Crown** in Heaton Moor, landlord Peter Belfield has embarked on a more adventurous guest beer policy. He now gets beer from Ogden Wade (a Boddingtons subsidiary). This has produced more interesting brews than the Whitbread list. Recent offerings have been Jennings Cockerhoop, Morland Old Master and Burts Newport Nobbler. Burts VPA is on the coming soon list. Peter is pleased with sales and customer interest and looks forward to being able to offer more unusual brews.

Still in the Heaton, the **BodPubCo** houses offer bargain drinking with happy hours at the *Three Crowns*, Heaton Norris, the *George & Dragon*, Heaton Chapel and the *Crown*, Heaton Moor. Times vary slightly but each pub has a tea-time reduced price session during the week whilst the *George & Dragon* has an early lunch hour reduction as well. Offers seem to be 20p or so off mild and bitter with prices as low as £1 a pint. Additionally the **Three Crowns** sells Oldham Bitter on permanent offer at £1.08, whilst in Reddish the recently refurbished *Grey Horse* continues with Boddingtons Bitter at £1 a pint throughout the day.

At the **Osborne House** in Rusholme we welcome new licensees Alison and Alan Edwards who took over on March 17th after working for Sam Smiths in Scunthorpe. Both are locals, though, Alan comes from Tyldesley while Alison hails from Chorlton. They hope to see the installation of handpumps in the near future.

In Edgeley the *Pineapple* appears to once again be closed. As we reported in last month's *Stagger*, customers did some times seem to be at a premium here. Nevertheless, let's hope that the closure is only temporary and not something more permanent.

Manchester is to get another free house specialising in real ales. This is to be the second in a nation-wide chain of 'Head of Steam' pubs which is being set up by Tony Brookes who used to run the *Legendary Yorkshire Heroes* chain of freehouses on Tyneside. These pubs are intended to appeal to train buffs as well as featuring up to nine real ales (plus trad cider to boot) and therefore feature a host of railwayana including a scale model railway. The Manchester site is in the premises formerly occupied by the Ministry night-club next to Deansgate Station and is projected to open on 14th June.

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LOCAL HAUNTS



by Pete Massey

Stockport is a fascinating town, full of interesting nooks and crannies. Hillgate is my favourite place - the oldest part of town, steeped in its own history and the source of many stories of spirits from the past which still haunt the premises of past and present taverns. Hillgate was the setting for the murder of his wife by a man who has the unfortunate distinction of being the last person in England to be gibbeted. Cast iron drainpipes display dates from the 18th century - being some of the earliest examples of decorative cast ironwork (the Red Bull is particularly impressive in this respect) and it is still possible to see part of the original castle wall along a certain dark passageway.

Underbank, the start of Hillgate, was a thriving community in the coaching days of the late 15th-18th centuries and there were many taverns to cater for the travellers. The present day entrance to the air raid shelters once held the cellars of a public house. Opposite the Three Shires on Underbank stands the Alliance & Leicester Building Society. On the Ordinance Survey map of 1850 the premises are shown as the Grapes Inn. Oblivious to this fact, I'd for some years a couple of accounts at that branch. The staff were friendly, nice and, what's more, pretty, but all was not as it seemed.

In 1988 it became common knowledge that there was an air of melancholy about the place; the girls who worked there spoke of being affected by overwhelming sadness. The toilets were upstairs and none of the girls would venture up there alone. There were other rooms upstairs, locked, empty and silent, as they had been for years.

Inevitably, it was decided to refurbish the upstairs and regular readers of Local Haunts will know what happens when you do that sort of thing. All was quiet for a while and then on the morning of Thursday July 9th 1992, a cleaner entered the building at 5.30am to perform her regular duties. At the top of the stairs she became aware of a presence, a 'slight breeze' and she saw a wispy white figure float past here and disappear straight through a solid wall. Needless to say, she was put off her original intentions and legged it, ringing up later and refusing to come back. On 13th July, the mother of all phenomena presented itself. In the corner of the downstairs office hundreds of maggots were seen to drop from the ceiling to land wriggling on the office furniture below, clogging up typewriters and computers. Rentokil experts were called in to remove

that part of the ceiling and guess what? They could find no cause for the fall of maggots. Subsequent research of a different kind revealed that, some time at the end of the last century, the body of the landlord's daughter was discovered in the room above that ceiling. It was never fully determined whether it was suicide or murder...until next month, sweet dreams...

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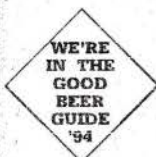
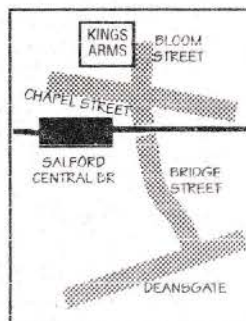
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MANCHESTER MATTERS



by Rhys Jones

It's been a great month for the Irish, or at least for Irish and pseudo-Irish bars. First to wear the green were the Magic Pub Company, who have renamed no less than three of their Manchester pubs: in the City Centre Sefton's has become Paddy's Rat and Carrot, and the Rising Sun is now Paddy's Wig, while the Crown in Longsight has become Riley's Tavern. All these pubs still bear some external evidence of their former names, though it's not clear how long this will remain. And frankly, the new names are the most Irish things about them.

The two in the City Centre have been given the "bare boards and sawdust" treatment, with assorted artefacts liberally strewn around, but little or nothing that's identifiably Irish; Riley's has been done in a slightly more restrained manner, and does at least boast a harp motif in the carpet. All in all, though, these make a pretty amateurish trio of conversions. The real ale range in all these pubs is unchanged: Riley's and Paddy's Rat and Carrot have Bass, Green Label, and Boddies, while Paddy's Wig adds a couple of guest beers (including, when I called, good if pricey Landlord).

In Fallowfield, Magic have changed the name of the Fallowfield to the Hungry Horse, which seems to be one of their standard "theme" names, cropping up locally in Offerton (the Golden Hind) and Disley (the Ram's Head) as well in much of their London estate.

If Magic want to know how to create a proper Irish pub, they could do worse than study Tetley's latest venture - Scruffy Murphy's.

This concept was savaged in a recent issue of CAMRA's national newspaper "What's Brewing", and I have to wonder whether the writer had actually visited one before the diatribe was penned, for I consider our two to be excellent examples of pub design, using quality materials and carving out an extraordinary number of separate drinking areas (including a creditable attempt at a Dublin-style snug) from what could easily have been cavernous boozing factories. Yes - we have two. They are on Wilmslow Road, opposite Owens Park, in Fallowfield (this, for my money the more characterful of the two, was formerly the Mock Turtle restaurant adjoining the Queen of Hearts pub) and on Grosvenor Street, almost opposite the Flea & Firkin, in All Saints/Chorlton-on-Medlock. There's good Irish food, from Boxty to Spotted Mick, and while shiploads of Guinness will undoubtedly be sold, there's also Tetley Bitter on handpump (no clips, though, at least to start with). The row of miniature handpump-style dispensers for keg beers will surely not deceive even the most naive; it may be worth mentioning, however, that Addestones cider, also served in this way, is as ever under gas pressure.



But Irish bars aren't the only game in town. In the obscure surroundings of New Wakefield Street, behind Oxford Road Station in the City Centre, Generation X is our latest trendy designer bar. Very smart it is too, in its post-industrial setting with its fabric lampshades hovering almost low enough to knock the glasses over. It's open 11-11 (though posters warn of 10.30 last orders at the bar), with decent-looking food from 11 till 8 and the daily papers put out in a rack for you to read. Boasting some interesting design features (including a perhaps disconcerting mirrored urinal in the gents), it may well develop an appeal wider than that suggested by its rather exclusive-sounding name. The handpumped beers, at just £1 a pint, are Boddingtons Bitter and Flowers IPA.

At the Dog & Partridge in Didsbury, the beers stillaged behind the bar are served using an "aspirator" or cask breather system, which supplies carbon dioxide gas at atmospheric pressure to replace the volume of beer drawn off; as such they do not fall within CAMRA's definition of real ale. While some may think this an almost pedantic point - and I would certainly far prefer a pint of "cask breather" Plassey Bitter, such as I enjoyed at the Dog & Partridge last month, to Websters Bitter from the most politically correct dispense system imaginable - perhaps the real point here is the folly of the current fad for gravity dispense in the specialist real ale pubs of the major operators. Before it reaches the drinker's glass, the best place for real ale is a cool hygienic cellar.

In Longsight, the New Victoria is closed and boarded (and rumoured for conversion into yet another Irish bar...)

Finally, I cannot close without drawing attention to the opening of Holt's latest pub, the Spread Eagle on Wilbraham Road in Chorlton-cum-Hardy. Occupying a large house formerly used as a hotel, it's spaciouly laid out with two bars and also offers accommodation. With a good pint of Holt's mild and bitter on handpump, this surely sets the seal on Chorlton's transformation from a drab suburb dominated by national breweries to one of Manchester's top drinking areas.

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We will be having the usual wide range of beers with old favourites being joined by many beers new to the festival. These should include the return of Porters beers from Haslingden, beer from the new Beartown Brewery at Congleton and Black Bull at Fenney Bentley. Whim ales will also be back and Whim should also be providing us with a special festival beer - a strong (5%) dark beer based on the brewery's popular Black Christmas winner brew.

With something like 80 ales to choose from ale lovers will be well catered for (and our bar managers will aim to have at least 40 beers on at any one time - until we start to sell out at the end of the festival that is!). Lovers of traditional cider and perry will also be catered for with our well established cider bar. This year we are ordering 240 gallons and aim to have one of the widest selections of any festival around.

There will be hot food and hot entertainment at all sessions. There will be the usual CAMRA shop, tombola, souvenir glasses and T-shirts. And just a word about the glasses - these will be oversized with a pint line on them. Full measures guaranteed!

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All members are invited to participate in our packed line-up of socials - at least two events per week: brewery visits (with plenty of sampling time!), curry crawl, minibus trips inside and outside of the area; awaydays by train, Staggers and Pubs of the Month are all forthcoming events. So why not become a member of the most successful consumer pressure group in Europe. There has never been a better time to join.

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