

OPENING TIMES



5,500 CIRCULATED
EVERY MONTH

No:
135

JULY 1995 - CAMRA NEWSLETTER OF THE YEAR

BE INDEPENDENT

Support your local brewers

CAMRA makes every July Independents Month - a chance to promote Britain's independent brewers. Five, and soon possibly four or even three, national companies control over 80% of the brewing market. Their brands dominate advertising and sponsorship. However Britain's growing band of independent brewers offer a wider choice.

There are now around 350 independent brewers - and a new brewery opened every week of last year. This year alone we have seen local entrants to the brewing scene in the shape of Richard Cobdens (Stockport), Millgate (Failsworth) and Beartown (Congleton). The independents success can be put down to their emphasis on choice, quality and value for money:

Independent brewers - for choice

between them, the independents produce 1100 real ales their beers are brewed to local tastes for local markets they have led the way in reviving and inventing beer styles, cask stouts and porters for instance this has forced larger companies to offer more choice and better quality, Whitbread's 'Single Varietal Hop Beers' being a good example.

Independent brewers - for quality

Take the judging of the Good Beer Guide 'Beers of the Year' judges gave 43 out of 46 awards to beers brewed by independents independent family brewers won 18 awards (39%) independent brewers won 25 awards (54%) the five national brewers won only three awards between them - and two of those were for bottled beers

Independent brewers - value for money

Tied pubs of independent brewers are consistently cheaper than tied pubs of national brewers - and generally cheaper than many free houses, too. Just look at the results of CAMRA's national prices survey.

During Independents Month CAMRA branches throughout the country will be working to promote their independent brewers but how can you help? If your local is owned by one of the national brewers encourage it to stock real guest beers from local brewers. Show there is a demand. Drink their beers and demand them in pubs - the best way of supporting them. Join CAMRA. Only £10 during July (£2 off the normal rate). You get a lively monthly newspaper full of beer news, advance notice of 140 CAMRA beer festivals every year, and a chance to take part in social activities run by 180 CAMRA branches.

* The following independent breweries are based in or near Greater Manchester: Robinsons, Richard Cobdens (Stockport), Hyde's Anvil, Holts (Manchester), Lees (Middleton Junction), Oak (Heywood), Millgate (Failsworth), McGuinness (Rochdale), Burtonwood, Coach House (Warrington), Porters (Haslingden), Beartown (Congleton), Weetwood (Tarpurley).

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Scruffy Murphys

Following our report last month, pumpclips have now been installed in both Manchester branches of Tetley PubCo's Scruffy Murphys chain which should go some way to promoting the cask Tetley bitter which is available alongside the more prominent kegs beers and stouts.

Another interesting development could be on the way, though. In the not too distant future both Scruffys will be selling a genuine cask-conditioned stout. Samuel Allsops Traditional Stout is to be brewed by what is coyly referred to as the "Samuel Allsop Micro-Brewery" in Burton-on-Trent (but which in fact is a small scale plant housed in the massive Ind Coope brewery in that town). However, notwithstanding its origins, this is welcome new beer will be a 4.2%ABV dry stout and seems tailor made for the Scruffy Murphys pubs. Tetley PubCo Operations Director Mike Wilson tells us that the beer was originally intended for the Festival Ale Houses (such as the City Arms) but he has insisted that locally it first appears in Scruffy Murphys.

A cask stout is just what these 'Irish' bars have been missing and it is to be hoped that this new move is a success. More news as we get it.



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PUB of the Month JULY

The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for July goes to the Orion in Withington. Situated at the Withington end of Burton Road, this former Whitbread house has been transformed since its take-over by local brewers Joseph Holts and the arrival of licensees Bev and John who came to the pub from Rochdale over two years ago.

In its Whitbread days the Orion was a mediocre pub usually selling only keg beers. All that changed on the Holts take-over and that brewery's value for money cask-conditioned mild and bitter now sell in huge quantities - 14 hogsheads (54-gallon barrels) of bitter and 7 22-gallon barrels of mild a week put the Orion 14th in the Holts sales league. A remarkable achievement when you consider it is quite a small pub with just a small vault and middle sized lounge. Its success is down to the superb community feel of the pub and the fine quality of the beer. The latter is such that the pub will be a new entry in CAMRA's 1996 Good Beer Guide, due to be published in October.

The unusual name, by the way, comes from a W.W.II battleship - a photograph of the ship and details of its history are displayed in the vault.

Once again we have another example of a national brewers backwater turned into a thriving pub by the intervention of a local brewer and keen, committed licensees. Join us as we celebrate this success story on the presentation night, July 27th.

How to get there - Bus 42 from Stockport Bus Station runs every 30 minutes until 8.00pm and will drop you in Withington village. Otherwise take buses 370 or 20 to Didsbury and change to any Manchester bound bus. Another option might be to take the train to Oxford Road and get on any southbound bus in the 40 series.



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MARSTONS PEDIGREE, CASTLE EDEN +

6 GUEST BEERS, changing continuously

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EVENING MEALS: MON - FRI 5 - 8pm
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FOLK MUSIC
CAMRA PUB OF THE MONTH MARCH 1995

STEAKS AT SILLY PRICES

OPEN ALL DAY

Festival Goodies

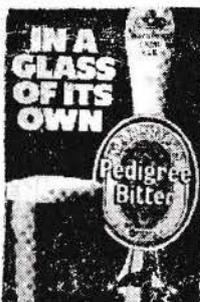
Did you miss out on your Stockport Beer Festival T-shirt? Well, there are a few left in black, white and grey (L, XL) or yellow (L) at £4.49 each, including post and packing. Note - extra-large are in particular short supply. There are also a few black sweatshirts (XL) left at the give-away price of £6.99 together with a number of the much-acclaimed central Manchester pub guide at £3.50 each. Send details of your order with a cheque made payable to "Stockport Beer Festival" to 66 Downham Rd, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, SK4 5EG.

The Red Lion

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Full Steam Ahead

A superhuman effort on the part of all concerned saw Manchester's latest freehouse open on time at midday, Friday 23rd June. This is the **Head of Steam** sited in the old Ministry night-club building on Whitworth Street, next to Deansgate Station.

This is in fact the second of what is planned to be a national chain of pubs, all located on or next to stations and with a definite railway theme. The first is at Euston and others are planned for Huddersfield, Bridlington and Cottingham near Hull. The idea is the brainchild of Tony Brookes, former owner of the Legendary Yorkshire Heroes beer agency and freehouse chain in the North East and CAMRA member since 1974 and if the Euston outlet is anything to go by, he has hit upon a recipe for success.

Hopefully that will be mirrored by the Manchester outlet which is well placed to capitalise on the Castlefield tourist trade. The first thing that strikes you is the sheer size of the place, it's certainly the biggest of the city's real ale freehouses. Essentially split-level the bar faces you as you enter and to the right there is a higher level with the food counter at one end with a dining area in an alcove off. Initially food will be served all day until the level of demand is determined.

A railway theme pervades the whole pub but this isn't done in a gimmicky way and there is in fact a definite intention of attracting railway enthusiasts - much of the memorabilia on display is for sale along with a wide selection of railway magazines, books and videos, the latter of which will be played in the pub.

Of prime interest to OT readers will be the beer range. There should be 10 beers regularly on sale. Permanent will be one from the range of Shepherd Neame, Banks & Taylor, Hop Back, Caledonian, Batemans, Wolves & Dudley and Bass. It is anticipated that different beers from the wide ranges brewed by these concerns will feature in rotation, although the Bass beers are likely to be either Draught Bass and Highgate Dark and from Caledonian, Deuchars IPA will effectively be a house beer. In addition there will be three ever changing guest beers plus real cider - Biddenden from Kent.



COPY DEADLINE FOR AUGUST ISSUE IS JULY 27

Please note that due to the impending 40th Birthday of The Production Editor, not to mention his party at the Great British Beer Festival at Olympia, the August Issue will be a week late and will not be distributed until 12 - 16th August.



A range of bottled beers from Shepherd Neame, Batemans and Caledonian plus a large number of country wines complete the picture

In charge of all this are licensees Dave and Heather Shipley who hail from the North East and have a wealth of experience in the licensed trade behind them. Dave's father was in the trade for 47 years while Dave himself has clocked up 15 years, 10 of them at Newcastle's Bridge Hotel, part of the Sir John Fitzgerald freehouse chain.

The Head of Steam is a bold and enterprising venture adding a welcome new dimension to the Manchester drinking scene, particularly so after last month's double loss of the Sportsmans and the Swinging Sporran. It deserves to succeed so pay it a visit and give it your support.



THE HEAD OF STEAM

2B WHITWORTH ST. WEST,
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(at Deansgate
Railway Station)

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- ★ Rail enthusiast and model SHOP
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THE CREAM OF MANCHESTER.

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW.

There is one theme running through our main stories this month - on all counts, be it value for money, choice and protection of our brewing and public house heritage, the independent brewers are those who, by and large, deliver the goods.

At the other end of the industry, though, turmoil beckons. If the proposed merger between Scottish & Newcastle and Courage is allowed to go ahead, regardless of how many strings may be attached to the deal, all hell will break loose. Not only will the new company take an axe to its breweries and beer brands but a fresh wave of merger mania will break out among the other nationals. Will Whitbread swallow the breweries currently run by Carlsberg-Tetley? What will Bass do to regain its number one slot? There

really is only one solution to this - the deal must be stopped in its tracks by the Monopolies Commission. They have done it before and they must do it again.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hydes Anvil, for a long time arguably the sleepest of our local brewers are now perhaps the most interesting. Brewers up and down the country are discovering that one off and seasonal brews are a way of increasing interest in their pubs and beer generally. This is certainly proving to be the case with Hydes who when it comes to initiative are now showing a clean pair of heels to their local rivals. Of course, the question on everyone's lips is - will we now see the return of the famed Anvil XXXX this winter? Only time will tell.

John Clarke

Mr Thomas's

After two years in receivership, the clouds of doubt have been lifted from the future of Mr Thomas's Chop House on Cross Street, Manchester with its purchase by the Boddington PubCo.

The pub is a magnificent Edwardian survivor with a superb tiled interior complementing the impressive terracotta facade. The pub is split into two areas - that at the front primarily for drinking while there is a seated dining area at the back - both have been generally cleaned and spruced up with the addition of period light fittings and photos completing the picture. The two regular cask beers are Boddingtons Bitter and Flowers Original plus a regularly changing guest. At present this is '125' which has been "specially brewed" at Castle Eden to commemorate the pub's 125th anniversary - a nice touch.



Gladstone

The Gladstone on Hillgate, Stockport, opened at the end of May and seems to be doing very nicely, thank you.

The pub has been generally spruced up and is a pleasant place to stay for a pint, or three. Ken and Keith are very much aware of the historic significance and the rarity of the unspoilt 1920s interior - they have already restored the bar shutters to working order. As predicted all five Burtonwood beers are on sale at value for money prices. Indeed price reductions seem to be the order of the day with the premium beers all recently reduced by 5p a pint - Forshaws to £1.25, Top Hat to £1.40 and Buccaneer to £1.50.

Ken Birch has also been instrumental in forming "The Friends of Green Bullet" formed to protest at Whitbread's use of the name for one of their speciality brews when, of course, Green Bullet was also the house beer for the Crown, Heaton Lane when Ken was licensee there. The 'original' Green Bullet was an extremely hoppy beer produced by West Coast Brewery, whereas the Whitbread version is very sweet and malty. Unfortunately for Whitbread, in the pubs that sold Green Bullet they distributed cards asking for drinkers views on the beer and giving a postal address to which the completed cards should be sent. You can guess what has happened - they should by now have been inundated with these setting out local drinkers trenchant views on their perceived hijacking of the Green Bullet name. The Friends of Green Bullet will be following up this protest, we understand.

EDITORIAL AND ADVERTISING

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STAGGER

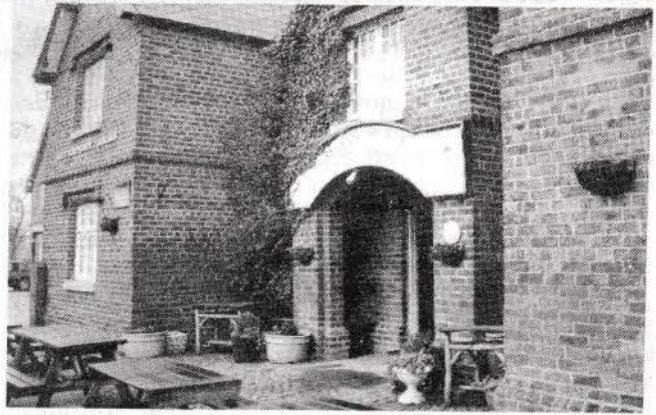
with John Clarke

This month we have a Stagger with a difference - a minibus tour of some of the better pubs on the Stockport and South Manchester fringes.

Our first port of call was the **Shady Oak** in Bramhall. Hidden on Radford Drive, deep in the Newhouse Farm Estate, it's not a pub you will come across by chance but it's certainly worth the effort of finding. Providing you can negotiate Stockport council's speedbumps, that is - this was our first, but by no means last, encounter with these and whilst it is not within OT's remit to comment on the pros and cons of them, you can certainly see what all the fuss is about! The Shady Oak originally opened as a freehouse but after about 18 months of successful trading was sold to Tetleys - who had originally owned the site but had apparently come to the conclusion that a pub on the site wouldn't be viable.

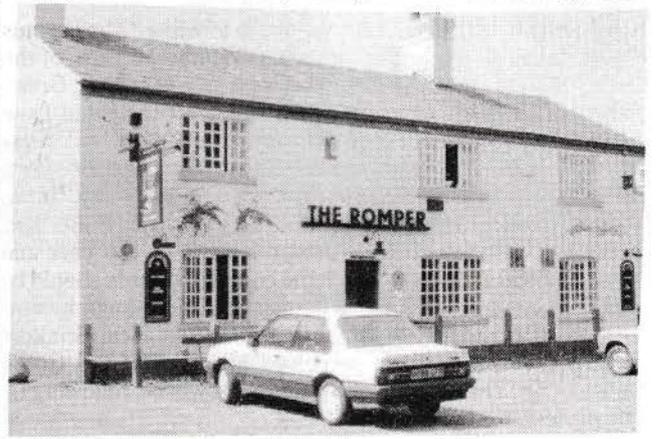
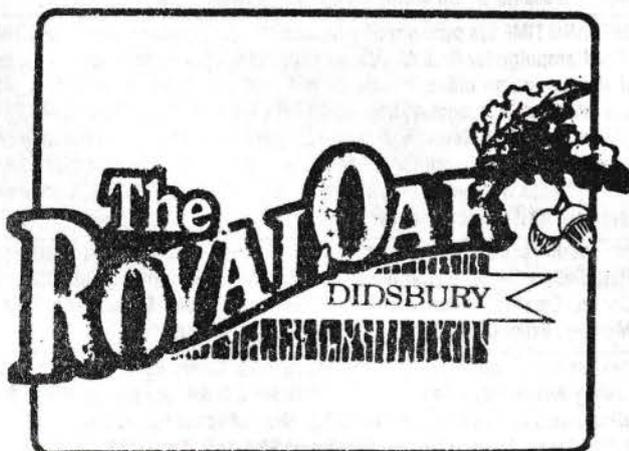
Since those days there have been several refurbishments and the pub can now best be described as a multi-area, multi-level big brewers 'traditional' pub with the usual plethora of stained wood, stained glass and bare brick. Having said that it is nevertheless a pleasant place to drink with five cask beers usually on offer - Tetley Dark Mild, Tetley Bitter, Burton Ale plus (a relic from the freehouse days) Thwaites Bitter and a regularly changing guest beer, Eldridge Pope's Hardy Country Bitter on our visit. Prices aren't cheap with the mild at £1.37 rising to £1.59 for both the Burton Ale and the Hardy Country Bitter. We tried three of the beers, Dark Mild, Thwaites and Hardy. All were comfortably above average with the Hardy marginally the more preferred. The pub also features a 'Big Steak' menu for the seriously hungry.

After that it's back on board and a short drive to our next port of call - the **Davenport Arms** at Woodford. Popularly known as the 'Thief's Neck' this pub has been run by the Hallworth family for over 60 years (and Robinsons didn't buy it until the 1920s). Current licensee is Yvonne who took over from father John a few years ago (although he still does a lot of the cellar work). Close to British Aerospace and situated in upmarket suburbia on the fringes of Cheshire the Davenport Arms could very easily have become an upmarket dining pub for the Cheshire set. On first glance the range of expansive motors outside might lead you to think that this is the case but step



inside and you will find a superbly traditional country pub catering to a wide variety of customers. Apart from the main area around the bar which is often very crowded there are two side rooms, a smallish lounge, which really comes into its own in the winter when it is a delight to settle down in front of the roaring fire with a glass of Old Tom, and an excellent locals vault. For the summer months there are benches set out at the front and a delightful beer garden at the back. Despite the crowds at the bar service here is never a problem and apart from Old Tom - which we didn't try on this occasion - there are three other Robbies beers on sale: Hatters Mild, Old Stockport Bitter and Best Bitter. All were very good indeed with little to choose between them. Old Stockport was a recent substitute for the slow selling Frederics and we were pleased to hear that it was selling well. We reluctantly bade our farewells to Yvonne as another classic awaited us.

A longer drive this time took us to Ringway village on the southern edge of the airport and the **Romper** on Pinfold Lane. This is a Boddington PubCo house with another long-serving licensee, Harry Curran. Unlike the Davenport Arms, though, the recent history of the Romper has been rather turbulent. It's not so long ago that Boddingtons threatened to seriously compromise the character of the pub by building a huge extension to accommodate dining facilities. More recently there was the long-running saga of the security gate erected by over-zealous airport officials which threatened the pub's viability by cutting off most of its airport trade. Luckily all of these threats have been successfully overcome and the Romper remains the traditional haven it has always been. There are four rooms, a traditional vault and three lounge-type rooms all comfortably furnished with a pleasing mix of furniture. For the summer months there is a huge beer garden where the airport traffic can be observed whilst enjoying one of the six traditional ales on offer. On our visit these were Cains Mild, Boddingtons Bitter, Theakstons Bitter, Draught Bass and two guests -



Jennings Snecklifter and Old Henry. The latter was new to us and turned out to be a 4%ABV house beer brewed for BodPubCo by Whitbread's Castle Eden Brewery.. Like the Davenport Arms, the Romper is a long-standing Good Beer Guide entry, and this was reflected in the beer quality tonight. All were comfortably above average with the Bass and Snecklifter being thought very good indeed. Prices are competitive, too - the Snecklifter was only £1.45 for a 5.1% beer - as Harry takes the admirable view that any discounts he gets should be shared by his customers.

The next stop wasn't to far. This was the **Tatton Arms** at Moss Nook, another pub whose location is dominated by the comings and goings at the airport. Clearly a very old building, the inside is heavily panelled in dark wood and the variety of rooms and levels give it a maze-like quality. Whilst it is clearly very popular and well-liked by its regulars, I have to confess that this is a pub whose charms have always escaped me - I don't know why but I've never really felt comfortable there. Plenty of people obviously do, though, so who am I to criticise. It's another Robbies pub with Hatter Mild and Best Bitter available on electric pump. Again both were comfortably above average with the mild slightly more preferred. Apparently there is a vending machine in the ladies which will sell you a jewellery box (!) for £1.

Ever onwards we now plunged back into deepest suburbia and, overcoming yet more speed bumps, found the **High Grove** on Silverdale Road in Gatley. This is a modern Hydes pub catering essentially for the locals, it's a pub you really have to go out of your way to find. It certainly serves its community well being pleasant and comfortable. Indeed the pub had recently been redecorated nicely in pubby shades of brown. I've had good beer here in the past but tonight proved to be a bit of a let-down. There were three beers on offer - Hydes Mild, Bitter and the new Victory Ale, the latter on a specially installed handpump. The mild and bitter were above average but opinions varied on the Victory. Those who had tried it before weren't impressed but those of us who were new to the beer thought it quite good. Oh well, you pays your money and takes your choice...

Time was now pressing and we had one last pub to visit. This was the **Griffin** at Heald Green. A large and very busy modern Holts pub, this too, had seen recent refurbishment which resulted in the snug being brought into the main body of the pub. Our party split into two, some staying in the former snug area but some of us chose the quieter vault. Considering the pub's location in upmarket Stockport suburbia this was an astonishingly spartan room, "like the day room of an old people's home" commented one of our party uncharitably. It's obviously well-used, though and boasts two dart boards, including a Manchester log-end. No doubts about the beer, though, which was superb, with both mild and bitter being rated equally good. We even managed to find time for a second pint before heading home.

So, how to sum up? A night of astonishing variety for both pubs and beer. The pubs ranged from the ancient to the very modern and between them offered no less than 20 different cask beers. Each one is worth a visit, you won't be disappointed.

**JOIN CAMRA NOW TO FIGHT
THE NITROKEG MENACE!**
membership form on page 23

**COPY DEADLINE FOR AUGUST
ISSUE IS JULY 27**

STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

Slash and Save

Chancellor Kenneth Clarke (well, he was when we went to press) should slash beer tax by two-thirds and help save the country's pubs. That was CAMRA's message to MPs last month.

Smuggling and legitimate imports from low tax countries like France already account for 1.1 million pints every day. This threatens the future of thousands of small community pubs, which are heavily dependent on beer sales for their business. Giving evidence to the Parliamentary Beer Club Inquiry into cross-border shopping, CAMRA Campaigns Manager Steve Cox said that beer duty was an unfair tax, whose UK levels had become doomed by the European Single Market. "With the same beer paying 30 pence in duty in Britain and 4 pence in France, customers will not stand for it - they will just take cars and vans to Calais. Already cross-border trade is 4% of the total beer market and that will double by 2000." CAMRA argues that the current policy threatens the unique contribution to the community made by the 'local'. The current policy will lead to pub closures and job losses, and encourages smuggling, crime and a contempt for the law, says CAMRA.

The brewing industry employs 910,000 people and raises £11.4 billion for the Exchequer, of which only £2.4 billion comes from beer duty. If the tax take from the industry as a whole is considered, cutting beer duty could raise revenue - by keeping pubs open, saving jobs, eliminating cross border trade and crime.

Tom Thumb's

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SKY HIGH

CAMRA has been monitoring the price of your pint since it was formed in 1971 and a regular national survey has been carried out since the early 1980's. This year's survey was the biggest ever, covering 1080 pubs across the country. Over 5000 beer and lager prices were checked during April in a whole variety of pubs and not just 'CAMRA favourites'.

The 1995 results were released at the end of June and the key findings were:

Beer prices up by 5.4% over the year, that's twice the rate of inflation. The annual increase would have been 4.8% without the Chancellor's duty increase last November.

'Premium pricing' of real ales compared to keg beers. Real Ale is now more expensive than keg. Only five years ago the reverse was true.

New 'nitro-keg' beers like Caffreys and Kilkenny cost more than other keg beers and real ale.

Drinking beer in a pub owned by an independent brewer will cost you less than in a pub owned by a national brewer. A pint is 3p cheaper than the equivalent in a nationally owned pub

More and more pubs are running price promotions as they struggle to compete for customers' money. The number of pubs running promotions has almost doubled since last year as pubs face the decline in their use and the threat from cross-border imports of alcohol

Real ale prices rose by 5%, with inflation at only 2.8%. The declining band of lager drinkers fared even worse with a 6.1% increase on the year. This was before the recent round of price increases which have seen some beers up by as much as 7%.

CAMRA's Mike Benner told OT "Beer drinkers are still paying grossly inflated prices for their pints. Comparing increases in beer prices with inflation over the last five years reveals that on average prices have risen by about twice the rate of inflation over that period".

As ever, the North West was the cheapest region for beer and the South East the most expensive. The cheapest beer found was in a micro-brewery's pub in Newport with a pint

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of bitter at 85p although our own Joseph Holts retains its crown with the cheapest widely available beers. The most expensive pint was £2.45 for a pint of strong ale in Buckinghamshire.

The new nitro-keg beers like Caffreys and Kilkenny cost 30p more than a standard keg beer and 10p more than a pint of real ale of similar strength. These new "draught-in-a-can" on draught beers are being promoted as premium products with prices to match. A comparable real ale costs less and does not have to be served so cold that any taste is killed off. Over the years the message from CAMRA's survey has remained constant - for value for money drink real ale and for the best value of all drink real ale from an independent brewer.

Summers Up at Hydes

Hydes venture into the seasonal beer market has not only proved a major success but also looks set to continue.

Victory Ale, introduced for the VE Day celebrations sold about five times more than expected and there is evidence that it was not only a success in its own right but has also helped to build volumes on other Hydes beers. Spurred on by this, the next seasonal brew will be out by the time you read this Summer Ale was due to be rolled out into the company's estate in the week commencing 3rd July. This is a light refreshing beer, just right for the hot weather, at 3.2% ABV. It is brewed primarily with Maris Otter malt (generally accepted as the malt for brewing) with the use of an 'eclectic blend' of coloured malts. Hops are Fuggles and Goldings and the beer is also dry-hopped.

OT managed to get a sneak preview tasting just before the launch and we think another success is on the cards - it's a pale golden beer with a refreshing taste and light hoppiness which will make it ideal for the hot weather and /or lunchtime drinking. The retail price is to be good-value £1.10 a pint and it is hoped that most of Hydes tenants will take it, all managed houses will be selling the beer as a matter of course.

Yet another seasonal beer is planned for early autumn (or perhaps sooner). The fine detail is being kept under wraps but we can reveal that this should be a premium strength, full-bodied dark beer.

*Work should be underway on the Farmers Arms in Burnage by the time OT comes out. This latest addition to the Hydes estate should be opening sometime in September.

Beer Gardens

by Richard Hough

With summer well and truly upon us (in theory at least) it's time once again to turn our thoughts to the pleasures of outdoor drinking. A few observations can be made on the subject of beer gardens (and I use the term "garden" advisedly). While the hum of traffic can never be completely eradicated in an urban area such as Stockport, the better beer gardens in the locality tend to be ones where traffic can't be seen (and the exhaust fumes can't be inhaled in large doses). A simple fence or hedge between drinker and driver can make a world of difference, and also help to reduce noise pollution.

Well-kept garden furniture can also figure strongly in the overall enjoyment of an outdoor pint. Split plastic chairs or rickety wooden tables are unfortunately too common, and the excuse that summer's too short to bother with these niceties is, frankly, unacceptable. If you're going to allow people to drink outside, encourage it, and make it worth everybody's while. And on the subject of wobbly tables, a word of advice. Sit down, then put your pint down. It's such a shame to see beer being spilt instead of being consumed....

Some pubs do very well when it comes to their outdoor area, and they are often a credit to (and occasionally the best feature of) the pub. Child-friendly beer gardens are becoming more important, especially with the children's certificate coming in. Child-friendly means that tots can't stray onto the road, that it is not all slabbed or concreted (if you've seen a toddler fall flat on a hard surface, you'll know the screams...) and there is more to do than sit and watch Mum and Dad drink good beer.

A little effort can go a long way for pubs, especially if the pub doesn't have a family room (where children are warmly, and legally, welcomed).

In short, beer gardens can enhance a pub no end. It's just a shame that they are so often neglected. And to find a beer garden that's pleasant can be a novelty to the extent of being surprising. It shouldn't be this way. Next time, I'll commend the best beer gardens in the area (and slate the worst?). Call me on 477 1973 if you know of a local beer garden worthy of mention.

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Ye Olde Cock, Didsbury

with Stuart Ballantyne

Exhausted but ecstatic could best describe your food writer following what proved to be the most successful Stockport Beer & Cider Festival ever. For Sunday lunch what I needed was a pub selling good beer and good food in convivial surroundings. Ye Olde Cock in Didsbury looked like a good bet.

Arriving at 1.00pm, the pub was already busy and a small queue had formed at the food counter so a round of drinks beckoned first. As I have come to expect from Ye Olde Cock, the beer range is usually good and only outside university term time can you expect there to be less than eight or nine different beers available. Today the total was ten, including Whitbread's controversial "Green Bullet" plus two traditional ciders, Scrumpy Jack's Old Hazy and Sheppys Farmhouse. I had to bite the bullet, as it were, and try the new Whitbread beer if only to confirm that whist it may be a perfectly good beer in its own right, it is decidedly sweet and malty; completely different from Dobbins sensationally dry and immensely hoppy 'original' Green Bullet. Even though I had been warned, I still couldn't



help feeling disappointed. Of the other beers that were on, our party tried Dambusters, Cains Bitter, Bunces Pigswill and Boddingtons Bitter, all in tip-top condition.

By now it was 2.00pm and the food queue had grown longer. It was not as though there was a shortage of staff - the pub was teaming with them. (A visit a couple of weeks later indicated that whatever problem was causing the queuing had been resolved - ed). Anxious not to miss our lunch we joined the queue and were able to contemplate the chalked up specials menu at our leisure. This included an imaginative range of dishes, Cauliflower and Broccoli Mornay or Potato and Leek Au Gratin for veggies; Lamb Nell Gwynn, Chicken Princess and various steaks for carnivores. Prices ranged from £3.45 upwards. In addition there is a standard printed menu offering everything you tend to expect from pub food these days. An interesting range of sweets was also on offer. One good move is to indicate the probable waiting time after you have ordered your meal - this was shown to be 30 minutes when we placed our orders but the chef excelled himself and our food arrived after a quarter of an hour.

The lamb was cooked in an orange sauce and served with new potatoes (chips were an alternative), garden peas and mint sauce producing a verdict of nicely presented, filling and good value. The rump and sirloin steaks came with the usual trimmings but proved a disappointment to one of our party who happened to dislike char-grilled steaks. "They should tell you about that on the menu", he grumbled. My chicken was excellent, cooked in a cream and asparagus sauce and served with new potatoes and vegetables.

Three of us had enjoyed our meal and were content to sit back and quietly digest the food. Discretion is always the better part of valour. As ever, there is always one who likes to be the exception to the rule and so a sweet was a must. An array of gateaux and sponges revolved temptingly in a glass cabinet, sticky toffee pudding called out from the specials board. With no hesitation, or discernible guilt, Black Forest Gateau (£1.95) was chosen. A shorter queue and a shorter wait ensued - was it worth it? The verdict - "great, lovely - I'll start the diet tomorrow!"

The meal certainly didn't disappoint but what about that queue? This got me thinking. There is something inherently British about queuing. If in doubt form a queue but never, absolutely never, complain. I suspect that our continental cousins view this unique British trait with complete disbelief. I look forward to the day when, as in the rest of Europe, we do not feel obliged to stand in queues to pay in advance for pub food that could potentially be awful, but that we pay once we have finished our meals before we leave. That way should the fare prove to be less than satisfactory than at least we start from a position of bargaining strength rather than staring defeat in the face. However, somehow I think that I am going to have a long wait.

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The Moor Top

The Moor Top in Heaton Moor re-opened on Tuesday 6 June after new owners Scottish & Newcastle had reportedly spent £200,000 on refurbishing it. This was apparently done before obtaining planning permission, and local residents are unhappy that they were not given a chance to comment on the plans, and that a side entrance closed for many years has been reinstated.

Inside, most of the raised seating areas have been swept away, and lavish carpeting, upholstery and woodwork have been installed. It's still basically a one-bar pub, though, with acres of open space, pool table, stage area, giant video/TV screen and CD jukebox turned up to an earsplitting volume. There's a slightly more sedate lounge area to the left of the main entrance, but even here it's far from peaceful.

Real ales available are Websters Yorkshire Bitter (£1.39), and Theakstons Best Bitter (£1.42) and XB (£1.50). When "OT" called the Websters was icy cold and lacking in flavour even for this normally bland beer.

The overall impression is of a loud, brash pub targeted at the younger end of the market, and it must be very doubtful whether this will prove right for the location. It's certainly



unlikely to draw many customers away from well-established pubs in the area such as the Nursery, Crown and Plough.



Isle of Man Pub and Brewery Guide

by Andrew Jessop.

PMCS Publishing, 88 pages, £4.95

Coming some 20 years after the last comprehensive Isle of Man pub guide, this new publication fills a long-felt need. It's comprehensive - just the thing if you need to know the name of the manager at the bar at the summit of Snaefell - and well-researched. Each pub gets a paragraph or two of description followed by letter codes indicating facilities - the codes are also pressed into service to indicate the availability of real ale, a task which might have been more easily performed by listing the beers available.

The pub listings are preceded by well-written articles on the island's pub trade and brewing scene. The author is a self-proclaimed real ale drinker (with, some pub entries suggest, a particular fondness for mild), and his comments are interesting and generally accurate (though he does give the impression that Matthew Brown's Blackburn brewery is still open). The centre pages present some attractive colour photographs of pubs (plus a rather jarring advert from Courage Brewing), and there is also the occasional line drawing.

At present the Island's pubs are under siege from threats both old ("the Clarendon has undergone a major transformation recently and is now a Video Bar") and new ("popular with the local Irish community, the Brewery are proposing to rename the pub the Simon O'Donnell"). However, there are plenty of proper locals left, and this well-informed and up-to-date book will help you find them, along with any other type of pub you might require. Highly recommended for visitors, the Guide is widely available on the island and should also be on sale on the Steam Packet Company's vessels.

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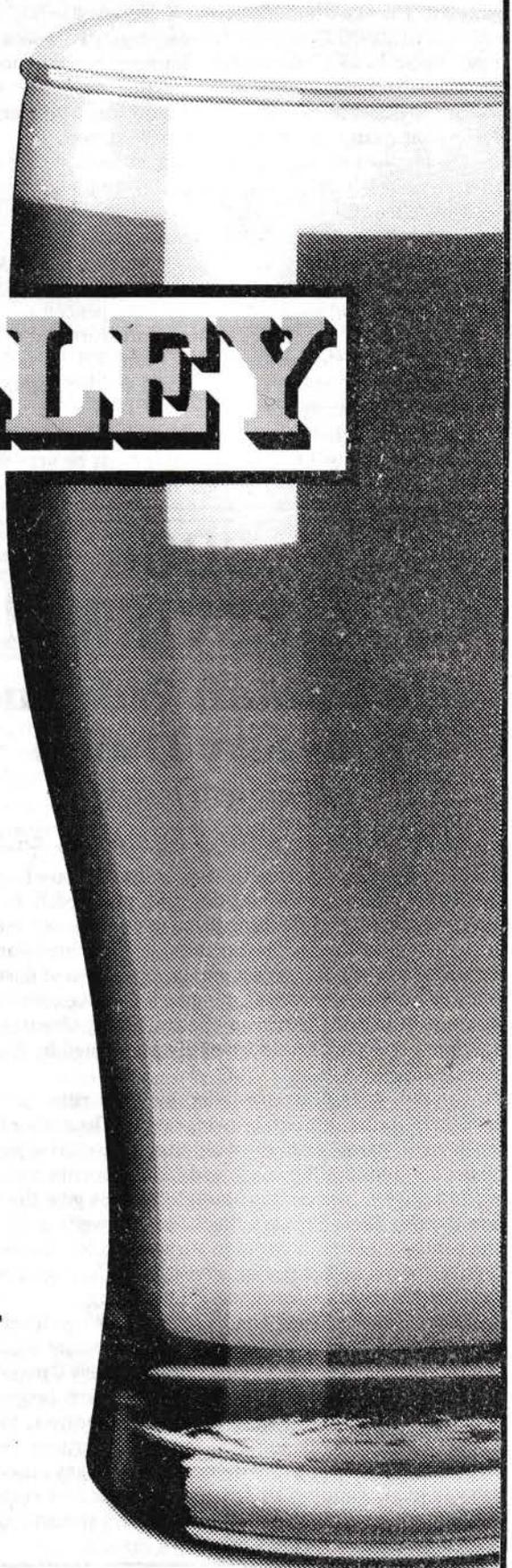
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CAMRA CALLING!

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	July 95	July 95	To Do
	<p>Monday 10 - Social, Waterloo, Waterloo Rd, (off Hillgate), Stockport. Starts 9.00pm</p> <p>Thursday 13th - Monthly branch meeting, Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 8.00pm. NB - guest speaker, Steve Cox, CAMRA's Campaigns Manager. All please try and attend.</p> <p>Monday 17th - Social, Friendship, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Friday 21st - Stagger, Burnage and Heaton Mersey. Starts 7.00pm, Milestone, Burnage Lane (Bus 22 from Stockport will drop you outside, Bus 169 from South Manchester will drop you close by), or joi at Sun in September, also Burnage Lane, at 8.30.</p> <p>Monday 24th - Two-way social: 9.00pm Old Mill, Mill Lane, Cheadle Hulme; 10.00pm Cross Keys, Adswold Road.</p> <p>Thursday 27th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Orion (see article on page 2).</p>	<p>Sunday 30th - Curry and Music: Meet 5.30pm outside Shere Khan, Wilmslow Road, Rusholme then Albert, Walmer Street 7.00pm on for Irish music.</p> <p>Monday 31st - Two-way social: 9.00pm Scruffy Murphys, Grosvenor Street; 10.00pm McNalleys, York St, both All Saints.</p> <p>Monday 7th August - Social, Tut N Shive, Wellington Road North, Heaton Chapel.</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>Saturday 22nd - Trip to Ripon (and races). Contact Frank Wood 01457 865 426</p> <p>Monday 7th August - Committee meeting, Shepherds Arms, Whaley Bridge</p> <p>Monday 11th - Monthly branch meeting, Buck & Hawthorn, Ashton-U-Lyne. Aim to get there by 8.30.</p>	Address
			Notepad
			Calendar
			CAMRA 95
			Phone

FORTHCOMING BEER FESTIVALS



July 7-9 High Peak & NE Cheshire Beer Tent at Tameside Canal Festival, Portland Basis, Ashton. Fri 7-11, Sat 12 - 5, 7.30 - 11, Sun 12 - 5. 30 Beers plus ciders. See advert on page 15.

October 27-29. Denbigh Beer Festival. Just about the friendliest and best of the smaller festivals.

Welsh Beer of the Year selection reflected by choice of 43 Welsh Beers. Thurs 6-11, Friday 6-11, Sat 12-4 and 6-11.

OPENING TIMES ON THE INTERNET ?

Strange but true - it is intended to launch Opening Times on the Internet. Sometime in the last quarter of the year - possibly co-inciding with the launch of the 1996 Good Beer Guide, an Opening Times 'Home Page' will appear on the Internet's World Wide Web. Both an electronic interactive version, with a 'live' letters page and nightly (well, twice-weekly, anyway!) updated pub news, and a full downloadable version in multi-platform Acrobat *.pdf format will be available, as well as an enhanced local branches section. Extra 'scratcher' features may well creep in too....Further details, E-mail and the Web Address in September

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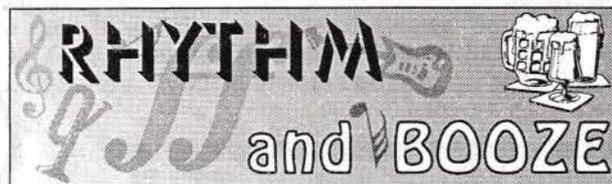
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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

RHYTHM and BOOZE



by Paul Felton

The evening of 10 June saw well over one hundred souls gather at the Roadhouse on Newton Street for the return to Manchester of Chris Smither. The Roadhouse is a functional cellar club, easily missed if you don't know exactly where you're going. In terms of the beers on sale, its early promise (several cask ales, including such enterprising choices as Fullers) has now largely gone; perhaps this was only to be expected. Now all we had to choose from was John Smiths at £1.80, and some surprisingly good Marstons Pedigree, albeit at £1.90. The boarded ceiling of the club had several holes in it; the result of some excessive pogoing by over-zealous latter-day punks, we wondered?

Forty-something Smither is from New Orleans, and was last seen in Manchester in February of this year, with fellow Americans Michael Roach and Kent Du Chaine in a three-way Rik Stuart blues night promotion at Jabez Clegg.

He came on stage at 8pm sharp, sporting a black waistcoat and a rather nifty blue solid bodied acoustic guitar. His vocal style on the slow tunes is deep and wistful, melancholy even, another poor soul railing against fate, although the

more up-tempo rockers are invested with the requisite fervour. As a guitarist, Smither is one of those incredibly annoying players who manage to make even the most intricate fingerpicking seem ridiculously easy and effortless. Hate'em. If you feel the need to pigeon-hole his music, I would suppose that "folk blues" might be the best description, although this does little justice to the wide range of both original songs and cover versions that we were treated to; originals ranging from chugging rockers to sensitive love songs, covers from blues classics to songs from a variety of contemporary American artists.

So he played two sets of about 55 minutes each, with a short break in between. Covers included Blind Willie McTell's 'Statesboro Blues'; the great John Hiatt's wonderfully witty 'Memphis in the Meantime'; Lowell George's Little Feat classic 'Rock 'n' Roll Doctor'; he even ended with a dedication (sic) on the Garcia/Hunter/Barlowtune 'Friend of the Devil'.

The gig finished as promised just after 10pm, plenty enough time for some of us to pop round the corner to the Jolly Angler for a beer or two. Highlights of the evening? Of his own songs, a rollicking 'Love You Like A Man' (his greatest 'hit', or as he put it, "one of the few songs that ever made me any money", famously covered in the early seventies by Bonny Raitt), and 'The Devil's Real'; of the others, and for me the best of the lot, a storming version of Elmore James's much recorded 'Dust My Broom'. A great gig by someone who really ought to be better known. Go down to Decoy Records on Deansgate in Manchester and check out Smither's music, you won't regret it.

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Other products offered are personalised wall clocks, either from a postcard sized photograph or your own artwork. Alternatively they will produce a design free of charge. These are ideal for that special clock with a picture or illustration of the outside of the building, tram photo or mascot etc. T-shirts are another popular product, again all art and design work is included in the price as is the case with leaflets, flyers, brochures, posters and menus. Baseball caps are also available.

Opening Times readers are offered a special price on a T-shirt or a clock, possibly based on the front cover design. All enquiries to Off The Wall on 0161 429 9179 and ask for Ivan Wall.



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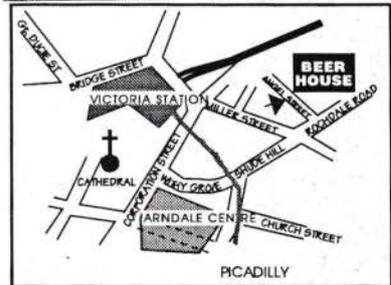
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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

15

SCOTTISH COURAGE

A marriage made in hell?

Now that the dust has cleared it is time to take a long cool look at the proposed merger between brewing giants Scottish & Newcastle and Courage and what its implications will be for both the brewing industry and drinkers alike.

CAMRA's position is quite clear - we want the deal referred to the Monopolies Commission. The new company would control 30% of British brewing and its creation could lead to another bout of 'merger mania' at the top of the industry. Bass would no longer be the industry king-pin and would seek to regain its number 1 spot. Already rumours have linked it to Vaux. Whitbread may be eyeing up the Carlsberg Tetley brewing arm of Allied Domecq. They have also indicated that if the deal isn't referred to the MMC they could mount a court challenge; chairman Sir Michael Angus told his company's annual meeting that failure to refer the deal "would amount to a rewriting of the rules while the game is still in progress and might well be open to challenge in the courts"

Believe it or not even Scottish and Newcastle think it's a bad move! Back in 1989 the boot was on the other foot when Courage tried to buy them. This is what S&N had to say at the time:

"...the effect of the take-over would be not simply a reduction by one in the number of separate companies operating in the UK beer market but would constitute a major alteration in the structure of the market, reducing competitiveness in all sectors....S&N believed that it was against the public interest that such (market) entry should be achieved by acquisition instead of by competition..."

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Since then the brewing market has become more concentrated not less. Courage bought Grand Met's breweries, Whitbread bought Boddingtons, Allied merged with Carlsberg. S&N's opposition to what they now propose seems even more relevant today than it was then.

Beers Under Threat

The new company would own nine breweries producing a host of competing brands. For example it will control three well-known Yorkshire bitters - John Smiths, Theakstons and Websters. Decisions about which to support and which to axe will not be made by consumer choice and competition but by administrative matters - such as which brewery site is worth most for redevelopment. One prime candidate for the chop must be Websters brewery at Halifax which suffers from poor road links. Production of its "flagship" brand, the perennially disappointing Websters Yorkshire Bitter could perhaps be transferred to Tadcaster but what happens to the small volume local brews like Wilsons? OT has already charted the decline of this beer - would production be contracted out or just stopped? A similar fate could face the Home brewery at Nottingham which, apart from producing Home Bitter for the East Midlands market also brews the Matthew Brown beers.

As a condition for the deal going through, the new company may be forced to float off one or more breweries as independent companies but one thing is for certain it would mean less choice and fewer jobs. Not only did S&N hint at this when the proposed merger was announced, they spelt it out more clearly back in 1989 claiming that up to 3000 jobs could go if Courage were allowed to take them over.

Hypocrites

The last word should go to CAMRA's Steve Cox: "This merger is grossly anti-competitive. It will give one brewer up to a third of the UK market. We believe that it will mean higher prices for customers and less choice. It will significantly reduce competition in the free trade and place increasing pressure on smaller brewers. Scottish & Newcastle are gross hypocrites. When Courage bid for them in the 1980s, they argues any merger of the two companies would be against the public interest". We are entitled to ask just what has changed since then.

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A few weeks ago, Scottish & Newcastle finally announced their much-heralded takeover bid for Courage, who themselves had acquired Grand Met's brewing interests only a few years earlier. At national level, CAMRA has made all the right noises about this representing an unacceptable concentration of market power in the hands of a few giant companies. Yet, on the ground, it's hard to get people worked up over the takeover of a company that hardly brews anything worth crossing the street for. Who'll go on a march to save Websters Yorkshire Bitter?

An understandable attitude, maybe, but in the long run a very dangerous one. With the spread of multi-beer alehouses, and the vast array of interesting beers available from micro-breweries, there's a great temptation to those interested in beer to ignore the big picture. Hence the rise of the beer spotter.

But, however successful and innovative the micros are, at least 95% of beer drunk in this country will continue to be brewed by an apparently ever-diminishing number of big companies. To imagine otherwise is to indulge in a naive romantic fantasy that we can return to a pre-industrial golden age of local craft breweries. If we don't watch out, while we're happily "spotting" the latest coriander-flavoured wheat malt stout, the giant brewers will have taken over the big wide real world outside with their characterless "family pubs" and their flavour-free nitrokeg beer.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Talking of which, in the past year, Caffrey's, the nitrokeg "Irish Ale" brewed by Bass in Belfast, has become one of the country's top 100 beer brands, despite a price much higher than other ales and, until recently, no advertising. Make no mistake, this is a dead, pasteurised beer, much inferior to good real ale, and I want to discourage people from drinking it.

But Caffrey's obviously delivers to a large number of drinkers something they think they want, and CAMRA members wanting to campaign against nitrokeg should think carefully about the implications of its success. Nitrokeg is not Watneys Red Barrel, and the keynote of our response to it must be to stress the positive virtues of real ale as an authentic product with an infinitely greater depth and variety of taste and character, not to go for the kneejerk reaction of dismissing it as absolute rubbish and the people who drink it as gullible fools.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

They say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and that's certainly true in the case of nitrokeg and real ale. Would the brewery boffins ever have dreamed up nitrokeg if they hadn't been trying to emulate the creamy head and smooth texture of real ale pulled through a tight sparkler? A fake, though, however good it looks, is still not the real thing. One sip will convince you of that.

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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JUNE '90

CAMRA's campaigning message on the front page was under the heading :- Independent's Day - Back Britain's independent Brewers. This was to celebrate Britain's very own "Independent's Day" in July. Most of Britain's beer is sold by the big brewers, and the Independents sell only a fifth of total production, but the Independents offer Good Value, Good Quality, and Real Variety. CAMRA believes that the future of good beer depends on the Independents - if nothing else they keep the giants on their toes.

Also on the front page was a "Thank You" to everyone who went to the Stockport Beer Festival, and helped to make it such a success. Estimated attendances had been put at 2500, but the final figure turned out to be 3300. The beer lasted until 10 o'clock on the Saturday night, but the supply of programmes ran out before then.

The sad tale of the takeover and eventual closure of Liverpool's last remaining brewery, Higsons, had been well documented in the pages of Opening Times. So it was welcome news that brewing was to re-commence on the site - the brewery had been bought by an independent company, GB (Brewers) Ltd.

Little was known of them, although it was believed that a Hull-based businessman was behind the venture. Apparently, the intention was to concentrate initially on supermarket "own label" business, but it was hoped that "real ale" would eventually be produced for the guest beer market.

There was more news from Merseyside - the small independent Oak Brewery of Ellesmere Port was experiencing a steady increase in the demand for its beers - it had been in production for 7 years, and had been so successful that it was bursting at the seams. They announced their intention of moving to the old Phoenix Brewery at Heywood, Lancs., where there would be plenty of room for further expansion.

An item picked out of Manchester Matters - the Waggon & Horses, round the back of Kendals, had re-emerged as Mulligans - an Irish theme pub, that was surprisingly well done, but with just a single real ale, handpumped Ruddles Bitter. (Does anyone remember whether the Guinness was served with a shamrock on the top? - Initially, yes, PBH)

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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

17



First thing this month we need to put the record straight regarding the availability of the new Burtonwood beer, Buccaneer Strong. It was reported in last month's OT that the only place in Stockport where this beer was available was at the Gladstone on Hillgate. Well this was not the case according to Peter Abell of the Royal Oak in High Lane. When he called me, some two weeks ago as I write, the beer had been available for at least two weeks at the Royal Oak. Apologies all round.

Still in High Lane the Dog & Partridge has re-opened after refurbishment and very nice it looked as I flew past the other day. When more accurate news is available we will be sure to report it in this worthy rag.

Quite a bit has been happening in Hyde in the last few weeks. At the top of Market Street the Bush has finally got new licensees after some time on the market. Further up the Clarks Arms is closed whilst being refurbished by new owners. The re-opening will be in the next few weeks. Watch this space.

However this bit of good news is balanced by the news that the Wellington in Kingston, Hyde is closed and up for sale. This comes only a short while after its re-opening following an extensive refurb. The pub has already been closed once before and recent history seems to be repeating itself with this closure and the sale. On a recent crawl of some of Hydes pubs it was noticed that the beer was not in top form; low sales perhaps? It

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begs the question, why does this pub struggle so much when the White Gates opposite plods along quite nicely thank you?

Over in Stalybridge there was a bit of a do at the Q Inn to mark its return to the Guinness Book of Records as the pub with the shortest name. Stalybridge is once again the proud owner of the pub with the shortest name and the longest, The Old 13th Cheshire Astley Volunteer Rifleman Corps Inn!

More remote, in Broadbottom the Crescent appears to be shut, which seems to be a bit of a recent tradition in this neck of the woods. However, further on, in Charlesworth the George & Dragon (Robinsons) has recently had handpumps fitted at the licensees own expense as is the way with Robinsons (and other breweries I dare say).

More remote still, in Hadfield the Lamb, a Boddington Pub Co. house recently advertised guest beers from Phoenix Brewery (Oak). The Midsummer Madness and August Moon sold out in double quick time and, thus encouraged, the licensee is planning to repeat the operation. See local press for details. (I've always wanted to write that!)

Regular readers will recall that I wrote about a goalkeeping licensee in Disley and how unusual that was, given that an appearance at Wembley was on his CV. Well how wrong can you be. The next pub (if you go that way), the Romper, can boast a licensee goalkeeper who appeared at Wembley with Arsenal in an FA Cup Final. Oh well! By the way the recent guest beer has been Wells Eagle Bitter, in good form according to our man in the know.

Finally, and this will have a bigger spread in next month's issue, High Peak have/will be publishing (in association with Tameside MBC Leisure Services) a comprehensive pub guide to the nine boroughs that make up Tameside. The handy sized guide (loosely based on a pub guide to Leeds) includes every pub and selects about sixty to feature with photos and extended entries. It will be selling at £3.25 and is a bargain. See next month's OT for more details and a review.

Stalybridge News

Expansion is the name of the game at the Stamford Arms, Huddersfield Road, Heyheads, Stalybridge - a country style pub on the border with Mossley. Arnold and Lynne Bunting have run this pub for the past 8 years and have recently introduced an already popular Sunday lunch-time menu in addition to their midweek meals.

Work is now underway to install a bar and provide family facilities in the former stables underneath the pub - this may double up as a bistro later at night.

Best of all, though, is the enterprise that Arnold has shown with his always well-kept beers. Alongside the full range of Bass products, he has recently moved away from a sole tie to the Caskmaster range to introduce his own weekly choice of guest. These have recently included such hoppy delights as Yates Bitter, Hop Back Summer Lightning ad Butterknowle Conciliation - all unusual in this part of the world. Lined up for the future are beers from the Caledonian, Cotleigh, Titanic and Exmoor breweries which makes this a pub worth seeking out.

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

A Quarter of a Million Pints!!

Where else but at the Great British Beer Festival can you find a quarter of a million pints of real ale, cider, perry and imported beer. Beers from all over Britain, representing the best in Britain's brewing heritage can be found in the main hall. With all traditional styles being represented from mild to barley wine, beer lovers will find something to suit their palate.

Alongside the traditional beer styles, British brewers have been experimenting. To celebrate their imagination, the Festival will have a bar that is dedicated to the more unusual brews, from beer brewed with fruit to beer brewed with flowers, some interesting tastes are promised to rival those found on the imported beer bar.

As usual there is live music every session including Alan Price on Tuesday evening; at only £3.50 to get in, it must be the best value gig he has done this year. But for those who like subtler music, Wednesday may be the best time to go, with Classical music both lunchtime and evening.

Add on a family room (in a Grade II listed hall), exotic and traditional food and craft stands and a good time is guaranteed for all!!

The Great British Beer Festival starts the evening of Tuesday 1st August and runs until 7pm Saturday 5th August at the Grand Hall, Olympia, London.

Great British Beer Festival

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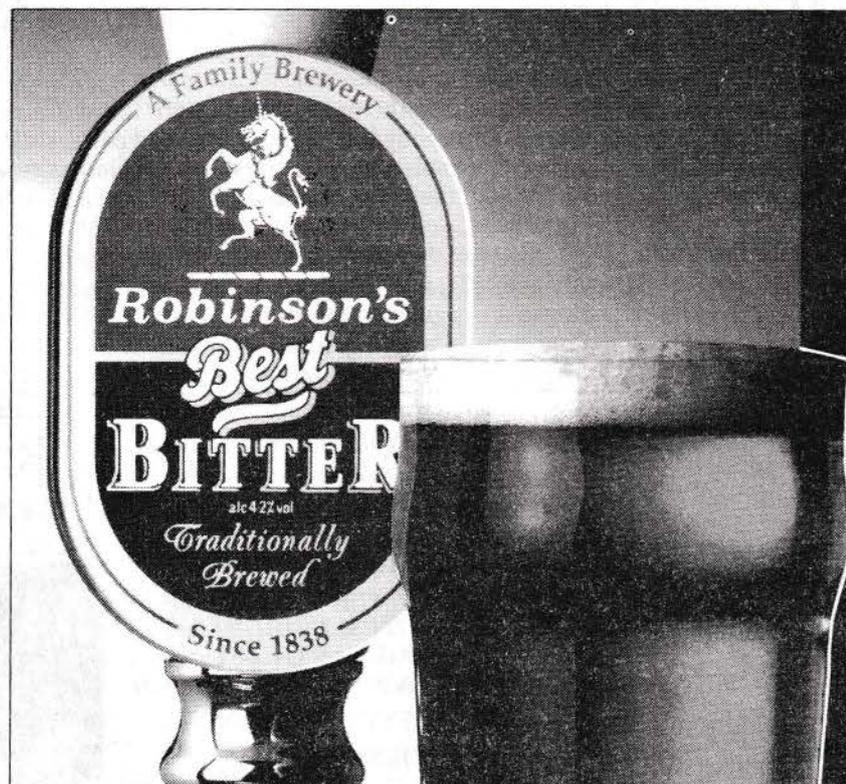
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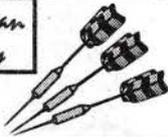


**SILVER MEDAL
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THE
BREWING INDUSTRY
INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



Stockport will find itself firmly on the darts map this year when the professional circuit rolls into town.

The World Darts Council are holding their World Triples Championship at Quaffers, Bredbury between October 4 and 8. As well as home grown stars, players from the USA, Asia and the Antipodes will grace the Quaffers stage.

Among the familiar names that are almost certain to compete will be Dennis Priestley, Phil Taylor, Jocky Wilson, big Cliff Lazarenko, Keith Deller and, of course, Eric Bristow.

Sky Television will beam over 20 hours of the tournament live round the world.

Sadly, local talent will be missing from the tournament. Because of the conflict between the BDO and the WDC, the cream of Stockport talent will not be allowed to enter. It is a shame that the politics of the situation stops the best players from competing with the most famous names of the game.

I am certain that a team consisting of Tony O'Shea, Darryl Fitton and any one of Phil Kerr, John Hollins or Mark Cairney would have gone a long way in this competition. The sooner the two factions get together, the better for darts.

There are few players in the country in better form than Tony O'Shea at the moment. He recently won an Open tournament at Pontins, Prestatyn. Among the players he beat along the way were England internationals Dave Aske and Andy Fordham. Tony's partner in the pairs tournament was Darryl Fitton. Both the last two Embassy champions, Canada's John Part and Wales Richie Burnett went out to the Stockport pair.

These results came hard on the heels of Tony's victory in the Isle of Man Open Mixed Pairs. Partnering Jane Stubbs, Tony found himself facing Sue Hambleton and Yorkshire county player Brian Bird in the final. By an amazing coincidence Sue is landlady of the Star & Garter, Hillgate. Tony plays his local league darts at the pub on Tuesdays.

The Star & Garter has been the venue for the heats of the Stockport Individual Open. By another quirk of fate the first two heat winners were Brian Bird and Tony O'Shea. Local enthusiasts will have the chance to see for themselves just how good O'Shea is. Tony will be taking on regulars from

the Railway Club in Edgeley on Friday 7 July. Get along early and join in the fun.

Sad to see the demise of Cale Green Social Club. It was a popular venue for Cheshire Super League fixtures and Men's, Ladies and Mixed teams were the most successful at a local level for the last few years.

Unfortunately, the club is now closed. It is to be hoped that local darts can find an alternative venue just as good for the future.

Early indications are that Greg Street Working Men's Club will fill the position. It was chosen as the venue for the Stockport Licensed Houses Super and Premier League Team Knock Out Cup Final. Ironically, one of the teams in the final was Cale Green. They lost on the last game to rivals Bobby Peel. Greg Street has also been chosen as the venue for the Stockport Express Advertiser Individual Open final, which was due to take place on 30 June.

Another good venue could be Cheadle Sports & Social Club, Councillor Lane. Formerly Cheadle Labour Club, this club was used to stage a match between Stockport and Manchester in memory of Jack North. It was a superb venue and it was good to see the generosity of dart players and fans, raising over four hundred pounds for the family of Jack.

The star of the show was Jack's 14 years old son, Chris, who put in a magnificent 17 darter. It was a great day of darts and also offered us the chance to sample Richard Cobden's Bitter at 99p!

The question was raised in my local about famous people who have played darts. It is a fairly well known fact that Tom Jones and Engelbert Humperdinck used to have a game of darts in between shows in Vegas. And the game often features in Coronation Street, Eastenders and Brookside.

But perhaps the most notable were the old King and Queen. Apparently they threw a couple of darts when visiting an old people's home in the thirties. This was reported faithfully in the national press and darts became an overnight craze.

However, there are many famous names featuring in the competitive game. Namesakes for Gary Player and Paul Hogan are regular county players. Nearer to hand Tommy Cooper plays "magic" arrows for the Magnet and the George & Dragon have James Garner regularly turning out.

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LOCAL HAUNTS



by Pete Massey

Some years ago, a friend and I set up Stockport Ghost Busters and Stockport Ghost Tours, gaining some notoriety with our various activities. We received an urgent request on our hotline, late one Thursday evening (I was at the Bakers Vaults that night, listening to the Removal Men). Martin and Gaye, my fellow ghostbusters, came in looking for me to tell me we had received an urgent call from the landlady of Little Jack Horners on Lord Street (incidentally, did you know there was a windmill at the top of Lord Street 200 years ago which "could be seen for miles"?).

We arrived there about 'last orders' and were met by the landlady who sat us down and proffered drinks. I remember thinking to myself "this had better be at least as good as the Removal Men". I was not to be disappointed. We asked her pertinent questions and I observed her husband's behaviour - all classic textbook material.

Doors shut, everyone gone, Martin, Gaye, the landlord and landlady talking in a dark corner, I walked around the pub to see what I could see. Little Jack Horners used to be known as the Oddfellows and was originally three cottages, the rooms of the pub are on three levels. In the far room, sat on the wall was a large framed photographic likeness, watching. "Shades of Dorian Grey", I thought, and rejoined the others.

There had been a positive plethora of psychic phenomena, far too much to include in this article, but for anyone wishing to find out the very interesting details I recommend Martin G Mill's book 'Supernatural Stockport' and Stockport Local History Library. Sometime after midnight we all went down into the soul of the pub, the cellars. Ale is sensitive to situations. The landlord showed us the barrels which were being affected. Overhead was a large wooden supporting beam. Suddenly our psychic communicator (medium to you), Gaye, went ice cold and started shivering uncontrollably. She had to get out. We went upstairs, back to the bar where a couple of stiff brandies did the usual. "There was something down there", she said - I felt her, she really was ice cold and shaking. We left soon after and promised to keep regular contact to see how things were going on - we all felt that we had achieved something positive.

Things went well for some time afterwards. There appeared to be no more problems - they had been exorcised and, as it happens, we all went our separate ways and lost touch. Some long time later, I happened to drive past Jack Horners during a time of the day when it should have been busy. It was shut and remained so for two or three days. Eventually, I discovered the reason was the suicide of the landlord. I was understandably intrigued but found out nothing further except choice little items in the press concerning the inquest and will (all in Stockport Heritage Library).

And that was that - until a few months later when I had occasion to visit a solicitor. We discussed a common interest

in conservation and historic buildings. It didn't take me long to start waffling on about ghosties and mentioned Little Jack Horners. "Small world", he said, "I was the solicitor acting for the will - I'll never forget when I went down into the cellar and was shown the rope hanging from the large overhead beam where they cut him down - I remember watching two flies buzzing round the frayed end."

Me? I was quiet as a mouse and wondered did he fall or was he pushed?

Postscript - the first spirit was the landlord Caleb Staley who was killed in a train crash in the fog on Stockport viaduct on November 30th, 1948. He, too, had two dogs as did the landlord of this article. The dogs are an important feature of this particular story, but space does not permit. However, Jack Horners is a place with more than its fair share of spirits. Let's hope they all get on together - watch out for the spinning ashtrays!

Next story should be about the Bishop Blaize or the Gladstone as it is now, on Hillgate - well worth a visit if you like real pubs and people.

THINKING

OF JOINING CAMRA ?

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INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP ONLY £12

(£6 for Students) - PAGE 23

THE KINGS ARMS

BLOOM STREET, SALFORD

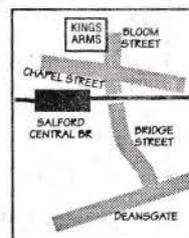


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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

Stockport Meets The Mild Challenge

The big brewers constantly tell us that cask conditioned mild is dying out and they can't sell it. The success of this year's Stockport Mild Challenge proves that with only a fraction of the effort and money pumped into the marketing of cold, dead lagers and cold, bland nitro-kegs, mild sales would soon turn up again

Almost 39% more people submitted entries this year and three-quarters of all entrants completed the Mild Challenge Extra by supping a pint of mild in 12 different parts of the borough and thereby winning a mild challenge T-shirt. It is also likely that for every person who completed the challenge, two or three others started but didn't finish.

With this year's introduction of the Mild Challenge Extra, the top ten most visited pubs are scattered throughout the borough, as you can see:

1. Blossoms, Heaviley
2. Crown, Heaton Lane
3. Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle Hulme
4. Nursery, Heaton Norris
5. Woolpack, Edgeley
6. Griffin, Heald Green
7. Crown, Heaton Mersey
8. Farmers Arms, Brinnington
9. Royal Oak, High Lane
10. Queens, Portwood

Another eight pubs came within two or three visits of the top ten. Special thanks are due to all the pubs which took part, the CAMRA members who liaised with the participating pubs, all those of you who took part, Robinsons and Hydes who showed where their hearts were by providing prizes and especially to

the Stockport Express Advertiser for their sponsorship. With the same level of support we will be back next year to prove the big boys wrong once again!

** Special mention is also due to Dave Meynell of Romiley who achieved the remarkable feat of visiting all 56 pubs on the trail, yes, all 56! Well done, Dave. We'll have to see if we can make next year's Challenge even more demanding.*

Stockport Beerex '95

A big thank-you to everyone who helped make the 1995 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival the biggest and best ever.

We thought we had enough beer but this year we were drunk dry by 10.00pm on Saturday night such was the record attendance. All those who helped know who they are but this is the place to thank you, our customers, for their support. After all, if no-one came to drink there wouldn't be a festival. Thanks are also due to the Stockport Express Advertiser for their continuing sponsorship of the event and of course thanks also to Ian Brookes of the Bakers Vaults for acting as our licensee.

As usual the Beer and Cider of the Festival competitions aroused a lot of interest - would any of last year's champions retain their crowns. As it turned out the answer was, largely, no.

In the cider and perry section despite strong showings by previous winners Dennis Gwatkin and Bryan Browning, the honours this year were taken by some of the bigger producers. Perry of the Festival was Westons Perry while the cider title, and overall winner in the cider and perry class was Dunkertons Improved Kingston Black.

In the Beer of the Festival contest the honours were fairly widespread, the winners being:

Mild - *Coach House Gunpowder Mild*

Bitter - *Black Bull Brewery Bitter*

Premium Bitter - *Porters Sunshine*

Strong Ale - *Lees Vintage Harvest Ale and Exmoor Beast share the honours*

Stout/Porter - *Whim High Peak Porter (special festival brew)*

There can of course be only one overall winner and this year's Beer of the Festival was Whim High Peak Porter. Our congratulations to all concerned and in particular to Giles Lichfield at Whim for his overall victory.

** While we were happy to see several brewers at the festival, a most welcome and surprise visitor was cidemaker Dennis Gwatkin. Dennis also took the opportunity to join CAMRA, signed up as it happens by National Chairman John Cryne who spent the Saturday afternoon working on the products and membership stalls!*

Last at the Sportsmans



Last pints being pulled by Brian and Jill at the sad closure of the Sportsmans on Manchester's Market Street, last month.

SPORTSMANS

62 Market Street (basement)
Manchester M1 1WP

CLOSED
SUNDAY 25 JUNE
1995

Brian and Jill
would like to thank all their
friends, customers and staff for
their support over
the years.



Gone
but not forgotten.

MANCHESTER MATTERS

As expected, two much-loved City Centre pubs closed last month. Neither the Sportsman nor the Swinging Sporrان fell into the classic mould of the archetypal unspoilt local, but both sold fine beer (the Sporrان having been selected for the 1996 Good Beer Guide) and each had its unique character which is now gone for ever. Truly a sad tale of the failure of the planning system to protect pubs as a class of building. Of course, new bars do open in the City Centre from time to time. The latest is Citrus, on Mount Street, which boasts eye-catching decor and an attractive-looking menu; sadly, though, the only ale is keg Tetley Bitter at £1.75 a pint (bizarrely "City Life" described the drinks here as "competitively priced" - where can they be used to?)



by Rhys Jones

There's some interest on the Hydes front in the City Centre, where the Grey Horse has been selling Dark Mild in place of the standard mild, and the Jolly Angler has given Victory Ale a try. Still in the Centre, the Hogshead has Symonds Old Hazy cider on handpump, as does the Olde Cock at Didsbury, which also retains a second changing "guest" cider, recently some rather good Sheppys. These put to shame the Bowling Green in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, which, although a recent conversion to real ale, also has keg Cidermaster on fake handpump dispense.

CAMRA's always argued that, if the fake handpump con is tolerated for cider, it'll soon enough be back for beer, and there seems to be evidence of this in the arrival of keg John Smith's Chestnut Mild served by handpump. First seen locally at the Cornerhouse (not the gallery/cinema complex, but the somewhat half-cock freehouse of the same name in Salford), this was recently sighted at the Cotton Tree in Gorton.

Elsewhere in Gorton, the Crown has added handpumped Flowers IPA to its range - but this won't stop me drinking the excellent Chesters Mild in this well-run little local. In Openshaw, the Oddfellows has handpumped Chesters Mild in place of Boddies Mild, the Albion no longer sells Chesters Bitter, and the Concert has no mild but does have handpumped Old Henry, a 4%ABV bitter brewed for the Boddington PubCo, by Jennings as far as I know. And the Halfway House in Openshaw was firmly closed on a recent Friday night, though whether this is permanent is not yet clear.

Having read thus far, readers may be thinking that the Magic Pub Company has had a quiet month - no such luck! The lorryload of tat came to Stockport Road on the Levenshulme/Longsight border, transforming the Midway into Bidy Mulligan's and the Victoria into the Little Vic. To be fair, both pubs were in serious need of a facelift, and the results, while not standing up to detailed scrutiny (what's a signboard for the Birmingham Evening Mail doing in a supposedly Irish pub?), do seem rather less dire than in Magic's previous pseudo-Irish efforts. Both pubs seem to be trading well after the alterations; in each, the handpumped range is Boddingtons Bitter and Websters Green Label. As an encore, Magic have transformed the Yew Tree in Wythenshawe into yet another Hungry Horse.

Strange But True

After being a by-word as a beer desert for years, the micro-brewing revolution is sweeping the USA. Such is the strength of the movement that the Great American Beer Festival is now well-established and a report of the 1995 event appeared in the American beer magazine "BeeR" (sic).

Apart from the variety of ingredients, the most remarkable thing about the new-wave of American beers are their names, which put even the more exotic UK offerings in the shade. Among the beers on sale at the festival were: *Doggie Style, Martha's Bitchin' Ale, Moose Juice Stout, Hell On The Boarder Porter, Goat's Breath Bock, Chicken Killer Barley Wine, Dead Horse IPA* and *What The Gentleman On The Floor Is Having!*

They make the likes of Wychwood Brewery's *The Dogs Bollocks* sound positively mundane.

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(OT135)

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

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Chris Stone / Sue Tiffensor, 11 Twiningbrook Road, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport, SK8 5PU

those wishing to join CAMRA who live in the Marple, Bredbury, Woodley or Romiley areas, should write instead to: Tom Lord, 5 Vernon Drive, Marple, SK6 6JH, where different terms will apply

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £6





A change of beer range at the *Plough*, Heaton Moor, sees Jennings Bitter (sadly) and Marstons Pedigree no longer available. In their place are a house bitter (during the week) and Tetleys Imperial. Tapsters Choice continues to produce some interesting choice. A recent novelty was Dartmoor Legend, a 4.6% brew from Fergusons, the Allied-Domeq brewery at Plymouth. The Ferguson beers are only rare visitors to the area.

The recent refurbishment at the *Grey Horse*, Reddish, has had its greatest impact in the vault. A remodel has moved the dart board, introduced a pool table, and even sees a carpeted area. In the lounge area, redecoration and re-upholstery have been the order of the day. Whitbread Boddingtons Bitter remains at £1 a pint.

Nigel and Jacky Currie have taken over the *Comfortable Gill*, King Street West, Stockport. They are currently holding managers but hope to put this on a more permanent footing.

A few changes in prospect in central Stockport, with the *Hole in th' Wall* set to reopen as the *Bridge Street Bar* (Bar 17 has been mooted as an alternative name) following its purchase by the owner of *Winters*, which itself is understood to be becoming a managed house.

While the *Hole in th' Wall* is situated at No 17 Bridge Street Brow we hope the new name does not denote a future as a would-be trendy bar for a once fine local (originally the *Castlewood*) latterly fallen on hard times. Up on St Petersgate at the *Imperial*, we hear a change of licensee may be imminent (perhaps even occurred by the time this appears), while the *Nelson* opposite the Town Hall shut in early June for a five-week refurbishment expected to leave it with but a single drinking area.

At the *Kings Arms* in Chorlton-on-Medlock, we welcome new licensee Jimmy Rowe, who is renting the pub from the receivers of West Coast Brewery. A local lad, Jimmy is keen to get the pub back to its best - some discreet redecoration has already taken place, and guest beers may well appear to complement the well-kept *Holts Mild* (98p) and *Bitter* (£1.05). With a friendly atmosphere both sides of the bar, the *Kings* is still well worth a visit even though West Coast beers are no more.

A new licensee was expected in late June at the *Britannia* in Beswick. A Good Beer Guide regular for several years, this is one of the few remaining pubs of character (indeed, one of the few remaining pubs!) in an area badly blighted by redevelopment; we trust standards will be maintained.



In Edgeley a new beer has joined the range at the *Greyhound*. Tetley Bitter is now on sale in place of Theakstons, sales of which had slumped. Two guest beers are also regularly available.

On Tiviot Dale, Stockport, the *Kings Head* has been spruced up. Regrettably the partition wall separating the small front room from the rest of the pub has been removed giving a more open-plan look to the place, although the room at the back remains. When OT popped in trade still seemed quiet. Boddingtons Bitter remains the only cask beer on sale.

The latest news we have concerning the JD Wetherspoon pub on Deansgate, Manchester, is that the projected opening date is 14th August. More news when we have it.

Banks's brewery are after a new pub in south Manchester. They aim to buy the old Catholic Childrens Rescure Home on Parris Wood Road, Didsbury and turn it into a pub and restaurant. The building contains a wealth of Victorian features and the aim would be to retain these in any development. This is a generally under-pubbed area of the city so this is a welcome move.

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