

OPENING TIMES



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EVERY MONTH

SEPTEMBER 1995 - CAMRA NEWSLETTER OF THE YEAR

Full Steam Ahead Booming Micros Advance Cask Ale Revolution

While the big brewers brace themselves for a new round of turmoil over the approval of the Courage/S&N merger, at the other end of the spectrum our local micro-brewers are soaring ahead setting the seal on the cask ale boom that has swept the country in recent years.

An Opening Times survey of local brewers has thrown up an almost unbroken picture of confidence with many reporting expansion plans. In Stockport at Richard Cobden's Brewery, owner John Perkind is test brewing a 4.5%-5% Irish-style stout which is to be launched before Christmas. Meanwhile his established brands, Cobdens Bitter and Premier (the former still contract brewed by Moorhouses of Burnley) are selling well, with some 20 barrels a week going to the Fylde Coast and a fortnightly delivery to Bristol. A wholesaler in Wakefield is also taking the beers.

In Failsworth the Millgate on Ashton Road West is also going great guns. Brewer Lee Simpson is complementing his standard range of Willy Booth's Bitter (4%) and Sam Mac's (3.8%) with recreations of the famous Dobbins range, brewed under the general supervision of Brendan Dobbin himself. Future plans include a national launch for "Dobbins Sierra Nevada Pale Ale", a mild for next Spring and Lee might "also have something in the pipeline for Christmas." The two main beers are also permanently on sale at Millgate's other 'tied house', the Strawberry Duck in Clayton. Expansion plans include the search for yet another pub with the capacity to instal a bigger brewery.

Things are a little quieter at the region's other two micro's, although both are brimming with confidence. Oak at Heywood is of course well established with many of its beers a permanent fixture in the local free trade and the strong Wobbly Bob well on the way to attaining cult status. Owner Tony Allen tells us that the mashing temperatures of the mainstream beers have recently been tweaked with the result that they are now much closer to the beers when brewed at Oak's previous location in

Ellesmere Port. Special beers are now produced on an almost monthly basis. Over at Rochdale, the Thomas McGuinness brewery is also chugging along nicely. "We're not doing too badly" says brewer Eric Hoare who has been supplying his beers to the Houses of Parliament for some time - this is via a beer agency who was recommended McGuinness beers by a satisfied London customer. No new beers are planned at the moment, although McGuinness Stout was successfully added to the range earlier in the year.

The picture is just as rosy further afield. Whim Ales at Hartington now have their first tied house, the Wilkes Head in Leek, and continue to experiment with new beers. A new wheat beer has been produced as has a beer with elder-flowers (!) Giles Lichfield is also about to brew a "single malt" beer at about 7% ABV. Whim of course won Beer of the Festival at this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival and will be featured at length later in the year. The other High Peak breweries at Penny Bentley are also set to expand.

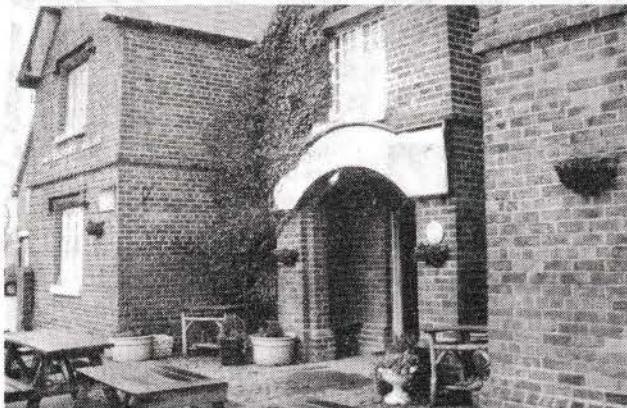
At Leatherbritches, plans are in hand to instal a 15 barrel plant (the current capacity is two and a half barrels per brew) and owner Bill Allingham hopes this will see production up to 50 barrels a week via the free trade. The brewery has had "a very good summer" and two new beers have just been produced - Belt n' Braces at 3.6% ABV and another, as yet unnamed brew, at 3.4%. There are also plans to expand further afield. The end of September/early October will see the "Steamy Billy Cidery" open at Fleckney in Leicestershire and it is also hoped to open a new brewpub in the Leicester area - if this doesn't come to fruition then the second brewery will also be installed at Fleckney.

Leatherbritches neighbour, Black Bull, is also set to expand capacity to a 15-20 barrel plant. This should be up and running by next Easter. Michael Peach tells us that business is booming "I've hardly been able to keep up with demand". The three mainstream beers, Dovedale Bitter, Black Bull Brewery Bitter and Owd Shrovetider, have been complemented by a stronger version of both Dovedale (og1045, for Sheffield Beer Festival) and BBBB (Raging Bull at 4.9%).

So, while the big boys whip themselves up into a lather over takeovers and nitro-keg, alcoholic lemonade and Irish theme bars, the micros are showing themselves to be at the real cutting edge when it comes to both quality and innovation. And still they come - next month we will review breweries in Cheshire, North Wales and Merseyside with a particular look at Liverpool's Passageway Brewery.

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Pub Of The Month

SEPTEMBER

The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month award for September goes to the Davenport Arms at Woodford, better known to many as the Thief's Neck. One of the very few country pubs in the branch area, it was bought by Robinsons in the 1920s, and ever since then the licence has been held by four generations of the Hallworth family.

In August 1989 John and June Hallworth won the pub's first Pub of the Month award and a couple of years later were presented with a plaque commemorating 25 years in the pub. Shortly after this, they retired and handed the licence on to daughter Yvonne. Since then, there have been a few subtle changes and improvements, notably the introduction of a no-smoking room, but the overall impression is of keeping up the very high standards that had been set for many years before.

Father John still looks after the cellar, and the quality of the beer - Hatters Mild, Old Stockport Best Bitter and Old Tom - is consistently excellent, making the pub a regular entry in CAMRA's national Good Beer Guide. Wholesome, good-value home-made food prepared by sister Alison is an added attraction, and there's one of the best pub gardens in the area.

Probably one of the big brewers would have turned the Thief's Neck into an upmarket eating house. It is to Robinson's credit that they have resisted this temptation and allowed the pub to continue as an unspoilt, multi-roomed local that is a true social centre for the community and, despite its location in an affluent suburban area, is genuinely unpretentious and welcoming to all.

This award is thoroughly deserved both for Yvonne's achievements in the three years she has held the licence and for a record of continuity stretching back over 60 years that is unique in the branch area. The presentation will be held on Thursday 28 September, so join us for what should be an excellent night - and don't leave it too late, as it's not the biggest of pubs inside, although there's always the garden!

Contributors to this edition: John Clarke, Rhys Jones, Paul Hutchings, Richard Hough, Phil Levison, Peter Edwardson, Stuart Ballantyne, Brian Carey, Lorraine York, Tim Jones, Tom Lord, Pete Massey and John Hutchinson.



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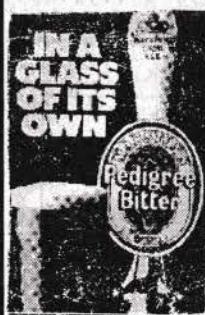
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OPENING TIMES SEPTEMBER 1995



Hydes Anvil

- Forging Ahead

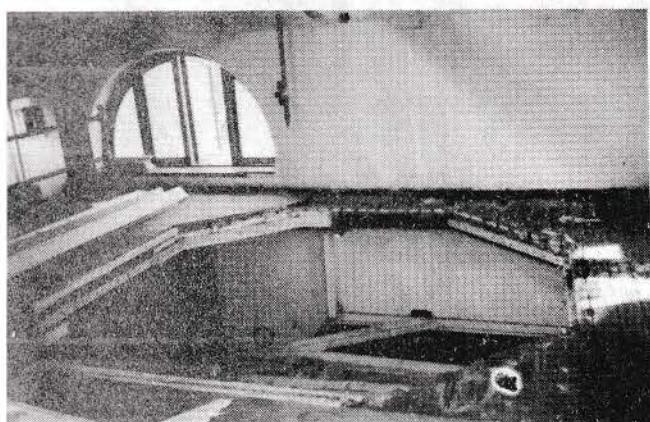
Quality Manager Tony Phillips invited Opening Times down to Hydes Anvil Brewery last month where he, together with Head Brewer Stuart Mackie and Second Brewer Alan Thompson, discussed their plans for the future and the philosophy behind them.

This, in short, can be summed up in one word - quality. There is an increasing emphasis on quality at all levels of Hydes' operations and a recent development is the introduction of 'Best Before' labels on the barrel ends, this being 28 days from when the beer is racked into the casks. This is part of an ongoing programme to ensure that not only does quality beer leave the brewery but also that quality beer is served in the pubs.

Hydes continue to be delighted with the success of their new seasonal beers. The last, Summer Ale, went so well that it will return next year, although possibly a little earlier. When OT called they were gearing up for the next new beer, Forge Ale, a 4.3% ABV darkish bitter due to be rolled out into the tied estate on September 11th. Whole Fuggles hops are used in the brew which also includes 7 1/2% crystal malt for colour and 5% torrefied wheat for head retention. The commitment of Hydes to these new beers is demonstrated by the installation of two new 30-barrel fermenters which will give the brewers more flexibility for the production of seasonal or other short brew length beers. Tony, Stuart and Alan are also keen to hear from us, their customers, what we would like to see in the way of further new beers - OT suggested a stout for February/March.

On the pub side refurbishments are planned for the Crown in Cheadle (as reported in OT last month) and the Cross Keys in Adswood. It seems Hydes are taking a more direct interest in the style and nature of their refurbishment than has been the case in the past, which again is good news considering their somewhat chequered history on this front. It was also confirmed that the Farmers Arms in Burnage was due to open in early September with new licensee Alan Bentham. A review will follow.

In short, Hydes look to be transforming themselves from perhaps the sleepiest of Manchester's old established brewers into the most innovative, which must be good news for licensees and drinkers alike.



work underway to install new fermenters at Hydes Anvil

**Copy Date for October Issue of
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW...

This month we lead with good news. As the beer festival season gets into swing with the chance to sample ever more exotic brews, it is obvious that the new wave of micro-brewers are more than up to the challenge of supplying quality beers to the ever more stringent demands of the free trade.

While the national and bigger regional brewers seem poised to embark on yet another round of mergers, takeovers and closures, at the other end of the spectrum, recent years have seen a virtual explosion in the number of new small breweries. Veteran observers of the real ale scene will recall that something similar happened at the start of the 1980s with very few of those new ventures lasting more than two or three years. This time things do seem to be different. There will be casualties to be sure, but for the most part our new brewers know what they are doing with financially sound, professionally run

operations producing quality beers. The Government's much maligned Beer Orders have also played their part as there is now much more of a market for guest beers than there ever was 15 years ago. Next month sees the publication of CAMRA's 1996 Good Beer Guide, which will feature many of these new concerns and their beers - look out for our feature and special offers next month.

★ ★ ★ ★

Our review of the new breweries got me thinking. Over recent years there has been a definite culture change amongst many beer drinkers. Even those who go to a couple of local pubs now expect to see a range of different beers on the bar. Many brewers are responding to this by either supplying guest beers to their pubs or brewing one-off seasonal beers. Compare and contrast with Sam Smiths. As we reported last month they have now withdrawn Museum Ale leaving their pubs with just one cask beer to offer. What can they be thinking of?

John Clarke

LETTERS OPENING TIMES

From : Pete Soane

There has been much talk this summer about the hot weather and many comparisons have been made with 1976. As I remember, during that long hot summer, lager consumption made great inroads into more traditional beer drinking. The reason? Well in hot weather the customer wants a cool drink and chilled lager is more palatable than luke-warm and consequently poorly conditioned beer.

As lager is cooled on its way from the cellar to the bar and not in the cellar as is the case for real ale, temperature control in the cellar is crucial in ensuring a decent pint. The same (in reverse) also applies in the winter when beer is often sold too cold.

Sadly, nearly 20 years on, I have noticed a similar trend. Surely, just a few years from the 21st century, proper temperature control in the cellar should not be beyond the means of our brewers?

From : Richard Hough

Oil Yes, you! Disagree with the Campaign for Real Ale? At odds with Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA? Can't understand why so-and-so pub got Pub of the Month? Fed up with Opening Times' bias? Don't like the Rhythm and Booze writer's flippant attitude?

Have your say! Join the Campaign, have your opinion, see your favourite pubs in with a shout, and if you've got a contribution to make, MAKE IT! It's down to you.

From : Vince Fitzgerald

In response to Paul Hutching's article in last month's OT regarding the Great British Beer Festival, I cannot agree with his comments regarding the quality of beer.

As one of the workers, albeit not on the bars, there were some dodgy pints - the cooling system was having some trouble keeping all the beer cool (it was well into the 90s after all). But as far as I was concerned most of the beer I drank was fine. At most Festivals you're going to find some bad/warm beer (Stockport is no exception) and it's one of those things you're going to have to accept whether you're a customer or volunteer. In no way can you compare it to Docklands - now THAT was TERRIBLE!

As to the organisation, on this we both agree, it was super, it could not be faulted and the parking was very good.

The chances, though, of it being moved to a cooler month is I think, wishful thinking. I think the National Executive would have apoplexy if someone suggested that it should move to another season. Miss out on all those moneybag tourists, I think not.

From : J H Baxterby

I was puzzled by Stuart Ballantyne's reference in last month's issue to "overcooked chips" at the Smithfield, as this is something I have never come across in hundreds of pub meals. I recollect that he has also previously complained about "brittle chips" at the Old Mill. In my experience, pub chips usually fail in the opposite direction, by being pale, soggy, floppy and undercooked. Everyone to his own taste, but Mr Ballantyne should realise that many people prefer their chips thoroughly cooked and having a certain degree of crispiness.

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STAGGER

with an (at the time)
somewhat lonely John Clarke

This month's Stagger, around Burnage and Heaton Mersey, could perhaps be appropriately subtitled, "I wandered lonely as a cloud". This Stagger is normally well attended but due to holiday and work commitments by many of our regular Staggerers, the early part of the crawl was carried out by your correspondent alone.

Indeed, due to a late arrival, I had only time for a quick look round the first pub, the Milestone, on Burnage Lane. One of the more successful of the Banks's pubs in the area-they seem to have more commitment to those they actually built rather than bought off another brewer-this estate-type pub sells cask Bank's Bitter by electric pump and Camerons Strongarm on handpump although tonight the pumpclip for the latter was turned round.

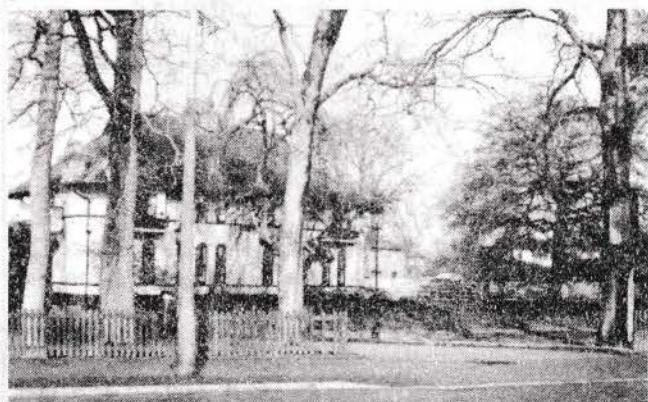
Hotfooting it down Burnage Lane, the next port of call was Boddington PubCo's Victoria. A pleasant inter-wars pub, the Victoria is a comfortably refurbished two-roofer with lounge and vault. Boddingtons Mild and Bitter are on handpump and my request for the bitter resulted in much pulling through and examination of the beer dispensed until the barman (landlord?) was satisfied that I had a beer of the right appearance and temperature. Sadly, it was also almost completely tasteless...

Pressing on, I paused to look through the windows of the closed Farmers Arms, in the throes of a major refurbishment by new owners Hydes. If they get the right person to run it, this will certainly be an asset to the area having previously been a lacklustre Greenalls pub with an unenviable reputation.



The next open pub was the Green End, a large inter-wars Whitbread house close by the roundabout at Green End (where else?). Although it has been opened up, the pub still displays many of its original features and in many ways remains an impressive place to have a drink. A variety of the usual Whitbread beers were on offer although I was disappointed to see that cask Chesters Mild had now gone as I had enjoyed good pints of that particular beer in the Green End before now. My Castle Eden Ale was reasonable enough and I was able to have a brief look round. The pub now styles itself as a family pub and is obviously taking advantage of the new children's certificates. This is the type of thing that big pubs like this can carry off and the facilities here do show that a considerable effort has been put in. Oldies will also want to know that the pub still has both an impressive, separate vault and a fine bowling green.

Continuing down Burnage Lane you come to another Hydes pub, the well-established Albion. This is another pub which used to have a dodgy reputation but recent years have seen notable improvements and once again this is a pleasant pub to enjoy a pint in. At one time there must have been a variety of rooms but now there are just two, vault and rambling lounge. The Hydes beers are dispensed via electric pumps and on my visit the Light and Bitter had been joined by Summer Ale but this was sadly not on. Whilst I have had good beer here in the past, tonight the Light was only OK.



The next pub was the Sun in September and here I was joined by two others. We all tried the Old Brewery Bitter which was most enjoyable. As, indeed, is the pub. Originally done out in a restrained vaguely Indian Raj theme, the Sun has now evolved into a pleasant and comfortable local. The lounge is rambling and split level, the vault is smaller and is my favourite room in the pub.

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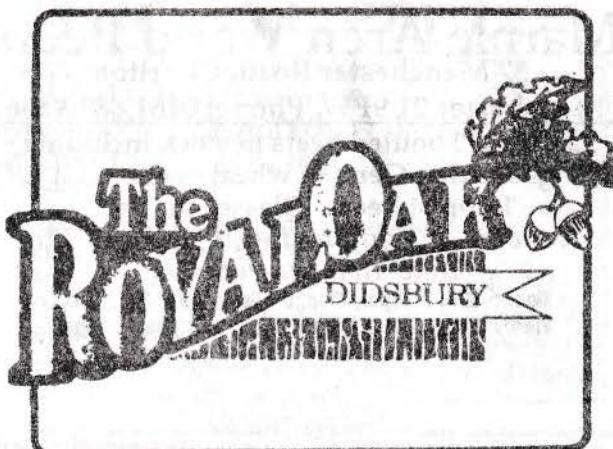
Pausing only to look into Bass's uninviting Red Bull, still keg, a long walk took us to Heaton Mersey and the Dog & Partridge on Didsbury Road. The pub is a mid-1960s rebuild of a much older pub of the same name. On my first visit here the pub looked like a building site as it was undergoing the refurbishment that was to turn it into the one-room Mersey Vale. That didn't last long and Boddington PubCo then did it up again, reinstated the separate vault (an admirable move) and restored the name to the Dog & Partridge. When we arrived a ladies football team was being presented with end of season trophies which made for a bustling party atmosphere and was also a good reflection on what is evidently a strong community focus. We all tried the handpumped Boddies Bitter which was pleasant enough - and far superior to that I had tried earlier in the Victoria.

Heading up into Heaton Mersey the next pub is the famous Griffin selling Holts Mild and Bitter. A fine Victorian pub which Holts at one stage wanted to knock down, it was successfully extended and refurbished a few years ago. Although it was as busy as ever we were sadly disappointed by the beer. The mild was OK but the bitter was thin and, dare I say it, almost sweet. And this for Holts! Oh dear.

Next along is the Railway or the Frog & Railway as the Magic Pub Co have renamed it. This was previously a dismally drab Chef & Brewer pub which desperately needed something doing. Whilst Magic Pub Co have been criticised for their work elsewhere, it has to be said that what they have done here is a distinct improvement. The pub was dimly lit, quite well compartmentalised and generally cosy, OK it's festooned with junky bric-a-brac but in some strange way it seems to work here. The standard Magic range - Green Label, Boddies Bitter and Bass were accompanied by a guest, the not very imaginative Theakstons Bitter. None of the beers we tried were more than OK which was a shame given the improvement to the pub.

No problems with beer quality in our final pub, the Crown. Housed in a very old building at the top of fashionable Vale Close, the Crown scores well on all fronts, atmosphere, beer quality and food (which co-incidentally is reviewed elsewhere in this issue). Our tastebuds were tired and overworked by now but we were still able to appreciate the high quality of the Robinsons Hatters Mild and Best Bitter. A welcome end to an evening that had produced some forgettable beer along the way.

An article like this can only produce a snapshot of the pubs and their beers at one time on a particular night and can't be taken as a once and for all judgement of the pubs or beers. Why not try and visit them yourself to see how much you (dis)agree.



STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

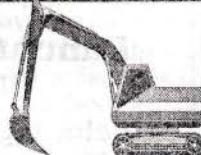
Imperial Changes

Reports of a change at the helm of the Imperial, St Petersgate, Stockport, have proved very wide of the mark. Licensee Paul Treanor is still very much in charge and, following a successful conclusion to his negotiations with Inntrepreneur over the pub's lease, he is now poised to take his plans for the pub forward.

An Irishman himself, Paul has been developing an Irish theme to the pub - more of a natural evolution rather than the instant theming favoured by the bigger operators - and this will now reach its conclusion by renaming the pub 'The Blarney Stone'. Etched windows are already in place and the new signs were to go up at the end of August. Inside there will also be a move to a more Irish slant to the decor.

Paul tells us that trade is good across the board and he is taking advantage of all day opening on Sundays. There is live Irish music on Thursdays through to Sundays and the pub also does a good food trade. On the drinks side there is currently just one cask beer on sale - Websters Yorkshire Bitter (which, unusually for this beer, was rather good when OT called) although a guest beer may be introduced in the future. For those who don't fancy the Websters there is a good range of Irish whiskeys plus bottles of the potent Guinness Foreign Extra Stout. Worth a visit.

GREENALLS CORNER



Following last month's Cheshire Inns, Brian Waine from Mid and North Cheshire CAMRA has sent us a clipping from his local paper concerning Greenalls activities at the Hatton Arms at Hatton.

In his article, Peter Edwardson reported that the pub was being extended into three adjoining cottages to provide a restaurant and some letting bedrooms. These were listed buildings and Greenalls duly obtained permission to carry out some minor external alterations and some internal demolition. Undeterred, Greenalls then proceeded to knock down the lot apart from the building's frontage and consequently now face prosecution by the local planning authority who have accused the company of "ignoring its duty to preserve the town's diminishing stock of listed buildings." Councillor Terry O'Neill, chairman of Warrington Planning Committee has been quoted as being "surprised and disappointed that a company with the stature of Greenalls could cause such damage to a building of so much importance to the town." Really? Perhaps somebody should take him to see the site of Tommy Ducks....

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CHESHIRE PUBS

by Peter Edwardson

Some pubs, standing in well-known beauty spots or occupying magnificent historic buildings, don't have to work too hard to be a success. Others, though, don't have such natural advantages, and a real effort is needed to make them stand out from the crowd. This is certainly true of the Bhurtpore Inn at Aston, where a pub that is genuinely special has been created where you would probably not expect it.

Where on earth's that? And where did such a strange name come from? Aston is a quiet rural village just off the A530 a few miles south of Nantwich, set amidst the lush dairy farming country of Cheshire's far south. The name, probably unique in Britain, comes from a famous victory of local dignitary Viscount Combermere, while he was Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in India in the last century. There are at least two pubs in the area named after him, and until recently another of his campaigns was commemorated by the Salamanca Inn next to Wrenbury station, now unfortunately closed and turned into a private house.



Opposite the Bhurtpore Inn is a magnificently crooked old timber-frame farmhouse with the date "1667" displayed, but the first impression of the pub as you approach from the main road is the less appealing one of a functional modern brick-built extension. Go round the front and it's a bit more promising, a modest 19th century brick house with prominent bay windows,

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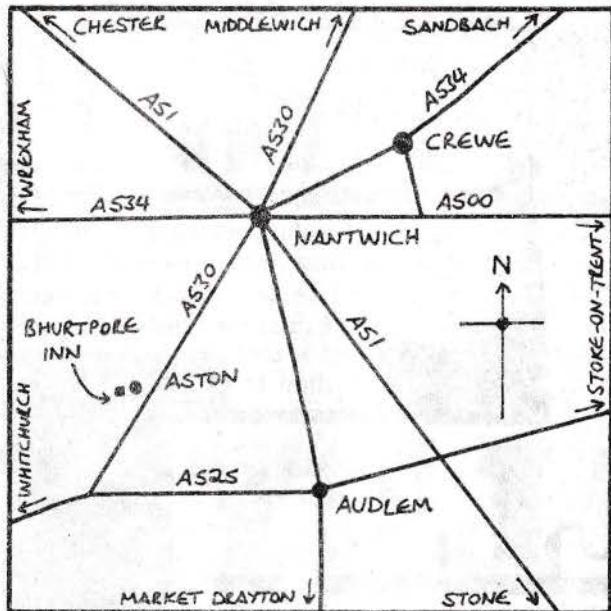
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but still with no suggestion of anything out of the ordinary. Just through the door, though, a blackboard announcing "750 real ales in the past year" gives more of a hint of what you will find inside.

For this, among many other things, is a full-blown multi-beer free house set deep in rural Cheshire. On our visit there were nine beers available, almost all from small independent breweries. Hanby Drawwell from Wem is the regular house beer, and there were eight others including Beartown Premium from Congleton and the regrettably-named Piddle in the Hole from Wyre Piddle Brewery in Worcestershire - the latter proving to be a marvellously hoppy pint. There was no sign of quality being compromised by slow turnover, and the prices were fairly reasonable, starting at £1.37 for the Hanby.

Westons Old Rosie cider was available on handpump, and there was an incredible menu of over 100 mainly bottle-conditioned British and foreign bottled beers. One of our party couldn't resist the temptation of some Frank Boon Kriek with his pudding - though cherry beer is a taste I haven't personally acquired and have no plans to do so. If that wasn't enough there were over 50 malt whiskies too including such rarities as Scapa and Ledaig. I can't think of another pub where there's such a wide range of interesting things to drink. The fact that quality goes hand in hand with breadth of choice is borne out by the pub's appearance in this year's Good Beer Guide, which indeed is where we found out about it.

The Nursery Inn



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Anvil Ales
Brewers of
Traditional
Cask
Beers
Always in
good taste

The food's not at all bad too, with a fairly comprehensive menu including a good choice of snacky things, together with full meals, and a specials board where home made curries feature strongly. Prices range from about £3.00 for some of the more straightforward dishes to £6.00 or so for the more elaborate specials. It was nice to see new potatoes available as well as the ubiquitous chips and jackets, and also a refreshing change to get a ploughman's with lots of cheese, pickle and crusty bread and hardly any namby-pamby salad.

The interior of the pub doesn't quite measure up to the quality of what's on offer, but it's very pleasant, and more characterful than you might imagine from outside. There's a main bar area with comfortable bench seating, a spacious vault at the back with a pool table, a lounge area by the food counter and the new extension, mainly used for meals, which is better inside than out, and where families are welcome. We visited on Sunday lunch, and by the time we left at about two the place was doing a thriving trade.

The Bhurtpore Inn greatly exceeded our expectations - it's a place where the owners have set themselves ambitious standards in terms of both choice and quality, and on the evidence of our visit were comfortably achieving them. If you want to experience its alcoholic delights in depth, though, make sure you get someone else to drive. Alternatively, it's only about a mile from Wrenbury station, which is served by stopping trains between Shrewsbury and Crewe running every two hours. The last train back on Mondays to Fridays is at 23.28, a connection at Crewe giving an 01.14 arrival at Piccadilly! Opening hours are given in the Good Beer Guide as 12-2.30 and 6-11, although I imagine they stay open for most if not all of Sunday afternoon.

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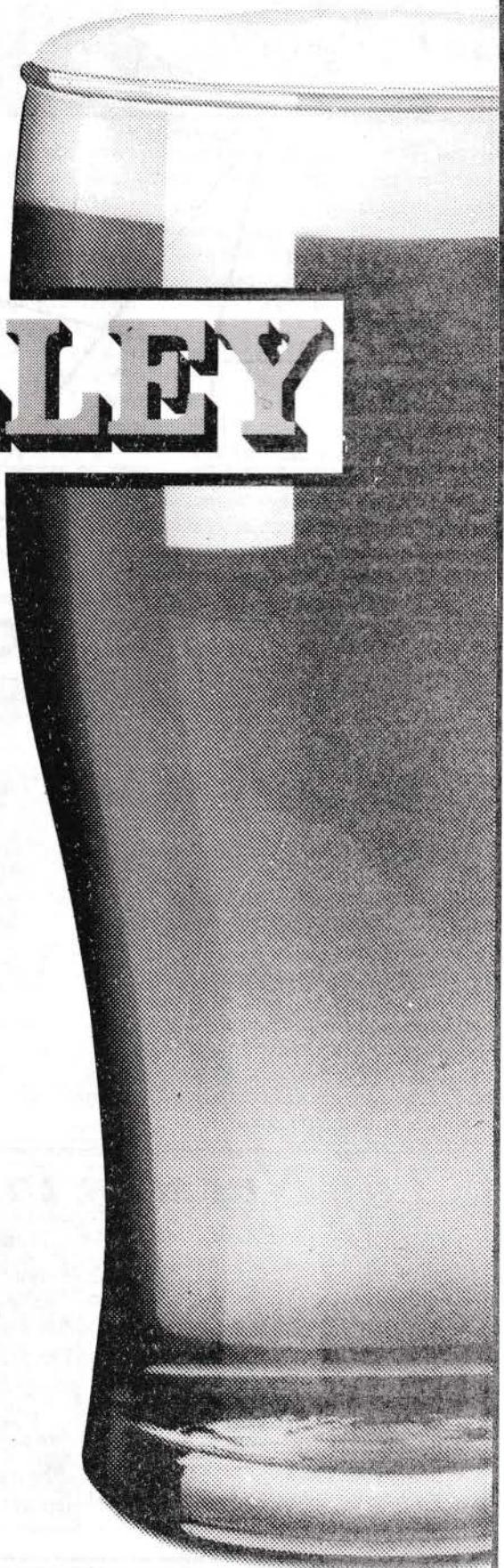


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CARRY OUT

Oddbins have for a while been regarded as one of the best wine merchants on the high street, Oz Clarke in the Guardian describing them as simply the best of their kind around. In recent years they have also branched out into a large selection of bottled beers and lagers from both the UK and around the world.

Opening Times spoke to Paul Morley, manager of the Stockport branch to find out more. Paul told us that over 50 bottled beers and lagers are now stocked in a wide variety of styles. British beers include Caledonian 80/-, St Andrews Ale, Deuchars IPA and the organic Golden Pale, Black Sheep Bitter, Eldridge Pope's Hardy Country Bitter and Sam Smith's Imperial Stout. On the foreign beer front these include Hoegaarden, Duvel, Lindmans Kriek and Chimay Bleu from Belgium, Hacker Pschorr, Schneider Weisse and Lammsbrau from Germany and the two Czech classics, Budweiser Budvar and Pilsner Urquell. From further afield are the famous Cooper's Sparkling Ale from Australia and the Pete's 'Wicked' range (Lager, Ale and Red) from the USA.

Paul also told us that there are one or two beers either exclusive to Oddbins or perhaps difficult to find elsewhere. These include two American beers, Old Style Lager and the aforementioned Pete's Wicked Red. One exclusive brew is Jim Pryor's IPA from Dorset. Shepherd Neame was originally exclusive to the chain but can now be found in most supermarkets. That brewer's powerful Bishops Finger remains an important brand for Oddbins, though, 'there's nothing else quite like it' says Paul. You will also find the champion bottle conditioned beer from this year's Great British Beer Festival, King & Barnes Festive Ale. The range is continually expanding as well. Latest editions include Marstons Oyster Stout and King & Barnes Porter, both of which are bottle conditioned. The powerful Hoegaarden Grand Cru is also on the way.

There are usually one or two special offers and at the moment these include 12 for the price of 8 on Banks's Mild and Caledonian 80/- and 4 for the price of 3 Hoegaarden Blanche and Pilsner Urquell. There is also a beer tasting each Saturday this month. On 9th these include Lindemans Kriek and King & Barnes Old Porter. A week later you can get your tastebuds round Caledonian Golden Pale, Duvel and Jim Pryor's IPA. There is a 10% mixed case discount on any of the beers bought on the day of tasting. The standard case discount is 5%.

Stockport's Oddbins can be found at 101-107 Buxton Road, Heaviley (that's next to the Duke of York). Opening hours are 10-9pm Monday to Saturday and 12-8 on Sundays.

The beer tastings run from 2-5pm, Saturdays only.



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Wetherspoons

Amid much publicity (and a very lavish pre-opening bash), The Moon under Water opened its doors to the public last month. This is the first Manchester outing of the J D Wetherspoon Organisation, a successful, London-based pub chain and judging by this offering they've certainly come up north with all guns blazing. Some £2 million has been spent on converting the old Odeon cinema on Deansgate into what may be the largest pub in the country with over 8000 square feet of customer space and a capacity of 1500.

Outside the pub has a restrained, almost modest appearance and indeed, immediately on entering the pub looks to be a fairly standard, if upmarket, drinking hall with a bar down one side. Appearances are deceptive, however. The heart of the pub is the old auditorium which has been converted into a stunning galleried affair at the cutting edge of design, quality and comfort on the Manchester pub scene. Downstairs the bar faces onto a split-level area, the upper levels divided into compartments (with much use of etched and stained glass) laid out with numbered tables which serve as the main eating area. At the far end is a breathtaking new floor to ceiling stained glass window, which you can study as you ascend the adjacent stairs to the upper level. This gallery boasts yet another huge bar and features one real gimmick - a couple of rows of the old seats have been installed and these are occupied by (not very good) effigies of Ena Sharples, Mrs Pankhurst, Christopher



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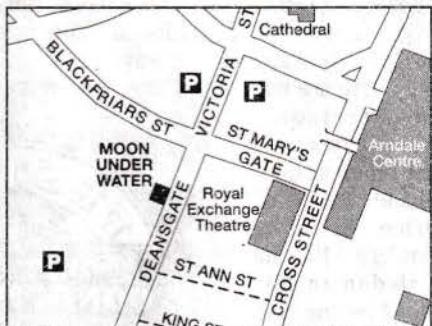
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SUBJECT TO AVAILABILITY

Lee and a couple of other unidentifiable individuals. Unless these are cleaned every day it's difficult to see them standing the test of time. The toilets are up here and there is also another, smaller stained glass window, this one with an industrial theme.

The accent is clearly on quality, quality and yet more quality - attentive bar staff, spotless toilets, luxurious surroundings and well-kept beer are all the order of the day. The beer range itself is perhaps ordinary and features the standard Wetherspoon range of Theakstons Bitter, XB, Courage Directors and Youngers Scotch Bitter, the latter retailing at 99p. Theakstons Mild is also a permanent beer, presumably a gesture to us here "oop north" but whether it will sell in a venue such as this remains to be seen. Two guest beers are also on sale and have included Burtonwood Top Hat, Hop Back Summer Lightning and Cotleigh Barn Owl. These tend to retail in the £1.60 region.. Noises have been made about cask cider but for the moment decent cider is confined to a couple of bottles from the Westons range.

The only area where this superlative new pub falls down is the food. The menu looks appetising as does the food when it arrives but it is no more than ordinary, with an apparent reliance on the freezer and microwave. Presumably this is a standard menu throughout the chain - the introduction of a few local specialities would have been a nice touch.

But this is a comparatively minor quibble. In last month's OT we wrote that Wetherspoons might find us less easily impressed in Manchester than in London where their pubs regularly open to acclaim. Well, we are impressed. Very. Go, see, drink and enjoy.

National News

CAMRA branches in Wales are celebrating a famous victory over new brewing giant, Scottish Courage. The bone of contention was "Welsh Bitter" a keg beer introduced into the Principality but actually produced at the ScotCourage plant in Nottingham. This led to accusations that drinkers were being misled into thinking the beer was actually produced in Wales. Despite protestations that the beer was simply brewed for Wales, trading standards officers took a dim view and the beer is now to be renamed....County Bitter. Oh dear - has anyone told Ruddles?

★ ★ ★

If you thought every conceivable theme for a pub had already been exploited, think again. Down in Wolverhampton, Bass have converted one of their pubs into a bar themed on an earthquake and its aftershock. Yes, really. There are apparently four different areas to take customers through the experience of an earthquake and features include a fibreglass tidal wave crashing through the bar. Has the world gone mad?

★ ★ ★

The antics of some micro-brewers in giving their beers silly names is in danger of doing more harm than good. The Steampacket Brewery of Knottingley, Yorkshire is a case in point. Not content with straining the bounds of good taste by naming their VJ commemoration ale "Little Boy" after the atom bomb dropped on Hiroshima, they have now introduced a new session beer rejoicing in the name of "Blow Job". The brewery claim this is to mark Knottingley's history as a glassmaking centre for the brewing industry, pointing out the pumpclip shows a Victorian glassblower in operation. This has cut no ice with the owners of the Tap & Spile freehouse chain who have banned the name.

Kenilworth

Last month saw the re-opening of the Kenilworth in Cheadle Hulme after a £400,000 refurbishment. Lorraine York reports on the new-look pub.

A complete interior and exterior refit has left the Kenilworth looking a lot more pleasing to the eye and looking more at home with the surrounding area. Gone now are the days of its chequered past, no doubt with sighs of relief from its former long-suffering neighbours.

The new licensees Ian and Kirsty Warrender hail from Gloucester and are no strangers to pub management and have in the past been keen supporters of CAMRA to boot. The pub itself is now a very relaxing place for a drink and despite being essentially open plan has been cleverly split up into various areas with a main bar area to the right and a semi-enclosed 'vault' or 'games room' for pool and darts. At the back the pub extends to a kitchen and eating area. The intention is to serve food all day and the food varies from the traditional such as Steak & Stout pie to the more exotic delights of Cajun Salmon. There is a separate "Jumbo Jim's Children's Menu" with a separate choice of 'Fun Meals' or 'Tummy Fillers'. Main menu prices range from £4 upwards.



The Kenilworth previously sold only keg beer but Greenalls have taken the opportunity to introduce quite a range of cask ales. Permanent are Greenalls Bitter, Original, Tetley Bitter and Bass and alongside these there will be a weekly guest beer. This was Sneck Lifter on opening night, very quaffable but on the expensive side at £1.75.

In deference to residents' concerns there is no beer garden or outdoor drinking. There are NO SMOKING areas and good facilities for the disabled. In short the 'new' Kenilworth is a major improvement and looks set fair to become the community pub it should always have been but never was.

Brewery Month

September is 'Brewery Month', run by the Brewers & Licensed Victuallers Association to promote the best of British beer. Some 28 seasonal beers will be making their appearance during the month, some brewed specially to mark the occasion. One or two will only be available in the pub where they are brewed but some will be available nationally. These include a new vanilla beer from Batemans, Lincolnshire Yellow Belly (!) and, perhaps more appetisingly, a September Imperial Stout from Bass.

RHYTHM and BOOZE

by Richard Hough

A steamy hot Saturday in August saw me arrive a little early for the gig in Withington. After popping into the Victoria to check the gig was still on (and sample a pint of Hyde's Summer Ale) I hot-footed it (literally) to the Red Lion to soak up the sunshine and peruse the Banks's Mild. The evening was off to an excellent start. I was about to leave when Marston's Owd Roger came on stream; I departed a little later, somewhat more tanned and happy!

A brief trip to the Orion was worthwhile: both Holts Bitter and Mild (and each costing less than £1 a pint) were in fine fettle. The misnamed Withington Ale House advertises "Fine Ales" in proud gold lettering - Theakstons Best, Courage Directors and John Smith's Bitter, all of which are fairly ropey. Is it any wonder that they were the quietest pub in the village, despite having the noisiest juke-box? S&N/Courage need a drastic plan of action to rescue this seriously under-performing place.

Cajun is the traditional music of French Louisiana, and it's becoming ever-more popular over here. That said, it's still quite a novelty locally, so I wasn't going to miss the Eunice Bobcats at the Victoria. It is a large traditional Hydes pub that serves the local community well. The notice boards and pool tables are well used, which is always nice to see. The 3.2% ABV



Summer Ale had been a little disappointing before so I plumped for a pint of Hyde's Bitter, which was rather good. The bar staff were friendly, if not the most efficient ever.

The Eunice Bobcats. What a wonderful name for a band! Two years ago a nameless five-piece took the stage for the first time. One of their number was sporting the shirt of a High School football team from south-west Louisiana - the Eunice Bobcats. And they have been entertaining the crowds ever since. The music they play could be described as folk with attitude, although thumping, jumping, get-up-n-dance is what it is. Toes were tapping and heads were nodding as they rattled through a few numbers, and there was no mistaking the good-time party feeling. Very briefly, the Bobcats are Rich "Fiddle" Butress, Rick "Squeeze Box" Booth, Tim "Big Big Bass" Kerr, Steve "Mr Guitar" Bass, and not forgetting Martin Bobcat Bruton on fiddle and occasional vocals. Between them they created some good music, and transformed it into a happening hoe-down. The punters, however, were rather less enthusiastic.

Between sets the Hydes Mild was sampled. No problems there either despite it being a smidge less brill than the bitter. A couple of slowish numbers appeased the sedentary crowd, but the Bobcats couldn't contain the feeling any longer, and they let rip with a hefty dose of folk-fuelled jingo. Captain Pugwash meets the Bluebells' "Young at Heart", add a dash of fun, and enjoy.

The band were good, the beer was good, but unfortunately the audience didn't want to know. They sat and clapped.

The accordion is the strength of this good-time music, with everyone hanging on to the runaway train. How can you not dance to the Eunice Bobcats? They're as infectious as 'flu! The good-time-girls had a super time, the rest of the pub merely enjoyed it. Overall the band came close, but they didn't really rock the place (or roll the reefer) and the audience didn't rise to the O'Cajun. They should've.



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YOUR HOSTS

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Frederic's on Anglesey

It was April 1994 when Robinsons new premium beer first appeared in four of their Anglesey pubs - the Bulkeley Arms in Menai Bridge, George & Dragon in Beaumaris, Breeze Hill, Benllech, and the Marquis in Rhosybol. The strength of 5% ABV, (and the price) seems to have proved too much for the local drinkers, and now, only the Breeze Hill is continuing to sell it on a fairly regular basis - the George & Dragon thought they might try it again for the August Bank Holiday weekend. There has been one gain - the Four Crosses, on the roundabout above Menai Bridge, now sells it alongside the Best Bitter (and both on handpumps.)

About two and a half years ago, it was not difficult to count the handpumps in Robinsons 11 Anglesey pubs - there was only one, in the Gazelle at Glyngarth on the Menai Strait. This has all changed quite dramatically now, and in most instances handpumps indicate that cask conditioned ale is available. But although most of the "boxes on the bar" have gone, some have been replaced by a dummy handpump, and the electrical dispense has been retained.

Celts get Everywhere!

As the country becomes saturated with Irish theme bars, the brewery marketing men are turning to our other Celtic fringes for inspiration. Already we learn that the Sherwood in Fallowfield is to become a Scottish theme bar and now comes news of a proposed chain of Welsh theme pubs. The first two outlets are planned for Cardiff and Llandudno but further openings could be in line for other cities around the country.

Pub Theatre for Manchester

Mid-August saw the Rocket Theatre Company auditioning actors and interviewing for a stage manager for Manchester's newest theatre which is to be housed in the Square Albert pub, Albert Square.

Rocket has been set up by Martin Harris, who has drama experience in both Birmingham and London, with the support of the Tetley Pub Co (who own the premises) and Allied Domecq (who supply it). The aim is to offer "affordable, quality theatre and an opportunity for local playwrights to win exposure."

The first season is scheduled to open on Tuesday 26th September with a double bill featuring Wilmslow playwright, Geoff Newson's The Oldest Profession and the world premier of his Something Big, two comedies tackling environmental issues. These will be followed in mid-October with the premier of Lancastrian Linda Anderson's first play, The Flight Response a "seductively intense drama of a love triangle" and the season concludes with a Tom Stoppard double bill - After Magritte and The Real Inspector Hound.

This is an interesting and novel venture, possibly the first of its kind in Manchester - let's hope it succeeds.

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SPECIAL ISSUE OF OPENING
TIMES IS 22 SEPTEMBER**

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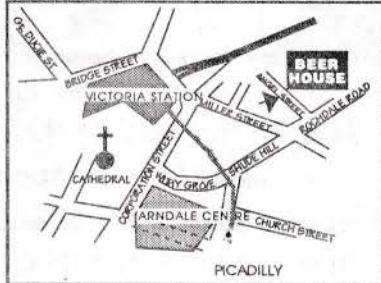
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Festival Fun

The wave of in-house pub beer festivals shows no sign of abating - this month sees festivals at the Crown, Heaton Lane Stockport; the Boundary in Guide Bridge and no less than two at the Head of Steam, next to Deansgate Station on Whitworth Street - the first of these, featuring North West Beers will probably be over by the time you read this (it runs from 5-10 September) but look out for their second festival, featuring rare ales, from 15-19th. How rare? Owner Tony Brookes was keeping tight-lipped as we went to press so searchers after the unusual will have to go and find out for themselves.

The month finishes with a festival at the **Moon Under Water**, the new Wetherspoon Organisation pub on Deansgate. This runs from Thursday 28th September to October 1st and will feature 30 different beers all retailing at £1.49 a pint. These include five brewed exclusively for the event and in addition the beers on offer will include the likes of Burts Nipper, Thwaites Thunderbolt, Hook Norton Hookey, Oakhill Yeoman Ale and Ridleys Mild. One or two of these sound expensive at £1.49 but there will certainly be bargains to be had. There will also be a booklet describing all the beers on offer. Wednesday 25th October sees the start of the festival at the **Howcroft**, Pool Street, Bolton. More on that one next month. Over the same dates is a festival at the **Witchwood**, Old Street, Ashton. This will feature over 50 ales, porters, ciders and milds plus a range of live entertainment which will form part of the **Boddingtons Manchester Festival**. This will include T-Rextasy (26th), Biggles Wartime Band (27th), The Cheatles (28th) and Blues Band guitarist Dave Kelly (29th). Those wanting to see T-Rextasy or Dave Kelly are advised to book in advance - see the Witchwood's ad on this page for the address.

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CURMUDGEON



There's been a lot of publicity about the 700 jobs being created by the new John Lewis and Sainsbury's stores next to the A34 at Heald Green. Cheadle MP Stephen Day got himself into a bit of hot water by expressing less than total enthusiasm for this project, and pointing out that for every job created, another one was probably being lost in a small local shop which was forced to close as its customers deserted it to travel in their cars to the new retail park.

But, it's a valid point, and with the opening of such a huge new pub as the Moon Under Water in the centre of Manchester, you have to ask whether it applies to pubs as well as shops. I'm not knocking the Moon at all - it's a bold new venture which has much to be said for it, and in many ways sets new standards of customer service. But, given the generally poor state of the pub trade nowadays, the only way it's going to succeed is by taking trade away from other pubs.

It's also in a location where there are very few people living within walking distance. To get there, particularly in the evenings, most of its customers are going to have to make a special journey in by bus, train, tram, car or taxi. You're not going to do that every night of the week, and you might forgo a few quick ones in the pub at the end of your street in favour of one special big night out.

I'm not against keen competition, but you can't have competition without having winners and losers. If this new mega-venue does well, will it be designer bars or Sainsbury's off-licence losing out, or will it be small community locals?

★ ★ ★ ★ *

Well, I can't say I'm exactly brimming with enthusiasm at the prospect of "Opening Times" appearing on the Internet. I would have thought that the appreciation of real ale should go hand in hand with a healthy scepticism about technology, not a slavish rush to embrace every dubious new development.

And, by definition, while you're reading about real ale on the Internet, you can't be down at the pub enjoying it with your friends (that is, unless your local turns itself into a "cyber-bar" with a terminal on every table). The Internet is something which adds to the break-up of society, by encouraging solitary contemplation rather than social activities. In the long run, that's much more likely to help the take home trade rather than the pub.

★ ★ ★ ★ *

A recent visit to a Whitbread "free house" proved disastrous when the bar staff were unable to produce a drinkable sample of either of the first two beers I chose. I got my money back and went somewhere else where they understand the basic principles of cellarman ship rather better. But how many other people, under those circumstances, would have switched to something like Caffrey's which they could at least rely on not to resemble a pint of soup? Bad real ale must be one of the best recruiting sergeants for nitrokeg. Those fond of conspiracy theories might almost imagine that the big brewers were deliberately encouraging sloppy cellarman ship and poor stock rotation to put people off drinking the real stuff.

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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

SEPTEMBER '90

Local beers did particularly well in CAMRA's prestigious Champion Beer of Britain competition, the finals of which were held at the Great British Beer Festival in August. The beers were split into 5 sections according to strength and style, with a further category for new breweries. Brendan Dobbin's West Coast Brewery gained a worthy second place for their premium Sierra Nevada Pale Ale - this was particularly noteworthy as the brewery had been in operation for less than 18 months. The other prizewinner was local brewer Robinsons, who won the Strong Ale category with their Old Tom, which went on to come third in the overall Champion Beer of Britain competition.

There was news of the winners in a very different type of competition - the 1990 Pub Vandalism Awards, a local CAMRA campaigning exercise, aimed at drawing attention to the continuing threat to our traditional local pubs. The first award went to Playmaster Leisure for their work on the Red Lion in Cheadle - originally a superb community local, it had been "extended, refurbished and dragged upmarket." The second award went to Tetley Walker for the "most gratuitous and unnecessary alteration" to the Sun & Castle on Stockport's Hillgate.

There was a small item on exorbitant prices in Brighton, which was the venue for CAMRA's national beer festival. A local free house was offering Robinsons Best Bitter at £1.46 a pint. (Don't forget this was five years ago.) The cheapest beer was mild from the local independent Gales, and that was £1.16.

As Opening Times went to press, Greenalls announced a board meeting was to be held to discuss whether they would sell their breweries, and do a Boddingtons by becoming a pub owning chain. Rumours had been rife for some time, and it certainly looked as if all would be revealed - an announcement was to be made on 31st August.

There was news of two completed refurbishments:-

1. The Crown Hotel in Heaton Moor Road - there were one or two quibbles over this one, but overall it was judged to be a "tasteful, sensitive, and sensible refurbishment."
2. Another Crown, in Didsbury - this had been extended, but the work was described as "seamless", so that a casual visitor would never know that the pub had been anything other than its present size. General opinion for this one was "a very impressive job."

The Victoria

Hall Street, Offerton

Greenalls Ales

plus

A GUEST BEER each WEEK

OPEN ALL DAY

BAR FOOD AVAILABLE

Your Hosts

Ian & Christine

Tel: (0161) 480 3983



Richard Hough goes upmarket

The Crown Inn on Didsbury Road, Heaton Mersey comes highly recommended for food. Not just from Opening Times, but Susan Nowak mentions it in the latest edition of CAMRA's Good Pub Food Guide. With its comfortable cottage-style interior it is one of the better Robinsons pubs in the area, serving some of the best beer in Stockport. Both Hatters Mild and Best Bitter are of consistently high quality; we hoped the food would be as good.

A variety of starters are available with prices ranging from £1.75 (Soup of the day) to £4.10 (smoked salmon). We declined this tempting offer, preferring instead to tuck straight into the main courses; with well over 30 dishes available as well as the chef's specials, we spent a while deciding what to have. The specials, which change daily, included Chicken Piccata, Beef or Chicken Jalfrezi (each £5.25), gammon, pineapple and mushroom kebabs, and McGilly Cuddy's Bake (£4.95).

The latter is one of two award-winning specialities that people cross the country for; (the other one, Chicken Caernarfon is a secret recipe containing Welsh tarragon). McGilly Cuddy's Bake (named after a range of Irish Mountains) is a dish of cabbage and ham, topped with potato and cheese. At £4.95 it was thought to be pretty good, although the sauce was perhaps a little thin.



The Chicken Piccata is a delicious combination of chicken in tomato and basil sauce, topped with Mozzarella. It cost £5.95 and was, and I quote, "Faultless, worth every penny!" The home made chicken and mushroom pie was accompanied by peas, cabbage and carrots, and, like the McGilly Cuddy's Bake, came with a side order of chips included in the price. The Crown is the only pub in Stockport apparently that still serves home-cut, home-cooked chips. The pie itself was top-heavy with chicken; no corners cut there! I fancied lasagne, home-made of course. I was treated to a mighty slab, with a proper side salad. Superb.

There was a lengthy wait for the food, but bear in mind that everything is made to order, and if you want this sort of quality, you must be prepared to enjoy a couple of beers before you dine. Bottle-conditioned Worthington White Shield is also available. You can tell when food is first-class when the conversation dies completely. Lunch-times at the Crown can be quiet affairs!

Colin Rowland is the wizard in the kitchen. He's been in the trade for 30 years, and with Robinsons pubs since 1976, when he started at the Red Bull on Hillgate. In his eight years at the Crown he has helped the pub to win a string of awards including: Guinness Pub of the Year for Food; the Uncle Ben's "Best Curry" award; the Mushroom Dish of the Year a few years ago; and Best Pub Food in the North of England, to name but a few. Egon Ronay can't get enough of Colin's cuisine.

Back to the food, and we drooled over the sweets menu. Eight sweets were available, each costing a reasonable £1.95, and including such delights as home-made Dutch apple pie, lemon sponge or apricot crumble. I plumped (literally) for the chocolate bread-and-butter pudding. A piping hot dish with plenty of chocolate, and not for the weak-willed. The sticky toffee pudding was also tried, with custard made to order. "Stunning" was the verdict. The real article!

All in all it was a most satisfying feed, and one of the best pub meals OT's editor has had in a LONG while. High praise indeed. With vegetarian meals making up around 45% of the menu, and a selection of sandwiches also available, there is something for everyone at the Crown. It MUST be experienced.



1995 BOLTON BEER FESTIVAL

in aid of Bolton Lads & Girls Club

Wed 25 OCTOBER
to SUN 29 OCTOBER at

The Howcroft Inn

POOL ST (off Vernon St/St Georges Rd) BOLTON

OVER 120 BEERS, Lagers & Ciders

Night Time Entertainment FOOD AT ALL SESSIONS

AWARD WINNING BEERS & HOPEFULLY THE FIRST

SHOWING OF BOLTON'S OWN BANK TOP BREWERY BEER

WED 25 7-11pm

THUR 26 7-11pm

FRI 27 5-12pm

SAT 28 12-4 & 7-12

SUN 29 12-3pm

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Beer Garden Awards

Ah, those lazy, hazy days of summer! As we approach the end of what has been a glorious one for most, it's time to reflect on the bastion of what is the English Summer, as Opening Times proudly presents:

The Beer Garden Awards 1995.

The Most Improved Beer Garden: without doubt the Anchor, Hazel Grove. It is a small Robinsons pub on the A6 serving both Hatters Mild and Best Bitter. Remember the knee-high brambles and nettles, not to mention the litter? The enclosed patio is now one of the better places to drink in the Grove, either indoors or out!

The Tended Flowerbeds Award: the Adswood Hotel, Adswood Lane West in Cale Green. Another Robbies pub again with Hatters Mild and Best Bitter, whose interior boasts numerous horse brasses and china cart-horses etc. The garden is totally child-friendly, and a delight when all the flowers are in bloom.

The Trimmed Borders Award: has been given to the Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Sample some Hydes beers by the meticulously well-kept bowling green, around which the shrubbery is kept well pruned. Not a leaf or blade out of place!

The Best of the Baskets: with competition so great, a number of pub's hanging baskets deserve a mention. The Hind's Head, Heaton Chapel, whose garden as a whole is superb; a couple of Marston's pubs on Wilmslow Road - the Station, Didsbury, and the overflowing baskets at the Red Lion, Withington. But the best for my money are at the New Union, perhaps not surprisingly in the "gay village" in Manchester. Canal-side colour-co-ordination, and beer from Burtonwood.

Adventure Playground: The kids'll love the Little Mill at Rowarth. All the usual stuff, in wood, plus a death-slide and tree-houses. Well worth the effort to get to. The beer's good too; four or five from different breweries.

The Paraphernalia Prize: the Travellers Call, Great Moor. This little Robinsons pub has a collection of hand bells inside, while

outside you can experience the red telephone box, sets of traffic lights and railway signals. Unusual, to say the least.

The Babbling Brook Award: the Old Mill, Cheadle Hulme. The Ladybrook wends its way past the Mill, which is actually only about six years old. Enjoy Tetley Bitter, Burton Ale plus about four others in one of the most idyllic pub settings, where the noise of traffic is well away.

The Perfect Fish Pond: the Oddfellows in Ashton. A taste of real tradition in this gem, 80 years in the same family. Robinsons Hatters Mild and Best Bitter can be drunk from "Oddies" glasses, while looking at the carp in the stone pond which comes complete with its own little waterfalls. Note the climbing ivy too.

The Aviary Award: This one's a toss up between two contrasting pubs, the Davenport Arms (read about it on page 2) and the Victoria in Clayton, a Tetley pub in the industrial area of East Manchester.

The Surprise: The Crown, Valance Close in Gorton. A little oasis of trellises and potted plants. Sit in the shade of trees, not brollies, and enjoy Boddies Bitter or Chesters Mild. Beware of the (3-legged) dog!

The Well-deserved Weed Award : The Cock, Whaley Bridge. I wasn't going to condemn anywhere, on the basis that most 'bad' beer gardens are disgraceful, hardly worth a mention. But the Cock exudes a real unkempt charm. It is a Robinsons house, part of which is a restaurant operation. In the garden, uncultivated plants poke through every available crevice. Miss Havisham would have been proud.

Thanks for the Effort: The Beer House, Angel Street, Manchester. You really could be in rural England! Wildlife includes a caged rabbit and his companion, a gerbil. Admire the butterflies, painted on the wall. With not enough room to swing a cat (or hardly turn around) you are best off going back in the pub to sample one of the dozen or so beers on offer...

Finally: My personal favourite outdoor experience of the summer was at the Olde Vic, Edgeley. Not in the enclosed paved area at the back, but on the bench at the front, with a cool refreshing pint, watching the sun set over Stockport...Until next year...

The advertisement features a large image of a Robinson's Best Bitter beer bottle on the left. The label on the bottle reads: "A Family Brewery", "Robinson's", "Best BITTER", "4.2% vol", "Traditionally Brewed", and "Since 1838". To the right of the bottle, the text "The Best in the North West" is written in a stylized font. Below this text is a circular silver medal with the words "SILVER MEDAL" at the top and "WINNER 1994" at the bottom. The center of the medal features a heraldic crest.

...Pub News...
News...P
...Pub News...
News...P

HIGH PEAK & NORTH EAST CHESHIRE
WITH TIM JONES
CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE CAMRA

Starting in Disley, The Hungry Rams Head Horse Inn is expecting a change of landlord in the near future (that's good news apparently) but the potentially bad news is that the couple that are to take over got the job due to their experience in food! Anyway on the matter of the Real Ale Bar in the stables (The Frog & Railway for God's sake!) has been given Listed Building Consent by Macclesfield DC so let's hope the new licensees develop an interest in beer to balance the emphasis on food.

Some quickies: the Dog & Partridge at Bridgemont, Whaley Bridge is up for sale; the Clarkes, Market Street, Hyde is open after refurbishment and over in Trafford and Hulme's area the Trafford Hotel (Websters) is to get the refurb treatment but interestingly the planning application has been submitted by Courage/S&N.

In Kettleshulme the Bulls Head has a regular guest beer which has joined the Boddingtons. At the time of "survey" after one of Woods Walks, it was from Arundel Brewery and was so inspiring no one could remember the name! Oh well I suppose it can be a bit of a lottery for landlords choosing guest beers. Anyway as one die-hard High Peak member would say, "one man's bland is another man's subtle".

Finally, in Glossop, The Whitfield WMC has done a long-term deal with Holts, so the Bitter will now join the Boddingtons and at £1.05 it's a bit of a bargain.

Users of the CAMRA Guide "Nine Towns Bitter" should go carefully in Hyde. The Gardeners and the George & Dragon, both listed as selling occasional guest beers by handpump, have now lost their handpumps and sell only keg; and the Talbot, a Centric pub listed as selling Stones and Theakstons on handpump, is now another keg-only haunt (a shame, as this largely traditional pub set in an obscure location surprisingly close to the town centre could be a real winner if it sold an interesting range of beers).

Tameside News

The Top House in Mossley is closed and for sale.

ASHTON'S
PREMIER
FREE
HOUSE

THE
STATION

SAT 11.30 - 3.00
07.00 - 11.00
SUNDAY
USUAL TIMES

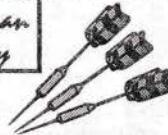
"... is head and shoulders above any other free house in Tameside in beer terms. The ever changing selection of real ale (invariably in good condition) from independent breweries from far & wide is to say the least impressive."

NINE TOWNS BITTER

WARRINGTON ST. ASHTON-U-LYNE NEXT TO BYPASS

Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



After a short close season, Stockport's premier darts league commenced another season at the end of August.

Established in 1947, the Stockport Licensed Houses Darts & Crib League, at least at Super League level, looks like being the most closely contested for several seasons. The past season saw Bobby Peel almost break the Cale Green stranglehold.

The Edgeley side led the table from the opening day of the season, until the last week of the season, when Cale Green ensured that their name be inscribed on the trophy for the tenth successive season.

One thing that is certain, another name will be on the trophy this term, as Cale Green Social Club has closed its doors. The team has moved over to the Royal Mortar and will be looking to maintain their grip. Early signs are not good, however. The first match of the season resulted in a 4-3 home defeat at the hands of Levenshulme's Sidings.

Among the favourites to take the title must be last season's runners-up and cup winners Bobby Peel. They were extremely unlucky not to snatch the title last season, and started the new term with a 6-1 thrashing of Printers Arms.

Lancashire Hill team Nicholson Arms, having signed local superstar Tony O'Shea, look formidable. Together with Barry Riley, one of the rising stars on the local darting horizon, these two will provide a firm foundation for Nich's.

Another side to change venue is Star & Garter. They will be playing out of the Church, Edgeley, this year. The gap left by O'Shea's departure will be filled by Paul Cumston. Paul is a very talented player and will grace the Super League.

Together with the Magnet, most will reckon that those teams will be contesting the top places. But I fancy the chances of Heaton Moor's Crown. Already with the basis of a strong side: John Alcock, Russ Eddleston, Stan Nield and Kevin Weir, they just needed a little strengthening. This they have achieved - and how! Big Pete Connolly and the stylish Tony Daniels, both current Lancashire players, have joined Crown. And they should give Crown the edge over most of their rivals.

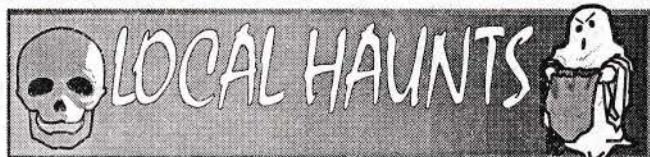
★ ★ ★

In my last column I mentioned some of the famous "names" who are noted dart players. It has been pointed out to me that I should, of course, have included one of the most consistent players in the area, namely "Bobby Charlton" who chuck for the Bobby Peel.

On the county scene "Paul Daniels" and "Frankie Vaughan" are regulars. Perhaps you may know of others. I would be interested to hear. Ironically, the week that the article was published in Opening Times, I found myself being beaten by Gateway's "Tom Jones".

One real person who enjoyed a game of arrows, apparently, was Violette Szabo. Portrayed by Virginia McKenna in "Carve Her Name with Pride", a recent biography of the wartime heroine reveals that she threw a tasty dart in London pubs before the war. Anyone know of any others?

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



by Pete Massey

I am concerned for the welfare of my toad. For those of you unfamiliar with "familiars", see last month's article about the Gladstone/Bishop Blaize. A sudden spark of life has occurred again at the Gladstone and I hurried there to check on how it was doing. No sightings, nor any reports of sudden underfoot squelchings and death by karma (who'd admit it anyway?). However, it would transpire that further verification and detail of psychic intrusions has been forthcoming.

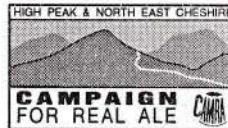
Apparently the top-most room, in what would have been the 'Bishops' is a place where no one for yonks has dared venture. In that room is the frequently reported sight of a young lady in a 'mob cap' who was cruelly raped and murdered by this villain who walked through a crowded pub, crept upstairs, did his dastardly deed and walked, undetected, out of the pub. The footsteps in the room above the vault have occurred regularly, as long as anyone can remember, at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. Perhaps they and the presence felt passing behind you in the vault, are the accursed spirit of this evil person who was never apprehended by the 'peelers' of the day.

So, with the feeling of a full night in front of me, I left that establishment in order to continue my journey. Somewhere, nearby, in the Hillgate area, I chanced upon a discussion of something redolent of Stockport's socio-political non-conformist past and a scenario straight from an Ealing comedy called "Passport to Pimlico", in which the residents of that London borough set up home rule, declaring it an independent state. This is being seriously discussed by 'a committee' in a pub on Hillgate. They know what they are talking about, too - something to do with feudal land and burgers of Stockport, dating back to the year dot. They are linking up with various disgruntled Hillgate traders, thinking of putting forward a local political candidate and Lord Sutch is apparently 'interested in providing his presence.' Remember, you heard this first in *Opening Times*.

I continued up Hillgate to a previously appointed place, with a view to a very interesting article, but the strains of Pink Floyd belting out a classic invited me into the portals of the Sun & Castle on Hillgate. A very interesting pub and history. I work just across the road from the pub and have been an intermittent regular for a number of years, though I've not seen the famous unknown murals behind the panelling. And there is something in the cellar, vouchsafed by the present incumbents, Lisa and Gypsy. That was their first night. They are the last chance for the Sun & Castle and I hope and think they can make it. There was a certain rapport between us, so much so that the mother of all esoteric societies now meets there on the last Wednesday of each month, starting 30th August. I will be there to present lots of hype on the paranormal including, for the first time in Stockport, the admittance of UFology into the debate.

There are two pubs in Stockport. For those wishing for further enlightenment, please come to the Sun & Castle - talks, videos and all manner of happenings are promised.

**JOIN CAMRA NOW TO FIGHT
THE NITROKEG MENACE!**



High Peak Featured Pub SEPTEMBER

Travellers Call

- Lane Ends, Marple Bridge

This month's featured pub is the Travellers Call, a Robinsons pub situated on the Marple to Glossop road at Lane Ends, just outside Marple Bridge.

This is a stone-built pub of good symmetrical proportions. Its origins as a pub are rather vague but there are references to it from about 1860 onwards, as a beerhouse. In 1890 it became the property of Bells Brewery of Hempshaw Lane, Stockport, and subsequently became a Robinsons house. It still remained a beerhouse however and did not obtain a full licence for wine and spirits until late in 1961.

The pub is not extensive inside and is all the better for that. Good use is made of the available space including a separate games room, and this use of space emphasises the pub's cosy and welcoming atmosphere. It is this atmosphere which is one of the pub's strengths.

It is well supported by locals in the area and is a respectable and well run pub.

The beers are Robinsons Bitter and Mild on handpump and are invariably in good condition, and the pub has featured in CAMRA's National Good Beer Guide.

Good value lunch time meals are served between 12.00 and 2.00 each day of the week.

All in all this is a splendid local doing well the job for which it is intended and well worth a visit.

THE KINGS ARMS

BLOOM STREET, SALFORD

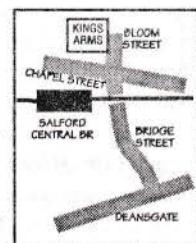


REAL ALE
SALFORD

Dave and Sue Price invite you to try the
fine range of beer, cider and foods in
**Salford's
Premier Free House**



Constantly
Changing Range of
Beers
on 13 handpumps



STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

Diary

September 95

- Monday 11th** - Social, Moon under Water (Wetherspoons), Deansgate, Manchester. Starts 9.00pm.
- Wednesday 13th** - CAMRA Regional Meeting, Beerhouse, Rochdale Road. Starts 8.00 and is chaired by Stockport & South Manchester branch. Moral support welcome.
- Thursday 14th** - Monthly branch meeting, Midway, Newbridge Lane, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm. Hopefully Steve Cox from CAMRA HQ will be our guest speaker so all members should try and attend please.
- Friday 15th** - Visit to Wildes Brewery, Slaithwaite nr Huddersfield. Minibus leaves Royal Oak, Didsbury at 6.45 and Crown, Heaton Lane at 7.00pm. 6.45. May also visit Sair Inn if time allows. Seats available as we went to press - phone 477 1973 to book.
- Monday 18th** - Social, Crown, Didsbury Road, Heaton Mersey. Starts 9.00pm.
- Wednesday 20th** - first planning meeting for new Stockport Beer Guide. All those who want to be involved in the follow-up to Viaducts and Vaults should come along to the Tiviot, Tiviot Dale. Starts 8.00pm.
- Friday 22nd** - Stagger around central Stockport. Meet Unity, Wellington Road South (opposite station approach) at 7.00pm. 8.30pm, Royal Oak, High Street.

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!

September 95

- Monday 25th** - Social, Victoria, Wilmslow Road, Withington. Starts 9.00pm.
- Thursday 28th** - Pub of the Month presentation to the Davenport Arms, Woodford. A minibus **may** be available. Phone 477 1973 for details.
- Friday 29th** - Trip to Whim Brewery to present Beer of Festival award. Depart Royal Oak Didsbury 6.45, Crown, Heaton Lane, 7.00pm.
- Monday 2nd October** - Social, Grapes, Castle Street, Edgeley. Starts 9.00pm.
- Friday 6th October** - Visit to Towns Brewery, Chesterfield. Minibus leaves Royal Oak, Didsbury at 6.30 and Crown, Heaton Lane at 6.45. Phone 477 1973 to book.

High Peak branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have notified Opening Times of the following events:

- Monday 11th** - Monthly branch meeting, Beehive, New Mills. Get there by 8.30.
- Saturday 16th** - Visit Millgate Brewery, Failsworth and McGuinness Brewery, Rochdale plus Rochdale crawl. Catch 12.10 train from Victoria.
- Saturday 23rd** - Trip to Holmfirth. Details from Frank Wood on 01457 865426.
- Saturday 30th** - Branch trip to Bamberg, Germany.

To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 95 Planner

FORTHCOMING BEER FESTIVALS

September 14-16 Bangor Beer Festival, Student Union Bar, 5 mins BR, 3 mins Town Centre 50 plus Real Ales from Wales and Britain plus ciders. 6-11 Thurs, Fri Sat 12-4 Fri & Sat.

September 15-16 Northwich Beer Festival, Memorial Hall. 60 Beers + ciders. Fri 7-11 and Sat 12-4 & 7-11. Camra members see What's Brewing re discount. No discount on door.

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 at 6-11.



OPENING TIMES ON THE INTERNET - 3

Opening Times' presence on the Internet grinds ever closer to reality. The initial pages should be made available sometime towards the end of October, with a local Good Beer Guide feature. The interactive letter column and pub news should be operational by early November with a selection of features from the pages of OT. Gradually the content will be increased, with the fully downloadable version available early in the new year. Details of local and regional CAMRA events, and CAMRA and Pub Beer Festivals will be among the early features! Any suggestions or ideas are welcome, contact me at 100662.12@compuserve.com. The OT Web page address should be revealed in the next OT.

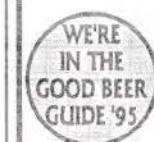
Phil Welcomes You To The
Arden Arms

MILLGATE, STOCKPORT

Robinsons Traditional Ales

BITTER, MILD, OLD TOM
ON DRAUGHT

Open ALL DAY Fri. / Sat.
BAR MEALS AVAILABLE



OPENING TIMES SEPTEMBER 1995

MANCHESTER MATTERS

While it's fully covered elsewhere, it would be remiss of me not to start by mentioning the Moon under Water, the J D Wetherspoon Organisation's 8,000-sq-ft Leviathan on Deansgate. On a scale more reminiscent of a Munich beer hall than a British pub, this monster will need to perform well to pull in the customers of a Manchester drinking scene which provides much tougher competition than Wetherspoons are used to in their London base - but if they get it right, it'll be a wonder of the city. Handpumped range is Theakstons Mild, Bitter and XB, Courage Directors, Youngers Scotch Bitter, and two guests (on opening night, Burtonwood Top Hat and Hop Back Summer Lightning); real cider from Westons, though not present on opening night, is promised for the future.

In Longsight, it's welcome back to the New Victoria on Stockport Road, re-opened with handpumped Wilsons Bitter, and in Rusholme the Clarence on Wilmslow Road returns to the real ale fold after a long absence with Worthington Bitter on handpump. But black marks for lack of enterprise to Didsbury's latest pub, the Didsbury Wine Bar on Wilmslow Road (not far from the Royal Oak), where the nearest thing to "draught" ale is KEG Boddies.

Of the month's losses, surely the saddest is the King's Arms in Chorlton-on-Medlock, now closed and boarded. Anyone who visited the King's when Brendan Dobbins West Coast Brewery was in its pomp will feel that a little bit of Manchester has died. The closure and subsequent fire damage of the Lancaster in Longsight will also disappoint many. Less of a loss, perhaps, is the Clayton Arms in Clayton, keg for some recent time but now closed, boarded, and officially styled a "dangerous building" - not much change there, you may think.

In the City Centre, the Castle now has handpumped Frederics, the Hare & Hounds has lost Cains and its guest beers following a change of licensee, while the Oxnoble is undergoing significant changes and is currently closed and surrounded by scaffolding as part of major refurbishment plans.



by Rhys Jones

In Chorlton-on-Medlock the Bowling Green has gained handpumped Tetley Bitter; in Rusholme, while the Whitworth is to be congratulated for removing its Scrumpy Jack handpump, the Lord Lyon, still with no real ale, has acquired a "handpump" for keg Cidermaster; and in Chorlton-cum-Hardy, I'm told that the Lloyds now has "handpumps" for both keg Scrumpy Jack and keg Cidermaster - are they going for the set?

Suns Up

A change of image is on the cards for the Sun & Castle on Hillgate, Stockport, with the arrival of new licensees Lisa and "Gypsy" from Stoke-on-Trent.

Down in Stoke Gypsy and Lisa were pub managers but here they are tenants of the Enterprise Inns pub and hope to revitalise its fortunes after a period of decline. Reflecting his own interests Gypsy has made the pub 'biker friendly' and indeed a sign outside now proclaims "bikers welcome" although Gypsy is keen to stress that the welcome extends to anyone who enjoys a good laugh. The change seems to be paying off since business is described as 'formidable' since the change of hands on 1st August with bikers and locals mixing well.



'Gypsy' - New at the Sun & Castle

Live entertainment is a possibility in the future but the main aim is to "make the Sun & Castle the centre of the community it was meant to be in the first place." Just one cask beer - Tetley Bitter - is currently sold although Gypsy tells us he has access to the full Enterprise portfolio which encompasses the full range of beers from Tetley, Bass, Whitbread and Courage, so more beers could follow once trade has built up.

APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(OT137)

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £6

I / We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale Limited, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Campaign.

NAME(S) DATE

ADDRESSS POSTCODE

SIGNATURE TELEPHONE NUMBER(S)

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

JOINT MEMBERSHIP £14

STUDENT or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £6

Lorraine York, 54 Lime Grove, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 1PF

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.





Whitbread are once again advertising the Farmers Arms in Longsight for sale - asking price £170,000.



In Stockport the Gladstone on Hillgate is open once again. In charge are Keith and Alan Sutton who intend to run the place on the same traditional lines in operation prior to the short period of closure. The full Burtonwood range, including the new premium Buccaneer is again available. Keith and Alan have a little lost ground to make up but we are sure they can do it. If you are passing, pop in and give them your support.

Not far away on St Petersgate, the Stockport Arms has replaced Stones Bitter with Tetley's as the 'guest' alongside the Greenalls.

In Manchester City Centre, work is now well underway on the new Boddington PubCo outlet on Canal Street next to the Rembrandt. More news on this one when we have it. Also in the City Centre, the former Barnaby Rudge off St Annes Square was in the throes of a thorough gutting as we went to press, we'll let you know if anything interesting emerges from the rubble.

Back in Stockport, the Royal Oak in Edgeley has reinstated Holts as a guest beer. Hooray!

John and Margaret (Station, Didsbury) have now left the trade and moved to Australia. John and Elaine Bradley from the Prince of Wales in Glossop have replaced them temporarily, as they are soon to move on to the Leigh Arms in Knutsford. No news yet of a permanent replacement.

At Lee's Britannia in Beswick, we welcome new licensee David Bridger, who brings to the pub experience from the brewery's houses in the Wrexham area. Despite arriving at the height of this summer's heatwave, he's managed to keep a creditably good pint of beer, and we wish him well in this splendidly traditional little local.

Mike Carrington has been in Didsbury since December 1994 and his Wilmslow Road shop now carries an extensive range of both English and Belgian bottled beers. The British include Taylors Landlord, King & Barnes and Caledonian Golden Promise amongst others whilst the Belgian side includes

Timmermans fruit beers and various Trappist brews. German and American beers also feature. In the future Mike hopes to extend his operation to selling cask ales in four-pint jugs and polypins. Beer tastings may also feature. Mike already operates as a beer agent, having recently dealt with Oak's Tony Allen. Carringtons is situated between the war memorial and the Station pub. Opening hours are 10.30am-11pm Monday to Saturday and 12.30-6.30pm on Sundays.

The toilets at the top of Great Bridgewater Street (Oxford Street end) in the City Centre have had a planning application submitted - into a pub with eating area... Surely Manchester's most unusual planning application to date. The toilets themselves have had an interesting history, having for a long time been virtually adjacent to Manchester's Gaumont "Long Bar", an old meeting place for the city's gay community and "ladies of the night"...

In Edgeley, Boddington PubCo have just carried out a most successful refurbishment of the Greyhound. In short the pub has simply been spruced up with new flooring, including some nice tiles around the bar, and new comfortable seating. The woodwork has been stained a darker brown and the whole colour scheme is one of reds, browns, green and blue which all serve to make for an inviting, cosy feel. The beer range remains at Boddingtons Mild and Bitter, Tetley Bitter and guests of a fairly restricted Whitbread list. Landlady Irene Morris is champing at the bit to serve guest beers and while BodPubCo have for some time now been promising a much wider range of guest beers for their tenants this has yet to materialise. Let's hope there's some movement soon.

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