

third of the price of a pint of beer in a British pub is tax. We pay nearly seven times more tax on a pint than the French. Because of the government's high tax policy, pubs and breweries are closing. Kent brewers Shepherd Neame claim that they have been forced to close 45 pubs since the Single Market came into force in 1992. In the last month alone we have heard of the closure of six small local breweries. This affects jobs, local services, and choice for customers...

There is, of course, an argument for cutting tax on all alcoholic products, but beer sales count for over 60% of the turnover of the average pub, so the effects of a cut in beer tax would be most beneficial. It's an unfair tax too. Frankly a 20 or 30p increase on the price of a bottle of wine wouldn't bother the affluent that much, but two or three pence on a pint of beer is bad news for those on low incomes who would perhaps like to visit the local boozer a little more often.

Unless the Chancellor cuts tax in this month's budget, the problem will get worse and worse. One pint in twenty drunk over here is brewed in France. This is set to increase to a staggering one pint in five by 2006.

There are no winners from high beer tax. Sensible use of the Treasury's own economic model has shown that a tax cut of 20% would be self financing after two years. The industry would benefit, all pub goers (not just beer drinkers) would benefit from increased investment in pubs and the government would not lose overall revenue due to the positive effects on demand of lower prices and better amenities. Unfortunately, the Treasury seems to be ignoring this.

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has just sent its budget submission to Gordon Brown. We want him to cut beer tax down to the European average staring with a 5p cut this month and followed by similar cuts in 1999 and 2000. We also want him to reduce the amount of beer individuals can bring into the country without risking being bothered by Her Majesty's Customs officers. The current limit is 110 litres (about 172 pints) and is too high. The Chancellor should reduce this significantly until our tax levels are the same as those on the Continent.

The call for a cut in beer tax is not new. But rest assured that despite the Chancellor's actions in his Budget this month, CAMRA will continue in its efforts to keep the issue at the forefront of the minds of both decision-makers and the general public.

White Shield Saved!

Bottle-conditioned Worthington White Shield has been saved from the axe following a joint deal between Bass and southern regional brewer King & Barnes.

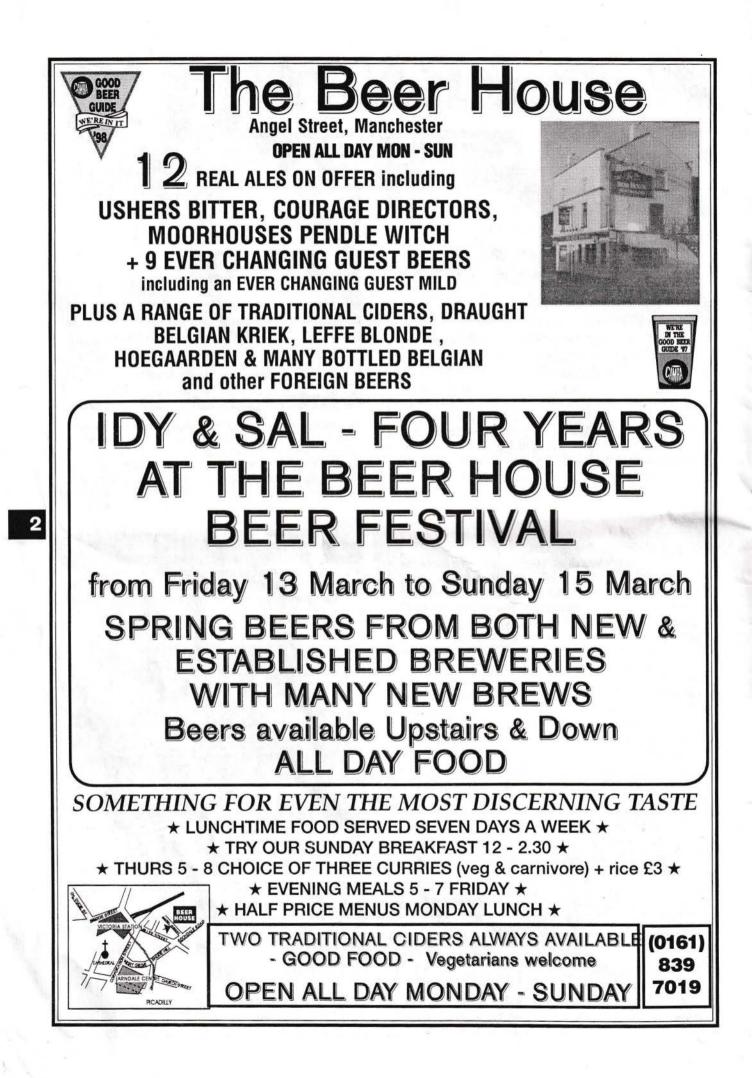
We reported last month how this classic beer was due for the chop following falling sales and suggested that one solution might be for it to be contract brewed by a smaller regional brewer. Bass National Sales have now struck a deal with King & Barnes to brew the beer at its Horsham, West Sussex, brewery and market Worthington White Shield under licence from Bass from early March.

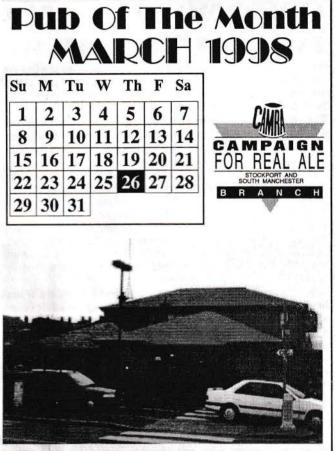
Bass Director of Sales, David Crofton said: "I can confirm that Worthington White Shield brewed by King & Barnes tastes every bit as good as the bottles I enjoyed...over 30 years ago."

Bass Brewers will continue to offer White Shield to its on and offtrade customers while King & Barnes will build distribution through their own channels both in the UK and overseas.



In	M	ARCH's Bumj	per I	ssue of Openii	NG TI	MES	
Pub of the Month	3	Curmudgeon	11	High Peak News	15	Out Inn Cheshire	18
Editors View	4	Five Years Ago	11	Poetry Corner	15	Beer Monster	19
Letters	5	Wayfarer	12	Bhurtpore Festival	15	Camra Calling	20
Brewery News	7	High Peak Pub	13	Mild Trail Prizes	16	Manchester Matters	21
Stagger	8	No Express Train	13	Focus	17	Pub News	22
How to Complain	10	Bass Baggage	14	Didsbury Doings	18	Hogsheads Abound	22





The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for March is the Grafton Arms on Grafton Street, Chorlton-on-Medlock, a Holt's house selling that brewery's mild and bitter.

The Grafton was rebuilt on the site of the 'old' Grafton in the 1980's and was such an immediate hit that it had to be extended after a few years to cope with the volume of trade. Subsequently, though, the pub seemed to lose its way until the arrival of Paul and ClaireTownley who have been at the Grafton, their first pub, for two years now, during which time they have transformed the pub from a frankly run down affair back into a lively, thriving local..

There are two rooms, the large, extended lounge, which often features entertainment of one form or another, and the lively vault where games feature prominently – pool and crib are well supported along with a football team.

The handpumped Mild and Bitter are invariably well-kept, with the mild kept in 9-gallon casks only to ensure turnover and quality. Both will no doubt be fully enjoyed on the presentation night, Thursday 26 March, from 8.00pm onwards.

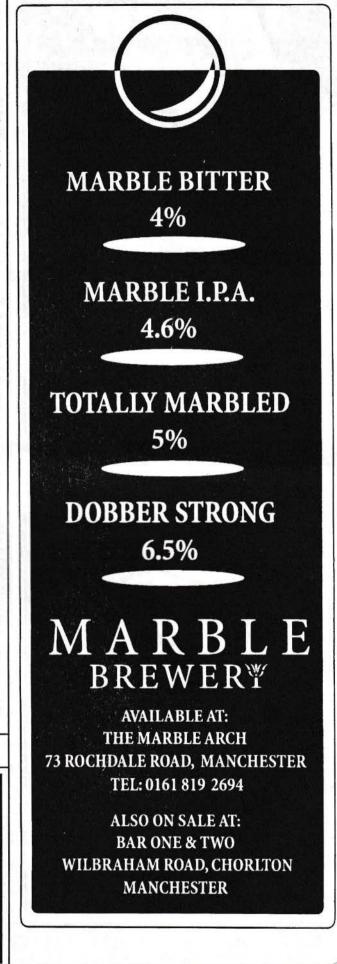
The Grafton is well-served by public transport, being midway between the Wilmslow Road and Upper Brook Street routes.

The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.

Railway View

It is with sadness we report that Vera Calvert, landlady of the Railway View, Macclesfield, passed away on Tuesday 10 February. Along with husband Graham, she had been at the pub since December 1993. Our sympathies to Graham.

The Railway View remains one of the town's premier freehouses and is now experimenting with real cider and perry. Lambourn Valley Old Berkshire Perry was on sale as we went to press.





OPENING TIMES 167 IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

It remains to be seen whether or not Chancellor Gordon Brown responds positively to submissions by CAMRA, and just about everyone else connected with the licensed trade, and reduces beer tax in this month's budget.

The arguments in favour of such a move are certainly overwhelming, although there are those who continue to oppose such a move, principally thinly disguised prohibitionists such as those taken to task by Curmudgeon this month.

The main argument put forward by these organisations is that cutting beer tax would lead to people drinking more and an increase in social problems related to alcohol. I don't think this is a reasonable proposition. Firstly, Customs & Excise reckons that 75% of personal cross border shopping for beer is direct substitution for UK sales. This means that 25% is additional, new sales due to the tax differential. I'm sure you'd all agree that it would be preferable for that beer to be brewed by British breweries and sold in British pubs.

Secondly, Customs & Excise also claim that two-thirds of the beer coming over from Calais is smuggled. Smugglers don't care who they sell the beer to so long as they have the cash to pay. This is leading to increased problems with under-age and street drinking. High tax is acting against licensing law. If tax was reduced more people would do their drinking in the socially controlled environment of the local pub.

Now is the time to stop the rot and take action.

Finally, congratulations to Bass for actually listening to their customers and reprieving White Shield. Of course brewing a beer miles from its original home is bound to lead to some change in its character and taste but King & Barnes are a reputable brewery with considerable experience of bottleconditioned ales. In any event it's good to see the venerable brand surviving at all. John Clarke

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STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA - MARCH 1998 - ISSUE 167

OPENING TIMES

From Paul Marsden, Hawk Green

Whilst not a member of your branch I do work and drink in your branch area six days a week.

It would seem that certain of your branch members are antagonistic towards Porters Railway.

I refer to the decision to award "pub of the year" to the Grey Horse, Portland Street, Manchester, rather than The Railway. After talking to several of your branch members it is becoming clear that (to quote one member) "the negative element" went to the meeting for "POTY" with the express intention of voting against the Railway, in favour of a city pub. I also have been led to believe that the Railway was the only candidate for POTY. Whilst the Grey Horse is a good pub, it is not one of the best in the city area. Its range of beers, pricing policy, atmosphere and décor are bettered by several other city centre pubs. I work close to the Grey Horse and have to go out of my way to get to the

Railway so I think this qualifies myself as a judge of the two pubs. Another reason that one suspects a bias against the Railway is your choice of pickup points for branch trips.

To quote one of your members who was at the Kitchen Brewery sampling at Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar, "the Crown is nearer the motorway for trips to e.g. Sheffield and that parking is easier". So it makes sense to drive **west** to join the motorway a junction further away from Sheffield? A look at a street map will confirm that the Railway is nearer the motorway. Parking space outside the Railway is harder to find than near the Crown? To quote Homer Simpson "duh".

(There were 12 candidates for Pub of the Year. Branch trips have been picking up at the Crown since long before the Railway opened as it is closer to the public transport routes which people invariably use prior to being picked up. – Ed.)

Name and Address Supplied (via e-mail):

Can I be alone at being utterly surprised at the choice of the Grey Horse in Manchester as Pub of the Year over Porter's Railway in Stockport - OT Feb. Whilst congratulations are clearly due to the Grey Horse, which, on most of my frequent visits, has seemed to be a perfectly reasonable and well-run pub, serving a very decent drop of Hydes, it has seemed that everywhere I go, branch members and others are muttering about 'fix', 'manchester bias' and 'ludicrous'. Can I also be alone in wondering why the chairman did not feel able to refrain from exercising a casting vote and declaring a tie. I know this may never have been done, but there was nothing in the rules to stop it. Two things, though, have been achieved. A CAMRA branch's right to exercise true democratic peversity has been exercised, and the long standing allegations of pro-Stockport bias must have been exorcised at a stroke. Perhaps the four branch activists who were drinking in the Railway that night (and you know who you are) have learnt a lesson in the danger of making assumptions! (I was working away so could not have made it! - pathetic excuse - Ed).

Thinking of this, and reading in the 'other' rag (What's Doing - Ed.) that Trafford and Hulme branch are having difficulties in meeting their committments to their local pubs reminds me of the complaint I face in so many Manchester Pubs - why is there no single Manchester branch to represent the interests of ALL Manchester Real-Ale Pubs? The time for the specious justification of 'historical reasons' and 'twenty year old feuding' just won't wash anymore.

A moment's research will show that Manchester has the unique status of being Britain's only divided city - except the capital (which is TOO big for one branch obviously). And not two, but three branches share the city centre. How do you explain to a frustrated landlord that the Forgery and Firkin (Moseley St) is in Stockport and South Manchester Branch, whereas the City Arms and the Vine are in Trafford and Hulme. The current demarcations are absurd. They serve no-ones interests except a few grumpy committee-wonks.

It is high time that the curmugeonly Holts-only drinkers of Salford and Eccles retreated to their burrows under the hostelries there, and Stockport branch (having retrieved Marple Bredbury, Woodley and Romiley from High Peak - YES - even more lunatic borders) retired politely to the metropolitan borough itself. If Manchester was deemed too big, fine, set up two sub-branches to cover South and North Manchester, with reasonable levels of autonomy, operating under a single City of Manchester Branch which could co-ordinate activity and campaigning in the City Centre. Oh, and open it up to all those who work and drink in Manchester but live outside the city boundaries. It would make Good Beer Guide selection a whole lot better as well. As for Trafford and Hulme - it should cover Trafford borough, and until ready to stand on its own feetagain, become a sub-branch of Stockport.

If any non-Camra member has got this far, you are probably aghast at the byzantine structure which creaks on around the city, despite which SOME effective work gets done. But with a touch of common sense it could be so much better.

Letters via e-mail are welcome: otletter@opentime.u-net.com

The Gardeners Arms

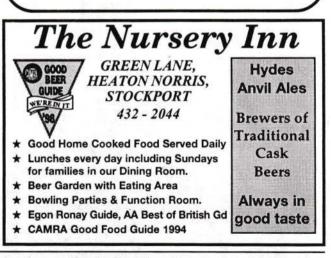
Northgate Road, Edgeley Tel. (0161) 480 3288

Dave and Julie invite you to try their cask conditioned

Holts and John Smiths Bitters

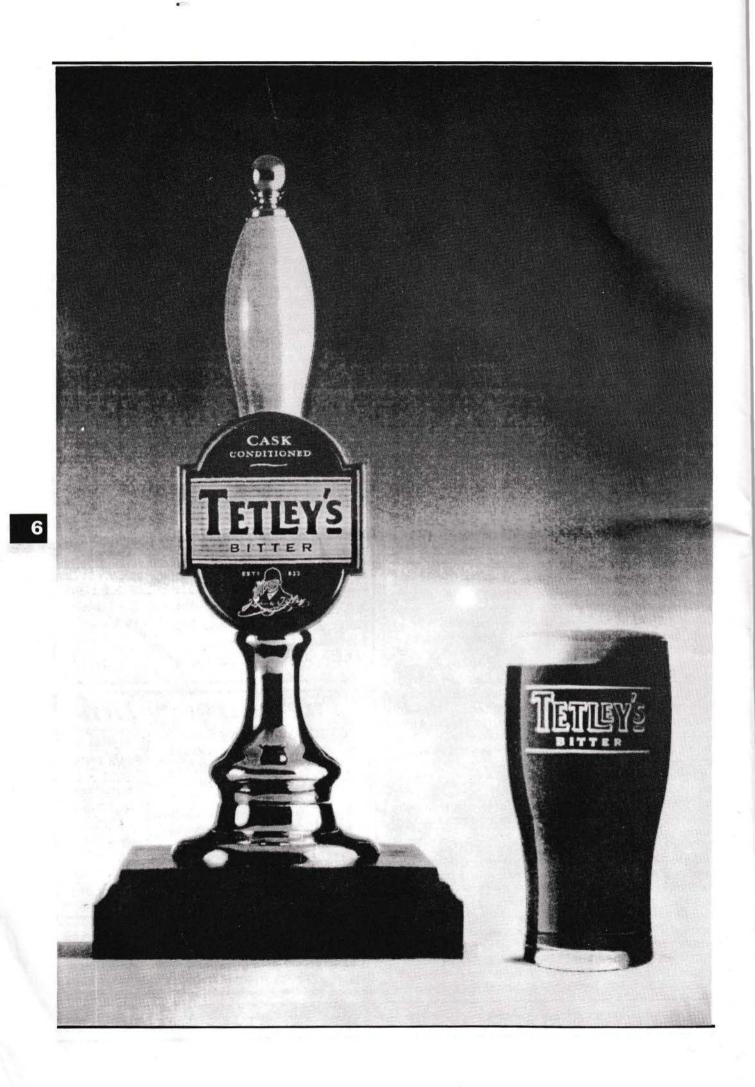
Bingo every Tuesday night D.J. & Quiz every Thursday Friday night is Kareoke night Live Cabaret Saturday night D.J. and Bingo Sunday night

Mon. - Thurs. 6-11pm Fri., Sat. 12 - 11pm t Sun. 12 - 10.30pm



Contributors to Opening Times Issue 167: John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Rhys Jones, Peter Edwardson, Wayfarer, The Beer Monster™, Tim Jones, Mark Jones, Jim Bowden, George Symes, Stuart Ballantyne, Brian Kemp, Ralph Warrington, John Cresswell, Mike Benner, John Hutchinson, John Tune, Robin Wignall, Geoff Williamson, Martin Wystyrk

COPY DATE FOR APRIL ISSUE OF OPENING TIMES IS MARCH 20





uite a lot to report from our local brewers this month, with several new beers in the pipeline

In Rochdale, the Thomas McGuinness brewery is celebrating an award in CAMRA's Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition, where a third prize was gained for Tommy Todd's Porter in the Stouts and Porters category. Very well deserved it was too for this tasty dark brew. Available until this month is Winter's Revenge, a dark, warming beer at 4.6% alcohol by volume. This is to be succeeded by an Easter special, Egg Nobbler, again at about 4.5-4.6%, this will be a dark, bitter beer.



Bank Top Brewery in Bolton, meanwhile, has just launched a series of one-off beers to be named after the Knights of the Round Table. February saw the first of the series, Sir Galahad, a 4.5% light coloured beer with a malty palate and a bitter finish. As we

went to press this had just been despatched to Bar Fringe and the Smithfield in Manchester. The next in the series will be a festival special for the forthcoming Great Northwestern Beer Festival to be held in Bolton - again at 4.5% this will be Sir Gawain. Visitors to Bolton will always find a Bank Top beer available in the Howcroft, effectively the brewery tap. Incidentally, the Howcroft has now removed the handpump serving pressurised Addlestones cider so an early return of the excellent pub to the Good Beer Guide cannot be ruled out.

Staving to the north of the county, Phoenix Brewery in Heywood have three new beers in the pipeline this month.

There's the regular seasonal March Hare, a smooth, hoppy 4.4% brew and this will be followed by Shamrock for St Patrick's night. A similar beer was produced last year but the 4.3% brew this time



round will be to a different recipe. Making up the three is Resurrection, a 4.7% reddish tinted beer which will be available from 23rd of the month. All three will probably be available at Sand Bar on Grosvenor St in the City Centre.



Porter's Brewery in Haslingden has two new beers out in PORTER March as well, although here it is more the welcome return of old favourites. Timmy's Ginger Beer will be back as will Centenary Ale. Initially brewed to mark Dave Porter's 100th brew, this time it will mark his 400th! At 5.5% it's a powerful beer and Dave tells us he thinks it's one of the best beers he's produced. Both beers will of course feature at

the Railway, Great Portwood Street, Stockport. Also out on 6th March is Rampant Ram, the first of the new bi-monthly seasonal ales from Hydes' Anvil. Look out for it it many of their pubs.





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The first Stagger of 1998, covering Brinnington & Portwood, offered a fair bit of walking to help work up a thirst – and best of all, the only really long haul is downhill!

We started at the **Cheshire Cat**, a Robinson's pub in the depths of the Brinnington estate but handy for the station. It was poorly lit externally, and frankly I feared the worst, but I entered to find a very well-kept little vault and a very well-kept pint of Best Bitter – we were not to have better until the very end of the crawl. Sadly the mild, which was fetched through from the lounge, proved to be of only average quality, but nevertheless the pub is a credit to its licensee and deserves to be well-supported.

On now to the **Farmers Arms** on the main road through Brinnington, a Greenalls (formerly Boddingtons) house and much bigger than the Cat. Of the two rooms, we chose the plush and wellmaintained lounge where karaoke was being set up. Boddingtons Bitter and Greenalls Festival were on handpump. The Boddies was fine, the Festival only average – but then, it's that kind of beer.

The route out of Brinnington takes you to the **Jack & Jill**, and with its gently curving frontage and commanding vistas over Stockport, what a showpiece this must have been when first built! A two-room pub, it's still kept in good order (I particularly liked the hop festoons in the lounge), and offered a reasonable pint of Robinson's Best Bitter, though sadly below-par mild, to go with "Coronation Street" on the large-screen TV. Now came the long walk downhill to Portwood, crossing the motorway and finding our way to the **Rifle Volunteer**. This former Wilsons pub has had its interior walls removed over the years, resulting in the odd spectacle of the staircase to the living quarters rising from the middle of an open-plan bar. Also odd was the presence of a (locked) fridge full of cans in the main bar area – presumably there isn't room for it behind the bar! The only real ale was Wilsons Bitter at a bargain £1.10 (was it happy hour?) – it was of average quality.



It was certainly happy hour at our next port of call, the **Park**, and that meant Holts Bitter was just £1.05–1p cheaper than Holts' own pubs since the January duty increase. The Park generally impresses as a thriving pub where the customer comes first (free pool, free jukebox), and tonight was no exception. Busy in both rooms with a good mix of customers, it offered Holts and Wilsons bitters on handpump. An eagle-eyed (or perhaps just peckish) staggerer also drew attention to the wide variety of crisps and similar snacks on sale. Rather put off Wilsons by the previous pub's



STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA - MARCH 1998 - ISSUE 167

only average offering, we all plumped for the Holts and found it comfortably above average, if perhaps a trifle cold.

Next came the **Midway**, which tonight was totally taken over by a very loud karaoke – it wasn't exactly packing the customers in, and indeed most of them seemed to be trying to talk over the dreadful racket. This is a pub which seems to have lost its way over the years, but it was good to see Lees Bitter on handpump and this turned out to be of above average quality (there was also Websters which we didn't try).

But the noise soon drove us out, and into the more congenial surroundings of the **Coach & Horses**. Another former Boddingtons pub now run by Greenalls, this is a good honest two-roomer with a comfortable lounge and a plainer but well-kept vault. Connoisseurs of beer dispense equipment (yes, there are such people) could see Boddingtons Bitter served by metered electric pumps into brimmeasure glasses. The barmaid thought Boddingtons Mild was also cask, and it later turned out that Greenalls Festival was also available. Nevertheless, we all ended up on Boddies Bitter (write out fifty times; I must show more enterprise on staggers) and this was above average, though not as good as the independent brewers' beers in the previous two pubs.

At the Brinnington Inn we found another comfortable and friendly two-roomer - we sat in the lounge, off which are what remains of two separate rooms now given over to table football and pool. It's a pub often overlooked (and was worryingly quiet tonight), but we thoroughly enjoyed our visit. Robinson's Hatters Mild was the best beer we'd had since the Cheshire Cat, the Best Bitter not far behind. Almost next door lies the Old King, a Bass pub which must once have been a classic. While there are clues a-plenty to its former glories, a brutal refurbishment twenty or more years ago did grievous damage. Still, there are plenty of knick-knacks and brasses to lend something of a traditional pub atmosphere. Like the Brinnington Inn, it was very quiet for a Friday evening. The real ales at the Old King are Draught Bass, Worthington Bitter, and a guest, which tonight was Honeypot from the Coach House Brewery in Warrington. Nobody tried the Worthington, the Bass was comfortably above average, but sadly the Honeypot was a beer like many of the new exotics - unpleasantly sickly and a big disappointment - all to do with the beer style rather than the pub! Whilst many exotic brewing ingredients such as ginger or coriander seem to work perfectly well, I must say I have yet to find a honey-flavoured beer I would willingly drink more than half a pint of.



While some of us headed straight for our final port of call, a few brave souls decided on a quick visit to the **Queens**. And it was quick. This crassly modernised half-baked attempt at a disco-style pub dispensed moderate Robinson's Mild, worse Best Bitter, and an ear-splitting karaoke to a handful of unfortunate customers. They were welcome to it. "Pub hell", muttered one of our number as we hurriedly left.



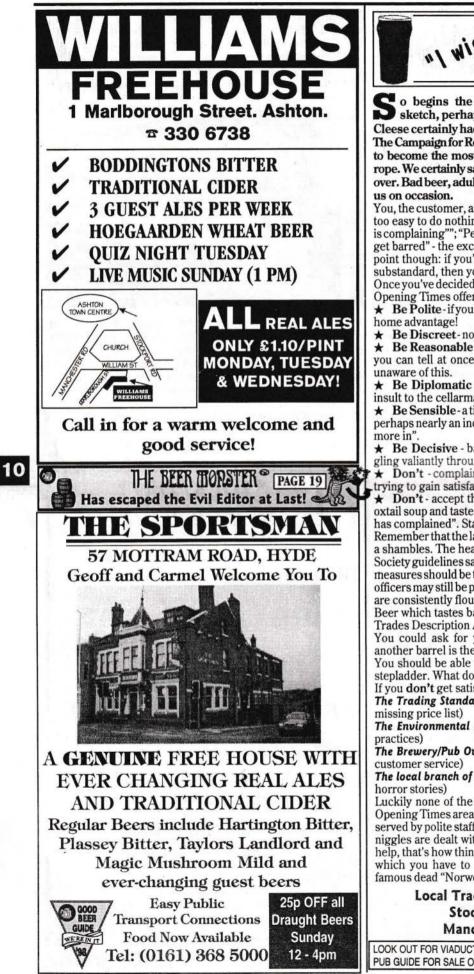
What a relief, then. To join the rest of the group in what could justly be styled Stockport's pub heaven – Porter's **Railway**. Packed with an appreciative crowd as on any Friday night (and most other nights), it sold the excellent Porter's beers in superb condition – my choice was Porter's Porter, with a superb hoppy finish, but all the staggerers were well satisfied. A splendid conclusion to a varied and interesting night – closing time and my bus home came all too soon.

Of Course, all the above is simply what a smallish group of us found and thought on one particular evening. We may have caught some of the pubs on a bad, or better than usual, night. As ever, the best advice is the most enjoyable – take a look for yourself and see what you think

9



Wigan Beer Festival, Mill at the Pier, Wigan: Thurs 5 (eve), Fri 6 & Sat 7 March (lunch & eve)





S o begins the famous Monty Python "Dead Parrot" sketch, perhaps one of the most quoted of all time. John Cleese certainly had a point; often we have cause to complain. The Campaign for Real Ale was formed to complain, and went on to become the most successful consumer organisation in Europe. We certainly saved traditional beer, but the fight is far from over. Bad beer, adulterated beer and short measure still trouble us on occasion.

You, the customer, are in the front line and we all know it can be all too easy to do nothing; "I don't like to make a fuss"; "No-one else is complaining""; "Perhaps it's supposed to taste like this"; "I might get barred" - the excuses for inaction are endless. Remember the point though: if you've paid good money for something which is substandard, then you've been swindled - so complain!

Once you've decided to do something, the question remains, how? Opening Times offers a few words of advice and technical points: **Be Polite**-if you create a conflict, you've lost.-the licensee has home advantage!

★ Be Discreet- no licensee wants to draw attention to a problem
★ Be Reasonable - if the beer has reached the end of the barrel, you can tell at once. The landlord may not be drinking and be unaware of this.

★ Be Diplomatic - "I think this might have gone" is less of an insult to the cellarman's craft than "this tastes foul!"

★ Be Sensible-a tiny shortfall in volume isn't worth the fuss, but perhaps nearly an inch is worth a polite request to "squeeze a drop more in".

★ Be Decisive - bad beer should be returned promptly. Struggling valiantly through 3/4 of a pint will undermine-your case.

★ Don't - complain to an outside body (see below) without first trying to gain satisfaction in the pub.

★ Don't - accept the guff that "real ale is supposed to look like oxtail soup and taste like vinegar" or that old standby "no-one else has complained". Stand your ground. Remember that the law on "full measure" is currently something of

Remember that the law on "full measure" is currently something of a shambles. The head is legally part of your pint but the Brewers Society guidelines say that your pint should be 95% liquid and short measures should be topped up with good grace. Trading Standards officers may still be prepared to take action where these guidelines are consistently flouted.

Beer which tastes bad is "goods unfit for the purpose" under the Trades Description Act and you have a statutory right to redress. You could ask for your money back, but a replacement from another barrel is the best solution.

You should be able to read the price list without binoculars or a stepladder. What do you mean "what price list?".

If you don't get satisfaction from the licensee, contact:

The Trading Standards Officer (for consistent short measure or missing price list)

The Environmental Health Officer (for sour beer or unhygienic practices)

The Brewery/Pub Owner - (for poor beer in a tied house or poor customer service)

The local branch of CAMRA (who will certainly check up on any horror stories)

Luckily none of the above is relevant in most of the pubs in the Opening Times area. Normally we find a full measure of good beer served by polite staff in pleasant surroundings, and that any minor niggles are dealt with in a quick and friendly manner. With your help, that's how things will stay, and we hope that the occasion on which you have to "register a complaint" are as scarce as the famous dead "Norwegian Blue Parrot".

Local Trading Standards Contacts are: Stockport - 0161 474 4248 Manchester - 0161 226 8283

LOOK OUT FOR VIADUCTS AND VAULTS 2.5 - THE INTERACTIVE STOCKPORT PUB GUIDE FOR SALE ON CD-ROM AT STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL



Seriously Concerned

The life of Dr Eric Appleby, the Director of the charity Alcohol Concern, must be a miserable and joyless affair. For his organisation is not one, as you might imagine, that exists to alleviate suffering amongst alcoholics and others with serious drink problems, something that would be a worthy and fulfilling cause. Its aims are rather to promote the awareness of drink-related issues in society at large, from a viewpoint that is staunchly opposed to alcohol in all its manifestations.

Whenever anything is proposed that will improve the lot of the moderate drinker, from longer pub hours to lower duty, they are the first to condemn it. Whenever there is any bandwagon that aims to curb the rights of drinkers, or show alcohol in a bad light, they lose no time in jumping on it. They won't admit it openly, because they'd be laughed out of court, but they wouldn't shed many tears if Prohibition was introduced.

The idea of people actually enjoying themselves over a few drinks in the pub must fill them with paroxysms of jealous rage, while the sight of a closed and boarded pub will cause a flicker of joy in their stony hearts. They are the lineal descendants of Cromwell's Roundheads, who for a while in the 1640's succeeded in having Christmas officially banned. You could be forgiven for thinking that these people suffered some grave childhood trauma that forever robbed them of the capacity for fun.

And why should anti-drink pressure groups such as Dr Appleby's enjoy charitable status, while it is denied to responsible pro-drink bodies such as CAMRA, which in its short life must have done far more to increase the sum of human happiness than the likes of Alcohol Concern could manage in a thousand years?

Uncorking the Market

While there's been a revolution in the quality and choice of beer available in most pubs, all too often the selection of wine has been left in the dark ages. You're confronted with a choice of dismal "house white" and "house red" which are usually the sort of stuff that Sainsbury's wouldn't dare put on their shelves. But, in our homes, we in Britain have become highly sophisticated wine consumers, and the general level of knowledge about wine is greater than that about beer, however much we beer-lovers may regret that. Although it's been a long time coming, there are now signs that the wider appreciation of wine is starting to spread beyond a small group of upmarket establishments to pubs in general.

But a problem confronting pubs selling wine is the incredible conservatism of the trade in insisting on sticking to 750ml bottles, which are far more than most people actually want to consume at a sitting. Every time a licensee opens a bottle of wine and pours a glass, he's taking a risk whether he'll be able to sell the rest before 5 Years Ago by Phil Levison WARCH '93

D ucks Downed At Dawn' was the front page heading, and there were two pictures – one of Tommy Ducks as it was when trading on Saturday 20th February, the other of a huge pile of rubble.

It had been pulled down in the early hours of Sunday, with a lot of the fixtures and fittings buried under the debris. Famous for its past theatrical associations, its topless barmaids in the 1960's, and a collection of knickers strung around the place, the pub became a tourist attraction and was regarded with much affection by Mancunians and visitors alike.

There was news of a dramatic price **decrease** just outside the OT circulation area in Macclesfield. On 9 January, the Three Crowns opened as a Holt's managed house. Prior to this it had been owned by Carlsberg-Tetley as part of the Peter Walker estate. The immediate result for drinkers was the reduction in the price of a pint of bitter from £1.25 to 93p, a hefty 32p drop! Mild was available at 88p. The curse of the false handpump had struck again (reported Rhys Jones in his Manchester Matters. The Cheshire Hunt at Belle Vue, a "free" house which for some considerable time sold keg John Smiths Bitter on fake handpump, was closed and boarded up.

Independent brewers Vaux of Sunderland, whose expansion locally has been charted in Opening Times, had announced that they were looking for another 400 pubs in the North West over the next four years. They were to build a new regional HQ on a greenfield site at Rochdale.

The Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport, reopened with a flourish as the Boddington Pub Co's latest 'Ale House' on February 9. Perhaps "re-opened" is the wrong word as it never actually closed, but about £30,000 had been spent on the pub. Well-known CAMRA member Ken Birch was in charge, with an interesting selection of nine or ten beers.

There are now 25 weeks till the Shambles (supposedly) reopens :) - ha! Given the current state of play -Probability STILL Decreasing!

it goes stale. This is a particular deterrent to pubs just wanting to put their toe in the water. It's like only supplying real ale in hogsheads. It would make a lot of sense for the pub trade if wine producers made decent wines available in 250ml bottles – enough for two small glasses – so customers were assured of a fresh drink every time. These might even take off in the take-home trade, as they would help eliminate the inevitable dinner-table arguments over whether to go for the Chardonnay or the Sauvignon Blanc.

MITCH

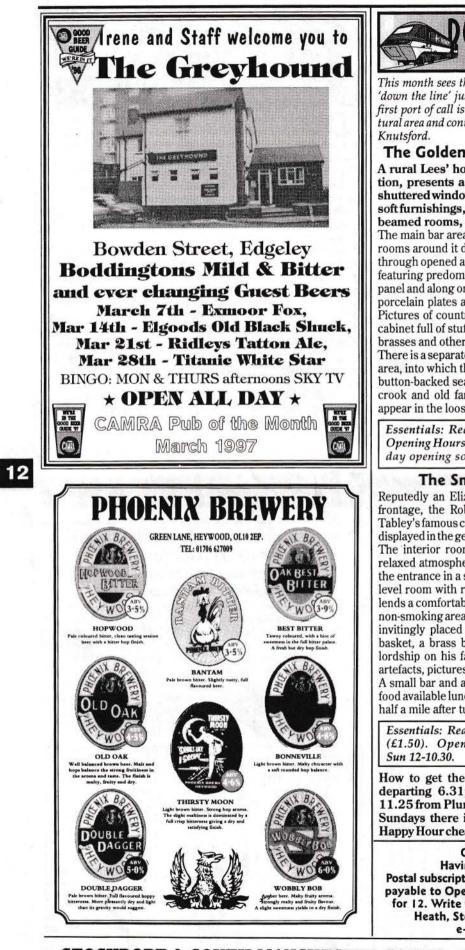


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JONES

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C 1997 BY MARK A



OWN THE LINE

This month sees the start of a new occasional series covering pubs 'down the line' just inside and outside the county boundary. Our first port of call is Plumley, Cheshire, a tiny village in an agricultural area and containing two public houses. It's a few miles beyond Knutsford.

The Golden Pheasant, Plumley Moor Road.

A rural Lees' hostelry, practically opposite the railway station, presents a pleasant frontage with bay and mullioned shuttered windows. Inside, there's a warm and cosy feel with soft furnishings, piped music and real fires in each of its lowbeamed rooms, carpeted throughout.

The main bar area, a longish affair, confronts one upon entry, the rooms around it divided into fairly large drinking areas, reached through opened archways. Padded seating and wheel back chairs featuring predominantly. By the entrance door is a stained glass panel and along one of the walls a carved architrave surround with porcelain plates and other items of crockery gently sitting atop. Pictures of countryside and wildlife scenes abound, including a cabinet full of stuffed animals. Brass fireplace implements, horse brasses and other items complement the surrounds.

There is a separate restaurant facility and a smartly laid out games area, into which the bar extends, with pool table, dartboard and a button-backed seating area. Look for items such as a shepherd's crook and old farm tools dotted around. Tiled country scenes appear in the loos. Food and accommodation offered.

Essentials: Real Ales – Bitter (31.34), GB Mild (£1.27). Opening Hours – Mon-Sat 11.30-3; 5.30-11 (changing to all day opening soon). Sun 12-10.30.

The Smoker, Chester Road, A556

Reputedly an Elizabethan thatched roadside inn, with cobbled frontage, the Robinson's house takes its name from Lord de Tabley's famous champion racehorse (see its track record proudly displayed in the gents', amongst pictures of other sporting themes). The interior rooms combine attractive furnishings to create a relaxed atmosphere, richly carpeted throughout. To the right of the entrance in a small alcove stands a fruit machine. Then a split level room with real fire, wheel back chairs and padded seating lends a comfortable feel. A room to the left has been designated a non-smoking area and has another real fire with tiled surrounds, an invitingly placed chaise longue, a free standing wicker flower basket, a brass bedpan type of collection and a portrait of his lordship on his famous stallion. The usual brass and porcelain artefacts, pictures and prints all appear at intervals.

A small bar and a separate dining area complete the scene, with food available lunchtimes and evenings. The pub is approximately half a mile after turning right out of the station at the T-junction.

Essentials: Real Ales – Best Bitter (£1.52), Hatters Mild (£1.50). Opening hours Mon-Sat 11.30-3; 5.30-11. Sun 12-10.30.

How to get there: by North West Trains from Stockport departing 6.31 pm and 7.31 pm, returning at 9.41 and 11.25 from Plumley. This is Mondays to Saturdays only. On Sundays there is a very limited service. Fare is £2.35 (a Happy Hour cheap evening return is available after 6.30 pm.).

Out of our Circulation Area ? Having Difficulty Getting Your Copy? Postal subscriptions to Opening Times are available. Cheque payable to Opening Times for £2.75 for 6 issues or £5.50 for 12. Write to : John Tune, 4 Sandown Road, Cheadle Heath, Stockport SK3 0JF Tel: 0161 477 8363 e-mail: jtune@geoworks.co.uk

STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA - MARCH 1998 - ISSUE 167



March Featured Pub:

Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar, Platform 1, Stalybridge Station

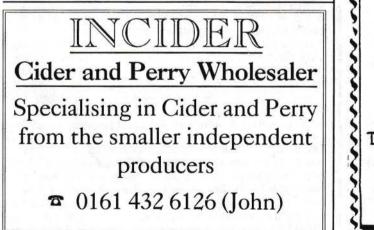
A long standing favourite watering hole with beer drinkers and train spotters, (sorry – railway enthusiasts), the near death of the Buffet Bar has been well documented in recent years in these pages. Suffice to say that a concerted effort by a great many people, including many from CAMRA, paid off when John and Sylvia from the well regarded Station in Ashton took on the lease of the building, safeguarding its future.

The rather careworn and cramped interior was tastefully restored, with much extra space being gained by incorporating what was previously the residential quarters into the public areas, the only changes to the existing areas being the removal of the conservatory vestibule, and a doorway appearing by the fireplace. Readornment was very restrained, and the result was an instantly welcoming public bar wholly in keeping with the history of the building. The quality of the work carried out was recognised by the award of a heritage plaque by Railtrack earlier this year.

Not forgetting the role of the Buffet, a selection of hot and cold food is available, including the famous Black Peas, very warming in winter, and the ideal accompaniment to a pint in front of the real fire. Wadworth 6X, Whitbread Flowers IPA, plus guest beers, the selection reflecting John's enthusiasm for bringing in interesting ales, mainly from small independents and micro-breweries. Given the ease of reaching the Buffet Bar, you are doing yourself a disservice if you don't visit it soon.

Dorothy Knows Her Station!

Once again Dorothy Goodbody weaves her Herefordshire magic at Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar with the welcome return of Wye Valley Brewery Week, starting on March 18. No less than 12 of the brewery's beers will be available including Wye Valley Bitter (3.5% ABV), Mortimer Ale (3.8%), St George's Day (3.8%), Dorothy's Springtime Ale (4%), HPA (4%), Supreme (4.3%), Classic (4.5%), Dorothy's Stout (4.6%) and Brew 69 (5.6%). In addition the Wye Valley are producing a couple of special beers for the event, Dorothy's Delight (4.8%) and Dorothy's Dilemma (5.1%) and in addition will be launching their new summer brew Country Pale Ale (3.1%). Those intending to visit should get there early as the last Wye valley 'week' only lasted four days!



The Beer (Less Than) Express

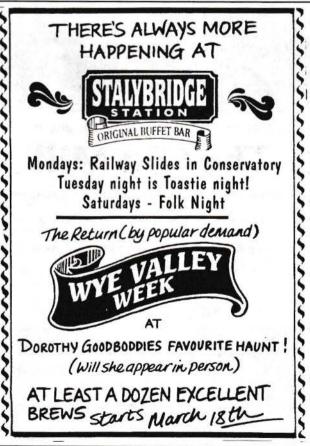
Despite the recent, much lauded, spin being put around the importance of public transport and trains in general, train operators still appear less than enthusiastic about keeping useful, if not particularly money-spinning, lines open. One such line is the Stockport to Stalybridge direct line, now down to the bare minimum one train, one way, once a week.

To demonstrate the need for such services, particularly in the quest for a pint, High Peak CAMRA recently arranged a trip on this ghost train from Stockport, with some members being picked up at the stations doted along the line to Stalybridge. The event was publicised in Opening Times, but we expected only half a dozen or so to make the Friday afternoon journey.

In the event some thirty people had gathered by 15:02, from most of the Greater Manchester branches. If this was a shock to the organisers, it was even more so to the railway staff who, having had an untrained train crew turn up, had expected to cancel the service. In the event a crew familiar with the route were sent up from Victoria Station...by taxi! The train departed amid much hilarity some fifty minutes late.

An interesting journey through some of the most neglected and run-down railway property in the region ended at Platfrom3, Stalybridge Station, whereupon 37 thirsty CAMRA members raced round to Platform 1 to enjoy the range of winter beers available at the Buffet Bar. Rochdale, Oldham and Bury Branch's Graham Chinn won the race to the bar, somehow without breaking into a run, and the throng were able to sample the likes of Gale's, Harviestoun and Hart beers.

A most worthwhile afternoon, which stretched out into a long evening as well for quite a few, with a serious purpose. Many thanks to everyone who turned up. **RW**.



The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch Contact is Tom Lord (0161 837 4474 (h) 0161 427 7099 (h))



Mill Lane, Cheadle Hulme, Stockport SK8 5PG

Tel: 0161 488 4090

Bass Beer 'Baggage'

ndications are that Bass could have set itself on a path that will ultimately lead to the phasing out of traditional cask beer if not from its pubs, then at least from its breweries. That apocalyptic opening sentence would no doubt be firmly contradicted by a company which still, on occasion, makes play of the fact that it is the country's biggest real ale producer. However, all the signs are that, certainly in the upper reaches of the company, a mindset is developing which could certainly countenance this. Just listen to Mark Hunter, the marketing director of Bass Brewing. "Modern drinkers don't have an emotional attachment to heritage," he said. "They are repertoire drinkers looking for different brands in different moods - they may switch from Caffrey's to lager to cask. We listen to consumers and they tell us they want beers that are appropriate to their lifestyles. Heritage doesn't rate - they want consistency. We have to invest in the future, not in a declining market.

"There are too many outlets serving too many cask beers in poor condition."

When Mr Hunter spoke of customers in groups using pubs as "congregation points" and choosing drinks that emphasised their "lifestyle", it was clear that Bass is concentrating its efforts on the youth market. He said growth in the beer market came from such lager brands as Carling and Foster's.

"Nitro-keg has flattened out and cask will continue to decline but it will do well in certain areas."

He said Draught Bass was "declining in a declining market" but was suffering more than some other brands because of poor quality.

He added that Bass was spending large amounts on cellar training but said that if a pub could not guarantee the quality of Draught Bass it would be taken out and replaced by a bottled version. His comments on quality are welcome, as is the company's investment in cellar training. However, the fact remains that the man in charge of marketing at Bass can apparently see no positive future for cask beer, and will therefore presumably be unwilling to invest in its promotion. The long-term, or perhaps not so long-term, scenario is therefore easy to predict. Bass's cask beers will simply be allowed to wither and die, eventually facing the axe due to 'lack of demand'. Any remaining demand for cask in the Bass estate could be met either by having Bass brands brewed under contract by other independent brewers, or simply by stocking other brewers beers in their place, for example Fuller's London Pride is already appearing as a guest beer in the London estate.

It is also easy to see the company actually manipulating the market in its pubs to engineer the fall-off in demand for cask that they clearly desire. The closure of the Stones Brewery in Sheffield is a case in point. Falling cask sales is the stated reason for this. We understand, though, that much of this fall-off in demand could perhaps be put down to the fact that in many pubs, cask is coming out and 'smooth' is going in. And of course Bass's remaining pub estate consists entirely of managed houses where the company can dictate just what is sold. All those inconvenient traditional locals where demand for cask beer is likely to be strongest were sold off last year.

A similar path was once followed by a company called Watneys. They, too, turned their backs on cask ales and saw their future in terms of themed pubs and concepts. Twenty-five years ago they were one of the country's national brewing giants. Today, younger readers of Opening Times may not even have heard of them. Does such a fate ultimately await Bass, which looks set to become, in corporate philosophy at least, the Watneys of the twenty-first century?

The Stockport & South Manchester branch website will be restored to its former glory this month, with links to CAMRA, other branches, the Beer Monster[™] pages, and on-line pub & beer guides following in April. Full details in next month's issue. The pub guides (alas) will require IE 4.n until Netscape sort out a proper version of dynamic HTML. Everything else should be (fairly) browser neutral for versions 3 and above.

STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA - MARCH 1998 - ISSUE 167



Early(ish) warning of the White House & Q Bar Beer Festival in early April from 9th-13th inclusive. There are expected to be up to 70 different real ales and real ciders. Beers including Hart, Linfit, Phoenix, Titanic, Moorhouses, Plassey and Kitchen are on the list with traditional cider. Food will be available and at some sessions, live music. Seems like another good reason to visit Stalybridge; home of the best (and possibly shortest?) pub crawl – which is? Station Buffet Bar, Q, Rose & crown and the White House. Total distance about 300 metres, and a similar number of beers.

In Broadbottom, the excellent Cheshire Cheese is now serving beer at £1 a pint until 4pm on Saturdays and Sundays – it's not known if the Hoegaarden is included (a bargain if it is!).

Over in Hyde, the Carpenters – behind the bus station – has closed. But up the road at Godley, the Godley Hall Inn's guest beer policy seems to be going strong with good reports coming in. Recently the Youngs Winter Warmer was said to be in good form.

In Glossop, the George Hotel on Norfolk Street has started taking guest beers at weekends. More choice in an excellent beer drinking area.

In Hatherlow, Romiley, the Spread Eagle has closed for refurbishment. This imposing Boddingtons/Greenalls pub seems to have only just reopened after the last refurb.

Finally news from Disley – an area which seems to be going from strength to strength in recent months in terms of beer choice and quality. What a shame this town, along with Poynton and the Pott Shrigley area only have one Good Beer Guide allocation!!

The Plough Boy has started taking guest beers and the Youngs Winter Warmer (did a Youngs dray get lost on the M6 recently?) was well recommended, especially at £1.70 a pint. *Geoff Williamson* adds, it's all change again at the Ram's Head (aka the Hungry Horse). As recently as three years ago the pub was completely refurbished by the Magic Pub Co at reported cost of £250,000. The acquisition of the 'Magic Pub' chain by Greene King in 1996 brought the pub into new ownership and another revamp of the premises is now planned. Again this is alleged to be costing £250,000 (perhaps pub refurbishments are costed by the square metre). This large, historic inn, in the heart of the village has great potential, which has never been fully achieved for many years. We await Greene King's version with interest.

Poetry Corner

The editorial in Opening Times 164 prompted David Dixon of Bramhall to forward a copy of a ballade, written in the late 1920's, lamenting the state of ale at the time and the nefarious activities of the breweries. Ballads of this style were popular between the Wars and the book 'One Hundred and One Ballads' was found whilst clearing the family home. It is by H S Mackintosh and was published in 1931. The complaints of almost 70 years ago still have a familiar ring to them.

Ballade To The Passing Of The Village Inn

The inns of Scotland and of Wales, The inns of England are betrayed, Their ancient kindly spirit fails, Their generous traditions fade; Another tankard to our aid! Another bottle from the bin! And drink their ruin who have made The ruin of the Village Inn.

The group-monopolist regales The labourer with lemonade, Or venomous synthetic ales To ease the toll of scythe and spade: Will no man lead a last Crusade In Parliament no paladin Arise to check the spoiler's raid; The ruin of the Village Inn

But none will rise the statesman quails Before the Powers have Paid – The Vested Interest prevails The nameless Combine is obeyed: Alas! despite my poor trade The Cranks and Companies will grin And see within the next decade The ruin of the Village Inn

Envoi

Prince-plutocrat, the game is played: Your dark resistless millions win Another triumph for "the Trade" – The ruin of the Village Inn

The Third request Stop Beer Hop

A fter previous successes there will be a third Beer Festival at the Bhurtpore Inn, Aston near Nantwich from Wednesday 1 April to Sunday 5th.

Although situated in the heart of the Cheshire countryside, the Bhurtpore Inn is easily reached by train, being twelve minutes walk from Wrenbury station. Wrenbury is a request stop for local trains on the Crewe-Shrewsbury line – you have to tell the conductor you want to get off there and coming back you put your hand out to signal the driver as you would a bus.

As usual the local Crewe & Shrewsbury Passenger Association are making some special transport arrangements for those wishing to visit the festival, although this year engineering work on Saturday 4 April complicates matters a little.

On this day a bus will run from Crewe calling at local stations and the Association recommends the following arrangements: the 11.33 Manchester-Cardiff train will run to Crewe (arriving at 12.13) and a bus will then leave Crewe at 12.28 and this will stop at Aston crossroads which is just five minutes from the pub. The train will leave Stockport at 11.42 and Wilmslow at 11.50. Coming back, the bus will leave Aston crossroads at 17.25 and 18.40 to connect with return trains to Manchester. Normal train services will operate on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and a train leaves Manchester at 17.33, calling at Wrenbury at 18.29. For coming back on Friday 3rd, a special stop has been arranged for a north-bound express to stop at Wrenbury at 21.00, calling at Crewe, Wilmslow, Stockport and Piccadilly.

The Passenger association will have stewards on hand at the station on Thursday and Friday evenings and at

Aston crossroads bus stop on Saturday. Cheap day return fares are available Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at £9.10 from Piccadilly, £8.80 from Stockport and £7.40 from Wilmslow. A 25% discount applies for parties of 10 or more – booking details are available on 0345 125625.

The festival itself will feature 70 beers, mostly from micro-breweries, and if past years are anything to go by will include many new and rare beers. The pub also features a huge range of bottled beers (well over 150) from both the UK and overseas (notably Belgium and Germany).



CAMRA CONTACT IN MACCLESFIELD IS JIM BOWDEN on 0161 483 9311 (wk) & 01625 572221 (h)

Stockport Mild Challenge 1997 Winners



The 10 lucky winners celebrate at the brewery with Head Brewer Chris Hellin

ednesday 11 February was a night of celebration at Robinson's Brewery when the lucky winners of the 1997 Stockport Mild Challenge enjoyed a VIP visit to see the home of Hatters Mild, the most widely available mild ale in the town.

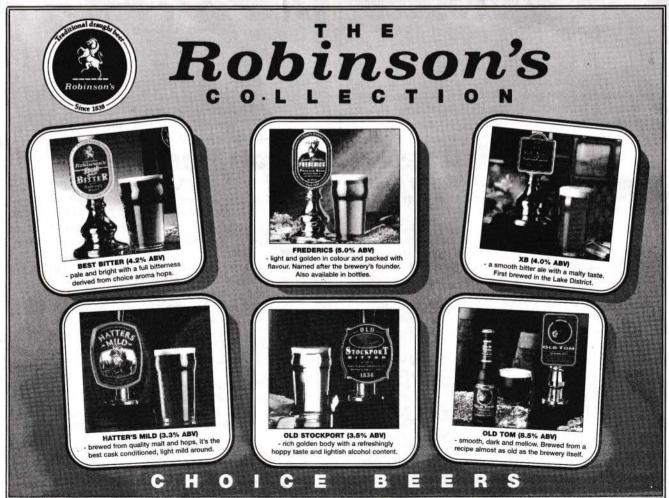
Our thanks go to Robinson's brewery for allowing us to offer this prize and to Head Brewer Chris Hellin who gave our party a most detailed and entertaining tour, before the group enjoyed a cold buffet and copious samples of not only Hatters Mild but also other beers from the Robinson's range. Thanks also to Oliver Robinson for being on hand to field questions from those present.

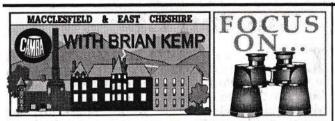
We took the opportunity of presenting Chris and Oliver with yet another award to add to the brewery's rapidly expanding collection. This time the framed certificate was for Old Tom which took runner-up spot in the Barley Wine Category in CAMRA's recent Champion Winter Beer Competition.



Above - the Fab Four who visited all 56 pubs, Robin Wignall, Dave Meynell, Anthony Meynell and Alban Pearce (L-R): Below, Oliver Robinson and Chris Hellin being presented with the Old Tom Award by John Clarke (L-R)







The Weaver, Thornton Square, Macclesfield

Little did I think 20 years ago that I would ever be writing an article in a CAMRA publication about the Weaver. In those days it was an uninspiring 1960's style estate pub selling keg Tetleys. However times change and anyone who doubts the real change that CAMRA has wrought on the pub scene in Britain in that time should visit the Weaver for proof. To find the Weaver drive south from Macclesfield on the road to Congleton and turn right down Thornton Avenue which is just before the Texaco garage. Thornton Square is on the left after you have negotiated the series of traffic-calming humps thoughtfully installed by the Borough Council.

We actually moved to a house only a couple of minutes walk away in 1981 after we got married and I can honestly say (really, Gill) I only visited it half a dozen times in the next five years preferring to travel to the Star on London Road, now sadly knackered and planned for demolition by Marstons (see article a few months back).

The Weaver is now a very pleasant, comfortable pub that consists of a busy simple public bar on the left as you enter and a much larger comfortable lounge to the right and back. It is in the middle of a large housing estate (sorry, private housing development!). It sells Tetley Bitter and Robinson's Best Bitter on handpump, and a regularly changing guest beer that recently has been well worth giving a try. It seems to be popular with all age groups with the public bar being more lively and the lounge more sedate, although I think it does offer live entertainment on Saturday nights.

There is a large public car park outside serving both the pub and the adjacent row of shops. It is well worth a visit and far better than its uninspiring exterior appearance would suggest.

Charity Corner

Whitbread's Crown on Valance Close in Gorton has been raising lots of cash for charity lately – despite having the Meanest landlord in the World!

Licensee Derek Shawcross's penny-pinching nature has brought him notice in several magazines and TV programmes; despite his legendary meanness, however, a series of raffles and other fundraising events at the Crown has raised some £1800 for the Special Baby Care Unit at St Mary's Hospital. Indeed, we hear that, despite his reputation, Derek has even chipped in his TV appearance fees to the cause. A grand presentation evening is planned for March, with stars from Emmerdale and Coronation Street.





Didsbury Doings

T he Didsbury, on Wilmslow Road in Didsbury, reopened on Friday 27 February after a £650,000 facelift.

The pub has been completely gutted with a new lowered floor installed, a wooden beamed ceiling, new bar and an extensive kitchen. There is a rustic feel to the place with tables and plain wooden chairs all set out for dining. Every chair is slightly different (as in the Royal Oak) and each table has its own candle. Much is made of the pub's history, from its incarnation as the Ring O'Bells in 1644, through its period as the Church Inn, and now its latest guise as an upmarket restaurant and public house. Didsbury Village Green (albeit a small green) has been reinstated on the old car park at the front of the pub.

Food is definitely the main thrust of the Didsbury's appeal, offering everything from snacks (jacket spuds £2.95) to an extensive range of main meals and daily specials from £6.95. When OT called these included Prawns in Lemon Sauce (£8.50), Chicken Thurmarind (£6.50), Venison in Red Wine (£8.95) and Bouillabaisse (£9.50). Sweets are also available, as is a good range of wines, and tea and coffee. While none of these meals can be called cheap, the Didsbury is aiming for the quality end of the pub food market, and by employing seven chefs its aim is to become the leading pub-restaurant in the area.

On the beer front, four cask ales are on offer. These are Theakstons Bitter, XB, Courage Directors and a guest beer, this being Tomintoul Wildcat at £1.85 when we called. Quality has been good so far.

Very much a quality restaurant, the Didsbury is certainly worth a try if you are in the area and want something a little better than Chilli Con Carne or Curry to accompany your pint.

Out Inn Cheshire

ocal branches of CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, are busy compiling details of the 1200+ pubs in Cheshire for inclusion in a new guide to the county. Due to hit the bookshelves in April, Out Inn CHESHIRE will provide details of meals, opening hours, disabled access, family-friendliness and of course, the beers available in pubs across the county.

The 100 or so of the very best are to be singled out for special treatment, with such flagships being described in glowing detail and illustrated by specially commissioned photographs, many in colour.

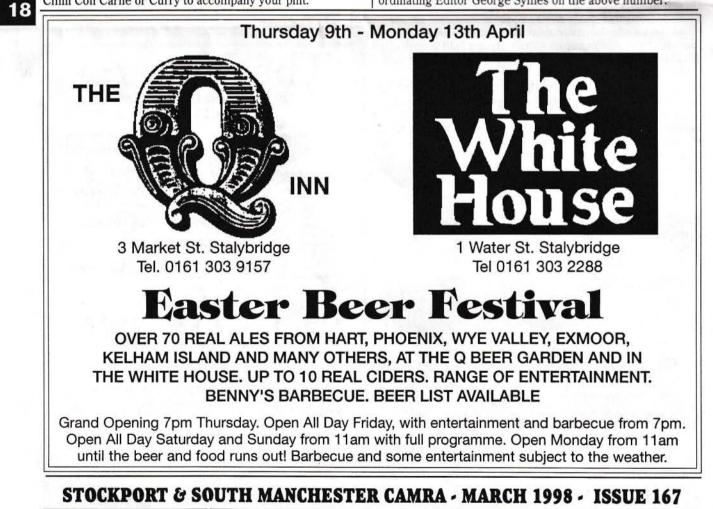
Coverage won't stop at the county border either, with the most interesting pubs just over the line also included.

Out Inn CHESHIRE will be an invaluable addition to the pocket or glove-box of everyone who ever wants to eat, drink, or socialise in Cheshire, and at an anticipated cover price of just £3.95, it cannot be beaten for value.

Special editorial and advertising features will include Cheshire's canals, local walking routes and cycling. The threat posed to rural pubs by proposed changes to the drink-driving laws is very controversial, and part of the answer must be in the increased use of various forms of public transport. Local bus, taxi and minibus firms are encouraged to support this approach by taking space in the particular feature.

Demand is likely to be strong, and if you do not want to take a chance on bagging a copy when it is launched at your local beer festival, you can order in advance on 01565 653096.

Pubs or other outlets with wholesale enquiries and businesses wishing to take advertising space are also welcome to call Coordinating Editor George Symes on the above number.





"I'm Baaaack!" So are Beer Festivals. Lots of them. More than the mind (or head and stomach) can conceive of! Personally I put it down to a conspiracy by the makers of Alka-Selzer and its ilk. But no matter. For once I have been earth (or rather UK) bound for a couple of months, so here are some thoughts on recent festivals.

Battersea was once more held in the Town Hall over the St. Valentine's Day weekend. It was alas, rather easy to miss, because the posters did not go out locally until ten days before (an especially bad sin because they were VERY good posters) and the fest did not appear in CAMRA's national listings till the February copies of Whats Brewing were opened. The result was a spectacular under-attendance. Lots left over. Just about break-even with a tad of luck. Strikes me that the one real sin of a beer festival is not to publicise itself enough. PUBLICITY. GET SOME! The beer list was a sad piece of paper (single sheet). I mourn for the days of real programmes (pace Stockport - though Bradford, see below, did a good job!). Lots of seating. Friendly. Beer range well, nothing new for me at any rate, but a list for the sort of drinker who never leaves his one local. Quality was not brilliant but the weather was unseasonably warm. German and Belgian ranges good. Food passable. Enjoyable nevertheless.

Liverpool was a new one for me. (Yes, really!) It has traditionally been all ticket and I can rarely predict which session my work commitments will allow more than a day or two in advance so in the past I have wasted a lot of tickets. This time Friday lunch was open (no ticket required), and quite excellent. The hall is a bit small, and the entrance to the St. George's Hotel (the venue) surprisingly well camouflaged for all that it is opposite Lime Street Station. Once inside a small but reasonable foreign beer range, a limited cider



selection (but featuring local product), and a truly stunning range of beers. Scratcherdom was in its element. Quality was very good. There were over 30 'new' beers for me. Happy monster. beer No handpumps except on Cains & Passageway Bars. The food looked, well... scouse. So I had none!

Handpumps on Passageway's stand special festival brew Hop and Bothered was the star of the show

Bradford was the following week, held in Saltaire (don't ask) Town Hall. There are trains. Very good range. Very reasonable quality, lots of handpumps. But VERY crowded, and this was Friday lunch, in the middle of nowhere, so everyone had taken the day off. All other sessions sold out, Hall was like Stockport but a bit smaller and squarer. Some draught German beers, and a good few

bottled Belgians. Nice atmosphere but NOWHERE to sit except in a smoking fumatorium. Not too good for the slightly disabled, but perhaps in Bradford they expose such unfortunates on the hillsides. It clearly needs a larger venue. Two days before Bradford I poked my head in at Bradford - busy staff on a very busy the Manchester Uni Stu- Friday lunchtime



dent Beer Fest. I was pleasantly surprised. Run by the Real Ale Soc. there were 50 beers on offer, and despite limited stillaging time, the condition was not bad at all. The Taylor's Landlord was as good as you would get anywhere in Manchester. Chosen to introduce people to safe (but good) beers, there were nevertheless a

good mix of milds and dark beers and session and premium bitters with only a very few loony brews. Makes a change from my days as a student! Well done to all concerned.

At the LLyn-y-Mawn was held what was probably their last St. David's Day Welsh beer festival. Welsh beers are a shrinking breed and this time we were down to eleven. Ten of them were excellent and in sparkling form. One was just odd (but then again it always is (Brecknock's Valhalla Gold). The pick of the bunch were Plassey's Welsh Stout and Dragon's Breath (which was pretty appropriate since brewer Ian Dale was getting his Champion Winter Beer of Britain award for DB at the event). Also very good was the Dyffryn Clwyd Drovers Gold, and the very reliable Buckley's Reverend James. When that goes it will be sorely missed.

Up and Coming

Next month I will be reporting on Irish Beers, on my return from the second Porterhouse Beer Festival in Dublin (12-17 March) where all 31 beers brewed by Irish micros will be on offer, so unless the editor is very generous, my profusely

illustrated Munich environs article gets delayed again (indeed until after I have been to Bavaria twice more, I expect). So by way of apology, let me suggest some venues to go if you can't bear the suspense



Wigan (the Berserk Pie) Beer Festival, famous for collapsing dignitaries and Melbourne

Tegernsee - finest micro in the world...when I get the space!

19

Catering's German Sausages is this weekend (March 5-7) so you may miss it. The Smithfield Hotel on Swan Street in Manchester (between Ancoats and the CIS tower) is holding its first beer festival from the 5th to the 10th of March (I am a LITTLE concerned about inadequate publicity, but we shall see). Idy and Sal at the Beer House have a 4 year fest from 13 to 15th of March, which sadly I shall miss. There is Leeds from the 19th to 21st (in Pudsey -see advert elsewhere in this issue), the excellent London Drinker Wed-Sat 25-27 in the Camden Offices opposite St. Pancras/British (New) Library if you fancy a trip, or more locally, Oldham, at the Werneth Park Music Rooms from Friday - Sunday that week. A great trip out is the Bhurtpore Arms Festival (April 1-5) but it closes each afternoon (except Sat). Easter and beyond I shall examine next month. Keep exercising those kidneys (responsibly!).



Campaign For Real Ale Branch Digries Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport

and South Manchester, followed by High Peak and Macclesfield. Members of all branches are welcome at each other's events!

March 98

83

Plannet

March 98

Monday 9th - Social, Ashton Old Road, Openshaw. Starts 9.00pm.

South CAMRA CALLING!

Thursday 12th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Plough, Hyde Road, Gorton. Starts 8.00pm. Monday 16th - Social: Horse & Farrier, Gatley. Starts 9.00pm.

Friday 20th - Central Stockport Stagger. Starts 7.00p, Nelson, Wellington Road South; 8.30 Little Jack Horners, Wellington Street. Monday 23rd - Social: Osborne, Victory St,

Rusholme. Starts 9.00pm. Thursday 26th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Grafton, Chorlton-on-Medlock. (see article elsewhere).

Friday 27th - Trip to Black Horse Brewery, Luddendenfoot, Halifax. Minibus leaves Royal Oak, Didsbury 6.30; Crown, Heaton Lane 6.45. Phone 477 1973 to book.

Monday 30th - Cheadle Hulme Social: 9.00 Church, 10.00 Governor's House. Friday 3rd – Trip to Bhurtpore Beer Festival.

Fully booked but check on 477 1973 for cancellations.

Monday 6th - Social: Union, Levenshulme (opp. Albert Road/A6 junction). Starts 9.00pm.

Thursday 9th - Branch Meeting and AGM, Nursery Inn, Green Lane, Heaton Norris starts 8.00pm

have notified us of the following events: Sunday 8th - Branch Walk. Meet at Three ToDo Stags Head, Wardlow Mires. Starts 10.00am. Add For more details contact Frank Wood on 01457 865426. Monday 9th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Noter Sportsmans, Mottram Road, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm. bad Monday 16th - Beer Tent/Festival meeting: Crown, Glossop. Starts 8.00pm. Wednesday 18th – Trip to Hydes' Anvil Brewery, 7.30pm. Contact Frank Wood for Annis Alessen details CAMRA

High Peak Branch covers Bredbury, Marple,

Woodley, Romiley and all points north. They

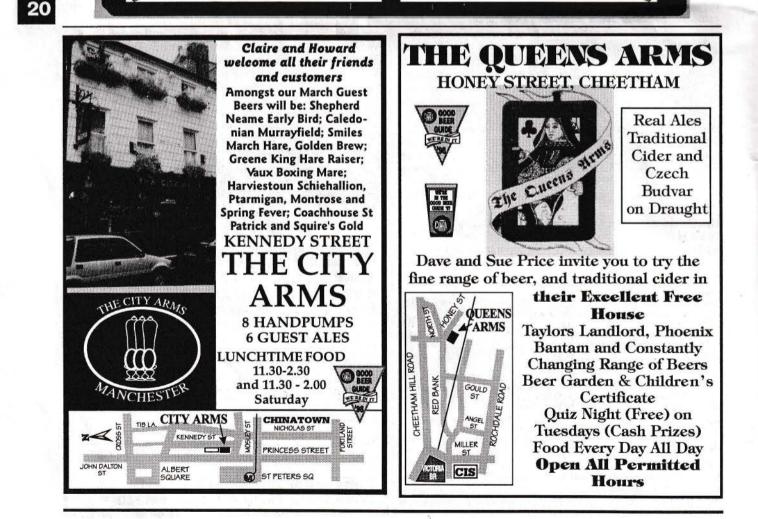
Monday 14th April - Monthly Branch Meeting: Crown, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm. Apart from Macclesfield and Bollington, the

Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following event:

Monday 24th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Roebuck, Mobberley. Starts 8.00pm.

REGIONAL EVENT

Wednesday 11th March - Regional Meeting: Beer House, Angel Street, Manchester. Starts 8pm





ost of the action last month was in the City Centre, with a couple of major openings, though neither has much to offer the real ale drinker.

The much-hyped Edwards on Portland Street, indeed, has no real ale at all - as a change from the permanently reversed pumpclips I've experienced at other branches of this Bass chain, here they by Rhys Jones haven't even bothered with the handpumps



to start with. With a split-level layout, the place is smart enough in the usual rather characterless café bar manner - but isn't it strange how poor old Bars never quite seem to get things right?

Round on Canal Street (with a rear entrance on Richmond Street), the Slug & Lettuce at least offers handpumps, with a choice of Theakstons Bitter, Theakstons XB, and Courage Directors. Early experiences of the beer have not been too happy, though, with quality indifferent or worse and no great enthusiasm to give full measure - and at a shocking £2 a pint for XB and Directors, that's serious! The bar itself - another chain affair, this time owned by Grosvenor Inns - is well-designed and welcoming, with the large expanse of glass at front and rear a particularly attractive feature. The menu looks good, too (pasta, venison sausages - sadly, no slug dishes!), with main courses mostly around a fiver. So if they can get the cellar sorted out, the place could have promise. A quality, stylish real ale outlet along this stretch would certainly be welcome, as both Manto and the Princess Street branch of O'Shea's have given up on real ale (I haven't had time to check the Chester Street O'Sheas).

The Royal Central Hotel, or Cox's Bar as many still think of it, is undergoing drastic refurbishment as I write. With the bar counter a forest of shiny fizz-founts, it seems clear that real ale will not be retained, and it's possible the name may change as well. One name change already confirmed is Café Racer on Charles Street. Never a real ale outlet, this is now known as Balearica and is essentially a restaurant.

Our two Firkins, the Forgery and the Footage, have stopped selling Addlestones Cider. Always controversial because of the handpump dispense used on what is a pressurised cider, it's been selling slowly of late, and there's also a suggestion that the problems of excessive fobbing that have long plagued the brand have not entirely been overcome. Staff at the Forgery recently were expecting to be stocking a replacement cider brand, though whether this will be a genuine traditional cider or a repackaged version of Addlestones remains to be seen. Bring back Westons, I say. Still on the brew-pub scene, the new beers from the Marble Arch, including the excellent IPA, are worth looking out for not just "at home" but also in Bar and Bar 2 in Chorlton.

The Wellington on Hyde Road in Ardwick is closed and shuttered, while nearby in Beswick, the Queen Victoria's only handpumped beer is now Whitbread Trophy - sad loss of a Holt's guest beer outlet here. At the Crown in Gorton, Boddingtons in now keg, and the pub has become an early recipient of Whitbread's new and sophisticated cellar cooling and dispense system. As a cellar management system this is undoubtedly impressive, including such customer friendly features as the automatic discharge of ullage to drain; it's a sad sign of the times, though, that the system is built around the assumption that most bulk beers will be both keg and severely chilled (6-7C). To the licensee's credit, however, Chesters Mild remains cask-conditioned, handpumped, cellarcool rather than chilled to death, and in excellent condition last time I called. Also in Gorton, the Pineapple has acquired a couple of handpumps, presumably for Hydes' new range of seasonal ales.



Finally, the 'famous' Crown in Didsbury is open once again, after a refurbishment that seems to have altered little in either the pub's layout or its style - there seems to me to be a shade more emphasis on food than previously, but that's about the size of it. Handpumped beers are Greenalls Bitter and Original, with, at least in theory, a guest - when I called Marstons Bitter was on the blackboard but not on the pumps. Some have asked why Greenalls bothered with a refurb when so little has changed, and I take the point, but on balance I think praise is due for retaining the place as a recognisable local. However a little more imagination on the guest beer front would be welcome - Marstons Bitter, already available in two very well-known pubs only a cockstride away, hardly seems an inspired choice. And even more finally, a late discovery - the Green End in

(Opening Times167) I / We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale Limited, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Campaig
NAME(S) DATE
ADDRESS
SIGNATURE TELEPHONE NUMBER
I / We enclose remittance for individual/joint membership for one year:INDIVIDUAL £14 JOINT MEMBERSHIP £17
UNDER 26 YRS or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £8

Burnage is now all keg.

21

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There are numerous licensee changes to report in the area – too many for comfort in fact. Gary and Bev Parker are leaving the Orion in Withington for another Holt's house, the recently purchased (ex-Greenalls) Crown in Horwich. Their replacements are from the Golden Lion in Blackley.

In Fallowfield, Ray and Jean left Hydes' Friendship for the High Grove in Gatley on 18 February, another Hydes' house. Rumours suggest that the Friendship, one of the few genuine locals on that part of Wilmslow Road, could be in for some sort of makeover to give it a less traditional image which would be a great shame. Meanwhile it is to be run on a temporary basis by...the former licensees at the High Grove!



Perhaps the most high-profile pub to be changing licensee is the City Centre's brewing Hogshead the Lass O' Gowrie on Charles Street, where Noel 'Joe' Fylan and wife Vi officially retired on 1st of this month. Joe is however staying on another month to show the brewing process to the new licensees, who arrive from the Flag Inn at Bromley Cross, a pub known for its guest beers.

We also hear that Bob, long serving licensee of the Kingsway in Levenshulme, is to leave in the not too distant future. He is to be replaced by the licensee of the King's Head in Droylsden, which is to close for rebuilding. The Kingsway's restaurant has been closed on several occasions lately, and it seems unclear whether this is a temporary affair or whether Holt's have decided to major on the pub's considerable wet sales potential.

The Smithfield Hotel on Swan Street, Manchester City Centre, will be holding its first ever beer festival from 5^{th} - 10^{th} of this month – just after this issue of Opening Times comes out, so get there quick! 40 beers will feature over the week with 13 on at any one time. All of the brews will be either unusual, new or both. The quality of the beer in the Smithfield is always good, so this should be a real treat.

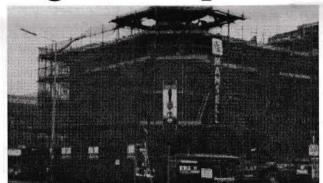
Work on the long-awaited beer garden at the Crown ('Corner Cupboard'), Hillgate, Stockport should be completed by the time you read this. Barbecues are already being planned for the summer. Customers meanwhile, have been beating the cold with authentic curries from an Indian chef. Regulars are so impressed that they have thought of changing the pub's nickname to the 'Korma Kupboard'! (groan! - ed.).

At the George & Dragon, Heaton Chapel (Boddingtons/ Greenalls), 1998 had a good start for Terry and Penny Moores. At a Greenalls presentation evening they received an award for Area Management of the Year 1996-97. The award is made for consistently good quality in all aspects of pub management, and recognises the efforts of Terry, Penny and their staff. Congratulations to the whole team of this busy locals' local are well deserved. This award comes just 12 months after the George & Dragon was presented with the Branch Pub of the Month certificate.

While a new bar seems to open every week in Manchester, in Stockport it's something of a rare event. So welcome then to Sam's Bar, newly opened in the Market Place next door to the Boars Head. Part of the ongoing regeneration scheme for the area, the building was previously occupied by a luggage shop and the famous clog shop (both of which have relocated just down the hill). It's been well restored and the new bar occupies the first and second floors. The main bar area is on the lower of the two and is a pleasant enough open-plan affair decorated in pale shades with lots of pine. The beer appears to come via a supply agreement with Banks's-when OT called handpumps dispensed 'Banks's' (or mild as they used to call it), Marstons Pedigree and Morrells Varsity. The Pedigree was £1.85 and OK. Worth a look if you are in the area.

Clynes Wine Bar on Cavendish Street, Chorlton-on-Medlock has been completely refurbished and the completion of the work has seen the long-promised introduction of real ale take place with Vaux Bitter on handpump. Not too far away, the Salutation has recently been selling Morland's Old Speckled Hen and Moorhouses' Peter Yates' Bitter on handpump.

Hogshead Expansion



The three forthcoming Hogshead 'ale house' pubs in Manchester are the forerunners of a massive expansion in the Whitbread owned real ale chain.

The company have announced that the chain is set to more than double in number from 120 to 250 pubs by 2001. This is coupled with the launch of its own separate division within Whitbread, the Hogshead Pub Company, part of an internal restructuring programme in the pubs and brewing giant.

The three forthcoming outlets, one on Deansgate in the City centre, the others on Wilmslow Road at the MRI and in Didsbury, will join the two existing City Centre outlets in offering up to a dozen cask beers, real cider, country wines and food for most of the day. It's a concept that may not be new but is one that Whitbread are starting to make their own. As Hogshead Pub Company MD Mark Jones puts it "We want to be the leader in our chosen market."

The company will be investing about £1 million a week during the next two years as it drives towards its target and expects to create more than 800 new jobs in the process.

The new company is headed by Mr Jones, who previously worked for Allied Domecq and Pizza Hut (!), and the operations director is Keith Lunn who previously worked for the JD Wetherspoon company.

STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA - MARCH 1998 - ISSUE 167



