

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

No:173

Volume 14
Issue 9

OPENING TIMES

FREE

SEPTEMBER 1998

6,600 CIRCULATED
FREE EVERY MONTH

Crown Sold (Again!)

The Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport's premier free house, has finally been sold after several false starts. The 'sale' has been reported before in Opening Times but on each occasion it has fallen through. This time however, the deed has been done.

The new owners are the 'Ale House Pub Company' a Southampton-based pub chain formed, we believe, by former employees of Labatts, itself a pub chain taken over in 1996. The Crown is among a block of forty or so pubs bought from Greenalls but is the only one operated as a genuine free house with a constantly changing range of guest beers.

The intention is that the pub will become a tenancy and we must hope that current managers Lorraine and Steve James remain as tenants. Of course the big question, as always with the Crown, is whether the new owners will allow it to keep its complete freedom of guest beer choice. As we have pointed out before, if the guest beers go then so do most of the customers and with them the pub's future as a viable going concern. It was because the Crown was failing as a conventional pub that it became an 'alehouse' in the first place.

Perhaps the greatest danger is the new owners accepting that guest beers are the lifeblood of the pub but misreading the particular guest beer market at the Crown and restricting it to the likes of Marston's Pedigree, Wadworths 6X, Abbot Ale and Wells' Bombardier. All well-made beers but available in countless pubs the length and breadth of the country and not what people visit the Crown for. In the meantime it's business as usual. Steve and Lorraine have in fact been taking stock of the literally thousands of guest beer they have stocked and our photo shows them with just a tiny fraction of the pumpclips they have accumulated - there are in total five large boxes full of these!



Plough Safe!

No sooner had last month's Opening Times gone to press than news came that the Plough, Hyde Road, Gorton was in fact safe from demolition.

Readers will recall that Manchester City Council had indicated to brewers Robinson's that they wished to occupy the pub in connection with a development in the area. A meeting has now taken place between Robinson's, the Council and the developers. It transpires that all that was really needed for the development was the bingo hall behind the pub and this Robinson's are willing to give up. With the pub now safe, hopefully permanently, the brewery is now proceeding with plans to upgrade the toilets, a welcome improvement in the pub's facilities. Hopefully at some stage there will be a gentle upgrade to the rest of the pub to restore its largely intact Victorian interior.

Brewery Chairman Peter Robinson told CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, "It is not often that such matters have a happy ending but this one looks as though it will". It is certainly a refreshing change to the seemingly never-ending depletion of the east Manchester pub stock.

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Foreign Beer Month ?

September sees no less than two specialist Foreign Beer Festivals launched in Manchester.

First 'on' the blocks is a Bavarian and other German Festival of Draught Beers in the re-opened Kings Arms on Bloom Street in Salford. This runs from 8pm on Thursday September 3 until Sunday September 6.

In mid month, Bar Fringe (Swan St, Manchester) is hosting its second Belgian Beer Festival, with four new draught beers and a very large range of new bottled Belgian ales. This runs from September 17-20. Two unusual events not to be missed. (There will also be a range of foreign beers on offer at the Howcroft (Bolton) Real Ale Festival in October (14-18)).

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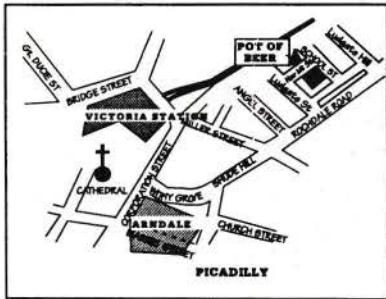
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Welcome to our real ale special. Yes, I know CAMRA is all about real ale but this month we are highlighting the basics: how it's brewed, why it's best and why you should drink it. Although as a reader of Opening Times you probably do that anyway. Do, though, come along to our two real ale talks arranged with local brewers. Your chance to have the mysteries of the brewing process explained and also have a few questions answered. Even if you can't make either event, you can do your bit for real ale this month by just going out and drinking the stuff. Luckily there's still plenty around in the Opening Times area but as is the case with so many things these days, it's a case of "use 'em or lose 'em". Each month we report one or two real ale losses as those pubs which were usually amongst the last to put it in at the height of the Eighties real ale boom now take it out just as quickly. If this trickle is not to become a flood we must all do our bit by asking for and drinking real ale.

One of the local bastions of real ale, of course, is the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport. It looks as though it has finally been sold. As we went to press it was unclear whether the guest beers would remain, at least in their current format. Let us hope that the new owners have sufficient imagination to see that the future of this pub lies in its guest beers. In fact, without them it probably has no future. We await developments with interest and no little trepidation.

A happier note is struck by two pubs holding interesting foreign beer festivals this month, Kings Arms (German) from September 3-6, and Bar Fringe (Belgian) September 17 - 20. A foretaste of what we can expect at the National Winter Ales Festival to be held in Manchester in January. *John Clarke*

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editors: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ (0161) 477 1973; Paul Hutchings, 8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport Cheshire, SK4 2NP. ☎ & Fax (0161) 432 8384. News, articles and letters welcome. All editorial items may be submitted in most popular WP formats or ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!) or via e-mail to pbh@opentime.u-net.com. Adverts or photos should be "hard copy" or in CorelDraw 3 or 5 (*.cdr) format or TIFF or EPS files (submit printed proofs for checking and ensure that any "include all fonts" options are on).

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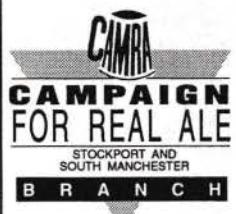
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Pub Of The Month

SEPTEMBER 1998

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



This month, the Pub of the Month award features a pub that in recent years has experienced very mixed fortunes – the Royal Oak in Didsbury.

The last time the Royal Oak won the award it was under the tenancy of the legendary Arthur Gosling. Arthur was a licensee who ran a famously tight ship and the pub was well known for many things; cheese lunches, good beer, instant service and invariably being packed most of the time. It even bounced back after an arson attack by a disgruntled former customer, despite predictions that it would never do so. After Arthur retired, however, it seemed as if the merchants of doom could be right as the pub entered a period of decline and from being one of the busiest pubs in the village it became amongst the quietest.

What the pub needed were keen, hands-on licensees. Enter Norma and Ron Hall, licensees with a long history of running successful pubs, mainly for Marston's. Regular Opening Times readers might remember them running the Station in Didsbury (from 1991-93) when they not only received a pub of the month award but also gained entry into the national Good Beer Guide.

The challenge to rebuild the pub's trade was a big one but Norma and Ron were confident that they could do it, as they were helped by the fact that they know most of the locals from their period at the Station. Their policy was simple – keep everything that was good about the pub and change the rest – and it looks to have paid off. Cask Bateman's Mild has made a popular return and the quality of the Marston's beers, including the seasonal Head Brewer's Choice range, is once again tip-top. The famous cheese and pate lunches have been retained and are a popular as ever. All in all the pub is a much more convivial place to drink, evidenced by the fact that many of the former customers have returned and trade is steadily reviving. For their hard work in reviving the fortunes of the south Manchester institution, Norma and Ron thoroughly deserve this award which will in fact be presented on Thursday 1st October as the pub is closed for a thorough redecoration from 14th-25th of this month. (CAMRA members please note the change from the previously published date). SB.

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

COPY DATE FOR OCTOBER ISSUE OF OPENING TIMES IS SEP 22

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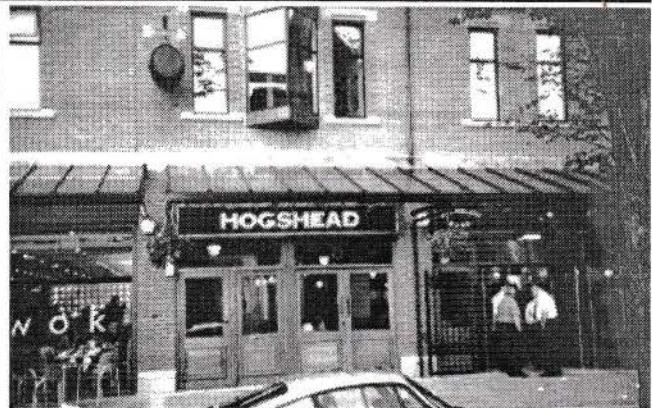


Didsbury Hogshead

The latest addition to Whitbread's growing chain of Hogshead ale houses is now open in Didsbury and a welcome addition to the local brewing scene it is, too. In the new Clocktower development, which houses a number of other chain eating establishments, the pub is undistinguished externally. Inside, however, it is a pleasing blend of the old and new with raised drinking areas, much use of natural materials, framed photos of Didsbury in times gone by and a light, airy feel. Of particular note is the ground floor cask ale cellar, visible through glass panels. There is also room for outdoor drinking at the front of the pub and free-standing heaters are to be provided to make this more of a year-round possibility.

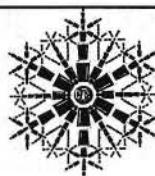


The usual wide Hogshead range of beers will be available. Being a Whitbread-owned chain, the three permanent beers will be Boddingtons Bitter, The Abroad Cooper and Wadworth's 6X, and these will be accompanied by up to 10 guest beers. Being Didsbury,



the pub will doubtless be sufficiently busy to turn all these over. Real cider (Inch's) is available on handpump, too. There is also a good range of foreign beer, with Hoegaarden wheat beer on draught and a well-presented range of bottles.

Manager is Pauline Tiernan who arrives from six years at Blackpool's Pump & Truncheon, a similar multi-beer style pub. Pauline is certainly keen on her beer, and its quality, an approach which saw the Pump in the national Good Beer Guide from 1992/93 and which led the local CAMRA branch to present her with a Merit Award shortly before her departure. She has a large measure of freedom in her choice of guest beers which will come mainly from the Beer Seller wholesalers so local drinkers are clearly in for a treat.



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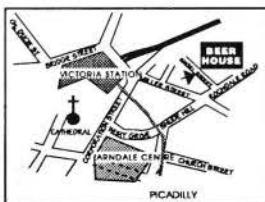
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LETTERS OPENING TIMES

From M T Ross-Murphy:

I thought you may be interested to hear that I had to pay £2.10 for a pint of London Pride at the Dysart Arms, Bunbury, Cheshire on Saturday (8 August).

Too much?

(LP sells for a minimum of £1.80 in London (over £2 in some Wetherspoons pubs) so yes, its steep, but what about £2.28 for a pint of Robinsons Old Stockport in Wimbledon! Ed!)

From Rhys Jones:

The Beer Monster is right to argue that CAMRA should be supporting micro-brewers, but his contention that CAMRA locally does not do so is not borne out by the facts. The programme for the 1998 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival lists 57 micro-breweries and just five regionals. Again, Beer Monster alleges anti-micro bias in Good Beer Guide selection, and goes on to list six pubs which he implicitly regards (and I would agree) as outstanding flagships for micro-brewers' beers. Unfortunately for his argument, however, all six pubs are in the Good Beer Guide! Of course CAMRA should support micro-breweries. Locally, it does just that.

From Dave Sheldon:

A few years ago I wrote to OT in praise of the spread of pubs that were starting to offer a large number of beers on their bars. Unfortunately, as CAMRA has been highlighting recently, many pubs are not able to match quality with quantity. This was certainly the case on 28th July when four of us visited the Marble Beer House in Chorlton. Of the eight cask ales available, four were tried. Two were in poor condition, one was OK, and one undrinkable. This newly opened bar was busy but no-

one else was drinking real ale. This was probably fortunate because anyone who was giving cask ale a try could have been put off forever.

Perhaps the Marble Beer House should have started with a couple of beers, served in top condition, and added further cask ales only if and when turnover merited it.

Contrary to the views expressed in the August edition of OT, it will not succeed, at least with its cask ales, unless the quality greatly improves.

(I have to say that on my few visits to the Marble Beer House, the cask ales have been uniformly excellent. Furthermore, manager Danny Bates tells me that ale sales are steadily rising at the pub whereas lager sales are drifting downwards – it sounds as though Dave may have visited on a somewhat untypical day – ed.)

From D.J.Wint via e-mail

On Friday lunch times after an hour of football I enjoy nothing more than a swift pint of Theakstons in our PUB on site, a wonderful pint kept by Terry and poured magnificently by the Staff, and a quick glance through your well presented journal. I thought that as its HOLIDAY season a pub I visited recently deserves a mention.

I visited Woolacombe in North Devon and just by chance I happened across a real Locals Pub called the Rock Inn. This pub kept a really fine (5 or 6) selection of real ales including one of my favorites Wadsworth 6X and served up good food (Not your typical Pub fare) at reasonable prices.

It was a bit hidden away and so wasn't full of tourists.

Any one visiting that area should definitely give it a try.

To get there Drive through Woolacombe along the coast road with the beach on your right. After around 1 1/2 miles turn right at the 'T' junction towards Georgeham. After around another mile look for the sign for the Rock Inn on your left. Turn left, its a narrow turning, Pub is on your left 10 yds. Park on the right.

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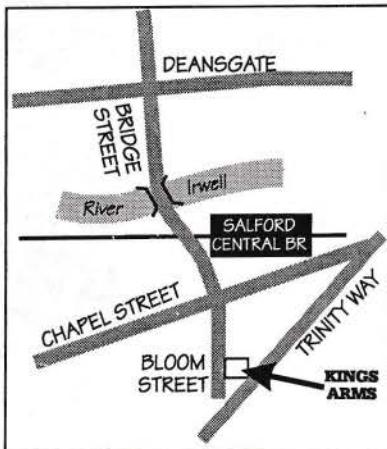


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From 8pm Thursday 3rd to
Sunday 6th September**

GBH!

Or the 'Good Beer Guide to Belgium and Holland' to you. Beer aficionados will tell you that Belgium and, to a lesser extent, Holland offers some of the most interesting beers and characterful bars available in Europe. One of the country's leading authorities on those beers and bars is Suffolk-based Tim Webb who late last month launched the latest edition of his Guide (replacing the 1994 version) to coincide with Belgian Beer Week. We review the book on the next page, but here Tim describes his passion for the beers of the Low Countries and his approach to the Guide.

Since I started compiling CAMRA's "Good Beer Guide to Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg" I reckon I have sampled nearly 2000 different beers and visited over 600 cafes. And I didn't get bored once. The 300-page end product of my endeavours is for you to judge. But I like it. And if you are the more adventurous type of beer traveller, I hope you will too. Belgium is fast becoming recognised as being to ale what Bavaria and Bohemia are to the world of lager. It simply does not get any better. The appeal of Belgium comes from the huge range of styles that are produced. Where we produce pale ale and bitter, brown ale and mild, porter and stout, winter brews and barley wines, the Belgians generate at least 60 definably different types of brew.

The 'GBH' is designed for use at home or abroad. It describes the different brewing methods involved in producing the many styles, lists every Belgian, Dutch and Luxembourgeois brewery and comments on the strength, style and quality of every beer in regular production.

For those who want to find the beers at source it aims to be the perfect travel kit. It directs you to around 500 specialist beer cafes in the three countries, along with descriptions of many local tourist attractions. There are also practical tips about getting there, travelling around and finding places to stay. There is even an introduction to Belgium's other great secret, its amazing cuisine. And for those who like souvenirs, the Guide lists the best off-licenses and warehouses to buy beer to bring home.

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I work on the principle that I want the book to include all the things I would like to have known when I started out. You start with a simple concept. Who produces what; what is it like; is it any good; where can I find it; how do I get there; and what else can I do while I am there? It sounds simple but it is not. Breweries and beer brands come and go with great rapidity. Some brews appear relabelled under dozens of names.

I duck the modern trend to describe beers with more puff than a Amsterdam smoking café. The brewing process produces hundreds of aromatic or taste stimulating chemicals but these often alter with keeping and in real life a beer's character can vary enormously with age, storage conditions and the way in which it is served. Its taste is also related to the drinker's mood, the company they are in, the time of day and their blood alcohol level.

Some beers are made with better ingredients, others with more interesting or painstaking methods. In my view a beer writer's descriptions should reflect this. But for me, some of the more florid descriptions I have read in recent times hold finer notes of *merde de boeuf*, I don't know what you think. So I keep it basic. What type of beer is it? Who made it and how reliable are they? How strong? Any good? And if I go more ecstatic you know the beer is special...or I was pissed at the time. The best way to plough your way through tasting a thousand beers is slowly. So I bring them back in cases and ponder them quietly in the comfort of my own home. Nowadays, I can also buy around 40 Belgian beers in the off-licences, supermarkets and bars of Bury St Edmunds. If the predictions of main beer buyers for the likes of Sainsbury's, Safeway's and Oddbins are right, within five years that choice will have quadrupled.

Trying out cafes is a different matter. Fortunately Belgian and Dutch towns still have reliable, cheap, good quality, family-run hotels and pensions. These usually accommodate the ideal travelling companion, which has two wheels and a saddle. Because of bike-friendly train services and networks of dedicated cycle lanes, bicycling is the cheapest, easiest, fastest and often safest way to get around the Low Countries. Whether you try it on a saddle or an armchair, I guarantee that a guided tour of Belgian ales will astonish you. Beer will never seem the same again.

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BANTAM

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BEST BITTER

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OLD OAK

Well balanced brown beer. Malt and hops balance the strong fruitiness in the aroma and taste. The finish is malty, fruity and dry.



THIRSTY MOON

Light brown bitter. Strong hop aromas. The slight maltness is dominated by a full crisp bitterness giving a dry and satisfying finish.



BONNEVILLE

Light brown bitter. Malty character with a soft rounded hop balance.



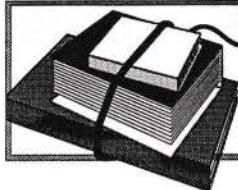
DOUBLE DAGGER

Pale brown bitter. Full flavoured hoppy bitterness. More pleasantly dry and light than its gravity would suggest.



WOBBLY BOB

Another beer. Malty fruity aroma. A slight sweetness yields to a dry finish.



BOOK REVIEW



Good Beer Guide to Belgium, Holland & Luxembourg, CAMRA Books, 308pp, £9.99

The first two editions of the Good Beer Guide to Belgium & Holland followed in quite rapid succession. It has taken a further four years to research this long-awaited third edition, and well worth the wait it proves to be.

Technically, it is the world's only comprehensive book about the breweries and beers of the Benelux countries and also, rightly, claims to be "the biggest and best guidebook in any language to these countries' better cafés". The emphasis is on guidebook, for this is more than just a guide to beer and beer cafés, rather it is an indispensable travel companion to the Low Countries with detailed sections on how to get there, where to stay, and what to see, do and eat (as well as drink) while you are there. Apart from the lengthy introductory pages, many of the place descriptions in the body of the guide direct the visitor to local places of interest and recommended hotels.

Particularly useful is an eight page section on beer tourism including eight varied suggestions for weekend breaks which will satisfy both those just about to start enjoying the beery delights of these countries to experienced old hands. As ever, though, it is the section devoted to beer, breweries and where to drink it that forms the core of the book. This section has been almost completely rewritten and the bar listings now top to 500 mark and in addition direct visitors to many more. The slightly erratic star ratings for the cafés have now been scrapped but the descriptions tell you all you need to know. A useful innovation is the subsidiary lists of try alsos (but still with enough detail to get you there and tell you what to expect) and the end of the main listing for the bigger towns and cities.

The beer and brewery section has also been completely revised and, like the rest of the book, is written in Webb's gloriously opinionated style. His views on the Trappist v. Abbey beer arguments, for example, will raise hackles in some quarters. You may not always agree with what he says but he never fails to both inform and entertain. The star rating for the beers has been retained although this does sometimes go awry where a beer might be given a three star rating ("a good quality brew that is worth sampling") not matched by the description indicating the beer is bland, boring or worse. The tasting notes are admirably sensible, eschewing the flowery nonsense which seems to infest too much of British beer writing, the aim being to make beer descriptions "practical rather than evocative, leaving poetry for the poets."

In short this is one of the best beer books to come out for some time. Highly recommended.

The Nursery Inn



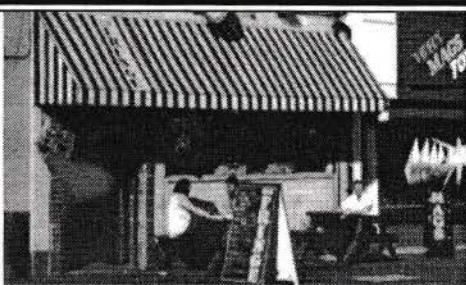
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September 17 - 20

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BURTON BEER FESTIVAL SEPTEMBER 24-26 (Thu - Sat)

Real Beer Is Best

September 7 sees the launch of a Week of Action by CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. The aim is to promote good, traditional beer and here Rhys Jones explains just why 'real beer is best'.

Back in the Thirties, the brewers coined a potent slogan -

"Beer is Best". In those days, all the beer was 'real', for keg hadn't been invented. And while nowadays all kinds of beer deserve a boost, if only to counteract Britain's absurd cultural cringe towards wine, it's only REAL beer - the naturally conditioned kind - that deserves the accolade of the best.

Truth to tell, it didn't take long for consumers to realise that the only advantages of early keg beers (Watneys Red and the like) accrued to brewers and licensees, who could keep the stuff for much longer and didn't need skilled staff to look after it. The beer itself was cold, tasteless, fizzy and generally pretty grim.

Today's keg beers, though, are subtly different - and not just in the name, which frequently incorporates some variant of the words "smooth", "cream", and "flow". (Personally, I prefer cream on my strawberries, not in my beer, but it takes all sorts). They're pushed to the bar by a nitrogen-rich mix of gases, rather than the carbon dioxide of old, and this certainly makes them less fizzy, though many would argue that they have no more flavour than old-fashioned keg. And crucially, they are produced in exactly the same way as old-fashioned keg beers - i.e. they are pasteurised and dead so that the flavours cannot develop.

Now, I'm not trying to persuade you to sign a pledge never to drink keg beer. Many brewers would argue that the new "nitro" kegs are a way into ale for those who have had the misfortune to be weaned on lager, and I myself will happily enjoy a pint of Draught Guinness (the original nitrokeg) if there's a problem with the pub's real ale.

But any sort of keg beer will never be more than the sliced Mother's Pride of the beer world - real ale is a tasty, characterful loaf from a craft baker. The interplay between the ingredients of real ale creates, in combination with a master brewer's ingenuity in crafting recipes, a vast array of beers whose endless variation in flavour and colour, aroma, strength, and texture provides a joy and fascination for a lifetime.

If you think you deserve the best, try a pint of real ale today - and find out for yourself why "Real Beer is Best".

8

Action Stations!

A Chance to Meet the Brewers

CAMRA is the Campaign for Real Ale, so what better topic to pick for our 1998 Week of Action than Real Ale itself?

Real Ale sales are in decline, largely due to the lack of interest by the bigger brewers. Many of these have slowed down their support for real ale, preferring to put their money behind nitro-kegs which require little of the care needed to look after real ale. Bass seem to have virtually abandoned it altogether. This means there is less advertising to encourage new drinkers to try real ale in the first place. So, if no one else is promoting it, CAMRA must, and will, take the lead.

CAMRA branches all over the country will be holding special promotional events during the week, which starts on September 7th. Locally the Stockport & South Manchester branch has organised two talks to be given by two leading brewers of traditional beer. These are the dates for your diary:

Wednesday 9th September - Robinson's Head Brewer Chris Hellin will give a talk at the Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heaviley (that's on the A6). Chris will explain the brewing process at Robinson's, what goes into the beer and why real beer is best. This takes place in the upstairs room and will start at 7.30pm.

Tuesday 15th September - Dick Venes, Second Brewer at Joseph Holt's will give a similar talk at the Sidings, Broom Lane, Levenshulme. This will start at 7.30-8.00pm.

How Beer is Brewed

Beer seems such a simple drink that we tend to take it for granted. Serious conversation about alcohol is reserved for wine and spirits. Yet beer - good beer - is a highly complex product and one that arguably needs greater skill to produce than wine. Wine, at its simplest, means crushing grapes and letting the wild yeasts on the skins ferment the sweet juices into alcohol.

If you crush an ear of barley, however, you will not get beer. The basic ingredient of beer needs careful transforming into malt before it is ready to begin the slow journey that ends with the pint in the pub. When barley is harvested it is taken to a maltings where the grains are soaked in water to encourage germination. The barley is heated and turned regularly, either in the traditional 'floor' maltings or in huge rotating drums.

When the maltster is satisfied that germination has unlocked the rich natural sugars in the barley, the grains are taken to a kiln where heat stops germination. The temperature of the kiln determines the type of malt produced: the higher the temperature, the darker the malt.

The malt is now ready for brewing. In the brewery it is milled into a powder known as grist and then mixed with hot water (known as liquor in breweries) in a vessel called a mash tun. The thick porridgey liquid is left for several hours while the natural sugars in the malt dissolve. When the mashing has adsorbed the maximum amount of sugar, the liquid, now known as wort, is run off through the slotted base of the vessel.

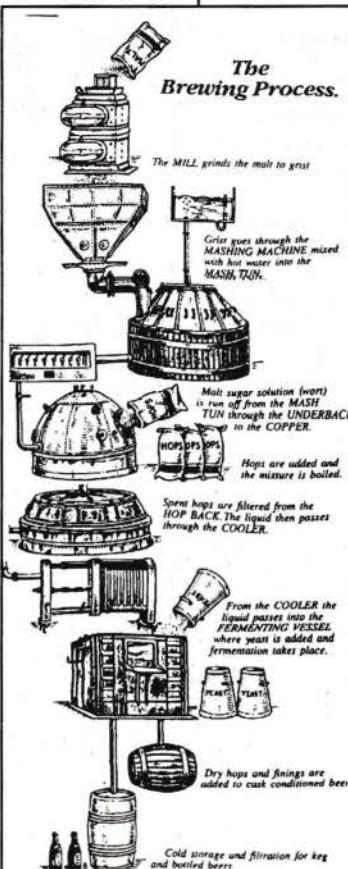
The remaining grains are sprinkled with more hot water to remove any last remaining sugars, a system known as sparging. The wort is then run into a copper where it is boiled for an hour or more with hops. Hops, brought to Britain in the 16th century by Dutch brewers not only add bitterness and aroma but also act as a preservative and help prevent infections in the brew.

After boiling, the hopped wort flows from the copper into another vessel called a hop back, and runs out of this over a bed of spent hops. The wort is then cooled and run into fermenting tanks where yeast is added. Yeast is a microscopic fungus which propagates itself rapidly in the warm sugary wort. Within a few hours a scum appears on top of the wort and this rapidly builds up into a great yellowy-brown crust as the yeast turns the sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas.

When fermentation has finished the beer is run into conditioning tanks for a few days. The remaining yeast continues to turn the residual sugars into alcohol and also helps remove rough after-tastes created by fermentation.

Now the beer is ready for the final stage in the brewery before it leaves for the pub cellar. It is run or 'racked' into casks, made either of wood or metal, sometimes with some "priming" sugar and a handful of dry hops: the sugar encourages vigorous secondary fermentation and the hops add aroma. Finings are also added to the cask before it leaves the brewery. A glutinous substance made from fish swim bladders, finings attract and stick to yeast cells and other particles in the beer, causing them to sink into the bottom of the cask, thereby clearing the beer.

After all the mashing and boiling and the heaving and frothing of fermentation we now have beer, ready for its journey to the pub cellar. The description of the brewing process varies from brewery to brewery depending on the equipment used. But as long as the finished beer is left to condition naturally and is free from such unnatural processes as chilling, filtering and pasteurisation the end result is traditional draught beer known in the industry as "cask conditioned beer" and more popularly as...real ale.



Both of these events will give a fascinating, behind the scenes look at two of our local independent brewers. Of course both brewers will be more than willing to answer questions, so if there is anything you've been dying to find out about Robinson's or Holt's beers, now is your chance.

CURMUDGEON



Fear of Flavour

I was talking recently to a confirmed lager drinker, a man of some intelligence, who has clearly given some thought to his preferences rather than just blindly accepting what the advertisers tell him. But, as far as he is concerned, the sole point of drinking beer is intoxication, and the less flavour the better. He much prefers smooth, bland lagers such as Foster's to those from Germany or the Czech Republic which to his mind have an unpleasant aftertaste – in other words they taste of malt and hops. Drinking from the bottle is a good way of avoiding the aroma of beer. And he has tried the original Czech Budweiser Budvar, but thought it much inferior to the American Budweiser.

These views may be anathema to anyone who appreciates beer, but we have to recognise that they are very widespread. In many other fields, blandness and predictability are a big selling point – how else can you explain the success of the Toyota Corolla or Celine Dion? Indeed, closer to home, the typical real ale enthusiast tends to choose his clothes for comfort and durability rather than being at the cutting edge of fashion.

Beer lovers often consider it a self-evident truth that people will prefer beers with strong, distinctive flavours if only given the chance to sample them, but this is not necessarily true. While no real ale should be bland, we must recognise that there is a place for those with flavours that could be described as subtle. If every beer was bursting with in-your-face hoppiness it would defer many potential converts.

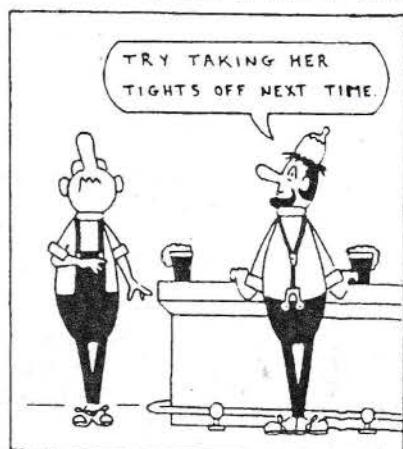
Bite Your Lip

I don't like to see people drinking beer out of the bottle. It's an ignorant, ill-mannered and unhygienic habit, and it shows you couldn't care less about the product. It's about on a par with picking your nose in public. If you guzzled wine or whisky straight from the bottle, you'd come across as a hopeless drunk – so why should it be any different with beer?

I suppose you have to expect that youngsters will do this kind of thing in their early drinking years. Far worse, though, to see thirty- and fortysomething men like my "friend" above necking a Bud in a pathetic attempt to appear young and trendy. And it's regrettably so commonplace that to express your disapproval is likely to be considered a social *faux pas*, and you're best advised to bite your lip and say nothing.

The distressing possibility exists that in forty years' time, our pubs – if we have any left – will be full of old blokes drinking insipid lagers out of the bottle. Or might they have grown out of it by then? We can at least derive some hope from the fact that trends do not last forever – you don't see too many people sticking slices of lime in the necks of bottles nowadays.

MITCH



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by Phil Levison

SEPTEMBER '93

The front page referred to the plans for a second runway at Manchester Airport, and how the local press had concentrated on the immediate environmental problems likely to arise. But attention was drawn to the fact that tucked away in future plans for the area was a scheme to take over the village of Ringway and replace it with a giant fuel depot. Amongst buildings to go would be the village pub – the Romper. The development was still some way off, and could possibly take place in the early years of next century. From the published plans, it looked as if the pub was towards the edge of the development, so perhaps common sense would be brought to bear.

It was time once again for the year's Pub Vandalism Awards – the previous year the judges had a difficult task because the area's pub stock had been treated reasonably well, but there were no such problems this time. The first presentation was the 'House of Horrors Revisited Award', won by Whitbread for their "Tut 'n Shive" concept. This was described as "little more than licensed building sites liberally scattered with inane chalk signs". Paradoxically though, it did a lot right on the beer front, bringing choice and quality into new areas. The second award was the first 'Lifetime Achievement Pub Vandalism Award' to Greenalls Group PLC, who were also admitted as founder members of the Pub Vandalism Hall of Infamy. Twenty years spent cutting a swathe through the brewing industry of the Midlands and the North, demolishing Tommy Ducks overnight, and then the Red Lion in Hazel Grove – they all played their part in winning these prestigious awards.

After reading the foregoing, it was very easy to get the idea that everything was doom and gloom on the pub front, but the Editor pointed out that the public house was not in terminal decline. There were three new pubs under construction in the Stockport and South Manchester area. On Princess Street in the City centre, Holt's Old Monkey was due to open before Christmas, and just down the road the Rev Joshua Brooks was almost ready to open (a new neighbour for the Lass O'Gowrie). In Hazel Grove, work had started on Robinson's new pub on Jacksons Lane, and it was due to open the following year (as the Three Bears).

The month's Stagger covered Gatley and Northenden, and among the establishments visited was Gatley Wine Bar – "architecturally this is a fairly undistinguished and functional building". So perhaps it is all the more surprising that it has just become Cain's first pub away from their Merseyside base – see last month's Opening Times, where the final thought was – "Well worth a visit. Almost compulsory in fact".



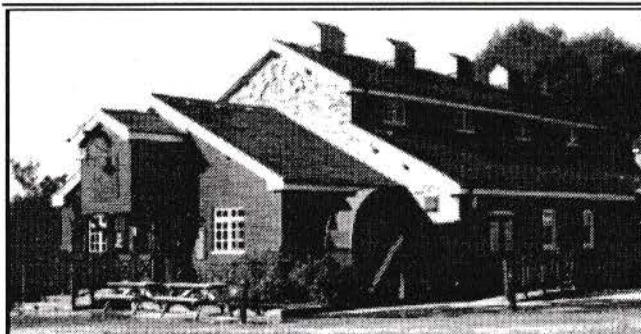
Hydes' Anvil launch their latest seasonal beer this month. Berry Good Ale is described as a "unique berry-red, full-flavoured, all malt ale" and includes "seasonal berry juice" in the recipe. It will be a lightly bittered beer at 4.5 per cent ABV. Look out for it.

A couple of very interesting beers are in the pipeline from the Footage & Firkin where brewer Richard Sutton now has the opportunity to produce one guest beer a month to his own recipe. By the time you read this, his IPA should be out. This is a powerful 5.9 per cent brew (in line with true IPAs) with a lip-smacking 50 units of bitterness (that's really, really bitter!). In October this will be followed up with a 5 per cent Porter. The recipe hasn't been finalised yet but expect something full-flavoured, to say the least. Up in Haslingden, Dave Porter, at Porter's Brewery has one or two interesting beers in the pipeline as well. The latest in his line of occasional one-off specials, Number 4, will be putting in the customary brief appearance early this month. This is essentially Rossendale Ale brewed with the addition of whole raspberries! Dave is interested to see just how this turns out, All he can promise at the moment is that it will be "very dry and very red". At the instigation of licensee

Paul Stanyer, Dave is also to produce a permanent house beer for the Railway, Stockport. It will be based on the beer that used to be brewed for the Farmers Arms at Holmfirth at 4/4.1 per cent ABV but with a more floral nose "and a lot more bitter". There will probably be a competition to name the new brew with a beery prize. Last, but by no means least, October will see the return of the ferociously dry Porters Stout. That's certainly one to look out for. New beers are also the name of the game at Bolton's Bank Top Brewery. The fourth in the 'Knights of the Round Table' series was launched at the end of August. This is Sir Percival a light-coloured bitter at 4.5 per cent and brewed using Northdown hops, the first



10



Your hosts Jon & Judi invite you to

The Old Mill

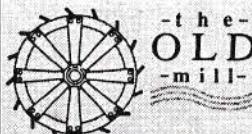
At least 10 different guest beers per week

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Great food served daily till 10pm
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time that brewer John Feeney has tried these. John will also be brewing two new beers for the festival to be held at the Howcroft Inn (Bank Top's unofficial brewery tap) from 14-18 October. One will be a festival special and the other the fifth 'Knight'. The Howcroft's beer festival will be well worth a visit, by the way, offering a massive 220 beers this year. Bank Top Brewery may also be on the move as John is looking to re-site it at a brewpub. Anywhere within one hour's drive of Bolton will be considered, "so I might be coming your way" he told us.

There have been a few changes at the Beartown Brewery in Congleton this year. One of the original founding partners, Andy Millican, has left and a limited company has been formed with Ian Burns as director. Ian is, however, taking a back seat on the brewing front, which is now being handled by his son Ross, who at 18 is perhaps one of the youngest brewers in the country. On the beer front, Ambeardextrous, the 3.8 per cent bitter, has been discontinued. However Black Bear Mild, the 5 per cent brew launched at this year's Macclesfield Beer Festival, has been made a regular, and is in fact on sale permanently at the Old Ship, Beech Lane, Macclesfield. Another beer that has been made permanent is Kodiak Gold, the 4 per cent pale, straw-coloured summer quencher. Beartown beers are also permanently on sale at Didsbury Golf Club and will in addition be on Greenall's guest beer list in November.

Phoenix Brewery at Heywood will be continuing their Flash flood this month as it has sold extremely well. Other beers may also be produced based on "the usual flashes of inspiration" brewer Tony Allen told us.

Last month we reported on Holt's trial of a new 5 per cent premium bitter which is to be made widely available for their 150th anniversary next year. It apparently sold well in most of the selected outlets (about 15 in all), hardly surprising given the £1.26 retail price, and will be back next year with a new name.



Burtonwood Sell-Off

Burtonwood Brewery have effectively hived off their brewing operation to a new joint venture company with the Dorset-based Thomas Hardy Brewery, although, for the time being at least, brewing will continue at both sites.



Thomas Hardy itself came into being when the family owned Dorchester-based Eldridge Pope floated off their brewing arm although the new company, to be called Thomas Hardy Burtonwood will have its headquarters in Warrington. It will be 60% owned by Hardys, though and that company will provide the chief executive, Peter Ward, who currently heads the Thomas Hardy operation.

The Burtonwood plant, which has had about £8 million invested in it during the past decade, is one of the most modern regional breweries in the country and has plenty of spare capacity. Initially the plan is to utilise this capacity by winning contract-brewing business from both the national operators and the new pub companies for whom tailor-made house beers could be provided. Lager will also be produced from next spring and a bottling line may also be installed.

This is of course all well and good, but...what chance a year or so down the line we see this new operation 'rationalising' its facilities? That means a brewery closure, and given the state of the Burtonwood brewery, the likeliest candidate for the chop will be the Thomas Hardy plant. Suggestions of such a scenario would doubtless produce emphatic denials all round at the moment but remember, you read it here first.

Unfair Pints

MP Dennis Turner's 'Fair Pints' Bill finally bit the dust last month. When it again came up for debate in Parliament it was objected to and did not proceed. Even if a debate had taken place the measure faced a formidable list of amendments from Tory MPs Eric Forth and David MacLean.. Whilst it could still be debated on 6 November the more likely outcome is government sponsored legislation to ensure that full pints finally become compulsory. Unluckily one of the proposals greatest supporters, Consumer Affairs Minister Nigel Griffiths, was sacked in the government reshuffle. Let's hope his replacement, Kim Howells, is equally committed to fair and full pints.



THE BEER MONSTER™

As promised last month, a look at some recent beer festivals...

Catford. I hated the first two, but after a few years they seem to have got this one just about right. A difficult layout, with some things having to be on another floor, but this year an excellent beer range (lots of solid mainstream stuff, and a good number of 'winners'). Use of the national cooling system meant good condition, plus a good foreign beer bar (even I 'scored' two new Bavarian beers).

Derby - for once produced a nearly decent programme, with a minor pub guide, a bit of history and a good guide to the beers. New ones are fairly strictly rationed, but there's something for everyone. The chance of a trip to the Brunswick, Alexandra and Flowerpot (pubs) at the same time make this an always good day out.

Canterbury (The Cowshed). This is becoming one of my favourites, despite the train journey through Kent, and this year, even with a sprinkling of churchmen from the Lambeth conference, it didn't disappoint. Good mix of known and new beers, almost all from micros. Excellent Foreign beer bars and wide choice of food. The only hassle is the courtesy bus to the site.... "Taxi!"

Great British Beer Festival, (GBBF) Olympia, London (Aug 4-8). Once again the sun beat down on the largest greenhouse full of beer in the World. Happily, the cooling system, and the opening of all the side gates, meant that the beer stayed in pretty good condition throughout. Once again, staffing was a bit of a problem, but those there worked very hard (well done to all), and to my mind (I went to three sessions) customer numbers seemed substantially down, so the queues never seemed quite as bad as last year. The food seemed as bad and overpriced as ever, and the beer prices were to say the least steep. The victory of Coniston Bluebird in the Champion beer was a little surprising, as it is surely one of the most inconsistent beers around (they must have caught a good batch - it was impossible to tell because the supply seemed exhausted before the festival even opened). GBBF is big, its quite enjoyable but it is very expensive. Hopefully the pricing at January's National Winter Ales fest in Manchester will be more enlightened. The foreign beer bars seem to be being taken over by American products, and to my mind, not the best American beers by a long way - too much rather tired seeming East Coast stuff, together with a little from California. The stand from Kozel (Czech) was a nice addition, especially since it was manned entirely by brewery staff, and the unpasteurised Budvar on the adjacent stand was very superior to the normal stuff you can get in Manchester, and a great relief from the overall heat. Because of the prices I may give it a miss in '99, for the first time in fifteen years.

Fat Cat, Sheffield. On my visit, 18 beers (out of about 40 over the three days) served from a tiny bar, in Sheffield's famous brew pub. Beer quality was pretty good, as was the range. Very cheap food, and a great atmosphere, all in all, an excellent day out. (Posters for their beer festivals are usually 'up' in the Beer House some time in advance). **Ship & Mitre, Liverpool.** Bank holiday weekend clash with the Beer House, but it makes for a day out. Oddly, the beers on the gravity stillage (cooled by a screen and a fan which worked incredibly well) were uniformly excellent, whereas the ones on handpump did not (with two exceptions) impress at all. The Ship (the "& Mitre" bit of the sign has fallen off!) is so reminiscent of the old 'unimproved' Beer House - tatty and falling apart - that it brings a tear to the eye. The decor does not detract though, from a very fine pub.

Beer House, Manchester. No Station/Buffet bar do this August, so the Beer House festival was on its own. As usual a great range of beers, all the ones I tried being in very good nick. Superb cheese on offer (especially the stilton with ginger) - one suggestion though, in Summer do the upstairs (gravity) beers first. I did them on the first day and they were great.

The Beer Monster's British Beer of the Month:

Rudgate Marauder

Foreign Beer of the Month:

Hermannsdorf Schweinsbrau Helles.

Upcoming Festivals: CAMRA: Sheffield (10-12 Sep), Stoke (9-12 Sep), Birmingham (17-19 Sep), Burton (24-26 Sep), Keighley - now back in the Worth Brewery- (24-26 Sep). Pubs: Brunswick, Derby (Oct 1-3), Howcroft, Bolton (14-18 Oct) and Smithfield Hotel, Manchester about the same time.



Irene and Staff welcome you to The Greyhound



Bowden Street, Edgeley

**Boddingtons Mild & Bitter
and ever changing Guest Beers**

Sep 5 - Rebellion Red Oktober

Sep 12 - Maclay's Wallace IPA

Sep 19 - Wychwood Bramling Cross

Sep 26 - Tisbury Natterjack

★ OPEN ALL DAY ★

CAMRA Pub of the Month

March 1997



11

ARMOURY INN SHAW HEATH



**BEST BITTER, HATTERS MILD,
OLD TOM**

Snacks Available

**OPEN ALL PERMITTED
HOURS EVERY DAY**

(including Saturdays & Sundays)



Robinsons Traditional Ales

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation From

£17.50 - (Evening Meals if required)

Free Meeting Room Available

For 20 - 40 people

THE CASTLE

OLDHAM STREET, MANCHESTER
NOW SERVING THE COMPLETE
RANGE OF ROBINSONS CASK BEERS!

Old Stockport Bitter, Best Bitter,
Hatters Mild, Dark Mild,
Frederics, Old Tom and Hartleys



A WARM WELCOME
AND FINE BEER IN
A CLASSIC PUB



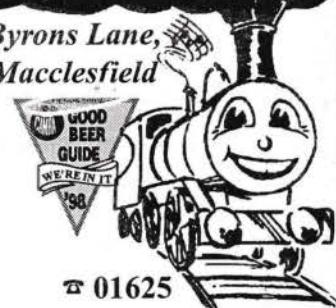
Graham
welcomes
you to ...

THE RAILWAY VIEW

GOOD FOOD
Now Being Served on
PLATFORM ONE

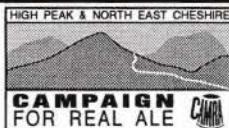
6 GUEST BEERS ☆
☆ QUIZZES ☆
☆ BAR GAMES ☆

REAL ALE £1.20 MON NIGHT



01625
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12



September Featured Pub:

Travellers Call, Bredbury

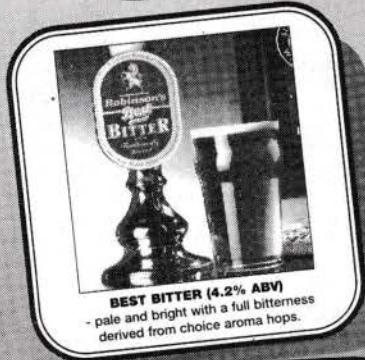
The Travellers had for many years been under threat of demolition because it was in the path of the proposed A6(M) bypass. Now that this project has finally been scrapped, the Travellers Call, and a nice area of open countryside, are both safe. This is good news for those of us who like a pint of Lees, as the Travellers is the only tied Lees pub in Stockport.

A few months ago the brewery carried out urgent repairs on the building, which had begun to show alarming cracks in the facing wall. The prospect of impromptu alfresco drinking seemed to loom large! However, the building is once again safe and sound to drink in. The brewery also decided to carry out substantial interior renovation and as a result the old black, bulky and somewhat gloomy bar was removed to be replaced by a new wood panelled bar. The greatly improved the ambiences of the pub, creating a warm and welcoming feel. As a result, the Travellers Call seems to have picked up a fair amount of extra trade. Just as well, because this pub has had a history of indifferent management that saw turnover fall off considerably. However, since the arrival of Maeve Thomas, the present landlady, a few years ago all this has changed. The Travellers has gone from strength to strength and it has now reclaimed its role as a real community local.

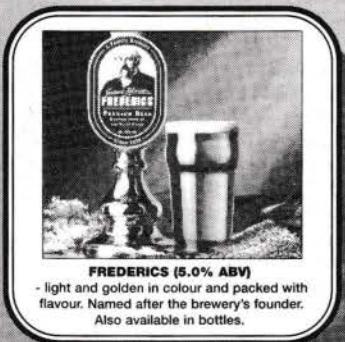
Indeed, progress has been such that Maeve recently finished runner-up in the brewery's in-house Pub of the Year award. No mean feat considering the level of competition! Although the renovation work has made the pub a more comfortable and pleasant place to be in, its main achievement has been the consistent quality of the beers on offer, including the occasional seasonal beers, all served by handpump. The Travellers Call is easily reached by bus from Stockport. The 330 and 384 pass by and bus stops are only a few yards away. Give it a try, and see for yourself! BZ.



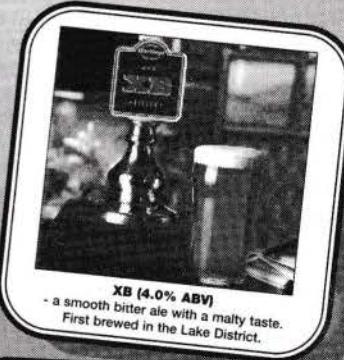
THE Robinson's COLLECTION



BEST BITTER (4.2% ABV)
- pale and bright with a full bitterness
derived from choice aroma hops.



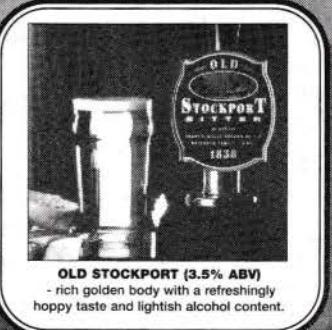
FREDERIC'S (5.0% ABV)
- light and golden in colour and packed with
flavour. Named after the brewery's founder.
Also available in bottles.



XB (4.0% ABV)
- a smooth bitter ale with a malty taste.
First brewed in the Lake District.



HATTER'S MILD (3.3% ABV)
- brewed from quality malt and hops, it's the
best cask conditioned, light mild around.



OLD STOCKPORT (3.5% ABV)
- rich golden body with a refreshingly
hoppy taste and lightish alcohol content.



OLD TOM (8.5% ABV)
- smooth, dark and mellow. Brewed from a
recipe almost as old as the brewery itself.

C H O I C E B E E R S

...Pub Ne
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Not a great deal of news this month. On balance probably quite negative with closures in a few areas – however...there is to be a new real ale outlet in Glossop. On George Street a wine bar conversion of an old glove works will be re-opening shortly complete with handpumps (and not a wine bar). The new owners are hoping to have a range of guest beers. We wish them luck and trust that the beer-drinking public of Glossop will support the new venture.

Now for the bad news...Sullivans Tavern, on Penny Meadow in Ashton-u-Lyne is closed and up for sale. The Talbot in Stalybridge which has been closed for some time is due to be demolished in September. A sad fate for an old coaching inn (which used to sell Burtonwood beers). The Oddfellows in Ridling Lane in Hyde – also closed for some time – is being converted into a Young Tigers Youth Centre. Shame for the pub and license but nice to see the building being put to good use. Finally – down the road from the former Oddfellows – the Moulders Arms (a former Good Beer Guide entry selling Tetley beers) no longer sells real ale.

Some better news from the Sportsman in Hyde (is there a month when this doesn't get a mention?) now sells a range of foreign bottled beers including some from the famous Mort Subite bar in Brussels.

Further afield – in Holmfirth, Bob Gosling of the Farmers Arms has retired and the pub has been sold. The new owners are continuing in similar vein although the beer range has reportedly been restricted to Tetley and Black Horse beers only. In particular the exclusive house beer brewed for the pub by Porter's Brewery has been discontinued (*not quite High Peak, though, is it? – ed.*)

Finally, John Hesketh of Stalybridge Buffet/Station, Ashton fame has arranged two more themed brewery weeks. The first is at the Station and will start on 10 September. The featured brewery is Wye Valley and there will be no less than 12 beers on offer, including three new beers (Reapers Ale, Ploughmans and Travellers) plus three festival specials. In mid-October the Stalybridge Buffet will be running 'Ell's Bells Week' featuring six beers from Lloyds Brewery and six from Lichfield Brewery which shares Lloyds' premises.



In Brief...

Unfortunately, due to the loss of one of my rough pages of notes, there was a pub omitted from my review of Glossop. This is the Commercial Inn on Sheffield Road. It's a large, opened out Whitbread establishment set on a busy road junction. There's both a pool room and an areas set aside for dining. Up to five real ales are available and these can include Boddingtons Bitter, Castle Eden Ale, Marston's Pedigree, Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Draught bass. Some have suggested that other pubs were also omitted but these will feature in a separate article on Whitfield. I'm now off on an expedition to cover all those pubs that have featured in every edition of the Good Beer Guide. Normal service will resume in a couple of month's time.



The 'rebuilt' Shambles Square in Manchester City Centre was due to re-open next week (the new target is March) – but at least things are happening on the new site. Sinclairs is going to be effectively a new-build replica, and I doubt very much if it will resemble the old one all that much. There is better news of the Wellington though - the timer frame (largely original) is fully in place. How much of the outer fabric is new however, remains to be seen.

THE SPORTSMAN

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A GENUINE FREE HOUSE WITH EVER CHANGING REAL ALES AND TRADITIONAL CIDER

Regular Beers include Hartington Bitter, Plassey Bitter, Taylors Landlord and Magic Mushroom Mild and ever-changing guest beers



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13

ATTENTION ALL FREE HOUSES!

Following the huge success of award winning Plassey Bitter and Cwru Tudno at

The Sportsman, Hyde, Geoff is now able to offer all Plassey products at realistic prices with free delivery to selected other Publicans (who would be willing to take it regularly) in the Stockport, Tameside, High Peak and Greater Manchester areas only.

Please ring Geoff on:-
0161 368 5000, fax 0161 366 1365.



"I wish to register
A COMPLAINT!"



So 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 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,
Tameside - 0161 912 4585, Cheshire (for Macclesfield Borough) - 01260 285500, Derbyshire (for Glossop, Buxton etc.) - 01629 585858, Trafford - 0161 912 4585

What Is Real Ale?

Opening Times is full of references to 'real ale', 'keg' and 'nitro-keg'. It's easy to take it for granted that everyone knows what these mean but of course that is not necessarily so. Here then is a quick run-through to put everyone in the picture... Cask conditioned beer is what CAMRA justifiably calls real ale. When the brewing process is completed the beer, still containing sufficient yeast and sugars for some more fermentation, is poured into barrels, or racked into casks as brewers prefer to call it. The cask is then sealed, often after a handful of hops have been added for extra aroma ('dry hopping' is the brewers' term), and delivered to the pub cellar.

In the pub cellar the beer continues to ferment and come into condition. It gains more flavour in this process and its condition improves. With the aid of finings, which are normally added shortly before the cask leaves the brewery, the yeast slowly sinks to the bottom leaving clear beer with plenty of flavour and condition ready for serving. One of the reasons for some beer appearing blander these days is the lack of proper cellar conditioning in the pub - very often the beer will have cleared but still need a few extra days to come into proper condition but some licensees seem either unwilling or unable to let this happen.

To achieve this clearing and get the best possible natural condition, the cellar staff in the pub put in a lot of effort aided with various venting tools, spiles and patience. The beer, having completed its secondary conditioning is then ready to be served. This can either be drawn straight from the cask, via a handpump or electric pump (as in many Robinson's and Hydes' pubs). Because air is drawn into the cask to replace the beer as it is served, reactions can and do take place, and the beer will lose its condition and start to 'go off' if it is not served within a couple of days or so.

Keg beer is processed before it leaves the brewery. It is normally filtered to remove all traces of yeast and pasteurised to make sure that any remaining yeast is killed off so that no more conditioning can take place. It is a dead product that cannot gain the extra flavours that real ale does during its time in the cask. The kegs are sealed in the brewery and the beer has to be forced out using carbon dioxide gas pressure. This gives the beer too much condition making it fizzy, and as it has not had the chance to mature properly it is often fairly sweet and with little character. However, for the unskilled cellar staff it is wonderful, as the only skill required to serve it is to attach the gas supply. It also has a much longer shelf life than real ale. Most lagers sold in the UK are served by this process.

A refinement on keg beer is the nitro-keg version. Here the beer goes through a similar process as keg beer except that it is dispensed using a mixed gas system of nitrogen and carbon dioxide. Consequently the beer is less fizzy, tastes smoother than ordinary keg beer and has a large creamy head. This beer is consistent, but as with other keg products lacks the range of flavours that cask conditioned beers have. Because of the large head produced as the nitrogen bubbles out of the beer it is often difficult to get a full measure. Nitro-keg beers can probably be best summed up as 'consistent but boring'. For a more detailed look at how beer is brewed see article on page 6.

Japanese Sair Inn

The Sair Inn, just over the Pennines at Slaithwaite near Huddersfield, is well known amongst ale aficionados as the home of excellent ales brewed on the premises. It's also proved a hit in...Japan! Representatives of Japanese brewer Alph Incorporated descended on the pub taking more than 200 pictures with a view to building a near-replica nestling in the foothills of Mount Fuji. The company found the Sair in a good pub guide and asked to photograph everything, including the logs kept under the seats!

Tameside Travels

Roving reporter Mark McConachie has been visiting most of the pubs in Tameside in recent months. It proved to be a pretty depressing trek with no less than 24 real ale losses discovered so far (when checked against the local CAMRA guide 'Nine Town Bitter' which came out a couple of years ago).

There were a few high points, though. The Rising Sun, Stockport Road, Quickwood (near Mossley) was one of them. There are new licensees of about six months standing, who arrived from the Great Western just over in West Yorks. They are very keen to promote cask beers and sell a permanent range of Boddies Bitter, Jennings Bitter, Black Sheep, Tetleys and Taylors Landlord, plus a changing guest beer. "Probably the best pub in Top Mossley by far". Nearby, the Church Inn sells John Smiths and Banks's Bitters plus a changing guest beer.

At Millbrook, the Church Inn has replaced Marston's Pedigree with the changing Head Brewers' Choice range. Marston's Bitter and Banks's Mild are the other two real ales here. The excellent Stamford Arms at Heyhead, selling Toby Light, Stones Bitter and a changing guest (Adnams Regatta at the time of the visit) has added a cellar bar.

As to those losses, these are:

Dukinfield - Dukinfield Arms (Lees Bitter), Liston (Greenalls), Brunswick, Friendship (Greenalls), Newmarket (Bass), North Star (Bass)

Millbrook - Commercial (Worthington Bitter), Hare & Hounds (Bass beers)

Heyheads - Buckton Castle (Bass)

Mossley - George Hotel, Stamford Arms

Ashton & Audenshaw - Pineapple (Bass), Oxford (Bass), Corporation Arms (Bass beers), Queens Arms (Greenalls Bitter), Mechanics Arms (Thwaites Bitter), Moss (shut), Star Inn (Worthington Bitter), Hop Pole (Bass), Beau Geste (Bass) Hyde/Godley/Newton - Commercial (Marstons - shut), Cotton Tree (Wilsons/Websters), Duke of Sussex (Bass), Hallbottom Gate Inn (Bass), Beehive Inn (Bass - shut)

Eagle-eyed readers will spot that over half of these are Bass owned or supplied pubs. Further evidence, if it was needed, of that company's slow but deliberate retreat from the mass support and distribution of real ale.

It's Firkin Keg

Locally we have been lucky with our Firkin pubs. No historic pubs have been wrecked to have the theme imposed on them, they are supplied with excellent beer (thanks to Richard Sutton at the Footage) and they generally promote real ales to those who might not otherwise encounter them. They play an important part in the thinking of parent company Allied Domecq, too. In fact they have been made a free-standing subsidiary for the first time, under the direction of John Cahill, allied Domecq Leisure's operations director for the past three years. CAMRA's national newspaper, What's Brewing interviewed him in its August issue. It made a point of asking him how important cask ale and in-house brewing still were. "Cask ale is a hugely important part of the mix," he replied. "We don't actually sell any keg ales..."

An impressive commitment. What a shame the, that if you walk into the Forgery & Firkin on Moseley Street in the City Centre you will encounter Tetley Smooth Bitter. A keg beer if ever there was one. We have written to Mr Cahill pointing this out. We'll let you know what he says. Don't hold your breath.

It's A Fact

The country's oldest barmaid retired in August. Annie Collins left the Leigh Hotel in Eastleigh, Hampshire after 18 years at the pub bringing to an end a 50-year spell working in the town's pubs. Annie is 85 - can anyone out there beat that?

The Sun Inn

The Pub where Quality Counts

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TRADITIONAL ENGLISH FOOD

Sandwiches always on Sale

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Licensee: Malcolm Roberts

e-mail: thesuninn@mccmail.com

The Sun Inn

45 Mill Lane, Macclesfield, Cheshire, SK11 7NN

Tel: 01625 610436

STAGGER

with Dave Hanson

While all around rain, thunder and lightning lashed Manchester, the Pack Horse on Ashton Old Road was bathed in warm sunshine. After being acquired by Holt's, the Pack Horse has become a haven for real ale in an area of Openshaw which is fast losing its cask beer outlets. The Thirties-style metal window frames, including one with the original Groves & Whitnall etched glass, suggest the interior would be art deco. Nothing of it, the lounge has been furnished in the comfy, front room style adopted recently by Holt's, the bar being less commodious but still inviting. The steady trade in the highly rated bitter was such that, when a lager was ordered, the barmaid appeared a little confused! The only mild being drunk was by yours truly, and suffered by having stood in the lines and being a little warm.

Up the road the Prince of Wales was entered to find that there was only keg beer available. Disco equipment was being set up to entertain the few kids who frequented its one large room. We decided to heed the notice on the front door, "No Travellers" and moved on.

Across the road, the elegantly tiled façade of the **Forresters Arms** was much more welcoming. Originally two, or more, rooms now knocked together, with the bar in the back corner. The dozen or so customers were offered both Robinson's Hatters Mild (not sampled) and Best Bitter (rated average). An eclectic selection of music was playing on the jukebox, culminating with George Formby as we left for our next port of call.

We decided to check the **Concert Inn** around the corner on Fairfield Road. After its recent period of closure, it was good to see it not only open, but vibrant and lively with a number of customers. Unfortunately there was no real ale on sale, and probably it will not be available in the near future.

Back on Ashton Old Road, real ale is still available in the **Lord Raglan**. Two bitters, Holt's (judged as average) and Wilsons (untried) were on sale, but sadly there was no mild. The bar separates the two front rooms, a third room being tucked around the back. The vault is entered through a corner door directly off the street and still retains its dartboard. The lounge still has many of its original features, such as round the wall bench seating, but is spoiled by the fake log fire. A clutch of six books, which huddled in one corner, exuding pathos, attempting to impersonate a library, was also incongruous.

Across the road we anticipated much from the re-opened **Halfway House** as it advertised itself as a 'cask and Bottle' pub. Upon entering the vast barn-like interior we spied not one but two

handpumps on the bar! Unfortunately we saw no pump clips. Ominous. "What real ale have you got?" we enquired. "Boddingtons Smooth" [not a real ale!] was the reply. "No thanks. What are these selling?", we asked pointing at the handpumps. "Oh, they're just for show, I'm not sure if they even work". We moved on.

The **Oddfellows**, a few yards down Abbey Hey Lane, is a no frills Boddingtons pub, which served an average pint of bitter. The three drinking areas are wrapped around the central island bar. Sitting in the front bar, we were treated to a television with the sound turned down which was broadcasting First Night at the Proms. We thus had the interesting spectacle of seeing, not listening to, a concert and watching a miming soloist! This did not prove gripping enough to detain us from the rest of the stagger.

Back on Ashton Old Road, and into the **Albion**. Although a Whitbread house, it had a changing guest beer policy. On offer when we called were Chesters' Mild and Coach House Coachmans Bitter, both rated above average, along with Boddingtons (untried). There were several posters advertising Lees, but none could be found, though there was an unused handpump, so who knows. The Albion has two distinct drinking areas. We adjourned to the vault because there was an active karaoke in the lounge. The vault is a real pub games room, with darts, dominoes, pool and a genuine 1970s space invader machine!

Further along the road, **Hickeys** has an architecturally interesting exterior. The interior, however, has been knocked about a bit at the hands of Banks's, suffering a number of naff artefacts such as old bicycles and sewing machines. On the beer front, a solitary handpump was spied, offering Banks's. "Two pints of mild" we ordered, pointing at the pump. "Sorry we don't serve mild, we only have Banks's". Wouldn't it be wonderful to find bar staff who understand what they are serving. "OK, that will do". Unfortunately this was voted the worst pint of the evening. In fact the lipstick on one glass was rated better than the beer!

A brisk walk along the road brought us to the **Crown**, another two-room pub. The lounge is well appointed, the vault is basic and spartan in its furnishings. The ceiling of the vault must however be seen as it has the arse end of a fox sticking through it! If anyone can cast further illumination, the author would be interested. We sampled the Boddingtons Bitter, which was rated average, as the Tetleys Bitter had run out. A Boddington mild pump was spotted, but this is believed to be keg.

Next door but one is the **Grove**, a multi-doored, multi-roomed, multi-level pub. The interior is essentially one large room with a new extension having been grafted on without being out of place. It is not however a large barn. The interior is broken up into a myriad of different drinking areas by numerous half walls and different floor levels, resulting in a maze-like layout. Anybody who enjoys Dungeons & Dragons should try the quest of getting from the games room to the gents before their bladder gives out! Three real ales were on offer, Boddingtons Bitter (not tried), Wilsons Mild (above average) and Websters Green Label (pump clip turned round).

Our final port of call was the **Railway** on Mansshaw Road, and we were back where we started, a well-appointed, no-nonsense Holt's pub. This is a turn of the century pub which has a number of separate rooms. Special mention must be made of the (original?) etched glass still evident in the windows and doors. The cynical would say that this was because Holt's never spend any money on doing up their pubs. But then Holt's were never ones to change a winning formula just for the sake of it. There was a vibrant and lively atmosphere to the pub, which buzzed with the murmur of conversation, as there is no piped music. Unlike on the last Openshaw stagger, mild was both on sale and, judging by the number of pints sold, apparently very popular. The mild and bitter were both rated highly, and turned out to be the best beers of the night. Thus ended our survey of the pubs of Higher Openshaw. This is a personal reflection of a particular evening's drinking and cannot be taken as a definitive survey, only a snapshot of the pubs and their beers on one particular night. Rather than taking our word, why not repeat the stagger yourself. Better still why not join us on our next stagger (of Cheadle, on Friday 18th) and offer your own comments.

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Your Hosts Brian and Tracey
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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak, Macclesfield & Trafford & Hulme. Members of all branches are welcome at each other's events!

Dairy

September 98

- Sunday 6th** – Day out in Holmfirth. Bus no 429, Stand A, Oldham Street, City Centre. Departs 11.46
Monday 7th – Social: Friendship, Hyde Road, Gorton. Starts 9.00pm.
Thursday 10th – Monthly Branch meeting: Friendship, Hyde Road, Gorton. Starts 8.00pm.
Monday 14th – Social: Moor Top, Heaton Moor Road, Heaton Moor. Starts 9.00pm.
Friday 18th – Cheadle Stagger: meet 7.00pm Crown, 8.30 Royal Oak (Red Lion if Royal Oak still shut).
Monday 21st – Stockport Market Social: 9.00pm Sam's Bar; 10.00 Bakers Vaults.
Friday 25th-Sunday 27th – trip to Norfolk to present Cider of Festival award to Crones Cider and also hopefully visit Wolf and Iceni breweries. Details from John Clarke (477 1973) or John Hutchinson (434 7177).
Monday 28th – Social: Union, Higher Ardwick (off south end Ardwick Green). Starts 9.00pm.
Thursday 1st October – Pub of the Month presentation to Royal Oak, Wilmslow Road, Didsbury. **Note change of date.**
Friday 2nd – Trip to Beechams Bar and Brewery, St Helens. Minibus leaves Royal Oak Didsbury 6.45; Crown, Heaton Lane 7.00. Phone John Hutchinson on 434 7177 to book.
Monday 5th – Social: Wetherspoons, Cheadle Hulme. Starts 9.00pm.
High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:
Monday 7th – Committee Meeting: Crown, Market St, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.
Friday 11th – Trip to Sheffield Beer Festival. Details from Frank Wood on 01457 865426.

To Do Address Note Pad Diary CAMRA 93 Planner

September 98

- Monday 14th** – Monthly Branch Meeting: Q Bar, Stalybridge. Starts 8.30pm
Monday 5th October – Committee Meeting: Wrights Arms, Offerton Green. Starts 8.30pm.
Monday 19th – Monthly Branch Meeting: Oddfellows, Ashton-u-Lyne. Starts 8.00pm.
Apart from Macclesfield and Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have advised us of the following events:
Saturday 12th – Social evening, Swan, Holmes Chapel. Starts 8.00pm.
Tuesday 15th – Trip to Cains Brewery, Liverpool. Minibus leaves Mac 4.30pm; Congleton 4.45. £14
Monday 21st – Committee Meeting, Railway View, Macclesfield. Starts 8.00pm.
Saturday 26th – Stockport Pub Crawl. Starts 12 noon, pubs to be confirmed.
Monday 28th – Monthly Branch Meeting, Parkgate, Over Peover. Starts 8.00pm.
Saturday 3rd October – Social Evening, Swan with Two Nicks, Little Bollington. Starts 8.00pm.
Advance Notice – Saturday 7th November, weekend trip to Bateman's. Details of this and all socials from M Gammage 01260 270064.
Trafford and Hulme branch covers Chorlton, Hulme, much of the City centre and the Borough of Trafford. They have advised us of the following events but in addition branch members meet most Thursday nights. Phone Dave Ward on 980 1170 for details.
Thursday 24th – Castlefield new bars survey. Meet 8.00pm White Lion, Liverpool Road, also finishing in White Lion.
Thursday 8th October – Branch meeting: City Arms, Kennedy Street, City Centre.

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THE QUEENS ARMS

HONEY STREET, CHEETHAM



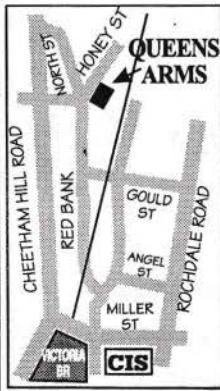
Real Ales
Traditional
Cider and
Czech
Budvar
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Dave and Sue Price invite you to try the fine range of beer, and traditional cider in

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Taylors Landlord, Phoenix Bantam and Constantly Changing Range of Beers
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Quiz Night (Free) on Tuesdays (Cash Prizes)
Food Every Day All Day
Open All Permitted Hours



Claire and Howard welcome all their friends and customers

Dry As a Bone Beer Festival First 2 Weeks in September

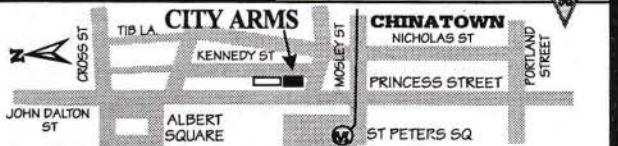
other beers include:
Everards Tiger & Equinox,
Tomintoul Stag and Black Gold,
Ushers Autumn Frenzy,
Broughton North Down,
Batemans Jollys Frolicking Reaper, York M'Lud

KENNEDY STREET THE CITY ARMS

8 HANDPUMPS
6 GUEST ALES

LUNCHTIME FOOD

11.30-2.30
and 11.30 - 2.00
Saturday



MANCHESTER MATTERS

As forecast last month, the Hogshead on Wilmslow Road in Didsbury has now opened, as part of a new development largely dedicated to "chain" eateries. First impressions are very favourable. It is what is rapidly becoming the standard Hogshead look, with timber, stone and rugs prominent, but an unusual feature is the ground-level cellar for cask beer, visible through a glass screen from the bar - an admirable way of highlighting the importance of cask beer to what the pub is about. There's a good range of beers, from Whitbread and other sources; most are on handpump, though there is also provision for some gravity dispense, and highlights on a mid-August preview night were Fullers Summer Ale and Caledonian 80/-. Inch's Stonehouse cider is on handpump, and there's a good range of Belgian beers. Food is important but not dominant - a decent menu with generous portions. Like all Hogsheads, it's not cheap but it will surely prosper in free-spending Didsbury. All in all, it looks like another winner for the chain.

Opposite at the Station, handpumped Banks's Mild has replaced Bateman's - I must admit I'm sorry to see the dark, rich Bateman's go, but it seems the regulars much prefer the Banks's, and that's what counts. In the City Centre, Horts Café Bar has been renamed Flares and is all keg; handpumped Websters Green Label has replaced Worthington Bitter at the Lord Nelson; and Oscars Wine Bar has been renamed Jonjo Greene's, and has Gray's Best Bitter from Mansfield Brewery as its sole handpumped beer. Early next month, the City Centre plays host to the First Manchester Food & Drink Festival, which may be of interest to readers. Running from 1st to 11th October, the Festival aims to promote and celebrate the City's pubs, bars and restaurants. While there's a preponderance of "foodie" events - cookery master classes, food crawls (three courses in three different restaurants), celebrity recipes - beer has not been forgotten, and the organisers have devised a "trail" of 18 excellent pubs in and around the City Centre. All 18 pubs will have a supply of cards for you to write your name and address to go into a free draw. Prizes are still being arranged, but I gather they may include a trip round a local brewery. The pubs comprise five freehouses (Beerhouse, Pot of Beer, Marble Arch, Queens Arms and Crescent), four Tetley pubs (Britons Protection, Circus Tavern, City Arms and Hare & Hounds), three Whitbread pubs (White Lion, High Street Hogshead, and Lass O'Gowrie), two Hydes' pubs (Grey Horse and Jolly Angler) and singletons from Holt's (Ape & Apple), Robinson's (Castle), Burtonwood (Bull's Head), and the former Wilsons estate (Peveril of the Peak). Splendid places all, and well worth rediscovering in the first week or so of October. Further information about the Festival can be had from Festival Director Phil Jones (no relation) on 0161 907 0034.



by Rhys Jones

Northumberland Memories

The Northumberland Hotel in Stretford is now 'closed, boarded and fire-damaged', the sorry condition which has been the fate of too many urban pubs in the Nineties. It wasn't always like that, though. Here Garth Prenderville recalls happier and busier times...

My memories of The Northumberland Hotel go back to my earliest confrontation with testosterone when the best place in South Manchester to find a woman was "The Irish Club" (as it was then known) on City Road. Many of the ladies were fresh off a farm out in the wilds of Connemara where the seeking of male company was regarded as vaguely sinful until she reached the age of 39. Once over here, some of them couldn't wait. And they were cheerful, friendly, and clever, and generally came complete with the sort of breasts normally associated with Vargas drawings.

There were drawbacks. You needed the stamina of a horse to keep up with the ferocious dancing, it helped if you had a degree because most of the Irish Club lady members did, and a few words of Irish helped as they sometimes lapsed back into it on forgetting that they had left the Auld Country. But the biggest snag of all was that the club was dry. It was run by a splinter group within the Catholic Church called the Legion of Mary and, as luck would have it, they are about the only Catholic organisation to take a Methodist view of alcohol.

So those of us who appreciated the club's finer qualities became well acquainted with the nearest pub - The Northumberland Hotel. It got that name because one of its three sides stood on Northumberland Road and most of the street in that part of the world are named after somewhere else (Chester, Shrewsbury, Stamford, etc., etc.). It was built in the back end of the last century, I was told by a former landlord, and was a residential hotel for a long time, serving sales reps and the like coming and going from Manchester. By the time I started going there in the late 1950s, it no longer officially functioned as a hotel (it did, but not officially) but it became my favourite pub.

Not just because of its proximity to the Irish Club but because it was the "tap" for the Empress Brewery over the road for a while and the beer was generally in good condition. Over the years it went down the pan and suffered a few catastrophic evolutions up to its closure in the mid-1990s. One such was one of those demented brewery revamps and renaming as "Sports" - which indicated a clientele of mono-adjectival lager enthusiasts and a pool table with all-over spots of dried blood.

Then I noticed one day as I passed that it was up for sale at a measly £75,000. It sold within a week or two and I watched to see what might happen next. Nothing did; it just stood there majestically boarded up. And on passing there in mid-July 1998 I noticed that it had been the victim of a fire. Any minute now it will go the same way as the Boar's Head, the Wellington and Sinclair's, Auntie's Bar, the St Vincent Hotel and lots of other Manchester pubs I used to like but which are now just memories. Still, Marks & Spencer's permitting, there's still the Beer House.

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APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(Opening Times 173)

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

ADDRESS

POSTCODE Date of Birth

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

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £8

Steve McCarley, 32 Howden Close, North Reddish, Stockport SK5 6XW

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.



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