

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

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OPENING TIMES



FREE

OCTOBER 1998

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Regional Rumpus

The ongoing convulsions in the brewing industry spread to the regional sector last month, with two brewers announcing major changes, Vaux following Morrells of Oxford out of Brewing.

Burton brewers Marston's sparked gossip in the financial markets by clinching a fundraising deal with Japanese merchant bank Nomura (who are in fact Britain's biggest pub owners with large parts of the former Grand Met estate). The deal involves Marston's 630-strong tenanted estate, and while there seems little chance that Nomura will actually buy them, the rental income from the pubs will be used as collateral for a fundraising exercise. Marston's would borrow money from Nomura, backed by the pubs' rental income, to fund expansion of the managed house branded chains such as Pitcher & Piano and the Union Taps' alehouses'. The danger is, of course, that the deal will involve the pubs' rents being jacked up to fund a larger loan cashflow. As the ill-fated Inntrepreneur saga showed, this would almost certainly end in tears with pubs closing and good tenants deserting the trade.

Vaux Quit Brewing

More serious, however, was the news from Vaux in Sunderland which announced that it is to quit brewing and concentrate on pub retailing. The group is to be split in two with the breweries, in Sheffield and Sunderland, plus 350 tenanted pubs being floated off as a package. The remaining pubs, both tenanted and managed, and the Swallow Hotels chain will remain within the slimmed down Vaux.

There are hopes that the breweries and pubs will be the subject of a management buy-out led by Vaux managing director Frank Nicholson who, with three other directors, is apparently putting a bid together. They hope to clinch the deal by the end of the year and would continue to brew such core brands as Vaux Samson and Ward's Bitter, presumably for their own pubs and in a supply deal with the Vaux. The danger is, however, that all beers could be produced in Sunderland, throwing doubt on the future of Ward's in Sheffield. This would be a grievous blow to that city which is already facing the closure of Stone's next year.

Vaux's presence in the Opening Times area is a recent one and came about through the purchase of a block of pubs from the old Wilson's estate. Some will doubtless be among those to be sold, although in Stockport only the Thatched House on Churchgate and the Swan on Shaw Heath are earmarked for sale, news which has

come as both a surprise and a blow to the licensees concerned. This is particularly so at the Thatched, where a planned refurbishment has been out on hold until the situation is clarified. Vaux has asked for offers on the package by the end of this month.

Morrells Closure Confirmed

Confirmation of the closure of the Oxford brewery of Morrells came with the information of a surprise buyer for the company. The bids of two companies interested in keeping the brewery open were rejected out of hand by Ken Hodgsons team.

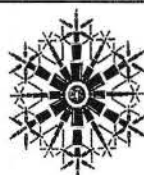
As seems inevitable, only the pub estate is now wanted. The existing (newish) team that was hired by the trusts who controlled the shares claim that the city-centre site was uneconomic, and that keeping the brewery open would cost some million pounds per year. The new owners - to whom CAMRA are submitting a petition against the move, are said to have given this option zero consideration in making their bid. A new pub company is effectively being set up by the American based former owner of the Magic Pub Co, though he denies any hands-on role in the management of the new company. If past track record is anything to go by, the pubs will be winnowed down to the most profitable (the less profitable offered for conversion to bijou cottages or similar), and the rump fattened up for a quick onward sale.

But Castle Eden Saved?

It's not all gloom in the North East, though, as Whitbread's Castle Eden Brewery looks set for a new life under the ownership of a consortium of local businessmen and the deal thrashed out between Whitbread and the consortium is likely to see the resurrection of the brewery's old name, Nimmo's. The brewery was due to close on 2 October and discussions have been drawn out over a viable package of beer brands to go with it. These include the well-known Castle Eden Ale, a familiar site on the bars of many Whitbread-owned and supplied pubs. A surprise addition to the portfolio will be the range of beers from the Butterknowle micro-brewery. That brewery's equipment will be moved into Castle Eden as a pilot plant and will continue to produce the award-winning Butterknowle range of beers. The long-term strategy for the consortium is said to be as a "quality brewer rather than a quantity brewer." There are also plans to develop a hotel on part of the site which is in a picturesque part of the County Durham countryside.

In OCTOBER'S OPENING TIMES

Editors View	2	Brewery News	12
Pub of the Month	3	Beer Monster	15
Letters	5	Fistful of Arrows	16
Stagger	6	We Brew Ale Too	18
GOOD BEER GUIDE ..	8	Tameside Travels	19
Winters Open	10	Pub News	20
Curmudgeon	11	CAMRA Calling	22
Five Years Ago	11	Manchester Matters ...	23

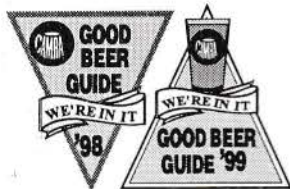


Winter Festival

CAMRA's National Winter Ale championships are coming to Manchester! The relaunched Manchester Beer Festival will also host this prestigious event which has previously been held in Glasgow. The winter equivalent of the Champion Beer of Britain contest held annually at the Great British Beer Festival, this is the chance for stouts, porters, old ales and barley wines to take centre stage. There will be plenty of other beers, both UK and overseas, plus cider and perry, for visitors to enjoy, too. Something for everyone in fact. More details next month, but just make a diary note now of these very important details: Where - Upper Campfield Market, Castlefield (it's just off Deansgate). When - January 21-23 1999.

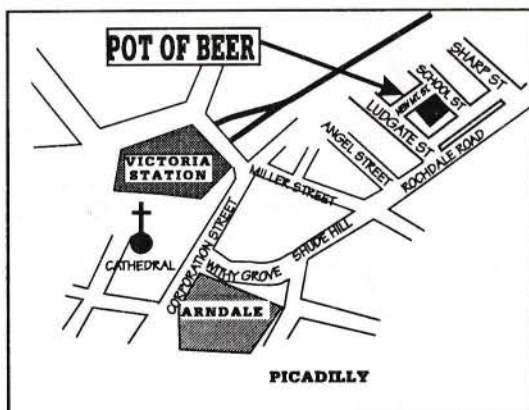
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Twelve months ago, the lead story in Opening Times was headed 'Black September' as we recounted the planned closure of numerous breweries by the national combines. A year on and the contagion has spread to the regional sector. A management buyout may save one of the Vaux breweries but almost certainly not both. Morrells is doomed to closure, brought down, incredibly, by the greed of family trustees rather than outside pressures. As I write this news breaks that Ushers Brewery in Wiltshire is once again expecting a take-over bid. And while Marstons remains as a brewer and pub operator, its use of tenants rents as security for loan capital bodes ill for those more marginal pubs in its estate. How do we respond to this turmoil? Opinions differ, as readers of OT will be well aware. Some say that the future remains with the micros, while other say that the regional brewers must also be supported. I believe the answer is a bit of both really. Our guideline should be to support all those companies brewing good, quality traditional ales and all those who run good pubs in which to sell it. That must be the duty of every lover of our beer and public house tradition. It will certainly be the policy of this magazine.

Of course, the national operators are now almost out of the picture here. Many of their best beers are brewed elsewhere under contract and their commitment to traditional beer as widely available commodity must be in doubt. Bass seem to be at the forefront of this trend. For the second month running we report a large number of cask ale losses in Tameside, many courtesy of Bass, while none of their pubs in Wythenshawe sell the real thing. Indeed, the number of Bass owned or supplied pubs in the Opening Times area selling cask beer is rapidly approaching zero. Certainly they will soon be down to single figures. Even those that do sell cask beer usually only manage to offer a solitary handpump dispensing Worthington Bitter, a beer so undemanding I have heard it described as a beer for people who don't really drink beer. But confront Bass with all of this and they will simply say they are responding to market forces and customer wishes. Are we really to believe that there is something oddly unique about the people who drink in Bass pubs? That they, alone amongst the British beer-drinking public, have completely turned away from cask beer? I don't think so, somehow.

Thank goodness for Holt's whose commitment to cask beer has never wavered. Winter's in Stockport is a real asset to the town and news that Holt's are also to buy the Sun & Castle is the icing on the cake. It seems that Holt's only discovered that this pub was for sale through the pages of OT. So, not only do we bring you up to the minute news and lively comment, we bring you Holt's pubs as well!

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 preferably 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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Pub Of The Month OCTOBER 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



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for October is the Blossoms, Stockport Road, Heaviley.

A landmark building, on the corner of Bramhall Lane and the busy A6, the Blossoms has for many years been a favourite with local drinkers and for much of the time was run by the redoubtable Barbara Mounkley and her sons. During that time the Blossoms won a number of CAMRA awards and when Barbara left the pub 18 or so months ago she was clearly going to be a hard act to follow. Luckily, in Neville and Margaret the pub is not only in safe hands but is arguably as good today as it has ever been. This is down to the hard work that Neville and Margaret, ably assisted by son Stephen, have put in to make the place a success. Not one of the town's most flamboyant hosts, Neville's quiet hard work, and 30-year experience in the licensed trade – although, incredibly, this is his first pub – shine through in the immaculate condition of not only the pub, itself, but more importantly, in the superb beer sold. The pub retains much of its Victorian layout and many original features, with the back smoke room one of the finest pub rooms in town. It is however in the beer where the Blossoms really comes into its own. Neville's career in the trade includes 25 years as a barcellarman and you'll be hard pressed to find a finer pint of Robinson's Hatters Mild or Best Bitter anywhere. These will be joined by Old Tom from October and who knows, it may be available in time for our presentation night on Thursday, October 22nd. What is certain is that a great night is in prospect when this excellent pub receives this richly deserved award.

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

Contributors to Opening Times Issue 174: John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Rhys Jones, Peter Edwardson, The Beer Monster™, Mark McConachie, Tim Jones, John Hutchinson, Mark Jones, Jim Flynn, Pete Brown, Mark Hall, Brian Carey, Dave Nunn

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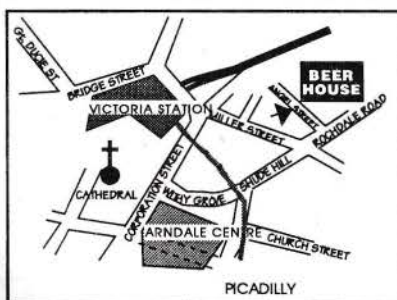


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OPENING TIMES

LETTERS

From: John Tune (via e-mail)

I regularly call in the Porters Ale House in Macclesfield, I first tried it shortly after it was mentioned in Opening Times. It is Greenalls version of the ale house theme started by Boddingtons Pub Co.

Greenalls allow their tenants to obtain guest from one of four lists (ranging from restrictive to extremely restrictive), each beer being available for only a short period of time. Once a tenant has chosen which list to choose from they can only choose from that list for the duration of the list. The difference at Porters Ale Houses is that they can order from any list at any time. This still means that only a small number of guest beers are available at any one time, and they will be the same as those in nearby Greenalls houses.

From Dave Nunn (via e-mail)

The Beer Monster must be the first person ever to have described me as conservative and fuddy-duddy or worse cast me in the same mould as Dave Goodwin. I did not wish, in my letter (July 1998), to declare myself anti-micro. On the contrary I enjoy numerous micro brewers products, although some, who shall remain nameless, are frankly not worth walking to the bar for. I rather want to make the point that given that brewers of the ilk of Robinsons produce rather more beer than the sum total of the micros. It is for this reason that we should make every effort to promote these companys' products, where quality is good, as this is where the majority of people will be exposed to real ale. Otherwise CAMRA is in danger of being exposed to ridicule as an insignificant specialist interest group not a mass consumer lobby group. As I have said many times before, we in this area don't appreciate how lucky we are with a number of sizable regional brewers operating in the area. It is their presence that preserves that quality and value for money we enjoy. I had the misfortune to spend some years in a relative (Whitbread 75% pubs) beer desert. I think we owe it to those people who live in such places to preserve what we have. Exclusive support for 1% of the industry will not achieve that.

The Beer Monster Replies (via e-mail): Whilst I never really thought that Dave despised ALL micros, I still think he is banging the wrong drum. Some micros now supply 30-40 houses with the bulk or all those pubs' real ale. This would make the largest micros more than 5% of Robinson's size - and there are rather more than 20 of them. The industry consistently underestimates the proportion of micro ale produced and sold (one supposedly 'expert' industry analyst told me that they count all ales consumed in Hogsheads as Whitbread products - as if!). I do accept that the remaining regionals are the best hope for the future, and in its general campaigns CAMRA should promote all real ales. The point I was making was that in a general sense whenever the city whiz-fortysomethings decide to close a regional - they will - Morrells and Vaux being just the two most recent - and there isn't a blind thing CAMRA can do except whinge. If CAMRA wants to save the larger breweries, it should start by educating the city analysts who represent the brewing sector. There is a shameful level of ignorance amongst them about product, demand, and just about anything except last years balance sheets. Many think Caffreys is a real ale. (I know, I asked some!) Local branches though, and beer festivals and word of mouth are the micros life-line. Here the individual member can and should make a difference. Criticise poor quality by all means, but proselytise the good. Those micros with five or thirty houses of their own or supplied ARE the regionals of the future. In this issue, Curmudgeon makes the point that half of all beer consumed in the US is ghastly, gassy, tasteless Budweiser, but that there are also more breweries

there now than in Germany. (Five years ago there were 20% of the current number). If that is the future, and they continue to grow, Bud's market share will be inexorably eaten away. The little people will triumph and some will grow much bigger (it is indeed happening already). It is a future that I for one would willingly embrace here if the suicidal tendencies of regionals continues. As it will.

From David Wragg (via e-mail)

Dear Sir,

The craft of the brewer is even more subtle than you suggest in the article "How beer is brewed" (September). Most of the sugars required for beer production are generated by the action of enzymes in malt on malt starch during the MASHING process rather than during malting. One of the main purposes of malting is to produce the enzymes ready for this later stage. This may seem like nit-picking, but it does emphasise the complexity of the mashing process. By adjustment of the mash conditions the brewer can "fine tune" the balance of sugars and further influence the character of the end product.

From D Lahan, Licensee of the Travellers Call, Great Moor:
With reference to your comments in your August issue of Opening Times.

The Stagger on page 8 mentions the Travellers call; I would like to inform you that I and not the brewery, paid as part of the ingoing, for the 'fixtures and fittings', for all the handbells and other brassware. There has been a difference of opinion with quite a lot of my customers as to the ownership of the brassware, and I have some comments on this issue.

At the time when I took over the Travellers Call, some ten years ago, the then licensee was going to auction all the brassware and donate all the proceeds to the RNLI, but he was persuaded by myself and the brewery not to do so as it would damage the image of the pub. But in doing so the brewery said that they would become part of the inventory, so I not only paid for them but also became the owner.

Could you please find space in your next issue to amend your previous comments in the August issue, as this would go a long way to satisfy myself and my customers.

(This letter arrived too late for our September issue. We are of course happy to set the record straight. - ed.)

From Andrew Maskrey-Iveson

In your September issue, a book revue of the Good Beer Guide to Belgium states that "technically it is the only comprehensive book about the breweries and beers of the Benelux countries". I can only assume your anonymous reviewer (er...yes, sorry about that. ed), has never come across Peter Crombecq's Bier Jaarboek the last issue of which was published in 1995 to cover 1995-6. This is a book of nearly 500 pages and lists not only the breweries beers and significant beer houses of the Benelux countries but the beers no longer produced, the breweries no longer brewing and or taken over. The tasting notes are the most comprehensive I have seen in any beer book. Sadly Peter Crombecq's wife has succumbed to serious illness and he has been unable to update the book in the last few years. I look forward to purchasing Webb's new book as I am sure it will be a useful adjunct to what I believe is the finest beer guide I have read. As yet Waterstones in Manchester do not believe that Mr Webb's book exists, could you print the ISBN number to ease their lengthy searches?

(I checked the CAMRA Web site and it's not even mentioned there....so we will try to get the ISBN next month [I had the same problem in Waterstones!] as to Peter Crombecq's book, we stand corrected... It certainly sounds good, though my own all-time favourite is Stefan Mack's neue Frankische Brauereikarte (2nd ed), which, heavily annotated as mine now is, remains my bible for Northern Bavaria. ed)

STAGGER

with Rhys Jones

A showery August evening found us exploring the pubs of Manchester's university quarter. Strange, you may think, to do this in the vacation – but what we lost in not seeing the pubs at their most typical, we gained in ease of access.

We started in the **Hogshead** – but since Manchester now has five of these, I should specify that it was the one near the MRI. A recent opening, this has gained a ready market and was well supported tonight. It's on two levels, the upper being entirely non-smoking. A wide range of beers was available on handpump, though the gravity dispense was not in use tonight. Cain's Bitter was no great shakes, but a lager-style beer from Dent called Rambrau was considerably better, Mitchell's Bitter better still, and I fared best of all with some quite splendid Pitchfork from RCH Brewery. This had in fact won its class in CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain competition only two weeks before.

I also chose well by avoiding the mild in our next call, the **Grafton**. This was quite frankly below par – a great shame, as this Holt's pub seems to be very well run nowadays. The bitter, though, was a lot better. The pub itself, a replacement for the old Grafton which had gently crumbled away over the years, is a modern two-room design, not chock full of character but it works well. It was enjoying a perfectly respectable early evening trade on this occasion.

Only a few doors down is the **Bowling Green**, one of the "old" Greenalls pubs (from before the Boddingtons take-over). Greenalls Festival and Tetley Bitter were on offer – there's usually Greenalls Bitter also, but not tonight. Neither could be rated any better than average, though at least in the case of the Festival, this says more about the intrinsic (lack of) quality of the beer than about the licensee's cellar skills. It's a two-room pub in which we chose the

lounge, which was dimly lit but comfortable. As ever at this pub, food menus were prominently displayed, both outside and above the bar, so I take it that it is a popular student eating place.

Next call was **Jabez Clegg**, named after a famous if fictional Mancunian and often described as the ultimate student pub. It was still busy despite vacation time, with a very noisy game of table football in progress. An ambitious conversion of a church hall, the pub clearly models itself on the Firkin chain, and caters well for its intended clientele. Handpumped beers were Worthington Bitter, which nobody tried, and Robinson's Best Bitter, on which opinions ranged from dreadful to well above average. We were served from two different pumps, so there may have been a problem confined to one of them. A range of flavoured vodkas was also advertised, with cucumber perhaps the most unlikely option.

From here, we walked past **McNallys** (keg), past **Barney McGrews** (keg, and mainly nightclub anyway), past the **Footage & Firkin** (but we'd be back), past **Scruffy Murphy's** (keg), to make our 8.30 rendezvous at **Sand Bar**. The usual relaxed atmosphere prevailed at this distinctive and enterprising little café bar, formed from a brace of Georgian town houses. Admirably, wall space had been afforded to a local photographer for an exhibition of photographs of Hulme residents, though admittedly it was a little busy to study these with close attention. Sand Bar is known for its range of German and Belgian beers, on draught and in bottle, and the draught DAB beer from Dortmund was pronounced excellent. British cask ales were two from Phoenix (Bantam and Flash Flood) and Wharfedale from Goose Eye. Bantam didn't greatly impress (more like an old broiler, said one wag), but the other two were a lot better, particularly the Wharfedale.

Having made our rendezvous, we now had to go back to the **Footage & Firkin**. We were greeted by the remarkable sight of an almost empty pub, when all around seemed thriving. Surely it can't have been Barnsley vs Stockport on the big-screen television that was putting them off? Personally, I pitied any County fans looking for a decent pub in Barnsley – I found one once, but it took some doing). The four beers regularly brewed on site were available; we stuck to the weaker two, Flicks and Footage, both of which were

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THIRSTY MOON
Light brown bitter. Strong hop aroma. 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
Darker beer. Malty fruity aroma. Strongly malty and fruity flavour. A slight sweetness yields to a dry finish.

above average without being remarkable. Short measure was commonplace, and the halves were plastic!

Across now to the **Salutation**, an old town local which has adapted well to the massive changes in its environment through university and other developments. A shame, though, that the grassland opposite, a grand place for outside drinking on a fine day, has been replaced by student residences. While the pub's layout has changed considerably over the years, the corner door and moulded ceiling remain as notable features. The result is a great traditional pub atmosphere. Handpumped beers were Tetley Bitter, Morlands Old Speckled Hen, and Moorhouses' Peter Yates Bitter (there was also a Marston's Pedigree pump, but what issued from it appeared to be Speckled Hen). Again, the beers were above average without being anything special, but the Peter Yates (4.1% ABV) was certainly good value at £1.30.

Not far away is **Clynes Wine Bar** – and anywhere less like a wine bar you couldn't imagine! Once a wonderfully basic Wilson's pub, it's been owned by Vaux for some years and was recently refurbished to a one-room layout, at which point real ale was reintroduced in the form of handpumped Vaux Bitter. Though a radical alteration, the refurb is a good down-to-earth job to suit the pub's character, and suggests that Vaux, unlike a good many pub operators, don't jut have a single lounge-orientated pattern-book. Sadly, tonight their efforts were not rewarded by an excess of customers, and the overbearing presence of golf on satellite television (which hardly anybody seemed to be watching) rather detracted from the atmosphere. Yet again, the beer was above average but not greatly so, though in fairness it should be said that this sweetish north-eastern brew was perhaps undervalued by palates more attuned to the hop. Just time for one more now, and it was the **Church** round the corner on Cambridge Street. A Lees house, this is a plain and simple inner-city pub, and like Clynes, was not enjoying a huge clientele this evening. It's a friendly place, though, and it didn't take long for us to appreciate its unassuming charm. No mild, but the handpumped bitter was a revelation after some of the evening's earlier offerings – crisp, hoppy, and refreshing, it was the best of the night with the possible exception of the Pitchfork in the Hogshead. A splendid note to end on – I needed a second pint before setting off to find my bus!

As ever, what I've written is no more than the way a group of us thought things were on the night. The district has a wide variety of pubs, and most of them are worth at least a glance, so you'd be well advised to try them and judge for yourself.

Crown Safe!

The Crown, Heaton Lane is safe. New owners Alehouse Pub Company have taken on board the message that guest beers are vital to the pub's survival and have given the green light for them to continue.

It really will be business as usual. For apart from the range of Whitbread products the pub currently stocks, all other guest beers will be sourced completely independently, as now. On this basis, managers Steve and Lorraine James are to take on the pub as tenants. The paperwork has in fact already been signed and they take on the tenancy on 15th of this month. Naturally, celebrations to mark this are planned!

The pub is also to receive a welcome make-over. The exterior and structural work will be undertaken by Alehouse while internal redecorations will be handled by Steve and Lorraine. Plans for this were already well advanced as we went to press.

This is the outcome that everyone connected with the pub had hoped for but dare not believe would actually come to pass. Alehouse Pub company are to be congratulated for their imagination and Steve and Lorraine for their tenacity in fighting to maintain the choice of beers that has made the pub's name. A welcome piece of good news in the descending gloom.

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

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7



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HYDES ANVIL ALES

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8

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Good Beer Guide '99

26th Thumping Great Edition

The 26th Good Beer Guide is launched by CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, on 13th October and features a complete redesign by new editor John Preece. It's now even easier to use, easy to read and great to look at. The text in particular is very easy to read and the whole book is even more visually attractive with many photos and brewery logos spread throughout.

At 576 pages this is the biggest ever edition of CAMRA's market-leading pub guide which has now sold over one million copies since it first appeared in 1974. While the Guide lists over 600 breweries and pub chains and 2000 different beers, it is the 5000 pubs that remain the heart of the guide. These are chosen by local members of the Campaign who know their local areas: there are no anonymous once-a-year inspectors involved. A pub has to be good all year round to get into the Guide. Easily arranged county by county, fully mapped and with all facilities highlighted, from accommodation and meals to family rooms, no-smoking areas and wheelchair access, this is a book for every pub lover.

There's plenty to read, too, with an editorial section with a dozen short features between one and three pages long. These include:

- ☆ An introduction by CAMRA's Head of Campaigns on the year's events, including the failure of the short measure bill and the disparity of duty rates.
- ☆ A complete list of historic pubs on the CAMRA Inventory of little altered or heritage pubs: a county-by-county list, including complete addresses for those who wish to seek out these rare gems.
- ☆ Pub Design Awards. A feature on the very successful Pub Design Awards organised by CAMRA in conjunction with English Heritage.
- ☆ Small brewers: how tough life is for small brewers, how they battle on and why they must be supported.
- ☆ Who owns our pubs? How the industry dictates what you drink.
- ☆ PLUS user-friendly articles on types of beer and the basics of brewing.

With tasting notes and a beer index to help you find a favourite pint, the Good Beer guide is the book no beer lover can afford to be without and is ideal for holidays, business trips, days in the country or nights on the town.

Order your copy now by simply sending a cheque for £10.99 (post and packing is free), made payable to CAMRA Stockport & South Manchester Branch, to Jim Flynn, 66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, SK4 5EG.

Good Beer Guide

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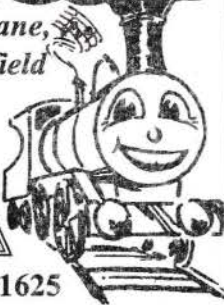
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HAVE YOU BEEN YET?

Winter's At Last

After a gestation period longer than an elephant, Holt's finally opened Winter's to the public on October 1st. The new Underbank pub in the Manchester brewer's first outlet in Stockport town centre, although they have long been represented in the Borough with pubs such as the two Griffins, in Heaton Mersey and Heald Green and the Cheadle Hulme. Winter's itself has had a somewhat chequered history. For much of its life the building was occupied by a jewellery shop later converted into 'Winter's Wine Bar' which seemed to open and close on a regular basis and fitfully sold cask Tetleys Bitter. Hopefully everything is now on a much more permanent footing.



The pub, occupying a listed building, still shows much evidence of its original incarnation, including large plate-glass shop-style windows and the famous automaton clock on the upper wall, now fully working again after a £6,000 restoration.

Inside, the layout is in what has almost become Holt's trademark for new pubs with two floors furnished in traditional style. Readers familiar with the City Centre's Ape & Apple and Old Monkey will immediately recognise the format with dark wood, tiled floors and plush furnishings in abundance. The bar, built by Holt's own barfitters, is to the right of the ground floor and is similarly kitted out in traditional style with lots of dark wood, etched glass and brass fittings. Handpumps dispense Holt's Mild and Bitter at the bargain prices of £1.03 and £1.09 respectively.

The upper floor is accessed by a central stairway opposite the main entrance and leads to a plusher, upper floor, complete with its own small corner bar. The highlight here, though, is a glass case displaying the workings of the clock. Watching the activity as the clock strikes is fascinating.

Food is served from lunchtime onward. The whole show is run by managers Laura and Brian Tomkinson who arrive from the Starkey Arms in Heywood. All in all Winter's is a definite asset to the local drinking scene and should be a runaway success.

And if that wasn't enough, Holt's look set to increase their town centre representation this month with the purchase of the Sun & Castle on Middle Hillgate. Although the former Tetley pub has been closed for some time and needs some remedial work on the interior, hopes are high that it will open early in the New Year.

CURMUDGEON



Broad or Narrow Minded?

Following what seems to be a growing trend, a pub near me has recently stopped selling real ale. It's a fairly ordinary pub, and the beer was only a national brand, so it's easy to understand why some people should think it isn't much of a loss. The idea that a lot of pubs are naturally "keg" is a tempting one, but it's a negative and defeatist view.

There will always be some outlets where real ale isn't viable, either because they appeal exclusively to very young drinkers, or because they don't have the required cellar facilities. But there's no reason why the majority of pubs can't keep and sell real ale if they go about it the right way. It's quite simple, really - keep it in good condition, always offer it if the customer doesn't express a preference, and don't crowd the bar with a forest of competing keg beers. The decline in the number of pubs selling real ale has little to do with falling demand. It's a question of interest and commitment - some licensees and pub operators have it, a growing number, regrettably, don't.

One of the most patronising and offensive expressions of this idea is that keg beer is quite good enough for people in working-class areas, who wouldn't appreciate real ale anyway. This is a view clearly held by pub operators in Wythenshawe, where a recent survey showed the vast majority of pubs to be keg-only. Yet the success of Holt's pubs in particular clearly gives the lie to this, and there are plenty of examples across Greater Manchester of pubs - generally belonging to the independent brewers - where real ale sells in large volumes to an appreciative clientele, in locations where the national chains would have written it off long ago.

The view has been expressed in these pages that pubs selling only national real ale brands such as Tetley's or Theakstons, or even the standard products of the regional brewers, aren't really worth bothering with. CAMRA should concentrate its efforts on promoting the beers produced by micro-breweries and the multi-beer free houses that sell them. This is understandable as an approach to be followed by individuals, but as a general policy it becomes elitist and ultimately self-defeating. Most people who develop a taste for real ale start drinking it because it happens to be available in a pub they go in. Once they have grown to like it, they may well start making the effort to seek out different varieties, and go to pubs where it is a specialism. But if you've never tried it in the first place, you're not going to go out of your way to find it.

If decent beer ends up being confined to a small network of specialist outlets, in a few years' time it won't be in most of those either, as they will be denied the lifeblood of new recruits. If real ale is to survive in the long term, it must retain a strong presence in the general run of pubs. CAMRA should be campaigning for real ale to be available everywhere it can be sold in sufficient volumes to ensure quality. That isn't every single pub, but it's far more than just a handful of niche outlets, it's three quarters or more of all the pubs in the country. The USA now has more breweries than any other country on earth. Yet if you go into a bar at random, you're very unlikely to find anything worth drinking, and half the entire beer market is accounted for by Budweiser, the blandest beer known to man. If we're happy just to contemplate our navels, that is how the UK will be thirty years from now. If we're lucky...

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison **OCTOBER '93**

It looked as if drinkers were at long last going to find out exactly what went into their pints - the move towards ingredient listing was being discussed by European Community minister, and looked likely to be implemented if agreement was reached. The UK Agricultural Minister, Gillian Shepherd, was in favour of the move as part of a plan for cutting down on red tape in the food law sector. There was also a move afoot to abandon the requirement for beer to be sold in third, half or one pint measures, and to allow pubs to adopt metric measures if they so wished. The possibilities for chaos and confusion seemed endless. But now, five years on, ingredient listing and metric "pints" are still in the future. The 2000 Olympics had been awarded to Sydney, rather than Manchester, and the Editor, although disappointed by the announcement, thought that at least the threat to the pubs to the rear of Piccadilly Station had been lifted. In fact, a proposed development of student accommodation nearby could mean that the pubs in question could look forward to a major revival in their fortunes. On another page of Opening Times, 'Curmudgeon' expressed a personal (or even a politically incorrect) opinion that perhaps he wasn't the only person in Greater Manchester to breathe a sigh of relief on hearing the Olympics had gone to Sydney.

Manchester's newest pub, the Joshua Brooks, in the premises of a former print works on the corner of Princess Street and Charles Street, had opened for business. The style was very similar to its sister pub Jabez Clegg, near the University, and like Jabez, seemed aimed fair and square at the student market. The point was made however, that at £1.40 for Boddies, and £1.70 for Pedigree, the students' grants wouldn't go far. (In last month's mention of Joshua Brooks, he was referred to as Reverend - must have been thinking of Reverend James, from Crown Buckley.)

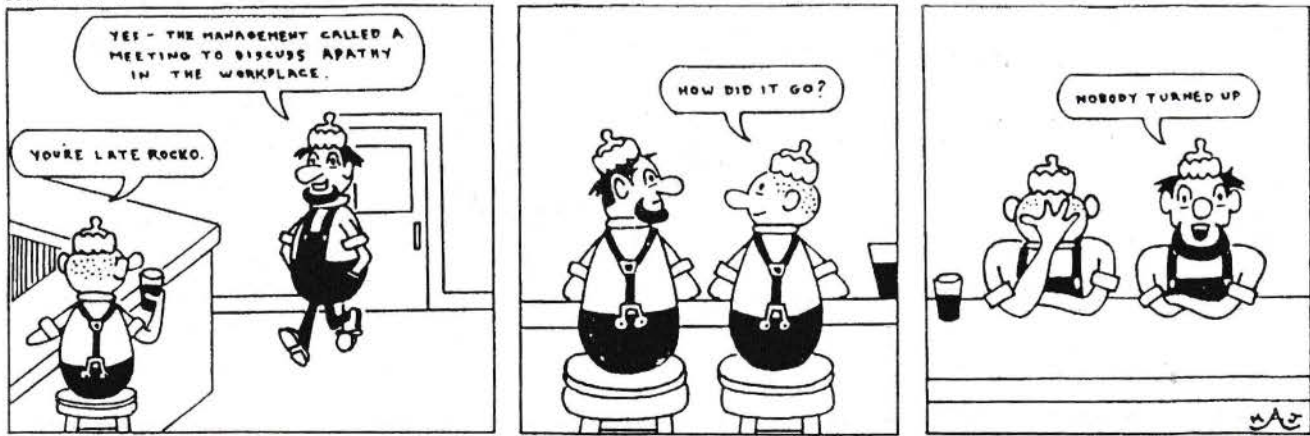
Just across the Medlock from the back of Joshua Brooks is the Lass O'Gowrie, and part of its exterior refurbishment had been the appearance of a plaque on the end wall. This marked what was claimed to be the site of Manchester's oldest Pissotiere - last used, it would seem, in 1896. There was said to be a better view available from the balcony of Joshua Brooks.

Finally, there was an item headed "Calling All Students". It politely questioned the motives of the Stella and Strongbow drinkers, and drew attention to what Manchester had to offer the real ale tipplers...around six firmly independent breweries...the "Lass" and "Flea" brewpubs with their unique beers...beers from all over the country at freehouses like the Marble Arch, Beer House and Crescent. Then local beer festivals - UMIST, "Flea", Ashton, Bolton, Bury, Oldham and Stockport. Let's hope the students found time to study as well.

11

MITCH

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Stockport CAMRA Pub of the Month April 1997

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Micro-brewers continue to open at a fast and furious rate and the latest venture is close to home, in Macclesfield.

The Bolliin Brewing Company will be the town's first brewery since the closure of the old Smith's plant in the early sixties and is being set up by Dave Stebbings and Hugh Thompson. Brand new equipment is being installed in a unit on the industrial estate at Higher Hurdsfield, and after a careful period of trial brewing, the first beer should be on sale at the end of this month. While it is early days yet, this could be a welcome addition to the choice of Cheshire-brewed beers available in the local free trade. Dave and Hugh are treading cautiously, with a 5-barrel capacity kit, but have plenty of scope for expansion.

They will be targeting those licensees able to take guest beers, but will also be looking at supplying casks or polypins for the barbecue trade, and are interested in making contact with sports clubs and the like who may be able to sell real ale in modest quantities. Potential customers should contact Macclesfield CAMRA member George Symes on 01565 653096 for more details.

The first beer will be a 4.2 per cent session bitter which will have an 'earthy natural name'. With luck Opening Times will include a full review when the brewery is up and running.

Elsewhere, the established brewers are brewing a whole raft of seasonal ales, particularly the Phoenix Brewery in Heywood. Spooky Brew (4.7 per cent) and Firecracker (4.7) are out now along with Whirlwind (4.1), Spinning Jenny (4.3) and Uncle Fester (4.4). At the end of this month look out for Rip-Rap at 4.1 per cent. Whew! Somewhat further afield, Wales looks likely to gain two more micro-breweries, at opposite ends of the country. In Anglesey, CAMRA member Martin Lewis hopes to set up Bragdy Ynys Mon (Anglesey Brewery) later this year or early next. Meanwhile in

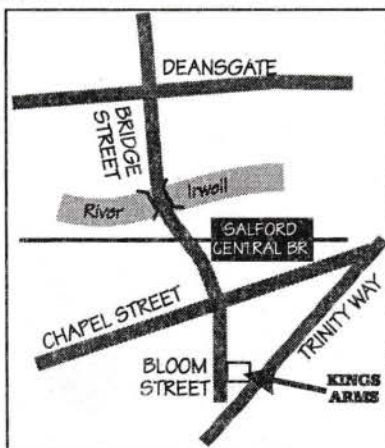
12



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8 REAL ALES

Foreign Bottled Beers

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Greater Manchester Beer

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including **Lees'** Ruff Yed
& Moonraker, **Phoenix**
Old Oak, **Hydes** Berry
Good Ale, **Robinsons**,
Bank Top and others

Gwent, the Spring Cottage Brewery of Upper Cwmbran is rather more advanced, having already released trial brews to a small number of local pubs. Martin's Bitter (no relation to Anglesey's Martin Lewis) was brewed to an ABV of 3.6 per cent for the trial brews, but is due to be uprated to 4.2 per cent for its full commercial release expected soon. On the downside, though, north Welsh brewer Bragdy Dyffryn Clwyd of Denbigh has stunned the local trade by closing and selling off its entire production plant to rivals Flannery's of Aberystwyth. The company has taken on three Dyffryn Clwyd beers (favourites at Stockport Beer Festival and in the local trade), Dr Johnson's Draught, Drovers Bitter and Four Thumbs, which the Denbigh firm will continue to sell to its customers in the north. Lastly, mention just has to be made of a new brewery in far away Reading. Installed at the Horse & Jockey pub, licensee Pete Taylor aims to brew two beers a month with suggestive titles in aid of local charities. He has named his enterprise the Innuendo Brewery and advertises the ales as "good taste beer from a bad taste brewery"!

Robinson's 'Real' Smooth

Robinson's are the latest brewer to introduce a 'smooth' version of some of their beers, Best Bitter, Old Stockport and Hartleys XB, and rather strange animals they are, too.

This is down to the fact that the beers are also cask-conditioned and are 'nitrogenated' in the pub cellar, rather than being processed in the brewery as is usually the case with this type of beer. A typical arrangement would be for the barrel to be fitted with a double-headed tap. The beer line from one would go the handpump on the bar in the usual way. The other line will go through a device fitted to the cellar wall (memorably described by director Dennis Robinson as a 'widget in the pub') which injects nitrogen into the beer to give the 'smooth' effect, and from there to the bar to be dispensed via a fancy new pillar tap.

Robinson's make the point that they remain a cask beer brewery and, while keen to satisfy a demand from some of their pubs for 'smooth' beers, they did not wish to compromise their cask ale credentials. Another perceived danger was that cask ale quality could be compromised in those pubs which experienced a major switch from cask ale to 'smooth'. In many ways this is a rather neat solution, with both beers coming from the same container cask turnover will not be harmed and indeed, if trials so far are correct, may even increase turnover thus improving cask ale quality. Reports so far are cask turnover increasing by 9-15 per cent with trade coming from lager, Guinness and cider.

There are however, potential drawbacks for both licensees and drinkers alike. Licenses will have to pay for the 'nitrogenator' and unless it is going to positively build trade, rather than just shift it around different products, it is hardly likely to be cost effective. And of course, the ease of handling that goes with normal keg smooth beers is absent, the product remains cask conditioned and needs proper cellaring. This is where the drinker comes in. Many smooth drinkers are used to a consistent, bland product. These beers won't be bland (although the nitrogen does round off some of the flavour edges, they retain many of the characteristics of their cask equivalents) and their condition will depend on the beer keeping skills of the licensee.

But most important is the question of price. These beers will sell at a premium, typically five to ten pence a pint more than their traditional equivalents. However, it will not take drinkers long to realise that they are being asked to pay a higher price for a beer that comes out of the same cask as the cheaper real ale but which has essentially had fresh air injected into it. Oh, and with a nice frothy top to guarantee a good short measure, to boot.

Another thing that needs to be made clear, though, is that despite its 'cask conditioned' tag, Robinson's 'Real Smooth' is not real ale. Nor are either the product or its means of delivery ever going to get a CAMRA seal of approval (despite the best attempts of the company that makes the device to wheedle some positive comments out of your editor). Having said that, if a brewery feels it has to introduce smooth beers then this must be a preferable way to do it, guaranteeing as it does cask ale volumes and quality. It's an intriguing experiment and OT will be watching its results with interest.

Hydes In The Black

Local brewers Hydes' Anvil have reported a record turnover for the year to March, topping £10 million for the first time in the company's 135 year history.

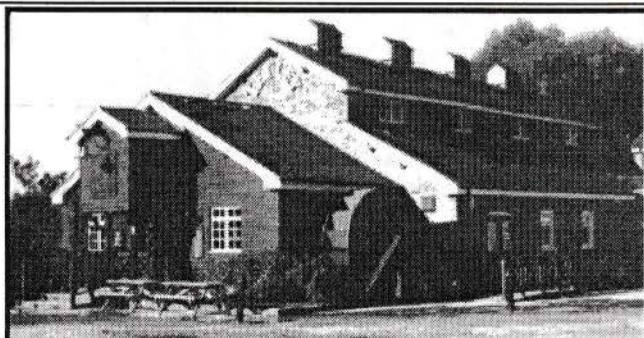
This is the first time the results have been made public and were greeted by new chief executive Chris Hopkins as a "welcome return to growth". Hydes' 28 managed houses where food turnover leapt by 70 per cent led the growth.

Hydes are now embarking on a three-month strategic review taking the form of "a fundamental look at all areas of the business and the way it operates. It will help us form the medium term aspiration for the business by allowing us to set out targets for growth." In the past, several companies embarking on such exercises have exited brewing at the end of the day but there seems little likelihood of that happening here as Hydes seems just as keen on their mash tuns as their pubs.

The latter are to be the subject of a refurbishment programme, although some unwelcome gimmickry has been apparent in some of the schemes so far. For example, the Bakers Arms in Altrincham has become 'The Gallery' a young persons venue, while the Unicorn in Hale Barns is to be turned into something rejoicing in the improbable name of 'Corbans Old Winery and Bar'. The company is also looking to expand its estate with the primary focus being south Manchester. On the beer front, the seasonal beer programme continues with the launch last month of 'Berry Good Ale' and 'Hydes' Black', a nitro keg stout-like beer - hopefully a cask version will not be too far behind. One report can however be discounted - the introduction of Hydes Black was accompanied by rumours that cask Hydes Mild was to be axed. This has been firmly denied by the brewery. While people are still drinking it, Hydes' will still brew it. And you can't say fairer than that.

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

13



Your hosts Jon & Judi invite you to

The Old Mill

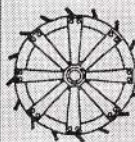
At least 10 different guest beers per week

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Great food served daily till 10pm
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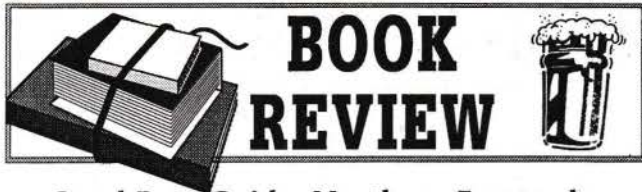
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OLD
mill

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Good Beer Guide: Northern France, by Arthur Taylor. CAMRA Books, 224pp, £7.99

Arthur Taylor first came to this reviewer's attention over 20 years ago as the author of a still unsurpassed book on pub games. At that time, oddly enough, CAMRA was publishing a much inferior book on the same subject by another author; now, however, local author Taylor (he hails from Oldham) is where he belongs, within the CAMRA stable.

In contrast to neighbouring Belgium, northern France is still undiscovered territory, even for most reasonably well-informed British drinkers. Taylor is tilling a virgin field, and the region's relatively small number of breweries – some two dozen are covered – means he has the chance to give each an in-depth description, rather than the thumbnail sketch familiar from the Good Beer Guide or CAMRA's Benelux guide. The brewery section is the heart of the book, and is followed by a meaty gazetteer with lots of useful information on the region's towns and cities plus an interesting selection of bars.

Criteria for inclusion seem to range from beer choice and quality to the unspoilt character of the bar, so you are introduced both to stylish Lille city centre bars and to "beautiful but basic" rural gems. The listings are broken up by some fascinating articles, on anything from northern French cheeses (and the beers to drink with them) to the extraordinary cabaret performance of "Ronny Coutteure and the University of Bierologie".

Directions to breweries and bars are given with care and in detail, though the option of public transport is consistently ignored. In the rural areas this is no doubt only realistic, but the town of Hazebrouck, to take just one example, is a railway junction of some importance and highly accessible – yet the Guide doesn't tell you this. There's only one map, a sketchy if attractive affair, but the author sensibly identifies the sheets of the IGN (French Ordnance Survey) you need to explore. And while I'm nit-picking, the proof-reading standards fall below what I would expect in what is a work of reference.

But enough of this! The author's enthusiasm shines from every page of this groundbreaking book. Read it, and you'll be getting out the maps in no time to plan a trip to this little-known but fascinating beer region. Very highly recommended. **RPJ**.

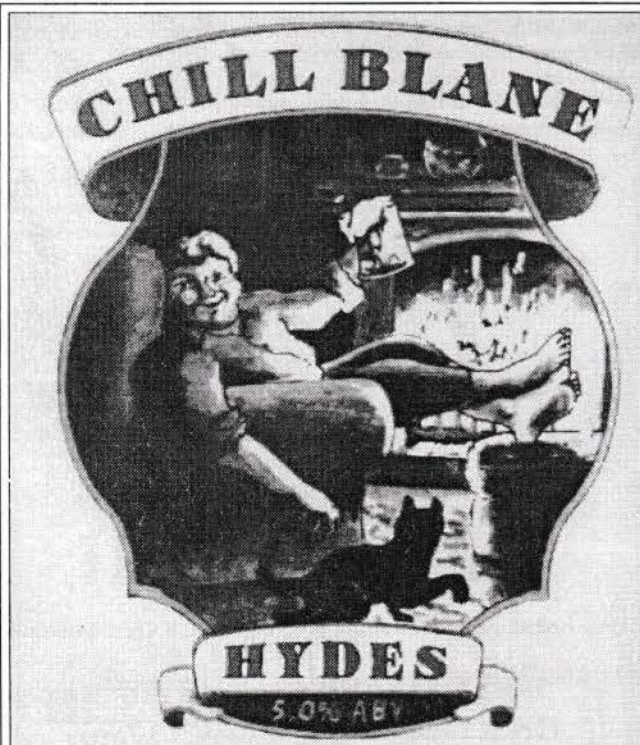
Beer Festival Doubts

Opening Times has learnt that the venue for the 1999 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival is open to doubt following initial discussion with the Town Hall.

When contacted by Opening Times, Festival Organiser Jim Flynn admitted that he had concerns and that other venues were being considered. Jim wouldn't disclose where else was being considered but emphasised that ideally the Festival organisers would like to stay at the Town Hall. "The staff have always been really great and we have always had a very positive relationship with the Council itself. I would be very sad if we couldn't stay at the Town Hall", Jim explained. "I don't want to comment any further as we are at sensitive stage in negotiations."

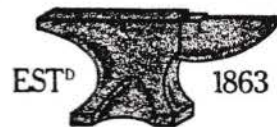
OT will keep its readers up to date with progress, so watch this space as they say!

14



COLOUR: DARK BROWN
BITTERNESS: MEDIUM
STRENGTH: 5.0% ABV

HYDES ANVIL



The real ale of Manchester

Warm yourself on Winter nights with the fifth of a season of exceptional ales

Chill Blane

This dark strong ale is the revival of an old English recipe from a bygone era when winter warmers were produced to ease away the frosty nights. A fine traditional ale brewed using only best pale ale and chocolate malt to produce a full-bodied and satisfying pint. Medium in bitterness, the hop varieties used are descendants of those employed by the Master brewers of Edwardian times.

Look out for Chill Blane from the beginning of November

For details of Berry Good Ale and other ales in the craft seasonal ale programme, call our hotline on 0161 226 1317



For those of you wondering when the World Tour will resume (in the Bamberg area of Franconia - an area rather more deserving of World Heritage status than Ancoats - but that's another matter), the answer is probably December, coupled with an article on Bavarian Winter Beer Styles and a preview of the National Winter Ales Festival (in Casrtlefield, Manchester 21-23 January) Foreign Beer Bar (at which I will be signing autographs...NOT).

Last month promised to be a sort of foreign beer extravaganza in Manchester. It did not dissappoint.

First out of the blocks was the Kings Arms on Bloom St Salford. The re-opening was marked by a small but excellent German Beer Festival, at which much excellent (if a tad pricy) bier was sunk and a very jolly time had by all. A very successful re-opening.

Bar Fringe was next with its second Belgian beer festival - a few days before the 'Belgian Beer Week' was celebrated at the Beer House. The Fringe's weekend festival was exceptionally good, and I was delighted to find a good framboise (St Louis, draught). A new range of bottles was on offer, and while some were possibly a tad underwhelming, there were some really excellent offerings. Well done to Martin Kinderman for supplying them - as he did to the Beer House, the following week, where there were two draught Rodenbach beers (all right for those who like them - which I definitely DO NOT) and again an interesting range overall - both pubs put on some Belgic food specialities as well, and both were very good do's.

I cannot let this issue go by without commenting on something (a letter) published in another local CAMRA rag (you know which one I mean). Local activist Paul Roberts launched a vitriolic attack on the prices and standards of Manchester free houses...comparing them unfavourably with those of London. Frankly I think he's been ill. That must be it. I spend nearly half my life in and around the capital, and I do my drinking at festivals and in the free houses in Manchester. Its quite true that the ale houses of London are often slightly more spruce and renovated, BUT, with the exception of occasional promotional offers, the £2 pint for interesting ales is the norm - 30p-50p more than we get charged here. The staff of these places vary from the chains (like Wetherspoons) with unctious and insincere civility, to the independents where they have honours degrees in surliness. The beer is more often than not green, too cold and short measured. Our free houses may not have as much spent on them, but the quality of the beer that comes out of the taps is testimony to the standards of hygiene found in the cellar - where it matters most. It should be remembered that the true 'free' houses do not get the big boys' discounts, so prices are a bit dearer than local tied pubs.

**The Beer Monster's British Beer of the Month:
Brakspears Reapers Reward (5%)**

The City Arms on Kennedy Street features this amongst 30 others in its festival starting on the 5th. I had it in late September, it is quite excellent, and different to most Brakspear products.

Foreign Beer of the Month:

Paulaner Oktoberfestbier (1998)

Beg, borrow, steal or whatever to get your hands on this. In bottled form the best thing Paulaner have done for several years. Blissfully and uncompromisingly dry. (Hacker-Pschorr have produced a traditional Marzen [red, and malty with a dry hoppy finish] for this years Oktoberfest, rather than another bock strength export pale lager and but for the outstanding quality of the Paulaner, would have been this months recommendation!) Interestingly enough, if you're quick enough, you should be able to get the Paulaner Oktoberfest bier on draught. The excellent Sand Bar is promising some, together with the Hofbrau (Munich) fest bier in a short festival starting on October 20th.

Upcoming Festivals: CAMRA:- Wakefield, at the Town Hall, Wood Street Thurs 8 - Sun 11 Oct (note - NOT Thurs, or Fri lunchtimes); Nottingham - generally a favourite, once again at the Victoria Liesure Centre, Sneiton - a ten minute walk from the station, Thurs 15 - Sun 18 October; Cardiff- October 29-31 at the Star Centre on Splott Rd. **Pubs:** City Arms, Kennedy St Mcr. Festival from 5th-19th. Wetherspoons (wherever) festival from 1st.Howcroft, Bolton (14-18 Oct) and Smithfield Hotel, Manchester starting 15th October with over 30 beers in about 10 days. Finally, as above, the Sand Bar, Grosvenor Street, German (and other! inc 5 draught Belgian White Beers) Beer festival from 20th October



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Boddingtons Mild & Bitter
and ever changing Guest Beers**
**Burton Bridge Burton Porter,
Woods Wonderful, Exmoor Fox,
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Museum E**

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SKY SPORTS TV



CAMRA Pub of the Month
March 1997



15

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OLD TOM**

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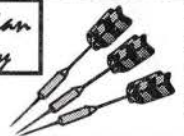
For 20 - 40 people

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

Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



A paucity of news this month. In Audenshaw, the Mechanics Arms (Thwaites), is advertising the tenancy. The Midland in Marple Bridge has no real ale, currently offering the delights of Boddingtons Gold and Boston Beer (whatever that is!). In Marple, the Bowling Green has stopped serving Lees Bitter due to lack of demand. It may be seen again but the range at the moment is Theakstons Bitter and Wilsons Bitter. (Perhaps the locals are missing the Holt's?).

On the weekend 16-18 October, the Royal in Hayfield is hosting its annual beer festival. This is always worth a visit.

Finally, at a recent meeting at the Crown in Hyde, yours truly was invited into the cellar to view the new Robinson's Smooth. Afterwards the convivial landlord offered the branch members a sample to compare with the usual traditional Best Bitter (both from the same cask). There were a few comments (à la Protz) but the main response was 'why?' According to the landlord, the smooth was outselling the Best Bitter 60% to 40% but sales of the Best Bitter - which the smooth is - had not altered. So I think the question 'why?' was well made.

Dave Nunn adds:


Some pub news that may interest High Peak branch, and many others. Steve and Janet are leaving the GBG listed Horsfield Arms, Bredbury. They are moving to the Railway at Rose Hill. Apparently they want a challenge! I just hope that Robinsons can find new tenants, for the Horsfield, who can match the high standards set.

Rhys Jones adds:


Centuries in Hattersley was closed and in a ruinous state when I passed on the bus in August. One of the last survivors of the Host Group gimmick pubs, it seemed to have been in that state for some considerable time.

Innovation in the game of darts can often be put down to gimmicks. The Quadro board, with its extra ring and the dreadful soft tip board with the flashing lights, have never, thankfully, taken off. However, I wouldn't be Luddite just for the sake of it, and even a boring old traditionalist like myself can sometimes see the benefit of "progress". Let's face it, the tungsten dart has improved performances at all levels and I honestly like the new "Equalizer" board. This board has just been introduced by Winmau, and although I know it will never replace the traditional "London" board or the "Log End" in our pubs, I hope that some of our locals will consider installing the board.

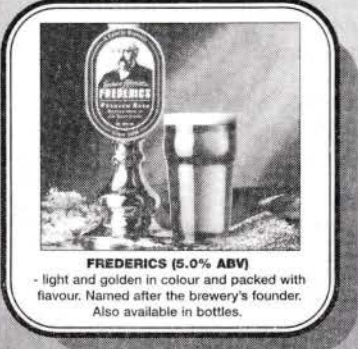
The "Equalizer" is called a "3 in 1" board. It is an ordinary board with the 20 - 1 - 18 - 4 numbering, with trebles and doubles. Nothing different there then, but the trebles and doubles are wider, with an extra wire running through them to give three sizes of the higher scoring segments. So an experienced player can use the narrowest size for improving accuracy in practice, the normal tournament size can be used for league games, while the novice player can use the largest targets for emulating the achievements of better players. All of us will be able to experience the thrill of chucking a maximum. But I think the board would really come into its own if it was used as a handicapping system for pub knock outs! Many local pubs and clubs run a nine week tournament, with eight heat winners going through to the finals night and the prize money. In the past some of these tournaments have been poorly attended. Many average players will not enter because they know that the eventual winner will be one of the big names - the semi professional if you will. By using this board, players will be able to be graded at three levels and play each other on the same board, but with the ordinary pub player having a chance to beat a county standard player. I wouldn't suggest that this becomes the norm, but it would add an extra dimension to what is becoming a predictable Thursday or Friday night.




THE Robinson's COLLECTION




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



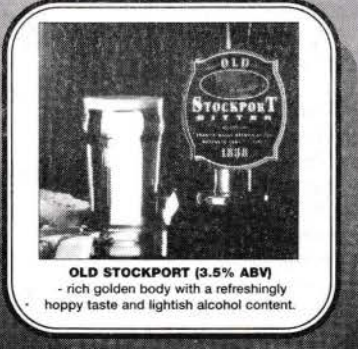
FREDERICS (5.0% ABV)
- light and golden in colour and packed with flavour. Named after the brewery's founder. Also available in bottles.



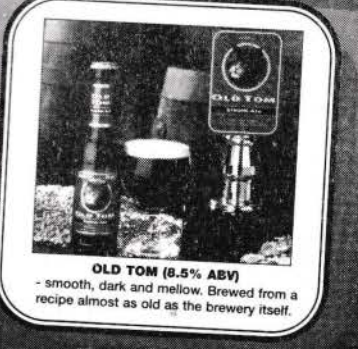
XB (4.0% ABV)
- a smooth bitter ale with a malty taste. First brewed in the Lake District.



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

The new season of the Stockport Licensed Houses League has just started, and it may be the most important in the history of the 51 years old league. For many years the Men's section has supported three divisions. But league management must have been devastated to learn that six teams withdrew from the league during the close season. Consequently the General Division has been scrapped, leaving only the Super and Premier Divisions. The reason for the mass withdrawal can only be guessed at the moment. But if darts as an organised pub sport is to survive in Stockport, then members of the organising committee must take steps to stem the flow. Otherwise we may face the new century, with the Licensed Houses League, at least at the highest level, as a memory. Strangely, the Ladies' section has three new teams ready to compete in the new season. Perhaps the men can learn from the women and start to grow again. I hope so. If the Tuesday night darts match was to disappear from some of our pubs, then much needed revenue would be lost. Let's face it, there a few pubs who would hardly have a customer on a quiet Tuesday without the dart team being at home.

A new points system is to be introduced this season, which is a step in the right direction. Each individual game will be worth a point, with two bonus points to the overall winner. This is a system which many leagues have employed for years, and it means that every game on the night will be important. For instance a 7-0 team win will mean nine points to the victors, while a 4-3 game will give the winners six points, while the losers will take three points. Another way of helping teams keep going has been introduced. If a side has to play short they will be able to play their first loser again, instead of having to give a game away. We all know that many players who sign on at the start of the season fail to last the course, and many teams struggle at holiday times and towards the end of the season. Because of that, they often don't put a side in the following season, and yet another side is lost. I applaud the committee for bringing in these rules. But I fear that they are way off the mark over the question of trophies or prizes. For the past few seasons teams have been asked if they want a trophy or a prize - say a tea service - to commemorate their successes. Fair enough. This season, after a vote a league meeting, it was decided that only prizes would be awarded, except for the main trophy for the pub's bar. This is going to present all sorts of problems that I am sure that the committee members could do without. For instance, how do you go about selecting a prize for a mixed team? What present would be suitable for all the members of such a team? There are often married couples in the teams, so would they want two jug kettles? And how can you find something that will be appreciated by the eighteen years old youngster in his first season and the seasoned septuagenarian? Remember darts is a sport that has a wide age range of participants than almost any other. What happens if a team wins two years in succession? How can you be sure that they won't be given the same prize year upon year? No, I am sorry, but trophies, no matter how tacky, are more appreciated by the players. If I wanted to win a set of wine glasses, I would go to bingo, not take part in a sporting activity.

This season's Game Show, sorry Presentation Night, will take place at the Town Hall on Tuesday November 10. You will know it's taking place, because the stage will resemble a car boot sale.

THE SPORTSMAN

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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





"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

We Brew Real Ales Too!

I have been reading with interest many of your Opening Times issues over the past few years which have been supplied to me by editor John Clarke. While all readers of this publication are interested in "Real Ales" and their continued growth, I'd like you to know there are many of us "across the pond" who have the same interests and goals in regards to the future of Real Ale.

My name is Mark Hall and I'm the Sales & Marketing Manager of Sea Dog Brewing which is a microbrewery located in the State of Maine. I've been with the company about 2½ years and have seen the highs and lows this business can bring. My background lies in sports marketing and advertising, but I made the switch because I have always been interested in the microbrewery scene. I have been to England 15 times since 1990 to see Blackburn Rovers matches, and due to my friendship with a CAMRA member who lives in Langho, I've had the opportunity to sample the fine brews the north west has to offer.

I can't say in all honesty that our beers are "true" in your sense of the word because they are dispensed using carbon dioxide or mixed gases, but we are making strides in the battle against the big boys. Sea Dog started in 1993 as we opened a brewpub in Camden, Maine, along the lines of the Griffin Inn, Haslingden, the home of Porters beers. Over the past five years we have expanded by adding a large brewery/restaurant in Bangor, Maine (about a four-hour drive north east of Boston) in March 1995 and a third brewery/restaurant in Falmouth (about two hours north east of Boston) which opened this past April.

At the same time in Bangor, we started bottling Sea Dog beers and put them on sale at retail outlets in May 1995 and are currently the third largest brewery in a state with 28 breweries. There aren't really that number of separate companies, but 28 individual brewing sites. If you checked the total number of breweries in 1986, you would have seen a big fat zero. In 1987, the first two breweries in Maine since Prohibition came on line in Portland, with Geary's Brewing and Gritty McDuff's, a brewery/restaurant which bottles and kegs, starting the trend. Since 1987 there has been an amazing amount of growth with more than half the breweries coming on line after 1995. At present, Sea Dog has six bottled products that we sell via retail. Four of the six sell year round and include Windjammer Blonde (4.8 per cent ABV), Old Gollywobbler Brown (4.5%), Old East India Pale Ale (6.6%) and River driver Hazlenut Porter (5.6%) which was voted World Beer of the Year in 1997 by one of the top beer writers here in the US. Our two seasonals included Blue Paw Blueberry Wheat (4.6%), our summer seasonal, and Cabin Fever Winter Stock Ale (7%) which is sold during the winter months. Overall we brew an additional 29 beers that are only sold at the three brewpubs. You might think the names are strange but most are related to sailing and other things indigenous to the State of Maine.

All Sea Dog ales (and our two lagers) are brewed in the British tradition as we use traditional two-row British malted barley in most of our creations. The majority of beers produced in the state are ales and it's worth searching out the appropriate breweries and brewpubs to sample their products. However, trying to find them all at your local ASDA or pub is another story. First not all the breweries bottle their products, and second, the competition is fierce.

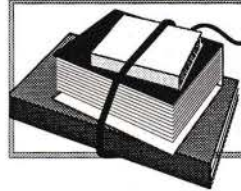
In the beginning, the microbrewery revolution in America caught the interest and imagination of those "particular" beer drinkers, as shopkeepers were more than willing to stock any or all new products. After a while, reality set in. How can we stock all these products with such little space? In addition to competing with Bass, Guinness, Budweiser, etc., you must battle the larger microbreweries from all over the US. Taking it another step, you have your regional and state competitors. Being a small microbrewery, you are extremely limited in funds and marketing so there's no way we can compete with the big national or micro brands such as Sam Adams.

As well as the above, I have seen a major change in the marketing of microbreweries. When many of these companies came out (Sea Dog included), they thought they could take the country by storm by just stocking the shelves with their products. It might have worked at first, but with the lack of funds available for marketing, breweries could only afford one or two salespeople. Top priority, of course, is your own back yard. This left beer on the shelves or on draught outside your local area with the job of selling itself. This didn't work and sales began to fall for many companies.

Sea Dog used to go as far south as Florida and west to Chicago; however with the advent of many other regional breweries, consumers started buying their local beers. The four-man sales force when I started in 1986 is now down to one. Me. We have scaled down and are now only selling in the six New England states and a couple on the fringes. I cherry pick my targets and set up priority lists which is the only way we can retrench and start to grow again. As you can see, it's a tough business, but as long as people drink the product you sell it makes the job a lot easier.

I bought a season ticket to Blackburn Rovers this year, so I am hoping to drop in on many of my favourite pubs during my visits. They include the Griffin Inn, Haslingden; Railway Hotel, Pleasington; New Inn, Clitheroe, and my favourite in Great Harwood, the Royal Hotel, where I always receive a warm welcome from Martin and Pam Hughes. If you have any questions on beer travels to the US or brewing in general, please contact me at ewoodpk@ime.net
Next: Breweries in New England and the North East.

The Beer Monster adds this thought. Given the increasing interest in the UK in the doings of the American micro-brewing industry, largely it must be said because of the increasing quality of their products rather than availability, since they are lamentably hard to find this side of the pond, computerised readers may like to know about an e-mail 'zine (with web site - at <http://www.HappyHours.com>) Called Brewsgram - its frequent and full of news:- anyone may sign up to receive their e-mail by entering their information at the site. Click on any of the links and use the navigation tool on the side to select "Receive BrewsGram" or click the link: <http://206.20.254.9/happyhours/news/brewmail.cfm>



BOOK REVIEW



Irish Pubs by Barrie Pepper.

Eric Dolby Publishing, 152pp, £7.99

This handsomely presented hardback presents pen pictures of 120 or so of the author's favourite Irish pubs - a personal selection, as he stresses. Even so, many of the usual suspects are included - Belfast's Crown Liquor saloon, Dublin's Brazen Head, CAMRA birthplace Kruger's Bar in Co. Kerry - but some little-known and glorious looking rural gems also appear.

There's a reasonably wide geographical coverage, though rather light on the Midlands and the Northern Ireland/Republic border counties, and there's even a pub on the Aran Islands (though regrettably this entry is marred by a gratuitous slur on Welsh speakers). In the main, however, the entries are to the point and give a good idea of the pubs' style and atmosphere; each takes up a whole page (indeed one or two over-run slightly) and is headed by an attractive colour photograph.

The big disappointment, though, is the scant attention given to Ireland's nascent micro-brewery movement, which surely needs all the help it can get, especially from an author with a CAMRA background. True, one or two of the micros are listed, but most are passed over in silence. And to add insult to injury, such firms as Cherry's and Macardle's are listed in what passes for a brewery section as if they were independent regional brewers rather than the Guinness subsidiaries that they are. This attractive book is worth taking with you on your next visit to Ireland. Regrettably, however, the definitive Irish pub guide still remains unwritten. **RPJ.**

19



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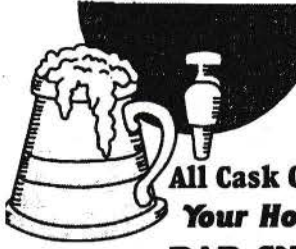
★ Bar Bistro Food (for quality and value) ★

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Tameside Travels (2)

Once again our roving reporter Mark McConachie has been trudging round Tameside, here's his latest report with the shocking news of 25, yes 25, more losses to keg...

The quest continues. First, to Hyde and Manchester Rd., where the Wellington (Bass) is closed and for sale; across the road Sam Smith's Whitegates no longer sells Old Brewery Bitter. Up to town, the Cheshire Ring is down to Chesters Mild and Boddies; Carpenters (Bass) has gone keg; the Bricklayers (Wilsons) is now selling John Smiths and Wilsons Mild (a rare beer, indeed).

On Market St the Clarendon (ex Beer Engine) has chucked out all of its Whitbread beers and gone over to keg; the two BodPubCo pubs (now Greenalls) - the Cheshire Cheese and Church have gone keg too; up the road at the Shepherds Call (Greenalls) the bitter has been joined by Festival. In the Market Place area, the Albion (Wilsons) has lost its Wilsons and is now down to just Websters; the Jolly Carter (Bass) is keg again, whilst the Queens (also Bass) is maintaining a cask ale tradition with Chesters Mild, Boddies and Stones. Across the motorway, the Talbot (now Gibbs Mew) has fallen victim to the tide of keg that is sweeping across Tameside.

Both the pubs on Lunn Rd - the Gardeners (Bass) and Globe (Royal Free House) have unfortunately lost their cask ale. The high point of Hyde, for me, was that the Robinson's pubs had changed very little in both their style and beer ranges - stability is a thing to be cherished. Of particular note are Robinson's White Lion, George, Unity and Crown, all of which are very good with the Unity standing out as an exemplar of civility and pleasantness.

Over in Gee Cross the cask ale count is very low indeed with the Cheshire Cheese retaining John Smiths and Directors, the Grapes (Robinson's) doing Hatters and Best, the Werneth (BodPubCo) now just selling Boddies. Away from the village, the Hare & Hounds does Boddies and Greenalls; most of the other pubs are Bass and do not now sell cask ale with the pleasant Buxton being a rare exception selling a nice drop of Stones. The keg pubs are the Apethorn, Lamb Inn, Queen Adelaide (all Bass), Clarkes Arms (Wilsons) and Ring O' Bells (J Smiths).

To the other side of Hyde lies the vast Hattersley estate. Here, out of five pubs just two serve cask beer, the Hustage (S&N) is now keg; the Four In Hand (Bass) remains so and Centuries (Wilsons) has been demolished following a fierce fire. John Smiths is for sale in the JFK on John Kennedy Rd and Hatters and Best are the offerings at Robinson's Chapmans Arms on the edge of the estate. I have to say that the Chapmans is a far better pub than I remember it being about five years ago.

Denton Changes Too

Denton has seen change too. On Hyde Rd. the Bullcote (ScotCo), Cottage, Angel and Broom House (all Bass) are now keg, whilst Marston's Coach & Horses is down to just bitter and Hydes' Red Lion has dropped mild to leave Light and Bitter on the bar. The Bowling Green (Wilsons) has dropped the Websters in favour of John Smiths, Boddies and Holt's Bitter (the latter being only 106p a pint).

Going towards Ashton, Sam Smiths have shamefully dropped OBB at the White House in favour of keg, but at the Silver Springs (Whitbread) Holt's has made its debut (here it is 112p) along with Chesters Mild and Boddies. In Dane Bank, the Windmill (Bass) has gone keg and at Robinson's Dane Bank, Hatters and Best are joined by the company's Smooth.

Near the Stockport border, the Fletchers Arms (Robinson's leased to Greenalls) has kicked out the Hatters and Frederics to leave just Best. I am sure the pub looked better a few years ago, now I find the place naff. Going up to Haughton Green, the Top House (Labatts) has gone keg, as has the Cock (Websters) and Marston's Manor House. In Haughton Green itself, the Shakespeare now has only Websters, the Jolly Hatters (Bass) is now keg as is the Old Dog (Greenalls) with the Bay Horse now down to Boddies alone. Elsewhere, the Acres and Jolly Hatters (both Whitbread) are now just selling Boddies.

Next time, changes in Ashton and Stalybridge (yum yum !)

...Pub News...
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In Cheadle, the Royal Oak reopened just before we went to press. The pub has been refurbished following the fire some time ago. A full report next month.

Another recent reopening is the Kings Head on Tiviot Dale which has had a thorough revamp. A glimpse through the windows reveals quite a traditional look. Again, more next month.

Another major refurbishment underway at the moment is that at the Withington Ale House. This is, we believe, being turned into a John Barras upmarket 'community' pub by owners Scottish Courage. Naturally there will be a full report when it opens.

Three City Centre openings were also imminent as this issue of Opening Times was put to bed. On Canal St, L'Abbaye a 'Belgian Beer and Mussel Bar' was set to open its doors. Despite the French name and almost exclusively Belgian range of beers, this is believed to be a Whitbread operation, in fact. Not far away on Bloom Street, 'Berlin' is due to open this month in the premises of the former Blooms Hotel. Finally, 'The Goose on Piccadilly' was in an advanced state of readiness at the end of September. This development is on Piccadilly, not far from Wetherspoons, and may in fact turn out to be one of the Goose & Granite chain of Wetherspoons lookalike pubs run by Bass.

Speaking of Bass, or rather their former leasehold estate, new owners Punch Taverns have announced an increased range of guest ales to be made available to their pubs. Over the next three months licensees will have access to some 13 additional beer and three winter specials. However, although nominally available to all 1400-odd pubs in the estate, they will really only be freely available to a core 500 that demonstrate a commitment to and demand for cask ales. The first of these requirements should therefore rule out virtually every one of their pubs in the Opening Times area.

Allied Domecq Inns is to rebrand its Festival Ale House chain. It is apparently to be split into two categories, Festival Inns and Festival Taverns. Taverns will be aimed at lunchtime workers and the post-work trade with a 'broader range of wines and higher quality coffees. Inns are being aimed at community-based outlets, with an emphasis on 'traditional values and a local atmosphere'. Each of the pubs will however maintain its commitment to at least six cask ales.

It has long been rumoured that Wetherspoons have had Didsbury in their sights. Indeed it would be surprising if this was not the case. Speculation is now at an end, however, as they have submitted a planning application to turn the DIY shop opposite the Royal Oak into a pub.

Yet again there has been a change of management at the Gardeners Arms, Northgate Road, Edgeley. Elaine Childs and daughter Vicki Lofthouse took over on 11 September. They are now serving food, and are aiming, if possible, to introduce a range of guest ales alongside the handpumped John Smiths and Tetleys. This definitely sounds like a step in the right direction. There is a quiz night every Thursday, and they are hoping to provide live entertainment every Saturday night. We wish them the best of luck.

It is very sad to see the Thatched Tavern in Reddish has dropped cask Tetley Mild and replaced it with nitrokeg. The mild was always kept well but apparently the decision was made due to a fall off in sales. Paradoxically, the only real mild in Reddish is at the Carousel where Theakstons Mild is the only cask beer left in the pub. No bets are accepted on how long this situation will continue.


Managers Matthew and Nicola are to leave Stockport's Queen's Head (Turner's Vaults) on Underbank to take over the reins at the Boar's Head in the Market Place. They take over on 8 October and Matthew tells us that there are plans in hand for the development of the pub (which now offers no live music in line with Sam Smith's company policy). Although he was unable to reveal details, he assured OT that we would like it! No news yet of replacement managers for Turner's who are likely to be reliefs in the short-term.

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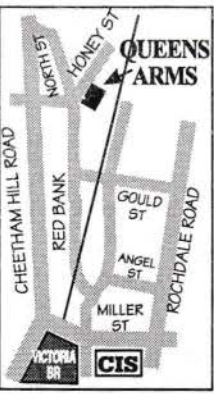


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Smithfield Hotel Beer Festival Starts Thursday 15 October

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!

Diary	October 98	October 98	To Do Address Mapped Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planned
	<p>Saturday 10th - Night out in Eccles. Meet 7.30, Lamb. Details from John Hutchinson 434 7177</p> <p>Monday 12th - Social: Polygon, Barlow Road, Levenshulme. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Friday 16th - West Didsbury and Withington Stagger: starts 7.00pm Four in Hand, corner Palatine Road/Lapwing Ln; 8.30 Orion, Barlow Moor Road.</p> <p>Monday 19th - Social: Royal Oak, High St, Cheadle. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Thursday 22nd - Presentation of Pub of the Month award to Blossoms, Heaviley (see separate article).</p> <p>Friday 23rd - Sunday 25th - Cider weekend away presenting various local and national awards. Details from John Hutchinson 434 7177 or Rhys Jones 231 6465.</p> <p>Monday 26th - Social, Britannia, Rowsley St, Beswick. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Sunday 1st November - Beer and Chinatown Social. Meet Grey Horse, Portland St 12 noon; 1.00pm Circus.</p> <p>Monday 2nd - Social: Winters, Underbank, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm. <i>High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Marple, Woodley and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:</i></p> <p>Saturday 10th-Saturday 17th - Trip to</p>	<p>Lille and French/Belgian border.</p> <p>Monday 19th - Monthly branch meeting: Oddfellows Arms, Hurst, Ashton-u-Lyne. Starts 8.30pm.</p> <p>Sunday 1st November - Woods Walk: a circular walk starting at the Valley Lodge, Bradwell. Contact Frank Wood on 01457 865426 for details.</p> <p>Monday 2nd - Committee Meeting: Glossop Labour Club. Starts 8.30pm.</p> <p>Monday 9th - Monthly Branch Meeting: The Royal, Hayfield. Starts 8.30pm. <i>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 events:</i></p> <p>Monday 19th - Committee Meeting: Sutton Arms Hotel, Sutton Lane Ends. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <p>Saturday 24th - Social evening: George & Dragon, Great Budworth. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <p>Monday 26th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Crown, Lower Peover. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <p>Advance Notice - Saturday 7th November - trip to Bateman's Brewery, Wainfleet, Lincs. Own transport, staying overnight. B&B cost tba but about £30 per person. £10 deposit required for B&B. details from M Gammage 01260 270064.</p>	

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- Late Red - 4.5% A.B.V.
- Wilmots - 4.8% A.B.V.
- Waggle Dance - 5.0% A.B.V.





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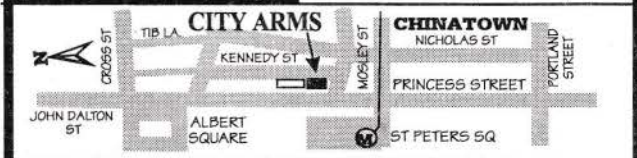
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MANCHESTER MATTERS

A recent visit to Wythenshawe will shortly be written up as a Stagger, and without wishing to steal our scribe's thunder, it may be appropriate to set down here the bare facts of beer availability revealed on the evening.



by Rhys Jones

They make grim reading for the lover of real ale. At the Tudor Tavern, the Portway, the Woodpecker, and the Mountain Ash (formerly, I think, known as Sports), all of which have sold real ale at some point in the last few years, no cask beer is sold. Both of Wythenshawe's Burtonwood pubs, the Greenwood Tress and the Talisman, were firmly closed on a Friday night, and through the windows of the Talisman it was apparent that real ale had been withdrawn here too. The Cornishman has, not too surprisingly, dropped Cameron's Strongarm but seems to be doing OK with its Banks's beers; the Silver Birch just has Websters Bitter on handpump, and Royals ostensibly has John Smiths Bitter and Worthington Bitter on handpump, though it seems that neither availability nor quality can be guaranteed. There's more bad news from Burtonwood in the City Centre, where the Wheatshaf has shocked many drinkers by converting to keg beer. This homely, no-frills pub had become virtually an associate member of the Northern Quarter "beer trail" (well, it's a long way from the castle to the Smithfield!) and I find it scarcely conceivable that it lacks the turnover to continue stocking cask beer. Still, it seems the City Council's latest contribution to what they whimsically term "Northern Quarter regeneration" is to propose the demolition of that agreeable little boozier the Cotton Tree, so we clearly live in strange times. And while the City Centre did see one reopening last month, sadly the Thompsons Arms, on the corner of Sackville Street and Major Street, has no cask beer to offer its presumed customer base of gays and coach travellers. And as for the "Goose Pub" now rapidly taking shape on Piccadilly and likely to be open by the time you read this, we shall have to wait and see. In the inner suburbs, the range at the Bowling Green in Chorlton-on-Medlock is now Tetley Bitter, Greenalls Bitter and Festival, all on handpump, while nearby Jabez Clegg appears to have two handpumped beers on at any one time. Further out, the Railway in West Didsbury now has Mansfield-brewed Grays Best Bitter as its sole handpumped beer (at £1 a pint on Mondays), while the Airport Hotel at Ringway no longer sells Robinson's Old Stockport. Back in the City centre, Internazionale on Whitworth Street lasted only a matter of months before being replaced by something called

Fred's deli - and no, that doesn't sell real ale either. Cider drinkers may care to note the appearance of a new draught cider from Weston's. At six per cent ABV, it fits between First Quality and Old Rosie in strength, and has been sighted at the Beer House and at certain Wetherspoons (though not yet in Manchester). Though I find it rather sweet for a session drink, it's certainly worth a try.

King's Hall

The King's Hall, the new J D Wetherspoon pub in Cheadle Hulme, opened its doors on Thursday 24th September and Opening Times went along on opening night.

Converted from an old cinema, which latterly housed a Chinese restaurant, it is in many ways a typical Wetherspoon operation with one or two individual touches. The main feature is the tall two-storey lobby with stairs leading up to a galleried drinking area and the toilets. This is finished in attractive light wood panelling inset with mirrors up the stairway. The whole lobby is dominated by a huge hanging metal sculpture/light fitting.

Passing through to the main body of the pub, the bar is on the left and if the opening night crowds are in any way typical (at least at weekends), this may prove too small to adequately serve all the customers. Certainly the four-deep queues at the bar deterred both us and numerous others from attempting to get a second pint. There is a variety of drinking spaces, including a sunken conservatory-type no-smoking area at the back. This backs onto the rear outside drinking area (there's another at the front) which has just a few tables but does include a small water feature.

Food is available most of the time from the standard Wetherspoon menu, which usually manages to combine value and quality even if the food is a little production line at times. The beer range is standard Wetherspoon, too, with boring old Theakstons and Courage Directors accompanied by Sundance (a 5 per cent ABV beer brewed by Marstons) and three or four guests. It was notable, too, that beer was served in brim measure glasses, whereas Wetherspoons normally make a great play about using oversize lined measures. Could this herald a change of policy, we wonder (*Apparently so - other ed.*). Look out, too, for the new 1½-pint glasses (yes, really) that the company is introducing "for the serious drinker who knows what they like".

All in all, the King's Hall is a welcome addition to the local drinking scene. For a 'super pub' it's on a reasonably human scale, the local trade is sufficient to stand an additional pub, and it should offer a good range of well-kept beers. Worth a visit. JC.

23

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 174

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APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(Opening Times 174)

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