

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

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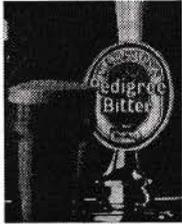
OPENING TIMES



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DECEMBER 1998

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Banks's Stalk Marston's



Merger-mania returned to the brewing industry late last month, when Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries launched a hostile £262 million bid for Pedigree brewer Marston's. The move has been both rejected by the Burton-on-Trent brewers and condemned by CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. The move came after Marston's rejected the offers of a friendly merger and has been timed to prevent Marston's proposed 'securitisation' of its 549-strong tenanted pub estate. The Marston's move is a complicated arrangement seeing some pubs converted from management to tenancy and vice-versa with the revamped tenanted estate 'parked' with a new set-up called the Premier Pub Company. Marston's would have exclusive supply right to the new company for four years but, in another twist, after 24 years the pubs would revert to another company in which Marston's held a controlling stake.

It's really just a fancy way of raising £137 million some of which would be returned to Marston's shareholders and the balance invested in their new managed concepts such as Pitcher & Piano and Via Vita - outlets for both have recently opened in Manchester. A dubious move as Marston's latest results show their tenancies outperforming their managed outlets. Wolves & Dudley, who trade locally as Banks's found the Marston's proposals unwelcome, describing them as "a complicated and earnings dilutive disposal of its best performing, most profitable and most cash generative business" While Marston's do show every sign of losing the plot at the moment, CAMRA believes they should remain independent and be given the chance to sort out their own problems, rather than have

solutions imposed from outside. In particular, the new 'super-regional' brewery would have approaching 2000 pubs creating local monopolies in parts of the Midlands with the consequent reduction in competition and choice. It would also have three breweries, in Wolverhampton, Burton and the Cameron's plant in Hartlepool - all of them unique, all of them vital to their local economies, and none of them working at full capacity. The spectre of 'rationalisation' clearly looms large, and already Banks's has admitted that 250 jobs could be lost at Marston's if the bid is successful.

The initial bid has been rejected but it is unlikely that Banks's will back down now that they have entered the fray. And even if they do there will certainly be other predators waiting in the wings.

Winter Ale Spectacular

The world will come to Manchester next month when the city hosts CAMRA's third Great British Winter Beer Festival and Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition..

The festival moves to Manchester from its original home in Glasgow and will be a truly national festival, with over 100 real ales - both super-strong winter warmers and more sessionable bitters and milds from all over Britain. There'll be an international flavour to the event, too, with a foreign beer bar showing off an unrivalled range of German and Belgian seasonal specialities and even a cask conditioned barley wine from the United States.

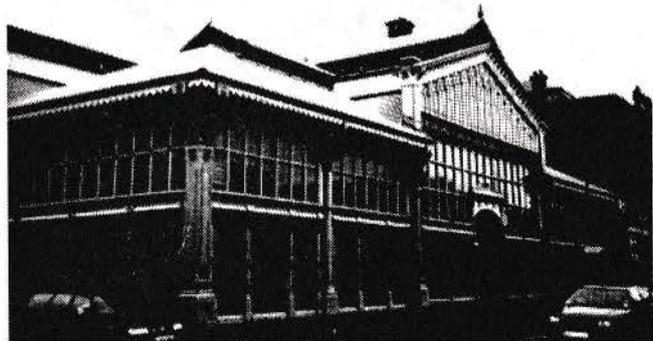
In DECEMBER'S OPENING TIMES

A Merry Christmas to all our
Readers and Advertisers from
all at Opening Times



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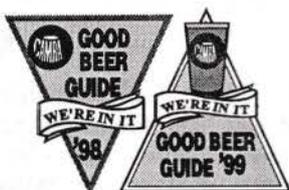
CHRISTMAS COMPETITION PAGE 21



The three-day event runs from 21-23 January and is being held in the historic Upper Campfield Market, a Victorian market hall in Castlefield, just off Deansgate in the City Centre. The Market was home to the newly relaunched Manchester Beer Festival in 1996, although it was then taken over by the Royal Exchange Theatre following that summer's IRA bomb blast. The Theatre has now returned to the Royal Exchange and CAMRA is delighted to mark the city's ongoing regeneration by hosting a national event as prestigious as the National Winter Ales Festival. This will really be an event that no beer lover can afford to miss. Get those dates in your new 1999 diaries now - 21-23 January.

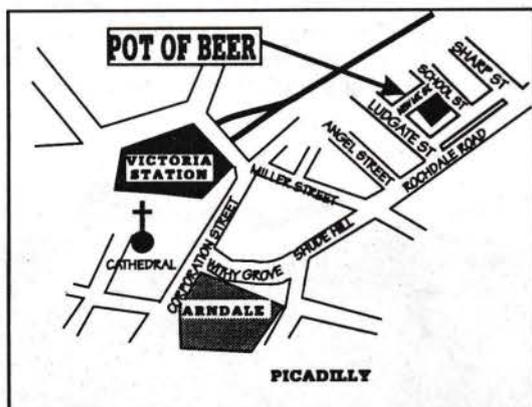
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

The possible return of merger mania to the regional brewing sector is an unwelcome development. A litany of take-overs, closures and mergers has already wreaked untold damage on British beer and consumer choice. The shock waves from the latest move, if successful, will reverberate throughout the regional sector. The thinking behind the move is not hard to divine. Marston's gives the impression of seriously losing its way, becoming obsessed with 'retailing' when brewing good ale and selling it through good, honest locals has long been its strength. These are also the strengths of Banks's and a merger would create a 'super regional' with almost 2000 pubs and a national presence for its beers. But the long-term effects of such a merger will send shivers down the collective spine of beer lovers, especially those with memories to recall the 1970s and earlier when the stitching together of the 'Big Six' brewers led to the rapid loss of beer brands (1500 in a decade) and the wholesale closure of breweries.

A super-regional would have the same knock-on effect today. Other large regionals like Greene King would have to go on the same trail to defend their own brands and market share and even among the smaller companies there would be head-scratching and disquiet about just where their future lies. Despite well-founded doubts about the direction that Marston's is taking, the future of the regional brewing sector would be better served by letting them make their own mistakes and resolving their own problems without outside interference. The worry must be, though, that Marston's will eventually come such a cropper that they will then be easy pickings for a company that cares rather less for tradition than does Wolverhampton & Dudley.

★ ★ ★ ★

Regular readers will note the absence of our bi-monthly darts column, 'Fistful of Arrows' this month. Sadly, Brian Carey has been quite ill with a bout of pneumonia and has been out of action for some time. Happily he is now home from hospital and I am sure all his regular readers will wish him a speedy recovery.

★ ★ ★ ★

Finally, I have now entered the computer age and am 'on the Net'. If you want to share your pearls of wisdom or nuggets of information with OT, then my e-mail address is johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com. 'Letter to the Editor' for publication should still go to otletter@opentime.u-net.com and please remember to include a proper postal address with any e-mail letters, as we can't publish them without one. Pen and paper is of course still more than welcome! All that now remains is for me to wish all our contributors, distributors, advertisers and, of course, you our readers a very happy Christmas and Prosperous New Year.

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES 176

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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CAMRA 1999 NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL

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(4 minutes from Deansgate BR and G-Mex Tram stations)

supporting



3

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Sat 23 January 12 - 4 & 5.30 - 10.30pm

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CAMRA members FREE at lunchtime & Sat Eve, £1 Thurs & Fri Eve**



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Stockport CAMRA Pub of the Month April 1997

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Stay Safe!

Don't Drink and Drive This Christmas

As a reader of "Opening Times" you will know that alcohol is very much part of the world we live in. Have a few drinks too many, and the only things that normally suffer are your head and stomach. But combine driving with your drinking and you have a lethal cocktail which could have a lasting effect - on your own and other people's lives. Each year in Britain, some five hundred people die in road accidents involving drivers or motorcycle riders over the legal blood alcohol limit. Fifteen per cent of all drivers and riders killed are over the limit and around 50 per cent at night between the hours of 10pm and 4am.

The more you drink the greater the problem. Some people's driving performance may be affected even below the legal limit. Twice the limit, and you are at least twenty times more likely to have an accident.

Contrary to popular opinion, alcohol is a depressant. It slows down the activity of the brain and makes you less alert, while at the same time giving you a strong but false sense of confidence. The more you drink, the more your brain is affected, and the greater your chances of having an accident.

Alcohol slows down your reactions
Alcohol affects your judgement.

Those who believe that sticking to weaker drinks will stop them going over the limit are sadly mistaken. It's not the type of alcohol that's important, it's the total amount of alcohol the drink contains. Alcohol takes effect quickly and wears off slowly. Once you've had a drink, there is nothing you can do to reduce the level of alcohol in your blood.

Exercise doesn't work
Nor does black coffee
Nor medicines of any kind
Nor vitamins

The only thing that will reduce the level of alcohol in your blood is time - and a long time at that. The body gets rid of alcohol at a very slow rate - equivalent to about half a pint of beer in every hour. If you have been on a long or late drinking session, you might still be over the limit the morning after, or even at lunchtime.

How To Avoid The Problem

Plan in advance. Take a minibus or taxi. Use the bus, train or tram. If you can't arrange transport home, then fix up somewhere to stay. If you are in a group, decide amongst yourselves that whoever will be driving will not drink for the evening. Drink soft drinks.

Don't be a statistic this Christmas. Don't drink and drive. For once the cliché is right. Drinking and driving really wrecks lives.

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Pub Of The Month DECEMBER 1998

| Su | M | Tu | W | Th | F | Sa |
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The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for December is the Horse & Farrier in Gatley.

The pub is perhaps the most prominently positioned of a clutch of excellent Hydes' pubs in the Gatley area. Right in the centre of the village, this old coaching inn is very convenient for the shops and cinema, but this prime position cannot however fully explain the pub's popularity.

Much of the ambience of the Horse & Farrier is down to the multi-roomed interior with its low ceilings, which certainly gives visitors a feeling for the history of the place. Just over a year ago Hydes' invested a considerable sum of money in refurbishing the pub and managed to achieve the considerable feat of modernising it without in any way adversely affecting its character. The smoke room is perhaps the most characterful of all the rooms with pictures of old Gatley and Cheadle, including the pub itself. Talking of smoke, the brewery also installed an extraction system, which makes sitting in the place a real pleasure for the non-smoker.

A pub though, is more than just a building, its fixtures and fittings. Critical to the success of any very good pub are the licensees and the Horse & Farrier is certainly a very good pub. Alan and Alison Edwards have managed the pub since March 1997 having previously been at the Cock Robin in Sale and the Osborne House in Rusholme. Their wealth of experience is reflected in the beer quality with the Hydes' Light, Bitter and seasonal beers always on good form - and if you haven't tried a pint of Light for some time, then a trip to the Horse & Farrier is certainly required. There's good food, too, served in the back room which operates as a restaurant until mid-evening.

All in all, you must make it down to the Horse & Farrier on Thursday 17 December for a pre-Christmas celebration of a successful pub run by expert licensees. **JF.**

The Horse & Farrier is well served by public transport. Buses 11 and 371 from Stockport will drop you outside, and from Manchester the 44 and W2 will almost do the same. Gatley Station is also just a short walk away.

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

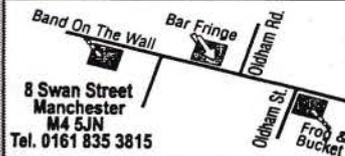
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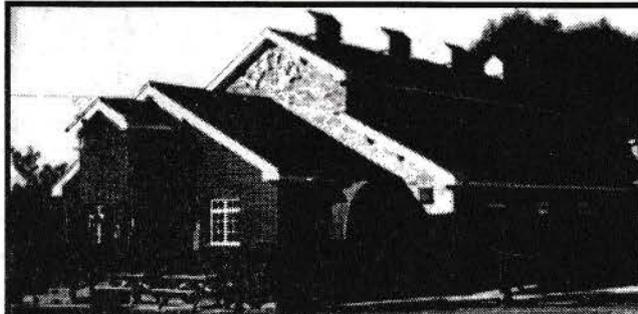


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Food available 12 noon till 8pm



5



Your hosts Jon & Judi invite you to

The Old Mill

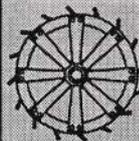
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COPY DATE FOR JANUARY ISSUE OF OPENING TIMES IS DEC 18

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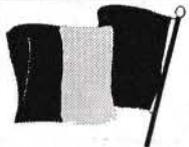


PLUS A RANGE OF TRADITIONAL CIDERS, DRAUGHT KRIEK, LEFFE BLONDE, HOEGAARDEN & BOTTLED BELGIAN & other FOREIGN BEERS

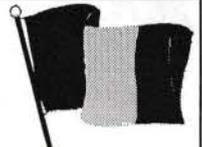
CLOSED CHRISTMAS DAY - **BUT** BOXING DAY SATURDAY OPEN ALL DAY FROM 11.30 FOR "HIDEOUS JUMPER DAY!" - FREE PINT OF THWAITES & SPOT PRIZES OF BEER etc. FOR THE VERY WORST CHRISTMAS JUMPERS AND JERSEYS - IDY'S DECISIONS ARE FINAL!

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EVERY SUNDAY**



**SPECIAL BEER HOUSE CHRISTMAS BREW!
"SALVO CLAUS"**

AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT DECEMBER

A Brand New 6.2% Copper Red Winter Ale with Liberty and Bramling Cross Hops - Maris Otter and Chocolate Malt - in the style of Leffe Radiouse, with yeast from a Belgian Monastic Brewery! Brewed by Sal (with Idy's supervision!) at Passageway

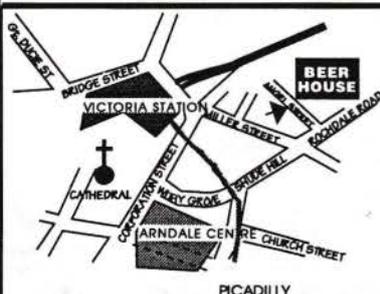


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AVAILABLE THROUGHOUT DECEMBER - £7.50
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THURS 5-8 CHOICE OF 3 CURRIES (VEG & NON-VEG) + RICE
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Firkin Changes

There's a change in the permanent range at the various Firkin pubs. The standard 3.5 per cent beer is to be replaced by a 3.8 per cent 'best bitter' and this should be in the pubs by the time you read this.

Footage & Firkin brewer Richard Sutton tells us that this probably the bitterest beer he has brewed and in addition it has a really good hoppy finish. Sounds like another winner from the increasingly impressive Firkin range. Look out, too, for a welcome return of the 7.3 per cent Rudolf's Rocket Fuel winter special, which should be in local Firkin pubs by the middle of this month. Last year's brew was a powerful warming beer which managed to avoid being heavy and cloying, dangerously drinkable in fact.

New Marbles

A new beer from the Marble Brewery made a brief appearance over the Halloween festivities. Only four barrels of Spooky Marble were produced but all were drunk in as many days. Not as heavily hopped as the regular beers and at 3.8 per cent, expect its return next year.

Already brewed and now slowly maturing in the Marble Arch cellars is the Christmas beer (not yet named). Weighing in at 8.2 per cent, it has a delightful reddish colour, almost akin to a fine light port wine. Early tastings are very promising and with another month to mature, the resultant beer could be something very special. The beer will also feature at the National Winter Ales Festival in January.

Burtonwood Plus and Minus

Burtonwood Brewery, now in effect a pub company, has unveiled a £20 million pot of cash to buy about another 50 pubs in the north west. At the same time, the Warrington company is to get rid of about 20 of its worst performing houses. MD Lynne D'Arcy said the acquisitions would be mainly among tenanted pubs that wanted to fall "under Burtonwood's wing".

Production staff at the brewery have now been transferred to the Thomas Hardy Burtonwood operation, the joint company in which Burtonwood has a 40 per cent stake. Sadly, one of the first decisions of the new operation looks like being a slimming down of the real ale range. Cask Top Hat has already been lined up for the chop and we hear that this is now being joined by Burtonwood Mild which will subsequently only exist in keg 'smooth' form.

Castle Eden Saved!

Whitbread's Castle Eden brewery has been saved from closure by a management buy-out. Brewery manager Jim Kerr and two north-east businessmen bought the Hartlepool brewery and the Trophy Special Keg brand from Whitbread for a reported £10 million. The

brewery will also produce the Castle Eden Ale cask brand under licence for Whitbread, although production of the successful Fuggles IPA has been retained by Whitbread, who have contracted it out to Burtonwood. Additionally, the brewery will produce the award winning beers from the Butterknowle Brewery near Bishop Auckland. This follows the closure of the Butterknowle plant by owner John Constable who joins the new team at Castle Eden and will continue to brew his beers there. Some of the old Nimmo's beers, which were produced at Castle Eden before the Whitbread take-over in the sixties, may also be revived. Good news indeed when gloom and doom is the order of the day in the regional brewery sector.

Robbies Round-Up

Robinson's Best Bitter is now available through the outlets run by Punch Taverns, the company which runs many former Bass pubs and which has an estate of 1455 houses. The beer is one of the 13 making up the first of Punch's 'Ale Spotting' portfolios and which is designed to give their licensees a selection of guest ales from different brewers and to offer customers a choice of familiar brands.

Robinson's first in-house bar and cellar quality competition is approaching its climax. The winning pubs have in fact already been selected and the awards will be made on 7 December. Opening Times hopes to be there and we will have a full report next month.

Salvo Claus

The Beer House in Manchester has started to establish a tradition of brewing their own beer at a friendly brewery for special occasions. After the terrific success of White Fang (brewed at Shugborough/Titanic, and named after the pub dog), we are now to be presented with Salvo Claus, for Christmas.



This has been brewed by Sal (under Idy's "watchful management" at Liverpool's Passageway brewery, and will be on sale throughout December. Opening Times was told to expect a 6.2% Coppered beer, brewed with genuine Belgian monastic yeast, Maris Otter Malt (and some chocolate malt), Liberty and Bramling cross hops, and a touch of Holy Water from St Arnold's well, which Sal is in process of adding in the photograph.



HYDES ANVIL ALES
AND A WARM WELCOME AT
THE MOSS ROSE
DIDSBURY ROAD, HEATON NORKIS

*Gladys and Graham wish
A Merry Christmas
to all their customers*



Merry Christmas From all the
Management & Staff at

THE CROWN

Northenden



All the best for 1999

Ye Olde Admiral Rodney



Prestbury
Robinsons Hatters
Mild and Best
Bitter



on handpump
Lunchtime Bar Snacks
12-2.30 Mon-Sat
Peter and Gail
welcome you
Tel: 01625 828078

STAGGER

with John Clarke

Wet Night In Withington...

And West Didsbury, too, as our meeting point was the *Four in Hand* on the corner of Lapwing Lane and Palatine Road. The filthy weather did not in fact prevent a healthy turnout for this exploration of the pubs in what is perhaps a classic slice of Manchester suburbia, the original bed-sit land, although nowadays its aspirations, if not all its pubs, are rather higher up the social scale.

The *Four In Hand* was a good place to start, being a warm and comfortable refuge from the teeming rain. Originally a grand Victorian house and latterly a children's home, this is one of Banks's better pub conversions with a rambling multi-levelled interior nicely appointed in traditional style without descending into mock-Victorian pastiche. The pub was nicely busy at 7pm with a good mix of customers. Three cask beers were on offer, Banks's Bitter, Cameron's Strongarm and Marston's Pedigree, all on handpump and all served into over-sized lined glasses. The Strongarm, the new groovy chilled version served from a striking metal handpump, was very enjoyable, the Banks's Bitter rather less so. We didn't try the Pedigree.

At the other end of Lapwing Lane two pubs face each other, and a greater contrast there couldn't be. The *Metropolitan* was formerly notorious as the Midland where drugs and violence went hand in hand. After being closed down by Whitbread, it was taken over by the owners of the nearby *Nose* café bar who have taken it up-market with a vengeance. The huge building, substantially knocked about and opened up a little, has essentially become an ale house for the middle classes with lots of wood, old prints and tiled floors all executed with a considerable degree of flair and style. The old billiard room is particularly impressive although the whole pub is a credit to its owners. Four cask ales were on handpump - Boddingtons Bitter, Hartleys XB, Taylor's Landlord and Morland Old Speckled Hen. Prices matched the pub ranging from £1.80 for the Boddies to £2.20 for the Speckled Hen. We tried the Hartleys and the Taylor's and both were pleasant enough without being particularly outstanding. Food is available here, too, from noon to 10pm, both in the bar areas and the attached restaurant.

Across the road is the *Railway*, different from the *Metropolitan* in almost every respect. A tiny pub which over the years has been knocked both back into a rear room and forwards into an old off-sales department. In fact this latter used to be largely intact and in use as a small snug, but is now largely occupied by an extension to the bar counter. There is still a good bar back and etched window, though. The rest of the pub was wonderfully grotty - smoky, homely and comfortable. A complete contrast to the last pub but for me just as good a pub in its own very different way. Only one cask beer was sold, the Mansfield-brewed Grays Best Bitter at a bargain £1 a pint and which, unfortunately, wasn't really very good.

*Bob and Ann wish a very meery
Christmas and a happy New Year to
all our customers*

Ye Olde Woolpack



Brinksway, Stockport

Guest Beers Weekly



Tel: 429 6621

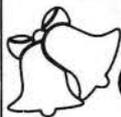


8

CROWN INN

154 Heaton Lane, Heaton Norris
Stockport SK4 1AR

Merry Christmas & A Very Happy New Year
To All Our Customers
from Steve, Lorraine & All the Staff



9 Rotating Guest Beers
(Up to 30 Beers per Week)



THE RAILWAY, PORTWOOD

Six Beers available from the Porter Brewing Co. Ltd.



Including the Railway's Exclusive Beer:- *Railway Sleeper*
and the return of the celebrated Christmas beer -

Sleighed

A Merry Christmas from Paul, Bev and all the staff



Look out for a new "One off" celebration beer for Dave Porters soon to arrive second child!

THE RAILWAY, 1 AVENUE STREET (Off Gt PORTWOOD STREET), STOCKPORT (0161) 429 6062

Moving down Burton Road, the next port of call was the **Old House At Home**. A pub I had enjoyed previously but which I had been assured now sold no real ale at all. The pub itself presented a welcoming sight, brightly lit and, inside, a rambling largely open-plan interior furnished in traditional style with lots of warm autumn colours adding to the cosy effect. Far from selling no cask beer, though, the bar counter displayed a veritable forest of handpumps with no fewer than seven cask ales – Boddingtons Bitter, Old Speckled Hen, Pedigree, Wadworths 6X, Hartleys XB, Castle Eden Ale and Fullers London Pride. Perhaps the relatively small number of customers should have warned us that not all the beer was going to be on top form and so it proved to be. We tried four beers, Speckled Hen, 6X, XB and London Pride, and they ranged from poor to downright disgusting. Indeed, the 6X was not only the worst beer of this night, but also of virtually any other night I can remember.

Leaving hurriedly, we hot-footed it to the **Orion**, pausing only to note the flats built on the site of the much-missed Waterloo. The Orion was formerly a keg-only Whitbread pub until it was bought by Joseph Holt's who worked their usual magic and turned it into a thriving centre of good ale. There are two rooms, lounge and vault, with a good community local atmosphere. The décor is typical Holt's but was looking very shabby when we called – a redecoration is well overdue, perhaps. There was nothing wrong with the beer, though. Mild and bitter, both on handpump, both at the usual bargain prices, and both very much enjoyed by the entire party (bar one dissenting voice who didn't much like his mild).

Thus fortified, we moved onto Wilmslow Road, past the closed Withington Ale House (being converted into a John Barras outlet) and into the **Albert** slap bang in the centre of the village. Years ago this would have been a two-roomed pub but now it's all been knocked through into one room with a bar in the right-hand corner with only some remnants of panelling and bench seating hinting at the pub's old character. That's not to say it doesn't have any character now. Far from it. The one room is essentially a vault, I suppose, but that's no criticism - there was a relaxed, easy-going atmosphere to the place with a good mix of customers. There is only one cask beer sold, Wilson's Bitter and opinions on this varied. The barrel was changed while we were ordering and those whose pints came from the old barrel thought the beer was pretty ropey. The new barrel was much better, although Wilson's is a beer that will never hit the heights, however well it is kept.

Nearby is Hydes **Victoria**, again very much a locals' pub which has seen some changes over the years. Several years ago it was extended into a neighbouring shop and is now largely open-plan, albeit with several distinct areas with a nice old fireplace in one room. Mild and Bitter are sold and while the bitter was alright, the mild wasn't very good at all. It turned out that this was due to one barrel running out and we were immediately offered replacements from the new barrel. Unfortunately these weren't very good either. Hopefully we caught the pub on an off-night because the Victoria has the potential to be a very good pub indeed.

Doubling back, we passed the keg-only Turnpike, and headed for the **Red Lion**. One of the famous pubs of South Manchester, this Marston's house was as busy as ever with a vault and snug at the front, endless extensions at the back leading to a conservatory and bowling green. It's a Marston's flagship and rightly so. We managed to get seats in the vault, arguably the best room in the pub, and

were able to take our pick of three handpumped beers – Bitter, Pedigree or Hop Pickers, one of the Head Brewers Choice range of guest beers. We all went for this, in fact, and it turned out to be the best beer of the night, crisp, hoppy and refreshing.

Time marched on, and so did we to our final port of call, the **Golden Lion**, further down Wilmslow Road towards Didsbury. It's a pub that has had several themes over the years, all courtesy of owners Allied Domecq. The current theme, or 'brand', is unclear but whatever it is, it didn't seem to be pulling in the customers who were notable by their absence with only a handful rattling around the large, rambling interior. Two handpumped beers, Tetley Bitter and Pedigree, and both reasonable enough in an unexciting sort of way. A rather downbeat end to an interesting evening's drinking. Of course this article can only present a snapshot of what we found on one particular night and should not be taken as a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers, certainly we seem to have hit some pubs having a definite off-night on the beer front, as even the best run pubs can do from time to time. As ever, why not visit some of them yourself and see how much you (dis)agree.

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OPENING TIMES LETTERS



From Peter Edwardson, Stockport:

Les Jackson ("OT" November 1998) complains about Wetherspoons' policy of not turning pumpclips round when beers are not on sale. This has irritated me too, and a couple of months ago I wrote to the company about it. They replied that they preferred the clips to be left facing customers so that customers were aware of the range of ales stocked. However, they recognised the concern, and were in the process of sending new pumpclips out to their pubs stating "Sorry Unavailable". I can't say that I've seen any of these yet, and it seems a very cumbersome way around a problem that can be solved much more easily, simply by turning the pumpclips around as every other properly run pub does.

From Stuart Ballantyne, Cheadle Heath:

AS a regular Stockport drinker, I am struck by the price differential that exists between local pubs in Stockport selling essentially the same thing. Some pubs seem to be able to knock out standard bitter at around £1.10 whilst others feel it necessary to charge £1.40 or more. This price difference seems to have no justification in terms of beer quality, location of pub, or standard of decoration and pub facilities.

By way of an example, the Railway at Portwood sells Porters Bitter, 3.8% ABV at £1.20, Winters on Underbank sells Holt's Bitter 4% at £1.09 and the Queens Head also on Underbank sells Sam Smiths OBB 4% at £1.12. Not a million miles away Robinson's Red Bull on Hillgate sells Best Bitter 4.2% ABV at £1.44, nearby the Bishop Blaize sells Burtonwood Bitter 3.7% ABV at £1.39 and at the bottom of Hillgate the White Lion sells Boddingtons Bitter 3.8% ABV at an incredible £1.58 a pint.

I would like to know how these prices can be justified. How can Robinson's pubs justify charging 30p more than the going rate for a pint of their bitter? Beers of similar ABV selling in the same area in similar pubs should be similar prices.

What happens to this 30p extra per pint that is charged in Robinson's pubs? Who pockets this money - is it the licensee or the brewery? I have spoken to a number of Robinson's licensees who all answer with the same voice "it's not me, ask the brewery".

Has the time now come when CAMRA should ask brewers like Robinson's to explain why their beers are so expensive? Why are Robinson's prices 30p a pint more than the competition? Are Robinson's the fat cats of the local brewing scene? If so should CAMRA continue to support such greedy exploitation? Every year Robinson's impose their price increase in January. As Robinson's prices are well above the going rate surely no price increase can be justified this January?

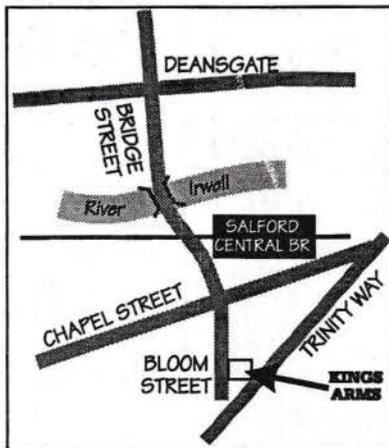
(I don't think picking the three pubs with the keenest prices in central Stockport and asserting that they set the 'going rate' stands up to close examination. A more sensible comparison would be to compare Robinson's prices with other mainstream beers in the town, which would show that they are indeed keenly priced. An equally measured approach would be to look upon the Railway, Winters and the Queens Head as selling particularly low-priced beer rather than accuse Robinson's of profiteering, which it is quite obvious they are not doing. It is also worth pointing out that the three pubs that Stuart cites as selling cheap beer are all managed houses with the prices set by the brewery, most Robinson's pubs (and Burtonwood's Bishop Blaize) are tenancies where the licensee has to make his or her own living - and I've yet to see any driving around town in their Rolls! - ed.)



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from
TOM
and all at

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CURMUDGEON



The Cold Light of Day

The government's annual TV drink-drive campaign has now become as much a Christmas tradition as turkey and mince pies. This year, for a change, perhaps they might consider using the following scenario:

A guy is seen at home getting ready for a big night out. He goes out of the front door, looks at his smart motor in the drive, but walks straight past it, saying "I don't drink and drive. It's not worth the risk". He gets the bus, meets his mates in the pub, and a good time is had by all over numerous pints. Afterwards they go on to have a curry, washed down by a few lagers. He gets a cab home and says "Only nutters drink and drive," his voice by now a trifle slurred. As he goes in through the front door, the clock shows a quarter to two. Six hours later, he feels a bit rough as he's shaving, but he's still got to get to work. He goes out of the front door, looks at his car, and this time gets in it. While driving to work, a bleary-eyed woman runs into the back of him. A policeman attends the scene, and routinely breathalyses both of them. The accident was her fault, but she's clear. He, on the other hand, is still over the limit from the night before. The last you see of him, his boss is telling him that, unfortunately, no licence means no job.

Every year, something similar happens to thousands of people, many of whom will have had no idea that they might still be running a risk, and may genuinely believe that they never drink and drive at all. It's the most common way in which people unwittingly break this law, and the implications of the slow rate at which the body gets rid of alcohol are not understood anywhere near as widely as they should be. Even so, I don't imagine we'll be seeing an ad on our screens along those lines, as it would be regarded as blurring the message and revealing the issue as a more complex one that the authorities like to pretend.

It also begs the question of exactly how you're expected to know whether you're fit to drive in the morning following an evening in the pub...

Drinking With Your Eyes

From time to time, I have been accused of "drinking with my eyes" when complaining about cloudy beer. What does it matter if it doesn't look right, so long as it tastes OK?

It's generally accepted, though, that you enjoy food more if it's attractively presented rather than just dumped on the plate, and I firmly believe that the look of beer in the glass is an integral part of its appeal. Apart from one or two speciality products, real ales - even dark milds - are meant to be crystal clear, and that's what the customer has a right to expect. There are rare occasions when freak atmospheric conditions can turn an otherwise perfectly good barrel of beer a touch hazy. But, by and large, if you pint's cloudy it's a pretty good sign that there's something wrong with it. While some beer buffs of the old school may be willing to give murky beer the benefit of the doubt, they should be under no illusions that

flavours from all over the world, but quality is not - everything is based on springwater, malt, hops and yeast - the German standards. Wheat is an acceptable adjunct for wheat beers (obviously) but the rice, potato peelings, tanker loads of chemicals and (presumably) dead bull-frogs that give Budweiser its awesome lack of character are thankfully all missing. The brewery states that it uses real blackberries (rather than essence), and given that the taste is subtle, and bittersweet, with a delicious tang in the finish, I believe them. There is a tremendous blackberry odour carried on the esters as the bottle opens and is poured, and it combines beautifully with the bitter aromatic hops in the head, fading delicately. Very nice and refreshing. I think it would go exceptionally well with a mild cheese. Oh, and you might find some in Bredbury (or other) branches of Safeways at a very decent £1.19 a bottle.

Probable Beer of December

Salvo Claus (6.2% abv) brewed by and for the Beer House, but I am sure the Marble's new Winter Beer will give it stiff competition. With Belgian yeast, and chocolate malt, whatever it turns out like, it certainly won't be boring.

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison **DECEMBER '93**

"Guest Beers Under Threat" was the front page headline, and the threat was from Blackburn businessman Andrew Ronnan, boss of the Bavarian Lager Company. He had found it difficult to get his imports into local pubs, and had made a complaint to the European Commission claiming that the right to stock a guest ale, which had to be a cask conditioned ale, discriminated against lager and keg beer suppliers. The Eurocrats had taken the complaint seriously, saying that the UK Beer Orders hadn't considered whether the "cask only" clause had actually contradicted European trading law.

There was another item referring to a reduction in guest beers which had already taken place. Two years previously, Boddington's tenants were able to order from a subsidiary company, Liquid Assets, which offered a wide choice. But this facility had been scrapped, and beers had to come from the Whitbread "Cask Beer Club", consisting largely of pretty dull in-house Whitbread beers, like Bentleys, Strongs, etc., with only a few decent beers from independent breweries, such as Greene King Abbot, and Taylor's Landlord.

"Back to basics" pubs had been in the news, a theme that more and more brewers were taking on board, with an ever increasing number of specialist real ale pubs opening. Locally, Whitbread had been to the fore in these developments with their Cask Ale Houses, Hogsheads and Tut n' Shives. Bass had now joined the fray with the opening of HR Fletchers, off Deansgate at the side of Kendals. The beer range was Bass, Worthington Best Bitter, Highgate Mild (or Dark, as it had been renamed), Highgate Old and Best Bitter, and several guests. The conversion had been done with "style and flair", which had not always been the case with some of the other pseudo-Victorian hostelries.

There was an item of pub news on the back page that referred again to Highgate Mild - apparently the licensee of the Bromale (West Park Road, Bramhall), Simon Eason-Brookes, had always wanted to sell it, and finally realised his ambition the previous month. Two nine-gallon barrels sold in as many days, and it was hoped to repeat the exercise. The re-named Highgate Dark was also due as a guest beer at Bramhalls, in Bramhall centre.

The Old Monkey, Joseph Holt's newest venture, was due to open on the corner of Portland Street - it looked set to be a worthy neighbour for the other two classic small boozers - the Circus and the Grey Horse.

ordinary punters, on whose custom real ale depends for survival, are going to be so charitable.

So, I feel entirely justified in "drinking with my eyes" as well as my tastebuds. And if I'm given a pint of beer that looks more like soup, I make no apology for returning it straight away without taking o much as a sip.

11

Alan, Alison and their staff wish all customers old and new a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year



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Fletcher Moss

In recent months Didsbury has had more than its fair share of pub refurbishments and openings and the trend continues at a pace. The latest reopening after a major refurbishment is Fletcher Moss, formerly the Albert, just off Wilmslow Road on Albert Hill Street near the old Healds Dairy site.

Hydes' have lavished quite a lot of money on the place, doubling its size by extending to the rear and adding a conservatory-style lounge. This new area is light and spacious with part stone-flagged and part wooden flooring, a high ceiling and large windows. The furniture is an eclectic mix of mismatched tables and chairs, which seems almost compulsory these days. The bar counter has been extended down into this area and now effectively comprises a large island bar serving the whole pub.



The New Look Fletcher Moss



At the front of the pub the layout is basically unchanged but given a mock-traditional makeover with lots of dark wood, leather upholstery and enough bric-a-brac to supply a moderately sized car boot sale. Having said that, it must be said that this refurbishment is quite an improvement and Fletcher Moss is a very pleasant place to drink indeed. We should also be thankful that Hydes' have elected to renovate this pub in a traditional manner as opposed to their recent efforts in Altrincham at the former Bakers Arms which is now The Gallery, a disaster and a horrible place to drink. When I called the beer range was Hydes' Light (£1.37), Bitter (£1.47) and the seasonal Chill Blane (£1.66). These prices are pretty good for Didsbury and the quality of the beers couldn't be faulted, especially as the pub had only been open a couple of days. The intention is to keep it a drinkers' pub, too, with food being restricted to bar snacks only – a laudable move at it would have been only too easy to turn this into a food-driven operation. All in all, Fletcher Moss is one of the most improved pubs in Didsbury and well worth a visit. Try it and see. SB.

12



COLOUR: RUBY RED
BITTERNESS: MEDIUM
STRENGTH: 5.3% ABV

HYDES ANVIL



The real ale of Manchester

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

Ruby Ratchet's Porter

An unusual porter, ruby claret in colour and exceptionally strong. This ale is a must for a fireside warmer in the cold months ahead.

Brewed with best Maris Otter malt and

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Most people probably imagine that Banks' have put in a hostile bid for Marstons, because they are a strong company set on gobbling up a weak one. Tosh. This is a story of the weak trying to swallow another weak player, to make the whole too unpalatable for anyone else. Frankly, while a recession looms, I can't really see the logic. Marstons are up to their armpits in retailers, making ever-more daft moves into 'themed' pubs which fail dismally - in Wandsworth in London they have two (tiny) themed pubs within a few hundred yards - and its the same theme - which only works in much bigger outlets. Its enough to make you weep.

Banks's, whilst in many ways a good company have a very mixed record out of their home territory, certainly round here. The worry I have is if the mergers did come off, three breweries would be at least one too many, and I cannot see Banks pulling the plug at Wolverhampton. Marstons would be under threat, and Marstons is the last true Burton Union System bitter brewery in the world. It should be a World Heritage Site (certainly more so than Ancoats!). The analysts seem to think that Marstons will go to a higher bid from outside (which will mean Banks have weakened themselves for nothing). Both will probably be absorbed into pub owning companies who do not brew in the next few years. I think I'm going to have to emigrate at this rate.

Burtonwood see their breweries future as almost solely contract brewing for regional/family breweries who can't be bothered to make beer anymore. It really is depressing. Peter Edwardson's recent letter said that by concentrating on micros I was deluding myself, because they are and would remain tiny. Well Peter, better tiny than non-existent. I doubt if there will be more than 15 significant breweries in Britain in fifteen years that make ANY real ale. Anyway, I'm off to Pig's Ear Winter Ales Fest in London to whet my appetite for Manchester in January. You really MUST make the effort. Upper Campfield Market. January 21-23.

**The Beer Monster's British Beer of the Month:
Beechams Original (4.3% abv).**

Beechams is the brand name of the St Helens College (training facility) brewery, whose wares can be sampled in the bar on Westfield St, underneath the Beechams clock Tower. This particular beer has a dominating pleasant malty dryness with the taste of hops coming through to the finish, which is decidedly bitter. A slight soft and warm aftertaste. All in all a splendid best bitter. So students ARE good for something! This was sampled at the Beer House, but I will be making the Westward trek.

Foreign Beer of the Month:

Henry Weinhard's Blackberry Wheat Ale (5.3% abv)

The Brewery of Blitz, Weinhard & Co, in Portland, Oregon, USA is one of the increasingly large number of craft micro-breweries producing high quality and interesting beers on America's West Coast. In common with most of the new or 're-established' - founded originally in 1856 - western 'craft breweries' ideas are picked up about styles and flavours from all over the world, but quality is not - everything is based on springwater, malt, hops and yeast - the German standards. Wheat is an acceptable adjunct for wheat beers (obviously) but the rice, potato peelings, tanker loads of chemicals and (presumably) dead bull-frogs that give Budweiser its awesome lack of character are thankfully all missing. The brewery states that it uses real blackberries (rather than essence), and given that the taste is subtle, and bittersweet, with a delicious tang in the finish, I believe them. There is a tremendous blackberry odour carried on the esters as the bottle opens and is poured, and it combines beautifully with the bitter aromatic hops in the head, fading delicately. Very nice and refreshing. I think it would go exceptionally well with a mild cheese. Oh, and you might find some in Bredbury (or other) branches of Safeways at a very decent £1.19 a bottle.

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Salvo Claus (6.2% abv) brewed by and for the Beer House, but I am sure the Marble's new Winter Beer will give it stiff competition. With Belgian yeast, and chocolate malt, whatever it turns out like, it certainly won't be boring.



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Bowden Street, Edgeley
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SKY SPORTS TV



CAMRA Pub of the Month
March 1997



13

ARMOURY INN SHAW HEATH



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OLD TOM**

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Sunday
12 - 4pm



This month Opening Times' resident chef brings you a suitably festive recipe and we accompany that with our traditional December recipes for Old Tom Cake and Christmas pud, but first...

Cerises Rodenbach

As Yuletide approaches, I thought hard of several alternatives to the traditional turkey and Christmas pud for this month's beer recipe. Several game dishes involving rich stouts, old ales or hefty abbey beers make a seasonally appropriate choice. I almost plumped for Christmas pudding, which any cook worth their salt would liberally soak with Guinness. However, I have decided to offer a simpler and lighter sweet, to complement your traditional Christmas bird. The dish is easy to make yet is, I think, a very satisfying end to any meal, but especially the gut-bustin' turkey dinner that many of us get stuffed with. The recipe serves four.

Ingredients

2 tins of black or red cherries or 1lb of stoned fresh cherries
1 pint fresh double cream
1 350cl bottle of Rodenbach
2 double measures (100 cl) of port
4 oz caster sugar

Method

1. Empty the cherries into a bowl, and drain off all the preserving syrup.
2. Open the Rodenbach and de-gas: use a vessel at least twice the size of the bottle (you'll need two such vessels), and pour carefully, between the vessels, until most of the froth has subsided.
3. Pour onto the cherries and leave to soak, preferably overnight, but for at least two hours.
4. Whip the cream until it is stiff enough to stand in soft peaks - be careful not to over whip (unless you're into S&M) - sorry!
5. Stir the sugar into the port until it has dissolved, then gently fold it into the cream until it becomes an even cherry hue.
6. Combine the cream with the Rodenbach soaked cherries until all are evenly covered, and then even out the sauce in the serving dish.
7. Chill in a refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.

The sweet is now ready to serve, but the appearance will be enhanced by some form of decoration - sponge fingers, milk chocolate fingers, meringue shells or tinned fruit or use your own imagination to make a truly festive-looking dish. Just a couple of points. Rodenbach is usually on sale at The Beer House or Bar Fringe or can be obtained from M Kinderman whose advertisement appears elsewhere in this issue. Finally - Good Eating, Good Drinking and Wassail!

Ken Birch is chef at the King's Arms, Bloom Street, Salford. Meals are available there 12-2.30 Monday to Saturday and 5.30-7pm Thursday and Friday.

THE CASTLE

OLDHAM STREET, MANCHESTER
NOW SERVING THE COMPLETE
RANGE OF ROBINSONS CASK BEERS!
Old Stockport Bitter, Best Bitter,
Hatters Mild, Dark Mild,
Frederics, Old Tom and Hartleys



A WARM WELCOME
AND FINE BEER IN
A CLASSIC PUB



Festive Fayre

For something refreshingly different our new resident chef Ken Birch has come up with a sweet dish using that famous Belgian ale Rodenbach but as is usual at this time of year Opening Times also brings you our two traditional festive recipes for Old Tom Cake and Opening Times Christmas Pudding.

Old Tom Cake

We have local brewer Frederic Robinson to thank for this recipe which was originally published on a leaflet available in the brewery shop (and still is, in fact).

Ingredients

- 4 oz butter
- 4 oz sugar
- 1 cup mixed dried fruit
- 1 nip bottle of Old Tom
- 2 cups plain flour
- 1 level tsp. bicarbonate of soda
- 1 level tsp. mixed spice

Method

1. Pre-heat oven to gas mark 4, 180C/350F
 2. Place the butter, sugar, fruit and ale into a saucepan, mix well and then boil for three minutes.
 3. Sieve the flour, bicarbonate of soda and mixed spice into a bowl, add the fruit mixture and mix thoroughly.
 4. Transfer to a 1lb. loaf tin and bake for at least 40 minutes in the centre of the oven.
 5. Test occasionally with a skewer - if it comes out clean, the cake is done.
- Old Tom Cake can be eaten either cold, spread with butter, or warm with cream or custard as a pudding.

Opening Times Christmas Pudding

A dish long associated with the use of beer is Christmas pudding. If you fancy a change from the usual shop-bought puddings, why not try making one yourself using Opening Times' special recipe.

Ingredients

- 8 oz fresh breadcrumbs.
- 6 oz brown sugar
- 8 oz vegetarian suet
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. mixed spice
- grated rind of one lemon
- ½ tbsp. lemon juice
- 2 eggs, beaten
- ¼ pint milk
- ½ pint stout

Method

1. Take a large basin and mix together all the dry ingredients.
 2. Stir in the lemon juice, beaten eggs, milk and stout.
 3. Mix well and turn into either one large or two smaller pudding basins.
 4. Steam for 8 hours checking from time to time there is enough water left in the pan.
- You can either eat this straightaway or let it cool, re-cover with a clean cloth and store in a cool place.

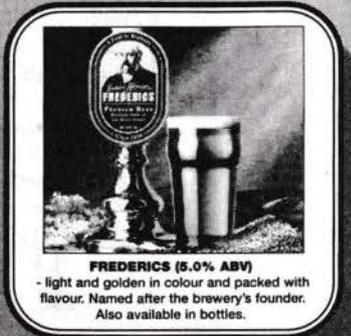
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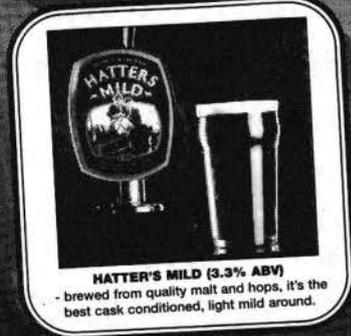
BEST BITTER (4.2% ABV)
- pale and bright with a full bitterness derived from choice aroma hops.



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.



HATTERS 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.



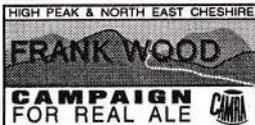
OLD TOM (8.5% ABV)
- smooth, dark and mellow. Brewed from a recipe almost as old as the brewery itself.

C H O I C E B E E R S

Macclesfield Pub of the Season



As reported last month, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire CAMRA Pub of the Season award for Winter 1998 went to the Waters Green Tavern in Macclesfield itself. The presentation was made on Thursday 19 November and our photo shows Brian and Tracey with their certificate.



**December
Featured Pub:**
Old Glove Works, Glossop

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Usually this month we feature a pub that has only been open since August, but has already jumped to the forefront of the Glossop scene.

The Old Glove Works was formerly exactly that although it was latterly well known as the Magic Mountain outdoor clothing factory for many years. In more recent times it has been a second-hand furniture warehouse. As a licensed outlet several previous licensees have tried the wine bar theme and most recently it was 'Bogarts Wine Bar'. This time, with new owners Russ and Sharon Dalton, customers are flocking in, particularly at weekends, when Russ will greet all his customers individually at the door.

Once inside, the interest for CAMRA members will instantly be the six handpumps. On my visit, early in November, beers from Coach House, Lees, Timothy Taylors, Ushers and Plassey were present but Russ is keen to point out that after the New Year, he will step up to include more lesser known beers (along with the Star, he already has the best choice in town).

The customers are all ages - some come for the Friday-Sunday evening discos, others for the Sunday afternoon cabaret acts. There is live music and the first and third Tuesdays of each month and on the Thursday I wrote this, a local pop duo were entertaining an appreciative full house.

Lunches are served from 12-2 Mondays to Fridays and from noon until 4pm on Sundays and like other aspects of the Glove Works, it is served well and is of high quality. There is also a well-used function room and pleasant outdoor seating areas for the warmer months.

All in all, a definite plus for Glossop drinkers. Russ and Sharon are to be congratulated on already making a great success of this venture. The Old Glove works is located at the far end of George Street, as you enter it from High Street West where buses will drop you off. It's also only a five-minute walk from the railway station. FW.

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

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

The Woolly Bridge Inn is closed having recently re-opened - this latest closure is due to ill health. The Criterion on Green Lane, Hadfield has fully reopened (having opened the vault recently). The pub has undergone "complete alteration and refurbishment".

In Hyde, the (in)famous former CAMRA-owned pub, The Whitegates, is now open again. But not such good news at the Cotton Tree in Newton which is now all keg.

In Glossop, the Glebe (Bass) now seems to have no real ale - in line with many other "bass" pubs in the region. The landlord of the Prince of Wales in Glossop, Bill Griffin - is set to take over the Cock Inn, Whaley Bridge.

The Bowling Green, Marple, continues to look for the ideal beers - the Theakstons Bitter has now been superseded by Wards Bitter.

Some more news from Hyde. The Carpenters (formerly the Royal Albert) by the bus station has Plassey Bitter on handpump. Nearby, the Dukinfield Arms is being linked with new owners - the relief manager from the Q and White House (Stalybridge) is rumoured to be taking the helm.

Ralph Heatley

Retired publican Ralph Heatley, who has died after a short illness, will be sadly missed by many CAMRA pioneers, both locally and on the national stage.

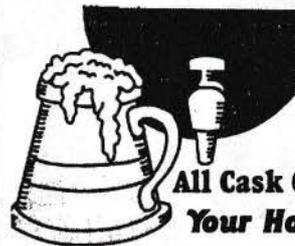
Ralph, a Hydes' licensee for 30 years, managed the Gateway in East Didsbury in the 1970's when it became the virtual headquarters of the then South Manchester Branch of CAMRA. Up to 80 members would attend meetings at the Gateway, among them CAMRA founders Michael Hardman and Graham Lees and national chairmen Chris Hutt, Chris Holmes, and Joe Goodwin.

A regular treat was a tour of the cellar to see anything up to 30 36-gallon barrels on stillage, including a dozen of mild in wooden casks.

Ralph and his wife Jean, who died earlier this year, were tenants of the Crown in Cheadle for eight years before they retired in 1996. Typical of Ralph's generosity was his donation of a large collection of bottled beers to the local CAMRA branch on his move to the Crown. Ralph leaves two sons and four grandchildren. NK.

The Victoria

Hall Street, Offerton
Tel: (0161) 480 3983



Stones Bitter,
Greenalls
Mild & Bitter

All Cask Conditioned - Guest Ales
Your Hosts Ian & Christine
BAR SNACKS AVAILABLE

Manchester Walks (1)

In a new series, Pete Soane introduces a series of walks around Manchester, taking in the sights, and, of course, calling in at some of the better pubs along the way. Those pubs noted (GBG) are in either the 1998 or 1999 Good Beer Guides.

Manchester has much to offer the beer drinker, from first time visitor to dedicated imbibor. What follows is a not too strenuous crawl around the Chinatown area of the city (with a short diversion at the end). Manchester is very well served by public transport of course, but travelling from Stockport as I do, the train is much the best option, being quick and cheap.

Whichever way you get there, our first pub is the **Grey Horse** (GBG99) on Portland Street, which is just off Piccadilly. The Grey Horse is a Hydes' house selling Hydes' Anvil Mild, Bitter and seasonal beers and is currently the Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year. There is always a convivial atmosphere in this small one-room pub, the service is friendly and efficient (top-ups provided without being asked for) and, of course, superb beer.

Leaving the Grey Horse, turn right and the **Circus Tavern** (GBG99) is our next call, almost next door. The Circus is recognised as one of Britain's most unspoilt, traditional pubs: a tiny two-roomer with a total capacity of around 40. Only one real ale is sold, Tetley Bitter, but always immaculately kept. Because of its size, the Circus is sometimes closed at weekends but, if this is the case, try again another time. You won't be disappointed.

Turn right again and on the corner of Portland Street is the **Old Monkey**, our first Holt's house. A comparatively new pub, the Monkey is on two levels and is built to a high standard with dark wood, etched glass and tiled floors in abundance. Mild and Bitter are the two real ales, both at Holt's bargain prices of £1.03 and £1.09 respectively. Because of its location on a busy corner, the Monkey is an excellent pub for people watching as revellers come and go. Turn right onto Princess Street, hopefully ignoring the tempting smells emanating from the many restaurants in Chinatown, although you could make a short diversion up Faulkner Street to view the Chinese Arch. Carrying on down Princess street and just before Albert square turn right onto Cooper Street; Kennedy Street and the **City Arms** (GBG99) are first on the left. One of Allied Domecq's Festival Ale Houses, the City Arms is a listed building with a noteworthy frontage. The bar is on the left as you enter with a mostly standing area in front (there are a couple of tables) which



gives way down a couple of steps to a larger room with comfortable fixed seating. This pub also features plenty of dark wood and is tastefully done in a 'traditional' way. Apart from the regular Tetley Bitter, there is an ever-changing range of beers along with regular beer festivals and brewery features. Recent guests I have enjoyed include Young's Oregon Amber, Tom Woods Bomber County and Highgate Black Pig.

Back onto Princess Street, turn right into Albert Square, pausing to admire the magnificent Town Hall (guided tours available), the Albert Memorial and the newly restored Jubilee Fountain, and then carry straight ahead on to John Dalton Street. On the left, just past the Italian restaurant (must be good as it always seems busy) is the last pub of this walk – the **Ape & Apple**, another Holt's house. I believe the strange name derives from an old Holt's pub called the Grape & Apple, the name of which became corrupted over the years. This is an even newer pub than the Old Monkey, also on two levels but more luxuriously appointed. There is a large standing area as you enter, splendid polished wood with tiling and carpets around the edges. The first floor is fully carpeted with more seating and its own bar. Holt's have spent a lot of money on this, one of their newest pubs, and it shows. Mild and Bitter are again the two real ales and again at the usual bargain prices.

From here you could amble back to Chinatown for a meal (and perhaps try the Forgery & Firkin on Mosely Street), head for the shops or just take a taxi back to the station. This crawl is just one of my personal favourites and there are, of course, plenty of other decent bars and pubs in the immediate area. Take a trip to Manchester City Centre and find out for yourself!

Come and Join Us!

Join CAMRA for Christmas! Stuck for an unusual Christmas gift? Then CAMRA membership could be the perfect present, particularly with our special membership and Good Beer Guide offer. You could even treat yourself!

As a reader of Opening Times you will already have an interest in pubs and beer. You will have heard of CAMRA but did you know that:

CAMRA is the Campaign for Real Ale, "the most successful consumer group in Europe".

We promote full flavoured and distinctive beers and independent brewers.

In 1997 we saved the vital 'guest beer law'.

We're run by our 53,000 members and there's a lively social side with 190 local branches.

We're entirely independent – run only by individual drinkers. Membership brings you some great benefits including What's Brewing, our lively monthly newspaper, packed with information about beer and pubs. You will also get advance notice of, and reduced or free admission to, our 150 beer festivals every year; brewery visits, beer tastings and pub socials. There are also pre-publication offers on all of our books.

Special All In One Price

CAMRA membership is £14 a year (£16 for joint members) and the Good Beer Guide retails at £10.99. However until the end of the year we are offering a special price for membership and the Good Beer Guide at £19 for the two, a total saving of £5.99 (although for orders outside Stockport and South Manchester please add another 50p for postage and packing).

Just complete the form on the back cover and send it with a cheque made payable to CAMRA Stockport & South Manchester to Membership Offer, 66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport. Remember, the offer is only open until 31 December. All orders received by 14 December will have a guaranteed delivery of the Guide before Christmas. If you only want the Good Beer Guide then please just send a cheque for £10.99.

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(please also supply a standard address)

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TEL: 01706 627009



HOPWOOD
Pale coloured bitter, clean tasting session beer with a bitter hop finish.



BANTAM
Pale brown bitter, slightly nutty, full flavoured beer.



BEST BITTER
Tawny coloured, with a hint of sweetness in the full bitter palate. A fresh but dry hop finish.



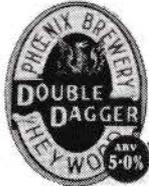
OLD OAK
Well balanced brown beer. Malt and hops balance the strong fruitiness in the aroma and taste. The finish is malty, fruity and dry.



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

18

Merry Christmas
And
Happy New Year

From
Les, Ann and Staff
THE STATION
Didsbury



Pat and Jo welcome you to one of the few traditional pubs left in didsbury

THE NELSON
Newly Refurbished

Seasons Greetings

to all our customers old and new

Look Out for new traditional guest beers in the
New Year
Fine Cask Conditioned Ales

Pub Hours Shake-Up

Years of campaigning for sensible licensing laws by CAMRA, the campaign for Real Ale, have not been in vain. In May, George Howarth, the Government Minister responsible for liquor licensing, announced that there is to be a ground-up review of our archaic licensing laws. Things have moved on since then and CAMRA is hoping for a new licensing Act by 2001. But we need your help...

The Government review is great news for pub-goers throughout Britain and for the many thousands of foreign visitors who are baffled by restrictions on our pub opening hours. CAMRA campaigned very successfully in the late 1980s for pubs to be allowed to open all day during the week and again in the early nineties for pubs to open on Sunday afternoons. Despite widespread predictions of drunken chaos on our streets there has been no significant effect on alcohol consumption or abuse or indeed the social problems attached to them.

Rather, this more relaxed approach to permitted hours has led to a more responsible attitude to day time drinking. People are no longer forced to 'get a last one in' before the 3pm bell tolls and in many pubs can sit back and take their time.

But the biggest problems remain. Every evening at about 11.20pm our town centres turn into no-go areas. It's an exaggeration, but it's true to say that increased circuit drinking round theme pubs targeted at younger drinkers has worked against the *raison d'être* of licensing controls. Hoards of tipsy teenagers do pour onto the streets all at the same time. Feelings are high, public services, other amenities and taxi firms are stretched to their limits and the result is tension and often public disorder.

It is for these reasons that CAMRA believes pubs should be able to open when they please. That's not as controversial as it sounds. There have to be suitable nationally set systems in place to prevent public nuisance. It does not mean that all pubs will be open 24 hours a day. What it does mean is that pubs can gear their opening hours to suit their customers and their businesses. Some pubs will close at 11pm, some at 11.30, some at midnight and some beyond. This will reduce disorder and other problems as people are able to take their time with their final drinks of the evening and travel home at different times.

Opening hours is, of course, only one aspect of licensing law. But it is the important aspect for you, the drinker. It's therefore of great importance that you make your views known to the powers that be over the coming months. Write to your MP and to the Home Office and support our calls for a ground-up review of licensing law. Remember the positive lessons of extended pub hours during the day. There is nothing to fear by change - relaxed opening hours with proper conditions to prevent public nuisance will benefit everyone.

OT SIZES: Column Widths, single 84mm, double 172mm. Image height 24cm. NB Advertisers who supply camera ready artwork designed for another publication that cannot be resized to our standard sizes will be charged the equivalent column/centimetre rate plus a surcharge of at least 30%. Adverts that require unusually large amounts of design work will have the extra work carried out by a studio at full commercial rate.

Graham
welcomes
you to ...

THE RAILWAY VIEW

Byrons Lane,
Macclesfield

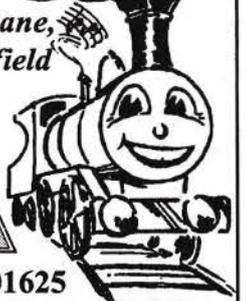
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REAL ALE £1.20 MON NIGHT

423657

Holt's Happenings

To celebrate their 150th anniversary next year, Manchester brewers Joseph Holt have launched both a new beer and a £200,000 appeal for Christie Hospital and the Holt Radium Institute, marking the brewer's long family connection with and support of this Manchester institution.

The beer, DBA, was formally launched at Holt's city centre flagship, the Ape & Apple on John Dalton Street, on Tuesday 24 November with the first pint ceremonially pulled by the Lord Mayor.



The beer was of course trialled earlier this year and met with a very favourable response. The final brew, though, is a little different from that which went out on test and in particular it has a slightly reduced strength of 4.8 per cent ABV as opposed to the test brew's full five per cent. It is an amber coloured beer typical of the Holt's style with a hint of roast malt on the aroma. The flavour exhibits the brewery's trademark bitterness but this is balanced by the full-bodied character and a long moreish finish.

It will retail at £1.29 and it is hoped to have the beer in about 50 of the company's pubs by the end of the year. The proceeds from the first two days' sales in each new outlet will go to the £200,000 Christie appeal, and in a splendid gesture the Lord Mayor made a point of paying for his first ceremonial pint as he also wanted to make one of the first donations to the appeal.

Sadly one of the outlets for the beer will not be the new Winter's in Stockport as there are accommodation problems in the pub's cellar. Hopefully it will eventually be in the range at the nearby Sun & Castle on Middle Hillgate which Holt's have now actually purchased. Some work needs to be done on the pub and it probably won't be open until January or February next year.

Holt's are planning other fundraising events throughout 1999. We understand that these could include a proportion of product sales profits to Christies next August and a proportion of bitter sales in September. Of particular interest to OT readers is the news that there will also be a programme of brewery visits, again with a charge and proceeds to the Christie appeal. Holt's is a brewery that many cask ale enthusiasts have waited years to visit so expect a stampede when dates are announced.



*Seasons Greetings & A Very Happy New Year
To All our Customers - Old and New*

From Bob, Paula and the staff,



ROYAL OAK

High Street
Stockport



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*Merry Christmas to all our customers
from Malcolm & Rachel*



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The Sun Inn

Licensee: Malcolm Roberts

e-mail: thesuninn@mcmail.com

The Sun Inn

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Tel: 01625 610436



Tameside Travels (4)

I had hoped to complete my round-up of Ashton and environs this month, but time prevented the completion of the survey so that's held over until next month. So, instead, we head for Stalybridge...

We start in Copley, where Wilson's Reindeer is down to just Websters YB from selling that and both Wilson's beers. Towards town, Marston's Cherry Tree remains closed until further notice. Up Mottram Rd, the Waggon & Horses (Robinson's) continues with mild and bitter but now with a few internal building alterations in place, nothing substantial mind you. Working down the road, the Dog & Partridge (Bass) has added Boddies to its cask portfolio, joining the Worthy on the bar; the Hare & Hounds (ex Bass) still sells Bass products, but of the smooth variety. There is usually an interesting guest ale on handpull, however, but for the life of me I cannot remember what it was on my visit! Further down still, the Stocks (J Smiths) has given over cask beer in favour of Smiths smooth; on Acres Lane, Wilson's Organ no longer sells mild and is only sporadically selling Wilson's bitter in what is a very dimly-lit and noisy pub.

Circling the town now, on Wakefield Rd, the Church (Mayfair Tavs.) is now doing Websters GLB, Tetley and Theakstons BB; the Travellers (J Smiths) is unchanged. Onto Stamford St. and Wilson's Dog & Pheasant retains its John Smiths bitter and has added handpulled Chestnut Mild - surely this latter beer is a keg product? If that is the case, the drinking public is being conned by this shameful deception. The Stamford Park Inn (Marstons) opposite is To Let, is rather bleak inside and is now keg to boot. Another Marstons house, the Fox has dropped Banks's Mild and Pedigree to leave just bitter on the bar; also on Ridge Hill, the Peacock (Robbies) has gone from metered dispense to handpulls for its Hatters and Best.

Onto the High St. area, where Bass's Feathers has now taken smooth on board in place of two cask beers; the Bridgefield (Whitbread) is down to just Boddies from that, Flowers and a guest; the Stone Jug has become the Barge, is now operated by Vaux and has gone keg; the Astley Arms (BodPubCo) retains Boddies but, has dropped Boddies mild; a similar fate has befallen OB mild at the Wellington, to leave just Boddies. The British Protection no longer does Matties, Theakstons nor Bombardier, it is now selling Flowers Original alone; the beer range has swapped between two Robinson's houses, with the Pineapple now taking Hatters as well as Best, but the Grosvenor losing Hatters (and not very busy, either) to leave just Best. The nearby Stop & Rest has become one of Gibbs Mews houses but remains staunchly keg; another pub to come under the Gibbs Mew umbrella is the Friendship, this has now gone keg with the loss of Theakstons BB; a pub omitted from Nine Towns Bitter for some strange reason is Vaux's Riverside on Melbourne St, fairly rough and ready but selling Vaux bitter (and sometimes another Vaux beer) from handpulls.

Wilson's Rifleman has lost its Wilson's beers and seems to have had a few openings made in the walls to make it more open. On the bar Grays Bitter is now the sole cask offering at 110p; the fairly isolated Pointsman (BodPubCo) has taken the smooth route and chucked out the cask Boddies. The Pineapple (Robbies) is also doing Robbies Smooth. I had bumped into Wayfarer that evening and the licensee offered us both an impromptu cellar visit. It all looked in first class order; the green nitrogenator device was shown to us too - very interesting all in all. Next month it's back to Ashton to tie up a number of loose ends. MMcC



Christmas Competition



As a seasonal treat, Opening Times readers have the chance to win a Hydes' seasonal beer T-shirt, celebrating Chill Blane winter ale. We have two T-shirts to give away and all you have to do is correctly answer these three questions, designed to test your knowledge of the brewery:

- (1) What is the name of Hyde's recently appointed Chief Executive? (5,7)
- (2) The early summer seasonal beer was well-received, but you wouldn't want it down your trousers! (What was its name? 3,6)
- (3) How many tied houses does Hydes' Anvil brewery now have? Is it:
(A) under 46; (B) 46-55; (C) 56-65; (E) over 65?

Answers should be sent to:
Opening Times Competition, 62 Cheltenham Road, Cheadle Heath, Stockport. SK3 0SL

The closing date for entries is 24 December and the winners will be announced in the January issue of Opening Times. Naturally, no employees of the brewery can enter and the editor's decision is final.

ADVERTISING RATES (1998): 1/8 page (60mm x 85mm): £25; 1/4 page (120mm x 85mm): £40; 1/2 page (horiz: 174mm x 120mm; vert: 240mm x 85mm): £70; Full page (175mm x 240mm) £140. Surcharges apply for back page. Discounts available on adverts of 1/4 page or above for runs of insertions. Advert design & origination usually free of charge unless large costs involved. Ring 0161 477 1973 for details.

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ATHERTON & TYLDESLEY
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IN ASSOCIATION WITH CAMRA
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28th 29th 30th January 1999
FORMBY HALL, ATHERTON
Main Beneficiary

CHILD FLIGHT

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| FRIDAY 29th JAN | 6.00pm - 11.00pm | £4.00 |
| SATURDAY 30th JAN | 12 noon - 4.00pm | £3.00 |
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Spread Eagle

(Robinsons Brewery Tap)

A very Merry Xmas
And Happy New Year
To Everyone

Still serving
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Robbies in the World

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

December 98

Monday 7th - Social and talk by Holt's brewer Dick Venes at the Sidings, Broom Lane, Levenshulme. Starts 8pm.

Wednesday 9th - Trip to Hydres' Anvil Brewery. Meet at brewery 7.30pm. names to John Hutchinson on 434 7177.

Thursday 10th - Monthly Branch meeting and Christmas Quiz., Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heaviley. Starts 8.00pm.

Saturday 12th - Joint Social with Macclesfield Branch, Davenport Arms, Woodford. A minibus will be available. Book with John Hutchinson on 434 7177.

Monday 14th - Social, Donkey Stone, Terminal 1, Manchester Airport. Starts 9.00pm.

Thursday 17th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Horse & Farrier, Gatley. To book a seat on the minibus phone John Hutchinson on 434 7177.

Friday 18th - Famous Annual Hillgate Stagger. Starts 7.00pm Queens Head (Turners Vaults), Underbank; 8.30 Black Lion, Middle Hillgate. End Blossoms.

Monday 21st - Edgeley Social: 9.00pm Grapes, Castle Street; 10.00pm Armoury, Shaw Heath.

Monday 4th Jan - Social; Bishop Blaize, Lower Hillgate, Stockport. Starts 9pm.

Saturday 9th - Branch 25th Anniversary meal at the Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris.

December 98

Great Buffet, Grand raffle, Guest speakers! Names to John Hutchinson on 434 7177.

The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:

Monday 7th - Committee Meeting: Kings Head, Droylsden. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 12th - Annual Christmas Social: Sportsman, Mottram Road, Hyde. Starts 8.00pm. Details from Tom Lord on 427 7099.

Monday 14th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Sportsmans Arms, Strines. Starts 8.30pm.

Monday 4th January - Committee Meeting: Shepherds Call, Market St, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.

Monday 11th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Travellers Call, Bredbury. Starts 8.30. *Apart from Macclesfield and Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have advised us of the following events:*

Saturday 12th - Joint Social with Stockport & South Manchester Branch, Davenport Arms, Woodford. Starts 8.00pm.

Monday 21st - Committee and Branch Meeting: Swan, Swan St, Wilmslow. Starts 8.00pm.

To Do Address: Macclesfield Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner

THE QUEENS ARMS

HONEY STREET, CHEETHAM



Real Ales
Traditional
Cider and
Czech
Budvar
on Draught

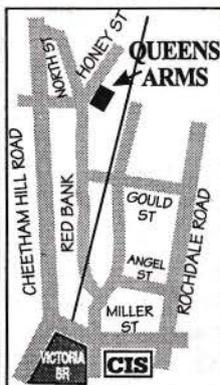
Dave and Sue Price invite you to try the fine range of beer, and traditional cider in

their Excellent Free House

Taylor's Landlord, Phoenix Bantam and Constantly Changing Range of Beers Beer Garden & Children's

Certificate

Quiz Night (Free) on Tuesdays (Cash Prizes) Food Every Day All Day **Open All Permitted Hours**



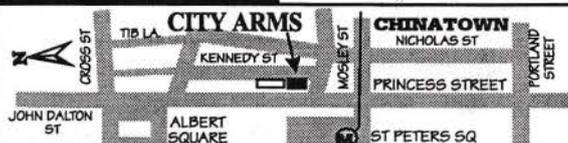
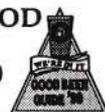
Claire and Howard wish all their friends and customers a very Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year Coming in November (among others)

Elgoods Cambridge and Golden Newt, Ushers Winter Storm, Batemans Yuletide and Rosey Nosey, Fullers Old Winter Ale, Brakspears Oh Be Joyful, Tomintoul Santas Sledgehammer

KENNEDY STREET THE CITY ARMS

8 HANDPUMPS
6 GUEST ALES

LUNCHTIME FOOD
11.30-2.30
and 11.30 - 2.00
Saturday



MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

The pre-Christmas rush to refurbish and re-open continues at a break-neck pace with another clutch to report this month. Sadly, though, we will have to wait until the New Year before the Wellington and Sinclairs are unveiled after their careful 'brick by brick' reconstruction (hah!).

Openings and Closures

It's a rare event these days when the City Centre actually loses a licensed outlet but last month saw not one but two losses. The most serious is the closure of the historic **Sam's Chop House** on Back Pool Fold, off Cross Street. After serving the city for 126 years time was called when owners Scottish & Newcastle were unable to agree new lease terms with the building's owners. Regulars have described the closure as "a tragedy" and you do wonder just how hard S & N tried to renew the lease. They certainly haven't kicked up much of a fuss over the closure.

The other loss is on York Street where **Rosies Bar** (formerly the York Tavern) has become 'Espres' an eat-in/take-out sandwich and coffee bar. In truth the place never had much character but it was a cask ale outlet nonetheless and even once featured in the Good Beer Guide, many, many years ago.

On a brighter note, Scottish & Newcastle have re-opened the **Sawyers Arms** on Deansgate after an extensive refurbishment which has seen the pub converted into one of their 'John Barras' community pubs, an unlikely choice of theme for a City Centre venue perhaps. The pub certainly looks good, both inside and out and the reinstatement of the corner door is particularly commendable. Inside there's lots of wood and bric-a-brac with the upper floor turned into a sort of gallery with its own bar. You have to wonder, though, whether this is enough to make a go of the place. It certainly wins no points for imagination on the beer front with the cask range restricted to the tired and predictable Theakstons Bitter, Websters Bitter and Marston's Pedigree.

There's a new bar on Oxford Street, too - **Elemental**. Very stark in appearance with much use made of plain galvanised steel. It is stark too, on the beer front - no cask ale.

Pub for Trafford Centre

The Dimplington shopping complex got its first 'proper' pub last month with the opening of the **Orangery** within the grounds. It has a neo-classical look and it stands out well being painted white; dolphins spew forth water in the fountains at the front. The interior is a complete contrast, very stylish and modern with furnishings to match. All that is missing is cask beer (why not give it a try, Whitbread?). Another reason to avoid the Trafford Centre...

Re-openings in the Suburbs

The Wilmslow Road corridor has also been a hive of activity in the last few weeks. On Grafton Street, the **Bowling Green** has become one of the Greenall's 'Porter's Ale House' themed pubs. The words 'Ale House' really tell you all you need to know about this pub - lots of wood, mismatched furniture and bric-a-brac. Not very imaginative but it works well enough and the new-look pub is very easy on the eye although it is now just one large room with pool table to the



right and raised seating area to the left. There's also quite an accent on food but then again there always has been here. The beer range when I called was Greenall's Bitter, Tetley Bitter, Cains Bitter (not bad at all) and a house beer. Worth a look.

But One False Start...

Further down the road in Withington, the **Withington Ale House** is now the White Lion once more and is another Scottish & Newcastle 'John Barras' pub. From what I can tell it should be an impressive job, although this is based on glimpses through the windows only. And why is that, you ask. Well, despite a sign saying the pub would open on 9 November (quickly taken down when that deadline was missed) and despite being told by people at the pub (on two occasions) that it would be open 'next week', it was still closed as we went to press, despite all signs of being finished. On my last attempted visit the sign on the door said helpfully (not!) 'opening soon' which, it turned out was Sunday 29th November. Let's hope its worth the wait, but since the beer range will doubtless be the usual tedious Barras range (Theakstons, Pedigree and Websters), possibly not.

East Side Notes

On a recent visit to the **Vale Cottage** in Gorton the only cask ale was Webster's Bitter (a pump-clip for a Coach House beer was reversed) but what a revelation - full-bodied, tasty and beer you would quite happily drink all night. Why can't it be like that all the time (or even some of the time)? Up in Clayton, the **Strawberry Duck** on Crabtree Lane has new managers and what an excellent pub they have - refurbished in traditional style, piano in the vault and Holt's Mild and Bitter on handpump, the Duck is one of the best pubs in this part of the city. Down in Beswick, the **Britannia** is still doing the business despite its remote location. The Lees Bitter I sampled there recently was amongst the best I have ever had - let's hope that the stadium to be built nearby revives the pub's fortunes - and doesn't prompt the brewers to knock it about. This, sadly, is the fate that has befallen the **Travellers Call** on Hyde Road where the corridor wall has been taken out and the sliding door to the back room removed, thus turning the pub into an open-plan L-shaped room. While you can see the need to improve the pub's trade, after all its licensee has to make a living, surely this could have been done without effectively destroying one of the few remaining small-scale Victorian pub interiors in the City. The beer was up to its usual form, though. As indeed it was at the nearby **Coach & Horses** with Robinson's Best and Hatters Mild on sparkling form. The bad news, though, is that landlady Beryl Lavelle is retiring next February, She will be sorely missed and will be a hard act to follow - let's hope that Robinson's choose her successor with care. Staying in Gorton, there are also signs of life at the **Birch Arms** and I hope to investigate this in time for the next issue.

Contributors to Opening Times Issue 176:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Ken Birch, Peter Edwardson, The Beer Monster™, Mark McConachie, Tim Jones, John Hutchinson, Jim Flynn, Pete Brown, Neil Kellet, Pete Soane



Refurbished Sawyers Arms



Two more inner city pubs went on the market just as the last Opening Times had gone to press. Greene King have put both Biddy Mulligans in Longsight and the Little Vic in Levenshulme up for sale. It will be interesting to see who takes them on.

building work is now well underway at the Pack Horse, Hillgate, Stockport. This ex-Whitbread pub, and later a freehouse, has been closed for many months now and its reopening should be a good thing - no news, though, as to what is actually planned for the pub or what it will sell.

Stockport's Manchester Arms has now finally closed its doors for the start of a major refurbishment which will see the pub gutted, extended backwards and taken substantially upmarket. Don't expect a re-opening before the summer at the earliest.

The company that owns such gems as the White Hart, Lower Turks Head and Auld Lang Syne (all closed) - Mayfair Taverns - has been sold for £37 million to pub group Enterprise Inns. Mayfair (formerly Ascot Holdings, formerly Belhaven) had an appalling record of letting pubs go to rack and ruin. Let us hope the few pubs that remain fare better under Enterprise.

24 The Orion in Withington is to have a major refurbishment by Holt's early in the new year and in a refreshing development, the exact alterations are open to discussion between management and customers. Licensee Sandra (to whom apologies for calling Barbara in last month's OT) has been asked to consult her customers on their views. One train of thought is to make the bar area at the front into a vault with the current vault becoming a snug area.

Staying with Holt's, we welcome new licensees Michael and Elizabeth (Betty) Burney at the Waggon & Horses on Hyde Road, Gorton. This is their first pub, although they were trained by Michael's sister who is licensee of the Chapel House in Denton.

In Edgeley, Stockport, there have been a couple of recent cask ale losses. The Hollywood on Bloom Street is now all-keg as is the Blue Bell on Shaw Heath. Neither pub has exactly made a feature of cask beer in recent years and the Hollywood has been up for sale for some time, with no apparent takers. The cask ale in nearby Tom Thumbs also appeared to be on its last legs when OT called recently and must be another candidate for a loss to keg.

No sooner do we report yet another change of management at the Gardeners Arms, Edgeley, than it happens again. What is Beckvale Ltd up to? This time it is Colin and Ricky (aka The Blues Brothers) who get to have a go. They moved in on 16 October. The beer range will remain handpumped Tetleys and John Smiths for the time being. Food will continue to be available and Colin intends starting a regular 'curry night' in the near future, along with weekend discos, quiz nights, and from December, live weekend entertainment (including an Elvis night). Currently he is busy arranging a children's Christmas Party for 22 December. Yes, we did say December - OT has been assured that there will be no more management changes this year. Good luck lads, and let's hope you're still here this time next year.

Staying in the Edgeley area, the Woolpack on Brinksway now has a new permanent mild - the superb Black Cat from Moorhouses of Burnley. The pub has tried a variety of milds over the years but this is certainly one of the best.

It's all change at the Greenalls pubs in Didsbury where the licensees of the Dog & Partridge, Crown and Parswood are all on the move. We don't have full details but can confirm that Martin and Jean Reilly from the Parswood are off to the Boat House at Irlam.

Also down in Didsbury, the Albert is now 'Fletcher Moss' (note the absence of 'the') and is reviewed elsewhere in this issue. Personally, I think Hydes' have done a grand job on the pub, although the bric-a-brac has been distributed with a perhaps over-generous hand. Opinions haven't been unanimously praiseworthy, though - one of my companions on the day of my visit memorably described it as "employing every cliché in the pub designer's book to little overall effect". Well, you pays your money and takes your choice.

Nearby, the Nelson has been thoroughly redecorated and looks a treat with smart new décor and upholstery. The Nelson is promising guest beers in the New Year, too

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APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(Opening Times 176)

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

NAME(S) DATE

ADDRESS

. POSTCODE Date of Birth

SIGNATURE TELEPHONE NUMBER

I / We enclose remittance for individual/joint membership for one year: INDIVIDUAL £14 JOINT MEMBERSHIP £17

UNDER 26 YRS or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £8

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £8

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

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

