

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING TIMES



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JANUARY 1999

Beer Vandalism Awards

SPECIAL EDITORIAL



Readers may be familiar with our periodic Pub Vandalism Awards which highlight the continued despoliation of our pub heritage. With one or two notable exceptions, there are grounds for cautious optimism on the pub front. However, there is still one part of our pub heritage that is under constant and remorseless attack – the very beer that we drink.

Two of the national operators in particular seem hell-bent on the marginalisation of cask ale. Step forward Whitbread and Bass, the first winners of the Opening Times Beer Vandalism Awards. Both of these two companies are doing immense damage to the cause of cask ale. Bass seem to have virtually given up on it altogether while Whitbread's policy seems to be to concentrate it into over-priced real ale ghettos (better known as Hogsheads) and at the same time flood the rest of their estate with nitro-keg Boddingtons. Let's have a closer look...

Barmy Bass

The antics of this company have been well documented in these pages. The Stockport & South Manchester and Macclesfield areas have relatively few Bass pubs and many of those haven't sold a drop of cask beer for years. In Tameside, though, as we have reported in these pages, there has been a virtual tidal wave of losses to keg beer. Worthington Bitter is now 80 per cent 'smooth', although it is such a blandly inoffensive beer, even in its cask form there is little to commend it. Sales of the former flagship beer, Draught Bass, are on the slide. The few Bass pubs which attempt to make a feature of cask ale charge the earth for it as evidenced by the Woodstock in West Didsbury and All Bar One in the City Centre. Unfashionable beers have been hived off to other brewers, breweries in Sheffield and Cardiff are to be axed, Stones Bitter has been weakened and is now a shadow of its former self. The list goes on and on – a sad indictment of a company that once was a byword for quality and tradition.

Wobbly Whitbread

Unlike Bass, at least Whitbread do have some pubs that specialise in cask beer. They are called Hogsheads. The standard of these tends to vary – they are all managed houses and if you get one run by a manager with a real enthusiasm for cask ale, the Didsbury and Wilmslow Road Hogsheads are good examples, then they can be good places to drink. If however someone runs them who is specialising in cask beer because he/she has been told to, then they can be dismally disappointing, and do the cause of cask ale no good at all. And all this comes at a price – you'll never get a cheap pint in a Hogshead. But what about the rest of the estate? Keg

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Sportsman

Regional Pub of the Year

For the third year running, the Regional Pub of the Year title for CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, in Greater Manchester has gone to a pub in the Opening Times area. It's not a Stockport pub this time, though, but the Sportsman in Hyde.

When owner Geoff Oliver bought the pub in July 1996 it was a failed, shabby Whitbread house with a low level of trade. Two and a half years later, the pub has been fully refurbished and turnover is up almost seven times.



The secret of the pub's success is simply to avoid gimmicks, offer a welcome to all, and provide value for money. A trick that even the likes of Whitbread could pull off if they had the vision and imagination but which seems to be so

sadly lacking in the bigger companies.

The refurbishment has been gradual but effective. Two lounges have been refashioned in traditional style with stripped, varnished floors, local brewery memorabilia on the walls and, in the front room, a welcoming open fire. The old local brewery relics in particular have created quite of lot if interest especially with some of the older customers who can remember some of them, notably the lamented Gartside's of Ashton. There is also a well-used vault and another games area with table football. This is another area where the Sportsman has gone from strength to strength – from a standing start, the pub now has two pool teams, a darts team, quiz team and social club. There is even the possibility of a football team for next season.

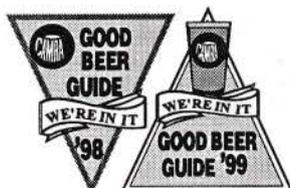
It's on the beer front, though, that the Sportsman has excelled, introducing choice and quality to a town where both were thin on the ground. The permanent range now includes Whim Magic Mushroom Mild and Hartington Bitter, Plassey Bitter (the pub's biggest seller and the brewery's biggest single outlet), Taylor's Landlord, one Robinson's beer, currently Old Tom, plus one or two guest ales. In addition there is traditional cider and a small but interesting range of foreign beer. All the draught beers are sold in oversize, lined glasses too. This has proved a very popular measure with customers appreciating the value for money that this means. With one eye on the newly opened Wetherspoon outlet nearby, Geoff also confirms that despite that company's claimed experience, his customers haven't confused full measure in lined glasses with short measure in brim glasses. Geoff was delighted with the news of his award. "All the staff are excited about it," he told Opening Times, "it's great to see all our hard work rewarded in this way. We've obviously hit on a successful formula and we intend to carry on in exactly the same way." Geoff also told us that he would also like to open a second pub in the longer term – we're keeping him posted about local opportunities!

The Sportsman in may ways sums up everything that CAMRA is about – a gimmick-free, thriving community pub serving a range of independently brewed cask ales in tip-top condition with full measures guaranteed every time. A worthy winner indeed of our regional Pub of the Year title. The presentation is to be made on Tuesday 12th January when a full house and a memorable night are promised.



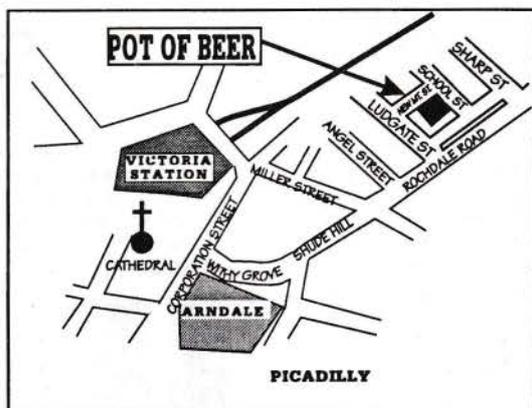
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Beer Vandalism Awards...continued

Boddingtons seems to be the increasing order of the day – most cask Boddies these days seems to be in Greenalls pubs. Only a few years ago Whitbread made great play about the large number of local beers they produced (albeit most of them refugees from previously closed breweries) but now virtually none of these survive. The company now has only one cask ale brewery – Boddingtons at Strangeways. The other remaining two went last year, with the closure of Flowers and the (welcome) sale of Castle Eden to its management. And the quality of Boddingtons? It can be very good indeed if licensees ignore the brewery advice that it can be sold within 36 hours of its arrival in the pub. Follow those guidelines and all you get is a pint of sickly glop, keep it for a week or so and the beer is transformed but how many pubs can afford to do this? Admittedly a few Whitbread Tenanted pubs - like the excellent Hind's Head in Heaton Chapel (with 6 cask bitters on draught) continue to fly the real-ale flag, but this seems to be in spite of, instead of because of, Whitbread.

Cock Up or Conspiracy?

So why is all this going on? It is certainly dangerous for the public view of the cask ale market. It is generally perceived that cask ale is in decline but many local and microbrewers report at least steady and often buoyant sales. This apparent contradiction can be explained by the distortion of statistics caused by the very size of operators like Whitbread and Bass. It's their cask ale that is in decline because they don't put it in their pubs and nor do they promote it. Are we seeing a deliberate attempt to drive cask ale out of the market? Possibly but another explanation is that both companies have been beguiled by that great god of the nineties, retailing. Pubs are now retail units just like shops. Beers are brands just like detergent. Customers are throughput. This could prove fatal to the long-term future of these companies. There are signs that pub-goers are turning more and more back to traditional locals run by tenants, a trend spotted and currently being exploited by the canner operators. Those breweries that concentrate on producing quality cask ales are prospering. Large impersonal managed pubs cater for a fickle audience. They need constant renewal and investment to keep their market share. The same goes on the beer front where the likes of Caffreys and other 'style' drinks' need ever growing advertising budgets to stand still. **It's a recipe for potential disaster. At the end of the day all that Bass and Whitbread might have to show for their efforts, amid the wreckage of their empires (remember Watneys, the first company to go down this route, and subsequently, down the plughole?) are our Beer Vandalism Awards shining proudly in the company trophy cabinets.**

John Clarke

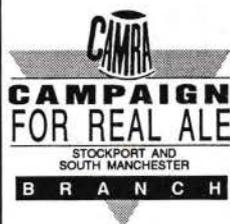
OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editors: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ (0161) 477 1973; Paul Hutchings, 8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport Cheshire, SK4 2NP. ☎ & Fax (0161) 432 8384. News, articles and letters welcome. All editorial items may be submitted in most popular WP formats or preferably ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!) or via e-mail to johnclarke@stocam.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). Letters to the editor on otletter@opentime.u-net.com. All editorial items © CAMRA: may be reproduced if source acknowledged. All Advertising images are copyright the respective design sources (Largely CPPR, but all other copyrights and trademarks acknowledged).

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Pub Of The Month JANUARY 1999

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



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for January 1999 is the Tiviot, Tiviot Dale, Stockport.

The Tiviot is in many ways an archetypal town centre pub in the old style. It's had no themes imposed on it nor has it been the subject of major alterations - it has just gently matured over the years. Although it's had the odd wall taken out, it's a fair bet that drinkers of 40 or more years ago would still find the place largely recognisable. There's a lounge on the right, with a small games room behind plus a separate dining room-cum-rear lounge. All of these are served from the island bar, as is the vault on the left. This is in many ways the heart of the pub and, to this writer, one of the best pub rooms in town. It's not some museum piece or historic relic but with the weathered décor and furniture, the cask of Old Tom taking pride of place on the long bar counter and the lively buzz from the cosmopolitan and mature customers, it presents an image of the pub trade that many commentators are only too keen to consign to history. In the Tiviot, however, it thrives.

This is a pub which knows its trade and caters for it supremely well. Good value food is served at lunchtimes and the pub is often busy with shoppers but in the evening when the action moves up to the market place, the Tiviot is an excellent place to enjoy a well-kept pint (Hatters Mild and Best Bitter as well as the Old Tom) in a quiet friendly atmosphere. Don't expect it to be quiet on Thursday 28th, though, when this well-deserved award is presented to hardworking tenants Dave and Jill Walker at this genuine town-centre local.

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

Contributors to Opening Times Issue 177: John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Ken Birch, Peter Edwardson, Paul Moss, The Beer Monster™, Mark McConachie, Tim Jones, Steve Smith, Robin Wignall, Stuart Ballantyne

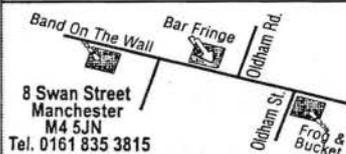
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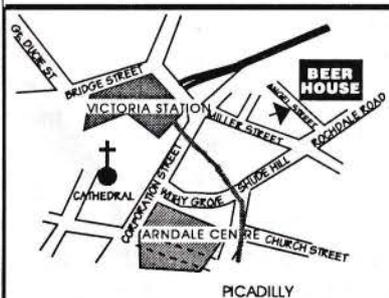
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STAGGER

with Paul Moss

Wandering in Wythenshawe

Sadly, it was only a small band that gathered for this evening's 'Stagger', a minibus exploration of the water-holes of Wythenshawe. Not allowing this to diminish our enthusiasm, we set off for our first stop.

Unfortunately, this proved to be brief, as the Tudor Tavern on Peel hall road was found to be selling no real ale. Undaunted at this early stage, we pressed swiftly on to our next port of call, the well-known Airport Hotel on Ringway Road. This large Robinson's house backs on to the runway at Manchester International Airport ("Ringway" still sounds better!), making the garden ideal for watching the aircraft take off and land. Inside, there are two lounge areas, plus a games room behind the bar in which could be seen a pool table. We chose to stay indoors, passing through an archway into the front lounge. Here, the attention is distracted from the wallpaper (rather too "Indian Restaurant" for my taste!) by the numerous photographs of aircraft, not least the Lancaster bomber flying straight towards us! Sadly the Hartley's XB had just reached the end of the barrel, leaving a choice of Best Bitter and Hatters Mild, both of which were found to be comfortably above average. Our next stop was Banks's Cornishman, on Cornishway, a large, pleasant local serving the brewery's bitter and just plain "Banks's", as the mild is branded these days. The lounge part of the pub is split into two distinct areas, the larger of which is set up with a stage area for entertainment. Dark wood panelling gives a cosy feel to the smaller area near the bar, where we sat. There is also a separate vault. Food is clearly a feature here, as a notice advertised an "All day breakfast" for £2.50, a "Big breakfast" at £4.00, or a "Mega breakfast" for a more esoteric 1000 pesetas. The beer was again rated above average, with the mild preferred.

Our next destination, also on Cornishway, was the Red Beret, sporting a Bass sign but, alas, no real ale to detain us. We therefore moved on to an investigation of the long and winding Portway, starting with the eponymous Portway. Again our stop was brief: no real ale available. Further along, we might have expected better luck at Burtonwood's Talisman, but found it closed. A quick detour onto Selstead Road found that the Bass-signed Woodpecker could also offer no cask conditioned ale. Back on Portway, we tried the Mountain Ash, "An Enterprise Inns Free House", and yet another real ale-free zone. Our last chance for suitable refreshment on Portway was the Happy Man. This description, regrettably, did not apply to us, as this, like the previous Bass-signed pubs, eschewed cask ale.

Time to try elsewhere, then: we moved north of Simonsway to the Silver Birch on Poundswick Lane, a big pub in the centre of Wythenshawe, offering loud music, Webster's Bitter, and not, despite the pump-clip, Theakston's Mild. The bitter was considered average. In search of an environment less painful to sensitive ears, we moved on to try our luck at Burtonwood's Greenwood Tree on Greenwood Road. This was indeed quieter, but rather too much so as it was, in fact, closed. Moving further up Greenwood Road, we came to Hydes' Anvil, outwardly an uninspiring, squat brick-built building, but disguising a lively, thriving local. Tonight the lounge was closed for a private function, but we found the vault busy and welcoming. The bitter and mild were both found to be on form; the seasonal Maris Gold was available on handpump, but was not tried on this occasion.

Moving out of Wythenshawe proper, we stopped at Royals, an imposing hotel on Altrincham Road. The exterior mixes black and white half-timbering and conservatory-style windows. A banner advertised "Dungeons & Dragons", but, on closer inspection, this proved to be the name of the children's play area rather than the role-playing game of the same name. On entering, we were met by loud music and a choice of one real ale, John Smith's Bitter on handpump. It seems that keg "John Smith's Smooth", served from

the immediately adjacent font, sells better here, as none of us were inclined even to take a sip of the cask version once the pungent vinegar aroma has assailed our nostrils. Leaving, we reflected that, sadly, Wythenshawe appears to be something of a desert for the real ale drinker, albeit punctuated by an occasional notable oasis. Indeed, thanks to the brevity of many of our calls, we still had time to pause in Gatley on the way back to Stockport. We chose the former Gatley Wine Bar, currently just "GWB", which, as you may have read in Opening Times, has been acquired by Cain's of Liverpool. Inside, pending refurbishment, the décor remains very much in the wine bar style, but with cask ale a priority. Indeed, before we had a chance to speak we were offered an apology for the lesser than usual range, with resumption of normal service promised the next day! However, we were more than satisfied with the well-kept Cain's Mild and Bitter which were available, not to mention the real cider - Weston's Great Western Revival - served from a cask on the bar.

As ever, I can only pass on the impressions gained by a small number of drinkers on one particular evening; the best way to find out if we were right it to visit yourself.

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CURMUDGEON



Pubs In Crisis?

You may wonder why I go on from time to time about the depressed state of the pub trade, when scarcely a month goes by without reading of new Wetherspoon and Hogsheads springing up all over the place. In reality, though, the apparent boom in new pubs is very much limited to the centres of big towns and cities, and is largely targeted at drinkers under thirty.

Outside these areas, it's rare to find a pub which is really booming. The majority are keeping their heads above water, although probably not doing the business they used to. However, industry analysts reckon that a good third of pubs nationwide are engaged in a real struggle for survival, and their business position is very marginal. Travelling around the country, closed and boarded pubs, or buildings which obviously used to be pubs, are a common sight. A new recession could lead to a tidal wave of closures in a very short space of time.

This is by no means exclusively a feature of rural areas and inner cities - there are many examples of suburban pubs in entirely viable locations, particularly in the South-East, where the owners have found it more lucrative to sell off the site for redevelopment as executive housing, an office block or a drive-thru McDonalds. There's an example of this near to home in Weaverham, a prosperous commuter town near Northwich, where a big 1950s pub ("The Salter", if you're interested) on the main through road was demolished last year to make way for a small up-market housing estate. It's dismaying how often I go in perfectly decent pubs, at times when you might expect them to be at least ticking over nicely, and find them embarrassingly empty. This can become something of a vicious circle, as, if you turn up at a pub and your group are the only customers, you might well feel awkward and end up not going back. The fact is, quite simply, that people just don't go in pubs like they used to, and the pub is losing its broad social base. There are various reasons for this, most of which have been discussed over the years in this column, but the truth of it is clear. Going to the pub on a regular basis is becoming less and less part of most people's lives, and the scenes depicted on TV in the Rover's return bear little relation to reality.

However hard you work at running your pub, it will not guarantee success, but it is clear today as never before that no licensee can simply sit back and expect customers to come through the door. If people are visiting pubs less often, they are going to be more choosy. But it is also obvious that there are plenty of pubs up and down the country, often in the most unpromising locations, in the deep countryside or rundown inner cities, which are very successful. If a pub is run with sufficient enterprise and commitment it can not only take trade from other pubs but also increase the total size of the market. Yes, there are wider social factors working against the pub, but licensees and pub operators must not be fatalistic in the face of this - there is a lot more they can do about it than many of them might imagine.

5 Years Ago

JANUARY '94

by Phil Levison

Chancellor Kenneth Clarke had presented his first budget prior to which both CAMRA nationally and the brewing industry had been lobbying hard for a reduction in beer duty to combat:

The threat to the industry posed by cheap foreign imports, mainly from France where beer duty was (and remains) so much lower than here.

The combined decline in the pub trade, believed largely to be caused by the high price of beer.

The Chancellor had responded by freezing duty - given the state of the public finances, it was thought that was the best that could realistically have been expected.

During the previous year, the new brewery revolution had been gathering steam, with more and more small breweries going into production. New Brew News reviewed those currently operating in and around Greater Manchester - these were some of the comments: West Coast - one of the oldest established, in Chorlton-on-Medlock - very much business as usual.

Flea & Firkin - no new products planned but Full Mash Magical Mild was due to reappear.

McGuinness, Rochdale - the newest of the local micros, and beers available had been increased to five.

Oak - operations had now been transferred from Ellesmere Port to the Phoenix Brewery in Heywood, and products were widely available in the local free trade.

Coach House - had gone from strength to strength since its foundation in 1991.

Weetwood - based on a pig farm near Kelsall - aiming to get more outlets in the Manchester area.

The Editor's review of 1993 commented that a lot of time had been spent drawing attention to and campaigning against the threat to various pubs, and there was optimism that some could be saved, but sadly, not Tommy Ducks. It had not all been doom and gloom, though. New pubs had opened, notably Holt's Old Monkey in the City Centre, and Bass's Woodstock in Didsbury. Holt's purchase of the Orion in Withington had been welcome, also the transformation of the Crown, Heaton Lane by the Boddington Pub Co. More and more pubs were turning to real ale, as shown by the improvement of the drinking scene in Reddish. There was optimism again in looking forward to 1994, and there were also two important anniversaries - Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA celebrating their 20th anniversary and in June Opening Times would reach the age of 10.

Christmas Competition Winners

The winners were Tracey McIlwraith of Gorton and Frank Wells of Rusholme

7

The Nursery Inn



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O **LETTERS**
OPENING TIMES

From John Hesketh:

It is with great regret I have to inform you that The Station in Ashton will no longer be in my hands. I am not entirely sure what the new proprietor's beer policy is but I am sure the membership will wish him well. The Buffet Bar in Stalybridge however will remain as ever in the capable hands of Sylvia Wood, as my manageress; possible opening even earlier for commuters! May I take this opportunity to wish you and your readership the best of festive greetings.

(The end of an era indeed. For more news about The Station, see this month's 'High Peak Pub News'.)

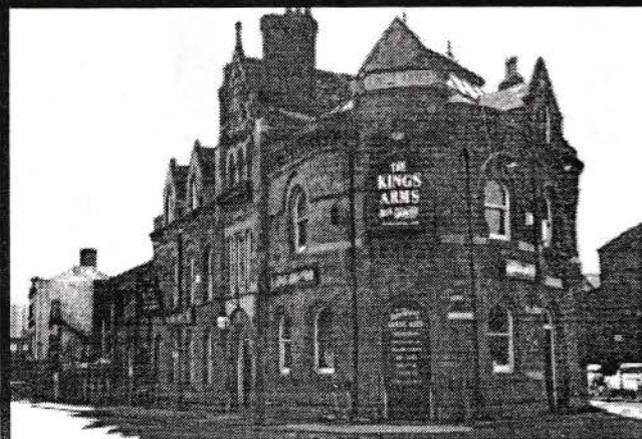
Letters to Opening Times via e-mail are welcome:
 otletter@opentime.u-net.com
 (please also supply a standard address)

The Gallery - An Apology

Last month we commented that The Gallery in Altrincham was 'a disaster'. Despite the context of the article clearly indicating otherwise, the pub's licensee, and one or two others apparently, have taken this to be a comment on its trading figures. This was not the case and we're sorry if anyone thought otherwise. The Gallery is trading well, we are assured.

In the Next Issue...

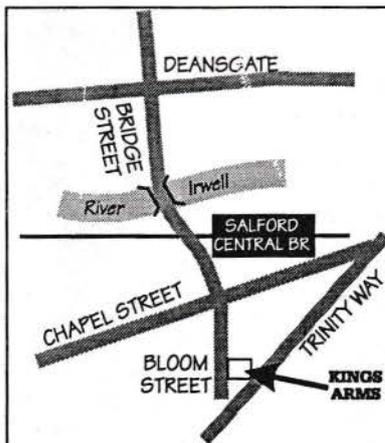
We review the National Winter Ales Festival, and compare The City Life Restaurant, Cafe Bar and Pub Guide and the New CAMRA Manchester City Centre Pub Guide. Wayfarer looks at Bollington, and Mark McConachie finishes his travels (or travails?) in Tameside. Ken's Kitchen has moved this month to the Winter Ales Festival Programme, but will return to OT in February.



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 5.30 - 7pm Thurs - Fri



**The
 Kings Arms**

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8 REAL ALES

Foreign Bottled Beers

Faxe Lager

Landlord £1.53 a pint

Hydes Anvil £1.10 a pint

**Brugs
 Wheat Beer
 and
 De Neve Kriek
 on
 DRAUGHT**

and a Happy New Year
 from all at
 the Kings Arms



Bold Burtonwood

Following last month's report, Burtonwood tell us that Top Hat is definitely NOT going to be axed as a cask ale brand. Good news indeed. Even better is the introduction of a guest beer programme through-out the tied estate from this month.



The 'Cask Collection' will feature a different beer each month, although the first will run for two months given the quiet level of trade at this time of year. The guest beers announced so far are: January/February - Caledonian 80/-, March - Mansfield Old Bailey, April - Everard's Tiger, May - Burtonwood Black Parrot June - Jennings Cock-a-Hoop

All are quality ales with the Black Parrot being particularly interesting. This beer has been brewed in the past as a 'special' for the CAMRA/Round Table 'Bent & Bongs Beer Bash' beer festival held each January in Atherton, but so successful has the beer been there it has now been recommissioned for the Burtonwood guest beer programme. Sadly our report of the demise of cask Burtonwood Mild has been confirmed - volumes have sunk to the level where it is to be withdrawn from the company's tenanted estate. However, this may not be the last we see of this beer - it is understood avenues are being explored to see if its production can be maintained.

Hyde's News



Meanwhile Hydies' Anvil are formulating their seasonal beer programme for the coming 12 months and in addition will be launching a new premium bitter this year. We understand that it could be based on last year's seasonal beer Maris Gold (albeit at a higher strength) which proved to be the best seller from what was by all accounts a successful range. The low-gravity Billy Westwood's Bitter, at one time one of the best selling of their new beers, has now been axed and the strength of Anvil Light reduced from 3.7 per cent ABV to 3.5 per cent. This will of course mean that less duty is paid on the beer - did the price also come down?

Holt's Happenings

Holt's DBA premium bitter is now firmly established in the company's tied estate and is apparently selling well. Those pubs in the Opening Times area taking the beer include the Angel, Knutsford; Chapel House, Denton; Cheadle Hulme, Cheadle Hulme; Griffin, Heald Green; Griffin, Heaton Mersey; Halfway House, Droylsden; Kings Head, Droylsden; Kingsway, Levenshulme; Queens, Macclesfield; Spread Eagle, Chorlton; Waggon & Horses, Gorton and despite our report last time, some clever cellar management has enabled the beer to be sold at Winters on Underbank, Stockport. It is on sale in the upstairs bar alongside the mild.



Less healthy, apparently, is the future of bottled Sixex strong ale (six per cent ABV). This beer is bottled by Banks's and it seems

that their bottling line can no longer cope with 170ml bottles. The alternative would be to use 330ml bottles (about half a pint) but this would entail a price increase from 77p to around £1.50. devotees of this beer should perhaps stock up now!

A second edition of 'The Story of Joseph Holt' by Christopher Grayling has just been published. It costs £4.99 plus 60p postage and is available from the brewery. The price includes a donation to the Holt Radium Institute.

New Micro for Manchester

Well, Salford to be accurate, as Bridgewater Ales will be based on Chapel Street, not far from the Kings Arms on Bloom Street which may operate as an unofficial brewery tap. Another regular outlet is expected to be the Millgate in Failsworth, where much of the equipment has been obtained. As it is in the same ownership as the Millgate, the beers could also conceivably appear at the Strawberry Duck in Clayton. Some building work is necessary before the plant can be installed so in the interim test brewing will be carried out at another local brewpub. A porter will be available at the National Winter Ales Festival later this month and this may be accompanied by a low gravity bitter. This is an exciting new venture - more news as it becomes available, and of course there will be a full review after the brewery is formally launched.



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The Greyhound



Bowden Street, Edgeley
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Rebellion Overdraft
Ridley's Rumpus
Hop Back Thunderstorm
Titanic/Slugborough Longhorn
Border Jams

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SKY SPORTS TV



CAMRA Pub of the Month
March 1997



Winter Extravaganza

It's the biggest and best festival of winter ales in the country. It's CAMRA's national Winter Ales Festival and it's coming to Manchester this month. The venue - Upper Campfield Market at Castlefield, just off Deansgate. The dates - January 21-23.



This is the festival which showcases those beers which show that brewing really is an art and not a science. Porter, Stout, Old Ale and Barley Wine - these are beer styles with a rich history and tradition, and the best that the UK has to offer will be there for you to try. The Champion Winter Beer of Britain will also be chosen here - will you be the first to try it? You only drink bitter?

Well, we'll have plenty of those, a large part of the total of 70odd beers in total, and a good selection of milds, ciders and perries. Foreign beers will be especially well represented - there will be at least two draught Belgian and two draught German beers available each session, and over 20 bottled beers from each country as well as a smaller selection of bottled American beers and a draught American Winter Ale. Whatever your taste the festival will have something for you. It's simple to get there as well. G-Mex Metrolink stop and Deansgate Station are just a few minutes walk away. This is a major national event for all beer lovers and is not to be missed. Make sure you're there.

Stockport's 13th

After tortuous negotiations, we can finally confirm that the 1999 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, the thirteenth, will be going ahead at the Town Hall. It's early days yet but the organising committee is already hard at work to make this the best ever. Get those dates in your diaries now - June 3-5 1999. Great news for cider drinkers too - for the second year running we will be hosting CAMRA's National Cider & Perry Championship. December was a pretty quiet month for festivals, the pubs see no real need to drum up extra trade - they're mostly full to bursting before Christmas, and only a few brave branches put on Winter Ales extravaganzas. The Pigs Ear Festival in Stratford was its usual noisy, and busy, self, and maybe I'm getting old, but I much preferred the rather more restrained Dudley/Netherton Winter Ales Fest, which once again was a very pleasant afternoon. The best beers I sampled though were to be found both closer to home and further afield, at (as I predicted) the Beer House, and to my surprise at The Head of Steam at Euston Station, in London

The Beer Monster's Joint British Beers of the Month:
Beer House (passageway) Salvo Claus (6.2% abv)
Barnsley 'By 'eck its Christmas' (4.9% abv)

The former was the second in a series of special beers brewed by Sal and Idy from the Beer House at a friendly local brewery, in this case Passageway of Liverpool. A 6.2% Copper Red Winter Ale with Liberty and Bramling Cross Hops - Maris Otter and Chocolate Malt - in the style of Leffe Radieuse, with yeast from a Belgian Monastic Brewery - and it really DID taste Belgian, a sipping rather than quaffing beer! The latter, a Barnsley special, full flavoured and not overly sweet with a superb dry finish was an absolute delight and surprise. Barnsley are definitely one of the most reliable of the micros.

Beer Festival Diary

National Winter Ales Festival 21-23 January (see poster on page 16) - miss this and live in shame...
Bent & Bongs (Atherton) Beer Bash, 28-30 January, (Thurs & Fri eve from 6pm, Sat 12-4 & 7-11) at Formby Hall Atherton. Generally a good 'do', proceeds to charity - joint event with Round Table.

10

ARMOURY INN SHAW HEATH



BEST BITTER, HATTERS MILD,
OLD TOM

Snacks Available

OPEN ALL PERMITTED
HOURS EVERY DAY

(including Saturdays & Sundays)

Robinsons Traditional Ales

☎ 0161 480 5055



Bed and Breakfast Accommodation From

£17.50 - (Evening Meals if required)

Free Meeting Room Available

For 20 - 40 people

New Face At Arden Arms

Stockport's Arden Arms on Millgate has had more than its fair share of ups and downs in recent years but now the pub is safely in new hands and has started on the long haul to regain its position as one of the jewels in the town's drinking crown. Rose Senior took over at the pub on 24 July last year after Robinson's took action to evict the previous tenants and immediately set about turning the pub around, not least by barring almost all of the existing customers! A brave move for someone taking over their first pub but Rose was not without experience of the local pub scene, having spent the previous four and a half years working at the Horsfield Arms in Bredbury. It's a move that has paid off, too, as many of the former customers from previous years are now returning and in fact the pub now has a totally new clientele to that just six months ago.

Rose is very conscious that she has one of the town's more historic pubs on her hands (it is a Grade II listed building) and stresses that she is there for the long term with the aim of restoring the Arden to its former status. That's not to say that the Arden Arms will become a stale museum piece - it still has to function as a pub, and provide Rose with her livelihood. Hence the pool table has been retained and a pub team formed. In addition Monday nights see the darts team in action. The fully refurbished kitchen re-opens this month and the pub will then offer lunchtime food, Monday to Saturday. At the moment the unique back snug, accessed through the bar itself, is only available by prior appointment but can be booked for private parties, meetings and lunches. The Millgate Room is also again available as a function and meeting room.

And the beer? Well, the cellar has also been refitted and Hatter's Mild, Best Bitter and Old Tom are all available on handpump. When OT has called the quality has been more than acceptable so the Arden is well and truly back on the Stockport drinking map. Well worth a visit. The Arden Arms is open 12-12 Monday-Saturday and 12-10.30 on Sundays. Telephone (0161) 480 2185.



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you to ...

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☆ BAR GAMES ☆



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THE CASTLE

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NOW SERVING THE **COMPLETE**
RANGE OF ROBINSONS CASK BEERS!

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

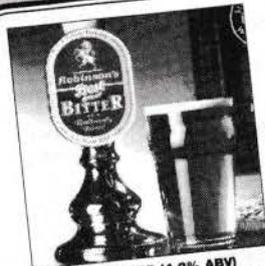
A WARM WELCOME
AND FINE BEER IN
A CLASSIC PUB



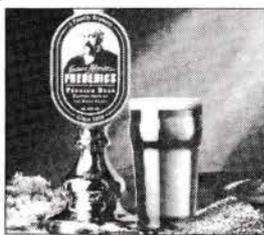
11



THE Robinson's COLLECTION



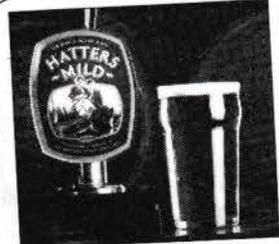
BEST BITTER (4.2% ABV)
- pale and bright with a full bitterness
derived from choice aroma hops.



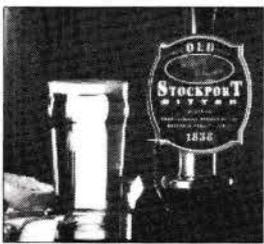
FREDERICS (5.0% ABV)
- light and golden in colour and packed with
flavour. Named after the brewery's founder.
Also available in bottles.



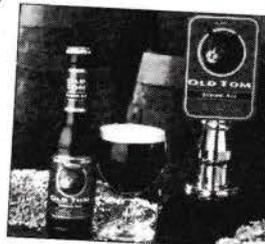
XB (4.0% ABV)
- a smooth bitter ale with a malty taste.
First brewed in the Lake District.



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



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



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

C H O I C E B E E R S

ATTENTION ALL FREE HOUSES!

Following the huge success of award winning Plassey Bitter at The Sportsman, Hyde, Geoff is now able to offer all Plassey products at realistic prices with free delivery to selected other Publicans (who would be willing to take it regularly) in the Stockport, Tameside. High Peak and Greater Manchester areas only. Please ring Geoff on:- 0161 368 5000, fax 0161 366 1365.

**CAMRA REGIONAL
PUB OF THE YEAR 1998**

THE SPORTSMAN

57 MOTTRAM ROAD, HYDE
Geoff and Carmel Welcome You To



**A GENUINE
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REAL ALES AND
TRADITIONAL CIDER**

Regular Beers include
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HIGH PEAK & NORTH EAST CHESHIRE
WITH TIM JONES
**CAMPAIGN
FOR REAL ALE** CAMRA

In Hyde it was reported that Carpenters had now got Plassey beers on. Well nothing's changed on the beer front but you'll have to look out for the 'Police & Hound' as it is now known. In Marple, the Jolly Sailor no longer sells Holt's leaving Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. Nearby in Marple Bridge, the Midland is all keg and the Norfolk has Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. The Grey Horse in Romiley has Theakstons Bitter alongside Boddingtons - both on handpump.

Over in Whaley Bridge, the Goyt Inn has Vaux Bitter, Wards Bitter and a changing guest beer on handpump. Over at the Shepherds Arms, the opening hours have changed as follows; Mon-Fri 11.30-3.00 and 5.30-11.00; Saturday 11.30-4.00 and 7-11 and Sunday 12-4.00 and 7.30-10.30. The beer range is extensive with Marston's Bitter, Pedigree and Head Brewers Choice, Banks's (mild) and Bateman's Mild, all on handpump.

The Railway at Rose Hill, Marple, is doing well under the guidance of its new licensees. Handpumps have replaced the electric pumps and the general opinion of the regulars is that the beer quality has improved.

Finally, some sad news for beer lover and tickers from Ashton-under-Lyne is that the Station on Warrington Street has been sold. John and Sylvia have left as has the extensive range of guest beers. The new owner Mr O'Halloran informed me that the beers will be from the Tetley range and that Guinness will replace Murphy's. He did say that he intended to have guest beers and that live entertainment was being considered for Friday and Saturday nights in the New Year.

It is a shame that such a fine free house selling an amazing range of unusual guest beers from small independent breweries has gone. We of course wish the new owner success with the pub but I personally hope that he will continue the guest beer policy of the previous owners and keep the Station on the real ale map because if he doesn't there must be a good chance that a large part of the pub's current trade will simply vanish overnight.

PHOENIX BREWERY

GREEN LANE, HEYWOOD, OL10 2EP.
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 maltness is dominated by a full crisp bitterness giving a dry and satisfying finish.



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



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



WOBBLY BOB
Amber beer. Malty fruity aroma. Strongly malty and fruity flavour. A slight sweetness yields to a dry finish.



January Featured Pub: King's Head, Market St, Droylsden

The King's Head is situated on the corner of Market Street and Greenside Lane in the centre of Droylsden – in front of The Bloods (Droylsden FC) football ground and opposite the refurbished market. It is a solid traditional street corner local. Not bad for a new pub.

The King's Head has had a chequered history recently. A run-down Wilson's house taken over by Holt's about five years ago and fully refurbished. When it finally became structurally unsound early this year Holt's demolished it entirely and began rebuilding at Easter – from the new cellar up. Over the months – driving past twice a day – it was clear that Holt's were making a good job of building a traditional pub and when it opened early in December it didn't disappoint.

Outside it is a red brick, traditionally constructed building (no expense spared). The new building utilised the corner plot well and the new King's Head is much bigger than the old one. There are three entrances – from Market Street into the large public bar, from Greenside Lane into the corner snug and lounge and from the car park (access off Greenside Lane) into the smoking section of the lounge. The three separate rooms (separated by real doors) are all served by an L-shaped bar where the full range of Holt's beers are available – Mild, Bitter and DBA – on handpump. As usual, despite the level of investment, the beers are at the standard great value prices.

The three rooms have been treated differently to suit their function – floor tiles and 'distressed' plasterwork in the public bar, carpet and wallpaper in the snug, and a mix of carpet, floor tiles with distressed plaster in the lounge. The public bar is functional, the snug is comfortable, but the lounge is something else!

Using the Greenside Lane entrance and opting left into the lounge it doesn't seem much out of the ordinary. The usual mix of patterns, checks and colours (which don't match – but seem to work well together) welcome you as you approach the bar. But with further exploration into the no-smoking half of the lounge you are welcomed into a Scottish baronial hall! Full height ceiling – exposed beams – mock balconies – an impressive fireplace and...stags' heads (yes, really!) I made plenty of notes about this room when I was there but somehow I think a visit is required if you're going to fully appreciate it. In my opinion it works well – it left me smiling (with it, not at it). All in all, Holt's have built an excellent pub using good design and materials to create a brand new traditional pub. For those of you who seldom or never visit this outpost of the High Peak Branch this is an ideal excuse.

George & Dragon

As expected the George & Dragon, Heaton Chapel (Greenall Group) re-opened early in December after refurbishment, to give management team Terry and Penny Moores a busy run up to the Christmas season.

External changes are noticeable. On the School Lane side, a newly built porchway gives access to the vault area. At the north west corner on Manchester Road, a new block has been built containing a new entrance into the lounge area, and a new toilet block, which includes facilities for the disabled. Also outside, a small patio will be available for summer use. Internally there is successful re-design/refurbishment, which includes tasteful re-decoration and re-furnishing, along with carpeting and curtaining.

A small minus is the replacement, perhaps inevitable, of the etched Boddingtons windows. The vault has been extended and opens into the lounge areas. Its distinct identity is retained with dartboard and pool table (new), and it will be home for teams for those games. Photographs are of sports teams and events. The big screen TV is also relocated into the vault.

The old 'football room' is now a separate raised area redesignated the Racing Room, with photographs to match.

The main lounge is slightly enlarged with the bar redesigned. The no-smoking area is retained and has the potential to be used as a meeting room. This adjoins a smaller lounge and together these

The Best of Robbies

The search is over for Robinson's to find the best kept bar and cellar in its estate of over 350 houses across the North West, North Wales, Derbyshire and north Staffordshire. Both the winner and the two runners-up are all in the Opening Times area.



Left to Right: Pete & Janice Burns (Church, Edgeley); David Robinson; Denise & Billy Parkin (King William, Wilmslow); Jenny & Sid Hampson (Masons Arms)

First place went to Billy and Denise Parkin at the King William, Wilmslow just two years after they entered the licensed trade. Billy put their success down to having spent enough time on the other side of the bar to know exactly what is expected when customers call in for a drink. "We keep every corner of the pub clean, from the cellar to the bar, and by not having a juke box or pool table we have created an atmosphere that our customers enjoy," he said.

The couple was among the first batch of licensees to pass through Robinson's British Institute of Innkeeping-approved training programme when it was launched two years ago. "Winning this award proves that the training in hygiene and cellar management was all worth while," added Denise. Billy and Denise now hold a shield that bears their names and say it will be a hard fought battle to take it off them next year.

Not resting on their laurels and sure to mount a strong challenge next time round are runners-up Peter and Janice Burns of the Church Inn, Edgeley. Certainly the high quality of the Hatters Mild and Best Bitter here were one of the highpoints of a recent 'Stagger' in the Edgeley area, and both are available at a bargain pound a pint all day on Fridays. The second runners-up were Jenny and Sid Hampson of the Masons Arms in Denton, who also receive our heartiest congratulations.

The Bar and Cellar competition was the brainchild of Oliver Robinson, one of the latest generation of the family to join the company. It involved careful scrutiny of various areas of every pub, including the bar, cellar and, of course, beer quality.

"Beer quality and the way things are looked after are among the most important factors determining the success of any licensed premises," said Oliver Robinson. "The competition is a way of rewarding the licensees who do the best job."

form the new dining area (all non-smoking at meal times). Decoration uses some wood panelling and pictures of local landmarks including work by *Viaducts & Vaults 2* and *Out Inn Cheshire* artist Rosemary Wignall.

Food is available 12-2 and 5-7 in the dining area, which is part of the Greenall's Innkeepers Table set up. A range of meals is available with main courses mostly around £3.50. The dining room was certainly popular in the week before Christmas.

Cask conditioned beer available is Boddingtons Bitter (£1.49), Tetley Bitter (£1.52) and Worthington Bitter (£1.52). The aim of the refurbishment was to enhance the George & Dragon as a locals' local. This aim has been achieved and on this occasion Greenall Group's efforts can be applauded. A job well done. RW.

13

NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL Upper Campfield Market (off Deansgate, Manchester) 21 - 23 January 1999

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

Diary

January 99

Sat 9th - Branch 25th Anniversary Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Book with John Hutchinson on 434 7177.

Mon 11th - Beer Festival Working Party Meeting: Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8.15pm (for those not attending, social in the Marble Beer House, Manchester Road, Chorlton from 9.00pm).

Tue 12th - Regional Pub of the Year presentation to the Sportsman, Mottram Rd, Hyde.

Thu 14th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm. **NB Pub of the Year 1998 will be chosen at this meeting.**

Fri 15th - Trip to Bank Top Brewery, Bolton. Minibus leaves Royal Oak, Didsbury 6.45; Crown, Heaton Lane 7.00pm. Book with John Hutchinson on 434 7177.

Mon 18th - Social: Cross Keys, Adswood Road, Adswood. Starts 9.00pm

Thu 21st - Sat 23rd - National Winter Ales Festival, Upper Campfield Market, off Deansgate, Manchester. **Will all branch members please support this event - if you cannot work, please come along and have a drink.**

Mon 25th - Social: White Swan, Green St, Fallowfield. Starts 9.00pm.

Thu 28th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Tiviot, Tiviot Dale, Stockport.

Fri 29th - ABC (Ardwick, Brunswick, Chorlton-on-Medlock) Stagger: 7.00pm Seven Stars, Ashton Old Road; 8.30 Church, Ardwick Green. **NB change of date to avoid clash with Winter Ales Fest.**

Mon 1st Feb - Social: Old Star, High Street Cheadle. Starts 9.00pm.

January 99

Tue 2nd - Committee Meeting, Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm. **NB pre-selections for 2000 GBG will be made at this meeting; all members very welcome to come along and contribute.**

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

Mon 11th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Travellers Call, Stockport Rd, Bredbury. Starts 8.30pm.

Tue 12th - Regional Pub of the Year presentation to the Sportsman, Mottram Road, Hyde.

Thu 21st - Sat 25th - National Winter Ales Festival, Upper Campfield Market, off Deansgate, Manchester. **Will all branch members please support this event. If you cannot work, please come along and have a drink.**

Friday 5th February - Sunday 7th - Branch Winter Trip to Brighton. Details from Tom Lord on 427 7099.

Mon 8th - Committee Meeting: Boundary, Audenshaw Rd, Guide Bridge. Starts 8.30pm.

Monday 15th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Crown, Victoria St, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm. **NB selections for the 2000 GBG will be made at this meeting.**

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:

Tuesday 19th - Committee Meeting: Chain & Gate, North Rode (just off A536 Congleton-Macc road, in secluded lay-by to west. Not in village) Starts 8.00pm

Monday 25th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Roebuck, Town Lane, (off Alderley Rd, B5085), Mobberley. Starts 8.00pm.

To Do Address Namepub Anniversary CAMRA 99 Planner

THE QUEENS ARMS

HONEY STREET, CHEETHAM

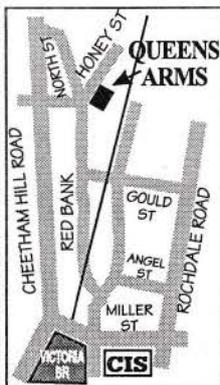


Real Ales
Traditional
Cider and
Czech
Budvar
on Draught

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

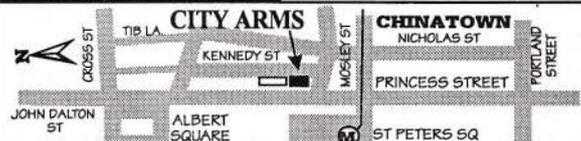


Claire and Howard welcome all their friends and customers
Coming in January (among others)

Wychwood January Ale, Gales Winter Brew, Bateman's Wee Beastie & Jollys Lightning, Smiles Bristol Porter, Broughton Reekit Yill, Ridley's Snow Joke, Tisbury Nadderjack, Archibald Beckett & Old Wadour, Springhead Goodrich Castle etc...etc...

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

Most of the pre-Christmas openings were covered in the last issue, although one that just missed our press date was All Bar One on the corner of King Street and Brown Street in the City Centre.

Opened in late November it offers a large open space set out in refectory style (long tables flanked by church chairs) to the rear with a smattering of other tables to the front. Everything is in light wood – the polished floor, the bar, seating and so on. A varied food and wine menu is available most of the day. Sited in the ground floor of the Norwich Union building on King Street, at the top near Spring Gardens, this is a Bass pub that does serve cask beer – Stones and Bass. Be warned, the Stones is £2.20. At present the opening hours are 11-11 Monday-Saturday and 12-10.30 on Sundays although the Sunday hours were under review as we went to press.

Apart from that, it's all been fairly quiet on the City pub scene. The Moulders Arms on Heyrod Street (just behind Piccadilly Station and highly recommended) has turfed out its Hydes' beer but don't panic – in its place comes not one, but two beers in the shape of Thwaites' Bitter and a beer from Phoenix.

Out in the suburbs, the Withington Ale House has reopened as the White Lion and is much as suggested last month – a great refurbishment let down by a dull range of beers. At the other end of Barlow Road, the Woodstock in West Didsbury has also reopened after major work by Bass. I haven't managed to get there myself but reports are very positive apart, that is, from the prices which are stratospheric. I was also hoping to get a look at a couple of pubs to the east of the city for this issue but again time dictated otherwise.

New Beer guide

Something to look out for this month is a new CAMRA guide to Manchester City Centre. Published by North Manchester Branch it promises comprehensive coverage of the City Centre along with historical notes, pub crawls and all sorts of goodies. It will be launched at the national Winter Ales Festival later this month and from the beginning of February will be available by post from: Roger Hall, 123 Hill Lane, Manchester M9 6PW. The cover price is £4.75 but CAMRA members get a pound off (but please add 25p postage if you order by post).

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Rotating guest beers have now been reintroduced to the Shady Oak in Bramhall. Licensee Tony Pecconi tells us he is starting off with the more familiar brews such as Old Speckled Hen and Abbot Ale, but even so they have attracted customers back into the pub who have not been seen for a couple of years. The initial batch has also included the excellent and increasingly rare Ind Coope Burton Ale. After abandoning plans to turn the pub into a Mr Q's pool lounge, Allied Domecq are still reviewing their options, but Tony hopes they will be able to give the Shady Oak more of a community focus and allow him to expand the range of guests on offer.

Mention a change in management at the Gardeners Arms, Edgeley, and regular readers will justifiably get a feeling of déjà vu. Last month we reported that two gentlemen named Colin and Ricky (aka The Blues Brothers) had moved in, but even as that issue went to print they were being replaced by Sam and Ann Arden. Both have been regulars in the pub for a number of years, and have in the past been known to throw the odd dart or two for the pub. They took over on 25 November. The beer range will remain hand-pumped John Smiths and Tetley for the immediate future and reports so far are of consistently high quality ("the best it's been for a long time"). You never know, if trade picks up again, maybe owners Beckvale will stop changing licensees around long enough for Sam and Ann to do some good.

Alan and Carol Seale are to leave Didsbury's Dog & Partridge this month after working 10 years for Greenalls, the last five at the Dog. We understand that the main reason for their departure is financial – with four children to bring up, Greenalls simply weren't paying enough! We have no news yet as to whom will be taking over.

Another departure to report is that of John Maguire from the Cross Keys in Adswold, Stockport. We hear that John and his family departed from the pub suddenly last month and again we have no news of a replacement. Presumably Hydes' will be choosing their replacement with some care as the Cross Keys is quite a high profile pub in their estate, housing Hydes' training department upstairs.

In Stockport, the Manchester Arms on Wellington Road is now well and truly gutted as work proceeds to extend the pub, already it looks to have been knocked through into the buildings at the back. On Middle Hillgate, Holt's have now taken possession of the Sun & Castle where work is again underway. This is far less drastic than that at the Manchester Arms and we look forward to an early reopening.

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(Opening Times 177)

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