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# ARMAGEDDON!

## Whitbread Sell Out To Interbrew - Bass Up For Grabs

**W**hitbread are to quit brewing after 250 years, with Belgium's giant Interbrew buying the company's three remaining breweries at Magor, Salmesbury and, of course, the old Boddington's brewery at Strangeways for £400 million.

Despite being the world's fourth largest brewing group, the Belgian giant has remained family owned, though they will now move to raise capital on the Stock Market. It has a very mixed record when it comes to brewery closures, having maintained brewing operations at a number of small plants in Belgium while at the same time showing more than a streak of ruthlessness when the need arose, and closing a number of the best craft breweries in Belgium. For the time being, assurances have been given that there will be no immediate UK job losses, although time will tell just how much weight can be attached to that.

Whitbread is keeping its 3000 pubs - for now. The company has already indicated that this area of its operations is unlikely to grow and sales of parts of its leased and tied estates to one or more of the new pub companies surely cannot be ruled out, especially given its recent reorganisations.

It looks like Bass won't be far behind Whitbread when it comes to quitting brewing, either. Just as the Whitbread sale was announced, Bass made it clear that its 'Strategic Review' looked like favouring a total sale - market-speak that indicates confidential discussions were underway which would almost certainly lead to the sale of its breweries for £1.5 Billion or so. Interbrew have also been linked with Bass, although it would be surprising if the regulatory authorities would now allow that to go through. Dutch-based Heineken or South African Breweries and even Carlsberg are more likely bidders here. The fall-out has already started, with the Salmesbury plant being split into two, and half to be leased back to Whitbread to allow it to continue to brew Heineken - which it is legally obliged to do. Of course if Heineken get Bass, well and good. Initially the casualties will be one or more of the brit-fizz ersatz lagers, and Flowers cannot be far behind AND, the Lass O'Gowrie, Manchesters oldest brew pub. This will have to cease brewing or be sold, for Whitbread not to fall foul of the beer orders. (The same reason Punch closed all the Firkin Breweries). It would be amusing if it stays open because Whitbread have to brew Heineken! This week also saw news that Bass is to sell 400 of its 'unbranded' pubs to regional operators to raise £150 million. If they can find tenants to take them on without freeing them of tie, we will be surprised. Even worse, profit warnings from Wolverhampton & Dudley (who have already closed Mansfield and still own Banks, Camerons and Marstons) have left them vulnerable to a bid from a non brewer, and shares are a recommended 'hold' pending take-over and brewery-closure bids. More on this shambles next month.

PBH & JC



The Whitbread-owned Lass O'Gowrie has been brewing beer in Manchester since 1982. Recently rebranded as a Hogshead, it will have to cease its brewing activities forthwith if Whitbread's Brewery sale to Interbrew goes through.

## GOLD FOR JEKYL'S

**T**he Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA "Cask Champion Award" for 1999 has been won by Hydes Brewery for the introduction of their new premium bitter Jekyll's Gold. This award was introduced last year to give recognition to the individual or organisation that had done most to advance the cause of cask-conditioned beer in the Stockport and South Manchester area. The inaugural award for 1998 went to Tony Phillips, Hydes' Quality Manager, for his initiatives in bringing about a dramatic improvement in the quality of Hydes beers and the standard of cellarmanship in their pubs. So another win for Hydes - this time for the company itself - is an impressive achievement.

In the past few years, local brewers Robinson's and Holt's have both introduced new premium beers with limited success locally. Robinson's Frederics was and is an excellent beer, but, with their Best Bitter at 4.2% ABV, there was little leeway in the range for a stronger bitter. They also made a mistake initially by pricing it at up to 40p a pint more than Best, which predictably meant it found few takers amongst local drinkers. Holt's DBA, at 4.9%, was not priced so excessively, but it was a heavy beer that many drinkers only felt they wanted one pint of, and it has now all but disappeared from their pubs.

But Hydes' got it right with Jekyll's Gold, giving it a relatively modest and drinkable strength of 4.3% and pricing it at only 10p a pint more than Bitter. It has also been widely acclaimed as a superb and highly distinctive beer - pale in colour, full-bodied, a touch fruity, bursting with hops and with a long, dry aftertaste. While, not surprisingly, it hasn't gone into the pubs mainly used by budget-conscious regulars, it has proved popular in a significant proportion of Hydes' estate, and has also won many free trade customers. At a time when cask beer availability is regrettably declining, it is rare for one of the established breweries to introduce an entirely new permanent beer. That Hydes have chosen to do, and produced such a fine brew in the process, is greatly to their credit, and makes them well-deserved Cask Champions for 1999.

PE

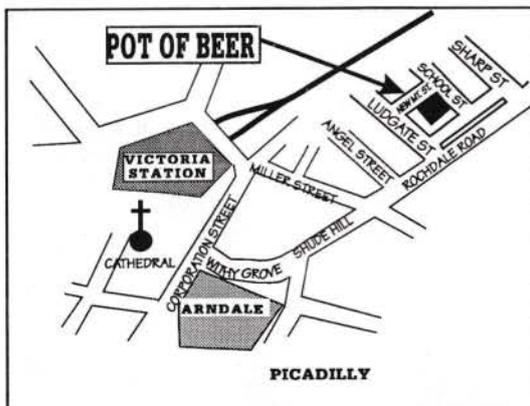
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## IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Whitbread's departure from brewing, soon to be followed by Bass, means that we are now entering the end-game of a 50-year period of consolidation in the brewing industry. The gulf between the regional and family brewers on one hand and the huge (multi) nationals on the other will have yawned so wide as to be unbridgeable. And of course, there remain the huge pub companies, likely to grow even larger should Bass dispose of its pub interests, too, as the announcement of 400 managed pubs 'to be disposed of on a regional basis' for £150 million seems to indicate. As Whitbread see themselves as a 'branded' pub group, to complement their hotel and leisure empires, one must wonder at the future of all the 'non' branded pubs, at the very least. Certainly the Lass O' Gowrie is bound to be a casualty one way or another. The brewery must close or the pub/brewery be sold to comply with the Beer Orders, and the City Council's forthcoming ban on street drinking will hammer the pubs informal summer trade.

Of course, whether they do or not, Whitbread is now just another pub company and at a stroke the last remaining large tranche of pubs enjoying guest beer rights will, technically, lose them at a stroke. In this respect the Beer Orders are now a dead duck - let's hope these recent developments are taken on board by the review that is currently underway. More than ever it is obvious that tenants and leaseholders of the pub companies must be brought within the guest beer regime.

Our other front page story is a complete contrast and sums up perfectly the two sides of today's brewing industry. Whitbread turn their back on 250 years of brewing history. Hydes' take pride in theirs with investment not only in their tied estate, but also their brewery and their brands. It is companies like Hydes', Robinson's, Holt's and Lees, reinforced by the new-wave micro-brewers, who are now the guardians of our brewing heritage. We trust they are up to the task. This publication will do everything in its (limited) power to support them, and to support the pubs that support them. We lose them at our peril.

*John Clarke*

## OPENING TIMES ISSUE 194

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**Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs - Join CAMRA now - see page 19!**

## PUB OF THE MONTH JUNE 2000

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



**T**he Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for June is the Tatton Arms, Trenchard Drive, Moss Nook. There can be very few licensees in the Stockport & South Manchester area who have been in the same pub for 28 years – and who have managed to maintain the quality of the beer and the reputation of their pub at a high level of excellence throughout this time. Alex Bell however has done just that at the Tatton and this, his second Pub of the Month award (the first was way back in 1987) is a well-deserved testimony to his continuing high standards. Alex's relationship with CAMRA goes back almost as long as his stay in the pub as he was one of the hardy band of individuals who stood in the garden of the Printers in Cheadle and founded the original South Manchester branch of CAMRA in February 1974. The Tatton itself is as individual as its licensee is. The core of the pub is an old coaching inn with a 17th Century fireplace in the bar area. Various rooms have been added over the years making the place sizeable without detracting from its character. The 'cellar' is in an attached outhouse which means that the beer has to be electrically pumped a considerable distance to the bar; nevertheless, both the Robinson's Hatters Mild and Best Bitter are always on excellent form. The pub is also near enough to the airport to enable plane watching from the very pleasant beer garden but far enough away for a reasonable conversation to continue as they pass overhead. Why not join us on Thursday 22 June when we will present Alex with his much-deserved award. Especially welcome will be all those original South Manchester CAMRA members who helped found the branch with Alex in 1974. The Tatton is within easy walking distance of Heald Green station and relatively close enough to walk from the Airport station. Bus 369 from Stockport will also drop you close by. **JF**

*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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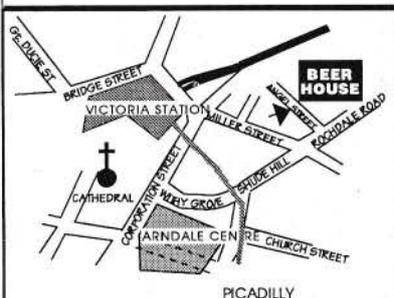
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# STAGGER

with Dave Meynell

## Brinnington & Portwood

**A**lthough the scheduled starting point for tonight's Stagger was the Farmers Arms, due to the early arrival of our taxi we decided to make an early start by calling at the Horsefield Arms on Ashton Road in Bredbury, directly in front of Robinson's bottling plant. For the time of night both the main lounge and the vault were busy and several customers were also drinking in the seated area outside. I always enjoy the comfortable atmosphere of this local and the quality of the Hatters Mild was excellent as usual. I believe the Best Bitter is equally good but there was no time for us to sample this.

A five-minute walk took us to the Farmers Arms on Brinnington Road. This two-room estate pub also has two entrances, one to the vault and the other leading to the lounge, where karaoke was being set up, prompting our departure to the vault, where a large screen was ready for the screening of the night's important clash between Manchester City and Birmingham. To me this large room lacks character and atmosphere. The Boddingtons Bitter was equally uninspiring so we swiftly continued to the Jack & Jill. This Robinson's house was certainly busier than the last pub, with a good number of customers watching the City match, which had now kicked off. Hatters Mild and Best Bitter are the cask beers and we all enjoyed reasonable pints of the former.

A longer walk took us to our 8.30 meeting point, the Park on Newbridge Lane, passing the still closed and boarded Rifle Volunteer. Always busy on a Friday night, this thriving pub has a great atmosphere with both the lounge and vault being very busy. Both rooms are furnished to a high standard, which is obviously appreciated by the regular customers and makes it one of the busiest pubs in the area. Free pool and jukebox at all times and happy hours are added attractions. On the beer front everyone drank the Holt's Bitter which is a permanent guest beer and, as usual, in excellent condition. Further along Newbridge Lane is the now much-improved Midway. After extensive refurbishment, and the opening out of the rear area to include a quite large restaurant, there is a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere throughout the pub. It has obviously proved a success as the place was very busy at the time of our visit and karaoke was about to start (enough to drive me away but obviously an attraction for most of the clientele). Courage Directors, Tetley Bitter and Boddingtons are the regular beers but tonight J W Lees Bitter was also available and at a bargain £1 a pint to boot. This was a big enough attraction for the whole group to try it, and it was a pretty decent drink.

Passing the site of the now-demolished Coach & Horses, we made our way to the Brinnington Inn on Great Portwood Street. This pub has suffered over the years due to its edge of town centre position. The current tenant is however striving to improve things and seems to be succeeding, as it was very busy with a great community



The Brinnington Inn, Portwood

atmosphere throughout the pub. As well as running and maintaining a good pub, Eamonn also excels in keeping a good pint. Every time I have called the beer has been excellent and tonight was no exception with both Hatters Mild and Best Bitter in superb form.

The Old King next door has changed hands again since my last visit and unlike the Brinnington was unfortunately very quiet with only a handful of customers. It did however have one real ale on offer: Worthington Bitter, which was nothing special, this being more a reflection on the intrinsic qualities of the beer rather than the cellar skills of the licensee who is clearly working hard with the place. The interior of the pub is clean and well-kept, and deserves better.

Our next port of call was the Railway which, as expected for a Friday night was very busy. Those of you who have visited this pub will know that Porters Brewery produces a wide range of beers - there are normally seven permanent beers on sale, as well as a draught wheat beer and traditional cider. Tonight's samplings included Dark Mild, Sleeper (brewed specially for the pub), Sunshine and Floral Dance, and all were in tiptop condition.

Only a short distance from the Railway is the Queens. The pub has been opened out and modernised over the years and seems to attract a largely young and lively clientele. It's a Robinson's house and both Hatters Mild and Best Bitter were available, and both were better than average.

We finished the night in the Arden Arms. Having gone through several changes of hands over recent years, it seems that the current tenants are transforming this classic unspoilt pub with its multi-room layout and unique features, including the small snug that can only be accessed through the bar. The restoration of this pub to its former glory is one of the most heartening developments on the Stockport pub scene in recent years. The beers has improved greatly, too and both the Hatters Mild and Best Bitter were judged the best of the night.

So ended a night with all of the pubs serving real ale and most of it in good form, too. As usual this is just the view of a group of us on one particular night but we all enjoyed ourselves so why not try this Stagger yourself and form your own opinion.



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# OPENING TIMES LETTERS

**From Joe Morris, The Conway, Cheadle Hulme**

As a publican and supporter of your campaign, I look forward to each month's issue of *Opening Times*, I find it more enlightening than *The Publican* and other Trade mags, which tend to push forward the big brewers and pub group companies views and forget about the most important person in our trade - **The True Customer**. For the past four and a half years I have been licensee at the Conway, Cheadle Hulme, and have had a unique opportunity to view the trade from every aspect as a landlord. When I first came to the Conway it was as a manager for Scottish and Newcastle Retail, and under their guidance, watched the removal of all cask ales in preference for Keg, not a popular move with my own customers, but a move I was assured that 'The Customer' wanted. Which Customers?

With S&N Retail intent on swallowing up all the opposition, spending on the less profitable outlets was non-existent, and eventually they decided to transfer the Conway to the Tenanted Division. I was given five days notice and made redundant. Having faith in my own abilities, the pub itself and the true customers (not fictitious S&N ones), I dug deep and secured the tenancy, albeit a tied agreement. Unfortunately I was not much better off on the product side, still being all keg with the single exception of being allowed one cask conditioned ale - which had to be Theakstons Best Bitter, but at least I was free of the restraints of management to develop the pub as I wanted.

Within twelve months an offer was made to change my agreement to free of tie, which involved me paying a much higher rent, but gave me total freedom of product range, a proposition I jumped at. Since then, alongside Theakstons we have introduced Old Speckled Hen, changed Websters Yorkshire bitter from keg to hand-pulled cask (it's a totally different drink - ask my customers) and we are planning to introduce regular guest bitters and a cask mild. Business has increased sufficiently to be able to afford phased refurbishment. Phase one was to enhance the outside appearance and redecorate the inside, which was completed last year, as I write this letter phase two is underway, to fully refurbish the vault area, which will be completed in the next few weeks and phase

three, the refurbishment of the lounge area, will be undertaken as we can afford it, hopefully within the next twelve months.

Having read May's *Opening Times*, especially the *Stagger*, I felt compelled to write to dispell all the doom and gloom. There is still some sanity out there and licencees who are listening to their customers and fighting back against the big brewers and pub operators. This country would be in a very sorry state if every drinking hole was either a restaurant/pub or "themed" venue, - so take heart and continue the good work, some of us in the trade welcome your efforts and do look upon them as a thorn in the side of the big brewers dreams.

**From Kim Rampley, Widnes:**

Regarding two items in May's OT:

With regard to the extension of licensing hours, I have to say that I am in two minds over this. Whereas I welcomed the afternoon opening in 1988 - clearly, pubs closed on a hot summer's day at 4pm in, say Knutsford or Chester, was a nonsense, for locals, shoppers and tourists alike - on the other hand, I always found the hour or so at evening opening time (5pm in Liverpool) had a very good atmosphere in city centre pubs. This atmosphere has largely gone now.

I agree with Curmudgeon that certain drugs pose a threat to the alcohol industry: as I said in a previous letter, cannabis users seem at a distinct advantage when compared with those arrested for "drunkenness" offences. However, not all "prohibitionists" are necessarily a bad thing. I recall when at university, Mary Whitehouse railing against certain films and TV programmes. She was dismissed at the time - especially by the BBC - as a crank and in a minority of one. How wrong they were: she has had a huge groundswell of popular support. I happen to believe she should have criticised violent scenes far more than sexual ones, but she had a point to make and that too many films etc are too explicit. I know I shall be called prudish or not politically correct but I don't care; I intend to stick by my principles come what may. Do any readers agree?

(I'm not entirely sure what this has to do with pubs & beer... Ed(1))

**From Tom Lord, Chairman High Peak & N.E. Cheshire Branch:** I am at something of a loss to understand the reference made by Mr Bottomley (OT May) in his letter to the 'delisting' of the Salybridge Buffet Bar in the Good Beer Guide.

On checking back, I find that the Buffet Bar was in the Guide from 1990 to 1994, omitted 1995-1997, was a 'try also' in 1998 and a full



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entry in 1999 and 2000. It will also be deservedly in the 2001 Guide. The reason for its omission between 1995-1997 was that during the period its future was far from secure and it could have disappeared at any time. Ignoring the arguments one way or the other of the Railway case, I can see no parallels between it and the Buffet Bar re the Good Beer Guide.

Happily since 1998 the Buffet Bar has gone from strength to strength and is a popular and deserving entry in the Guide.

Glad that's cleared up. (Ed(2))

From P.B.Hutchings, via a keyboard

I notice from the front page of this issue that a 'Cask Champion' award has been given by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA to Hydes for Jekylls Gold. Hear, Hear! Well done and congratulations....but hang on, I notice that this award made in May 2000, and publicised in June 2000 claims to be an award for 1999! Now, I realise that the award is given for contributions to the cause of real ale, etc., etc., over the previous 12 months, but some 4 (at least) of those months were in 2000. I also realise CAMRA have less marketing know-how than the average gnat, but hasn't it dawned on any of the pedants who attend meetings that the whole purpose of these awards is to generate publicity and promotion for the recipient. As soon as a press release goes out with the numbers '1999' on it, the immediate reaction is to bin it as 'old news'. In Blairs Britain anything of value is of the moment, of 2000, of the new millennium (yes, I know it doesn't start until next year, but that's irrelevant). The reaction of most readers of such publicity would be, in any case, "So what? Who won it for 2000?". Now I'm sure Hydes are pleased with the award, but its value is lessened. An even stronger case can be made about the 'Pub of the Year' award. This of course is awarded every January, for the 'best' (or as voted) pub out of the previous year's 12 Pub of the Months. So there is a logic to dating it for the year before the award, but after presentation, usually at the end of February or early March, the plaque hangs in the pub for the rest of the year after the date. Well and good, but if I got a fiver for every time I've heard the "I wonder who won it this year?" refrain I could go to Munich and back several times.... Logically and pedantically accurate yes, from the Branch's internal point of view. As an engine of promotion, publicity and marketing, a major shot in foot. Perhaps understandable in January, but in June!!! (I did not give the erstwhile Branch Chairman, - also known as Ed(1) - any chance to reply. He can of course write a letter to himself next month! Ed(2))

## WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?

How often have you gone into a pub and seen the signs displayed above the bar offering "Free Beer Tomorrow" or "Free Drinks to Anyone Over 80 Accompanied By Their Parents"? Most of us have, and few landlords expect to honour them, seeing the signs as little more than light humour or a joke. However, for one landlord the joke backfired and he ended up paying for the drinks.

Andy Billington, landlord of the Globe Inn in Accrington was taken aback when Molly Greenwood called in to celebrate her 80th birthday...accompanied by her mother Elsie Riley, aged 101. When Molly pointed to the sign and demanded drinks on the house, a dumbfounded Mr Billington had no option but to meekly hand over a brandy for Molly and a babycham for her mother. Then they came back for more.

Most of the pub's oldest customers are in their fifties and Andy never expected to see anyone that old in the pub, let alone with their parents. One customer, Sheena Tyldesley who works as a care assistant, decided to see if Andy would honour his pledge. Both women lived in the care home where she worked and the trip to the pub was the ideal birthday present as they both liked a drink. So licensees beware. With many people living longer these days - will you be next? *Ale Talk, the Kirklees real ale magazine.*

## Ye Olde Admiral Rodney



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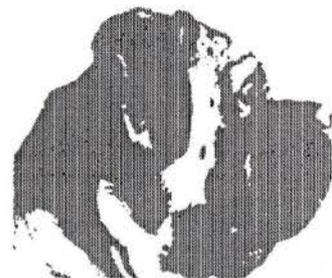
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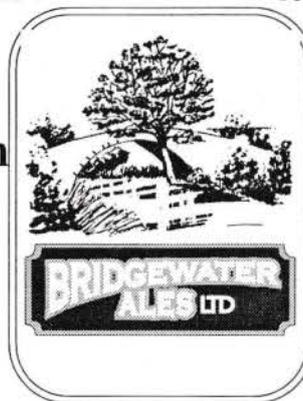
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J W Lees has launched its "Passport Trail 2000", inviting beer lovers to visit and buy a pint of beer in as many of the brewery's 149 pubs around the Manchester area as they can over a year, collecting passport stamps along the way. The Passport Trail, last held in 1997, has always been popular with Lees enthusiasts who are rewarded with prizes for every 30 pubs they visit. Those drinkers who manage to visit all 149 pubs are invited on a VIP Brewery visit and Celebration Dinner at the end of the year. There is also a Welsh Passport Trail for drinkers who visit Lees' 29 pubs in North Wales.

Fans of John Willies who want to take up the Passport challenge can get their official passport from any Lees pub or by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the following address: Passport Trail 2000, J W Lees & Co, Greengate Brewery, Middleton Junction, Manchester M24 2AX.

Lees have also brought out the latest in their seasonal beer range - White Bear appeared last month and is a refreshing 4.2 per cent alcohol wheat beer made using Saaz hops.

Rochdale's new Pictish Brewery has produced its first monthly special This is Summer Solstice a 4.7 per cent blonde beer. Brewer Richard Sutton tells us that the beer will be very pale with a good hop rate using Saaz hops. It was due to go out into the trade as these words were written and should be available throughout June.



No seasonals from Bridgewater this month, though. A broken cooler led to some production problems and in addition brewer Richard Bazen needs a holiday!! The regular beers should still be available, though, and Richard tells us that Salford Pride is proving so popular it could well become permanent.



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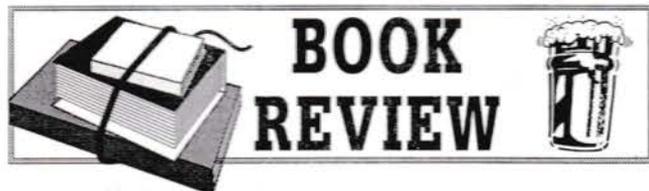
## N/4 ABV TOUR - DAY 1

Last month's "N/4 ABV Tour" was possibly a seminal event on the Manchester Pub Scene with eight pubs coming together to offer drinkers a choice of over 130 cask ales. Roy Cottam went along on day one and filed this report from the front...

I went on the 'Tour' for the first lunchtime session on May 18. The rather odd concept of scattering the ales must be unique and I made my first point of call the **Hogshead** on High Street. The barman here must be the friendliest in Manchester. He chatted with me for ages about ales, his love for Sarah Hughes Ruby and he gave me a free sample of a new session brew (Titanic) which he hopes to introduce, called Northern Quarter. The beer tasted like Boddingtons when it was good, with a biscuity, hoppy taste. I went on to sample (buying this time) Marston's Pedigree, Wychwood Fiddlers Elbow, and (the best in the pub) Youngs AAA. This latter being smooth and tasty.

I then had a walk to the **Beer House**. My session here got off to an odd start when I could only see one ale from the Big Red List supplied detailing the beers in Manchester for this festival. As a half of Phoenix Black Shadow was pulled, and wondering where the other 49 beers were, I noticed a list of available beers was on show, the only pub to do this, as far as I am aware (no, *Bar Fringe did too!* Ed(2)). I then had a Scatter Rock Brent Tor Mild which was in good form and my best sampled in the pub.

Just around the corner, on New Mount Street, is the **Pot Of Beer**, a small pub where I had Salopian Jigsaw. This was heavily roasted and led me to wonder what this fad for "burnt toast" flavour stout is within the brewing industry.



## BOOK REVIEW

**The Concise Guide to Lakeland & Furness Pubs; CAMRA Westmorland and Furness Branches; 90pp, £2**

The new edition of this workmanlike little guide, one of CAMRA's slimmest and lightest and surely designed to nestle in the rucksack next to the bar of Kendal mint cake, has expanded its geographical coverage to include Furness. It is pleasing to note that Barrow can still boast 25 real ale pubs and a wider range of beer than in the bad old days of Bass domination.

Entries for keg-only pubs have been dropped, which is a pity in principle but understandable in a region where so many of the full on-licences are hotel or caravan site bars.

A recent trip to Jennings Brewery allowed me to field test the guide, and in general it acquitted itself well. One or two real ale gains and losses since publication, inevitable (the guide is dated November 1999), but the pub descriptions, of roughly Good Beer Guide length and supplemented by bespoke and slightly fiddly-looking facilities symbols, give a good idea of what to expect. Plenty of town maps, simple and diagrammatic but perfectly workable (apart from Keswick which is a bit of a jumble owing to the heavy concentration of pubs in the town centre). The fold-out overall map is a simple affair too - but who would go to the Lakes without a decent map? And crucially, there's a one-to-one match between places on the map and places in the guide - a simple necessity often overlooked. Apart from the excellent and eye-catching front cover photograph, the guide is devoid of illustrations apart from CAMRA clip-art space-fillers. In terms of content and organisation, however, its no-frills professionalism puts many flashier and more highly-praised CAMRA guides to shame. For the next edition, here's hoping they rope in the rest of CAMRA's Cumbrian branches to produce a guide of similar standard for the whole county. **RPJ.**

**Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs  
- Join CAMRA now - see page 19!**

I must say now that my quest was for Sarah Hughes and Pilsner Urquell. The obvious drawback of this ABV tour was that I didn't know which beers were in any of the pubs (*that was the idea - so you had to try most (or all) of the pubs and not just the Beer House!* Ed (2)). I could have been falling over drunk before I found the ones I wanted! A short stroll back onto Rochdale Road/Gould Street brought me to the **Marble Arch**. The micro-brewery there churns out some interesting brews; but here was Sarah Hughes Ruby Dark Mild, with its smooth, fruity, full-bodied taste it was easily the best beer of the day. Thinking that the Urquell was in the **Bar Fringe**, I headed for Swan Street but on the way up Tib Street I noticed the small **Bar Centro**, (I think he missed the larger downstairs bit, Ed(2)) which I had never been in. Inside I spotted the Urquell dispenser. As you would expect the lager was chilled, and its pleasant hoppy bitterness disappeared in the mouth as soon as it was drunk. Rather disappointing, but reasonably priced at £2.30 a pint.

I then meandered home after what had proved to be a superb day out.

Incidentally, good pictures of the above pubs can be found on [www.n4abv.co.uk](http://www.n4abv.co.uk).

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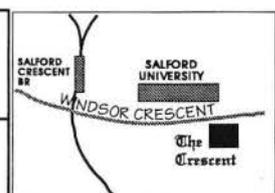
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**10 CASK ALES  
ALWAYS AVAILABLE  
LARGE FUNCTION ROOM -  
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**Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs - Join CAMRA now - see page 19!**



### Longer Hours, Fewer Pubs?

In 1989, the announcement of the Beer Orders was greeted by CAMRA as opening up a new golden age for quality and choice in the beer market. But the reality turned out to be very different, as the ensuing shake-up of the industry led to the concentration of market share in ever fewer hands, the closure of numerous established independent breweries, and the removal of real ale from huge swathes of our pub stock. Some of these things would have happened anyway, but the Beer Orders made matters much worse.

Now we are told that the government's plans for a complete shake-up of licensing law, opening up the possibility of much later closing times and even 24-hour opening, are great news for drinkers that will give traditional pubs and beer a shot in the arm. Well, I'm sorry to cast a dampener on things, but the only part of the licensed trade it will do much to help is city-centre bottle bars.

Previous experience with all-day opening shows that the overall amount of trade will not increase, it will just be spread over a longer period of time, thus inevitably putting up costs. And bar staff are likely to demand premium payments for working into the small hours. The effect will be to widen further the price gap between the on- and off-trade. 10p on a £2.30 bottle of Bud might not make much difference to the bottle-swigging circuit drinker, but an extra 10p on the price of a pint in the local may lead many drinkers, particularly older ones and those on a budget, to forsake the pub in favour of cheaper booze from the supermarket or the local bootlegger.

If pubs are allowed to open substantially later, there will also be great potential for noise and disruption in residential areas, which is a genuine fear, not just the moans of a few killjoys. Now, I like a drink, but I don't want drunken shouting and taxi doors slamming at two in the morning when I'm trying to get a good night's sleep. If, in response to these concerns, "local" pubs are made to close much earlier than those in town and city centres, it will accelerate the drift of customers away to central drinking circuits, which are much less likely to include traditional pubs serving real ale.

The proposal to take licensing out of the hands of magistrates and give it to local authorities will turn it into a political battleground. Imagine the potential for conflict in areas such as Didsbury where there is a busy circuit, all of the pubs on which will want to open much later, and a large, vocal and organised resident population. There will also be problems with comparability between different areas - if Manchester allows Didsbury pubs to stay open until 1 a.m., licensees two miles down the road in Cheadle will feel aggrieved, and lose trade, if Stockport insists on them closing at midnight.

The belief that a licensing free-for-all will be good news for traditional pubs and beer is a triumph of hope over experience. The pub inhabits a fragile eco-system and, if you open it up to the winds of change, there is a real risk that much of what we cherish will be blown away. Last month, Roger Hall wrote about the decline of the traditional pub spreading out of the inner-city into the suburbs, and this change will accelerate the process. Undoubtedly there is a strong case for some measure of reform, but what is proposed goes much too far.

Visit Curmudgeon on the World Wide Web at <http://members.tripod.co.uk/Curmudgeon>

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## 5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JUNE '95

**T**he front page called for "Battle Stations on the New Keg Threat", as CAMRA had declared war on the new nitro-keg beers which were described as the biggest threat since the days of Watneys Red.

They were making rapid inroads on the bars of pubs and clubs, and there were generally two sorts - either well-known brands such as Boddies, Theakstons, and John Smiths, or the new wave of Irish ales. The big brewers seemed content to blur the edges between nitro-keg beers, served by a mixture of nitrogen and carbon dioxide, and cask ale, but drinkers were to be under no illusion - the new nitro beers were keg beers, pasteurised, dead and filtered. (This, of course, was before Robinson's and Holt's blurred the edges even further, with their "real smooth" beers, drawn from the same casks that supplied the handpumps.) On the inside pages there were two further items concerning the rapid spread of the "new" beers, one titled "That Damn Nitrokeg", the other "The Menace of Nitrokeg".

The new Stockport brewery, Cobdens, had produced its first "local" beer, but the bitter was still being brewed by Moorhouses. Now that the brewery was up and running, it was thought that a porter would soon be available.

Whitbread had been producing single varietal hop beers from time to time, and the latest to appear was "Green Bullet". This was also the name of a stunningly hoppy beer that Brendan Dobbin's West Coast Brewery had produced as a house beer for the Crown on Heaton Lane. Not surprisingly, the Whitbread version was completely different, being described as "overly malty, and not overhopped". Brendan took great exception to this, and was planning to produce a batch of his own version for the Stockport Beer Festival, named "Dobbin's Original Green Bullet".

A few months earlier, Opening Times had reported speculation that Scottish & Newcastle were going to buy the breweries run by Courage - this was likely to result in higher prices, less choice, and loss of jobs. This month's editorial revealed that the deal had just gone through, and was likely to lead to "carnage in the industry". Finally, two items of pub news: the Kenilworth in Cheadle Hulme was to have a £400,000 refurbishment, there would be five cask ales, and a likely name change. The Gladstone on Lower Hillgate, after a long closure, was to re-open on 26 May, with Ken Birch serving the full range of Burtonwood real ales - Mild, Bitter, Forshaw's, Top Hat and the new Buccaneer strong ale.

**HELP HOLD BACK THE NITROKEG TIDE!**

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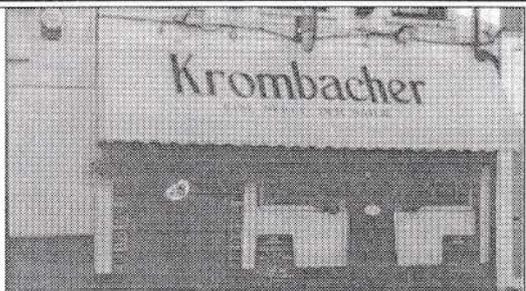
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Brewers of  
Traditional  
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*There's so much going on at the moment that I could probably fill 20 pages with diatribes of my own. Still we must make do!*

**In The City (London)**

The catastrophe that may overtake the pub trade let alone the brewing industry through Whitbread and Bass' brewery sales cannot be underestimated.

First on the beer side. Leaving aside the loss of the Lass O' Gowrie in Manchester, Fellows in Nottingham and the Frog & Parrot in Sheffield, all of which will have to go to get round the beer orders, what of Whitbread's major brands. Interbrew no nothing about cask ale - their best product is Hoegaarden, which already comes in three distinct varieties, all - allegedly - produced in Belgium. Its a fair bet that a new nitro version of Boddingtons will appear, and those Whitbread beers that are badge brewed will probably disappear. As to the lager co. that takes on Bass...well given Bass' apparent hatred of real ale, we can expect a consolidation of brands and in the short term no more than two cask brands can be expected to survive - just think of what Burton used to produce. Of course we can still comfort ourselves with the knowledge that Pedigree (and to a lesser extent, Burton Bitter) come from Burton. But for how long. The analysts - who want to see EVERY British company quit brewing (why?) have the knives out for Wolverhampton & Dudley and are pushing non-brewers to bid for them AND CLOSE DOWN ALL THE BREWERIES. At this rate the only real ale in Burton, capital of British Brewing, will be from the Burton Bridge Micro. Oh, and on a lesser point, how long will Interbrew be able to resist brewing Hoegaarden at Salmesbury? After all they let Whitbread brew a foul and headache inducing version of the quite reasonable (though not outstanding) Leuven brewed Stella.

And what of Whitbread direct? This is the in-house distributor that supplies non-branded Whitbread tenancies etc. with their beer, both from Whitbread breweries AND extensive guest lists. I cannot see them surviving long, so pubs like the GBG listed Hinds Head with 6 cask ales may find themselves in trouble soon. The branded managed houses in the main get their beers from The Beer Sellar. One single range, and not that extensive (look at the duplications now routine between the City Arms (Punch Taverns owned Festival Ale House) and the Hogsheads because the same company have exclusive beer supply rights.

All that will happen is less choice, more keg, and more micros going to the wall. So much for the customer as king - king only if you buy what the marketeers tell you that you want, heavily advertised 'new', trendy, overhyped, overpriced, garbage. A bit like much of the rest of Britain these days.

**N/4 ABV Tour**

It rained most of the weekend, which was a dreadful shame. Despite this the event was a roaring success. The Pig Roast (Pot of Beer) and Chicken Barbecue (Queens) were a great success. Fringe got through four cask ales in a single night, the Pot unloaded 18 over the weekend, significant numbers of people tried new pubs, and a brave few drank the 16 pints for the free t-shirt. (Which explains my condition on Thursday night....)

Didn't have a bad beer anywhere, visited all the venues at least twice, ate some of the pig, which was good, and was impressed by the good humour and relaxed atmosphere all through. It is going to be repeated - probably next summer but there is a little loose talk about October this year - I will keep you posted.

One thing that is a bit sad, one of the major local suppliers of draught and bottled Belgian beers has ceased trading - hopefully not indefinitely, and the result is that the cornucopia of Belgian products available in Manchester, and especially the N/4 area is going to be substantially restricted for a time, with a single supplier



having to fill the gap. Hopefully a solution will present itself shortly. There has always been a problem of 'sameness' on the German beer front, with most coming from Sand Bar Beer Trading, but with a few odds and sods coming in from other sources, its been bearable. Incidentally the Beer House now stocks more German bottled beers than Sand Bar (Bar) does. Come on Rob - retaliate!

### Upcoming Festivals

Stockport, and Ian's Beer House Flaming June Festivals should be over as you read this, so the focus moves elsewhere.

The Crescent, Salford, is having 30 plus beers for its midsummer festival, Thursday 22 - Sunday 25 June, with all day food and a barbecue. Idy & Sals efforts are always good, so book that one in The Boundary, at Audenshaw is holding its annual beerfestival in the huge marquee in its car-park from 14th to 18th June - a mere two weeks after Stockport. This is a very enjoyable do, with a good range of beer that would do justice to most CAMRA affairs, excellent food and some foreign beer. Take the train to Guide Bridge station and turn left, and you can see it in front of you. Its become a "Dont Miss" event.

There's even more happening in July, with the Beer House having a High Summer Festival (quel surprise) on Thursday 20 to Sunday 21 of probably 40 odd beers, but interestingly the Gothic Bar and Grill in Gatley are having a go a week earlier from Thursday 13 to Sunday 16. The annual (and now 90 beer) Bhurtpore Inn Beer Festival, Aston, Nantwich - one of the very best of the year is the same weekend, starting on Wednesday evening, but note that Saturday is the only one for all day opening.

### Beer of the Month

#### Roosters Cirrus (4.3% abv)

This was recommended to me by about six people in the space of five minutes at the Beer House, during the recent N/4 ABV Tour. Like all Sean Franklin's beers it is, to say the least, hop friendly, but in this case showing a lighter touch than some Roosters products. Bone dry, long hoppy bitter finish. Marvellously refreshing and well worth spending a session on. A great light bodied pale beer. Sadly, as I was after my T-shirt (two pints in each of the eight pubs - or two bottles) and I'd already had my quota at the Beerhouse I only managed to neck a couple....



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DEFINITELY  
PROBABLY THE BEST  
ROBINSONS ALES IN  
TOWN**



**ROBINSONS  
FREDERICS  
BEST BITTER  
HATTERS MILD  
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**13**

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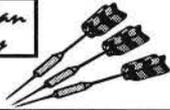
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Robinson's Best Bitter and Hatters Mild all on hand pump.*

*Excellent home cooked food served:  
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12.00 - 3.00 Sunday. 3 course special plus full menu*



# Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



**C**ongratulations to the Cheshire county squad. Their 26-13 victory at Buckinghamshire, meant that they will return to Division One next season as overall champions of Division Two. They finished the season with a nine point gap ahead of runners-up Berkshire. Cheshire are in much the same position as Stockport County in that they are always in the shadow of illustrious neighbours. Lancashire are usually challenging for the Premier Division title and boast some of the biggest names in darts like Alan Warriner, Paul Williams, Steve Coote, Les Fitton and our own Darryl Fitton and Kevin Weir. So their achievement is all the more creditable. It would be nice to see the Cestrians return to the Premier Division themselves, a feat that they have only achieved once in the 25 year history of the Inter-Counties Championship. One of the main reasons for this season's success is the consistency of Tony O'Shea. In the final game, playing against Damien Fyffe, Tony registered a 99.99 average, gaining not only the "Man of the Match award", but also achieving the best game of any player in the Division. He hit two 180's to beat his opponent in 13, 15 and 12 twelve dart legs, despite losing the opening leg. Just how long Tony's claim for a England place can be ignored is anybody's guess. But, if I was a gambler, I would put money on him representing his country before the end of next year.

Tony's international claim has been helped by the fact that England lost their grip on the British International Championship for the first time in 20 years. This tournament is for twelve man squads, and many people, including myself, thought that Tony should have been selected for the England team. It is interesting to note that in the match against Wales only Mervyn King and Kevin Painter registered higher averages for England than Tony scored in that final county match, while in the game against eventual champions Scotland no player for either side could equal Tony's feat. If England want to regain the title, then surely Tony must be among the squad for next season's tournament! Tony should get the chance to impress the selectors at this year's British Open. This tournament is coming to the North West this year

and will take place at Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool on Sunday October 1. I would imagine that most of our areas top players will be entering this one. We have complained for ages that our area, supposedly a hot-bed of darts, has been denied major open tournaments. For the last 25 years, the British Open has been a pre-Embassy tournament and has attracted top players and big crowds. Let's hope we can continue, and improve the tradition up here. I hope that our area will support the tournament and that some of pubs that pride themselves on their commitment to dart will get up a trip to the Open.

We have heard over the years plenty of rhetoric from politicians of all parties, paying lip service to the game of darts. The latest comes from Sports Minister Kate Hoey. "Darts matters to me because it matters to two to three million people who play regularly for teams in pubs and clubs around the country, not to mention the other four million who play casually."

I doubt whether that this means we are any closer to darts being regarded as a sport, but who knows. We are getting closer to another election, and, using the Ministers own figures, there are a lot of voters out there, who throw arrows.

I have been asked on a few occasions how difficult it is to achieve a nine-darter on the big board. Well as a below average player, I never expect to manage it myself, and even for really top class throwers it is often a once in a lifetime prospect. I only know that, to the best of my knowledge, there has only been one recorded occurrence of a nine dart game in our area. Surprisingly, perhaps, there are at least a dozen ways of scoring 501 in nine darts and only five of them need a 180. I won't bore you with the details, but if anyone is interested they can contact me and I will let them know facts and figures. If you know of anyone locally who has hit a nine darter, or achieved anything else connected with darts, don't hesitate to contact me. I can publicise your league, tournament, exhibition or marathon.

Contact me on 0161-286 7762, 07945 308036 (mobile) or e-mail me at [b.carey@cwto.net](mailto:b.carey@cwto.net).

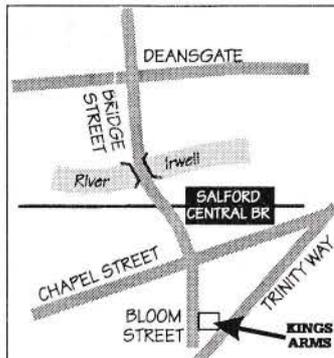
Finally, on a very sad note, I was shocked to hear of the death of Mark Oliver. Mark was a regular player for Bredbury's Sportsman's Rest and the Royal Oak in High Street. The tragic circumstances make it all the more sadder. All darts players will offer our deep sympathy to his family

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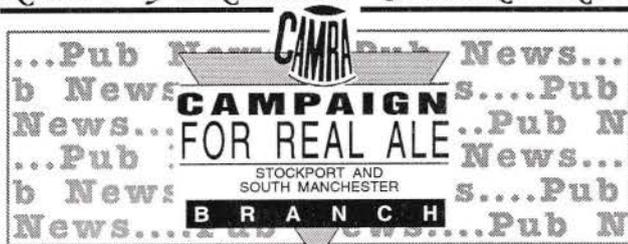


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The Plough on Heaton Moor Road has now reopened after refurbishment by new owners Punch Taverns. There had been fears that the distinctive stained glass windows would be removed, and the pub's attractive stone frontage spoilt by knocking through full-length glass doors, but neither of these things has in fact happened. Inside, the basic layout is unchanged, but the pub has been given a more open feel by removing the over-bar and the partition between the main bar and the eating area at the rear, which now incorporates a raised section. Some of the internal pillars have been painted an incongruous turquoise and, while virtually all the fixed seating has been retained, some has been reupholstered in a very unpublike pale floral fabric that surely will not wear well. The bar is now dominated by T-bar keg dispensers, with only a couple of tucked-away handpumps remaining, serving Tetley Bitter (£1.70) and Marston's Pedigree (£1.90). When "OT" called the Tetley's was fine but the Pedigree had to be changed, which to the pub's credit was done without fuss and the difference in price returned without needing to ask, unlike many pubs that should know better. Food is available all day from the "All For One" menu, meaning that all dishes in each category - starters, sandwiches, mains etc - are the same price. The menu is fairly standard and fails to match the refurb's café-bar aspirations. All in all, while things could have been worse, the job is no improvement on what went before.

The long-planned refurbishment of the Ash, Manchester Road, Heaton Norris is scheduled to take place this month and may in fact see the pub closed for the whole of June. A full review will of course follow when it reopens for business.

The Pomona in Gorton now no longer sells real ale but just up the road, the Bandstand overlooking Debdale Park is selling Tetley Bitter and Marston's Pedigree on handpump. The Church in Northenden, probably a leading contender of a Grot Watch award, is up for sale. The pub will be an enormous challenge for whoever takes it on - many years ago there were rumours that Holt's were interested in the pub, perhaps now is their chance to step in. The Fir Tree in Reddish has had some external improvements and a new kitchen installed. The "Mr Q's" format of the lounge has remained untouched, although it is now looking a little tired. Thankfully cask Tetley Bitter is still on sale

## Band On The Wall

### Help Wanted For Research Project

Historical researcher Brian Holmshaw is currently working on a project for the Manchester Festival in August and wants to know if any readers or their relatives help with stories and anecdotes of the amazing history of The Band on the Wall, (formerly The George and Dragon ) Swan Street), Manchester City Centre. Since 1975 some of the world's greatest jazz musicians have played here - Abdullah Ibrahim, John Scofield, Art Blakey, Carmen Lundy among them. It was also a seminal meeting place for punk bands in the late seventies - Joy Division, The Fall, Buzzcocks - even John the Postman - played on New Manchester Review nights. Further back as the George and Dragon in the thirties it had a strong reputation as a popular and classy music venue featuring Italian bands such as the Manzini brothers. It changed during the Second World War into something a bit more disreputable! There are stories of objectors and deserters hiding in the cellars. If you have any vivid recollections, interesting stories (or sordid tales for that matter) please contact Brian Holmshaw, on 1061-795-3041, 13 Westbury Road, Crumpsall or email: Brian.Holmshaw@btinternet.com

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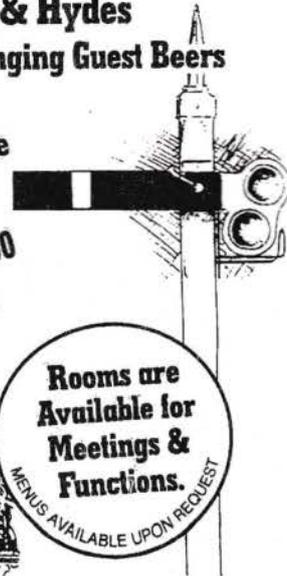
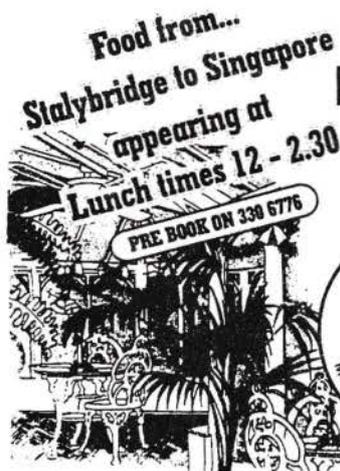
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**CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE** CAMRA

In Mellor the *Pack Horse* now has two guest beers on sale while in Marple Ridge the Jennings-owned *Romper* is now selling the excellent Taylor's Golden Best. In the same general area, the *Hare & Hounds* at Otterspool has changed hands but Bank Top beers are still available though their appearance has been erratic. In Glossop, the *Manor* now has a guest beer while the *Surrey Arms*, part of the Dorbiere pub chain has reopened. A guest beer is planned alongside the Grays range. Meanwhile the Sam Smiths at the *Crown* has increased in price, up from a cheap £1.13 to a still very reasonable £1.15!

A few snippets from Buxton now – the *Sun* now seems to be selling just beers from Banks's/Marston's (although on a recent visit *Whim Stout* was on sale – at an astonishing £2.17 a pint. That's a cool 37p more than was charged for the same beer in the *Crown*, Heaton Lane). Nearby, the *Swan* will soon be offering three guest beers instead of the current two. It seems that Marston's Pedigree will be going to make way for the extra guest. The new *Wetherspoon's* has opened alongside *Adswold Dale Garden* and has been selling *Bateman's Mild* for a bargain 99p a pint.

Finally, Peter Wood from the *Lowes Arms*, Denton and the *Beehive*, New Mills, is brewing a house beer for the two pubs in conjunction with *Bridgewater Brewery*. It will be a 4.2 per cent bitter – more details when available.

## SPONSORED WALK...

...In Aid of the Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust

Following the success of last year's inaugural walk for *Christies Hospital*, this year *High Peak & North East Cheshire CAMRA* are organising a 17 mile, eight pub sponsored walk on Saturday 24 June. A well as publicity for CAMRA, the *Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust* will benefit financially. All in all, a very worthy cause to stretch your legs for.

The route starts at the *Sportsman Inn*, *Mottram Road*, *Hyde* and then as follows: *Andrew Arms*, *Compstall*; *Sportsman/Royal Oak*, *Strines*; *Beehive*, *New Mills*; *Printers*, *Thornsett*; *Little Mill*, *Rowarth*; *Hunters*, *Chisworth*; *Cheshire Cheese*, *Broadbottom*; and finishes at the *White Hart*, *Mottram*.

Eight stages in all, some fairly short; some longer; some easy going; some hill walking; starting from the *Sportsman*, *Hyde* at 11.00am and aiming to reach the *White Hart* at approximately 7.00pm. *Hyde* and *Mottram* are both easily accessible by bus and *Broadbottom railway station* is within walking distance of the *White Hart*. Anyone walking can either do the whole route or any number of stages.

*High Peak Branch* are keen for other CAMRA branch members, or indeed anyone else for that matter, to take part if they wish. Time is of the essence, though, so if you are interested please contact *Tom Lord* on 0161 427 7099 (home) or 0161 837 4474 (work) as soon as possible. An indication of whether you intend to walk the full route or which stages would be useful.



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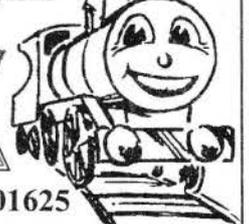
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### Beer Mushroom Risotto

This month's recipe can be served hot as a light lunch or as an accompaniment to grilled chicken, or many fish dishes. As a further example of its versatility it can be used cold, to either stuff or garnish many summer salads. For this reason I will use this as a *key dish*, so readers are invited to keep this edition as in following articles I will be offering many other meals which, I think you'll find, offer intriguing combinations with the risotto.

#### Ingredients

1 bottle pale ale	2 cloves finely chopped garlic
¼ oz. dried porcini mushrooms	2 oz. butter
4-5 fresh brown mushrooms	4 fl.oz. olive oil
1 medium onion, finely chopped	3 tablespoons chopped parsley
1½ cups arborio, or short grain, rice	teaspoon chopped thyme
¾ pint made up vegetable or beef stock	4 oz. grated parmesan
6 finely chopped sun-dried tomatoes	salt and pepper

#### Method

De-gas the beer and heat in saucepan until just below boiling point. Remove from heat and add the mushrooms. Soak for 20 minutes and drain the liquid, which you need to keep for future use. Rinse the brown mushrooms and chop coarsely. Keep the rehydrated porcini mushrooms separate.

Take a four or six-pint saucepan add the mushroom soaking liquid, add the stock, bring to the boil and simmer for 2-3 minutes. Then place on one side.

In another, similar sized, pan, heat the butter and oil, add the onions and soften them for 5 minutes over a low heat. Add the prepared brown mushrooms and cook for a further minute.

Add the rice and ensure that each grain has a covering of butter/oil. Stirring gently but constantly, cook until the rice turns translucent, then add the thyme and the re-constituted porcini mushrooms. Add one cup of reserved liquid and stir in on a medium heat until it has been absorbed. Continue to add the liquid at about half a cup at a time in this manner until it has all been used -but remember! Make sure all the liquid is absorbed (just) before adding more liquid.

Simmer for 15 minutes, then test the rice - there should be a little hardness in the centre of the grain. Add dried tomatoes, garlic and seasoning and cook for 3 minutes, then add the parmesan. Stir this in and remove from the heat after 1 minute. The dish is now ready to serve with a hot dish or to cool, refrigerate for an hour and serve as a cold accompaniment.

#### CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 194

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Peter Edwardson, Jim Flynn, Dave Meynell, Mark McConnachie, Roy Cottam, John Cresswell, Tim Jones, Paul Stanyer, Ken Birch, Richard Hough, Brian Carey

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Stockport CAMRA Pub of the Month April 1997

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**17**  
CAMRA  
CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE

# 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 and Macclesfield

Diary

## JUNE 2000

**Monday 5th** - Social: Ye Olde Woolpack, Brinksway, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.  
**Thursday 8th** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Blossoms, Buxton Rd, Heaviley. Starts 8.00pm.  
**Monday 12th** - Social: Friendship, Wilmslow Rd, Fallowfield. Starts 9.00pm.  
**Friday 16th** - University/All Saints Stagger: 7.30pm Whitworth, Moss Lane East; 8.30 Grafton, Grafton St.  
**Monday 19th** - Social: Queens Head (Turners Vaults), Underbank, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.  
**Thursday 22nd** - Pub of the Month presentation to Tatton, Moss Nook. 8.00pm onwards. Minibus will run to this departing Crown, Heaton Lane at 8.00pm. Book with John Hutchinson on 434 7177.  
**Friday 23rd** - Trip to Bridgewater Brewery. Meet Kings Arms, Bloom St, Salford 7.30pm. Minibus may run - contact John Hutchinson for details.  
**Monday 26th** - Social: Waldorf, Gore St (off Piccadilly), Manchester City Centre. Starts 9.00pm.  
**Saturday 1st July** - Provisional date for Beer Festival Staff Party  
**Monday 3rd** - Social: Griffin, Didsbury Rd, Heaton Mersey. Starts 9.00pm.

## JUNE 2000

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 12th** - Branch Meeting: Royal Hotel, Market Street, Hayfield. Starts 8.30pm.  
**Saturday 24th** - Sponsored Walk for Anthony Nolan Bone Marrow Trust. Starts Sportsman, Mottram Rd, Hyde 11am.  
**Monday 3rd July** - Committee Meeting: Lowes Arms, Hyde Rd, Denton. Starts 8.30pm.  
**Monday 10th** - Branch Meeting: Old Glove Works, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm.  
 Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following events:  
**Monday 5th** - Presentation of Jim Bowden Memorial Award and 20 Year Good Guide Award to The Highwayman, Rainow. Starts 8.00pm.  
**Monday 19th** - Committee Meeting: Rising Sun, Hawkins Lane, Rainow. Starts 8.00pm.  
**Monday 26th** - Branch Meeting (and possible SGM): Bird In Hand, Knutsford Rd, Mobberley. Starts 8.00pm.  
**Saturday 1st July** - Cains Brewery tour with South Cheshire Branch. Starts 10am.

To Do Address Namepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner

18



Dave and Sue welcome you to

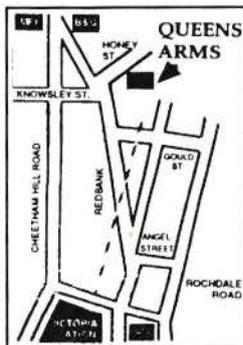
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Saddlers; Hoskins  
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Harvest Best, Barndance;  
Wychwood Obernon,  
Three Lions; Orkney Red  
MacGregor, Dark Island;  
...and many more

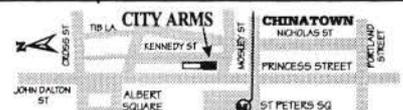


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**COPY DATE FOR THE JULY 2000 ISSUE OF OPENING TIMES IS JUNE 22**

# MANCHESTER MATTERS by Cityman

**N**ews reaches me of yet two further bars opening in the City Centre's leisure complexes. The Printworks is to be the site of *Waxy O'Connors*. If memory serves me correctly, the original version is in London and can perhaps best be described as a less restrained version of *Via Fossa*, if such a thing is possible. Meanwhile the Great Northern development is to get a *Parisa Café Bar* - these you may recall are a spin-off from the old Greenalls off-licence chain and started off with the notion that each would have a in-house micro-brewery. There has been precious little sign of those so far and I'm not anticipating great things for the Manchester outlet either.

## City Centre Changes

The latest new opening is **Box Bar**, occupying the bottom half of the old church building at the end of Deansgate. It's quite well executed with a large outdoor area and inside lots of brushed steel and bare brick but to me it lacks something, not least on the beer front. Not only is there no cask beer (natch) but the rest of the range is possibly one of the most dreary and unimaginative to grace any of the new City Centre bars, the one saving grace being *Leffe* on draught. Compare and contrast with *Atlas* across the road and *Dukes 92* around the corner.

I don't know who's responsible for the refurbishment of the **Town Hall Tavern** on Tib lane but they deserve a medal for bringing it back into the pub mainstream. It's now done out in traditional style and while there are period light fittings and such like, the mock-Victoriana isn't over-done. OK, it might not be the most imaginative job of work ever carried out but it's head and shoulders above the pub's two previous nightmarish incarnations as *Copperbutts* and the grisly *Flares*. As an added bonus cask ale is back, too, with *Boddingtons Bitter* and *Pedigree* on handpump.

I believe that the people behind the **Town Hall Tavern** are also responsible for the very welcome return of **Corbieres** on Half Moon Street, just off St Annes Square. One of the few cellar bars left in the City, it has now been done out in a vaguely gothic style with pale orange-washed walls adding a necessary touch of warmth. Cask beer has always tended to feature here (on my first visit many years ago, *Marston's Owd Roger* was on draught) and *Pedigree* and *Tetley Bitter* are on handpump.

Just around the corner on Old Bank Street I understand that *Bass* are to convert **Bar 5** (formerly *The Conservatory* - and does anyone remember when it was the *Old Bank Street Brewhouse*?) into...*Flares*! Can you believe it? Two flops already and still they won't give up.

## In The Sticks

As well as good quality *Lees mild* and *bitter*, *Diane Davidson* at the **Britannia** on Rowsley Street in Beswick is benefiting from nearby Commonwealth Games stadium workers guzzling down her hearty

all-in breakfasts a £2 a throw from 9.30 to 11am. A recent cup victory in the *Bradford & Openshaw Darts Gallon League* was the first for the pub in over four years. *Diane* would be pleased to see any drinkers who enjoy good ale; she is still surprised at how few folk know the pub even exists, as am I - it's certainly one of my favourite east Manchester pubs.

There's bad news from *Ardwick* where **The Kings Head** on Chancellor Lane closed in early May to the great surprise of many. Whilst not the most bustling of pubs it did serve *John Smiths* and *Theakston BB* on handpull; lunchtime trade was its mainstay - providing food and drink to the many hundreds of people who work very close by. I hope the closure is temporary as this one was of the very few real ale oases in the area but I'm not hopeful - it was still firmly closed and boarded as we went to press.

Less bad news is the closure of the **Bulls Head** on Kingsway. It's a pub that has struggled to find an identity for years and hasn't sold real ale in living memory - indeed given the continuing excellence of the **Sun in September** around the corner on *Burnage Lane*, I'm surprised that it lasted as long as it did.

## REQUEST STOP BEER HOP

The **Fifth Beer Festival** at the **Bhurtpore Inn**, *Aston near Nantwich*, takes place from **Wednesday 12 July to Sunday 16** with all day opening on **Saturday 15th**. The **Bhurtpore Inn** is **12 minutes walk from Wrenbury Station**, a request stop on the **Crewe-Shrewsbury** line.

Due to the substantial increase in passenger numbers during last year's festival, the **Crewe & Shrewsbury Passenger Association** has arranged with *Wales & West Trains* for two trains from Manchester to stop specially at *Wrenbury* on **Saturday 15th**. These are the **11.33** and **14.33** *Piccadilly-Cardiff* trains which will also call at *Wilmslow* at **11.49** and **14.49** respectively. Intending passengers from *Stockport* should note that due to engineering works these trains will not call at *Stockport* this year (for details of services call *National Rail Enquiries* on **08457 484950**). Stewards from the Association will meet the trains at *Wrenbury* to give advice and directions.

To ease the return journey, the Association has also arranged that two trains will call at *Wrenbury* at **17.05** and **19.36**, these are through trains to *Wilmslow* and *Piccadilly*. Other return services are available from *Wrenbury* at **18.35**, **20.57** and **22.03** but all these involve a change at *Crewe* (and a long wait if you catch the **22.03**). Around **90 real ales** are promised so this should once again be an excellent festival and live up to its reputation as an essential date on the beer lovers' calendar.

It may of course seem strange that a *Rail User Group* should promote a beer festival, but the huge numbers of passengers using *Wrenbury* station during last year's festival certainly makes the effort worthwhile. To quote Association Chairman *John Cresswell* in a conversation with *Wales & West Trains*: "I don't know if you keep a graph of passenger numbers at *Wrenbury*, but if you do it must have gone right off the paper during Beer Festival days."



## APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(Opening Times 194)

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.

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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.*



# THE ULTIMATE MILD CHALLENGE II

with Guest Beer Writer Richard Hough

**T**he famous WINTERS clock struck eleven, and we were off. The Ultimate Mild Challenge had started, for the second year running. Further to the 'Mild Challenge Extra' as part of the Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge, I had decided to make it into a proper Challenge, and rather than try milds in 12 different areas, see if we could sample 12 different milds in 12 different areas, and to make it a bit more serious, do the lot in one day. Were we to manage it, or not? The *Holts Mild* in Winters was pleasant enough, although the bar staff asking if we wanted 'Real' or 'Smooth' was a bit disconcerting; the Mild Challenge is, after all, a promotion of *Real Mild*.

We emerged before most of Stockport was even contemplating going to the pub; surely a good advert for a proper relaxation of opening hours since Winters is not particularly renowned as being an alcohol-fuelled trouble spot. Yet they open all permitted hours, and are invariably busy all the time. A crafty filler was needed before lunch; we decided on the *Tiviot* for some fine quality *Hatters Mild*. Often overlooked, this shows how a traditional town pub should be run. A warm welcome, and well patronised with a mix of shoppers and locals, in a multi-roomed establishment that modern planners would probably shun as 'uneconomical use of space' (too many walls).

Lunch beckoned, and it was a slight case of history repeating as we walked round to the *Swan With Two Necks*. We hadn't included it on last year's Mild Challenge, but we had eaten Bev's excellent lasagne made with Real Ale. [Paul and Bev Stanyer have moved from the Railway, Avenue Street - lasagne with Porter's Porter - to the Swan - lasagne with Old Tom]. The mild on offer (in addition to *Hatters*) was the under-rated, and hard-to-find *Robinson's Dark*, and very good it was too. We sat in the excellent top-lit snug, arguably one of the best five pub rooms in Stockport; here we were joined by our third party member, who happens to co-edit OT (yours truly - ed(1)). We were doing extremely well for time compared to last year, but there was no time for complacency. We hurried to the aforementioned *Railway*; unfortunately John was accosted by one of the regulars over the much publicised conflict between owner Dave Porter and local CAMRA. That aside, the *Porter's Mild* was superb, being dark, roasty, big on flavour and cracking value to boot. People who diss mild as being a thin and insipid second choice should pay the Railway a visit. All credit to licensee Fleming Robb-Brown for doing a sterling job.

On again, this time a bit of a walk took us to *Ye Olde Vic* in Edgeley. This little four-square pub is undergoing a new lease of life in the capable hands of genial host Steve Brannan. An impressive range of beers selected from independent breweries often includes a mild; the *Buffy's Dark* was a delight, and we were reluctant to leave. But we had business to attend to...

The Mild Challenge organisers had this year made the UMC a bit easier by increasing the number of different areas in the Challenge. So we walked down the hill to the only pub in Brinksway area (Edgeley last year) - *Ye Olde Woolpack*, the current local CAMRA Pub Of The Year. Major Disappointment! It was ten to 3 and the pub was shut. This was a double blow since the Moorhouse's *Black Cat Mild* had been so wonderful last year. We carried on up the hill to the *Moss Rose*, one of the few parts of the day where we re-traced last year's footsteps. The weird exterior belies a good traditional pub with great traditional beer. The *Hyde's Light* was exceptional, and one of the reasons (the other is the Bitter) why the *Moss Rose* has regularly appeared in the CAMRA Good Beer Guide recently. We were informed that interest in the Mild Challenge had been considerable, and no wonder.

Astonishingly, we had completed half the Mild Card, yet were still to catch a bus. It arrived in time to save us from getting rained on, and dropped us near the *Crown*, Heaton Moor. This is a great traditional multi-roomer with a boisterous, friendly atmosphere. The mild on offer is *Greenalls Dark*, a very dark brew which promised rather more than it delivered. Our 4th party member joined us here, you remember, Bec from last year's Mild Challenge. We emerged from the pub to see our bus zoom past. Early. Ho Hum. Back up for a taxi, then, still special people demand special treatment. Next stop, the *Gateway*. It was here that we encountered the same problem as last year. A Hydes pub which was advertised on the Challenge as selling Hydes Dark Mild, yet in reality, it was *Hydes Light*. Not that it was at all unpleasant, and mid-afternoon is a good time to enjoy the pub since it can get extremely busy in the evenings.

A sprint for the bus, and a few minutes later we were entering Gatley, destination the *Gothic Bar*. This is a sensitive conversion of an old chapel, and a recent worthy winner of the local CAMRA Pub Of The Month award. We sat on the upstairs balcony and enjoyed some seriously good *Cain's Dark*. It is an interesting pub, with a good atmosphere, and deserves all the success that comes its way. Plan B had now to be adopted to try and include some *Hydes Dark*. Cheadle is but a short hop on a bus from Gatley, and before long we were ensconced in the *Old Star* with accompanying pints of the elusive Dark. It is a pleasant ale, and a good example of a dark mild. It is also proof positive that interest in cask mild is

still alive; credit to Hydes for sticking to their guns and providing the discerning drinker with real choice. This choice has been further enhanced by the introduction of a range of seasonal beers by the brewery; since we were well on schedule we lingered a while in the comfort of the pub to try 'Jekyll's Gold' which was certainly on form.

It was here that JC left us (he'd only intended popping out for one or two). We boarded another bus and meandered our way to Didsbury. We had a choice of possible pubs here, but not before solid sustenance was procured from the chippy. The *Fletcher Moss* is one of the more traditional pubs in the village, and this after it has undergone a major refurb since its days as the Albert. You will not be surprised to learn that it is operated by Hydes, who know how to do a job properly. The mild on offer was *Welsh Dark*, and while it looked suspiciously like the English version we had encountered earlier, was nevertheless a tasty drop. We felt we were on the home stretch now, so we decided to stop off at the *Castle* in Manchester so that Bec could nail the *Robinson's Dark*, while we opted for something rather stronger: Old Tom is essentially a (very) strong mild after all!

We had just one square to fill on the Challenge card, so we ambled up Oldham Street and round to the *Smithfield*. This is a comfortable Free House, and another of the pubs on the now infamous N/4 crawl of the city. The mild on offer was the pleasant, although not spectacular *Greene King XX*, one of the milds brewed in the south that is under threat of extinction. And there you have it. 12 different milds, in 12 different areas of Stockport and Manchester, and all in 12 hours. We knew it could be done. Next year we shall return, with another challenge to overcome! With thanks to the organisers of what turned out to be a highly successful Mild Challenge, with special mention to all of the licensees of participating pubs.

RH

PS When asked if I had a hangover the following day, I was able to truthfully reply 'Yes, but only a mild one!'

More on this year's record breaking Mild Challenge next month!

## OT JUNE COMPETITION

The re-run of the May competition, this time with the right grid, proved to be a bit of a stickler. One of the few correct entries came, appropriately enough, from Ron Elder of Penicuik, Lothian. Ron is a regular entrant to these competitions and he wins a *Swan With Two Necks* T-shirt, as does John Tune who was one of the heroes who managed to submit a correct entry, based on May's incorrect grid. The pubs you were looking for were: *Hunting Lodge*, *Eagle Hotel*, *Laffertys*, *Shore In*, *Nether Abbey Hotel*, *Levenhall Arms*, *Station Bar* and *Royal Hotel*.

As last month's was a tough one, this month's - again set by Paul Stanyer from the *Swan With Two Necks*, is a bit easier! It's beers you're looking for this time. They are all in the 2000 Good Beer Guide, so complete the grid in a clockwise spiral: the last letter of an answer is the start letter of the next. We have given you the first letter.

If any pub or brewery would like to sponsor the prize for an OT competition, please let us know. You don't have to set it, just sponsor it, please.

1,Z						2		
							5	
4		9				8		
	7		6					3

- (1) Time for bed said ...
- (2) Swampy was one of these from Pitfield (2 words)
- (3) Soviet fish in clearwater (2 words)
- (4) It might be said the apple fell on his head relatively so anyway! (2 words).
- (5) Did this mythical bird rise from the ashes thirty times? (2 words ish)
- (6) 24th ,16th and 1st letters will give you an early Bath?
- (7) Go through the lights on yellow to be one of these (2 words).
- (8) Baked cashews in a Rebellion? (2 words)
- (9) Do Druids go here for the solstice

Entries to: OT Competition, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport, Cheshire, SK3 9HD by 22 June please.

