



OPENING TIMES



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FREE

BEST BEER IN BRITAIN

Moorhouses Black Cat Spooks The Competition

The Champion Beer of Britain 2000 was announced at the 'biggest pub in the world', CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival held last month at Olympia, in London. And it was a North West beer that scooped the honours. Moorhouse's Black cat was judged to be the best beer in Britain by a panel of brewers, beer writers and journalists. The mild beer is described in the 2000 Good Beer Guide as "a smooth, well-balanced dark mild with a fruity aroma. Chocolate and coffee flavours complement the bitter roast character that lingers on into the aftertaste."

The Burnley brewed mild was chosen as the overall winner from over thirty finalists in five categories including beers from tiny micros to major national brewers. Mike Benner, CAMRA Head of Campaigns & Communications told Opening Times: "This is only the third time a mild has won the most prestigious beer competition in the world, the last time being twenty years ago. At a time when many brewers are dropping their milds claiming drinkers don't want them, this marks a real achievement for Moorhouse's and promises to turn the mild market around."

Malcolm MacDonald from Moorhouse's said, "It's a tremendous achievement for us all. It proves that a mild style beer is still in demand with today's drinkers. Big thanks to all the staff here in Burnley and we look forward to selling huge quantities of mild!" The Silver award went to 'TEA' from Hogs Back Brewery in Tongham, Surrey. The Bronze went to Yorkshire Terrier Bitter from York Brewery.

Mike Benner added, "family and small brewers have again won the day with distinctive and full-flavoured beers. It's up to the big brewers to show drinkers that they can match such quality."

Full Champion Beer Results

These are the full category results from this year's Champion Beer of Britain contest:

Milds

Gold - Moorhouse's Black Cat; Silver - Bateman's Dark; Bronze - Brain's Dark.

Bitters

Gold (joint winners) - Bullmastiff Gold and Brakspears Bitter; Bronze (joint winners) - Oakham JHB and Harviestoun Brooker's Bitter & Twisted.

Best Bitters

Gold - Hogs Back TEA; Silver - York Yorkshire Terrier; Bronze (joint winners) - Taylor's Landlord and Houston St Peter's Well.

Strong Bitters

Gold - Cropton Monkman's Slaughter; Silver - Gale's HSB; Bronze - Hop Back Summer Lightning.

Speciality Beers

Gold - Nethergate Umbel Ale; Silver - Oakham White Dwarf; Bronze - Heather Fraoch Heather Ale.



INDIE PRICES HELD AS FIZZ HITS £2

Big Brewers' Above Inflation Increases

Drinkers who want value for money should go for real ale in an independent brewer's pub - preferably here in the North-west of England.

And CAMRA's annual national survey of the price of a pint, launched at the Great British Beer Festival, finds that the average price of a pint of lager has broken the £2 a pint barrier for the first time.

In the country's biggest beer price survey, undertaken earlier this year, CAMRA volunteers tracked 5,000 prices in 1,000 pubs and found that:

Pubs owned by independent brewers are the cheapest - £1.68 for real ale compared to £1.84 for beer in a pub owned by a national brewer.

The most expensive region is London, where drinkers pay an average £2.18 for lagers and £1.95 for real beer, with many pubs charging far more.

Drinkers here in the North-west are laughing all the way to the bar - only £1.55 for real beer and £1.83 for lager, although that's still a 28p difference.

Cider drinkers get a bad deal - cider prices are up by more than 9 per cent since last year.

Stout drinkers are crying into the bottom of their glasses - the average price of a pint of stout is £2.15.

Real ale prices have risen by the rate of inflation over the last year (3.3 per cent) with the average price of real ale £1.82, but lager prices have risen by nearly 4 per cent to a staggering £2.01 a pint. CAMRA Head of Campaigns Mike Benner said: "Lager drinkers are paying through the nose for a product which is no more expensive to produce than real ale. We'd like the big pub chains to explain why lager costs nearly 20p more than real ale and their prices have gone up by 5.5 per cent - well above inflation."

"The truth is that lager drinkers are paying for the hugely expensive advertising campaigns for these beers to give them premium status. But the taste, choice and diversity of Britain's 2,000 real ales leaves them in the shade when it comes to value and quality."

"while some might expect us to be pleased lager drinkers are being penalised, high prices at the bar threaten to drive people out of our pubs at a time when many community pubs are finding it difficult enough to keep their heads above water. Given the taste and variety of our real ales today, our advice to lager drinkers is switch to the real stuff - and save money."

In September's OPENING TIMES

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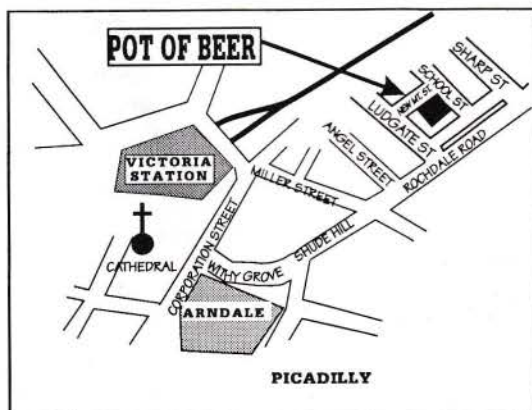
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

The Price Is Not Right

Beer prices are very much in the news right now. CAMRA's annual survey is out, showing that the average pint of lager is now more than £2; Interbrew boss Hugo Powell is pledging to end years of price cutting by big brewers; and micro brewers are predicting a less harshly competitive pricing environment. So beer prices generally look set to rise and keep on rising. But it's a curious paradox that the more prices rise, the less the beer drinking public seems to care.

Once upon a time people would budget carefully but go out regularly. These days people go out less often, but plan to make a night of it. They visit the cashpoint, fill their wallets or purses, and blow the lot. If they've had a good time at the end of the evening, they'll say they've had value for money. They don't count the pennies, and they reckon anyone who does is pretty sad.

That doesn't mean that beer isn't price sensitive, as the brewing industry has long maintained. So many pubs are all but deserted from Monday to Thursday these days, and a whole tranche of customers - especially pensioners, the unwaged, and low-paid workers, who used to be able to afford at least a few pints a week - are effectively disenfranchised.

Years of rising beer prices have meant that, for too many people pubgoing is no longer one of life's little everyday pleasures but something special - an occasional treat, or weekend splurge. That's one reason why community pubs, both urban and rural, have been closing in droves in the last 20 years. That's one reason why big, loud, youth pubs with their grim train of social and public order problems have spread through our town and city centres so fast.

And that's one reason why CAMRA's drive for fair prices, including and especially the uphill slog for a cut in beer duty, will remain at the very heart of our campaigning.

(With due acknowledgement to Ted Bruning and What's Brewing.)

John Clarke

News & Yet More Bad News

News that the Marble Arch brewery in Manchester is moving to produce only Organic Beers seems to be greeted with cautious enthusiasm. There are certainly a number of excellent Organic beers produced in different parts of the world, and it might well lead to an impressive boost in sales at the start of the next College Term. Whatever, Opening Times wishes the project well. Less good news is that Wolverhampton & Dudley (Banks & Marstons) are now - as the City would say 'In Play'.

Disappointing results from indigestion arising over swallowing Marstons & Mansfield too fast, have led to the arrival of a very unwelcome predator - Robert Breare, the man who closed Ushers. Wolves have put in a defence document proposing to close Mansfield and Camerons of Hartlepool. Bad news which ever way it goes.

P.B. Hutchings

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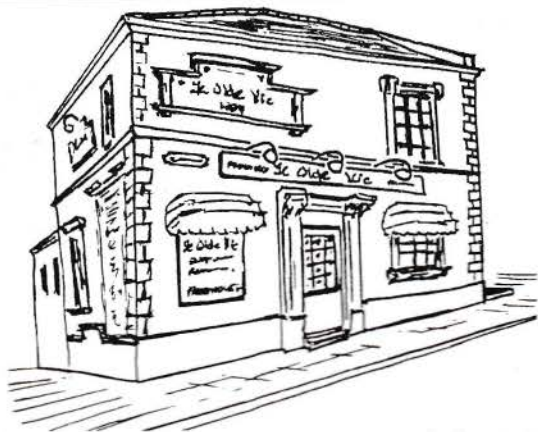
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Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs - Join CAMRA now - see page 23!



PUB OF THE MONTH SEPTEMBER 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



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for September is Ye Olde Vic, Chatham Street, Edgeley, Stockport.

The Olde Vic has long had a place in the hearts of local drinkers as it was the first Stockport pub to offer a changing array of guest beers, a policy which earned the pub both Pub of the Month and Pub of the Year awards. That was several years ago, however, and in recent years the pub had seemed to drift, struggling to establish a firm identity and with a restricted beer range.

All that changed in October 1999 when Steve Brannan and Johanne Quinn took over as tenants of the previously managed pub, which remains in private ownership. At the time Opening Times reported Steve and Johanne's aim of taking the pub "back to its former glory", although few would have imagined just how comprehensively this aim would be achieved and in such a short space of time. The Olde Vic is indeed a pub transformed. There are now up to six cask beers on sale, the regular Greene King IPA and Theakstons Cool Cask being supplemented by four ever-changing guests usually from micro brewers. Beartown Brewery is a regular supplier and the pub is a reliable outlet for the new Pictish Brewery monthly specials, although these are just two out of many, as the expanding pump clip collection shows. Quality is invariably tip-top. Real cider has also been reintroduced, and on handpump to boot, thus ensuring its temperature.

Considerable work is being put into the pub's fabric, too. The beer garden at the back has been restored and the pub is currently being repainted and re-signed. This should be followed by an internal decoration.

This would be an impressive list of achievements on its own, but what really makes this pub stand out is the quality of the welcome extended by Steve and Johanne. No-one is a stranger for long in the Olde Vic, and indeed the warmth and friendliness of the pub is something really quite exceptional. Steve and Johanne have the happy knack of balancing a relaxed informality with the firmness needed to run a good pub these days (fall foul of the strictly enforced 'no swearing' policy and you'll soon be out on your ear). This well-earned award will be presented on Thursday 28th September when a memorable night is in prospect. Get there early if you want a seat.

JC.

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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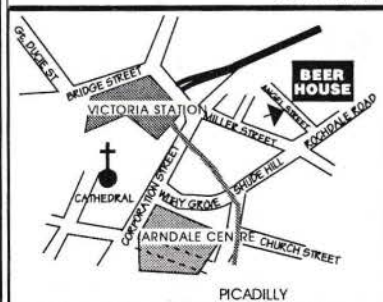
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STAGGER

with Paul Moss

East Manchester Highlights

The pubs, and especially the Real Ale pubs, in east Manchester being rather more sparsely distributed than was once the case, we staggerers resorted to the easy option - a minibus - to visit a selection of those remaining. Our first call was the well-known and popular **Waggon & Horses** on Hyde Road in Gorton. This is a large Holt's pub, decorated in typical unpretentious style, and already fairly busy at eight o'clock. We sat in the lounge, though in a distinct drinking area which was once a separate room. There is also a vault, with a big pull-down television screen, on the opposite side of the horseshoe bar. We enjoyed both the bitter and the mild, and it was encouraging to see the latter still selling despite the ominous presence of a "smooth" mild font.

Back on the bus, and onwards to the **Hare & Hounds** at Abbey Hey, passing on the way the Prince of Wales on Abbey Hey Lane (keg only) and the Hamlet, still sporting its sadly obsolete Vaux signs. Here we found a classic pub which still retains much of its original multi-roomed layout around a central, traditionally tiled, corridor. Front left, according to the etched glass in the door, is the "Smoke Room", whilst front-right lies the former vault, now open to the bar, but once (one of the regulars told us) accessed via a separate door from the entrance lobby. More etched glass led us through to the back snug, with its bench seating complete with bell pushes. Evidently once much smaller, this now occupies the full width of the pub and contains a pool table and television (although neither were in use) and provides access to the beer garden. The one cask ale available is Boddington's bitter, which most of us felt was on very good form.

Next up was the **Railway**, on Manshaw Road in Fairfield. This is an imposing Holt's pub in an open street-corner location with a magnificent restored lamp over the main entrance. The interior looks to have suffered some rearrangement, but still retains character, with rooms either side of the entrance and another separate drinking area beyond the bar. The "News Room" front left still bears a small plaque on the top of the doorframe stating "Cert. for officers", apparently harking back to when army officers were quartered across the road. Handpumped mild and bitter were available; most of us opted for the former, and found it to be very good, whilst the bitter received slightly less enthusiastic reviews. The licensee told us that we had ordered more mild than he had sold in the rest of the week - a sad reflection on modern drinking tastes. On now to the **Strawberry Duck**, a square, brick-built free house next to the Ashton canal on Clayton Lane, Clayton. Pump clips on the central bar advertised Holt's mild and bitter, although it appeared that the mild was available only with added nitrogen - "cask smooth". We thought this odd, as surely a normal handpump could be run off the same cask? Nevertheless, we enjoyed a good

pint of bitter in the relative quiet of the back room, whilst other drinkers enjoyed the karaoke out front.

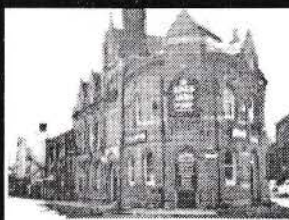
Our next call was the **Britannia** in Beswick, a former Greenall's house now serving Lees bitter and GB Mild. We drank in the L-shaped bar on the right, whilst the smoke room, identified by an etched glass door panel, lies on the far side of the bar and is accessed via a short corridor to the left. Surrounded by a combination of dereliction and new developments, the Britannia is a remarkable survivor. While the Commonwealth Games stadium being erected nearby should provide a boost to custom and long-term security, let's hope that the brewery don't seek to capitalise in this too heavily and wreck the pub's character in the process. Luckily Lees have a good reputation in this respect. Of the two beers, the bitter was thought particularly good.

Our final stop was at the **Coach and Horses**, a Robinson's house located at the junction of Hyde Road and Belle Vue Street in Belle Vue. The interior consists of two rooms at the front, both served from the central bar. We chose the quieter lounge on the left, where the tables are covered in beaten copper. The two rooms are joined by a corridor behind the bar. The checkerboard floor tiles here are in brown and white, which one member of our party suggested was Boddington's old colours - evidence of previous ownership? The cask beers on offer here are Best Bitter and Hatters' Mild. Both were generally well-received, with the bitter just shading the mild for preference.

What, then, of east Manchester? Whilst some commentators have described the area as something of a Real Ale desert, there is clearly still decent beer being served in decent pubs. And if that's the way you want it to stay, you can do your bit - keep drinking Real Ale!

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

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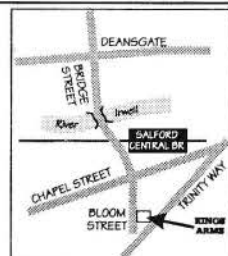
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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Allan Sykes, Hull CAMRA (via e-mail):

With reference to the letter from Peter William in the last (August No 196) issue of OT regarding the vexed question of smoking in pubs, in particular in respect of lack of smoke free rooms. Surely the time has come where pub owners should provide a smoke free environment for its customers, as well as catering for smokers.

A simple solution would to have designated Smoke Rooms and separate non smoking rooms in pubs. From a recent survey (conducted by pro smoking FOREST) it seems that 80% of pub and restaurant owners favour freedom of choice should prevail when deciding on banning smoking from their premises. Fine, but what of the choice of the non-smoking 60% of the population who may not want to risk being in a polluted smoky environment? People are becoming increasingly aware of the dangers arising from passive smoking and it would seem that there is a growing number of people who, like Mr William, are choosing to stay at home to enjoy their beer.

Pub designers, architects, magistrates and environmental officers should now be looking at ways to ensure pubs (new and old) offer a choice of rooms where at least one room is smoke free. Surely there are grounds in these more environmentally conscious days to introduce legislation to ensure this option is available before granting new licences? In his August article Curmudgeon reported on the potential problems attributed to large, single room establishments, which unfortunately are rapidly becoming the norm. The provision of a non smoking, separate room (i.e. with doors and not non-smoking areas which are as effective as a chocolate fireguard) is another reason to favour the case for 'compartmentalised' licensed premises. It would be a welcome change to see pub designers going back to designing multi-roomed pubs offering a choice of environment. Freedom of choice should be extended to all - smokers and non-smokers alike.

From Kim Rampley, Widnes:

Re "Named & Shamed" (OT, August), I fully agree with doing this. Nothing like publicity to concentrate the minds of those guilty of such practices.

However I cannot agree with the implication that **only** S&N Retail/Scottish Courage should "...know better". Surely any pub operator - a free house owner with a solitary pub, a small chain, large pubco or an operator still brewing - worthy of the name should not be indulging in said practice any more that they should be guilty of short measure, filtering back or other bad/unhygienic practices.

On a hopefully more positive note, could not ScotCo put some of their own beers into the many Greenalls houses they now own? I have seen Theakstons Best Bitter in a pub in Widnes - bit wouldn't Courage Directors be a better choice? Theakstons must surely take trade off Greenalls or other standard bitters, real or otherwise. I realise that Directors (like Draught Bass) is said by some to have lost character and flavour but I still rate it a reasonable drink - I have had it in the past at the Swan & Railway, Wigan and more recently at the Ferry, Penketh.

I have written to S&N Retail with this point (they are at Northampton). Does anybody share my view?

From Geoff Corfield, Ontario:

Been in the UK twice since I left in 1992, but missed Stockport last year, and the time before that didn't see you in any of the pubs I was in! Anyway, I get a batch of Opening Times once in a while, and enjoy reading them over a small jug of Waterloo Dark in the Victoria Tavern.

However it gives me no great pleasure to say "I told you so" over the Beer Orders; nor to writing this letter just a few miles from where the company started that now controls one third of the UK brewing industry (Hugo Powell of Labatts Canada now calls the shots for Stella).

Far from being a panacea, the Beer Orders were a predictable disaster. Slay the devil you know, only to unleash the devil you didn't know. The UK is open season for foreign brewing companies, and will be/is awash with more lager than you've ever seen in your life.

There was nothing fundamentally wrong with the UK brewing industry pre-Beer Orders. But CAMRA slashed out at the tied house and the Big Six (they look pretty small now, don't they?); and unfortunately the Conservative government of the day listened to you (supported by Labour). It was the worst thing Maggie ever did. A healthy, competitive, homespun industry was hand-cuffed by government regulation, and you have reaped the result: British companies replaced by international giants; and not only British ale facing its biggest fight ever (much tougher than against Red Barrel); but the British pub is under attack too. All very sad. Change of some sort would have come of course, but the Beer Orders brought in bad change for the wrong reasons. Government regulation seldom works, you are learning a painful lesson.

And don't place any hope in Hugo Powell and Stella either. Powell is a marketing man and beer is a commodity to be marketed. They'll run roughshod over ale unless they can put it in a can and sell it all over the world (Boddingtons).

The future? As long as it's still possible to sell your own beer in your own pub, smaller companies can survive. Break what's left of the tie completely and you've bloody had it. The tie was a unique nothing-wrong-with-it feature linking pubs to beer. CAMRA kicked it in the teeth and what you have is now the result.

(CAMRA has long supported retention of the tie and still does - ed(1))



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Winter's on Great Underbank has long been a Stockport landmark, notable for its automaton clock with moving figures which strike the hour. As a long established jewellers it was something of a local institution but since its conversion into a pub it has struggled to find an identity. In point of fact Winters occupies an uneasy middle ground, a sort of halfway house between pub and café bar, although since it passed into the ownership of Joseph Holt's, that most traditional of brewers, there is certainly more of a pub feel, split between vault on the ground floor and lounge upstairs. There have been a variety of licensees during Holt's ownership and while they have all been hardworking, none has so far stamped their presence of the pub. This looks set to change, indeed it has already changed, with the arrival of Peter Sibbit, as reported in these pages last month. Peter has many years experience in the trade, and although he has not run a pub for the past four years, the previous nine were spent at the Horseshoe in High Lane where he gained an enviable reputation for his food.

Apart from throwing out a small number of less desirable customers, it with the food operation that Peter has set about making the pub into the town centre flagship for Holt's that it should always have been. This is now heavily promoted and runs from 12 noon to 4pm every day, with a traditional lunch on Sundays. Whilst you can eat anywhere in the pub, the upstairs lounge with the tables set out for eating is perhaps the preferred location.

At first sight the menu might appear to be unexceptional, covering the usual range of pub fare from sandwiches, toasties, soup, and a selection of specials which include, pie, chicken, curry, fish and chips, gammon and an all day breakfast. Appearances are deceptive however, for behind these perhaps mundane descriptions lies food which combines top notch quality and exceptional value for money. The curry of the day for example was Thai Green Chicken, always a personal favourite and a snip at £3.75. The All Day Breakfast at £2.95 looked exceptional value but I finally went for the Pie of the Day, Meat & Potato at £3.95. My companion chose the Chicken Dish of the Day, Lemon Pepper Fillet, again £3.95. We weren't disappointed. The pie came jam packed with the tenderest beef, thick gravy and just a touch of potato, all topped by an expertly crafted puff pastry top. The chicken fillet came smothered in a creamy peppercorn sauce with the slightest hint of lemon and garnished with red and green peppers. Accompaniments included tip top boiled potatoes (for me) and chips (companion) together with al dente broccoli, cauliflower and carrots plus a few spears of asparagus. Both were polished off in double quick time and neither of us had room for one of the tasty puddings, all at £1.75.

We did have time to browse the a la carte menu, which is served upstairs on Fridays and Saturdays between 7 and 10pm. This really does look the business, with a variety of steaks and fish dishes, all at bargain prices. A 1lb T-bone steak is just £7.50, a whole Aberdeen Plaiice (minimum weight 1lb) £4.95, and a Jumbo Grimsby Haddock (the word 'jumbo' is always the sign of a good menu in my book) a snip at £4.20. These are just a few highlights from a raft of tempting main dishes, not to mention an impressive array of starters.

As if this wasn't enough, the pub is now serving possibly the best Holt's ever dispensed there. Neither of us tried the mild but the bitter was classic Holt's of a standard rarely encountered these days. The attention to detail is best illustrated by the fact that due to the long lines and the warm weather, the beer was brought up from downstairs to ensure that it was at the perfect temperature. Very highly recommended. JC.

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National First for Marble?

Manchester's Marble Brewery, based at the Marble Arch, Rochdale Road, has become possibly the first brewery in the country to go entirely organic. A tasting of the new range was held on 25 August when the four new beers were available for sampling and comment. The new beers, all of which have been reformulated with organic ingredients, comprise N/4 (3.8%), brewed for the Northern Quarter pubs; Marble Bitter (4%); Amber Kitchen Ale (4.7%), the recently introduced strong mild; and IPA (5%), and remain characterful, well-made beers.

Reactions were mixed with N/4 being perhaps the best liked and the only serious criticism reserved for the IPA, which has had its bitterness halved (the old Liberty IPA which it replaces had 50 bitterness units, the new beer has 25). Brewer Mark Dade explained that he would be collating the tasting notes completed by those present and tweaking the beers as necessary.

The move to an all-organic range has been suggested by brewery owners Janet Whitehead and Vance de Becheval. They are conscious that the brewery's main outlets, The Bar (Wilbraham Road) and the Marble Beer House (Manchester Road), are the two tied houses in Chorlton, epicentre of the city's metropolitan elite and hence somewhere where the appellation 'organic' will boost sales. While the move is understandable, and not in itself unwelcome, the downside is that the rest of the current Marble range, including the wonderful McKenna's Revenge Porter, has been discontinued for the time being pending the sourcing of the necessary organic ingredients. New organic beers are in the pipeline, though and later this month the first organic 'special' will appear. This will be Old Lag at 5.5%.

Bank Top Latest

At long last, Bolton's Bank Top Brewery has produced its long awaited Dark Mild. The 4 per cent brew has a ruby hue and a faint hint of sweet roastiness which gives way to a refreshing dry finish - very moreish, and selling well Bank Top's John Feeney tells us. It was originally to be called 'Muddy Waters' - an excellent name for a dark mild - but John didn't get the pump clip artwork finished in time so has settled on the more prosaic 'Dark Mild', a name that is likely to remain.

At the end of August, John produced a new 4.2 per cent beer using experimental hops from hop merchants Charles Faram. The hops are so new they are currently named 'Hilary' after a girl on the hop farm. One cask of the new beer will be going to an open day at Pridewood hop farm hosted by Farams and the rest will be sold locally - John hadn't finally decided on a name when we spoke to him but thought that it would in all likelihood be 'Old Slapper'. Expect to see it on the bar of the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport, which always has a Bank Top beer on the bar and including all of the new brews. Finally from Bank Top, there will be a new beer for this year's in-house beer festival at the Howcroft in Bolton (11-15 October) although details of the beer hadn't been firmed up as we went to press.

More Seasonals

As we reported last month, the seasonal beer programmes for Hydes', Lees and Robinson's now run in tandem and this month sees new beers from all three. Hydes are following up the very successful Your Bard with Henry's Hampton, the latest "T'Ale of the Century" and commemorating the exploits of Henry VIII with a 4.4 per cent full-bodied brew. We also understand that Hydes' legendary 4X strong ale (6.8%) may well reappear on a limited basis at the end of the year.

Lees are once again brewing John Willie's Manchester Champion Beer (5%), the draught version of the brew that won a Tesco bottled beer competition. Deceptively smooth



and easy drinking for its strength, this is a dangerous beer.



Robinson's second seasonal, following the very well received Whistlin Will is Cooper's Bell. Again at 4% this will be a rather more bitter beer than its predecessor, having a high hop rate, and extra crystal malt will give the beer a darker and more autumnal hue. The next in line, for November/December will be "Robinson's Robin" - apart from the strength (4.5%) details of this have not yet been finalised, although a strong version of Hatters Mild is a distinct possibility.

Pictish Brewery's September special is 'Staddle Stone' a 4.5 per cent ruby red ale which brewer Richard 'Sooty' Sutton tells us will be "really quite bitter" as he wanted a "really bitter beer" so this will be more bitter than is usually the case with Pictish beers. Sooty tells us that the brewery is currently very busy indeed, which is certainly good news. Look out also for a reappearance of 'Siren' the 4.1 per cent wheat beer from July that has been brewed again due to popular demand. A staddle stone, by the way, was a mushroom-shaped stone used to support medieval grain stores. The shape prevented rats from getting into the store, apparently. Pictish Brewer's Gold (3.8%) is now regularly available at the King's Arms, Bloom Street, Salford, by the way.



New from Phoenix

The latest beer from Phoenix Brewery is 'Navy' a quenching 3.8 per cent bitter, which is very similar to (although distinctly more bitter than) the late lamented Bridgewater Navigator, although with the wrinkles ironed out. It debuted at the Kings Arms, Salford, where two 18-gallon containers sold out in a weekend. Consequently Navy will now be the second regular beer at the Kings, alongside



Pictish Brewers Gold. Phoenix (and ex-Bridgewater) brewer Richard Bazen tells us that the Phoenix plant is very similar to that at the old Holt, Plant & Deakin (HDP) set-up in the West Midlands. The significance of this trivia becomes apparent when you consider that Bridgewater Barton Ale was a recreation of HDP Entire, thus perhaps we may look forward to 'Phoenix Entire'. Remember, you read it here first.

Also new from Phoenix this month will be Flight of the Phoenix at 4.2%. Apart from this no other new beers will be produced for a short while, as the brewery has to get into its stride to meet the demand from the new accounts gained by salesman Danny Bates, some of which we understand are quite substantial indeed.

MORE BREWERIES TO CLOSE!

The battle for Wolverhampton & Dudley breweries future has been joined. Wolves who produce Banks, and also own Camerons of Hartlepool, Marstons in Burton and Mansfield are being stalked by Robert Breare (who previously closed Ushers of Trowbridge whilst working for Alchemy Partners - yes the same bunch that wanted to buy Rover and close almost all of it). Now backed by John Bott a US based financier (i.e. asset-stripper), it is almost certain that he intends to close or sell the breweries if he wins, despite claiming to be 'not unfriendly to brewing'.

It has been no secret that Wolves boss, David Thompson, bought Mansfield with the intention of closing it - though apparently not until 2002 or 3. The Wolves defence of remaining independent has begun, sadly, with what looks like a panicky 'me too' letter to shareholders. In this, Thompson proposes bring forward the closure of Mansfield, and adding Camerons (which again has no 'national' brand) to the hit list.

Now this might well be preferable to Mr Breare, who has claimed that Wolves weakness lies in 'regional' rather than 'national' brands with a high profile - except for Marstons Pedigree. Under his erstwhile stewardship it can be safely assumed that Marstons brewing business would be sold, and the Wolverhampton brewery itself would be threatened. Given the track record of Alchemy's forays into the pub business, disposals, rationalisations, amortisations and nitrokeg would seem to be the order of the day. The quite considerable Marstons pub estate in South Manchester needs all this like a hole in the head. Oh dear.

David J. Bradley Esq.

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This month's Desert Island choice comes from Ken Birch, a well-known figure on the local pub and beer scene. He was a founder of Bridgewater Brewery and is now licensee of the Pot of Beer. Already armed with the current Good Beer Guide, the Champion Beer of Britain, Moorhouses Black Cat, and the Champion Winter Beer, Robinson's Old Tom, these are his other five choices:

"All of the beers chosen have some personal memories; however I have tried to judge the beers purely as a drinker, and not for any connection that a brewery or beer had with me. My 'best ever' list has changed over the years, and only one is on a current brewery list, so I hope that most of you remember the lost beers.

"Bridgewater Delph Porter - sorry, but yes, it was a beer myself and Richard Bazen brewed at the Old Pint Pot and Chapel Street breweries, but I believe I would have been smitten even if Anheuser-Busch had brewed it! The blend of various malts, rye and malted oats seemed to be ambitious, yet yielding great possibilities. The results were far better than we had hoped for: the beer was complex in flavour and modesty (late flowering though it may be) decrees that I let others pass more fulsome judgements on it. Enough be it for me to say that the devising, brewing and drinking of it was a highlight of my life in real ale.

"Franklin's Bitter (the original brewed by Sean Franklin) - around about 1982, I kept on hearing about this new beer in glowing terms, the gist of most comments being 'like Landlord but 50% better'. I was then taken to the Junction in Otley; since I was driving, the two pints I had were nothing like enough - this was it! The perfect pint! I sought out the beer in other pubs, and great though it was, it wasn't that extra 1% better that good cellarmanship will create. I finally returned to Otley, had five pints and reached satisfaction. There are now many dozens of fine small breweries but in the early 80's Franklin's Bitter was truly unique.

"Holt, Plant & Deakin Entire - I love the Black Country beers - Hanson's, Holden's, Batham's, Simpkins and Ma Pardoes made the late 70's and early 80's a voyage of discover whenever a visit took me that way. Shockingly full-flavoured at first or subtle and light at first, then releasing the flavour through the finish, no one beer could produce all of the flavours present in these characterful beers, but one got damn close.

"Holt, Plant & Deakin was a bold experiment by Carlsberg-Tetley, to produce a separate estate within its empire which looked and felt like a small independent outfit. Locally themed pubs and a locally produced beer from a beautifully constructed brewhouse at Langley Green, Oldbury. Success was immediate. The beer was a classic best bitter (4.3%), hoppy and sweet on first taste, full and satisfying passing the soft palate and slightly dry and malty in the finish. Incidentally, Richard Bazen, my ex-Bridgewater colleague, was assistant brewer at HPD and, as then, unknown to me.

"Cotleigh Snowy Owl - Cotleigh is one of the most revered of the old wave (late 70's/early 80's) small breweries. All of their beers are superb and have been sought out by me since their early days. Snowy Owl is an occasional brew and tends to be in the 'hens' teeth' category of scarceness. However I persuaded a beer agency to let me have a precious kil. Yes, it was Cotleigh quality; yes, it had that indefinable quaffability but it had that extra something that stops people spouting on about it. Everybody just said 'that's good' in awed tones. Words would not possibly do this beer justice.

"Dobbin's Chinese Pale Ale - while these beers are not in any order of merit, if a gun was put to my head and I was asked to choose my all time favourite, this would be it. The fact that the beer was short-lived makes it even more memorable. Provided by Brendan Dobbin as a house beer for me at the Marble Arch (1992), it was a variation on his esteemed Sierra Nevada/Yakima Grande 5% Pale Ale. The only difference was the addition of specially imported Chinese hops. Yakima Grande was a classic and its doppelganger - Sierra Nevada which is brewed in California is achieving cult status among the growing band of US beer lovers. To my mind the slight variation in hop flavour that the Chinese P A had was just enough to judge it above all others. We can only hope it may return."



The Macclesfield Meander

A cheap evening return rail ticket (available from Stockport after 6.30pm, and under two quid on my outing) is ideal for visiting some of this Cheshire town's pubs. I concentrated on those more renowned for their choice of real ales and I wasn't disappointed.

Three of the pubs are quite close to the town centre but first it was a trip to the furthest out. This involved negotiating a series of left turns - leaving the station and going via Sunderland Street, Park Green, Mill Lane, Cross Street and then onto Byrons Lane will bring you to the aptly named **Railway View**, by the railway bridge and overlooking the London to Manchester line. This is a pub dedicated to providing up to eight real ales, food and enjoyment, including special drinks and price promotions. It has a comfy, opened-out interior, open fire, plenty of pub games and an outside patio. A pump clip collection covers one wall. This is a Good Beer Guide entry for the current year, and one of *Out Inn Cheshire's* flagship entries. The regular beers are Boddington's Bitter, Cain's Mild, a house beer (Railway Steam) brewed by Coach House of Warrington, and guests. It's worth the walk of about 15 minutes or so, so do try and visit if you can.

Retracing my steps, the **Sun Inn** on Mill lane is again a Good Beer Guide entry, and is a smart and prepossessing house with a compact, three-room interior, decorated in 'ale house' style. There is a beer garden at the back and ales offered were the consistent Burtonwood Bitter with guests coming from Bateman's, Hampshire, Titanic and the like.

Next it was back to the railway station and opposite the opened out thoroughfare of Waters Green, which becomes quite lively with revellers at night time. By here is the **Waters Green Tavern** and, yes, it's another Good Beer Guide inclusion. Not a free house as

such, but it does boast several handpumps which offer a changing range of rotating guest beers. Local brewer Storm often has a beer on sale, and it's usually a guaranteed outlet for Whim and Roosters, although these are just the tip of the iceberg as the extensive pump clip collection testifies. The bar has been opened out to an L-shape and is functionally but tidily decorated.

On leaving here I ascended the hill to Churchwallgate where the sweet repose of the **Castle** awaited. Echoes of yore in this old pun with its warren of tiny rooms, from the side vault to the more comfortably appointed lounges and snugs. To the rear a window looks out onto lush colour and foliage. You can almost imagine the clatter of a coach and six on the outside stone sets! On CAMRA's National Inventory of heritage pubs and another *Out Inn Cheshire* feature. A 'must see' for any pubgoer to the town. On handpump is a good range of S&N handpulled beers including Courage Director's, Theakston Best Bitter and the rarely seen mild.

My final venture of the night took me back onto Waters Green and one of the less prominent buildings in Robinson's **Nags Head**. Perhaps the most basic pub of them all, but nevertheless very popular, once again with a collection of different rooms. The bar is a simple affair with an iron rail above to hold the glasses. The beer range consists of Best Bitter, Old Stockport Bitter and Hartley's XB, sometimes supplemented by the recently introduced seasonals. A poster on the wall, no doubt as a wind-up, promotes Hydes' seasonal offerings!

To summarise, Macclesfield is easy to get to, with frequent train services from Manchester and Stockport, and boasts a wealth of good pubs serving tasty cask ales for you to enjoy on arrival. This is a town to which I will surely be returning soon.

HYDES PLUS FOUR

Manchester Brewer Hydes have now added four pubs to their tied estate in the last three months. In addition to Q & the White House in Stalybridge, previously reported in OT, the Red Lion in Leek and Vine in Nantwich were acquired in August.



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No3 in the series May - June

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No4 in the series July - August

"Crafted with no less than three hop varieties with the same dedication that "Will" applied to his classics, this masterpiece is crisp, light and refreshing.
Strength - 4.0% ABV



No5 in the series September - October

"Combining quality Maris Otter, Crystal and Cara Malts with English Northdown and Fuggle hops, this beer is resplendent in it's style much like Henry's famous Palace.
Strength - 4.4% ABV



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HISTORY IN A GLASS - FROM MEAD TO ALEHOUSE

A Wry look at the History of British Drinking by Pete Soane (Part 2)

In the Fourteenth Century there was a rapid rise in the number of alehouses and Edward III grew concerned that the yeomen of England were being distracted from their archery practice which they were duty bound to do.

The King subsequently outlawed many games including cards, dice, games of chance, football and handball. However the most important event of the Thirteenth Century was the assize of Bread & Ale of Henry III in 1266. "When a gallon of wheat is sold for 3s or 3/4 and a 1/4 of oats for 15d then brewers in cities ought and may well afford to sell two gallons for a penny and out of cities sell three gallons for a penny. And when in a town three gallons is sold for a penny out of town they ought and may sell four. And this assize ought to be holden throughout the land." This assize was the first attempt to relate the price of ale and bread to the cost of wheat and barley, and to produce a system of guaranteed supply with an element of consumer protection built in.

Ale tasters or ale-conners were very early local officials who tested the quality of a brew before it was offered to the general public. Chaucer wrote this of an ale-conner:

*"A nose he had that gan show
What liquor he had I trow
For he had before long seven yere
Been of the town the ale-conner"*

The ale-conner's job was an important one which survived for several hundred years. Shakespeare's father was ale-conner of Stratford in 1557. The badge of office was this leather breeches. He would pour a sample of freshly brewed ale onto a stool, sit on it for half an hour without moving and then attempt to stand. If his breeches stuck to the stool there was too much sugar left in the brew and it was deemed not fit to drink. If it passed his test he then tasted the ale to determine the quality and price. An important job indeed.

In 1319 there was at Bridge Foot in Southwark a very early tied house, The Bear, which existed until 1761 when it was sadly demolished in order to widen the road. The tie was in the form of

a lease, granted by Thomas Drinkwater to James Beauflour in return for which Beauflour bought all his wines from Drinkwater. The increase in the number of alehouses and taverns (the latter originally sold only wine), was beginning to cause alarm, not helped by an incident in 1354 at The Swyndlestock Tavern, later known as The Mermaid, in Oxford. The taverner, John de Croydon, quarrelled with some students over a jug of wine and when the jug was thrown at his head a fight broke out. John de Beresford, the former mayor, and some locals sided with de Croydon against the students and after several days rioting a number of students lay dead.

Building continued apace in the Fifteenth Century and many medieval inns were built for investment purposes. The George at Glastonbury and the galleried New Inn at Gloucester Abbey (which was a pilgrims' hostel for those travelling to the tomb of Edward II) are two examples. Perhaps one of the most famous inns of all was the Tabard at Southwark which was mentioned as early as 1304. Chaucer wrote of the landlord Henry bailey in 1338, "A semely man our hoste was with alle...A large man was he with even stepe...Bold of his speche; and wys, and wel y-taught...Ere thereto he was right a merry man." The Tabard was galleried, a Roman idea already used in Britain as a feature of their Divesoria and mansions. Another example of an inn was the Angel at Grantham which was of the gatehouse design. This type of inn was confined within one building with a courtyard at the rear whereas the galleried inns were built surrounding a courtyard.

The Angel is an ancient inn built on the site of a manor house belonging to the Anglo-Saxon Queen Elith, and King John held court there in 1213. It was rebuilt as an inn in the Fourteenth Century and again in the Fifteenth. Richard III signed the death warrant of the Duke of Buckingham there on 19 October 1483.

concluded on next page



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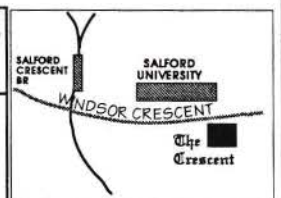
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You Can't Do That in Here

I was in a market town pub on a boiling hot day when a couple of bare-chested lads came in. The landlord took one look at them and said, politely, "I'm sorry, you'll have to put a shirt on." They made their exit, calling after them, "You've just lost about twelve pints' trade, mate!" Maybe he had, but given that the pub seemed to cater mainly for middle-aged regulars, in the long term he would probably lose a lot more trade if he did serve shirtless yobboes.

While this response from the licensee is entirely reasonable, and would probably happen in most pubs, it made me think how you no longer see the grumpy, tyrannical landlords of old, who treated their pub as their own private fiefdom, and wouldn't tolerate any quirks of appearance or behaviour they didn't approve of. I remember one licensee, long since retired, who ran a spotless, spick-and-span little pub in a Cheshire village. One day, a couple of mildly scruffy-looking hikers came in, he spotted them and, without hesitation, barked "Public Bar!" No doubt, if he was still in the trade, and someone allowed a mobile phone to ring in his pub, he would immediately bellow "Outside!"

Of course, times change, and if you barred everyone who didn't conform to the manners of the 1950s you wouldn't have many customers left. But, on the other hand, the relaxation of standards can go too far. A pub that is full of bare-chested, shaven-headed yobboes shouting obscenities, children running round in circles screaming at the tops of their voices, mobile phones warbling the William Tell Overture and morons bawling "I'm in the pub!" into them, is likely to lose more customers than it attracts. So perhaps it is high time we brought back at least a few of the prejudices of the old-fashioned grumpy landlord to restore a little civilisation to our pubs.

Never After Two

All-day opening is now taken for granted as part of the British pub scene, and has brought about a marked change in people's pubgoing habits, especially in terms of when they want to eat. For some years, my local pub has served Sunday lunches, and the peak time now seems to be around 3pm. Look at the car park of any chain dining pub at 5pm on a sunny Sunday and it will be full. But, on the other hand, there are still an awful lot of pubs that stick religiously to the traditional food serving hours of 12 - 2.

More often than not, if I am in a pub that stops serving meals at 2, in the following hour at least one group will come in looking for food, and be surprised and disappointed when told that it's finished. I know it costs money to keep staff on, and many smaller pubs are struggling to keep their heads above water, but such is the mark-up on food that, even if you only sold three or four main meals and a few soft drinks, it would easily cover an hour's wages.

By doing this, independent pubs must be losing out to the Brewer's Fayres and Wetherspoons of this world, which may serve predictable standardised food, but at least give the confidence that they serve it all day, every day. Pubs have to be flexible and respond to the changing demands of the trade, rather than sticking to an outdated pattern and then moaning about declining business. It's like all the small shopkeepers who complain how the supermarkets are killing them, but still take an hour's lunch break and close promptly at 5.30pm just as potential customers are on their way home from work.

Curmudgeon Online:
www.curmudgeon.co.uk

History in A Glass - Part 2 (continued)

The Tabard was rebuilt in 1628 then destroyed by fire in 1676, rebuilt again but renamed the Talbot. Sadly in 1875, despite a huge public outcry, the inn once again known as the Tabard, was destroyed by property developers.

"Bifel that, in a season on a day
 In Sothwark at the Tabard as I lay" - Chaucer

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

SEPTEMBER '95

The front page was all about the growth of the local microbrewers, contrasted with the turmoil amongst the big brewers over the approval of the Courage/S&N merger. In Stockport, John Perkin at Cobden's Brewery was test brewing a 4.5% Irish-style stout, whilst his two regular brands were still being contract brewed by Moorhouses. The Millgate in Failsworth was starting to reproduce the famous Dobbin's range under the general supervision of Brendan Dobbin himself. Oak's Wobbly Bob was well on its way to attaining cult status, and Tony Allen disclosed that a bit of tweaking had brought the beers much closer to the originals at Ellesmere Port. Thomas McGuinness was chugging along nicely, and Whim at Hartington had bought their first pub, the Wilkes Head in Leek. Plans were afoot to enlarge the brewery at Leatherbritches, also at the nearby Black Bull.

It was all happening at Manchester's new pub, the Head of Steam (at Deansgate railway station) with special offers, stupid prices, beer festivals, brewery trips and railway models. So where did the Head of Steam go?

Hydes' were forging ahead, and their plans for the future were summed up in one word - quality. They had recently introduced "best before" labels on the barrel ends (28 days from racking) as part of an ongoing programme that ensured not only did quality beer leave the brewery, but also that quality beer was served in the pubs. Hydes' had been delighted with the resounding success of their new seasonal beers - the brewery's commitment to these new beers had been demonstrated by the installation of two new 30-barrel fermenters, to give more flexibility for short length beers. In short, Hydes' looked to be transforming themselves from perhaps the sleepest of Manchester's old established brewers into probably the most innovative.

Finally, one item of news from the back page - the toilets at the top of Great Bridgewater Street (Oxford Street end) in the City Centre had been the subject of a planning application - surely Manchester's most unusual planning application to date. These toilets had had an interesting history, being adjacent to the long-defunct Gaumont cinema's "Long Bar", notorious in its day as a meeting place for the "ladies of the night". After a successful application, the toilets were converted into the Temple of Convenience, an excellent little bar (no real ale but decent bottles) which still trades today.

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 197:

John Clarke, Phil Levison, Peter Edwardson, Paul Moss, Tim Jones, Brian Carey, Steve Bray, Ken Birch, Graham Mason, Paul Stanyer, Steve Smith, Stuart Ballantyne, Pete Soane, Andrew Sleight and a rude mechanical, presumably not worthy of a mention.

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The Touch of The Oirish

A tale indeed of two cities, and two Oliver's. In London, the Porterhouse opened on Maiden Lane. No brewing in England - because Oliver Hughes wants to keep his Stout(s) - there are three, multi award winning Plain Porter, Oyster Stout and the sublimely black Wrasslers XXXX - Irish. All are brewed at the Dublin plant and shipped over. A special cask ale has been brewed to honour Turner (the artist) who was born on the London site (Turner's Special Brew), but all the other beers are mixed gas dispense which Oliver Hughes sweras is better for the Stouts. He might even be right, taste-wise, but Burton Bridge, among others produce some damn fine cask conditioned stouts over here. More openings are planned in Britain, apparently. Perhaps I could suggest to Oliver that he buy the site of the other Oliver (Peyton)'s emporium, the lamented Mash & Air.

Now Mash & Air was an interesting concept. Ineptly, it must be said, executed. There was a brand, spanking, and very large micro brewery in a glass tower up the spine of the building. Absurdly 'designed' loos in the wrong place - a habit Bass & Wetherspoons have picked up - and a trail of tears from the kitchen to the customers in the restaurant. The bar front/top - lime green gloss - needed repainting almost daily, and...well the list goes on. What was true, though, was that the beer, whilst getting a less than fulsome nose from the yeast, was often more than palatable, and on occasion blindingly good - a pale aromatic wheat beer was truly exceptional. It was also true, to my constant smug delight, that the beers in Manchester were infinitely superior to the fairly tasteless and insipid product brewed at the sister plant in London. Now alas, all is desolate, the plant stripped out and moved to London, and a new venture planned 'in the future' to sell the London-brewed beers to the denizens of our provincial village, at more than London prices. Posh and Becks were said to visit (the restaurant bit) on occasion, when it re-opens they probably the only ones who will be able to afford it. A Porterhouse would be VERY welcome.

Wholesome Marbles

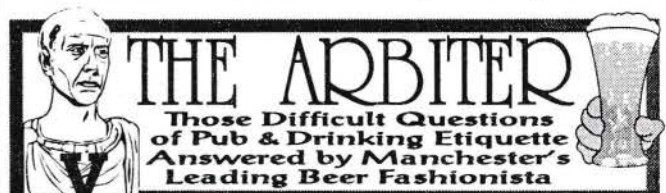
So Mash has gone, Bridgewater is dark, The Firkin is a brewery-less joke. The Lass O'Gowrie bravely flies the flag, as does the Marble Arch...but hang on, what's this? Its gone organic. I duly turned up for the sampling, to give brewer Mark Dade my thoughts on the new organic test-brews. I think (as Sir Humphrey Appleton would say) that this is a "brave" move. Now don't get me wrong - the beers are not at all bad (with one exception). I liked the new Amber Kitchen Mild more than the non-organic original. The new N/4 bitter and Marble Bitter were (to my mind) very samey, and resembled Hogsback TEA (which won the Best Bitter category at GBBF, so it must be popular) though personally, I found the tannins a tad overwhelming. The new low-bitterness IPA though, I'm afraid is very disappointing. The Liberty/Marble IPAs were my favourites among their pre-organic beers. Without hops of the right type (currently unavailable to Mark in organic form) they cannot be reproduced, and will be sadly missed. I think he is working from too restricted a toolset. Good luck, though, and give them a try..

Letters to Opening Times are welcome by post to:
The Editor, Opening Times, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley,
Stockport. SK3 9HD

or via the internet to johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com

COMING NEXT MONTH...COMING NEXT MONTH

The Beer Monster's VERY BAD BOOK Review
Musings on CAMRA's (Excellent) Good Beer
Guide 2001....and we are joined by...



Festival Round Up

Reports: Due to family commitments I could not make Stalybridge Buffet, I gather that the owners decided to rotate things around the pumps rather than use the back room for an additional stillage. Perhaps this was because (a) the expected hot weather (ha!) can be expected to 'turn' beers outside a cellar rather quickly, and (b) the beer has tended to run out a touch early... anyway a few grumbles were heard, and apparently (heresay only) some of the beers may have had Leadmill-like qualities. Most people confirmed that it was well worth a visit - judge for yourself in next month's Durham Week mini-festival 19th - 25th October - I certainly will.

The Lancashire Festival at the Beer House was a lot quieter than usual - peak holiday season - but there were a goodly number of pale bitters in good shape. The new Passageway beers came a bit late, and I actually ended up trying them all the following week at Idy and Sal's Bank Holiday festival at the Crescent Salford. Spent a very pleasant afternoon and evening there, much of it in the company of my religious colleague from our 5th-cousin-twice-removed publication (now styled as "Britain's biggest selling CAMRA magazine", probably because its the only one with a cover price....) and the Arbiter. You can always rely on Idy to provide good food, and the beers on my visit were top notch.

Coming up we have the Highlans & Islands festival at the Beer House (21 - 24 September), and then Idy's 'European Week' (Beers Wines, Spirits, Food from across Europe) in early October, and the N/4 Worlds Tour - including German Beer Festival at the Beer House - later in the month.

CAMRA festivals: Shrewsbury (8-9 September) promising beers from all 12 Shropshire breweries, Stoke 13-16, and Birmingham 14-16 September and St Albans 27-30 where a considerable amount of the GBBF's marooned American Cask Ales can be expected to finally turn up.

Cask Ales of the Month

Phoenix Pale Moonlight (4.2% abv)
Phoenix Lancashire Lightning (4.2% abv)

The former appeared at the Beer House Lancashire Festival - billed I believe as an exclusive, the latter at Idy & Sal's Bank Holiday Festival at the Crescent. I will describe the latter and comment on the former....

(Pale Moonlight) Straw coloured, almost yellow, with just a hint of the orange gold of early autumn. A very light and fragrant though definitely hoppy nose, giving no hint of the massive bone-dry malt flavour that hints the mouth when you drink it. The malt gradually gives way to a massive, cleansing hop flavour, with subtle hints of more, and complex malt flavours threatening to burst through. A short, sharply dry finish. A beer demonstrating all the hoped-for qualities of a 5% IPA, but with a quaffable 4.2% strength. A truly excellent late summer drink.

(Lancashire Lightning - drunk a week earlier at the Beer House...) As above. Perhaps a little less intense hoppiness.

Could they possibly be related? An extra week for the hops to penetrate...a tad of dry hopping? I am sure Tony & Richard won't tell. Still if you see either, drink them! Another winner(s).

Foreign Beer of the Month

Hopf Weisse (5.2% abv) Draught

I seem to have been whinging about the poor quality of draught Wheat beer for some time, from the inconsistency of Hoegaarden (seems to be OK in Manchester at the mo'), the sweet nothingness of Dentergams, and the ineffable blandness of Erdinger...not to mention the scorn I have poured on the vast majority of British brewed draught Wheat Beers (yes, I agree there are exceptions - Salopian, Passageway, Oakham etc). Then suddenly and unannounced, one of all-time favourites appears on a font in the excellent Kings Arms, Bloom Street Salford. Hopf Weisse. Described by CAMRA originator Graham Lees as "Pale and unfiltered. A fine balance between fruity sweetness and tart dryness. Quite Sour". All very well, but I can't help feeling that Graham is somewhere missing the point. Certain Wheat beers give of esters that smell and taste slightly of...bananas. Not in a Jilly Goolden "creosote with hints of blackberry and elderflower" sort of way, but honest, in your face (and up your nose) bananas. Well, as banana flavoured wheat beers goes this is the banana-iest (hmm...a new word, ed(1)) of them all. Massive flavour, if a little unusual, and an antidote to blandness everywhere. Congratulations to Steve Holt & Cains for importing it!



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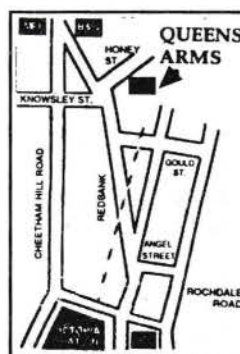
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BEER ON LINE

One of the newest websites, to appear on the Internet is currently devoted to promoting Beer Festivals. The site at www.beer-festival.com has been set-up as the Definitive Beer Festival Website, by Graham Mason, ex-Chairman of the Rochdale, Oldham & Bury Branch of CAMRA (the Campaign for Real Ale), who now lives in Chorley, Lancashire.

"Most beer festivals produce a programme listing the beers that are going to appear at the festival. However due, printing deadlines, suppliers unable to obtain certain beers, and other changes the Programme can be out of date by the time its printed" said Graham, "The Website can be updated the day before the festival opens, or even when the festival is actually open"

Whilst the site has no official connection with the Campaign for Real Ale, it includes links to local CAMRA branches that have their own websites, and for branches that don't have their own offers a design service and hosting service.

It also includes pub festivals, and currently is hosting pages for a number of pub including The Beer House, Hogshead on High Street, both in Manchester; The Crescent in Salford, and Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar amongst others. Out on the Lancashire border at Horwich is The Squirrel that is holding the 1st Horwich Beer Festival in September. It is planned to include other Pub Beer Festivals in Sheffield, Derby & Rugby in the near future.

For the "beer spotter" the site also includes current Free House Beer lists where appropriate, which are updated on a regular basis, sometimes weekly or in busy pubs daily. This enables customers to see what beers a pub has currently on sale.

Through intensive searches of the Internet, the site also includes links to special offers including vouchers on site, which can be printed out for meal discounts and even Free Beer. Currently the Hogshead chain is giving away 10,000 pints and links are provided on www.beer-festival.com to print out vouchers for this offer.

The website which has been running for about 6 weeks now, is currently in its infancy but it is planned to include country wide Pub Festivals, Current Beer Lists, and links to other beer related Websites. For more information, please contact: Graham Mason, 01257 483 463 (home) or 07801 250 930 (mobile), Email Address : Openscreen@btinternet.com. Website: www.beer-festival.com

N/4 ABV WORLDS TOUR

Thursday 19 - Sunday 22 October 2000

Hard on the heels of May's successful Manchester Northern Quarter ABV (alternative beer venues) tour - which featured 260 beers in cask and bottles, a second special event is going ahead in October, full details of which will be available next month, with entertainment, food and promotions, as well as a multitude of cask and other beers available in the nine featured pubs (Bar Fringe, The Beerhouse, Castle Hotel, Centro Cafe Bar, Hogshead, Marble Arch, Pot of Beer, Queens Arms, Smithfield Hotel) with (among other things) a true cornucopia of rare and interesting real ales, the Marble's new organic range, and a German Beer Festival.

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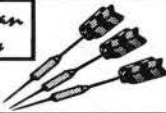
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WARM WELCOME AND FINE
BEERS IN A CLASSIC PUB



Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



My long time held belief is that the local pub should be the hub of the local community. Regular readers will know that I believe that darts is the perfect pub game, although I am happy to see games like dominoes and cribbage being played. I do not even mind pool and quiz leagues and I think that the local is a great headquarters for Sunday league football teams. All these games can be played without any disturbance to other patrons, who do not have to be unduly inconvenienced by the participants.

I am disturbed, however, to learn that some people are planning to run a Karaoke league. I can't think of anything that sounds as dreadful. I am sure that I am not alone in the opinion that Karaoke is the quickest way to empty a pub. Now please don't think that I am a music hating killjoy. Quite the reverse. I think that live entertainment has a place. I am happy to see a well rehearsed, talented musician present a decently thought out set. But my, thankfully, limited experience of Karaoke has been of people who couldn't carry a tune in a bucket inflicting their lack of talent on people who had gone out for a quiet drink. If I ever see the tell-tale signs of Karaoke, I will leave before I have my ears assailed. And I suggest that you do the same.

On a happier note, I received an interesting letter from Taffy Roberts, who is handling publicity for the Cheadle & Gatley Darts League. The season just finished saw The Griffin as league champions, while the Vine were cup winners (their first ever trophy). The Gothic Wine Bar were slip-up champions. Jeff Kellett was men's singles champion, while Jim Brown of the Wagon & Horses finished in least arrows (13). Michelle Wooton recorded a maximum and beat quite a few men during the season. "She is a credit to women's darts and our league," says Taffy. The league offer special thanks to Eric and Nora from the Star Inn for sponsorship and the past. Cain's brewery have come up with

sponsorship for the coming season, so thinks look good for the future. Chairman Steve Jones has stepped down due to personal reason. "He will missed due to his Sterling work in helping the league stay afloat. It's now looking in great shape. Thank you from all the teams," remarked Taffy. John Thearens from the Griffin will take over. It is good to see that this league is so successful. I am sure that they will still be going long after the Karaoke has croaked its last note. Well done to the ladies from the Parkside Social Club in Bramhall, they raised over £1,300 for children's charities when they took part in a 24-hour darts marathon. Darts players have big hearts and many charity events take place throughout the year. If you fancy a night with a difference at your pub or club, you can do little better than booking the Darryl Fitton Roadshow on a Friday evening. Darryl is well known on the tournament circuit and is one of the stars of the Lancashire county squad. Darryl is prepared to take on 12 players from your local, either for charity or a fun night. Stockport's "Mr Darts", Jack Hyman, will MC the event. Call 0161 292 1530 for further information. It was ironic to read of the "success" of the lads from the Brinnington Inn. Typifying all that is good about the game, the darts team from the Great Portwood Street pub, were recently featured in the Stockport Express. They had recently won a game for the first time in three years and were as pleased as anything. However, further on in the same publication was the news that the pub had been sold by Robbies to Peel Holdings. It looks like the lads will have to find another venue in which to record their second win.

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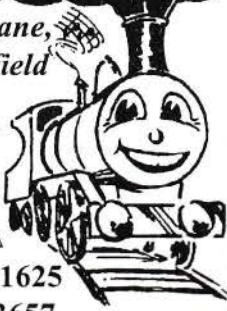
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10 Years in the Good Beer Guide

The George & Dragon can be found on Sunderland Street in Macclesfield, next to the bus station. The licensee, Kevin Biggar, has been resident for some years now and always keeps an orderly house along with serving good quality Robinson's Best Bitter & Hatters Mild. Don't be put off by the electric pumps - the beer is always on fine form and is served in oversized glasses - so a full pint is guaranteed. In fact Kevin is keen to experiment with Robinson's seasonal beers and was selling Whistling Will at the time of the 10 year Good Beer Guide presentation.

The 'G & D' is a friendly local, participating in all of the local pub game leagues - darts, crib, dominoes, pool & bar skittles. The clientele are predominantly beer drinkers and Kevin sells a significant amount of mild, a beer that is not easy to find in the other pubs in the immediate vicinity in Macclesfield (mores the pity).

So congratulations to Kevin & Ros, the 'G & D' certainly deserves its award for 10 years in the Good Beer Guide.

More Pub News

Bollington: The licensees at the Crown are changing yet again. Despite trying hard to make a go of it (televised sports events, barbecues, cheap beer) they still cannot make the pub pay. Rumours abound that the owning company wants to turn the place into 2 houses.

The licensees at the Meridian are also to change yet again - again the pub just does not pay. The future of this listed building is once more in doubt - watch this space.

Macclesfield: The Peels Arms has been bought by Thwaites. The Chester Road Tavern is replacing the Greenalls mild by Cains mild. Tytherington-based company Chestergate Seddon, have bought the old art and college building on Park Green and hope to get the go-ahead from the borough council for the site to be used as a pub and restaurant.

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HAYFIELD'S 8TH ANNUAL BEER FESTIVAL

The eighth annual Hayfield Beer Festival is being held at The Royal Hotel in Hayfield, High Peak, Derbyshire on Friday, Saturday and Sunday 6th, 7th and 8th October 2000.

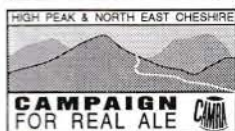
The event is being held again following its successes in previous years, and Proprietor of The Royal - Colin Hazelden says that this year's festival will feature over 30 different real ales, mostly from micro breweries all over the British Isles. This year they are making an effort to emphasise award winning beers and northern beer producers with some new and not very well known breweries who are striving to establish themselves. Also again featuring will be a Foreign Beer Bar with an extensive selection of unusual bottled and draught beers and lagers from Belgium, Germany and the rest of the world.

The Festival will also be offering Live Entertainment, with Bands booked for Friday and Saturday Nights and Sunday afternoon. Hot and Cold Food will also be available throughout the festival. Festival opening times will be Friday 7 - 11pm, Saturday 11am - 11pm, and Sunday 12 - 10pm.

All the real ales will be on handpumps and served at cellar temperature and not be in a traditional marquee.

The Royal Hotel is situated in the centre of the picturesque village of Hayfield in the High Peak District, a village famous for its walks over Kinder Scout. Centrally located between Glossop and Chapel-en-le-Frith off the A624, and only a couple of miles from New Mills just off the A6. Bus 358 runs directly from Stockport with the last bus back at 11.40 on Friday and Saturday and 11.30 on Sunday. A regular bus service now operates to and from Glossop. A regular train service to New Mills Newtown and Glossop Stations, then it's a short bus ride direct to Hayfield.

More information can be obtained by telephoning 01663 742721.



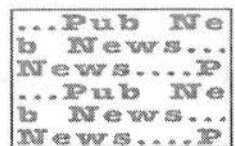
**SEPTEMBER
FEATURED PUB
Ramsay's Bar, Buxton**

The High Peak & North East Cheshire CAMRA featured pub for September is Ramsay's Bar, Buxton, writes Andrew Sleigh.

Situated on the junction of St John's Road and Burlington Road, next to the Pavilion Gardens, this large public bar along with a restaurant forms part of the Buckingham Hotel. The owner-managed hotel offers traditional standards of comfort, friendliness and enthusiasm to all. The bar's name comes from the fact that No.1 Burlington Road where the hotel is situated was once the home and studio for local artist George Ramsay in the early part of the 19th century; his engraved signature is to be found on one of the bar windows.

As reported in the last issue of Opening Times this bar has seen a remarkable turnaround recently after the hotel was taken over some months ago. Previously the only beers on offer would not have warranted such a review. Now with five hand-pumps installed they are currently serving two regular (Ruddles County and Wells Bombardier) and three ever-changing guest beers (Speckled Hen, Hop Back and more interesting micro brewery beers to come), and they are establishing a good trade with a mix of regulars, hotel residents and local groups. There is also a wide choice of food available ranging from simple bar meals to a full-blown restaurant menu and carvery serving a good selection of roast meats. The prices, as you would expect of this type of establishment, are above average, though interestingly they run a loyalty card scheme on all purchases of food and drink, which can mean a reasonably good reduction for regulars.

Now with the beginnings of a pump-clip display, which is growing weekly and the commitment to serving good quality real ale the future for Ramsay's Bar is looking very good indeed. Ramsay's Bar is a short walk from the town centre and provides another port of call on a regular stagger around Buxton.



A smattering of pub news this month. In no particular order - The Rose & Crown in Stalybridge and Mechanics in Audenshaw are both advertising the tenancy. The Eagle (Hydes) in the Market Place in Buxton is currently being refurbished, and a breath of fresh beer for Mr Oliver - in Marple the Otters Lodge is serving Holt's Bitter at £1.35 a pint.

Told you it was only a smattering. Hopefully more information when the holiday season is over.

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and many more...

House Bitter:

Greene King IPA 3.6% abv



Tuesday night

is Quiz Night

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Purpose-Built

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Please note - we STILL have a zero tolerance policy towards bad language and/or bad attitude

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



DURHAM WEEK

19TH - 25TH OCTOBER

**A CELEBRATION OF DURHAM
THE CITY, DURHAM THE COUNTY,**

ITS CULTURE AND

**OF COURSE — ITS BEERS
AT LEAST 16 LOCAL ALES**



2001 STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER

FESTIVAL SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Stockport Beer & Cider Festival is probably one of the biggest annual events in the area attracting around 4,000 people each year.

In 2001 the Festival will offer even more sponsorship opportunities to local companies and organisations:

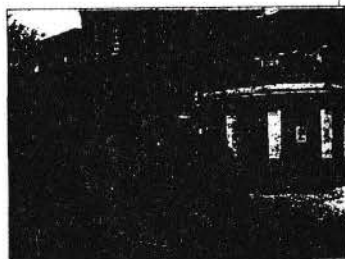
- ★ Souvenir Glasses
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- ★ Entertainment
- ★ Family Room
- ★ Beer & Cider
- ★ Even the Staff!

Sponsorship can be financially based or on a barter basis. If you are interested, please contact Jim Flynn, 66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, Cheshire. SK4 5EG (Telephone: 0161 432 1816)



Royal Hotel Hayfield

Beer Festival



TRADITIONAL BEERS

LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

GOOD FOOD AVAILABLE

6, 7 AND 8 OCTOBER 2000

TELEPHONE 01663 742721

THE ROYAL HOTEL, MARKET ST. HAYFIELD, HIGH PEAK. SK22 2EP



"I wish to register
A COMPLAINT!"



So begins the famous Monty Python "Dead Parrot" sketch, perhaps one of the most quoted of all time. John Cleese certainly had a point; often we have cause to complain. The Campaign for Real Ale was formed to complain, and went on to become the most successful consumer organisation in Europe. We certainly saved traditional beer, but the fight is far from over. Bad beer, adulterated beer and short measure still trouble us on occasion.

You, the customer, are in the front line and we all know it can be all too easy to do nothing; "I don't like to make a fuss"; "No-one else is complaining"; "Perhaps it's supposed to taste like this"; "I might get barred" - the excuses for inaction are endless. Remember the point though: if you've paid good money for something which is substandard, then you've been swindled - so complain!

Once you've decided to do something, the question remains, how? Opening Times offers a few words of advice and technical points:

- ★ **Be Polite** - if you create a conflict, you've lost - the licensee has home advantage!
- ★ **Be Discreet** - no licensee wants to draw attention to a problem
- ★ **Be Reasonable** - if the beer has reached the end of the barrel, you can tell at once. The landlord may not be drinking and be unaware of this.
- ★ **Be Diplomatic** - "I think this might have gone" is less of an insult to the cellarman's craft than "this tastes foul!"
- ★ **Be Sensible** - a tiny shortfall in volume isn't worth the fuss, but perhaps nearly an inch is worth a polite request to "squeeze a drop more in".

★ **Be Decisive** - bad beer should be returned promptly. Struggling valiantly through 3/4 of a pint will undermine your case.

★ **Don't** - complain to an outside body (see below) without first trying to gain satisfaction in the pub.

★ **Don't** - accept the guff that "real ale is supposed to look like oxtail soup and taste like vinegar" or that old standby "no-one else has complained". Stand your ground.

Remember that the law on "full measure" is currently something of a shambles. The head is legally part of your pint but the Brewers Society guidelines say that your pint should be 95% liquid and short measures should be topped up with good grace. Trading Standards officers may still be prepared to take action where these guidelines are consistently flouted.

Beer which tastes bad is "goods unfit for the purpose" under the Trades Description Act and you have a statutory right to redress. You could ask for your money back, but a replacement from another barrel is the best solution.

You should be able to read the price list without binoculars or a stepladder. What do you mean "what price list?"

If you **don't** get satisfaction from the licensee, contact:

The Trading Standards Officer (for consistent short measure or missing price list)

The Environmental Health Officer (for sour beer or unhygienic practices)

The Brewery/Pub Owner - (for poor beer in a tied house or poor customer service)

The local branch of CAMRA (who will certainly check up on any horror stories)

Luckily none of the above is relevant in most of the pubs in the Opening Times area. Normally we find a full measure of good beer served by polite staff in pleasant surroundings, and that any minor niggles are dealt with in a quick and friendly manner. With your help, that's how things will stay, and we hope that the occasion on which you have to "register a complaint" are as scarce as the famous dead "Norwegian Blue Parrot".

Local Trading Standards Contacts are:

Stockport - 0161 474 4248, Manchester - 0161 234 5600

Tameside - 0161 342 3477, Derbyshire - 01629 585858

Cheshire - 01244 602500, Trafford - 0161 912 2274



First of all, apologies for missing last month's deadline - it really was a hectic time: trying to save Bridgewater Brewery, and get Navigator reinstated for the Champion Beer of Britain voting; then failing and taking on the Pot of Beer instead. Busy, but extremely rewarding. Anyway, I'm back with pen in hand, having learnt some Polish dishes from Wanda (the Pot of Beer's owner); so look forward to some Polish beer recipes in future! For now, I will continue with a dish to go with the Beer Mushroom Risotto previously mentioned.

Kriek Kebabs

This tasty dish will serve 4

Ingredients

- 1lb lamb fillet (usually needs ordering from a good butcher) or 1½lb lamb chops
- 1-2 33cl bottles of kriek (Timmermans, St Louis or Lindemans)
- 2 small redskin onions
- 20 small (or 10 large) bay leaves
- 2 cloves of garlic
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper

Method

- 1) Open the bottle(s) of kriek and de-gas by pouring into another jug or glass and allowing to stand for 15 minutes.
 - 2) Dice the lamb into one-inch cubes.
 - 3) Finely chop the garlic into the salt and add this, the paprika and black pepper to a bowl large enough to allow the lamb to be covered in liquid.
 - 4) Add the lamb to the bowl. If you have some kriek left, save it. Cover the bowl and refrigerate for a least 4 hours or overnight.
 - 5) Peel and halve the onions lengthwise and slice thickly (at least half-inch thickness). The bay leaves need to be roughly the same length as the onion slices.
 - 6) Thread the lamb cubes, onions and bay leaves on to skewers, thus: onion, bay leaf, lamb, bay leaf, onion, lamb, and so on.
 - 7) Preheat your grill to medium and cook the kebabs for 2 minutes then turn over (no, not you, - the kebabs) and repeat. Finally, turn the grill to high and finish each side, carefully watching for any blackening of the bay leaves, for 20 seconds.
 - 8) Re-heat the risotto and lay the kebabs across it by running a fork along the skewer and gently removing the kebabs.
- Kriek, of course, will accompany this dish perfectly, but a light red wine is a reasonable alternative.



**B
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CAMRA 2001 NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL

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Festival Open:
(hours to be confirmed)
Thursday 18 January
5.30 - 10.30pm
Friday 19 January,
12 - 4 &
5.30 - 10.30pm
Saturday 20 January
12 - 4 &
5.30 - 10.30pm



Upper Campfield Market, Deansgate,
MANCHESTER

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

National Champion Winter Ale Competition,
MASSIVE SELECTION OF BITTERS, WINTER WARMERS, OLD ALES, STOUTS & PORTERS AND OTHER REAL ALES including many BRAND NEW BEERS TRADITIONAL CIDERS & PERRIES

Unique Foreign Beer Bar featuring:
Draught Winter Beers from Germany, Ireland & the USA and an extensive bottled range from Belgium, Holland and Germany



Hot & Cold Food at every session

18-20 JANUARY 2001
THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE



Jayne & Bryan welcome you to THE ASH HOTEL

232 Manchester Road, Heaton Chapel 0161 476 0399

After Major Refurbishment

Now Offering

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Fine Cask Ales
including Boddingtons, Tetleys
& Old Speckled Hen

ARMOURY INN SHAW HEATH

☎ 0161 480 5055 SNACKS AVAILABLE

Robinsons Traditional Ales
BEST BITTER, HATTERS MILD,
OLD TOM

Thursday Night: Singers, Folk & Acoustic Night
with Kieron & Mary. All Welcome

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation From £17.50 -
(Evening Meals if required)

Free Meeting Room Available for 20 - 40 people

OPEN ALL PERMITTED HOURS EVERY DAY
(including Saturdays & Sundays)





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

SEPTEMBER 2000

Friday 8th - New Members trip to Beartown Brewery in Congleton. Details from Paul Moss on 439 8309.

Thursday 14th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Gateway, Kingsway, East Didsbury. Starts 8.00pm

Monday 18th - Stockport Social: 9.00pm Blarney Stone, St Petersgate; 10.00pm Little Jack Horners, Wellington St.

Thursday 21st - trip to Hydes' Brewery. Names to John Hutchinson on 434 7177.

Friday 22nd - Hyde Road Stagger: 7.30 Travellers Call, Hyde Rd; 8.30 Pineapple, Garratt Way (visible from main road).

Thursday 28th - Pub of the Month presentation to Ye Olde Vic, Chatham St, Edgeley. 8.00pm onwards.

Friday 29th - Sunday 1st October: provisional dates for trip to present Beer of the Festival award to Heather Ales. Details from John Clarke on 477 1973.

Monday 2nd October - City Centre Social: 9.00pm Grey Horse; 10.00 Circus. Both on Portland St.

Thursday 5th October - First meeting of 2001 Beer Festival Committee. All welcome to come and lend a hand. Nursery, Green Ln, Heaton Norris. 8.15pm.



SEPTEMBER 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 18th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Stalybridge Station Buffet. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 30th - Sunday 1st October: Buxton Social - Saturday overnight stay in Buxton; Sunday Branch walk, Buxton to Hayfield.

Monday 2nd October - Committee Meeting: Ash Tree (Wetherspools), Ashton-u-Lyne. Starts 8.30pm.

Monday 9th - Monthly Branch Meeting: White Hart, Mottram. Starts 8.30pm.

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers an area from Wilmslow to Knutsford down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following events:

Monday 18th - Business Meeting: Castle Inn, Castle Inn Road (A527), Dane-in-Shaw, Congleton. Starts 8.00pm.

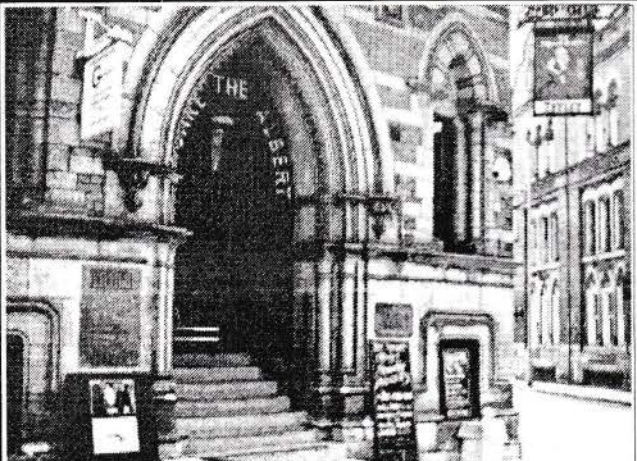
Monday 25th - Branch Social: Leathers Smithy, Clarke Lane, Langley. Starts 8.00pm.

Monday 16th October - Business Meeting: Hanging Gate, Meg Lane, Higher Sutton. Starts 8.00pm.

Regional Event

Saturday 23rd - Regional Meeting: The Sportsman, 157 Mottram Road, Hyde. Starts 12.30pm.

To Do Address Notepad Anniversaries CAMRA 93 Planner



Albert Square's ONLY Cask Ale House Proudly Presents A Choice of SEVEN Cask Beers Tetleys, Marstons Pedigree, Taylors Landlord & Four Ever-changing Guests REAL ALE in REALLY COMFORTABLE SURROUNDINGS

AT THE SQUARE ALBERT Food Served Mon - Fri 12 - 2

Claire and Howard welcome you to Manchester City centre's friendly Ale House

Among Our SEPTEMBER BEERS:

- Castle Eden Bitter,
- Autumn Knights; Gales
- Harvest Ale, HSB;
- Woods Shropshire Lad;
- Fullers Red Fox, ESB;
- Hop Back Oat N Apple;
- Hydes Henry Hampton;
- Hall & Woodhouse
- Brecais; Elgoods Barley
- Mead; Wychwood
- Shires; Green Man;
- Smiles Wurz All Gone;
- Batemens Go For Gold;
- Woodfordes Wherry;
- Ridleys 5 Rings; Brains
- Buckleys Merlins Oak
- ... and many more



KENNEDY STREET THE CITY ARMS

8 HANDPUMPS
6 GUEST ALES
LUNCHTIME FOOD



11.30-2.30
Mon - Fri
& 11.30 - 2.00
Saturday



Great Food from Our Menus & Specials Board

MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

Visits The Lass O'Gowrie

This being a quiet month for pub news in the city, I decided to make a long overdue visit to the Lass O'Gowrie, long one of my favourite City Centre pubs.

It's on Charles Street, just behind the BBC, and its classic tile frontage is easily spotted. It's a Whitbread house and old hands may remember its days as a fairly grim keg-only drinking haunt. A thorough gutting – though retaining the rear snug, the only room of character in the old pub – saw the pub re-open as a brew-pub in 1983. Given the ownership by a national brewer few would have put money on the pub's longevity in that form, but remarkably it survives and prospers to this day. A feat which makes the Lass O'Gowrie the longest surviving micro-brewery in Greater Manchester (Phoenix started in 1982 but was then based in Ellesmere Port).

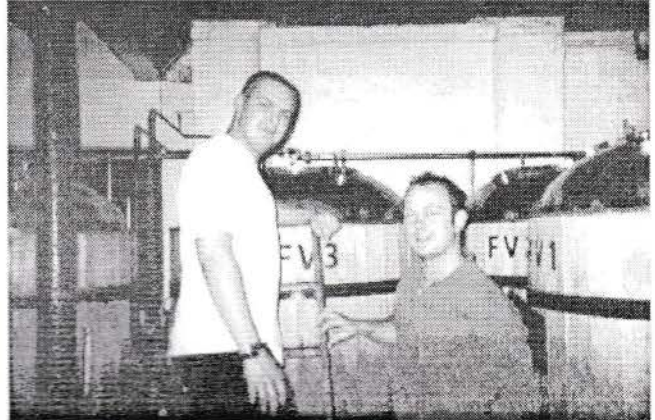
For many years the pub was run by Joe Fylan whose endeavours made the pub a firm favourite with students, media-folk and city types alike. Despite the pub's popularity though, it's fair to say that the home-brewed beers largely failed to capture the imagination of the city's beer drinking cognoscenti. There were just two of them, LOG 35 and LOG 42, (at 3.5% and 4.2% ABV respectively), occasionally supplemented by an end of term Celebration or Graduation Ale at og 1056, and all bore the lightly hopped, sweetly malty house style. Major changes are taking place however.

Jamie Bell took over late last year, and it's fair to say that he has beer in his blood – his mum and dad run the Taps in Lytham, another Whitbread-owned multi-beer free house that has won a clutch of CAMRA awards. The Lass O'Gowrie had been placed under the banner of the Hogshead chain, which provided for an interesting but restricted range of guest beers. The pub is no longer a 'Hogshead' with the result that the guest beers are sourced from a 300-strong list supplied by the Flying Firkin agency. The stocking policy is to feature one (or more) Lass O'Gowrie beers, a couple from the Whitbread stable, say Boddies, Pedigree and perhaps Wadworth 6X, plus a range of guests – when I called these included, amongst others, Harviestoun Bitter & Twisted, York Terrier and Ryburn Best Bitter – the latter a great rarity in the free trade. One of the guests is usually a mild, too. There's also a chance that Jamie will also be able to source one beer independently outside the list, although he has yet to explore this option. From Monday to Friday 10 cask beers will feature, dropping to six at the weekends, to maintain throughout and quality. There's real cider on handpump, and ten or so Belgian bottles, and a range of country wines to boot. You can get fed seven days a week, too, from midday to 3pm (extending to 5-ish from October).

This is impressive in itself but it's with the in-house brewery where things are getting interesting. Jamie is good friends with Keith Bott

of Titanic Brewery who has helped greatly with brewing advice. The Titanic connection continues with Roy Constantine, the assistant brewer who came to the Lass O'Gowrie from the Burslem brewery.

To start with the 42 has been revamped. The hop rate has increased substantially and the yeast now comes from Robinson's at Stockport (it was formerly supplied by Whitbread's Salmesbury plant). It's essentially a different beer. Next in line is a re-launch of the currently suspended 35 which again will be very different to its predecessor which resembled a watered down 42. The new version will be a pale beer and very different in taste to 42. The powerful Celebration may also appear as a one-off.



Jamie and Roy in the midst of their basement brew plant

The aim is to increase the brewing from about once every three weeks to two-three times a week and to achieve this Jamie is looking to produce five or six new beers in the coming year. Details have yet to be decided but a stout will certainly feature. The beers will remain malt extract – while Jamie and Roy would ideally like to move to full mash brewing, there are logistical problems (such as not much room for a mash tun) currently preventing this.

The one cloud on the horizon could be Whitbread's exit from brewing, as mentioned in previous issues of Opening Times. If they want to be a pub company pure and simple, they might 'do a Punch' and close their brewpubs. Jamie has taken this up with the powers that be and has been given an assurance that brewing will continue at the Lass O'Gowrie (as it will at the company's two other brewpubs in Sheffield and Nottingham). OK, so big brewery assurances don't have the best track record, but this is about as good as we're going to get.

The range of very well kept guest beers already make the Lass O'Gowrie a worthwhile call when visiting Manchester but now, after 17 years, it looks as though the brewery is coming into its own as well. Highly recommended.

I'll be back next month with the usual news roundup.

WATCH OUT FOR THE N/4 ABV WORLDS TOUR NEXT MONTH!



APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(Opening Times197)

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

NAME(S) DATE

ADDRESS

. POSTCODE Date of Birth

SIGNATURE TELEPHONE NUMBER

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

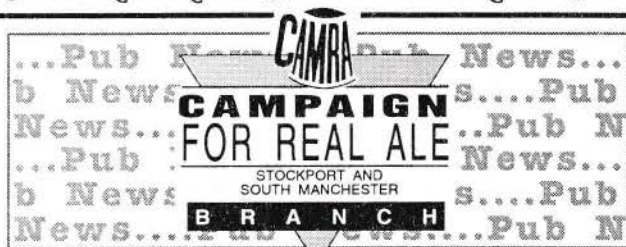
UNDER 26 YRS or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £8

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £8

Paul Moss, 60 Adelaide Road, Bramhall, Stockport SK7 1LU

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.





Some you win, and some you lose. Just as the darts team from the Brinnington Inn (Portwood, Stockport) were celebrating their first victory in 1092 games came news that their pub was to be demolished! The pub has apparently been bought by Peel Investments who intend to flatten the pub and replace it with a retail unit in a further extension of



the Peel Centre. Of course, if the Brinnington Inn is going, there must be a question mark over the neighbouring Old King. The nearby Coach & Horses has already come down and if the rumoured demolition of the Railway comes to pass as well, this area of town will have been turned into a pub desert in just a few years.

In Cheadle, the local residents' group is alarmed by plans produced by Bass Leisure Retail to turn Carpe Diem into an 'ale house'. While an 'ale house' type development is something that CAMRA might normally be expected to support, Cheadle is already arguably over-pubbed and given the involvement of Bass it is highly doubtful that it would be an 'ale house' as we know it.

One of the pubs we 'named and shamed' last month for having misleading signs was Squires in Didsbury. We now hear that the pub is to close for a major refurbishment for eight weeks in the run up to Christmas. No news yet of what 'brand' Scottish & Newcastle will impose on the pub, although if it's a John Barras operation, cask beer should feature.

Joe and Pat Slattery are to retire from the Nelson, Didsbury, this month. We hear that the replacement will be a Andy Black, but confirmation of this had not been received as we went to press. Staying in the area, Mark O'Neil (known locally as MarkO) is a local barman of 10 years standing in the pubs of Didsbury and Withington, latterly at the Nelson. However he left the pub last month to take over his own pub in Skelton, North Yorkshire. This is a Whitbread house in which Mark hopes to introduce guest beers.

One pub that has gained real ale following its 'John Barras' conversion is the Fiveways in Hazel Grove. Keg-only for years, the pub now has Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. Ironically, while 'John Barras' is Scottish & Newcastle's community pub 'brand' one of the first actions on reopening was to ban a ladies group which had met in the pub for 20 years. Apparently they weren't spending enough money...

More improvement to report at the Crown, Heaton Lane, where the bar counter has now been repainted in cream and brown, giving a welcome old fashioned feel to the pub. The missing etched window is being replaced, too. The beer range here continues to impress with 10 cask beers usually on sale accompanied by real cider as well.

In Edgeley, Jonjo Green's looks to be undergoing another name change and now sells no real ale. Nearby, the Jolly Crofter has kept real ale on following the closure of Vaux and now sells Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. Further down Castle Street, the business of the inexplicably keg-only Sir Robert Peel is currently up for sale. We understand long-serving licensee John Parkin is running a bar in Spain and will be joined by wife Kath once the sale is complete. The good news, though is the reopening of the Prince Albert - the pub has been totally refurbished and there's real ale into the bargain. More next month.



OPENING TIMES SEPTEMBER COMPETITION

Sponsored by The Beer Seller

As of this month we welcome beer agency The Beer Seller as our competition sponsors - many thanks to them for their generous sponsorship.

Apologies first - there was a space missing from last month's grid! Despite that there was still a good response to the competition (and welcome back competition regular Ron Elder from Lothian). The winning entry, picked out at random, was slightly closer to home, though, and is Raymond Cronie from South Reddish, who wins eight pints of beer at the Ye Olde Vic, Edgeley.

The beers and breweries you were looking for were: Bah Humbug; Grey Wig; Grand Slam; Maypole; Eddystone; Ewe Brew; Wee Murdoch; Highwood; Danish Dynamite; ESB and Brakspear.

This month's competition has again been set by Paul Stanyer of the Swan With Two Necks and this time you are looking for beers or breweries, all of which are in the 2000 Good Beer Guide. As usual, complete the grid in a clockwise spiral - the last letter of an answer is the first letter of the next. We have given you the first letter.

The prize, kindly sponsored by The Beer Seller, is an Old Speckled Hen T-shirt and wall clock. Entries to OT Competition, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport, SK3 9HD by 25th September please.

- (1) Cowardly mallet from the Black Isle
- (2) Return web hv from Aviemore ? (2 Words anagram)
- (3) She may serve you this in the Kitchen
- (4) She with 101 meets 2001 computer and a big cat for this Harviestoun brew.
- (5) Aurora borealis will point you to this Brecknock beer (2 Words)
- (6) SUNDOWN BO would be good in a Phoenix pub.



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- (7) This Flagship may demolish everything
- (8) Boating event at Adnams?
- (9) Mozart's middle name from Hart.