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# OPENING TIMES

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FREE

# BASS-ACRED

## Interbrew Forced to Sell Bass Brewing by Competition Commission

by our Editorial Staff: CAMRA input John Clarke; financial input: P.B.Hutchings

**I**n a surprise move that has shocked many Industry experts, not to mention the Belgian Government, trade secretary Stephen Byers has scuppered the takeover of Bass's brewing operations by Belgian giant Interbrew.

### Interbrew's UK Interests

After buying out Whitbread's brewing interests (including the Boddingtons brewery in Manchester) last summer, Interbrew made an unconditional offer of £2.3 Billion for the Bass breweries which was accepted in August. The company then floated on the Belgian Stock Exchange last year. The government have now ordered Interbrew to find a buyer for the Bass breweries after accepting a report from the Competition Commission.

The Commission felt that there was a danger that the industry would come to be dominated by a powerful duopoly of Interbrew and Scottish & Newcastle. S&N have 26% of the UK beer market, and Interbrew (including Bass) would have had 33-36% (estimates vary). Mr Byers said this would "reduce competition in the market, lead to higher prices for end consumers and reduce consumer choice".

The deal had been opposed by supermarkets, pub operators and regional brewers alike, and also by Scottish & Newcastle who would have lost their number one spot. One of the sharpest critics was Hugh Osmond, head of the Punch Taverns chain who said: "This is an absolute disaster for Interbrew. I don't want to gloat too much, but it is very amusing."

Amusing it may be to Punch, and to Carlsberg-Tetley, who are very much the smallest of the 'big three' brewers - and whose new Chief Executive took over on the day of the announcement, but the decision raises some serious questions and throws the industry into turmoil.

The initial reaction of CAMRA, The Campaign for Real Ale, was positive, stating that the Government's decision to block the acquisition of Bass Breweries sent a clear message to other global brewers - further consolidation in British brewing is off. Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns and Communications said, "There is no doubt that competition and consumer choice in the UK beer market would have suffered if the merger had been allowed to proceed. We hope that the Government's hard line approach will continue as a policy. Today's decision sends a clear signal to other global brewers that the UK market is not open for abuse."

### Double Standards?

Experts in the area of competition and the Belgian government, however were scathing of the decision.

Firstly, the Competition Commission decided last year that 40% was the figure for 'market dominance'. Interbrew would have only 36% at the most inflated estimate (33% on Interbrew's figures). S&N were the most vociferous complainant, and the problem was a 'duopoly' according to the Commission - which would include S&N. So why does the remedy only affect one company - and so badly? Secondly, the case of 'proportionality' is raised. Bass represents two thirds of Interbrew's British Operations. No competition authority (even in the States) has ever told a company to sell 66% of itself and reduce its size to half that of a complaining competitor. And last but not least, S&N, through their Kronenbourg subsidiary own over 48% of the French Beer Market. Is

(continued on page 3)

## BATTLE ROYAL FOR FULL PINT

**T**he 15-year fight to ensure an honest pint in Britain's pubs and clubs is within an ace of ending in victory - provided consumers keep up the struggle.

Consumer affairs minister Kim Howells is proposing that a pint of beer should mean a pint of liquid, with the head as an extra. Persistent offenders would risk prosecution.

But following a vicious last-minute bid by the Brewers & Licensed Retailers Association to stifle the measure, CAMRA Head of Campaigns, Mike Benner warned that the three-month consultation period announced by Dr Howells would be the most intense period of scaremongering dirty-trick lobbying seen since the late 1980s.

Then, the Brewers Society mounted a huge poster advertising campaign backed by a public relations misinformation drive which persuaded the Government to water down the Beer Orders that had been framed to implement the Monopolies Commission report on the supply of beer. Now, the BLRA is out to persuade politicians that giving people the pint they've paid for will increase prices and threaten pubs.

Just days before Dr Howells announced his proposals, the BLRA deluged senior civil servants and ministers - including Tony Blair - with letters warning of the dire consequences and urging them to drop the consultation exercise. And Mr Benner predicted more to come.

"The last hurdle is always the highest," he warned. "If we are not to be robbed of victory at the last minute, it is up to every one of us to do everything in our power to counter the tide of misinformation which will be unleashed, and to drive home the message that the multi-million-pound Great British Beer Rip-off has gone on far too long."

But consumers and the honest British pint have some powerful enemies. They include brewers of stout and nitrokeg beers, which CAMRA surveys prove are persistently served well short even of 95 per cent liquid and which will have to be served in oversized glasses if they are to have a head.

And some managed house operators have for years sought to get 76 pints out of a 72-pint barrel by institutionalising short measure. A fair deal for drinkers will squeeze their profits badly. They have to be beaten.

Please Also Read:- FULL PINT WAR on page 3

### IN JANUARY'S OPENING TIMES

Editors View .....	2	Pub Grub .....	12
Full Pint War .....	3	Curmudgeon .....	13
Letters .....	4	5 Years Ago .....	13
Pub of the Month .....	5	Desert Island Beers ...	14
Stagger .....	7	High Peak News .....	16
Pub'News .....	8	Macclesfield News ....	17
Kens Kitchen .....	9	Camra Calling .....	18
Brewery News .....	10	Manchester Matters ...	19



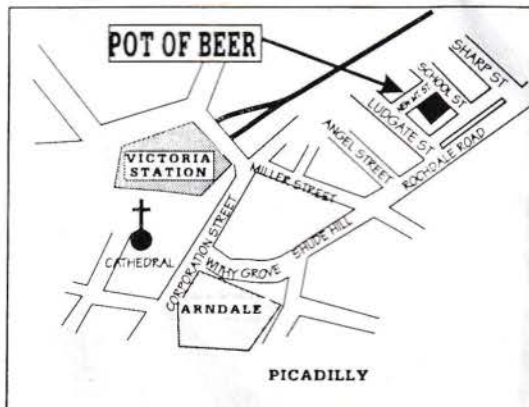
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## IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Britain's brewers are in complete disarray over the issue of full pint legislation. More than any other issue, this has mercilessly exposed the divisions in the ranks of the Brewers & Licensed Retailers Association.

Logically, the introduction of full pint legislation is in the commercial interest of anyone who owns a tenanted estate. If pub tenants are forced to sell a consistently full pint, then the sales of those who supply them – whether brewers themselves or pubcos which depend on bulk discount for their profit – are going to go up, possibly by as much as 5 per cent.

Conversely, full pint legislation is against the commercial interest of operators of large managed estates, who want to wring every last drop from every barrel – we've already seen Scottish & Newcastle seek to abolish wastage allowances in its managed houses, a move which pretty much guarantees short pints.

This internal contradiction has not, by itself, been enough to crack the façade of unity the BLRA has so far managed to maintain. But the Association's bully-boy bid to quash public consultation on the issue – basically by sending scaremongering letters full of warnings, threats, dire predictions, all entirely bogus, to anyone they thought might be frightened off or taken in (no-one was) – ought to be enough to do the trick.

No wonder that BLRA officials are frantically trying to deny that their last-ditch backstairs attempt at lobbying this vital piece of consumer legislation out of existence ever occurred. For there are plenty of brewers, believe it or not, who are honest, decent, and truthful. The more old fashioned regional and family brewers (and that includes all of those in the OT area) can still grasp simple concepts like telling the truth. They must be dismayed by the falsehoods and misinformation put out in their name. And they must be wondering now whether it's worth paying the 10p-odd a barrel levy (a fair chunk of change, even if you're only brewing 20-30,000 barrels a year) for membership of an organisation which misrepresents their concerns and betrays their interests in this way.

(With acknowledgements to Ted Bruning and What's Brewing, the monthly newspaper of the Campaign for Real Ale.)

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Dates for your diary – The National Winter Ales Festival in Castlefield from Thursday 18 to Saturday 20th of this Month & the Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge, which will be run again this year from 7 April to 14 May. Look for more details in future issues of Opening Times!

*John Clarke*

## OPENING TIMES ISSUE 201

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





## BASS-ACRED (Continued from front page)

it a case of it being OK for British Companies to operate monopolistic regimes, but not Belgian ones. The Belgian Minister for Europe, Charles Pique clearly thinks this is the UK Governments position "It appears that the refusal has the immediate effect of harming only Interbrew, whilst its direct British competitor is untouched and should even benefit."

The European Commission have declared that approval for the disposal of Bass must come from Brussels rather than the DTI.

### Interbrew Fury

The reaction from Interbrew was one of predictable fury. Chief Executive Hugo Powell said: "This recommendation defies logic and is clearly disproportionate to the competition issues at stake." The company is threatening to seek a judicial review as it nurses a potential loss of up to £1 billion from the forced sale of Bass Brewing, a prospect which has seen its share price plummet by 27% in the first two days after the decision was announced.

One explanation of problem seems to have arisen from a fundamental miscalculation by the Belgian brewers. It has been suggested that they viewed the deal from a wider European perspective and calculated that they would only have to satisfy the EU's competition authorities about the deal. The narrower concerns of the UK authorities weren't considered, a move which appears to have been a fatal flaw in their plans.

### Whatever Next?

The majority opinion is that despite threats of legal action, and even diplomatic moves by Belgian ministers, the Bass deal will have to be unpicked. Out of the last ten appeals for Judicial Review of Competition Commission recommendations, none has been successful. Possibly on Interbrew's side, however, are the fact that this was a majority (3:1) and not a unanimous decision, and that Dame Helena Shovelton (who had to stand down over the Lottery fiasco) was one of the majority.

The question must be asked as to whether the decision is fair or proportionate. A sale of the Whitbread brewing sector would have levelled the playing field between Interbrew and S&N, but the Commission felt that a new group based on the former Whitbread brands plus a few disposals from Bass would not be viable. Four national groups were needed, they said. A further twist is that any new purchaser will have to be approved by the Director General of Fair Trading, (and probably the European Commission) although a number of names are in the frame, including the usual overseas suspects South African Breweries, Heineken and Anheuser Busch. After an apparent initial interest, Carlsberg Tetley have said they are not in the frame. Three American Finance houses are also interested - Hicks, Muse Tate & Furst, Texas Pacific & CVC. The problem of course, is that many of these global operators would have little time for the smaller traditional brands owned by Bass - and in terms of barrelage that includes ALL of its cask conditioned beers.

### Worst Case Scenario

Mike Benner from CAMRA explained: "We are concerned for the future of Bass Brewers as it is likely that the only potential purchasers are other large global brewers and this would offer few benefits to consumers. The ideal outcome to promote consumer choice, fair prices and access to market for small brewers would be to see Bass Brewers operate as an independent brewer.

"Draught Bass is a unique high profile brand and we would like to see it thrive as a premium and high quality real ale, but it needs care and investment to achieve this. Whatever the outcome of the divestment of Bass, we will be lobbying the owners to provide choice and value for money for consumers."

For all its faults, and these should not be downplayed, Interbrew did like to portray itself as "the world's local brewer" and does have some record of promoting niche products (as well as ruthlessly closing down surplus capacity). It remains to be seen whether the alternatives prove any more palatable. One of the main mistakes Hugo Powell made was telling the Pub Groups that he was not going to get in a price/discount war with S&N. The Competition Commission Report stated its belief that competitive drives would refocus on advertising & marketing, forcing wholesale & retail prices up.

This however, might well have been a good thing. Since the Treasury repeatedly refuse to allow sliding scale duty (on the European model) to assist small brewers who cannot achieve the economies of scale of the big groups, Interbrews policy would have somewhat levelled the playing field as regards prices, and let the small and micro-brewers become more competitive for pub-groups business. This could well have saved many small quality businesses. All that will happen now is that there will be four lager & keg led giants, committed to wiping real ale off the map, or at best into tiny marginal ghettos.

## Full Pint War

### BLRA Lies Rejected

CAMRA Head of Campaigns, Mike Benner, has disproved scaremongering claims put out by the Brewers & Licensed Retailers Association in their desperate attempt to stop British drinkers getting a fair pint.

- ★ Serving full pints need not mean price rises: Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries had been doing it for years and its beers were among the cheapest.
- ★ There would be no extra overhead in replacing glasses: a two-year phasing-in meant any replacement necessary would fall within the breakage cycle.
- ★ The BLRA's claim that consumers weren't interested in the issue was a lie. CAMRA's research showed that 84 per cent of drinkers wanted a full pint. The top-up requirements in its own guidelines proved that drinkers wanted, and asked for, a full pint. And trading standards officers - the consumers' first line of defence - had been urging full-pint legislation for years.

"The industry claims are nonsense," said Mr Benner. "Giving a full pint will not mean a move to 100 per cent oversized lined glasses or the end of the traditional hand pump.

"There has been too much short measure in too many pubs for too many years. These proposals are a giant leap forward for consumer rights."

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# OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Rhys Jones, Aberystwyth:

Where has CAMRA been in the battle for Banks's? There may, for all I know, have been some furious paddling below the waterline, but the ordinary drinker in the street, not to mention Wolves & Dudley licensees, could be forgiven for thinking we've packed up and gone home. The few mildly critical remarks that have been made have adopted a tone of weary resignation, as if brewery take-overs were just part of the weather that we can't really do anything about.

Well perhaps we can't - but in the past that's never stopped us making our feelings know loud and clear. Where are the protest marches? Where are the petitions? Where has our passion gone? Where is our righteous anger?

From Gordon Thorburn, Buxton:

If 'PBH' wants to see something which 'beggars belief' - front page, last issue - I suggest he looks at the DTI's consultation document about the proposed legislation on pints of beer and cider. An especially good bit is where they try and say the 20-ounce liquid pint won't force a price rise to negate the whole business. You see, we need legislation because so many licensees are cheating us, but the price won't go up because not all licensees are cheating us.

When you've worked that one out, try this. Landlords won't put the price up, because to do so would admit to having given short measure previously. Presumably the high-powered civil servant who drafted that one has never been in a pub. He also thinks that you get a frothy head on cider.

I'm sure it's a misprint but PBH's arithmetic doesn't seem so good - 23 complaints minus five equals four - but perhaps he, and every other proponent of the 20oz pint in a glass bucket, can do this sum. Imagine we live in a world where the pint as currently defined, 95% liquid, costs 95p. If it is redefined as 100% liquid, what will the new price be? (a) 90p (b) 95p (c) 100p. If there is a living soul who cannot work out the answer, he should ask any licensee in the country. Two very small minorities - CAMRA and a few weights and measures inspectors - are forcing the enlarged pint on the millions of beer drinkers who never asked for it. We like our pints as they are. When oversized glasses were tried before - for example by

Tetley and John Smith in the 1960s - the drinking public would not accept them and forced their withdrawal. Let's hope the same thing happens again.

[ Please be brief. Ed(1). OK, if I send in 5 complaints and two others of whom I know send in 4 and 5, it is probable that the remaining 9 were the work of two other such motivated individuals...making four + myself. Oh well, pearls, as they say...Ed(2)]

From Maß von der Krugswiller, Braustübl, Tegernsee (Bayern) via an excellent bottle of Bavarian Beer.

Hello all my English Friends!

I am reading your esteemed magazine which brings much pleasure to my fellows at the brauhaus. I am at a loss to understand all the fuss being made in your December copy about the size of bier glass and the underfilling.

Here too in Bayern there are man (and egos) of many different sizes and tastes, but we manage to satisfy all. For the people in München, crude and harassed cityfolk that they are, the normal biergarten measure is the giant handled litre mug (some say it is to compensate for their shortfall in other aspects - no, I mean their egos) which is surely heavier than the 'buckets' Herr Thorburn refers. In the beautiful alpine south of the Freistadt, we prefer the measured flow and feel of the half litre smooth sided glass. Because there is a history of treacherous hostel-keepers shortening our measure, all our glasses have a line well below the rim. Although many of us have been seen drinking from the litre mugs this is usually at kirche festivals when we are all very drunk. With my English friend who brings over the OT we conduct a small experiment. He has a 'one pint' (I see you still hold out against European standards, despite packaging laws) can of the English Boddington bitter. This was carefully poured into a normal Tegernsee glass - and - it came nearly to the top with the foam just clearing the glass! So - the answer to Herr Thorburn's problem is clear. End your xenophobia. Embrace the European ideal and we will have half litre measures for all. These come in what must clearly be 19.5 - 20 fl.oz. glasses with a line. It will look (nearly) like one of your English pints, can have a big head, can fit in a comforting glass, and will make the greedy brewer happy too - since he will be serving you the 17.5 fl.oz. of the beer and charging much the same. Oh yes, the Boddington. We pour it out for the brewery dog, but he becomes sick, and so we wash the glass very carefully to remove the defilement. See you at the Bavarian beer stand at the January Festival in your city's Castlefield. PS The dog is still feeling poor.



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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			



**T**he Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month Award for January 2001 goes to the Moss Rose on Didsbury Road in Heaton Norris.

From the outside it must be a strong candidate for Stockport's ugliest pub, an unpromising example of modern design built in 1971 to replace an old pub of the same name further down Heaton Lane. However, once you've got through the door you will find a warm, comfortable and welcoming pub that you'll want to come back to. There's a strong band of regular customers and a particularly lively vault which supports numerous sports teams.

For many years the licence was held by Graham and Gladys Tildsley, under whom the Moss Rose won two Pub of the Month awards, the most recent in June 1998. After they left in the middle of 1999 there was a period of uncertainty, but since Lynda Bryan and partner Damien took over in October of that year the pub has returned to its old self and is now as good as it ever was. This award is a tribute to Lynda and Damien's hard work and dedication in restoring the pub to be everything a good community local should be. There isn't sufficient demand to stock Hydes' seasonal beers, but the Light and Bitter are always in excellent condition, helped by the fact that the pub was purpose-built with spacious separate cellars for Mild and Bitter. It's also one of the dwindling band of pubs still using oversize glasses to ensure full measures.

Come and join us on Thursday 25th January, from 8.30 pm onwards, when an enjoyable night is in prospect. The Moss Rose is easily accessible from Stockport and Manchester by the numerous buses running along Didsbury Road, including the 22, 42 and 370. **PE.**

*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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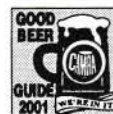
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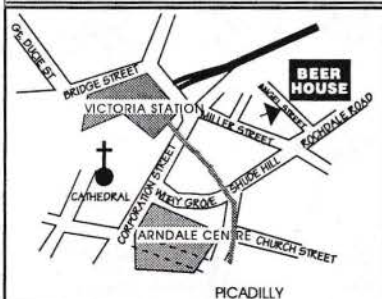
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# STAGGER

with John Clarke

## West Didsbury & Withington

**W**est Didsbury and Withington are classic suburban bedsit land. Although both areas now seem to have upwardly mobile pretensions they retain a very mixed population ranging from up and coming young professionals to students and the area's traditional working class population. These differences are reflected in the wide variety of local pubs. The Stagger started at one of the areas newer pubs, the Woodstock on Barlow Moor Road. This impressive Victorian villa formerly housed the headquarters of the British Council and was converted into a pub by Bass about ten years ago. It's a very successful new conversion with a variety of rooms together with a mezzanine drinking area on a large stair landing. There are also extensive grounds which can be enjoyed in fine weather. The mainly young clientele reflect the cosmopolitan nature of the area and, unusually for a Bass pub, four cask beers are available. These comprise Greene King IPA, Bass, Stones Bitter and Fullers London Pride. All proved perfectly acceptable.

Across the road is the Barleycorn. This is a sprawling, slightly shabby, open-plan affair, which in the past has sold a decent range of cask beers. Not tonight, though. The Tetley Bitter handpump was not in use but all was not lost as Adnams Bitter was available as a guest beer at a bargain £1.30 a pint. It wasn't bad either. The general impression is that a major refurbishment is now overdue here although the pub does seem popular enough as it is.

Turning down Burton Road, a short walk brings you to The Metropolitan on the corner of Lapwing Lane. In its original incarnation as the Midland, this pub had a gruesome reputation but all that is now firmly in the past. An extremely impressive refurbishment just a few years ago saw the pub move upmarket with a vengeance and a high class food operation, a decent range of cask beers and comfortable seating saw this become something of a theme bar for the area's aspiring young professionals. Are they starting to lose the plot though? On tonight's visit the clientele's emphasis was more on 'young' than 'aspiring professional', service was poor (try employing more bar staff and teaching them to serve customers in turn), the beer (Landlord, Wells Bombardier, Old Speckled Hen and Pedigree) was indifferent and not particularly good value - £2 for a pint of Taylor's Landlord.

The Metropolitan has been very enjoyable in the past so it was with a sense of disappointment that we left and, after pausing to note the ongoing work at the Railway opposite (to open later this year as a

Joseph Holt's house), we headed to our next port of call, the Old House At Home on Burton Road.

The last time a Stagger called in at this pub we experienced some truly terrible beer. All that is now changed thanks to the arrival of a new and keen licensee. Indeed the contrast with the previous pub couldn't have been greater. For all of the Metropolitan's upmarket pretensions, on this night the Old House At Home, which doesn't claim to be anything other than a good down-to-earth pub, knocked it into a cocked hat in all those areas that matter. Friendly and attentive staff (customers served in turn, beer left to settle and topped up without asking), excellent beer, good value and a busy pub atmosphere with a good customer mix made this the star of the night. Boddingtons Bitter is the regular and there are three guest beers which tonight were Bateman's Winter Wellie, Daleside Old Legover and Jennings Cross Buttock (it was clearly daft beer name night here). The Bateman's was good value at £1.90 for a 4.7% beer and on top form.

It was difficult to leave but other pubs beckoned. Passing the site of the long-demolished Waterloo, next up was the Orion, again on Burton Road. Rescued from Whitbread keg hell by Joseph Holt's, the Orion is an unassuming little pub with lounge and vault, both decorated in traditional style. For some reason the pub seemed very quiet, not what you would expect in a Holt's pub. Both mild and bitter were on handpump and it has to be said that the bitter was only average. All in all a bit of a let down, as indeed were the next two pubs. There's now no real ale in either the White Lion (Scottish & Newcastle) or the Albert (Wilmslow Road and owned by some pub company or other but ex-Wilsons).

And so it was we sought refuge in the last pub of the night - the Victoria, again on Wilmslow Road, right in the village centre. This is a Hydes' house and to be honest in the past it's not been my favourite of their pubs. Tonight though there was an excellent atmosphere with a good mixed crowd of regulars clearly having a good time. The beer was on top form, too. Four cask beers were on handpump - Hydes' Mild, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the seasonal Rocket Fuel. Again none of the beers disappointed and the Rocket Fuel was particularly good value at £1.68 for a 5% beer.

And that was that. A good mix of pubs and an impressive selection of beers made for an enjoyable night out. Despite one or two disappointments, none of the beer was less than acceptable and some of it was very good indeed. Of course this article can only be a snapshot of what we found on one particular night and so can't be taken as a definitive judgement on the pubs or their beers but on the basis of what we found, it's fair to say that the pub scene in West Didsbury and Withington is healthy enough and offers something for everyone. Why not try some of them yourself and see what you think.



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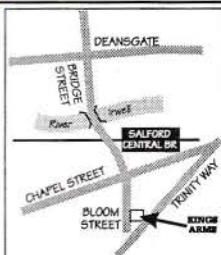
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Saturday evening

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Budvar,  
Kriek &  
Hopf Weisse**



A pub that has been in the doldrums in recent years is the *Greyhound* in Edgeley. Happily this now looks set to change with the arrival last month of Donna and Len Grimes who have taken over as tenants. While this is their first pub, both have plenty of licensed trade experience - Len has managed a pub in the south and Donna's brother, Big Al, successfully ran the *Crown* on Hillgate in recent years, while her parents ran both pubs and clubs.

They are both locals, Donna having spent seven years working at the nearby *Grapes*, and are keen to restore both the pub's fortunes and its reputation. To this end the *Greyhound* is due for an internal redecoration this month, together with external work on the car park and the outside patio, which Donna and Len hope to make full use of in the summer months. Much of the brasswork which adorned the walls has been found in storage and will be returned to its original setting, thus helping restore the pub's cosy atmosphere. Their efforts so far have certainly been recognised with "tremendous support" from former locals who are now coming back. Trade over the Christmas and New Year period was very good and the old football crowd is returning. The pub has also now picked up a Thursday night ladies darts team and a Tuesday team is also being sought. On the beer front, the regulars remain Boddingtons Bitter and the excellent Greenalls Mild, both reasonably priced at £1.48 and £1.35 respectively. These are to be joined by a weekly guest beer - Robinson's Samuel Oldknow was due in on 8 January and this was to be followed by Morrells Old Don and Rebellion "Hangover From Hell". Clearly, it's early days yet, but if anyone is to make a success of the *Greyhound* it will be Donna and Len who have our best wishes.

There was a good turnout of CAMRA members at the presentation of the Regional Pub of the Year award to the *Woolpack*, Stockport, last month. The revellers were even joined by a party from the Surrey/Hants Borders Branch of CAMRA who were amazed the relatively low beer prices in the town.

The annual Hillgate Stagger produced some welcome highlights. Excellent Old Tom in the *Spread Eagle*, served in vintage nip glasses; top quality Burtonwood Bitter in the *Bishop Blaize*; the welcome return of the *Lamp* to the real ale fold, with Theakstons Bitter back on handpump ("I don't know why it was taken off, it was one of our best sellers" the owner told us); a pin of Old Tom behind the bar at the *Royal Mortar*; Adnam's Bitter as a guest beer at the *Wheatshaf*; and of course a brilliant atmosphere in the *Blossoms* to finish where, as is becoming traditional, we drank the pub dry of Old Tom.

Less good news was the apparent closure of two pubs. Both the *Black Lion*, Hillgate, and the *Bowling Green*, Charles Street, were in darkness and have not been spotted open since. Indeed the *Bowling Green* is boarded up (although for some reason the boards are behind the glass rather than in front).

At long last Scottish & Newcastle have carried out the long-planned refurbishment of the *Chestergate Tavern* in Mersey Square, Stockport. And a good job they have made of it too; the pub, now just 'The Chestergate', is clean and smart both inside and out. Sadly they omitted to install real ale at the same time.

In Edgeley, the *Gardeners Arms* on Northgate Road is now closed again. It looks more permanent this time as the pub is now officially for sale. Elsewhere the keg-only *Rafferty's Irish Bar* on Castle Street is to be renamed again. This time it's to be called *Windsors*. Will real ale make a reappearance?

Wetherspoon's plans for a Stockport outlet seem to be ever more confusing. Firstly they were to actually build a new outlet on Underbank, next to the Natwest Bank. Building a new pub was something of an unusual departure for *Wetherspoon's* and it looks as though that there has now been a change of heart. Instead of a new-build, *Wetherspoon's* have now obtained a license for the *Bensons For Beds* shop on St Petersgate. No details yet of when the pub is due to open; indeed, the shop was still trading as we went to press.

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**T**his month, as Jack Frost nips our extremities, I thought a filling, warming dish would be appropriate, so here is a quick goulash – or, more correctly, I believe, a Goulashi (no not Ghoul-ishy). It gives the traditional flavour that the Magyars love, but may offer more variety in presentation so here it is :-

**Ingredients (for 4 people)**

- |                                      |                                  |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 2 large pork fillets                 | 2 small onions, finely chopped   |
| 1 x 12oz can chopped tomatoes        | 4oz flour                        |
| 3-4 tablespoons mild paprika         | ½ pint Brown Ale - Thwaites      |
| 2-3 teaspoons hot paprika (use 1½    | Brown is ideal                   |
| teaspoons of Cayenne pepper instead) | 1 pint stock                     |
| 3 finely chopped cloves of garlic    | 2 tablespoons olive oil          |
| 20 small potatoes (or buy the ready  | 20 pieces bought Gnocchi (fresh) |
| peeled packs)                        |                                  |

**Method**

Gently sweat the onions in the olive oil for 4 minutes, meanwhile dice the pork into 1" cubes, then add to the pan and seal for two minutes each side. Finely sift in the flour and colour until light brown, then add a little of the beer until a stiff paste is formed. Add the garlic and paprika - stir in - then add the tomatoes. Slowly combine the rest of the liquid until a thin sauce is obtained. Cook the gnocchi and potatoes in a separate pan by boiling for 8 minutes, drain and put to one side. You now have two choices - you can either serve the dish with everything in, or serve the gnocchi and potatoes separately. If electing the first way, then add the gnocchi to the pork/sauce and simmer for 6 minutes, then add the potatoes and simmer for a further 3 minutes. For the second way simply simmer the gnocchi and potatoes separately for the same period, whilst simmering the main dish for 9 minutes. Garnish with soured cream and a little dry paprika, and I particularly enjoy fresh green beans with this meal, or, if there are any left from Christmas, try some sprouts. A good porter or sweet stout may help you to wash this down well. P.S. I will have a beer banquet on the Friday and Saturday of the Winter Ales Festival from 4.30 to 7.00pm at the Pot of Beer.

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### Robbies Awards

Robinson's announced the winners of their annual Bar & Cellar Awards last month. Introduced in 1998, this contest, in which all Robinson's pubs are automatically entered, is seen as a way or both rewarding quality and driving up overall standards throughout the Robinson's estate.

It was Syd and Jenny Hampson at the Masons Arms, Denton who most impressed the judges this time around after finishing in the



top three for the previous two years. Top marks were awarded for their beer and only a handful of points were dropped during the inspection of the cellar and back bar areas. "It's worth remembering that our inspections were made as surprise visits, so no special preparation could have been made," explained Head Brewer Chris Hellin who judged the finalists alongside Oliver Robinson.

The winners lifted the Unicorn Trophy along with a £100 cash prize, a barrel of Best Bitter and £250 worth of cleaning materials from sponsors Chemisphere. Runners up awards went to the King William in Wilmslow, inaugural winners in 1998, and the Railway at Rose Hill, Marple. Our photograph shows Syd and Jenny with the coveted Unicorn Trophy.

### New Seasonals

Three of our local family brewers have new seasonal beers out this month, and all three are remarkably different brews. Hydes' entrant is a premium bitter, the 4.8 percent Quick One, a strong brew for the winter months. Hyde's also revived their famous XXXX (6.8 per cent) last month and while the run was limited you may still be able to catch up with the beer in one of the local outlets which include the Star, Cheadle; Moss Rose and Nursery, Heaton Norris; Victoria, Withington; Friendship, Fallowfield; Q and White House, Stalybridge, Hope, Hulme and the Jolly Angler, City Centre.

By contrast, Robinson's have come up with Samuel Oldknow, a 3.5 per cent bitter "brewed specifically with the exhausted post-Christmas palate in mind". Oats have been used in the brewing process and the end result is a pale, crisp and hoppy beer which is dry-hopped with Goldings hops. The initial seasonal programme will be completed by Stockport Arches for March/April and Young Tom for May/June. This latter is a welcome revival of an old Robinson's brand and no doubt dedicated Old Tom drinkers will await it with interest. The programme will recommence in July/August combining a return of the more popular beers from the first run along with new beers to add continuing interest.

Lees' addition to the seasonal fun is another beer using oats but a very different animal to Samuel Oldknow. This is Dark Magic, a 4.2 per cent oatmeal stout with a "full, dry and well rounded flavour" As ever the reliable Rain Bar in the City Centre will be a guaranteed outlet. Visitors to local Banks's and Marston's pubs may also be able to sample their new seasonal, Balti Buster, a 4.8 per cent premium brewed by Banks's and described as having a flavour "hoppy enough to bust a Balti". The next seasonal from the Wolves & Dudley stable will be out next month and will come from Mansfield Brewery.

### Micro News

The Altrincham Brewing Co, based at the Old Market Tavern in Altrincham finally came on stream before Christmas. Cheshire Cat Ales are now on sale in the pub and the first two beers are Agent "X".

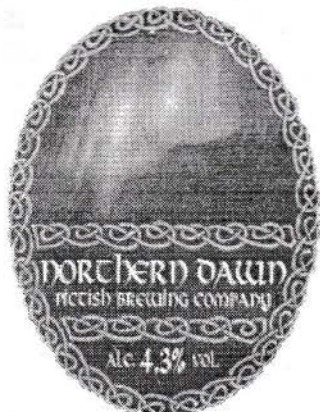


Letters to Opening Times are welcome by post to:  
The Editor, Opening Times, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport.  
SK3 9HD or via the internet to [johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com](mailto:johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com)



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## National Winter Ales Festival - Castlefield, Manchester January 18 - 20, 2001

a 4.1 per cent bitter and Coal Porter at 4.8 per cent. Look for a full report on this new venture next month. We also hope to be able to report in depth on Mark Dade's new Boggart Hole Clough Brewery. The three inaugural beers now have names - Boggart Bitter (3.8 per cent); Angel Hill (4.2) and The Dark Side (4.34). The last named was due to be premiered at the National Winter Ales Festival at Castlefield this month.

Mark's successor at the Marble Brewery is James Campbell. While James had brewed at the Firkin chain, much of his recent experience has been in the Irish Republic, where some excellent beers are now brewed by the micros there. James has worked for both McGraths and the Tipperary Brewing Co (Dwan) and apparently comes highly recommended by brewing guru Brendan Dobbin. The Marble Beers therefore look to be in safe hands.

Phoenix are also launching a new beer at Castlefield. This is The White Monk, a 4.5 per cent pale and hoppy bitter. Also out now is Golden Glow, a pale 6.5 per cent Christmas beer brewed as a follow up to the powerful Humbug (7 per cent). Next month sees the return of favourites Jovian and Massacre. Bolton's Bank Top Brewery has renamed Fred's Cap as Flat Cap, and sales of the 4% bitter have really taken off. Look out, too for Volunteer Bitter at 4.2 per cent. This is a re-brew of 'Dr Dibnah' which appeared last year at the Howcroft Beer Festival. There's good news for mild lovers, too. Bank Top's excellent Dark Mild (4%) has proved so popular that it has now become a permanent beer. Brewer John Feeney also tells us that the brewery may finally be moving in the Spring, something that has been in the pipeline for some time.

Finally, Rochdale's Pictish Brewery also has a new monthly special out to replace the superb Winter Solstice. The new beer is Northern Dawn, a 4.3 per cent beer described as "a full bodied deep amber coloured ale with caramel notes and a lingering malty but bitter finish".

### OPENING TIMES JANUARY COMP

THE BEER SELLER

Sponsored by The Beer Seller

**J**ust to keep you on your toes, last month we contrived to print 10 clues for 11 answers. A few hardy souls were undeterred by this, and most submitted correct entries.

The beers and breweries you were looking for were: Phoenix; Xpired; Decadence; Earl Soham; Mildly Mad; Darwin; New Timer; Redwood; Domino; Overdraft (the missing clue!) and Tormented Turnip. The winner of the usual pack of beer-related goodies was John White of Chorlton. Congratulations! This month we have some more brewery related items, again kindly donated by the Beer Seller. The competition has once again been set by Paul Stanyer of the Swan With Two Necks and this time you are looking for beers and breweries, all of which appear in the 2001 Good Beer Guide. As usual complete the grid in a clockwise spiral - we have given you the first letter. Entries to OT Competition, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport, SK3 9HD by 26 January please.

- (1) Off tucks knackered this dark tribe?
- (2) We here this happened for a white Christmas in Crouch Vale.
- (3) This may happen if you drink to much in Sutton)
- (4) A rebellion at the rebellion?.
- (5) Three feet glued to the Cambrinus
- (6) Sulwath says hit end OK?
- (7) Record breaking one foot jump from Blanchfield? (2words)
- (8) Will this give Marston Moor pupils energy?
- (9) This Edinburgh brewery will be made to rest alright
- (10) Keep barley here? No in Rutland!
- (11) Cop he mad after drinking this Cambrinus brew

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### Anything But Half-Baked

*Chris Walkden dines out in style at the Pot of Beer...*

Visitors to the N/4 ABV Festival in Manchester in October were able to avail themselves of lots of different types of food as well as a massive number of beers from the UK and across Europe. One of the more exciting culinary adventures was served up by Ken Birch at the Pot Of Beer on New Mount Street - a banquet of food cooked in beer with beer to drink complementing the dishes. The success of this evening encouraged Ken to hold another in late November featuring new dishes.

And so it was that half a dozen adventurous souls assembled at the Pot on Tuesday 28th November for the latest menu. It was disappointing that another half dozen had had to cancel at short notice - but no matter - it meant more for us!

The beers for the evening had been supplied by Euro Beer, a new supplier based just across the road from the Pot. They can supply a very wide range - around 500 - of bottled beers from around the world including over 300 from Belgium. It must have been a difficult job selecting just five for drinking plus another few for use in the cooking process!

For my pre-dinner drink from the bar, I chose the elusive Robinson's Dark Mild, which was excellent: there are always 4-5 cask ales available including those from several micros. And then came the food. First up was a warming prawn and cod chowder with extra special ingredients - Boon Gueze and "a hint of Delirium Tremens". Nevertheless, it did not taste sour as you would expect a gueze to be and was very passable. The ideal compliment beerwise was the 5% Blanche des Neige with its subtle creamy taste.

Salmon and egg risotto followed, cooked with Hoegaarden, one of the more familiar Belgian beers and to drink, one of the classic beers from Belgium, Rodenbach Grand Cru (6%), a fine old style red ale. I was so enthused to get stuck into the Smoked Ham Pie cooked in kriek, the cherry beer, that I started without waiting for the Peche sauce made with Timmermans peach beer. What a difference it made!! The original pie was nice enough, but the peche sauce took the sharp taste of the ham away and transformed into a different dish. You can try this yourself if you follow the recipe Ken outlined in the December edition of Opening Times. The beer to go with it wasn't bad either - Brigand Christmas Ale, a 9% ruddy ale with a clean palate. Ken is constantly experimenting with his menus and sometimes things do go wrong. Problems with the oven meant that the Olive Beer Bread cooked with Nastro Azzuri was only half baked so we had to make do with the excellent Kasteel Donker on its own. This 11% beer is dangerously drinkable, lacking the vinous nose often associated with beers of this strength - however it had a real kick of a finish almost burning the throat - lovely stuff!

All good things have to come to an end, but not before the pudding. This was a Pineapple Cream with a chocolate and framboise sauce and an excellent beer to finish - Polish Zywiec Porter at 9.3%. Polish food is of course a speciality at the Pot and Zywiec beers are often to be found. The porter is not too sweet and was a nice way to round off the evening.

The cost of this culinary and beery adventure was a mere £8, which covers all food, and the beer served with it - tremendous value for money. Hopefully, the small attendance will not dissuade Ken from holding more of these evenings in the future and if he does I am sure they will be advertised here in Opening Times. When he does, I hope this account will encourage more of you to get along and enjoy the delights of the Pot next time. I will certainly be there!

[Ken is holding a beer gourmet food evening on the Friday & Saturday of the National Winter Ales Festival - 19 & 20 Jan - Ed(2).]

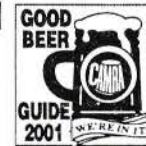
12



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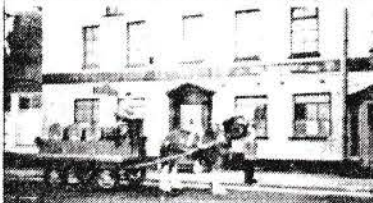
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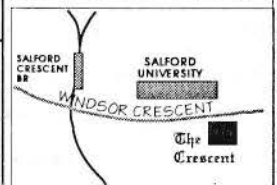
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### Don't Count Your Chickens

It was good to see Stephen Byers at the DTI deciding to grasp firmly the nettle of full measures and go for the full 100% liquid pint option, rather than being prepared to tolerate a 3% shortfall or whatever. Pubs have been given two years' notice before the change comes in, so they will have ample time to renew their stock of glasses over the normal replacement cycle. Oversize glasses will not be compulsory, so each pub will have to make a decision as to whether to serve beer in brim measures with a shallow head, or to go for the larger glasses to reflect customer preference for a bigger head.

Some people have said this will lead to increased prices, but any pub that raises its prices to cover full measures will in effect be admitting that it was deliberately serving short pints before. And pub prices are driven by what the market will bear, so it may not be in a pub's interest to jack them up, although you can be sure that full measures will be used as an excuse.

However, don't count your chickens yet, because I distinctly remember that the previous Tory government said they would do something similar when re-elected in 1992, but in the event the plans were quietly shelved. So it will be interesting to see whether any of the dwindling band of pubs still using oversize glasses switch over to brim measures in the next couple of years, because if that happens it will strongly suggest - as it did eight years ago - that the plan is dead in the water.

### The Tortoise and the Hare

You often read in the "Pub News" column of "OT" a report to the effect that "We welcome Fred and Vera as new licensees of the Jolly Plover. They have ambitious plans to revive the pub's trade by extending the range of beers, serving a wider range of food and introducing a variety of events such as quizzes and live music." These plans are no doubt entirely genuine, and a couple of months later they seem to be making a go of it. But the customers never quite turn up in the numbers they hoped for, and the guest beers start going off before the barrel is empty. Slowly but surely their initial enthusiasm drains away, and with it what extra trade they attracted. Six months later, the Jolly Plover has reverted to being the same gloomy deadhole it was before, and Fred and Vera have learned the hard way about "the best laid plans of mice and men". Sometimes it does happen that new licensees with fresh ideas and enthusiasm can really make a difference to the trade of a pub - and there are a handful of good examples in the Stockport area at present. But it isn't easy to swim against the tide in the pub trade, and it's littered with the casualties of those who have tried and failed.

By and large, most of the best pubs are ones that have been doing what they do for a long time, know what works and are able to build on their earlier achievements rather than constantly starting from scratch. In contrast, many of the least successful pubs seem to get into a vicious circle of having new licensees every few months. This also underlines why it can be very risky to select pubs for the "Good Beer Guide", however promising they may seem, on the basis of only a couple of months' trading, when we know from bitter experience that it all too often turns pear-shaped not too long afterwards.

## 5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JANUARY '96

The front page covered the story of how the Guinness Park Royal plant was about to produce the first real ale in its 60 year history. Harwood's Porter 5.2% ABV was to be launched in March as one of Carlsberg-Tetley's Tapster's Choice guest ales. The brew had been named after Ralph Harwood, a London publican who had been credited with inventing Porter in the 1720's. Guinness had turned out to be strangely reluctant to talk about the new beer, and whether Harwood's was likely to be the fore-runner for a cask-conditioned version of Guinness. (In the event, however, Harwood's was only available for a few weeks, as was usual with the Tapster's Choice range, and then it vanished without trace.) The Editor's comments on what he had called a "lively year" gave a fair summing-up of what had been going on. "Greenall's bought Boddingtons, Allied Domecq announced the closure of the Warrington brewery; Scottish & Newcastle bought Courage, and a plague of Irish theme bars descended upon us." Then there was a look to the future - would Allied Domecq get out of brewing? Would Whitbread sell their breweries and buy Greenall's and Vaux?

Weatherspoons successful entry into Manchester with the "Moon under Water" on Deansgate earlier in the year, had been followed by "Weatherspoons", a £1 million conversion of the former Halford's store on Piccadilly, which opened on the 5th December. (It's surprising how many new pubs and re-furbishments manage to open during these few weeks run-up to Christmas.) Whilst there was the Weatherspoons standard formula of no music, no pool, food all day, and a range of cask beers including some at 99p, this latest version was thought to have been a bit of a let-down. Compared with the "spectacular" sister establishment on Deansgate, the new design was thought to be uninspired - a square lounge with a bar down one side. But having said that, it was undoubtedly proving a success, and it seemed that more were likely to appear in the region.

"Manchester Matters" also had some comments to make on this second Weatherspoon pub in Manchester City Centre, giving it the tag of "airport lounge" pub style, which seemed to have lost favour during recent years. There was another interesting comment - perhaps the success of Weatherspoons in London had more to do with the dire nature of much of the competition than with their own inherent virtues.

Curmudgeon Online: [www.curmudgeon.co.uk](http://www.curmudgeon.co.uk)

### OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

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The Castlefield National Winter Ales Festival is upon us (full details of times etc. back page). As we are a bit starved of space this month because of heavy 'news' stories I will try to whet your appetite a bit. The National Winter Beer Championship judging happens on the Thursday Morning before the festival opens - but all the championship beers will be available from Thursday evening. Among the more interesting non-championship beers will be those from Greater Manchester's newest breweries - Altrincham and Boggat Hole, other locals such as Pictish and Phoenix will be well represented, and among the 100+ selection, there are a reasonable smattering of new brews (more will be found at the Beer House, Angel Street, and the City Arms, Kennedy Street, both of which have concurrent festivals...)

German draught beers dominate the Foreign Bar offerings, though there are up to 6 American, four Irish, and one Czech beer promised, all on draught and free-of-gas dispense, complemented by bottles from Belgium, Germany & the US. This years non-beer offerings include a well-chosen cider list (details of which will even be in the Festival Programme) and a small but select wine bar. The excellent food produced by Idy Phillips from the Crescent Salford will be back and in addition to Camra membership and products stands, the tombola, the excellent engravers, t-shirts and beery books, we have a pub games area and a Belgian glasses stand (conveniently next to the Belgian beers....) Truly something for everyone. The Charity is Rainbow Trust. Not enough room for much else, but I will leave you this month with this thought. What do we (discerning beer drinkers, that is), care, if Joe Scrote has to pay 20p a pint more for his Carling of Heineken? Not a sausage, that's what. So why all the hoo-ha about Interbrew and Bass? If Hugo Powell had had his way, 'brand' prices - Britfizz lager and nitro keg - would have been ramped up to create 'realistic' margins for the brewers. Those bland apologies for cask produced by the nationals - Courage Directors, John Smiths Cask, Worthington, Bass etc. would have followed, so as not to increase the differential pricing beyond reason. Thus the price difference to pubs and small groups between national bland and interesting micro products would have all but disappeared. This might well have saved 30 or 50 microbreweries from the liquidator. So much for the protection of consumer choice....



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# National Winter Ales Festival - Castlefield, Manchester January 18 - 20, 2001



This month's Desert Island choice comes from Chris Hellin, Head Brewer at Frederic Robinson Ltd. Already armed with the current Good Beer Guide, the Champion Beer of Britain, Moorhouses Black Cat, these are his five other choices:

"Having been asked to select my five Desert Island Beers by the editor, I have decided to choose beers which for one reason or another bring back the most pleasant of memories to me during my lifetime sand career in brewing.

"My roots go back many years now (perhaps too many) to those childhood and youthful days in my home town of Wrexham, North Wales. I can remember only too clearly the pleasure I had as a youngster walking past the Border Brewery on my way to school each day.

"Those recollections of malty and hoppy aromas emanating from the copper boil obviously had a marked affect on my interest in embarking on a career in brewing. However, Border Brewery wasn't the only brewery in Wrexham and it was at its other brewery, Wrexham Lager, where I started my career some 30 or so years ago.

"I have to be truthful that should a position have been available at Border Brewery at that time then that would have been my first choice. But lager it had to be! Don't get me wrong - I really enjoyed my time there, but everything within a lager brewery appears clinical and lacking in tradition and atmosphere. I soon realised that lager brewing was not for me, so I decided to move on to a more traditional ale brewery, Higsons in Liverpool. But before I leave Wrexham behind, the first choice for my Desert Island Beers has to be Border Bitter ('The Prince of Ales'). Sadly this is no more, a victim of the Marston's takeover and just a distant memory now. It was the first pint of bitter beer I had ever tasted - a full-bodied, malty bitter beer, which certainly got some getting used to at the age of 16 or so- ish!

"So now to my days in Liverpool where I spent 15 happy years enjoying both brewing and drinking many pints of Higsons classic ales. Perhaps the most memorable of these was Stingo Gold, a strong barley wine,

but the beer I am going to make my second choice has to be Higsons Bitter. A fully robust bitter beer with a distinctive yeasty character. At its best it must have rated as one of the top ten bitters in the country. Again, sadly, Higsons is no more but the tradition of brewing good ales has continued in the name of Robert Cain whose brewery Higsons acquired back in 1923. So perhaps for nostalgic reasons I would accept Cain's Bitter as an 'alternative' present day beer to remind me of my old brewery.

"When Higsons was acquired by Boddingtons in the mid-80's I decided that it was time for me to move on and it was at this point that I joined Frederic Robinson Ltd. I must admit that the character of Robinson's beers was quite a culture shock to my palate in those early days with the company, having been used to those robustly bitter and yeasty beers at Higsons. However, it didn't take me long to realise that I had discovered a very different but now in my opinion a far superior range of ales. Robinson's Best Bitter has to be my third beer for selection. I think Roger Protz sums it up very well in his description of the beer in the Good Beer Guide - 'a magnificent pale, tart and thirst quenching complex brew - one for the Desert Island! Say no more!

"Revered and judged Gold Medal Winner at the 1998 International Brewing Industry awards speaks for itself.

"My fourth beer may come as somewhat of a surprise as I have had no involvement in its production whatsoever. Indeed it has been a thorn in my side for a number of years now, battling it out, neck and neck, with Robinson's Best Bitter at many a Brewing Industry Awards ceremony. Sometimes we won, sometimes we lost, but what if for sure I have to admit it has to be rated in the same class as Robinson's Best Bitter. It is of course Taylor's Landlord voted supreme champion Cask Beer at the Brewing Industry Awards this year - a worthy winner (but only on this occasion!!).

"So to my final choice which has to be a beer one can enjoy as a night-cap during those long, cold and lonely evenings on the island - Robinson's Old Tom. CAMRA Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2000 - a great tribute to a great beer, especially when the award comes from all those members who cherish cask ales at their very best. Old Tom a dark, rich and warming superior barley wine with heady vinous aromas of dark fruit with a palate which has a 'booming' balance of ripe malt and peppery hops, and a deep port wine finish. I'm getting so carried away with the thought of it that perhaps I'd better stop dreaming now before I cast away to that paradise island.



Dave and Sue welcome you to

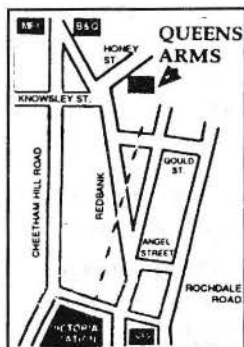
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Following a recent meeting with Chesterfield CAMRA, a grey area of the High Peak Branch boundary in the area south of Buxton has been clarified. As a result the branch has gained a handful of new rural pubs. Frank Wood gives us the details: Whereas for many years the Quiet Woman at Earl Sterndale had been the branch's most southerly pub, it has now lost its title to the Pack Horse at Crowdecote, just over a mile away, and close by, the Royal Oak at Sparklow, just off the A515 Buxton to Ashbourne road. Just to confuse matters, though, the revision gives Chesterfield Branch the Bull i'th'orn at Hurdlow, a little further up the A515 towards Buxton. Another gain for High Peak Branch is the Church Inn at Chelmorton, a pub we are pleased to have since it is a rare local outlet for Adnams Bitter, along with Marston's Bitter and Pedigree. Thus looking for a Sunday walk in late October, myself and three other branch members called in en route and were very impressed with the quality of the Adnams as we have on plenty of occasions before. Branch member Steve Green checked out the Royal Oak. All we knew about the pub was that it had a green door (!) and even this turned out to be wrong (!!) - it's brown. There's good news about the permanent beer range, though, comprising as it does of Tetley Bitter, Marston's Pedigree and Whim Hartington Bitter. Finally, the Pack Horse. I managed to get the phone number and gave the landlady a ring. We had in fact called in as a branch on the way back from a beer festival earlier in the year but no-one could remember what beer was on sale. The pub is very rural with only a narrow lane passing by although the landlady remembered our visit since no-one normally goes there in a 20-seater coach (she was probably too polite to say she remembered us because we were worse for wear from the festival...). Two cask beers are sold - Marston's Pedigree and Mansfield Cask. One other pub also appears to fall within the High Peak Branch by the skin of its teeth. This is the Waterloo at Taddington, on the main A6 Buxton-Bakewell road and the branch boundary seems to be the cart track that runs down the side of the pub, which is a Robinson's house.

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A new pub called the Litton Tree opened on Mill Street, Macclesfield on 14th December. It is located in what was the Majestic cinema and has a large open plan design that makes it look like a clone of Yates (which is located further along the same road). The Litton Tree 'boasts' wide screen TV, a DJ and 6 handpumps on the bar - on my visit only one of these handpumps was in use selling Draught Bass. However I am told that on a good day you can also get Directors and Litton Tree bitter (which seems to be a Worthingtons product).

In Bollington, the Meridian has finally re-opened with a major relaunch on 15 December and considers itself to be a wine bar (according to the local press). The new licensee is Alan D'Arcy while the business itself is owned by Niel Stevenson who explained: "We have basically done the pub up like a wine bar - it's still a local pub with a restaurant and lot's of wine in it!" Each rooms has been separately laid out with a different theme. While not having had the chance to visit, I am told it sells Marston's Pedigree (at £2 a pint). The Plough at Eaton has been sold (because the previous pub owning group went bust) and is now selling Bass, Pedigree and Boddingtons. It is hoped that the new owners will be more adventurous than their predecessors and reinstate Beartown beers.

The Coach & Horses in Timbersbrook has new licensees. The place has been redecorated and the electric pumps have been replaced by handpumps. Robinson's Bitter is still served, but now they also have the seasonal beer, Robin Bitter - a first for the Congleton area.

Morris and Barbara Mellor, licensees of the Plough, Station Road, Macclesfield, had a surprise waiting for them when they returned from holiday - their beer garden had been replaced by a ten-foot hole! The pub was full of drinkers when the subsidence occurred on 24 November. Jack Mayes who was looking after the pub claims to have heard a low rumble but thought it was a passing train. Workmen are now carrying out tests to see how the ground gave way so dramatically.

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# 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

## JANUARY 2001

**Thursday 11th** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm, NB Pub of the Year will be chosen at this meeting so a good turnout please.

**Saturday 13th** - Annual Branch Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 7.30pm. Guest Speaker (and slideshow) - CAMRA Historic Pubs Caseworker Geoff Brandwood.

**Monday 15th** - Didsbury Social: 9.00pm Fletcher Moss, Albert Hill St; 10.00pm Royal Oak, Wilmslow Rd.

**Thursday 18th - Saturday 20th** - National Winter Ales Festival, Upper Campfield Market, Castlefield, Manchester.

**Thursday 25th** - Pub of the Month presentation to the Moss Rose, Didsbury Rd, Heaton Norris. 8.0pm onwards.

**Friday 26th** - Hazel Grove (North) Stagger: 7.30pm Anchor; 8.30 Crown, Great Moor.

**Monday 29th** - Social: Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.

**Tuesday 30th** - Committee Meeting and Good Beer Guide 2002 pre-selection: Armoury, Greek St, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm. **NB Good Beer Guide 2002 pre-selections will be made at this meeting - all welcome to attend. Note change of venue.**

**Thursday 8th February** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Gateway, Kingsway, East Didsbury. Starts 8.00pm. **NB entries for the 2002 Good Beer Guide will be chosen at this meeting.**

## JANUARY 2001

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

**Saturday 13th** - Trip to Pictish Brewery, Rochdale. Meet at the brewery 1.30pm or Beer House, Manchester 12 noon.

**Monday 15th** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Salybridge Station Buffet. Starts 8.30pm.

**Friday 2nd-Sunday 4th February** - Weekend away in Peterborough. Details from Tom Lord on 0161 837 4474.

**Monday 5th** - Committee Meeting: Pack Horse, Guide Ln, Audenshaw. Starts 8.30pm

**Monday 12th** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Travellers Call, Bredbury. Starts 8.30pm.

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

**Monday 22nd** - Committee Meeting and Branch AGM: The Baths, Macclesfield. Starts 8.00pm.

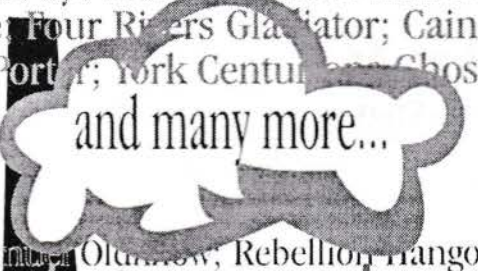
**Monday 29th** - Pub of the Season Presentation to Olde Admiral Rodney, Prestbury. 8.00pm onwards.

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## Put on your flat caps, start walking the whippet...

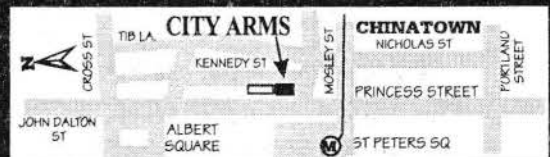
Abbeydale Black Mass; Phoenix Hopwood; Big Lamp Summerhill Stout; Porters Bitter; Coniston Opium; Daleside Old Lubrication; Goose Eye Wharfedale; Castle Eden Porter; Salopian Minster; Mordue Radgie Gadgie; Four Rivers Gladiator; Cains FA; Beartown; Star Eclipse; Timothy Taylors Porter; York Centurion; Ghost.....



Wychwood Goliath's Giant Ale; Robinsons Samuel Oldman; Rebellion Hangover; Batemans Jester IPA; Loxley Liquor; Hopback Monkeys; Revange; Highwood Mill Race; Brakspear Resolution; Hook Norton Double Stout; Federation Tummy Tickler; Clarks Golden Hornet; Weltons Tight Fisted Sod; Cains Blackout Porter; Tisbury Archibald Beckett; Hopback Sellar Nectar; O'Hanlons Red Ale; Morrells Old Don; Caledonian Burns Ale; Riddleys Blizzard; Smiles Blond

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**CITY ARMS - KENNEDY STREET, MANCHESTER**





# MANCHESTER MATTERS by Cityman

After the huge number of pub and bar openings last year, 2001 promises to be a little quieter, although there are still a number of openings in the pipeline. The City Centre will be gaining three new Wetherspoon outlets for starters with the first one due to open in The Printworks next month. There will be additional licensed outlets in The Circus development on the corner of Portland Street and additional openings can be expected in the Great Northern complex on Deansgate. The great Whitbread pub sale will also see a number of high profile outlets changing hands and may, or may not, see changes afoot at the numerous Hogshead outlets, not to mention pubs like the Olde Cock in Didsbury and the Lass O'Gowrie in the City Centre (although any prospective purchaser would be mad to interfere with what is clearly a winning formula there). It looks like we may have to wait until the spring to find out who has snapped them up, though.

One major City Centre opening that I unaccountably missed at the time was the **Old Monk** on Lloyd Street, across from the back door of the Rising Sun and next to the Old Nags Head. The owning company, which bears the same name, has about 40 pubs throughout the country and is owned by the brother of JD Wetherspoon entrepreneur Tim Martin. The Old Monk is a spacious affair, with bars on two levels and a basement function room. The décor is mainly deepred with a few artworks and is all very relaxed. There's real ale, too. Boddingtons Bitter and Theakstons XB feature regularly with a third pump for Taylor's Landlord, Old Speckled Hen, Courage Directors of a Black Sheep beer. Food is available all day, too. When I called in mid-December, the pub was busy with an after-work crowd and looks to have already established itself as a popular venue.

It's also a belated welcome to Brian and Julie Dyson who took over at the Hat Feathers on Mason Street (just off Swan Street) last year. Well kept Cain's Mild and Holt's Bitter are on handpump and guest beers will be added to bring the pub into the Northern Quarter real ale circuit. I also popped into the **Bulls Head** on London Road recently. This

excellent pub has recently had a very impressive makeover and must now be something of a local flagship for Burtonwood, both the pub arm and the brewing arm since the beers always seems to be well-kept in this very welcoming pub.

## In The Suburbs

Two major refurbishments have been unveiled and pride of place must go to Hydes' and the **Gateway** in East Didsbury. I said last month that spies had reported a very impressive job and this is indeed the case. The bar has been remodelled and faces the main room, which has been cleverly split up into a number of slightly raised areas. The rest of the pub comprises a very impressive vault/games room and two snugs, one with a gas primed 'real' fire and the other having the air of a study in a gentlemen's club. The decor is traditional and yet manages to avoid neo-Victorian pastiche, as well it should, given that the pub dates from about 1935. In fact there's an interesting collection of photographs in the vault showing the pub, both inside and out, when new and while the clean art-deco lines have long-since been consigned to history, it's not necessarily a bad thing. Many of these old inter-war road-houses could be soulless, barn-like affairs and weren't even particularly popular with the drinking public at the time. Indeed the Gateway probably has a pubbie feel now than it has done for a long time. Four cask beers are on handpump - Hydes' Light, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the current seasonal (Rocket Fuel when I called). Food is available both lunchtimes and evening (6-8pm).

In Didsbury proper, Squires has reopened as the **Clock Tower**. Now badged as an 'Original Pub Co' outlet (which I think is just another facet of Scottish & Newcastle), this is another pub which looks better than it's done for years. Open plan, of course, but broken up by pillars and raised areas, plus clean modern décor really have transformed the place which is now light and airy. There's quite an emphasis on food but, surprise, surprise, cask ale returns with Theakstons Cool Cask and Boddingtons Bitter on handpump.

Elsewhere, I'm told that the **Church** in Levenshulme is closed again and there's a 'tenancy to let' sigh on the **Union**. The pub scene in that part of the city really does seem to be going through a rough patch at the moment. There's good news from east Manchester, though, where the **Coach & Horses** on Belle Vue Street has reopened. I hope to get out to Gorton for next month's column, so hopefully more on this next time.



## Join CAMRA Now! & get into National Winter Ales Festival (Manchester, Jan 18-20) FREE (or just £1 Thurs/Fri Eve)

Calling all Opening Times readers! As you may know, Opening Times is published by the Stockport and South Manchester branch of the Campaign for Real Ale. But what is CAMRA all about, how do we, the Campaign's local representatives, fit into the picture, and what's the point of being a member? Briefly, CAMRA has campaigned for many years, at a national and local level, for quality and choice for the British pubgoer. Locally, our campaigning activities are combined with a lively diary of social events.

### Best Ever Time To Join

If you're considering joining CAMRA then this is your chance! For the rest of this year we're offering £2 off full membership - that's a bargain £12 for your first year. And there's even better news if you're under 26 or a full-time student - concessionary membership is just £8. Not only

that but as a CAMRA member you'll be able to buy the new 2001 Good Beer Guide from the Branch for just £7 - that's £4.99 off the cover price! Added to which you can get into the superb National Winter Ales Festival (see page 3 for details) for free on the Friday lunchtimes and Saturday sessions, or just £1 Thursday/Friday Evening.

## APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP - £2 REDUCTION!

(Opening Times 201)

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  £11  JOINT MEMBERSHIP  £15

UNDER 26 YRS or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £8

Send To: 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.

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £8







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# CAMRA 2001 NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL

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

Admission:

£2 Thurs Eve, £3 Fri Eve,  
£1 Sat Eve, £2 Lunchtimes  
CAMRA members FREE  
at lunchtime & Sat Eve,  
£1 Thurs & Fri Eve



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  
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**Extensive Range of excellent  
Hot & Cold Food at every session**

**18-20 JANUARY 2001  
THE CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE**

[www.camra.org.uk/site/natwinter/natwinter.htm](http://www.camra.org.uk/site/natwinter/natwinter.htm)

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