

OPENING TIMES

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6,700 CIRCULATED
EVERY MONTH

FREE

NURSERY IS REGIONAL CHAMPION

Stockport Local is Greater Manchester Pub of the Year

For the sixth consecutive year, the Regional Pub of the Year title for CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, in Greater Manchester has gone to a pub in the Opening Times area. The Nursery on Green Lane, Heaton Norris, scooped the award despite a strong challenge from pubs in Wigan, Glossop and Salford.

The Nursery is an superb all-round pub that appeals to a wide clientele and offers most of the things you would expect in the perfect pub. Originally built in 1939, the multi-roomed interior, including a superb wood-pannelled lounge, and that endangered species, a proper vault, is little changed since then and the pub is on CAMRA's National Inventory of historic pub interiors. The Nursery is a real hub of the community, with a strong local trade and supporting numerous sports teams. At the back is an immaculate and well-used bowling green, an increasingly rare feature on the local pub scene, and the spacious upstairs room is popular for meetings and functions. Despite its well-hidden location, the pub also draws customers from a long way around, particularly for the excellent food, which has earned it an entry in CAMRA's Good Pub Food Guide. The Sunday lunches are especially well-regarded.

As well as Hydes Mild and Bitter, the Nursery also sells Jekyll's Gold and the various Hydes seasonal beers, plus the potent XXXX over the Christmas period. The beer quality is consistently good and the pub has been in the Good Beer Guide since 1984 without a break, by several years the longest record of continuous entries in the Stockport & South Manchester branch area.

Of course simply having a fine building and serving beer from a well-respected independent brewery does not automatically make a pub a good pub, and what has made the Nursery really stand out from the crowd is the hard work, dedication and attention to detail of both George and Susan and their staff, several of whom have also been there for many years. It's a conspicuously well-kept, spick-and-span pub where it's hard to find anything out of place.

George declared himself 'gob-smacked' when told of this latest award. "That really is wonderful", he said. Hydes' were equally cock-a-hoop. Production Director Paul Jefferies told Opening Times, "That's absolutely fantastic. I'll make sure everyone in the brewery knows straight away!"

The presentation night will be on Saturday 6 October from about 8.30pm onwards. While it's a big pub, it's likely to be a very busy night, so make sure you get there early. It's not the easiest pub to find - probably the best way to reach it on foot is to get the 192 bus to Belmont Way on the A6 and then walk along Bowerfold Lane in a westerly direction across the railway bridge for six or seven minutes until you reach the pub on your right.



WOLVERHAMPTON & DUDLEY SCRAPES THROUGH

Pubmaster's bid for W&D failed, but only just. A successful bid would have meant the break-up of the company and the breweries being put up for sale. As a buyer would have been difficult to find, it would have almost inevitably have meant the closure of four real ale breweries..

For the moment at least Banks's and Marston's are safe. Cameron's will also continue but under new ownership as it is due to be sold to Castle Eden. The downside of that deal is that the current Castle Eden brewery will shut. Mansfield Brewery is still doomed to closure.

It seems that real ale, and the tied house system, only works on a local basis. As soon as brewers try to become regional players by acquiring other brewers, they themselves become victims of national or international predators. This happened to Boddingtons, which bought Oldham and Higsons breweries before breaking up and selling its pubs to Greenalls and its brewery to Whitbread. Greenalls was rapacious, acquiring brewers like Davenport, Simpkins and Shipstones, before moving out of brewing entirely and selling its tenanted estate to Nomura and the managed pubs to Scottish & Newcastle. W&D nearly went the same way, and might yet. In brewing, small and local is still OK. Being medium sized is fatal. Being big on the national stage is no longer any projection, as we've seen with Bass. So, it's global or local, take your choice.

(This article is based on a piece by Roger Hall in What's Doing)

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Major Changes at the Beer House - Page 12



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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Last month's expose of pubs advertising but not selling cask beer caused something of a stir. Behind the scenes Trading Standards officers are now on the case and next month we'll let you have an update. Already one of the offenders, Hardy's Well in Rusholme, has painted out the offending sign. Another of our long-running stories concerns the Railway in West Didsbury and the smooth beers on handpump. It looks as though the handpumped lager is still being sold in smooth, gassed-up form, although this still isn't clear. Hopefully, more next time on this, too.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Hearty congratulations to George & Sue Lindsay at the Nursery on their superb achievement on winning the Regional Pub of the Year Award, especially when the competition was so stiff. This really is a tribute to their hard work over so many years in making the Nursery such a stand-out pub. Hydes' themselves also deserve some of the credit. Not only have they successfully exploited the Nursery while in no-way compromising its traditional layout and values, but by improving and expanding their beer range they have significantly added to the pub's attractions.

The pub now goes forward to the next stage of CAMRA's Pub of the Year contest, which is the 'super regional' round. Here the Nursery will be competing against other regional winners so the competition will be particularly intense. The best of luck to all concerned.

John Clarke

The victory of the management at Wolverhampton & Dudley (Banks & Marstons) over a predatory take-over bid is welcome, since it secures a temporary future for the breweries in Wolverhampton & Burton on Trent, if nothing else. Thinking back to the Morlands (brewers of Old Speckled Hen) saga though, gives pause for thought. Greene King tried to buy Morlands and was spectacularly rebuffed after a long fight. Two years later though, they came back, and Morlands gave in with hardly a whimper. It is not unlikely that there will be another bid for Wolves before too long, and this fight may have sapped their will for another bruising fight. It's not just here though, consolidation is happening world-wide. Brazil's brewing (wot?, ed(1)), is now largely in the hands of South African Breweries, but more relevant both Becks and Munich's Giant Paulaner breweries in Germany have fallen to foreign competition (the latter to Heineken - of all people). It makes you more aware of the uniqueness of our region with no less than four regional breweries - Hydes, Lees, Holts and of course Robinsons, flying the flag for proper beer, and a long list of microbreweries. Long may it remain so.

P.B. Hutchings



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GOES TO A GOOD INN"*

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Speak for Themselves...*

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 209

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editors: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ (0161) 477 1973; Paul Hutchings, 8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport Cheshire, SK4 2NP. ☎ & Fax (0161) 432 8384. News, articles and letters welcome. All editorial items may be submitted in most popular WP formats or preferably ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!) or via e-mail to johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com Adverts or photos should be "hard copy" or in CorelDraw 3.5 or 7 (.cdr) format or TIFF or EPS files (submit printed proofs for checking and ensure that any "include all fonts" options are on). All editorial items © CAMRA: may be reproduced if source acknowledged. All Advertising images are copyright the respective design sources (Largely CPPR, but all other copyrights and trademarks acknowledged).

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

Column Widths, single 84mm, double 172mm. Image height 26cm. NB Advertisers who supply camera ready artwork designed for another publication that cannot be resized to our standard sizes will be charged the equivalent column/centimetre rate plus a surcharge of at least 30%. Adverts that require unusually large amounts of design work will have the extra work carried out by a studio at full commercial rate.

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

PUB OF THE MONTH SEPTEMBER 2001

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The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for September is the Old House at Home on Burton Road, Withington.

The Old House at Home seemed to be a pub that was going nowhere and was seriously let down by its beer quality. Indeed, when visited on a 'Stagger' the party encountered some of the worst beer ever. Shortly after the appearance of that article, the pub changed hands and Dave Ogden took over a manager, and so heralding a major turn around in the pub's fortunes.

The range of beers was sensibly reduced and reduced now consists of Boddingtons Bitter and three ever-changing guest beers, occasionally from the likes of Robinson's and Hydes' but more often from micro breweries around the country. This is all the more surprising for a pub that is a 'Whitbread' managed house. And luckily, the transfer of the pub to the Laurel Pub Company (along with the rest of the ex-Whitbread pub estate) hasn't threatened this position.

The pub itself is an attractive building and has obviously been extended over the years. Inside, the rambling interior is an open-plan L-shape with well-supported food operation at one end. The décor is in traditional autumn colours, although this is in line for a restrained makeover.

Although situated in the heart of student bedsit land, the Old House attracts a mixed clientele comprising students and more established locals and has the feel of a genuine, unpretentious, community local.

Join us when we celebrate the pub's success at the Pub of the Month presentation on Thursday 27 September.

The Old House at Home is about a 5 minute walk from Wilmslow Road which is well served by many buses. Service 42 from Stockport will drop you close by.

Don't forget the presentation to the CAMRA Regional Pub of The Year at the Nursery inn, Green Lane, Heaton Norris on Saturday 6th October - full details on the front page!

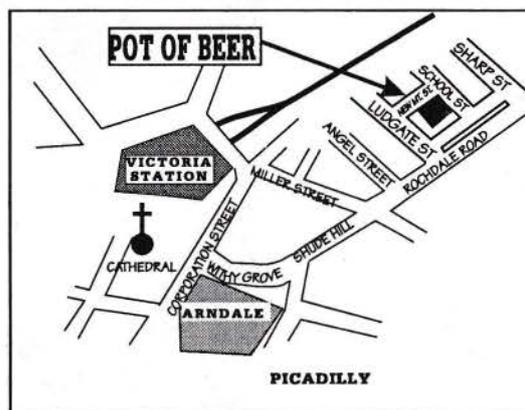
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CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

STAGGER

with Ric Yates

I can't think of a better place to start a Stagger than the Crown, Heaton Lane.

This Victorian pub is one of Stockport's premier ale houses, even appearing on national TV in the census adverts, and it has to be said that it must be the most visually impressive of any pub in town. That's not to say it doesn't have plenty of other attractions with rock nights, quiz nights and a growing reputation as a live music venue. And, of course, the huge and ever changing range of guest beers.

On our visit the range included beers from Pictish, Phoenix, Castle Rock, Leyden, Cambrianus, Milton and Hart Breweries. All of the beers tried were enjoyed, apart from the Hart Fylde Ale which had 'gone'. This was changed immediately and the cask replaced with the superb Pictish Ginger Ale. There's real cider, too, and tonight it was the very rare Brownings from Herefordshire. This pub really is a gem and a credit to the hard work put in by Graham Mascord and Jeanette Walmsley who run it with a sure hand. It was a struggle to leave.

But leave we did and our next port of call was the **Comfortable Gill**, a small Boddingtons house just behind the bus depot. A popular little local, there are thriving darts and crib teams here. There's just the one cask beer, Boddington's Bitter, which was generally thought to be above average

The next pub up the hill is **Tom Thumbs**, now under new management and all-keg. Which is perhaps just as well the real ale was terrible here when last visited on a 'Stagger'.

So it was onwards and upwards to the second free house on the night, **Ye Olde Vic**, on the corner of Chatham Street. To the casual observer the pub might appear closed but don't be put off by this - inside it's an excellent little pub with four ever-changing guest beers, real cider, and a warm welcome. There's also an excellent beer garden at the back which effectively doubles the size of the pub. On tap tonight was Worfield Shropshire Pride, Greene King IPA, Heather Kelpie, Mauldons Mousetrap and Weston's Special Vintage cider. Something for everyone, really, and everything on fine form, although the Shropshire Pride didn't appeal to everyone who tried it. Another pub that is difficult to leave but we managed to tear ourselves away and headed for the **Armoury** on Shaw Heath, passing en-route the **Blue Bell**, closed for refurbishment. The Armoury was our first Robinson's pub of the night, and is a classic in its own right. Rebuilt in the 1920s it still retains the layout and many internal features from that time. The vault is arguably one of the best in Stockport. Hatters Mild and Best Bitter were accompanied by a cask of Old Tom on the bar. One of our party was going to try the Old Tom but was put off by the tilt on the barrel; the mild and bitter didn't disappoint, though, with both on top form.

Next door but one is the **Swan**. A former Wilson's pub, the pub was bought by the late lamented Vaux and is now owned by Pubmaster, the company that has just failed to buy Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries. We were pleased to find that real ale had been reintroduced here in the form of Old Speckled Hen. And at a bargain £1.50 a pint we weren't surprised to learn that it was selling well. Opinions on the beer varied, which was more down to the style of beer, then how it was kept. I thought it was excellent.

Next up was the **Florist**, another Robinson's pub with Hatters Mild and Best Bitter. It's a rambling multi-roomed pub with a friendly feel, and always seems busy. The beer is usually very good here and while the Best Bitter lived up to expectations, the Hatters Mild was horrible. Well, most pubs have the occasional off night and it was exchanged with good grace, so no real complaints there.

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 209:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Edwardson, Phil Booton, John Tune, Steve Bray, Ric Yates, John Taylor, Phil Levison, Tom Lord, Steve Smith, George Symes, Anthony Firmin, Stewart Revell, Alan Gardner, Roger Hall, Steve Robinson and Sue Ridings

Moving on down Shaw Heath we discovered that the **Plough** no longer sold real ale so it was off down Adswold Lane to the **Adswold Hotel**. This is a hugely improved pub and we took advantage of the fine weather to sit in the beer garden. This is one of the best beer gardens in Stockport and deserves to be more widely known (as does the pub, too) - there's even an outdoor clock so you don't miss last orders! Our conversation turned to the age of the pub and landlord Peter Needham told us he thought it was a 1930s pub on the site of an earlier building. Again Hatters Mild and Best Bitter were the order of the day and both were very good, with the bitter just having the edge.



There were still pubs to visit and next up was **Copperfields Bar** which is part of the Southlands Hotel. It was my first visit but others who had been before seemed to think it something of a shadow of its former self. There was just one real ale, John Smiths Bitter, and only a handful of customers. The beer was well-kept but struggled to make an impact on the taste front.

At this point our party briefly split, with three making a short diversion to the **Wheatsheaf** at the top of Hillgate, while the rest of us settled in the final pub of the night, the **Blossoms**. The Wheatsheaf sells Adnams Bitter on a regular basis and this was found to be very acceptable. The Blossoms, of course, is another classic pub, keeping its 19th century layout. The smoke room at the back is an unspoilt gem, while the two rooms at the front feature pinball and pool. Needless to say, the pub was very busy with large amounts of both Hatters Mild and Best Bitter being consumed (you will have guessed that this is another Robinson's pub). As you would expect from this Good Beer Guide regular, both beers were on top form, with this time the mild taking the honours.

And so ended another varied and enjoyable Stagger, and with everyone still standing. Of course, this can only be a snapshot of what we found on one particular night and can't be a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers. However, from what we found, everywhere visited would be worth another visit and all had something to offer.



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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Colin Valentine, Edinburgh:

I read with interest the article on page 1 of July's Opening Times concerning licensing hours. You quote ex Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien as saying that "The Prime Minister has broken a promise made to every pubgoer in the land." That, of course, depends on your definition of "land". If you define land as England (and possibly Wales), then Mr. O'Brien is correct. If, however, you define land as either Great Britain or the United Kingdom, then he is just plain wrong. Mr. Blair made no promise to me about longer pub opening hours for the simple reason that I live in Scotland and Mr. Blair has no influence over licensing in Scotland as it is an issue devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Even before devolution, Scotland had more liberal licensing hours than the rest of the United Kingdom. We were first to have all day opening during the week and on a Sunday. I have no problems getting a drink up until midnight in the pubs I regularly drink in as most pubs in Edinburgh are licensed until at least midnight.

I wish the English and Welsh every success in their campaign for longer opening hours as it annoys me greatly that, unlike in Scotland, I cannot get a legal drink in a pub in England and Wales after 11 o'clock. That this nonsense still prevails in places like London, one of the major tourist destinations in the world, beggars belief. I spend many weekends in England and look forward to being one of the first people to enjoy a pint after 11 o'clock at night, some 20 years after I first enjoyed that pleasure in Scotland. I trust that whilst this campaign is running, and I suspect that it will, unfortunately, run for a few more years yet, you point out to your readers that drinkers in England and Wales wish the same privileges as your Scottish (and Northern Irish) cousins when it comes to going out to the pub for a pint.

From Peter Boardman and O Owen (by e-mail):

Having recently returned from a holiday on the Isle of Wight, we recommend that anyone visiting the island must visit The Blacksmiths Arms near Carisbrooke, the good beer and hospitality we received makes it easy to see why it is regularly voted the I.O.W branch pub of the year.

Having arrived at the hostelry mid afternoon on foot, to our dismay we found that on this occasion it closed at 3pm but on seeing us outside the landlord, Edgar not only let us in and served us with drinks but also offered to drive us back into town some two miles

away, this of course we declined and stayed until late evening. (did I mention Edgar is German.) In over twenty-five years of drinking I have never met a native landlord who would go to so much trouble for two complete strangers. Edgar has his own excellent website, www.blacksmiths-arms.co.uk which is also worth a visit.

Form John Tune, Cheadle Heath:

I am ashamed at the comments of several CAMRA members at the Railway Pub of the Month presentation. They complained that the event was for CAMRA members only and tried to limit the food to CAMRA members. The pub of the month presentation is our branches way to present ourselves to the general public, not a closed club event. As for the food, this was provided the landlord Alex Lord not CAMRA so it was up to Alex who the food was for. With regard to Jim Flynn's letter, yes Jim I agree Education and health are of a higher priority than licensing reform, this does not mean they are the only items they should include on the agenda. If only these two items were included nothing else would be done as they are both insoluble. They promised license reform and at the first opportunity reneged.

(Speaking as Branch Chairman rather than Ed(1), John is absolutely right about the food at The Railway.)

From Rhys Jones, Aberystwyth:

As someone who's been involved with Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, in one capacity or another, from the outset, I must take issue with Phil Booton's assertion (OT, August) that the festival actively discourages beer tickers.

I hope and believe that the festival doesn't discourage anybody - apart from, I suppose obnoxious drunks, who are not usually fans of good beer anyway (friendly drunks are a different matter). Certainly, known tickers (including members of the small but gallant band of cider tickers) are commonly seen at Stockport, and those I speak to are generally kind enough to say they've had a good time - I gather notable absences during the last couple of years have been due less to ideological differences than the absence of weekend trains.

What is true is that tickers are not the festival's target market. As I see it, the main aim of Stockport Festival is to build a market for interesting, high-quality beers and ciders in the local licensed trade by presenting a wide selection of such drinks to a predominantly local audience. Often, this will mean drinks new and/or rare enough to be of interest to tickers - I recall some notable premieres over the years (West Coast, York Brewery, Gwatkin's Perry) - but probably more often, the drinks sold, while richly deserving to be better known in Stockport, will be familiar to dedicated and expert tickers.

Plenty of CAMRA festivals (and probably a higher proportion of pub festivals) do cater specifically for tickers, plenty more follow Stockport in making local drinkers the focus of their concern, while others attempt to span both markets. Each approach has its proponents, and CAMRA branches have the autonomy, in this as in most things, to run their events in the way they think best suits their local circumstances. Variety is the spice of beer festivals!

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

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Almost over the edge in Alderley

The leafy suburbs of this pleasant village community are south of Wilmslow on the main A34. A frequent train service is available from both Manchester and Stockport, and there is at most times an hourly bus service passing through.

Turning left out of the station, going along Heyes Lane, passing for the time being the pub on the right, I eventually reach Moss Rose (a cul-de-sac), down this narrow lane, by a pretty row of terraced cottages, is the **Drum & Monkey**, the pub having reverted back to its original name after a spell as the Moss Rose. A fine Robinson's house that has a well tended bowling green with stone flagged spectators' area, a popular spot in the summer months. Inside a central bar offers handpulled Hatters Mild, Best Bitter and the seasonal beer. There are three distinct rooms, one no-smoking, and wooden beams, exposed brick and stonework all feature, along with piped music. The pub attracts a more mature clientele and has a good food operation. Of note are the customised drip mats depicting a gentleman in period costume and a drum barrel with a monkey sitting on top.

Retracing my steps, I now visited the pub passed earlier, the **Royal Oak Hotel**, a prominent Victorian building with a half-rendered exterior. Inside it is more akin to a café bar-cum-pub with split levels, light colours, and pastel walls. The £2 pint has arrived here in the form of Theakstons Best Bitter, with Boddingtons Bitter as the other real ale. The bar area had a television bearing away and there is also piped music. The pub divides itself up and the lower area is mostly for those wishing to dine. Outside at the back is a children's play area, a once-proud bowling green.

Back towards the station and just opposite is Trafford Road, which takes me to Macclesfield Road, the B5087, a left turn and a long hike uphill to find the **Wizard of the Edge**. Shock, horror - on reaching here I find that this National Trust-owned property is now a licensed restaurant only, with no public bar and no real ale. The

name is no doubt taken from the tales of witches and wizardry that abound in these parts, for the 'edge' has a mysterious aura about it. It's now all the way back to the main A34 but at least it's downhill. On reaching here, on London Road is the **De Trafford Arms**, a disappointing Greenalls dimly-lit den, dominated by its youngish patrons and the obligatory loud music. Needless to say it is keg only, after a brief flirtation with the real stuff.

Staying on the same side and heading north until reaching Brook Lane (B5085), some winding and twisting is needed for me to reach the **Oakwood**. From its humble beginnings as a Boddingtons community local, some road widening has taken place here and the pub has undergone an extensive refurbishment. There is some outside seating and inside it has been opened out considerably to create yet another café bar-cum-pub in the modern style. There's a preponderance of light wood, a variety of floor and wall coverings, and subdued lighting. The accent is on those wishing to dine and the real ales are Boddingtons Bitter and Marston's Pedigree.

It's back to the main A34 once again and further north are two pubs on Wilmslow Road, close to Harden Park. The first of these is a newish creation, the **Merlin**. What magic spells are woven in this large roadside hostelry, I wonder? Nothing short of parting me with £2.05 for a pint of Draught Bass. The other real ale is Tetley Bitter. It's a 'Village Inns' family oriented place with a hefty food operation, with a number of rooms, one no-smoking, mix and match furniture, twee sayings on the walls and some stone flagged flooring.

Next door, the wonders of the 'Wacky Warehouse' await me in the form of the **County Hotel**. This is another family friendly, dining pub, this time under the 'Big Steak' banner. It's a split-level layout and is decked out in the usual 'country dining pub' style. Draught Bass is available.

Before catching my train, I called into the former **Queensgate**, now **Brasingamens** (aka the **Braz**). It's adjacent to the station and has been transformed into an upmarket wine bar, with designer drinks, none of them real ales, at prices to match the pockets of its upwardly mobile, youthful customers.

I used a cheap evening return rail ticket between Manchester Piccadilly and Alderley Edge, costing £2.25, available for trains departing from 6.30pm.



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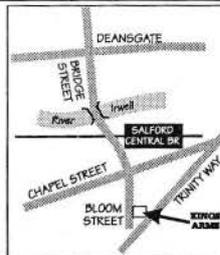
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Bass Push Cask?

Bass Brewers, of all people, is apparently working on a new strategy for what remains of its cask ale range. Not only are the cask versions of Worthington Bitter and Stones Bitter to have their profiles raised (pity there don't seem to be any plans to do anything about the taste), but seasonal versions of Draught Bass are on the cards. Yes, really! Spring and autumn versions of what is still the number one selling premium bitter are to appear as Bass promote a dedicated real ale portfolio.

Meanwhile, the regulatory authorities are still discussing with Interbrew how to resolve the competition issues raised by that company's purchase of both Bass Brewers and the Whitbread Beer Company. The latest idea, apparently, is that Interbrew will be allowed to keep the rest if they flog off Carling. Expect a resolution soon.

Latest Local Brewery

The latest Greater Manchester brewery is in Standish, near Wigan, and is the first in that town for 33 years. The new venture is the Mayflower Brewery which occupies an old bleachworks on Chorley Road. The brewery is run by Stewart Thompson and his wife Chris. Stewart is no stranger to the brewing world, having started his career as a quality assistant at Tetley Walker in Warrington over 30 years ago and latterly was second brewer/brewing manager at Hydes' (after which he worked on short contracts at both Jennings and Moorhouses).

Mayflower Brewery will be capable of producing up to five barrels a week and three beers are currently produced - Mayflower Best Bitter (3.8%), Wigan Bier (4.2%) and Hic Bibby (5%). The equipment comes from St Helens College, which runs course in Brewing Processes and Techniques, and supplies the student bar. The plant became available when the college decided to increase its brewing capacity. Five varieties of hops are used: Styrian Goldings, First Gold, Fuggles, Goldings and Challenger. AS well as crystal malt, the brewery uses Maris Otter malt, which has become popular with some regional and micro-brewers since its higher cost is offset by the consistent and superior results obtained.

You can keep up to date with the brewery's development by checking out their website at www.mayflowerbrewery.co.uk. (This information comes from an article by Alan Gall in *What's Doing - OT hopes to pay Mayflower Brewery a visit in the next couple of months so look for our further report*).

Regional Seasonals

This month sees new beers from all four of our local family brewers. Yes, even Holt's are coming up with something new! The Holt's beer, as yet unnamed, will be a 4.5 per cent brew for the Independent Family Brewers Cask Ale Week, which runs from 17 to 23 September. Unlike any other Holt's beer, the newcomer will be very pale and not as bitter as is usual for Holt's. Just 80 barrels are being produced and as we went to press outlets were not known (although the Railway, West Didsbury, is a likely candidate).

The other three family brewers are each bringing out the latest in their seasonal ranges. Robinson's are reprising Coopers Bell from last year. A refreshing, 4 per cent mid-brown beer, this proved very popular last time around. (on the subject of Robbies' seasonals, we are assured that this year's Whistling Will was unchanged from last time, apart from the use of new season's malt and hops. Many drinkers considered it a better beer, though).

Lees are offering something new in the form of Red Dragon, a 4.5 per cent 'Welsh Honey Ale' brewed with, yup, honey from Wales. The brewery's publicity blurb suggests that "every mouthful urges you to sing from the mountain tops in praise of its splendour" - we shall see. Also with a new beer are Hydes' who have One to Unwind, a 4.5 per cent dark reddish ale dry hopped with Cascade hops. 'A good solid autumnal ale' is how brewing director Paul Jefferies describes it.



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More From the Micros

As usual, the local micros are producing a ranges of new beers in the coming months. Phoenix have Struggling Monkey, a 4.7 per cent pale beer using both US and British hop varieties; White Tornado, a 4.3 per cent clear wheat beer with a full hop palate; and Diamond Geezer at 4.3per cent.

Bolton's Bank Top Brewery's next new beer will be for the annual beer festival held at the town's Howcroft Inn from 10 October. The beer will use Australian Pride of Ringwood hops. Also in the pipeline is a beer named after Greater Manchester Police's new helicopter, India 99. John is still waiting for GMP permission to use the name but if he gets he go-ahead, expect, naturally, an India Pale Ale.

Pictish are reprising last year's successful Staddle Stone, another beer for autumn with a tawny colour and a 'ruby red hue'. As ever with Pictish, though, there will be the usual, and welcome, dry bitter finish.



NEW BOTTLED BEER GUIDE FROM CAMRA

It's a problem we all have to face from time to time. You're thirsting for a pint of real ale but, for some reason - work or family, perhaps - you can't get to the pub. There is, however, an escape route: it's called real ale in a bottle.

It may seem like a contradiction in terms, but, yes, you can have real ale in a bottle. Real ale, according to the CAMRA-agreed definition in the Oxford English Dictionary is 'beer which has been brewed and stored in the traditional way, and which has undergone a secondary fermentation in the container from which it is dispensed'. The definition is usually applied to draught real ales, beers which contain yeast and continue to mature in the cask at the pub (cask-conditioned beers), but it equally applies to bottled beers which contain yeast and mature in the bottle (bottle-conditioned beers). Such beers need to be poured carefully to avoid the yeast sediment dropping into the glass, but the yeast won't do you any harm even if it does. The net result is a beer that tastes fresher, is more complex and has a much lighter texture than ordinary pasteurised and filtered bottled beers.

When CAMRA began life in 1971, there were only five bottle-conditioned beers in regular production: Worthington's White Shield, Guinness Original, Gale's Prize Old Ale, Thomas Hardy's Ale and Courage Imperial Russian Stout.

Guinness, sadly, has now been sacrificed to the pasteuriser, and Imperial Russian Stout and Thomas Hardy's Ale have recently been discontinued, but White Shield is going strong (at its new home at the Bass Museum brewery in Burton) and Gale's has kept faith with the powerful Prize Old Ale down in Hampshire. The good news is that these two stalwarts have now been joined by well over 300 other bottle-conditioned beers, from all over the country. The last few years has seen a remarkable revival in bottled real ale, thanks mostly to the imagination of Britain's smaller breweries and the opportunities provided by high street retailers, mail order companies, specialist beer shops, local craft centres and farmers' markets.

The choice of bottle-conditioned beers is now staggering and CAMRA Books has the whole field covered in the new, third edition of the award winning Good Bottled Beer Guide (sponsored by Safeway). In its handy, pocket-hardback format, the book profiles all bottle-conditioned beers currently available in the UK, and includes features on storing, serving and tasting bottled beers, plus a survey of easy-to-find bottled real ales from overseas.

Compiled by Jeff Evans, eight-times Editor of CAMRA's Good Beer Guide, the Good Bottled Beer Guide is priced £8.99 (a remarkable £3.99 to CAMRA members if ordered direct from CAMRA before the end of October) and is available from good bookshops or (post-free) from CAMRA at 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans AL1 4LW; tel. (01727) 867201 (credit card orders accepted).



Robinson's PART OF THE COMMUNITY

While many regional brewers have disappeared in recent decades, Robinson's is still going strong. An important reason for the brewery's success over the years has been the close and mutually beneficial relationship it has built up with its local community, in Cheshire in general and Stockport in particular.

Unlike many towns in the north west, Stockport continued to prosper following the decline of the cotton industry in the twentieth century. It had been less dependent on textiles than the northern Manchester towns and built up a strong and diversified economic base that included engineering and the retail sector.

This relative affluence meant that many local people still had sufficient disposable income to provide Robinson's with a strong market for its cask conditioned ales, unlike other breweries which were faced with a large fall in demand for their products.

A further factor in Robinson's success has been its extensive network of rural pubs, including many in the Cheshire countryside. The twentieth century saw other estates suffer from an increase in rival leisure attractions such as the cinema and the television, as well as from rising housing standards that made staying at home a more appealing prospect than had previously been the case.

Robinson's foresight in acquiring numerous pubs in picturesque locations, however, enabled it to appeal to a new family-orientated, car-owning, clientele and so further cement its customer base.

While Stockport and Cheshire have been good to Robinson's, the reverse is also true. The brewery has always recognised the importance of ensuring its customers receive the highest standards both in terms of the condition in which their cask conditioned ales are served and the surroundings in which people drink them.

Moreover, the long-standing success of Robinson's has in turn benefited Stockport and Cheshire, most directly through the wealth it has generated for the area and the jobs that have been created at the brewery, the Unicorn Packaging Centre at Bredbury and throughout the estate.

The relationship between Robinson's and its local community is epitomised by the brewery's links with Stockport County Football Club. For the last decade, the Nationwide club has been sponsored by Robinson's, a vital source of revenue for the Hatters at a time when so many teams outside the Premiership are feeling the pinch.

In addition to financial backing, the brewery also plays its part in helping the club in its crucial task of establishing a rapport with its fans via a series of forums held at Robinson's pubs.

There are many more ways in which Robinson's cements its links with all parts of its estate, including Stockport and Cheshire. These range from support for carnivals and shows to aiding charity appeals and other community projects. While this help may often not receive widespread publicity, it is still of great importance to the people involved.

The partnership between Robinson's and the local area has served both well for over 160 years and, at the beginning of a new century, looks set to continue long into the future.



This space is sponsored by Frederic Robinson Ltd.



THE LAB REPORT

Progress is continuing at an ever increasing pace at The LAB in Denton. The test brew has now been successfully produced. The first pint of "St. Annes Ale" was pulled in the Lowes Arms, Denton on 17 August by Peter Wood and Anthony Firmin. It is very popular with the locals and has subsequently been selling FAST! The beer ended up being a 4.8% rather than 4.2% which was the aim but with a lovely ruby colour and an initial roast malt taste, it is full bodied with a light bitterness and leaves a slight dryness in the mouth. The beer was originally going to be called "First Flight" but because the test came out so well, and as a result of the "Rededication of the Bells" at St. Anne's of Haughton church it was decided to rename it "St. Anne's Ale".

The next beer to be produced was "Broomstairs Bitter" and was brewed to be 4.2% ABV. This will be a one-off at this ABV as a decision has been made to change it to 4.3% in future. The following is a list of the beer names, ABV and a brief description with an insight to the names of each one...

Frog Bog Bitter - 3.9% A golden bitter lightly hopped, definitely a quaffing session beer. But why the name "Frog Bog"? A decision was made early on to name the beers after the area to keep a sense of community in the area. Peter and Anthony were searching for a name and whilst looking at an 1892 map of the area found a place about half-a-mile north of the pub called "Frog Bog". But it doesn't end there. Traditionally Public Houses used to keep a couple of frogs in the cellar to kill the flies and when they died they would go to the Frog Bog to get some more.

Wild Wood - 4.1% A lovely ruby coloured beer with and smooth on the palate In the spring of 2000 Bridgewater Ales was commissioned to brew a beer for landlord Peter Wood who has a reputation for being a bit of a wild child. But all good things seem to come to an unpredictable end and along with the sad demise of Bridgewater Ales went the Wild Wood. However, this was one of the beers Peter wanted to produce again, as it had proved very popular at the Lowes Arms in Denton as well as the Beehive in New Mills. When the micro-brewery was set up it Peter insisted this was to be one of the first beers to be reproduced. Without the recipe it was pretty much guess work but they believe they are very close!

Broomstair's Bitter - 4.3% A bitter with a distinctive roast taste and a lingering bitterness in the aftertaste. One of brewer Anthony Firmin's favourite recipes it is a single hop bitter that is a little bit different. The pub is located in the Broomstair area of Denton hence the name.

Haughton Weave - 4.5% A "woosh" pale ale with an interesting weave of 5 hop flavours that flood around the mouth. The pub being located in the Parish of Haughton and textiles being the predominant industry in the area for many years along with the weave of hops in the taste give this interesting beer its name. Hopefully destined to become a firm favourite with discerning beer drinkers.

Denton Dynamite - 5.0% Another strong pale ale but with a single hop that provides fabulous fruity flavours in the bitterness. With the pub located in Denton this beer is sure to be a blast! (*groan - Ed(1)*)

Haughton Hangover - 6.0% A classic porter. Well balanced and smooth, dark with just the right amount of bitterness for this style. This will need plenty of time to mature to be available for this Christmas. Look for it at the National Winter Ales festival at the end of January.

Reverends Ruin - 8.0% A true barley wine which will be available Christmas 2002 - will probably be brewed by the end of September.

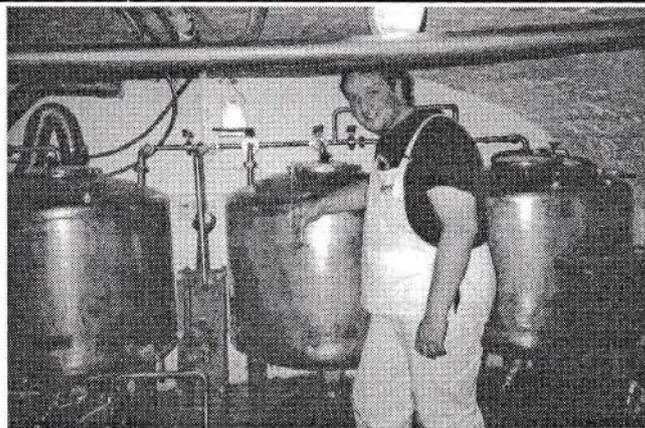
**ANTHONY
FIRMIN
BREWER**

THE LOWES ARMS BREWERY
17 AUGUST 2001

07802 401 400

**THE
LAB**

The Vicar likes a pint or two - but this will blow his socks off!!! In addition to the beers The LAB has available for sale a range of merchandise including T-shirts, polo shirts and



Brewer Anthony Firmin with 'The Lab'

baseball caps. All of these can be purchased at the Lowes Arms in Denton. And for those planning an evening out, Jill and Peter Wood will give you a warm welcome at the Lowes Arms where there is an excellent menu of food

To celebrate the opening of the brewery a launch night is being held on Saturday 29th September at 7pm where there will be Raffle and Beer Quiz where prizes include a gallon of beer, t-shirts and hats. There will also be some entertainment along with free finger food. All are welcome to come along.

CASK ALE WEEK

The Independent Family Brewers of Britain (IFBB) have announced details of a major new initiative which is aimed at promoting cask conditioned ale - Cask Ale Week.

Cask Ale Week will run from Monday 17 September until Sunday 23 September and is designed to provide opportunities for those involved with cask conditioned ale to use the week to promote one of the country's great traditions.

All 33 IFBB members will be running events and promotions which will focus attention on cask conditioned ale and will be aimed at attracting substantial levels of involvement from brewers, pubs and consumers as well as generating plenty of interest from the media. Cask Ale Week activity will be controlled centrally with a national focus but most of the initiatives will be originated and run on a regional basis.

Commenting on the launch, IFBB PR Committee Chairman William Lees-Jones (of local brewers JW Lees) said, "this is a great opportunity for anyone involved in the production, distribution and selling of this great British product to use Cask Ale Week to further enhance the reputation of cask ale and to introduce it to as many people as possible."

"Through various tastings, special offers, and events we will be looking to promote the craftsmanship, quality, passion and pride that goes into producing cask ale, while focussing on the regional qualities that exist and the flavours and tastes which make cask ale such a unique product".

Sales of cask ales in many IFBB pubs have been bucking the national trend in recent times by continuing to rise.

The four local members of the IFBB, Holt's, Hydes', Lees and Robinson's, are all taking part in the Week and will holding a photo-shoot, complete with brewery drays, at Manchester's Rain Bar on Monday 17 September from 12 noon.

In addition Holt's are producing a new beer to mark the event (see Brewery News). Hydes' are donating to their charity, St Anne's Hospice, 5p from every pint of cask ale they sell during the week; are running a half-price student promotion in certain pubs (Victoria, Friendship, Gateway, Fletcher Moss and Eagle, Buxton); and also intend to run a brewery tour for local celebs from Manchester City and Coronation Street.

Robinson's will be holding events at the brewery for the 12 finalists on their Bar & Cellar Competition and new licensees; they hope to get local MP's to have a go at taping barrels and are also looking to arrange a Stockport County 'jobswap', along with a variety of other events.

Stockie on The che

By John Taylor



In this new column I intend to concentrate on the issues that affect local darts and not on the high profile personalities that you can read about in the daily tabloids. I would like to thank the editor for the chance to promote the game that is played by thousands of men and women every week in the pubs that you read about in this paper. I believe that darts is not given a fair coverage in the local press and so hopefully this will be the start of things to come.

In the Stockport Licensed Houses Super League, two teams have dominated Tuesday night darts for well over 10 years; firstly we had Cale Green Social Club and then the Nicholsons Arms on Lancashire Hill, but now we have a new force to be reckoned with, the Royal Mortar on Hillgate. This team has just won the Super League Division for the second season running, and this was achieved without losing a single match all year. One of the team is Darryl Fitton, who recently won the Cheshire Open and who has recently returned to the Cheshire scene, after a couple of seasons playing his county darts for the Red Rose of Lancashire.

This season Darryl along with some of his Royal Mortar team mates, including Kevin Weir and Phil Kerr will be playing for the newly formed Stockport team in the Cheshire Super League. This league has been split into two divisions this year, to save on travelling. The venue will be the Ash Hotel on Manchester Road and the fixtures will take place on a Sunday evening. Their first fixture was a resounding 8-1 win against Warrington and the quality of players who turned out was a sight for sore eyes and included Lancashire stars Les Fitton and Brian Derbyshire. The win was even more convincing when you looked around and saw the number of good players who did not get a game on the night, plus Darryl who away on holiday, and also one of the main bright lights of local darts for many a year, Tony O'Shea who was also unavailable (baby sitting, I believe).

Tony recently got away from child minding and played probably the most important darts matches of his life, and that was when he represented his country at the British International Championships in Scotland. In his first match against Wales he was last on with the score at 6-5 to England. As if the occasion needed any more tension, he dropped the first leg, but then went on to win the next three, to earn England and himself a great win, that inspired him to another win against the 'auld enemy' Scotland. He ended up with a big 30+ average on the day but there was no coverage of this tremendous achievement by any of the local media. Incidentally, Tony had qualified for his England place by finishing third in the national county averages, with one of the two players finishing above him being none other than the present BDO world champion John (boy) Walton.

If anybody reading this column wishes to make an input into any future articles, I would very much like to hear from you. Although I represent the Stockport Licensed Houses, I will include anything that is of benefit and interest to local darts, such as forthcoming weekly knock-outs, good performances by any team or individual or any other issue you wish to raise. Thanks for reading and watch this space, as they say. John Taylor can be contacted on 0161 432 2707.



The King's Hall in Cheadle Hulme was badly damaged in an arson attack at 6.30 on the morning of 25 August. It is thought that those responsible were caught on CCTV. The fire was started with the use of a petrol canister at the back of the pub. The conservatory was badly damaged whilst the whole pub suffered serious smoke damage.

The King's Hall was due for a refurbishment in January with the conservatory due to be extended and this will now form part of the repair work. We understand that the alleged culprits have been caught.

The Bowling Green on Charles Street, off Hillgate, reopened last month following an extensive refurbishment. The pub has been thoroughly gutted and now looks better than it has done for years, both inside and out. What a shame, then, that real ale doesn't feature in what would otherwise be a highly recommended pub.

Following a change of hands, the Nelson on Wellington Road South has returned to the cask ale fold. When OT called this was restricted to just Theakstons XB, although more, including guest beers, may follow.

Laurel Pub Co, formed from the 2,500 pubs in the old Whitbread estate, is targeting 400 of its managed houses for what has been billed as an assault on the cask ale market. However the company has also warned that real ale could vanish from those outlets where it wasn't working - and this could include some of the Hogshead chain.

The plan is for the pubs to each feature four cask ales on the bar, with two of them coming from local and micro brewers. So far, so good. However, this will be the maximum across the board - which means that Hogsheads and other multi-guest beer pubs (the Lass O'Gowrie comes to mind) will see their range cut back dramatically.

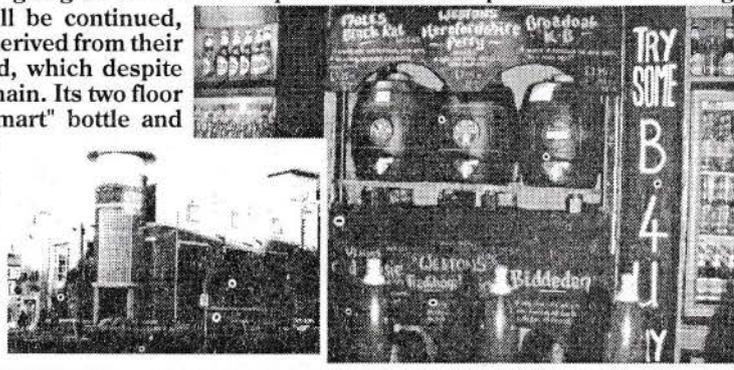
The aim, which in itself can't be faulted, is to go for quality rather than quantity, with managers and staff going through a comprehensive training programme to that cask beer is properly kept and served. It is unfortunate, though, that those pubs which have a proven track record of combining both will be effectively penalised.

Laurel's Communications Director Maureen Hefferman added that "only by making it a premium and aspirational product" would cask ale have a secure future. Call us cynical, but when pub owners talk about 'premium and aspirational products', it means just one thing - expensive, very expensive.

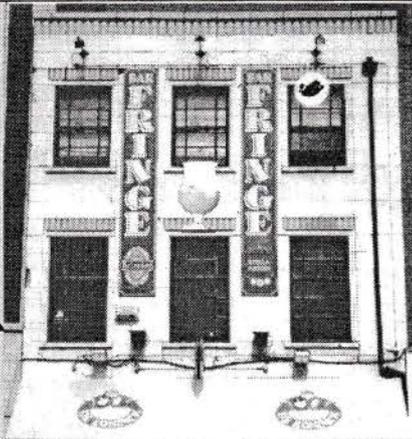


FREESTYLE AT THE HOGSHEAD

When is a Hogshead not a Hogshead? Apparently, when it is 'Freestyle'. Despite the comments from Laurel PubCo quoted in the Pub News item above, there are apparently going to be some exceptions. These are pubs that are trading exceptionally well, where existing arrangements will be continued, presumably to see whether any wider lessons can be derived from their success. One such is the Hogshead on Oxford Road, which despite being called "The Hogshead" is no longer one of the chain. Its two floor layout is now being intelligently utilised with a "smart" bottle and cocktail bar upstairs (ugh!) and a very traditional multi-ale pub downstairs (hooray!). The beer range is excellent, with constantly changing guests, and quality was excellent when Opening Times called. The REALLY exceptional thing though, is the range of traditional ciders - no less than SEVEN! The behind-bar chiller is now used exclusively for cider - and there was even one on handpump. A CAMRA festival is the only place to find a bigger range. Well done indeed!



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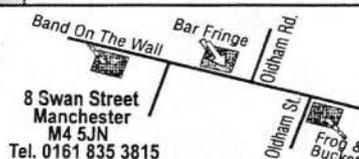
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The current rather ramshackle, if not parlous, state of my health is due, in no small part, to four institutions. In no particular order they are the bar of the Oxford Union, the Nags Head on Hythe Bridge Street, Oxford, The Hole in the Wall at (or at least, very near to) Waterloo Station, and the Beer House on Angel Street, the heart of the Northern (Beer) Quarter of Manchester. You may notice, gentle reader that all four have something in common.... they are all licensed premises.

Of the Oxford Union, all that need be said is that in my time on the Wines & Spirits Committee, the cellar was done up and it went and (creditably) still is, "real" selling at my last look, Wychwood, Wadworths and a guest. This was the heyday of the Campaign For Real Gin (I kid you not), when "young" William Hague was barely out of nappies and buying everyone 14 pints of bitter in hope of becoming President (surprisingly enough, it worked). A very large amount of alcohol was, as is the way with student-kind, consumed.

The Nags head is no more. It is now some ghastly managed house called "Antiquity Hall" serving bottles of pop (alco) to tourists and anyone who can forge an RU18 card. In its pomp it was the most profitable tenancy in the Halls estate, run by two generations of the same family - who were unceremoniously turfed out when the pub was sold off by the brewery, despite all three of the brothers having been born in the place. From the moment I got off the train to closing time, and most weekends, I socialised, played pool, and drank anything that resembled beer.

The 'Hole' is still there. Described in one espionage novel as a place "no-one with the slightest social pretensions would be seen dead in", it probably sells as much real ale as anywhere in London from its 16 handpumps, kept excellently by Brian & Dean, but is about as far removed from CAMRA as a pub possibly can be. In fact the only other CAMRA member I've ever seen in there was from Stockport Branch! Which brings me, lugubriously to the point of this diatribe. Because in my opinion, the same (far removed from CAMRA) can almost be said of the Beer House.

The Beer House has evolved under its four last incumbents. The first time I walked in, when it was in the hands of the estimable, if wildly eccentric, Simon Finch, the first thing I noticed was a customer fast asleep on the bar. "Budge 'im up" said the genial host, "he won't wake up". I knew at once that I had found a home from home.

When Graham Rawlinson bought the place (Simon had gone bust, which surprised us not at all), much of its seedy splendour was well established, but Graham was determined to create a temple of beer, where serious beer drinking was going to be a lot of fun. Aably abetted by Peter Caton, a horrendous range of bottled Belgian beers was built up, all of which (400 odd) I was induced to try, and many of which were absolutely ghastly. Trying a gueuze for the first time without warning was an experience I will never forget. Peter (and Graham) wanted the largest number of bottled beers in any pub, and Peter was determined to have the largest number of handpumps - somewhat over 20, I recall. This led to activities like the 'gold run', going round the handpumps in pints to win a terrible t-shirt. It was stopped before anyone died, which, I suppose is just as well. In-pub Beer festivals proliferated. I found my "Dunker than Drumbo" festival t-shirt the other day - then there was Drumbo's Revenge...and who can forget (or wan't to be reminded of) Albert the mad cider apple....fine days when we still seemed young and beer drinking was a glorious adventure.

After Peter moved on to Oldham, and Graham made a major investment in the pub with a new bar and a (sensible) reduction in handpumps - indeed the old layout with a sort of triangular formica and papier-mache bar sticking out into the room - rendering a third of the floor-space unusable, had lasted longer than God intended, Graham made an announcement at a North Manchester CAMRA meeting in the Kings Arms in Salford, that Idy & Sal were coming from Liverpool (and Italy) to take over. There was stunned outrage - a scouser in Manchester? What do Italians know about beer? Well as most of us now know it all turned out very well, and under Idy & Sal's careful stewardship, the Beer House went from strength to strength. The frequency of beer festivals increased, including the infamous attempt to sell 400 Beers in one month (five beer festivals in May). As I recall it reached 386. Eventually Idy & Sal moved on to the Crescent, wanting to run

Knott Bar Fringe

Due to the sterling efforts of John Henley and his team, Knott Bar Fringe opened on time to an invited audience on August 23. The pub may not have been entirely finished, but it was able to serve beer. A very nice job has been done, and maximum use of the interesting spaces created by its situation (it is under the railway bridge arch on the North side of Deansgate - come out of the station and it's across the road) means it is tards-like inside. The roofed balcony is a particularly nice feature - almost european. Well worth a visit, and at the time of writing the kitchen had just been finished, so food is now available to complement the very decent beer range.



The views expressed in this article are those of its author. They are not to be considered representative of CAMRA nationally, locally or indeed of Opening Times

The Beer House Remembered

their own business rather than be managers forever, and they have made a great success of it. As Graham ruefully put it, "They're doing very well, but I wish they were doing very well in Leeds or Liverpool, rather than two miles up the road".

The peculiar thing is that by and large CAMRA support seemed to leave at the same time.

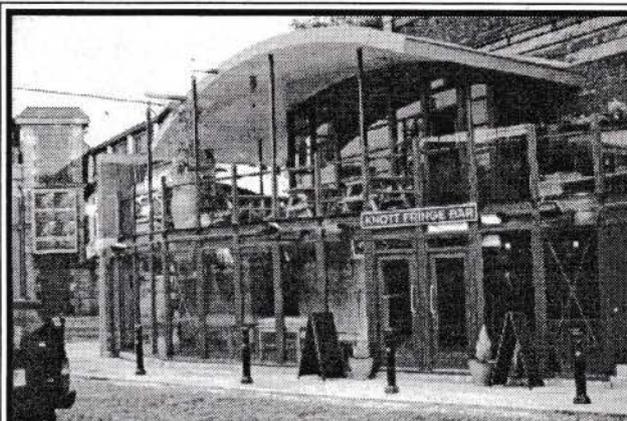
Now there are quite a few members of Stockport & South Manchester Branch (not, I hasten to add, its "owning" branch) who do not like the BeerHouse. Fine and dandy. There are some who do not like, or disapprove of multi ale pubs, period. Especially ones that specialise in "new" beers exclusively from micros. There are others who like family pubs, and still others who go for a bit of plush. Plush the Beer House is not. Posh it is not, it is a no-nonsense basic boozier, celebrating the vast diversity of microbrewery ales. I'd used to moan occasionally about the effort involved in always having some new beers on for our "ticking" brethren - some of whom will simply not drink the same beer twice, ever, and Ian Casson, the current incumbent, has moved heaven and earth to always present the bulk of his beers as 'new'. This is what makes the BeerHouse an institution, unique in Manchester, and very unusual anywhere. You can virtually guarantee that there will be a number of 'new' beers to tick on any visit, and Ian raised the ante by having nineteen official beer festivals in less than two years, and the place is a virtual beer festival on any day. The oddest aspect is the apparent attitude of the local CAMRA branch (*what follows is specifically the strongly held view of both Ian and Graham*). They (the local branch) seem to virtually ignore the place, and when they have something to say, almost invariably it is a moan. Running the Beer House cellar is like running a perpetual CAMRA Beer Festival stillage, rather than a normal pub operation. Whilst there IS a cheap standard beer, the real standard is any one of the eleven guests. Graham and Ian have no access to Wetherspoons-level discounts, but have fought hard to keep prices down to a reasonable level, and given that beers come from all corners of the UK, the Irish Republic and even France, its quite an achievement. Now the guys don't expect to be showered with plaudits, they recognise that CAMRA is a campaigning consumer organisation, and complaining when something is not right goes with the territory, but it is also, surely, essential to celebrate and point out things that are good. The odd note of approval (choice of ales and quality) might have been nice. Considering how much work Ian has put in, and how much investment Graham has made over the years, (he did after all eventually get round to putting in a new gents - pace Dave Glass), recognition that Manchester possessed a truly remarkable institution would have been welcome. CAMRA members do use the place, in droves, but remarkably few from the local branch, they come instead from Warrington, Leeds, Sheffield, Stoke, Clwyd and even London.

Last month I prophesied that with Ian leaving, Graham might just decide to wash his hands of the whole thing. Well you read it here first. People never appreciate what they have, just moan when its gone, well by the time the next issue of Opening Times comes out, the BeerHouse as I knew it will have gone. The building will still be there, it will still be a pub, and it will still (I believe) be called the BeerHouse, but subject to contractual hitches it will be the tenanted pub of a local-based pubco (as will another of Graham's pubs, the excellent Cemetery in Rochdale). Graham told me that in a time of increasing competition (especially the Lloyds/Wetherspoon operation in the Printworks), without greater support it didn't seem worth carrying on. Not getting the support takes the fun out of it all.

Now Opening Times will welcome the new tenants and wish them every success, the group do have a number of successful real-ale pubs, with a fairly wide but nevertheless restricted list of beers. Indeed the Cemetery would seem to fit their style nicely. It is a positive sign that they specifically wanted the Beer House, so it may well prove to be a successful and well run pub. I certainly hope it is, but the "All Year Beer Festival" of thirty brand new beers a week will have closed its doors for the last time. However good the new operation is, it will not be my BeerHouse. That will live on only in memories. "Simply the Best" was Graham's motto for the pub. Indeed. Goodbye old friend, and thank you.

Mea Maxima Culpa

Even Homer nods and it appears that I was the victim of exaggerated rumour last month. Contrary to "common knowledge" and comments I made in this column in August's organ, I am delighted to confirm that Vance's Empire (The Marble Arch & the Chorlton emporia), have NOT in fact been sold and remain in the usual hands, though there appears to be some re-arrangements between Vance and Jan. Therefore things at the excellent Northern Quarter Pub/Organic brewery remain unchanged in the immediate/foreseeable future. Apparently however, serious offers to buy would be entertained.



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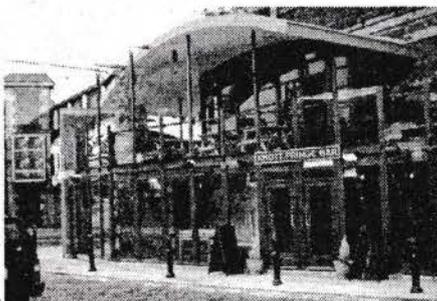
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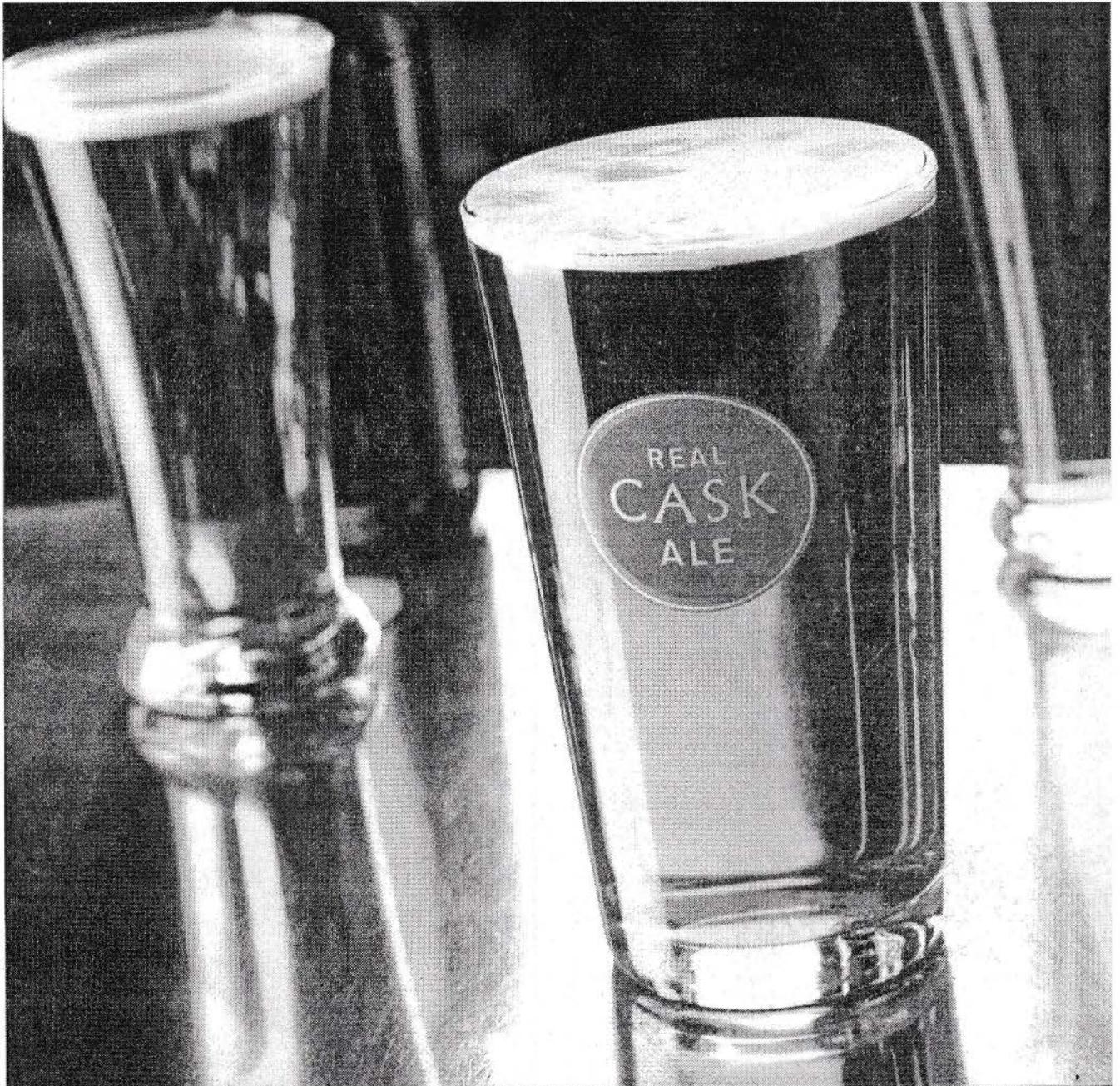
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TICKING IN TALLINN

Phil Booton goes all Baltic...

Many people may be asking – Tallinn, where's that? Well, it's the capital of Estonia, for many years part of the USSR, but now proudly independent. It is a city with a population of 415,000 and has been described as "the new Prague". Perhaps this is a bit of an exaggeration but it is becoming a popular tourist destination for a weekend break. It is a compact city and the best way of getting around is to walk, although there are trams and trolley buses.

The attraction of Estonia for the beer tourist is that it has a well-established beer-drinking culture, rather like other East European countries. There are seven Estonian breweries and although none are actually located in Tallinn, all their beers are available in the city. The most common styles of beer are the ubiquitous Pils, stronger lagers and strong porters, an Estonian speciality.

My first port of call was **Hell Hunt, Pikk 39**, in the old town. This vaguely Irish-style pub, bare boards, beer-related posters, blackboards, has an interesting intimate snug to the rear. It had a few Estonian beers on draught among the Guinness and Kilkenny. I tried A Le Coq Premium (4.7) from the Tartu Brewery and Magus Mary (4.0) from the Parnu Brewery. The latter was a clear, sweetish cherry beer. In bottle I sampled two beers from Estonia's largest brewery, Saku – Hard Rock (7.5) and Sack Bei Reval (5.0), the former being deceptively easy to drink. This pub also serves cheap, filling food – try the soup!

The next pub was **Kalle Kusta, Viru 21**, a rather bare cellar restaurant with a horse theme. Here I tried two beers from the Viru Brewery, Toolse (4.7), a pils, and Palmse (5.6), a dark porterish beer. I thought both these to be a bit bland. As everywhere in Tallinn, English was spoken here and service was good. Both beers were 25 Estonian Kroons (EK) a half-litre, which equates to about £1 a pint, a pretty standard price in Tallinn.

Near the centre of the old town, just off the main square, is **Karja Kelder, Vaike-Karja 1**, another cellar bar, with an excellent range of beers. On draught I had Saku Tume (6.7), a very tasty dark beer. In bottle (in the course of two visits!) I tried A Le Coq Porter (6.5), more like a strong mild but very nice, Rock Ale (5.3), Bear Beer (4.9), Alexander (5.2), all these three lager-type beers, and Tartu Double Bock (8.0), a surprisingly light beer for its strength. Very good-value food here also - sausage, sauerkraut and fries for 50EK, for example.

I called in another recommended bar, **Vana Villemi, Tartu mnt. 52**, situated on the way to the airport some distance out of the centre. This was a traditional-style pub, bare boards, spacious, dartboard. Only about three Estonian beers available here. I tried Saku Original (4.6), the biggest-selling beer in Estonia, an ordinary Pils, which I nevertheless found quite hoppy and refreshing. If anything prices for Saku beers seemed higher than for other breweries.

The highlight of my visit was the **Olletorn, Liivalaia 40**, near the new Hotel Olympia. This pub is quite difficult to find – look out for the sign on an archway set back from the road. It is a locals pub with a small outside drinking area, away from the tourist beat and consequently cheaper. Almost every Estonian beer seemed to be available. On draught I sampled Munchen Vaskne (Sillamae Brewery – 6.2), an amber, supposedly Munich-style beer. In bottle: Nigula Brewery WBG Swing (6.5), which drank its strength; Parnu Brewery Viking (5.5), a rather bland lager; Karme Brewery Ordumeister (6.0), a dark beer which is unpasteurised and unfiltered. This completed my collection of all seven Estonian breweries. I was sorely tempted by the Viru 2000 Millennium (10.0), as all the bottled beers were 19EK, or about 70p!

Other places worth a visit are Molly Malone's, an Irish pub just off the main square; **Tristan and Isolde**, a cafe on the main square, at which I tried Karksi Premium (4.7) from the Karme Brewery; and, the hotel where I stayed, **Mihkli, Endla 23**, which serves beers from Sillamae Brewery, including Munchen Tume (5.8). I had obtained a list of pubs in Tallinn from the internet but discovered that several have closed. One recommended pub, **Ale Kok, Tatari 56**, was closed when I called, but it wasn't clear whether this

was permanent. I didn't have time to try **Bierstube, Suda 7**, which is a German-style restaurant with a good range of beers. There is also an "English pub" called the Englishman in the Hotel Olympia, Liivalaia 33.

So to sum up I would recommend Tallinn for a weekend break. It is cheap and friendly with some excellent pubs. I did however find many of the beers to be a bit gassy – the darker beers were on the whole less so. Incidentally I was interested to see that the custom in Tallinn is to order and pay at the bar as in the UK, rather than table service, as in many other continental countries. Another plus is that pubs are usually open all day from 11 in the morning until at least midnight. For more information on Tallinn in general, visit the informative website at: www.tallinn.ee, or for details of Estonian beers: www.beerguide.ee.

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Spotting the Broad Picture

In last month's "OT", Phil Booton complains that many CAMRA members refuse to accept "beer spotting" as a legitimate activity. Personally I have no problem with it at all - if people want to spot new and rare beers, good luck to them. But beer spotting as such has precious little to do with campaigning for real ale, just as there's no automatic link between train spotting and campaigning for better transport networks.

It would be great if members of the beer spotting fraternity were willing to play a constructive part in the range of issues covered by their local CAMRA branches. But unfortunately all too often we hear them carping from the sidelines and dismissing as without interest the long-established independent breweries and the traditional two-beer locals that form the backbone of the real beer and real pub scene. As long as that attitude persists it's hardly surprising that many CAMRA members have little time for them.

Wolves Set Free

It was good news that Wolves & Dudley managed a narrow escape from the fatal embrace of Pubmaster. While Wolves are by no means perfect, this is a far better outcome than the scorched earth policy towards their breweries that their rivals would have pursued. But you have to wonder just how long any publicly-quoted integrated brewing and pub business can survive in the face of the money men's obsession with global brands and short term profits. The reason we still have four substantial independent breweries operating with a fair degree of success in Greater Manchester is that they are family-controlled businesses that can afford to take a long-term view and don't have to answer to the City every six months. So I would suggest to David Thompson, Wolves' chairman, that if he wants to see his business survive more than a couple of years, he should take steps to arrange a management buy-out and take the company private.

Low-Alcohol Lunches

According to a recent survey of British companies, lunchtime drinking should be banned and staff subjected to random drug tests to curb high levels of substance abuse among employees. Three quarters of firms questioned said they wanted their staff to refrain from the traditional liquid lunch while a further one in three said it was considering introducing drug and alcohol tests in the office because workers were not performing to the best of their ability. But surely this misses the point. Unless you're in a safety-critical role, having a swift half at lunchtime is hardly going to impact on work performance, and the demotivating effect of banning it could be far worse. We hear all this talk nowadays of "empowerment" and "employee involvement", but in reality employees seem to be subject to ever more petty and intrusive regulations. The key to a harmonious, productive workplace must be trust between employers and employees, and clamping down on even a modest lunchtime tipple shows a singular lack of it.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.co.uk

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

AUGUST '96

There was bad news and good news on the front page in September 1996. Guest beers were under threat, and Dave Porter had bought Byron's.

In bizarre, and potentially extremely damaging proposals, the European Commission was threatening to undermine the guest beer provision, which allowed tenants of national brewers to buy one cask conditioned beer from outside the tie. But, thankfully, possibly realising the enormity of what they were about, they began to beat a hasty retreat. The purchase of Byron's was described as one of the most exciting developments on the Stockport pub scene since the opening of the Crown Ale House. It was to revert to its original name of the Railway, and its beers would score on both quality and price - from Mild at £1.05, to Sunshine at £1.45.

The long-running saga of the Stalybridge Buffet Bar seemed to be drawing to a close. This terminology often heralded imminent demise, but not in this case. John Hesketh and Sylvia Wood of the Station in Ashton-under-Lyne were the successful bidders for the lease, which was very good news, but it also signalled the end of the Buffet's long connection with the Redfern family. Plans for the re-opening were well underway, and the conclusion was "we can now look forward with optimism to the future of this much-loved institution."

Another item was headed "End of an Era" - this was a reference to Kay Ord's departure from the Olde Vic in Edgeley. In her 10 years there she achieved two Pub of the Month awards, a Pub of the Year and numerous Good Beer Guide entries. The Vic was the very first pub in the town to sell a constantly changing array of beers from a whole range of brewers, covering the whole spectrum from family independents to new-wave micros, and was also the first to sell Taylor's Landlord on a regular basis.

"Unspoilt by Progress" is the well-known trade-mark of Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries, the company that owns Banks's, and until a few years ago they could probably claim the slogan to be true. But Curmudgeon's column was headed "Spoilt by Progress", and it listed a number of reasons. They closed their Hanson's Brewery at Dudley, and killed off Hanson's Bitter, and then re-launched Banks's Mild as plain Banks's. They moved into this area and spent vast sums building new pubs, none of which had really been a great success. They flirted with nitrokeg and there were Banks's pubs offering nothing but. These antics had resulted in the share price yo-yoing up and down, but never really going anywhere much.

A final item of pub news - the "famous little pub", the Harp & Shamrock, was due to reopen as the Pot of Beer freehouse.

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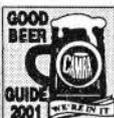


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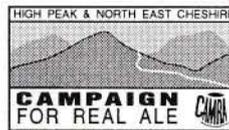
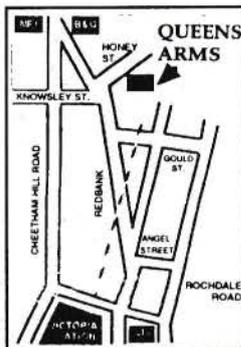
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SEPTEMBER FEATURED PUB The Pineapple, Stalybridge

This month we move into the Tameside area of the Branch and to the Pineapple on Kenworthy Street in Stalybridge town centre.

The pub itself is on the corner of Kenworthy Street and the main road High Street, and was once part of an area of terraced houses, yards and courts, long since demolished leaving it standing in splendid isolation on the corner. It has a pleasing exterior appearance with a tiled upper half.

The Pineapple was opened in 1873 by a grocer called John Kenworthy. The year before he had been a beer-house keeper on Grasscroft Street; he was succeeded by Edward Kenworthy, a brass moulder.

Isaac Knight owned and ran it in the 1880's and in 1897 Sarah Knight put the pub up for auction when it was described by the local paper as 'admirably adapted for its purpose'. On the ground floor was a spacious vault, music room and snug and various clubs met there, such as the Carpenters & Joiners.

The buyers were Schofields Portland Brewery who paid £5,800. They were based in Bentinck Street, Ashton, and had 42 tied houses by the time they were taken over by Robinson's in 1921.

The pub was considerably refurbished in 1984 but the original Kenworthy Street entrance remains. The interior of the pub is semi-open plan with several rooms and separate drinking areas, one of which is a large traditional games room. Mark the licensee has also recently introduced a full-size snooker table in the upstairs room and this can be hired for games. There is also a nice quiet snug with no intrusive music, as is the case in the rest of the pub. Outside are a beer garden and the large car park (accessed from Kenworthy Street and not the main road).

The pub is one of those on the once famous Stalybridge 8 pub crawl, but no-one can seem to remember which number it was!

Another plus point for the pub is that it is close to the newly re-opened Huddersfield Canal in the centre of Stalybridge, and handily placed for anyone mooring nearby.

The beer is Robinson's, with Hatters Mild, Best Bitter, the seasonal beer, and in summer XB, and in winter Frederics, all on handpump. Bar snacks are also available.

Mark is turning this good quality local into a thriving pub, with a Monday evening computer club, pool teams, and regular meetings of the Stalybridge Motor Cycle Club and various sporting groups, including the Manchester United Supporters Club who meet there on Tuesdays.

The Pineapple is open 4-11 Mon-Thur; 12-11 Fri/Sat and 12-10.30 on Sundays. It is only a 7-8 minute walk from Stalybridge Station and buses 220, 343, 338 and 389 pass the pub.



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In 1999 real cask ale received less than 2% of the total UK advertising spend on beer. The truth is that in today's complex brewing and pubs market, most big companies can't be bothered to sell you interesting beers that require care to keep in the pub and go off if not properly looked after.

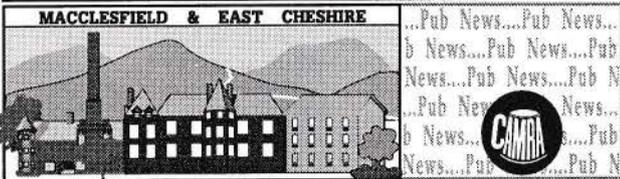
The fact is that real cask ale is brewed using natural ingredients. Endless varieties of hops and malted barley are crafted together to create over 2000 different brews. Unfortunately, it's only the enlightened few that seem to enjoy them. A majority of drinkers choose the same old boring lagers - led by the latest huge-spend TV advertising campaign. Don't be afraid - try something different for a change! Just because you don't know the brand name, it doesn't mean that it won't be any good!

60,000 CAMRA members are fighting back. We believe that the only reason most younger drinkers prefer the safety net of big brand lagers is because successful marketing has made it 'uncool' to try anything different.

In March 2001 CAMRA launched the biggest generic promotion of real British beer for over fifty years. This campaign to 'Ask if it's Cask', is this month entering its second phase with new posters to tempt the most hardened lager lover to try the delights of fresh, cool real cask ale.

If you think the world of real ale is closed off to all but fat men with beards, think again! What can be more stylish than a beer that meets the needs of all modern consumers - cool, refreshing, natural and available. Just to cap things off, every real ale tastes different.

Life's too short to drink the same old lager every day. Be individual. Try something different. Try a pint of real cask ale - next time you go to the pub - Ask if it's Cask!



The Redway Tavern in Kerridge has been sold and immediately closed for a refurbishment. It has now re-opened and is selling Tetley's Bitter and two guest beers - Old Speckled Hen and Greene King IPA on my visit, however they both retail at £2.10 a pint. The pub is owned by the same group that owns the Lord Eldon in Knutsford - Gaynor Qualter. The Meridian in Bollington has changed hands yet again - while it still sells Moroccan food it now has real ale back on the menu - Pedigree and Black Sheep at the moment.

The New Inn in Wilmslow has undergone a refurbishment and has been renamed the Coach and Four.

In Bollington, the Church House has been sold to a pub chain and the Vale is now for sale as a private residence.

In Langley, the Leathers Smithy has been bought by Scottish & Newcastle so I suppose the choice of beers will suffer as a result. Also the St. Dunstan is to get a much over due refurbishment and will be closed from the 12th of September for about 10 days.

In Wilmslow, the George and Dragon is closed and boarded up. This is a terrible waste of a splendid pub building. I suppose the proliferation of cafe/wine bars in the area over recent years has led to the George not getting enough trade and hence its closure - a great shame.

The new J D Wetherspoon's pub on Park Lane, Macclesfield opened on 18th July and an impressive place it is too. Formerly a college, it goes by the name of 'The Society Rooms' and in keeping with the company policy it has no jukebox, it serves good value food and has a no smoking area.

It is obvious that a lot of money has been spent creating this huge pub, which is open plan but manages to break up the floor space by the use of split level seating. There is an outside drinking area, well away from the road, but the car park belongs to Macclesfield council so it is a pay and display until after 6pm. What really impresses me is the disabled access. Not only is there a ramp to the main door, but there is also a special disabled toilet on the ground floor (ask for the key behind the bar), however the physically fit amongst us must use the toilets on the first floor. On my visit seven real ales were available on handpump - Boddingtons, Theakstons, Directors, Tanglefoot, Abbot, Spitfire & Hopback Summer Lightning (the last 3 retail at £1.49 a pint) with the promise of guest ales in the future. On the down side there is no mild available and the lagers are cheaper than the real ales.

On the food front you can get 2 meals for a fiver every day, there is a steak menu after 2pm each day and on Thursdays between 6 and 8pm there is a curry night - £3.99 for a curry and a pint of Theakstons.

The Society Rooms certainly has promise and I wish it the best of luck. The Freemasons in Knutsford has changed hands and is advertising 4 cask ales (Theakstons Mild and Bitter, Bass and Worthington). This pub has had a mixed history. A long-time Burtonwood outlet, it recently had a spell in the wilderness with no real ale at all. This is an encouraging development, although beers from independent brewers would have been more welcome.

The Grape & Grain in Wilmslow has become a Wetherspoons outlet, although with a very narrow beer range, at least initially. Up the road, Hydes' New Inn has reopened after a major make-over, renamed as the Coach & Four.

The fashionable Roebuck in Moberley has been awarded The Cask Marque for the quality of its cask ales. They currently serve Timothy Taylor's Landlord, and for the less discriminating, Tetley's. They are now achieving sufficient volume to rotate two guest ales each week. Batemans XXXB and London Pride were on recently. Great grub too!

John Tune adds, Hydes have opened 'Jar Bar'. This is a cafe-bar style bar. On the opening night three beers were available, Hydes bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the seasonal guest, since then the guest handpump has disappeared.

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THE MILD WALKING CHALLENGE

Steve Robinson and Sue Ridings strike out

We had previously taken part in the Mild Challenge before, having obtained five tee-shirts between us. This time we decided to go for a tankard each by visiting all of the 66 listed pubs. This didn't seem too much of a problem(?!), but we decided to make the Challenge harder. As we're both keen fell walkers, and all our favourite hills and tracks were closed due to the foot and mouth problem, we would try and walk to all these pubs, hopefully keeping ourselves fit, and making the Challenge even more interesting. We realised, though, that the distance involved was likely to exceed 100 miles, and if any pubs were shut (i.e. on Sunday afternoons etc) or has no mild available, then we would have to walk there and back again! Living in Norris Bank, one mile from Stockport town centre, all trips were to commence from, visit the pubs en route, and return to either home or Stockport.

We left home on Day 1 of the Challenge, Sunday 8 April, at lunchtime and decided to visit as many Manchester City Centre pubs as possible - out via Longsight, back via Burnage. On the outward part of this journey disaster struck. We arrived at the Sir Edwin Chadwick after a three-mile trek only to find that the mild hadn't been ordered early enough. What a start! The manager was very apologetic, and in fairness we had been in several times before and the beers have always been good. The mild was to have been made especially available for the Challenge anyway.

We then carried on into Manchester (for a further three miles) but only managed four 'stamps' as two pubs weren't open at all on Sunday, and some were not open Sunday afternoons. The one pub in Burnage was visited on the way home, but the weather had turned nasty since leaving Manchester and we arrived home thoroughly soaked. Just five pubs done, although five different milds consumed, and 15 miles walked. We were tired, dispirited and thought of quitting. The Challenge was going to be harder than we had thought, or maybe beyond us!

Day 2: Monday 9 April gave us the opportunity to regain some confidence. We both have active social lives but this evening was free. Again the weather was awful but we managed four pubs in the Hillgate/Offerton area (meeting Ed (1) en route by chance), covering four miles and drinking Hatters Mild in all four. We felt a little more upbeat about our chances of success after this leg of the journey.

The next opportunity arose on Good Friday, 13 April, and we agreed to target Gatley South, Heald Green, Airport, Gatley and Cheadle, back via Edgeley. For a change we remained dry all day, visited eight pubs (one in Cheadle closed afternoons), walked 15 miles, and sampled seven different milds (three from Hydes). We were well satisfied with our progress.

On Easter Saturday our feet were sore in the morning, but we planned to push ourselves a bit harder - Salford, via Didsbuey, Withington, Rusholme, then all remaining Manchester City Centre pubs, back via Longsight. We kept dry until Rusholme, but arrived like drowned rats in Salford, and the rain never stopped before we arrived back home. Still, what a day! Ten pubs visited, 17 miles walked, and nine different milds sampled (two from Robinson's - Hatters and the rarely available Dark Mild) including the excellent Bateman's, newly available in the Sir Edwin Chadwick at just £1.06 a pint (all was forgiven).

Easter Sunday gave us yet another day to consolidate. We planned a leisurely (?) stroll to Woodford, then Cheadle Hulme, Adswold, Cale Green and back home through Edgeley. Just six scattered pubs visited in fine weather, 17 miles walked and three different milds including, disappointingly, one keg (Kimberley) in the Governor's House, Cheadle Hulme. We understood this was due to the new licensee being told that the brewery were unable to supply him with cask conditioned mild. Even more frustratingly, the Greyhound in Edgeley had no mild ready for consumption, it wasn't to be ready until the following day.

Easter Monday gave us both some kind of a break from the Challenge, but we had travelled to Anglesey and visited a few Robinson's pubs which of course all sold Hatters Mild, and some more was sampled!

33 pubs done, 33 to go. After just one week we were well ahead of schedule and well satisfied. *(more next month)*



Peter Edwardson has been a CAMRA member for over twenty years and has lived in Stockport since 1984. For many years he has been a leading member of the organising committee for Stockport Beer & Cider Festival and he has also been Secretary of the local branch of CAMRA, in two separate stints, for far too long. While normally a mild-mannered chap he has been known to express the occasional "curmudgeonly" opinion. Although he admits to starting drinking real ale on Greenall's "Local Bitter", he seems to have made a full recovery.

"My first experience of drinking real ale was in the unlamented "Greenall Whitley Land" in the late 70s. Although it must be said that in those days Greenalls Bitter, described by the "Good Beer Guide" as "sharp, fruity and creamy", was not at all a bad drink. It was only in the 80s that the accountants got to it and reduced it in the years before the closure of the brewery to a dismal apology for beer. But it wasn't long before I realised that there were far more interesting and worthwhile beers to be found further afield.

"So my five 'Desert Island Beers' are as follows (in no particular order): "Brakspear's Bitter. In the early 80s I lived for a few years in the south-east, and was impressed by the variety of independent brewery beers available there, if you knew where to look, which completely contradicted the usual Northern stereotype of "Southern beer". Many of these beers are still available - Youngs, Fullers, Harveys, Shepherd Neame, Gales - although not all are what they once were, but to my mind the best of the lot was and is Brakspear's. Their "ordinary" bitter is only 3.4% ABV, but it is a superb and highly distinctive beer, full of flavour, very hoppy but with an underlying malty depth. Beer writer Michael Jackson has, with justification, named it as the classic English bitter, so it's a pity it's so rarely seen in the free trade up here. It also reminds me of unspoilt little thatched pubs hidden away in the Chiltern beechwoods, some of which have hopefully avoided being either closed or turned into "gastropubs".

"Whim Hartington Best Bitter. Many beers are widely considered to be much blander than they once were, Boddingtons Bitter being the prime example. However, one feature of the many micro-breweries that have sprung up in the past twenty years is that they haven't been afraid of uncompromising flavours, particularly in producing some seriously hoppy beers. I remember visiting the Whim Brewery in its isolated Peak District location, on a freezing winter's day just before it started brewing, and being treated to generous hospitality (cups of tea) by owner Giles Litchfield. This really is a very hoppy, bitter beer, but far from one-dimensional, and it's one I'll always go for if I spot it on the bar of a free house. If anyone asks me to name my one favourite beer, Hartington Best Bitter is usually the answer I give, although really it's an unanswerable question.

"Hop Back Summer Lightning. The micro-breweries have also been responsible for introducing a whole new style of beer to Britain - the "dangerously drinkable" strong pale ale. There have been many fine examples such as Kelham Island Pale Rider, Porter's Sunshine and the fondly remembered Dobbin's Yakima Grande Pale Ale, but Summer Lightning is undoubtedly the classic of the style - very pale, very hoppy yet very easy to drink, as I know to my cost on more than one occasion. I vaguely remember enjoying several pints in the brewery's own pub, the Wyndham Arms in Salisbury.

"Tisbury Real Nut Ale. Another innovation of the micro-brewery sec-

tor has been introducing new and exotic flavourings to beer. Some of these completely pass me by - in particular beers flavoured with fruits such as cherries and raspberries, which seem to be a totally incongruous combination. However, I'm much more amenable to the idea of flavouring beer with nuts and spices, and this dry, full-bodied beer, brewed with real chestnuts, looked right up my street. I was bowled over by it the first time I tasted it, and while I've only come across it two or three times since I've never been disappointed. "Robinson's Old Tom. While the micro-breweries have greatly increased the choice and variety of real ales available to us, I remain a strong supporter of the established independent breweries, and we are fortunately in Greater Manchester to still have four in operation, all of which brew some excellent beers. I make no apologies for naming my local brewery in Stockport as my particular favourite, and Old Tom is a true world classic - rich and warming yet at the same time dry and complex, totally unlike the cloying sweetness of most beers of that strength.

I have fond memories on various CAMRA trips to the Davenport Arms in Woodford of the landlord, the late and much-missed John Hallworth, inviting the party to partake of 'a glass of Old'."

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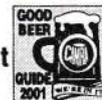
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CAMRA CALLING!

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

SEPTEMBER 2001

Thursday 13th - Monthly Branch Meeting; Adswood Hotel, Adswood Lane West, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm.

Friday 14th - Mild Challenge winners trip to Hydes Brewery. Meet at Brewery 7.30pm.

Monday 17th - Meet the Branch and membership recruitment night: Hinds Head, Manchester Road, Heaton Chapel. Starts 8.00pm.

Friday 21st - Adswood/Cheadle Stagger: 7.30pm Cross Keys, Adswood Rd; 8.30pm Red Lion, Stockport Rd, Cheadle.

Monday 24th - Social: Travellers Call, Hyde Rd, Gorton. Starts 9.00pm.

Thursday 27th - Pub of the Month presentation to Old House At Home, Burton Rd, Withington. From 8.00pm onwards.

Saturday 29th - Minibus to Keighley Beer Festival (and possibly Turkey in Goose Eye, which is now brewing). Minibus leaves Crown, Heaton Ln 10.00am, back in Stockport by mid-evening. Book with Paul Formby on 0161 612 0759 (after 6.00pm)

Friday 5th October - New Members Trip to Leyden Brewery. Minibus leaves Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport at 7.00pm. Book with Paul Moss on 0161 439 8309.

Saturday 6th - Regional Pub of the Year Presentation to the Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. 8.00pm onwards.

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

SEPTEMBER 2001

Monday 10th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Buffet Bar, Stalybridge Station. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 22nd - Branch Trip to Hart Brewery. Details from Tom Lord on 0161 427 7099.

Saturday 6th - Sunday 14th October - Branch trip to Prague. Details from Tom Lord.

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 10th - Macclesfield Pub Crawl (begin at the Railway View on Byron's Lane at 8pm, and onward to the Albion at 8.45, the Travellers Rest at 9.30, the Lord Byron at 10.00 and the Sun at 10.30)

Monday 24th - Campaigning Meeting, Castle, Macclesfield. A gem, usually serving cask mild.

There are rumours the Castle may be threatened with closure. Come along and see it while you can!

Monday 8th October - Autumn Pub of the Season, British Flag, Macclesfield. We pay homage to a great pub



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22

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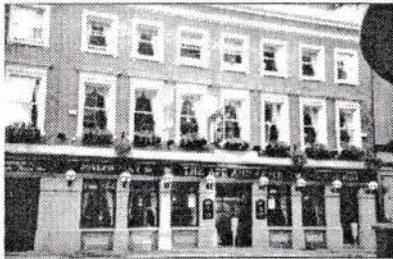
MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

Not so much this month, following August's mega-column. Still, one or two nuggets, though.

I suppose the big story is what appears to be a largely unreported change in the attitude of the police and magistrates to new licenses in the City Centre. After several years of a virtual free-for-all, the new approach looks at local concentrations and if part of the City Centre is already well-stocked with bars then new licenses in that part of town are going to be much harder to come by. The first casualty of the new approach is Wetherspoon's who have been knocked back in their attempt to get a licence for the building on the corner of Deansgate and Quay Street. This, of course, is in the thick of the Great Northern/Peter Street circuit where bars already proliferate and where, it seems, enough is now enough.

After lobbing a number of (well-deserved) brickbats at Holt's for their antics at the **Railway**, West Didsbury, it's time for an equally well-deserved bouquet. I mentioned last month that the **Ape & Apple** was in the throes of refurbishment and now the covers have come off to reveal a really first-class job. The ground floor has been transformed by the addition of a number of wood and glass screens to create a series of alcoves and separate areas, add in new furniture and seating, including a number of easy chairs, and the result is very impressive indeed.

There's even a no-smoking area. When I called I felt that the extensive use of dark wood and cut glass gave the pub something of a London gin-palace feel. It's certainly worth a visit - the beer's still good and there's now a greater emphasis on food, which is now available 11.30-7 Monday to Saturday and 12-4 Sundays. Oh, the upstairs bar has had a makeover, too, with new carpet and upholstery but otherwise is much as it was.



Another new City Centre outlet is **Knott Bar Fringe** which is at the far end of Deansgate just opposite Atlas. Originally opened as Nowhere Bar, it's had a variety of unsuccessful identities over the years but this one looks set to last. As you might imagine it's the brainchild of John Henley of Bar Fringe in the Northern Quarter and so has echoes of that establishment. The décor isn't quite so off the wall, though (although there are welcome elements of eccentricity) and comprises a welcome blend of tradition and up to the minute modernity. It's also bigger than it looks from the outside with a surprisingly rambling interior including a first floor room complete with balcony. The beer range differs from that at Bar Fringe in that there is less emphasis on foreign beers (although there is a small but well thought out range of German and Belgian

bottles) and a wider range of cask ales - when I called these included Tetley Bitter, Greene King IPA, Brains SA, Phoenix Arizona and Boggart Hole Clough Sun Dial. Food is available from 12-6 and the bar opens every day at 12 noon. Highly recommended. Nearby, I am told that the **Crown** on Deansgate is due for another makeover, this time to make it a bit more 'pubby'. I know that I mentioned a flying visit a couple of month's back when all the pump clips were reversed and no real ale available, well, that's certainly not the case now. When I passed recently Bombardier and Landlord were on tap and a blackboard advertised forthcoming beers as including Old Speckled Hen, (Taylor's) Ram Tam and Dark Mild. Well, you can't grumble at that.

Elsewhere in the City Centre, both the **Salisbury** and the **Old Garratt** have the builders in. Work's been under way for some time so hopefully they will have opened in time for a report in the next issue.

Further out, the beer festival at **Kro Bar** will be underway as some of you read this and I hope it's well supported, I'll certainly be there more than once. The Kro Bar people are on the expansion trail too. In the pipeline is **Kro 2** which will be in the part of the recently extended ground floor of the National Computing Centre on Oxford Road. The idea is to have something run on very similar lines to Kro with cask beers, a good foreign bottled range and good food. As if that wasn't enough, there will also be a Kro-run bar in the newly revamped **Manchester Museum**. This won't feature any cask beers but should have Krombacher and Budvar on draught complemented by a range of German bottles.

ARE YOU NEW?

Are you a new member of CAMRA, or do you just want to know more about our organisation? Or perhaps you're interested in joining? If so, two events coming up are just for you.

On **Monday 17 September**, we are holding a 'Meet the Branch and Membership Recruitment Night' at the Hinds Head on Manchester Road, Heaton Chapel. The event starts at 8.00pm and this will be your chance to meet Branch officials and members to find out how we operate and what we do. If you're a new member, or new to the area, this is an ideal opportunity to meet other branch members for an informal chat and get to know people.

If you've been thinking of joining, then this will be an ideal chance to sign up. We'll treat all those joining to a pint on the night. You will be able to order a copy of the 2002 Good Beer Guide at our special members' price and also sign up for other social events.

One of those events is our special New Member's Trip on **Friday 5 October** which this year visits the Leyden Brewery based at the Lord Raglan pub in Nangreaves, just north of Bury. The minibus will be leaving Stockport at 7.00pm with a brewery trip later in the evening. The pub serves an extensive evening menu so you'll be able to eat there if you don't have time before we leave. The discounted new members' price is just £3 a head. Details about this are available from Branch Membership Secretary Paul Moss on 0161 439 8309.



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