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ALL OUT WAR!

CAMRA challenges Blair to end rip-off Britain's short pint scandal

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, has declared all out war on the brewing industry's latest backstairs bid to stifle full pint legislation.

A new law to put an end to the country's biggest consumer rip-off was promised by Labour before the 1997 General Election. The Labour party's web site still states: "We will tighten legislation to ensure consumers are protected from short measures and get a full pint."

Secondary legislation, which doesn't have to go before Parliament, has been drafted and the necessary regulatory impact assessment has been completed. All that is needed to consign Britain's longest-running consumer scandal to history is Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt's signature.

But fears are growing that industry lobbyists have put the boot in by persuading the DTI's Small Business Unit that full pint legislation is not a consumer protection measure but another bit of red tape being imposed on an already overburdened industry.

CAMRA's campaign to bury the industry's black propaganda and hold the Government to its publicly made pledge was launched at the National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester in January.

It is backed by new research showing that the short-pint scandal is getting worse. The research, drawn from surveys conducted by trading standards officers in 21 local authority areas, shows that nine out of 10 pints served in British pubs are less than 100 per cent liquid – an increase of over 10 per cent since the last survey in 1997.

The research shows that:

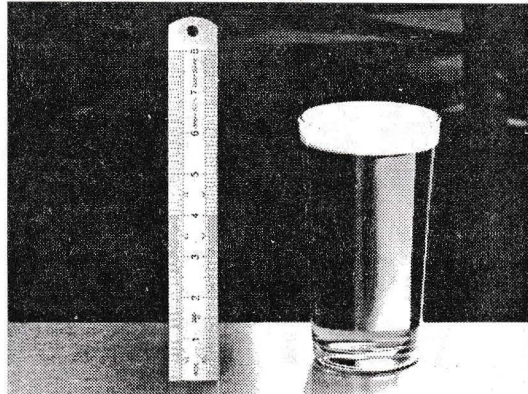
- ✱ 89.4 per cent of pints are less than 100 per cent liquid.
- ✱ 27.7 per cent fall short of the industry's 95 per cent guideline.
- ✱ Pubs which already serve 100 per cent liquid pints charge 14p a pint less on average than pubs which do not.

CAMRA Head of campaigns Mike Benner said: "It is Labour policy to tighten the law to protect Britain's 15 million beer drinkers from short measures, but despite proposals from the DTI, the Government seems to have swept reform under the carpet.

"Our research shows clearly that short measure is on the increase and there is a need for Government action to stop drinkers being ripped off. "Industry bodies have persistently claimed that legislation would lead to higher prices for consumers. The truth is that pubs set their prices based on a number of different factors, which is why the same beer is priced differently in different pubs.

"Our research stamps out the myth that full pints mean higher prices. Drinkers are charged per pint and they should get exactly that: 100 per cent liquid"

✱ This article by Ted Bruning originally appeared in What's Brewing, the monthly newspaper of the Campaign for Real Ale



HOW DOES YOUR PINT MEASURE UP?

- Short beer measures cost drinkers £1 million a day
- 8 out of 10 pints are less than 100% liquid
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The Sixteenth STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

Stockport Town Hall
30th May to 1st June 2002

Stockport Beer & Cider Festival is well and truly up and running. Once again sponsored by the Stockport Express, arrangements are now well in hand.

Our beer managers have been getting together to plan one of the best beer ranges ever, with some old favourites being joined by newcomers from all over the country. Hopefully we will be able to bring you more details next month although OT can confirm that the festival special beer will be coming from Rochdale's highly regarded Pictish Brewery. Given this company's formidable reputation, hop lovers should be in for a treat!

Cider lovers shouldn't feel neglected, though – while we will not be hosting CAMRA's National Cider & Perry Championship this year, this does give our cider manager much more freedom with the order. This means there should be plenty of treats in store. So don't forget those important dates – Thursday 30 May – Saturday 1 June. Get them in your diaries now!

IN MARCH'S OPENING TIMES

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

CAMRA's long battle for a full pint could well be drawing to a close. Either we succeed in getting Tony Blair's government to fulfil one of the promises on which it was elected, or the industry's spin doctors succeed in getting the issue quietly buried. If CAMRA wins, it wins once and for all. If the industry wins, the struggle is over for the foreseeable future.

What drives our full-pint campaign is a mystery to some observers. They see it as a non-issue: most people aren't too worried about it, they say, and if you do get a short pint, just ask for a top-up. That may be true. But it doesn't go the whole way.

What infuriates so many consumers so much is not merely the feeling that they have to ask, and often embarrass themselves in the process, for what is theirs by right; it's the outright lies the industry resorts to to defend its pinchpenny practices.

The biggest lie of all is the British Beer & Pub Association's bald assertion that "no-one complains". It's true that no-one complains to the DTI, which is what the BBPA actually means - but then who would? On the other hand people do complain to their local trading standards departments; and anyway every request for a top-up is, in effect, a complaint.

Another lie is that this is just one more bit of red tape being imposed on an already overburdened trade. It isn't. It's a simple consumer measure. Every other trade delivers the quantity it promises as a matter of course: your pint of milk, your litre of unleaded, your 330ml can of Coke are just what they say they are. Only the pub trade stands out as one where a pint doesn't necessarily have to be a pint. The list goes on. It would mean higher prices. It would cost a fortune in new glassware. It would mean the replacement of handpumps by metered electric pumps. And so on and so on. Every one of these lies crumbles under examination: but by repeating them often enough the BBPA thinks it can make people believe them.

This is why CAMRA has planned its campaign on as many front as possible to publicise the worsening problem of full pints. We also need your support. Write to your MP (at House of Commons, London SW1A 1AA) and Patricia Hewitt at the DTI. Register your support by voting "yes" on our on-line poll at www.camra.org.uk. The fight is on. The battle must be won.

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 215

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

PUB OF THE MONTH MARCH 2002

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for March 2002 is Little Jack Horners on Wellington Street, Stockport.

The pub has had several owners over recent years, originally Wilsons, then Vaux and now, following the demise of Vaux, it is owned by Pubmaster. Luckily, despite the changes of ownership, there has been a welcome degree of continuity in the form of Paul and Christine Roberts who have been running the pub, their first, since December 1993.

Deceptively small from the outside, Little Jack Horners is a surprisingly large, rambling pub although, being built over several levels gives the interior the warm and cosy feel of a suburban community local. The difference here, of course, being that the pub is right in the town centre with the roar of the A6 in one direction and numerous office blocks in the other. Not surprisingly, then, the pub tends to be busiest at lunchtimes, when food is available Monday to Friday.

That's not to say the pub is dead at night. It boasts darts and crib teams and has a good solid crowd of regulars, who also enjoy the four cask ales on offer - Marstons Pedigree, Tetley Bitter, Worthington Best Bitter and Camerons Strongarm

While many of the local ex-Vaux pubs have conspicuously failed to thrive, Little Jack Horners really does stand out as a success story. It is no coincidence that it is the only one to have been repainted and re-signed by Pubmaster. For commitment and continuity, this is a well deserved award and will be presented on the night of Thursday 28 March.

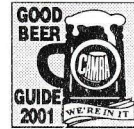
The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

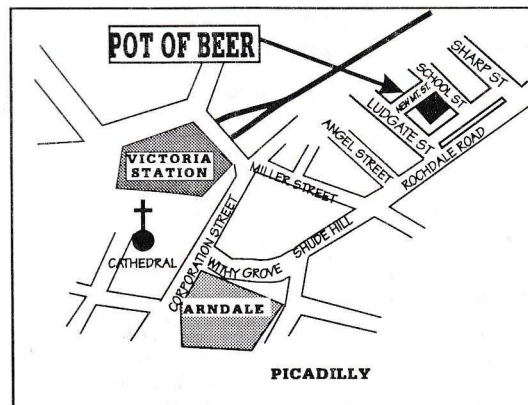
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STAGGER

with Peter Butler

Adswood, Cheadle and Cheadle Heath

This Stagger took place on a pretty blustery autumn night and was something of a strange animal, being sort of bolted together from left-over bits of other Staggers. Having said that we encountered an interesting selection of pubs and beers.

The meeting point was the excellent **Cross Keys** on Adswood Road. The latest refurbishment by Hydes has been a startling success and those of us who hadn't been there for some time found it difficult to recollect the former layout. There's essentially just one rambling room although it feels like three different ones and there's a proper vault. Beers available included Hydes Mild, Bitter and Jekyll's Gold. Unusually, no-one tried the Bitter but the other two beers were perfectly acceptable, with the Jekyll's just having the edge. From there it was just a short walk to the **Greyhound** on the corner of Councillor Lane and Ladybridge Road. This pub has undergone several transformations over the years, including a spell as the ghastly Gamebird. It now has a vaguely sporting theme and is split up into several distinct areas. The good news is that a keen licensee has seen the introduction of cask beers in the form of Greenalls Bitter and John Smiths Bitter. It was good to see a big poster advertising the cask version of John Smiths, too. Sadly this is a beer that even at its best is usually pretty uninspiring and so it proved tonight. The Greenalls Bitter was rather more appreciated, though.

Continuing down Councillor Lane brought us to the **Micker Brook**. This is a new (ish) Whitbread (as was) 'Brewsters' formerly a 'Brewers Fayre'. Not that the re-branding seems to have made much difference as it is still basically a family dining pub, although unlike some there's no real problem if you just want to stay for a drink. That's if you think it's worth the effort. Three cask beers were available - Boddingtons Bitter, Flowers Original and Marston's Pedigree, and while none of us tried the Boddingtons, the other two weren't up to much at all, and certainly not worth the wait some of us encountered before being served. The Flowers had an oddly cloying taste while the Pedigree attracted rave reviews along the lines of "stale" and "past it".

To digress slightly, whenever I've tasted Pedigree in the last few months it's been disappointing, lacking flavour even when in good condition - a pint at the Lass O' Gowrie last year was sulphurous (as expected) but tasted of little else! Are W&D running it down? I've had a couple of reasonable pints of Pedigree but it does seem to have less flavour than it used to. On a recent trip to Bramhall someone said the same thing was happening to other regional brewers' beers with national distribution, naming Wadworth's 6X - I haven't tasted 6X lately, it would be a great shame for it to lose its distinctive quality.

After the Micker Brook there was an exceptionally long walk, punctuated by a brief halt outside the shabby and keg-only **Malt Shovels**. This really does seem to be a lost opportunity (and apart from which it would have made a useful stopping point in what seemed like an endless trek to the next pub, which turned out to be the **Red Lion**, on Stockport Road in Cheadle. This is a Robinson's pub currently leased (following a labyrinthine series of takeovers) by Scottish & Newcastle. The music was loud and the pub was very busy indeed, so clearly it's doing something right. Despite the S&N involvement, the Robinson's connection ensures that cask beers are sold, in the form of Frederics and Best Bitter. The former was unavailable but the Best was one of the best beers we'd had so far.

Nearby is the **Royal Oak**, a 'proper' Robinson's pub with a traditional exterior and multi-roomed inside, with a quiet lounge and traditional vault as well as a larger central main room. A loud and occasionally awful karaoke was in session but everyone seemed to be having a good time, so who am I to criticise? It was Best Bitter only, and again this was pretty good, certainly on a par with the Red Lion.

More Robinson's next at the **Queens**. An excellent traditional local, still retaining a multi-room layout despite some opening up. When we called the current long-standing licensee was about to retire, and has now been replaced by Tony Dunn, who has plenty of experience in serving good cask beers so the pub will be in safe hands. There were three beers on when we called, Old Stockport, Hatters and Best Bitter. None of us tried the Best, but the other two were perfectly all right, with the Old Stockport having the edge. Across the road is the **Printers**, a pub much changed over the years but still having more than one room plus a pleasant conservatory at the back. Bright (too bright, personally) and very busy, Hatters and Best Bitter were the order of the day. Both were OK without being exceptional. This part of Cheadle, you will have gathered, is perhaps too dominated by Robinson's - a Hydes or Holts pub would make a welcome addition.

Cheadle Heath next and the **Farmers Arms** on the corner of Edgeley Road. Now a Greene King-owned 'Hungry Horse' we were surprised to find no cask ale at all, not even Greene King IPA. Not what you expect in a Greene King pub. Luckily a bus turned up and whisked us into Stockport so we could get last orders at the **Crown**, on Heaton Lane. The usual range of excellent beers regaled us, on this night Slaters Top Totty being on particular form. A high point finish to what had been a very mixed evening indeed.

Given its tortuous nature, this is probably a crawl that hasn't been undertaken before. Of course, we can only report what we found on that particular night (and there may have been some changes since then) rather than give a once and for all judgement on either the pubs or their beers, but while there were some definite highlights, there were also some notable missed opportunities. The Malt Shovel seems to be crying out for investment and cask ale, while the absence of cask beer at the Farmers Arms is just inexplicable.

4



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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Andy Rigg, Hazel Grove:

Regarding Dave Nunn. He's at it again! Just what gives with this guy? Firstly he has the gall to call us all "pondlife", OT a few months ago, and now has the effrontery to doubt the quality of the wine at Brown's, Hazel Grove.

May I suggest that he sample the said wine before he proffers an opinion and perhaps be more aware of the people in his "pond". On second thoughts, is there anyone out there who really takes this man seriously? That is of course - disregarding the contents of his fish tank.

From John England, Disley:

I am a regular reader of Opening Times and obtained your address from the February edition. I am a solicitor based in Disley having up until Feb. 2001 practised in Stockport for some 19 years. In September 2001 I set up my website www.flytheflag.net in an (admittedly ambitious!) attempt to try and rekindle a sense of identity and pride in England. The site is developing nicely and I have now set up a section called "The English Pub Guide". If you access the site (and I would be grateful if you did) you will see what I am trying to do. I hope to create a national guide and am trying to get a brewery to associate itself with the guide if at all possible.

I wonder if the guide is of any interest to CAMRA or to "Opening Times". If you are able to provide me with a list of local pubs on the net then obviously this would be helpful. Entry on the guide is free of charge and so I cannot see how any pub could fail to be attracted. I would like to stress the English element of the guide and if at least some of the participating pubs could fly the national flag outside their premises then the exercise would, in my opinion be worthwhile.

(CAMRA is a UK-wide, strictly non-political organisation so this isn't something we can actively promote - Ed(1))

From: Simon Eyles, Marketing Manager, Burtonwood Brewery:

Regarding Opening Times (February), page 17 carries a question relating to the Britannia, Hurdfield Road, Macclesfield. The pub was extensively refurbished in November of 2001. The refurb would have involved removing external fascias and considerable internal works to allow for extensive alteration. The pub reopened on 30th November 2001 and regularly stocks Burtonwood cask Bitter in addition to either Top Hat or the Burtonwood Cask Collection beer of that month. Should you require any further information about any Burtonwood pubs please feel free to contact me.

From Tony Pearson and Helen Macneill:

Being new members to Camra we were somewhat disappointed to read the brief! article in the Jan issue of Opening Times, number 213 concerning the Kings Head in centre of Stockport. We would like to suggest to Mr Ballantyne, the person whose name appears at the top of the said rubbish, for him to give a clear picture of the pub and state the facts more clearly next time.

For example, on the night in question the pub had just run out

of Bass, so it was available (No, it had been. Ed(2)), the people who arrived at that late hour had missed out on a fine beer. This should have been stated within the article and the fact that the people who run the Kings Head have only been there just over 12 weeks and are trying to encourage and promote good beer. One might have thought that Mr Ballantyne had got his facts correct by doing a little research before entering the pub. As far as the beer being, and I quote "average or poor" We can think of many so called "real ale pubs" in Stockport that claim to serve good beer, but do far from that. In fact most of them are revolting and many are Robinson's, of course this is only our opinion. So give the Kings Head another try, it is a good pub and it does serve good ale, and now has along with Bass, IPA and Top Hat on.

(We do of course make clear that comments in a Stagger are simply a reflection of what we found on one particular night and are not a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers. It's also fair to say that Worthington Best Bitter, even when very well kept - as I fully accept it is at the Kings - is not a beer to set the taste buds alight. Happily, we've now been back - see this month's 'Pub News' - Ed(1). Ed(2) adds: "most of them (Real Ale Pubs in Stockport) are revolting"...who are these people trying to kid and what planet are they from? Presumably "new" to CAMRA also means new to decently served beers that are no stranger to the hop and/or a bit of taste. At a guess their all-time favourite beer is badge-brewed Stones - a classic taste free zone! Robinsons may not be every drinkers favourite (though I am known to be fairly partial) but compared to the majority of Bass products it is the nectar of the Gods.)

From Hazel Grove Prune Life (aka Dave Nunn):

In respect for the late Spike Milligan, many (nah most) regulars of the Grapes, Hazel Grove now wish to be known as the "Prunes off the round table". Prune Life will never be the same without Spike. (Well, that's enough of that - Ed(1))

Letters to Opening Times are welcome: The Editor, Opening Times, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport. SK3 9HD or johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com



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This month's Desert Island Beers are supplied by Tony Molyneux, a long time CAMRA stalwart, doughty campaigner and socialist. Now living in Bury he has long been identified with CAMRA on Merseyside and is to be found at most local beer festivals.

"As I approach the tasting of my 10,000th British beer I reckon I can allow myself to indulge in a little nostalgia. I'm choosing eight beers which sadly are no longer available due to a combination of brewery takeovers and closures, and sheer short-sightedness of some brewers.

"**Higsons Bitter** - I'll never forget or forgive Whitbread for denying me the pleasure of this wonderful beer. The combination of a sulphurous nose, an astringent bitterness with a lot of tasty hop, and a long lasting finish made this beer a true classic. The desperately feeble attempts to replicate it at Sheffield, Castle Eden and Burtonwood served only to insult us all, and when the name finally died it was neither loss nor surprise.

"**Higsons Mild** - Much as I love Cains Mild (my second favourite beer out of the 10,000) I still have fond memories of this Higsons brew. A lesser known but only marginally less-appreciated stablemate of the Higsons Bitter. A gorgeous ruby red colour. Lots of bitterness for a mild, but with some malt also coming through, made this beer a classic too. It died without having to endure the same indignity as the bitter.

"**Burtonwood Light Mild** - As the name would suggest, very light in colour, and in alcohol, but bursting with taste, and a respectable amount of hoppiness. Burtonwood do seem to have lost their way of late in terms of their cask ales. A strange brewery to deal with! The CAMRA campaign to save this beer met with little interest at the brewery and the beer had to suffer a lingering death; at the very end the late lamented "Snigs Foot" in Ormskirk accounted for 50% of total production.

"**Carlisle State Bitter** - The Carlisle State Management Scheme produced some very tasty beers, sold at a cheaper price than the private enterprise beers in the area, and many of the pubs contributed greatly to the architectural glory of the Border City's pubs. It was a deliciously delicate beer but with enough bitterness to trigger the palate into a "more please" reaction. Though now regarded as a harmless old moderate, it was Edward Heath who sold this brewery off to the Tory funds contributing national brewers, thus initiating the whole chain of often disastrous privatisations which have followed. A recent recreation of this beer by the Derwent micro-brewery was actually quite a good replica of the original.

"**Yates & Jackson Bitter** - A palate-blastingly hoppy pale bitter from the Lancaster independent, taken over and closed by fellow Lancashire independent Thwaites in spite of CAMRA protests. I learned two things as a result of this closure. Never take part in a CAMRA last day protest unless as a futile last gasp gesture - much better to get behind the local brewers while they're still in good health. Never trust any brewer! The independents can be just as bad as the big boys!

"**Hartleys Bitter** - As above, another independent beer lost due to the actions of a fellow family brewery. The Robinson's takeover and closure of Hartleys resulted in the discontinuation of the Ulverston brewed Mild and Bitter with only XB moving to Stockport, with consequent dumbing down and loss of its strawberry taste. The Bitter was beautifully balanced in the best sense of that phrase (too often used nowadays to describe something without *any* taste). This beer was a tasty combination of hop and grain, both there but neither dominating.

"**Boddingtons Bitter (up to about 1980)** - The straw coloured, full tasting, tartly hoppy (with just a hint of sweetness) bitter from Strangeways was a true classic. I would regularly undertake a bus/rail round trip from Aintree to St Helens just to savour this beer (fond memories of the Vine in Thatto Heath). First Boddingtons own accountants, and then the Whitbread ones, decided this beer could be dumbed down, and that without its distinctive taste more people would flock to drink it. Well they didn't! And in spite of elaborate and costly adverts it just failed to take off as a national brand. It's a beer I wouldn't cross the street for now!

"**Greenalls (St Helens) Bitter** - I could never understand in my pre-CAMRA days, why the Greenalls in St Helens area was so different and superior to the Warrington version. This beer had all the hoppiness and flavour (a little bit Roosterish!) that its Warrington cousin lacked. Now even the Warrington brewery has gone - along with many others in the Greenall empire. Although I certainly loathe Whitbread I actually despise Greenalls even more. For one brewery company to have eliminated Wem Pale Ale, Simpkins Bitter, Shipstones Bitter and Davenport's Bitter as well as the above is absolutely unforgivable. Nasty people indeed!

"I am aware that all these beers I've chosen are from North West England, but that's natural since this is the area where my beer education started, developed, and continues, and where I'm happy to consume some of the glorious beers still around. (maybe the Editor will permit me to submit a current list of favourites in a later article?) (*oh, go on then - Ed(1)*). Being an optimist by nature I hope the best are yet to come, but I'll cherish the memory of all the beers I've talked about. Cheers!"



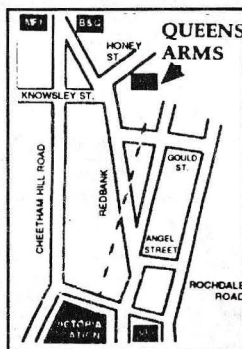
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MANCHESTER MATTERS by Citym

Following last month's brief round-up, there's something of a bumper offering this time...

The hoardings are up around the new Wetherspoons on Princess Street. The Waterhouse, as it will be known, is due to open in April. The hoardings are also up next to **Churchills** on Chorlton Street as the pub is expanded into the building next door.

New At The Circus

Not a million miles away from Churchills, there has been a change of licensee at the famous **Circus Tavern** on Portland Street where George Archondogeorge took over from Steve Campbell on 28 January. As promised last time, I've now been able to call in and have a word. Changes are underway in that the entire interior has been re-decorated to the same colour scheme as original - so the grained, matchboard walls and seating, and the bar remain as they are. The exterior is also being repainted. Tetley bitter will remain on handpull and will be joined by Carlsberg lager on draught (the first time the pub has ever sold a draught lager). George says there is a demand for a weak lager, especially from the ladies who find Stella too strong. Opening hours are extended to include all-day opening Saturday and Sunday.

George is not new to the trade, but it is some 20 years since he ran the Douglas Arms (Wilsons) on Corporation Street for eight years followed by a spell at the nearby Moonraker. George is a previous customer of the pub and knew Terry and Kath Corless very well; during his tenure at the Douglas he was dubbed 'Mad George' or George 'The Barmy Greek' by journalists from the nearby Maxwell House, Daily Mirror newspaper offices. As a nod to his roots, you can now get Ouzo in the Circus.

Other City Centre Changes

Elsewhere, I was surprised to learn that Jamie Bell was leaving the **Lass O'Gowrie** on Charles Street. Not only leaving the pub, but the licensed trade as well. Until a permanent replacement is found, the pub is being run by the Lass's brewer, Roy Constantine who produced a special beer to mark Jamie's departure. This was planned to be a strong, (4.9%), dark and bitter beer. Sadly, I didn't make it down to the Lass to try any! There has been some restriction of the beer range at the pub, too. Until recently they were getting through about 1000 different beer a year but under new arrangements introduced by Laurel PubCo, this is now down to 20 a month. Still well worth a visit, though.

In January I reported last year's closure of the **Temple of Convenience** (Oxford Street), apparently for good, it seemed at the time. I delighted to report that in fact it's reopened (12-11, seven days) with the slightly shorter name of **The Temple**. There's still no draught real ale but it's there in the form of Chimay, Duvel and Kwak in the cold cabinet, together with Erdinger Weisse and other interesting bottles, all with their own glasses. They also have Taylor's Landlord and Black Sheep in bottle (but not bottle conditioned).

Didsbury Doings

The **Royal Oak** (Wilmslow Road) has now reopened following redecoration. The main change is the removal of the cocktail bar in the front lounge as it was not used and this has been replaced by upholstered seating. The whole pub has been tastefully redecorated, new carpets, new curtains, and new wooden chairs. The TV has been removed from the front lounge as it was never watched, and most of the picture rail ornaments (jugs/tankards etc) have been consigned to the bin. The beer range is as it was before the redecoration, Banks's Mild, Marston's Bitter and Pedigree plus a guest beer from one of W & D breweries. However no sooner is this all finished than we say farewell to licensee June Bunton who retires on 12 March. June has worked hard to maintain the traditions at the pub and I'm sure we all wish her well.

Also refurbished is the **Station** which now looks a treat. The pub has new carpets, new curtains and a new colour scheme. There are also new tables and seating together with larger pictures of local interest. Apparently the refurbishment is attracting more women to the pub which must be a good thing.

I was sorry to learn that Ken Mallion from the **Fletcher Moss** has been quite ill with septicaemia i.e. blood poisoning. This has been caused by an old leg injury gained in his rugby playing days, which flared up. Ken has spent three weeks in intensive care in hospital but is now out and hobbling around on crutches. Get well soon, Ken. Nearby, the **Wok Wok** café bar restaurant is currently closed for a major refurbishment. This is described as 'an exciting new concept' so I dread to think what this actually means. It is scheduled to reopen in spring 2002.

At the **Hogshead**, the Laurel pub company have now reduced the length of the guest beer list available ditching a lot of the micro breweries in favour of regional breweries such as Wadworths and Hook Norton. Surely in pub's such as this (and the Lass O'Gowrie), which have proved themselves more than capable of selling a very wide range of beer this is a seriously retrograde step. Is there no room for any initiative and flair at Laurel?

On a brighter note, it's welcome to Andy and Karen Carter who took over at the **Olde Cock** earlier in the year. The beer range is now fixed selling Boddingtons bitter, Hook Norton Old Hooky, Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Deuchars IPA. At the moment Andy is awaiting his entertainment licence and he hopes to be able to put on live music.

Finally in Didsbury, the **Nelson** has now dropped Websters Yorkshire bitter and sells Boddingtons bitter and Holts bitter, and more recently the excellent John Smith's Magnet at £1.30 a pint. A snip!

Ladybarn Latest

The **Brewery Arms** has had some bad press in OT but things are looking up. Last October the pub was taken over by Tracie Maun and David Proctor who have put in a great deal of effort in cleaning the pub up, in every sense of the word. The result has seen the return of a good crowd of regulars and a doubling of turnover and now they hope to reintroduce cask beer.

There has been a small glitch, though. The couple originally took over as managers for Clarinbridge Pub Co who held the tenancy from Enterprise Inns. Clarinbridge have now pulled out but Tracie and David remain and are negotiating to take on the tenancy themselves. This will see the pub repainted outside (its first lick of paint for about eight years or so) and real ale installed within. Tracie is a real cask ale fan; her favourite pub being the famous Blue Anchor in Helston, and the strong 'Spingo' brewed there ranks as one of her favourite beers. However, something less potent is planned for the pub, Tracie favouring Jennings Bitter while David fancies Adnams. The overall aim is to run a "good old fashioned pub", as Tracie told me when I called in recently. I'll certainly drink to that - and hopefully in a pint of cask ale at the Brewers. Tracie has promised to keep me posted on developments and I will of course pass this on straight away.

Whilst in Ladybarn, I also popped in to the nearby **Peninsula**, formerly the Talbot, and have to say I was pleasantly surprised. It's been done out in a modern café bar style, with blocks of colour, mood lighting and comfortable seating, including leather sofas. More to the point, it stocks real ale in the shape of Wadworth 6X and Black Sheep Bitter. The latter was in good nick and cheap at £1.60 a pint.

East Side Story

There's some news about the **Britannia**, Rowsley Street, Beswick. This excellent former Lees pub has been bought by none other than Mike Summerbee of Manchester City fame. Of course, City are to make the nearby stadium their new home from the 2003 season so Mike is clearly thinking ahead to the commercial possibilities that will bring. As this is the only pub near the stadium he should rake it in. I just hope that both cask beer and at least some elements of the pub's character survive all of this.

Elsewhere there are a handful of pubs up for sale. These include the **Bridge Inn**, Clayton Lane and on Hyde Road both the **Wellington** and the **Midland**. Don't all rush at once.

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Robinson's

A QUESTION OF ROBINSON'S

Over the past year, this column has been giving readers an insight into the operations of Robinson's, past and present. We hope that you have enjoyed hearing about the Stockport brewer's rich heritage and the ways in which it continues to achieve the highest standards in all areas of its operations. We're pleased to tell you that the Company will be continuing its support of both the Stockport and South Manchester Branch of CAMRA and Opening Times. One of the brewer's highest profile connections with CAMRA will come at this year's Stockport Beer and Cider Festival. The popular event will be taking place at Stockport Town Hall between 30th May and 1st June. The Company will once again be sponsoring both the official T-shirts and the beer glasses.

As a bonus for this year, Robinson's will also be running a quiz in the festival programme with an attractive prize on offer to the winners.

To get you in the mood, the brewer will, from the next issue, be running a monthly competition in Opening Times. The focus will naturally be on cask conditioned ales with each month's questions set to test your knowledge of one of the beers in the Company's portfolio. While the majority will be familiar to you, there may be just the odd surprise along the way as head brewer Chris Hellin and his team are currently developing some new brands.

There will be some high quality Robinson's products on offer as prizes over the coming months including fleece jackets and award-winning real ales.

April's competition will certainly get the series off to a great start with a superb hardback book entitled *The History of Robinson's Brewery* as the prize. Its author is Dr Lynn Pearson, a writer and historian with a special interest in the history of brewing and public houses.

The full-colour volume charts the development of the brewer from its origins in the early nineteenth century up until modern times.

Contained within the book are fascinating case studies of the successive generations of the family and the way in which they contributed to the Company.

The book charts key events such as William Robinson's purchase of the Unicorn Inn in 1838, the development of the estate, the acquisition of other breweries and the building of the Unicorn Packaging Centre in Bredbury in the 1970s.

In addition, the volume also provides a deep insight into the social and business history of Stockport over nearly two centuries as, unlike many towns in the region, it continued to prosper despite the decline of the cotton industry.

The book is a wonderful read and will get our year-long run of competitions off to a great start. So get your thinking caps on and good luck!



This space is sponsored by Frederic Robinson Ltd.



The National Scene

Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries is sending out 25,000 text messages to customers, in what is seen as a cheap and effective way to boost consumption of its product. Those who signed up for the service will be sent a mobile voucher that can then be used to obtain a free pint of Fosters at one of W&DB's outlets in Manchester or Birmingham. Why don't they extend their cask products? Or are they just desperate to flog Fosters?



In Hertford, **McMullens** has been put up for sale by the family for £200 million. The company had a turn-over last year of £47.3 million but as much of the property is freehold, including the Nags Head in Covent Garden worth about £10m alone, the asking price may not be too unrealistic. Favourites to buy the business include Greene King and Pubmaster, although the consensus seems to be that whoever buys the company will close the brewery.

Coors Brewers is developing a new premium cask ale to market in place of Draught Bass as the latter brand remains in Interbrew's ownership (albeit brewed for them by Coors). It is probable that the new beer will use the Worthington name, although it is to be hoped that the new beer will be more than just a stronger version of the terminally dull Worthington Best Bitter.



The finalists in this year's **Brewing Industry International Awards** were announced late last month – and now face a two-month wait until the winners are announced in late April. North west beers among the finalists include Cains Best Bitter, Robinson's Old Tom, and Phoenix Navy and Wobbly Bob.

Family Brewers Update



To cope with expected demand for its new range of seasonal beers, **Joseph Holt** is installing a brand new microbrewery at its Empire Street site. The new plant has the flexibility for 10-barrel test brews as well as bigger production runs. Head Brewer Keith Sheard said: "These are very exciting times. We plan to commission the new brewery by the end of March and will hopefully be doing test brews by Easter."

Our other three local family brewers have new seasonal beers out this month. **Robinson's** will be reprising Stockport Arches while Hydes and Lees will be bringing out brand new beers. **Lees** entry is Brooklyn Bitter, a bitter 5% beer in the American style, while **Hydes** have Styrian Spring, a 4.2% beer continuing this year's craft ale theme featuring different hop varieties.



Micro Magic



As the **Lowes Arms**, Hyde Road, Denton will be participating in this year's Mild Challenge, Peter Wood at the LAB will be brewing a 3.6% ABV mild for the occasion. It will be dubbed 'Jet Amber' as it will utilise amber malt and will have a deep red colour together with a biscuity malt taste and a slight bitterness and hop character. The name also follows the brewery's tradition of using local names and landmarks to name its beers, so this beer's name derives from the fields across the main road from the pub called Jet Amber Fields. Surely, another good reason for readers to participate in this year's Mild Challenge.

Expansion and progress at "The LAB" is continuing at a steady pace. Two 2.5BB fermenters have been purchased from Blackpool Brewery which will increase capacity to 10 Barrels per week. The additional capacity will also help increase the range of beers brewed.

Down in Congleton, **Beartown Brewery** is cock-a-hoop at the continuing success of the Navigation in Stockport. The pub has recently been redecorated and now looks a treat with new seating



and curtains adding the finishing touches. A beer to look out for this month is Blarney Bear, Beartown's superb dry Irish-style stout, which will be out in time for St Patrick's night.



Heywood's **Phoenix Brewery** has a whole raft of new beers to tickle your tastebuds. Double Stout (4.5%) and Jovan (4.7%) were already available by the end of February and this month will see March Hare (4.4%) and Shamrock (4.3%). From 2 April, the brewery will also have Resurrection (4.7%) and St George's (4.3%).

Pictish Brewery is reprising Dolmen from last year. This 4% bitter is an amber coloured beer with a long bitter finish in the popular Pictish style. Pictish will also be brewing the Festival Special for Stockport Beer Festival this year - the aim is to have a quaffable bitter session beer at about 3.6%.



In Moston the **Boggart Hole Clough Brewery** is producing Humphrey Boggart, a 4.3% light Spring ale and is aiming to bring out a mild for April, although the final specification for the beer had not been decided as we went to press.

There are two new beers from **Bank Top** in the pipeline, too. These have been commissioned by Bolton council to mark the town hosting cycling and badminton events during the Commonwealth games. Boneshaker and Spitting Feathers will both be 4.2% pale bitter beers. Bank Top also intends to start bottling in the near future, although the beers will not be bottle conditioned. Work has now finally started on the new brewery site so expect a move later this year.



Up in Nangreaves, the **Leyden Brewery** continues to go great guns. The next new beer is Cool Shamrock, a 3.9% hoppy, easy drinking bitter and this is to be followed by a lager-style beer brewed using lager and wheat malt together with Hallertau and Hersbrucker hops. The beers, due to be launched at the Hare & Hounds (Holcombe Brook) Beer Festival is to be named "Leyden Hosen"! Leyden are also producing a house beer for the pub in the form of Hare & Hounds Bitter (3.8%). The brewery's latest dark beer, Frombury (from Bury, geddit?) a 4.2% dark beer halfway between a mild and a stout has proved so popular that a further three brews have had to be produced.

Finally, mention has to be made of the superb new beer from **Marble Brewery**, launched on the weekend of the National Winter Ales Festival. Manchester Bitter is a 4.2% pale gold beer with a slightly spicy taste and a long, moreish bitter finish. It's just fabulous - and has proved to be an instant hit with Marble Brewer James Campbell brewing flat out to keep up with demand.



EASTER IN PARADISE

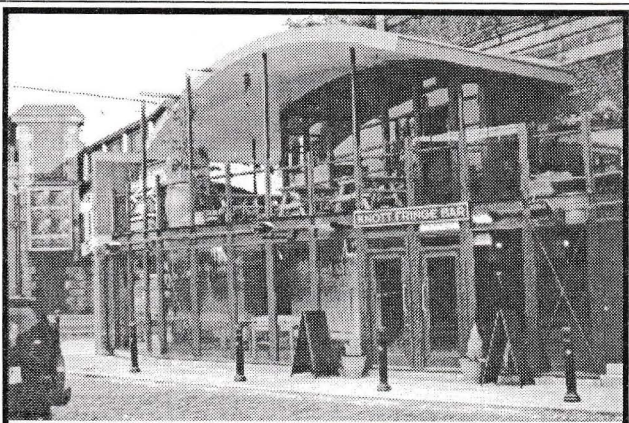
Following the success of the Christmas Beer Festival at Paradise Brewery at Wrenbury, an Easter Beer Festival will be held from Friday 29 March to Monday 1 April.

The redoubtable Crewe & Shrewsbury Passenger Association has again made arrangements for trains to stop at the adjacent Wrenbury Station. The 11.33 Manchester-Cardiff express will stop specially at Wrenbury on Friday 29 and Saturday 30 March. A return service will stop to pick up at 17.05. On Friday these services will serve Stockport and Wilmslow. On Saturday, Stockport passengers will need to check local arrangements as there may be engineering work taking place. Remember, Wrenbury is a request stop - tell the conductor you wish to get off there and hand signal to board the train when coming back.



With 30 beers available, mostly from small brewers, this promises to be an excellent festival. And of course, the weather should be a lot warmer than it was at Christmas!

The Passenger Association tells us that with 560 arrivals by train for the July festivals (Paradise and Bhurtpore) and 336 for the Christmas festival, they will soon be dubbing Wrenbury the 'Beer Festival Capital of Britain'.



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STOCKPORT & MANCHESTER
Mild
 CHALLENGE
2002

Following the success of last year's competition, we have once again teamed up with the Stockport Express to bring you another Mild Challenge, and again we have stretched our wings to include parts of Manchester and Salford along with a few other pubs further afield. In fact it's looking as though we may have a record number of pubs taking part. The previous Challenges have been a great success and if you haven't taken part before, try and have a go this time. It's fun and it's easy. It's also a chance to visit some new pubs, try new beers and, of course, to win some great prizes.

The Challenge runs from Saturday 6 April to Sunday 12 May and offers everyone taking part the chance to win something. All completed entries will receive either a free entry ticket for the 2001 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival or, if you're a member of CAMRA, a voucher for two free pints of mild at the Festival.

We are also again featuring the **Mild Challenge Extra** - visit a participating pub in 12 different areas, using the headings shown on the card, and you will win a special Mild Challenge T-shirt; visit all participating pubs and you will win a specially engraved pewter tankard.

Full details including a list of all participating pubs and an entry card will appear in next month's Opening Times.



An Australian By the Tail

"FOSTERS - don't ya just luv it?" The quintessential 'pale amber nectar', crystal clear, - and in the UK - full of chemical additives and virtually taste free. The beer that gives Australia (the land of everything that swims, creeps and crawls and is especially venomous) the name for bland crap.

We'll knock me down with a didgeridoo, sport, but sales of beer by Fosters Brewing have now been surpassed by sales of wine from their vinyards! Its enough to make yer prawn fall off the barbie! It is also a victory for commonsense, as Fosters Brewing have some quite excellent vinyards in both Oz and the US of A. Reality though, beckons. The wombats who are running the show are now boasting that they are looking to "outsource" their wine production to concentrate on their core areas of expertise - Marketing and distribution. So expect massive numbers of tinnies of revolting sweet wine with a plastic kangaroo glued on top in a bar near you soon (and no, I didn't make this up, well except for the bit about the plastic kangaroos!).

God & Mammon

Last month I promised some sort of considered opinion on the Winter Ales Festival and the start of the "Beer Festival Season". In the best tradition of half-truths peddled in this column, here goes...

As you may have read elsewhere, the National Winter Ales Festival was a great success. Manchester saw a tremendous range of great beers, and the queue for the Gents was a lot smaller than last year (either the european idea of unisex ladies' or the drinking men of Manchester developing bigger bladders was clearly responsible). Beer condition on the main British bar was first class, which on the Thursday night was a relief to us on the European Bar, because most of our draught beer was still on the wrong side of the channel. First, our friends in Customs & Excise are delighted to be playing silly buggers over occasaional import licences - apparantly it is too difficult to discriminate between 'White Van Man' doing a booze and fag run (- no, honest, guv, its all for me own use (cough) (barf)) and the legitimate small trader with all the paperwork duly filled in. Result, they stop the legitimate trader. When you've jumped through the thousand new hoops that C&E put in your way, then God closes the channel with a storm! Anyway we unloaded the van on Friday lunchtime at least 90 seconds before the customers entered the building. Of the beers, the Goss pale bock and Kneitinger DunkelBock were exceptional. We had four Oktoberfest beers on draught, the Hacker Marzen and Paulaner being sublime. The Tegernsee beers were their magnificent selves. On the Irish front, one judge and a good few others who had tasted the competition beers said that the Carlow O'Haras Stout, or the Dwan An Dubhain stout would have won the Winter Ale competition had they been eligible. The Carlow Curim Gold Wheat Beer was the best I have ever had it - as the stewards (who drank virtually all of it) concur! But it seems we were not the only festival accured... The huge Rotherham festival I missed through illness, and Bradford was hit severely by the Arriva train strike (a prior bout of which affected Winter Ales as well!) Still as we go to press there's Wigan (at

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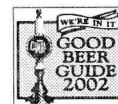
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