



OPENING TIMES



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FREE

TIME RUNNING OUT FOR LICENSING REFORM?

The clock is ticking on licensing reform...and unless Tony Blair's Government can be held to its promise to act soon, time could run out for longer pub opening hours in England and Wales.

Culture Secretary Kim Howells has unveiled a full set of proposals, including concessions for licensees who feared the new dual licensing system would suffocate them in red tape, which he aims to see introduced by July 2004.

But now there are fears that despite Government promises to act on licensing reform early in this Parliament, his Bill might not be included in the Queen's Speech due on 13th of this month. And if that happens, the whole package of reform, including the abolition of permitted hours, is in real danger of being swept away by the next General Election.

Now CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, is urging its members to put overwhelming weight behind a move by Lib Dem MP Lembit Opik to make sure that licensing reform doesn't fall off the Government's agenda. He is tabling an Early Day Motion expressing support for the reform proposals.

CAMRA Public Affairs Manager Jonathan Mail explained: "If licensing reform is in the Queen's Speech it should become law by next summer, and there will be a transition period of at least a year while it is brought into force. "If it is postponed for a year, there's a very real risk that the transition period will be overtaken by the next General Election and the work necessary to implement it simply won't be done. Local and community pubs are at a significant disadvantage to town-centre venues with late licenses. To give them a chance to compete more fairly we need this measure as soon as possible."

New Year Setback

Campaigners for more flexible hours suffered another blow last month when it emerged that once again the Government has left too late legislation guaranteeing the now traditional New Year 36-hour opening. For the third year running, pubs will not know until the very last minute whether they are able for the extended period over the celebrations because the plans are still to be debated in the House of Commons.

It now seems unlikely that the government will be unable to say for sure whether extended hours have been granted until the first week of December, which will leave pubs with very little time to arrange entertainment and parties for the New Year period. A spokesman for the Department of Culture, Media & Sport said that while the government was unable to confirm when the legislation would be passed, it was still on track to go through before New Year.

"It's been delayed but the two Houses are looking at it. The House of Lords has reported back, and its report is favourable," she said.

Meanwhile solicitors and magistrates are advising licensees to apply for special orders of exemption, namely an extension of hours until 12.20am on January 1, in case the extension is not approved in time.

BODDIES SAVED FOR MANCHESTER

As Opening Times went to press, news broke of a last minute deal to keep all brewing of Boddingtons Bitter at Manchester's Strangeways brewery.

Last month we reported that Interbrew, owner of the Boddingtons Brewery and the beer brand, planned to run down production of beer at the Manchester brewery, and from April 2004, retain only the cask (real-ale) version in Manchester, brewing the keg and 'smooth' versions at their plant in Magor, South Wales.

Apart from the job losses, this would have meant the Manchester brewery running at only an uneconomic 20% capacity, and this led to fears over the brewery's long-term future.

The result of Interbrew's change of heart is that although the brewery in Manchester will see some job losses, these should involve "natural wastage" and some transfers to the Salmesbury (Preston) brewery, with (hopefully) no compulsory redundancies. The positive result was announced after five hours of talks between the company and the union (TGWU) and vociferous local protest, led by (among others) Manchester City Council, CAMRA and the Manchester Evening News who raised thousands of signatures for petitions which were sent to Interbrew's Belgian headquarters.

T & G union officer Franny Joyce said: "We campaigned to keep production of Boddies in Manchester and that is what we have done."



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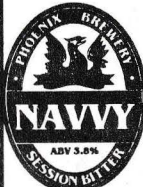





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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

This month we should finally find out if the government is serious about licensing reform. The signs are good but then again we have been here before only to see everything fall at the last fence.

There have been some concerns in the trade that the reforms may lead to extra costs for pubs and this would certainly be unwelcome to say the least. On top of that there is a right old battle being fought over plans to move licensing in general from the magistrates to local councils and the jury must be out as to whether or not this is a good thing. Local authorities have had control in Scotland for several years and that doesn't appear to have been a disaster so there's no reason why problems should be encountered here.

The main bonus for local drinkers will be the extended hours available. We won't be seeing the round-the-clock binge drinking prophesied by the temperance lobby, instead most pubs will opt for sensible and modest extensions to midnight or 1am at weekends. This is a welcome and long overdue reform.

We report in this issue on the changes planned to the Hogshead - or should that now be Hog's Head - chain. There is very little mention of cask ale in these plans although we understand that a commitment has been given that real ale will remain although it seems certain that the number of beers will be restricted. Earlier reports suggested that a minimum sale of two containers a week of any particular beer would be needed before it was stocked. Of equal concern are the other proposed changes and the gushing terms in which they are expressed. Those readers with long memories may feel that the spirit of Pennine Hosts is with us here.

John Clarke

Just as the final brews of Brakspear were quaffed, before the ersatz Warrington stuff made its appearance, came news that Boddingtons was to become the "Cream of Magor". Within CAMRA there were mixed feelings about this. Boddingtons is NOT the beer it once was, indeed its now a sad apology for the hoppy session brew of yesteryear, it has been run down by the original company, Whitbread who bought it, and now Interbrew who bought it from them. 80% of production is now keg, nitrokeg or can. What a travesty. But it will at least continue (to be present) to be brewed in Manchester, for which I suppose we can raise one and a half cheers. Perhaps having kept it here, we can now hope to start a similar campaign to put the taste back into the beer?

P.B. Hutchings

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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 CD-R, 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).

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



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for November is the Plough Hotel on Hyde Road, Gorton.

This Grade 2 listed building has been a pub for at least 200 years (brewery records show it changing hands in 1802!) and for most of the past 50 years it was threatened by proposals to widen Hyde Road. Campaigning efforts by CAMRA and other interested bodies helped save the day and prevent the demolition of this historic gem.

The lack of investment during the long period of threat helped preserve the many historic features of the pub. From the outside the pub may look quite plain, but within there is a wealth of etched and cut glass, ornate tiling and other Victorian features, largely unchanged since the pub was refitted in 1893. There's a fine lobby with three rooms off (the pool room having been converted from a former kitchen) but the heart and sole of the pub is the large vault with parquet floor, bench seating and carved mahogany bar. There are now plans to gently refurbish the pub, bringing the toilets inside and restoring many of the features.

None of this means that the pub is some cold museum piece. Far from it - this is a thriving community local with lots of charity work for the local area and hosting darts, crib and dominoes teams. Of course, behind every successful pub you need good licensees and the Plough is lucky to have Tony and Linda Lindsey at the helm. They have been there about 3½ years and during that time real ale sales have about tripled as the pub's fortunes have revived. Robinson's Hatters and Best Bitter are on handpump and these have recently been joined by a cask of Old Tom on the bar. Beer quality is invariably top notch - it was so good on a recent Stagger that the end of the itinerary most of us went back to the Plough for more. This award will be presented on Thursday 28 November from 8.00pm when a busy and entertaining night is promised. DP.

The Plough is well served by public transport. From Stockport buses 203 and 42A (Heatons/Reddish) will take you there and from Manchester all of the Hyde Road buses (201, 203, 204, 205) stop nearby. In addition services 166, 168 and 168 will drop you near Gorton Market from where it's only a short walk down Wellington Street to the pub. For rail travellers, Belle Vue Station is only a short walk down Hyde Road.

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

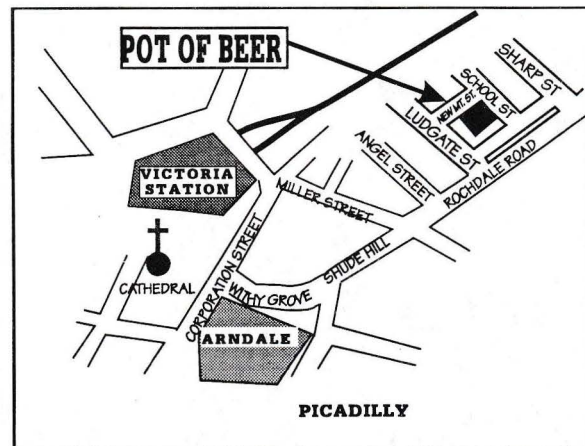
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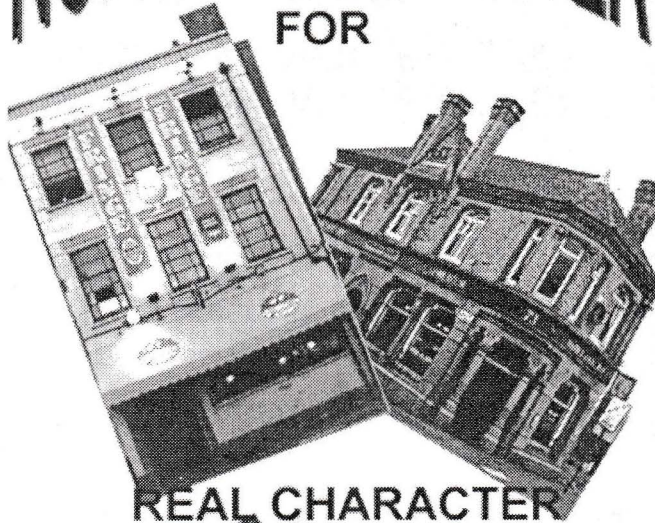
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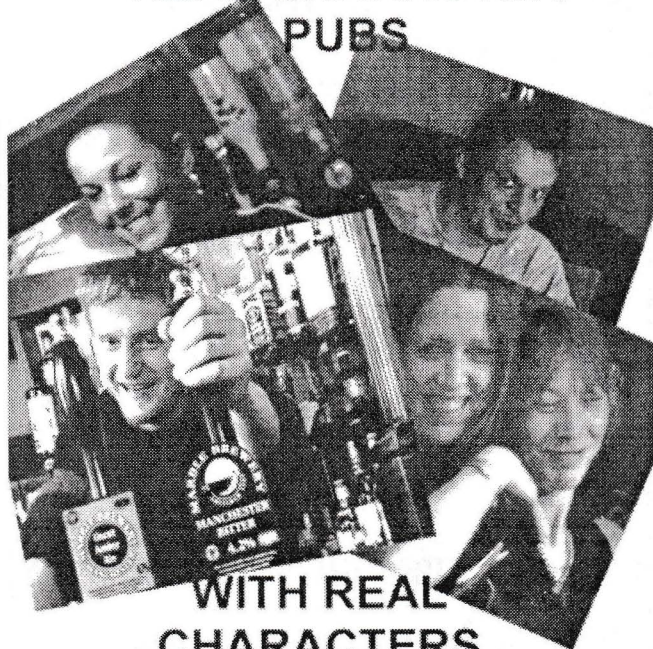


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with Jim Flynn

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If you are going on a pub crawl around the University area, and also want to get served quickly in most of the pubs, then August is the month to pick.

Given that it was the holiday season, it was a surprisingly large group of us who met up at the **Whitworth** on Moss Lane East. The pub has been opened up over the years but not to the extent that it has lost its multi-roomed character. There's a beer garden at the back, too, although we chose to sit inside. Possible a mistake as at times conversation was difficult over the unnecessarily loud music – after all we were almost the only customers so just who were they hoping to entertain? There were three cask beers – Marston's Bitter and Pedigree plus a guest beer, Brakspear's Special. We all went for the latter and found it in good condition. The evening had started well.

Further down Moss Lane is Hydes' **Denmark**, our next stop. This open-plan pub had a robust but not unpleasant atmosphere despite the Alsatian pup padding around the lounge where we sat (can't you tell I'm not really a dog lover?). The feature of the lounge (other than the dog) is the sloping, varnished wood ceiling, giving the pub a slightly incongruous country feel. The only cask beer as Hydes Bitter, which was reasonable enough.

Retracing our steps, we cut through Whitworth Park to Oxford Road and to the **Hogshead** in the heart of the University area. The pub is typical of the chain with a predominance of bare brick and wood over two floors. One interesting feature is that the toilets are in the basement and on your way to pay a visit you can see the pub cellar through a large window in the corridor. Four cask beers were available – Hook Norton Old Hooky, Caledonian Deuchars IPA, Boddingtons Commonwealth Ale and Boddies Bitter. Between us we tried all but the Boddingtons Bitter and found the Old Hooky to be the pick of the bunch. Particularly commendable was the keenness of the staff to top up the beer and ensure full measure. Moving out of the immediate area of the University, we walked up Grafton Street to the **Grafton**. Unfortunately for us, the new licensees were refurbishing the lounge and we had arrived a week early for its reopening. We crowded into the pretty typical Holt's vault and drank the bitter, which attracted a variety of opinions. Some of us had initially tried the mild but found it close to undrinkable, although to be fair it was changed without any problem. Having had not dissimilar problems here over the years you do have to wonder whether it's really a pub for cask mild at all. Further up Grafton Street is the **Bowling Green**, a 'Porter Ale House', although sadly nothing to do with the excellent Porter Brewing Co. No, this was a 'brand' of Greenalls when they still ran pubs, and what a disappointment this place was tonight. Almost deserted and only indifferent Flowers Original on sale. Perhaps it has more atmosphere when the students are around but for now the less said about this pub the better.

Our next port of call, the **Mawson**, across Upper Brook Street on Kincardine Road, was a complete contrast. No sign of student life here (although some probably use it), this brilliant community local oozes character and atmosphere. Certainly my favourite pub of the Stagger, the multiroomed in-



COPY DATE FOR THE DECEMBER ISSUE OF OPENING TIMES IS NOVEMBER 26



terior is largely unspoilt with many original features, and is also one of the few pubs on this side of Upper Brook Street still serving cask beer. Tetley Bitter, Mild (yes, mild!) and Coach House Dick Turpin were all on handpump and between us we tried them all. They were as good as the pub itself. As we left the landlady chased after us, shouting for us to go back and have more beer! If there hadn't been more pubs to cover, we would all have found it almost impossible to resist her request.

Tearing ourselves away we returned to the University area and a refurbished **Jabez Clegg**, and yet another contrast. This former church hall with its long bar and bench seating is packed in term time, but it August getting a seat was relatively easy. Two cask beers were on sale and not the 'usual suspects' but instead Moorhouses Premier Bitter and Taylor's Landlord, both of which were well up to the standard you would expect from these beers. Moving back to Oxford Road, **Kro Bar** was next, a modern conversion of the old Manchester Temperance Society with plenty of chrome and pale colours. I have to declare this is just not my cup of tea (or glass of beer) but some of our party rave about the place (*including me - Ed(1)*). We resisted the temptation to drink inside, either in the more traditional upstairs room or the bar areas downstairs, but chose instead to sit outside on what was a very warm evening. Unusually, the only cask beer was John Smith's Cask which, as ever, was pretty average. Later, when most of our party had already departed, Theakstons Cool Cask and Gales Summer Hog came on. I quickly tried the Gales and found it much better than the John Smiths (no surprise there, then).

As some of the Staggerers went for last buses, most went to the last pub of the evening, **Sand Bar** on Grosvenor Street. This conversion of two old town houses has often featured in these pages. Notable for a bohemian atmosphere (there is usually an art exhibition on the walls), good cask beers and a large selection of continental beers, both on draught and it bottle, the place was heaving, although we were able to get seats outside. Most of us finished the night on a variety of refreshing wheat beers in bottle although those trying the cask offerings, Cropton Two Pints, Jennings Cock-a-Hoop and Phoenix White Monk, weren't disappointed either.

Thus ended a varied Stagger, with a wide variety of pubs and beers. Most of them didn't disappoint and would repay a return visit, after all this article can only be a snapshot of what we found on one particular night and can't be taken as a once and for all judgement on either the pubs or their beers. Why not visit them yourselves and see how much you (dis)agree.



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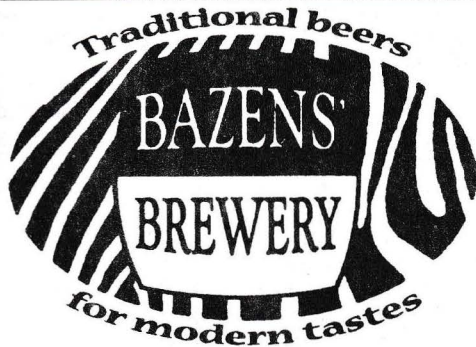


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NATIONAL NEWS

Hogshead Revolution

It looks like the end of the road for the Hogshead chain as multi-beer freehouse style operations. Owners Laurel Pub Company have unveiled their new look for the chain which is to be rolled out across the chain's entire 111 outlets in the next year.

The pubs are to be renamed Hog's Heads and the old Hogshead barrel will be disappearing from pub frontages to be replaced by Harry Hog "a figure which symbolises the new emphasis on personality-led service". This will be supplied by "Hoggers", front of bar staff on duty from 9pm Thursday, Friday and Saturday offering table service and who will earn commission by selling "shooters and platters". The Hoggers will also be encouraged to interact with "guests" (that's customers) by, for example, playing table football and Connect Four.

Other design changes include the introduction of more sofas and chairs plus "additional vertical drinking stations". Walls will become a "backdrop for the offer" - photographs will feature "fun or stupid images such as clowns" to reinforce the feelgood atmosphere. Plasma screens will show videos selected by a focus group composed of target audience members. Harry the Hog, shown moonwalking and flipping - will be projected from the front of the pub. "He provides a bit of personality and provides us with a language" says Karen Forrester, the architect of the new-look pubs. You couldn't make it up.

Binge Drinking

According to Ross Cranston, MP for Dudley North, who is a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on alcohol misuse, the demise of the traditional pub has led to the growth in binge-drinking among teenagers.

The move away from community locals towards trendy high street bars was at the root of the modern binge-drinking culture. If youngsters drank in a community pub where there are often organised social activities, they would be drinking less, he argues. Mr Cranston said there was evidence that factors such as happy hours and loud music in modern bars were also encouraging binge-drinking. His views followed the release of research by Alcohol Concern called 100 per cent Proof. The research revealed that unsafe drinking among 16-24 year old women had more than doubled, with young men's drinking up by over a third.

Pressure on Customs

The Government is coming under growing pressure to end the "stop and search" policy used by Customs to control duty-paid alcohol imports.

In an action brought by a ferry company, the High Court ruled that Customs had no right to search travellers at random, and said the "indicative limit" above which duty-paid imports are assumed to be for illegal resale was itself illegal. Customs is ignoring the ruling pending its appeal, and continues to seize vehicles belonging to anyone it suspects of smuggling.

Now the European Commission has said the policy is too harsh and says it may take Britain to the European Court of Justice. And in a House of Lords debate, Labour peer Lord Dubs said he thought the present system was "grotesquely unfair". Lib Dem peer Lord Newby said: "The only options are to accept that nothing can be done or to look at a strategy which might lead to lesser differentials on duties between this country and the rest of the EU."

Brakspears Shuts

Brewing has now ceased at Brakspear's historic Henley-on-Thames brewery. The Brakspear beers are now brewed in the north west at the Thomas Hardy Burtonwood brewery near Warrington. For several weeks prior to closure the Brakspear beers were apparently a blend of Burtonwood and Henley beers. No reports yet as to how the Burtonwood versions compare with the classic Brakspears of old.

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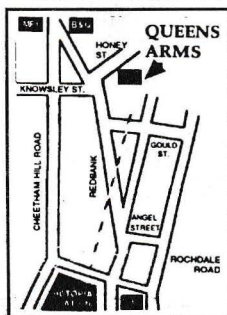
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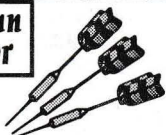
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Stockie on The che

By John
Taylor



Champions of the Stockport Licensed Houses Super League, Reddish WMC, are presently leading the table by four points. After week 15 of the fixtures they are still the only unbeaten team in the league, but in week 12 they came very close to losing that record when they entertained fourth placed Magnet.

The visitors took the first three games of the match through Geoff Millward with legs of 18 & 23, and a 180; Alan Riley (16 & 21) and Martin James (24 & 17). The league leaders showed why they are currently the best team in Stockport as they won the final four pairings. Vic Clegg led the way (19 & 15), including two maximum scores. He was well supported by son Brad (17 & 25), Neil Hunter with two legs of 23 darts, and Dave Becket who came from a leg down to win the last two of the evening in 19 & 21 darts. There were 51 tons or over scored in the match. Great entertainment and two more points for the champs.

Also in week 12, England International Tony O'Shea went out in legs of 11 & 16 for the Union Inn and a match average of 37.11 per dart. It was the second week on the trot that Tony had hit an 11 darter.

★ ★ ★

In week 13, the half-way stage in the season, bottom placed Jack & Jill were at home to the Royal Mortar. The result was never in doubt, but the way the Mortar won was nothing short of ruthless. They dropped only one leg in the entire match, with the magnificent seven winning as follows: Phil Butler (20 & 19), Pete Woodin (23 & 19), John Hollins (18 & 19), Darryl Fitton (17 & 15), Tony Daniels (19 & 18), Chris North (20 & 19) and Mark Turner (21 & 20). Those wins included outshots of 146 by Daniels, 131 by North and 110 by Hollins. Fitton hit his tenth 180 of the season and we are only half-way.

Week 13 also saw CAMRA Pub of the Year, the Nursery Inn, pull off a much needed win against the high flying Bobby Peel. The scoreline was 4-3 and saw wins for Frank Devlin, Alan Howarth, Pete Webb (24 & 23) and Andy Proctor (20 & 21) plus a 180. In reply Bren Shields (22 & 21) and a 180, landlord Paul Cretney (24 & 26) and Eric Stubbs all won for the Edgeley team.

★ ★ ★ ★

The following week saw the Jack & Jill lose again, this time 5-2 to the Bobby Peel. Captain Dennis Kidd did all he could to encourage his side by winning in legs of 17 & 16, hitting a 180 and having a 136 outshot. It was alone battle, though, and is one which is seeing this team slowly slide back into the Premier Division. Best for the Bobby Peel were Steve Lyons (25 & 21) and Mick Clooney (24 & 20). The Royal Mortar beat Club Leisure 7-0 without dropping a leg - they're getting boring now. Best of the match was Chris North (21 & 16). It was also the battle of the clubs as Reddish beat North Reddish 6-1 with Dave Beckett having an outshot of 141, and the Union Inn defeated the Nursery 6-1 (the real ale must have been off) as captain John McArdle won in 17 & 19 for the Union.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Week 15 saw the Printers Arms return to losing ways after recording two wins on the trot against Greg Street and Club Leisure. But they couldn't beat the Copperfields 'A' who had Gary Edgerton and Rob Hollinshead both winning in 24 & 22, and Cliff Cartwright with two legs of 24 darts. Best for the Printers was mister reliable himself, Derek Elliott (24 & 19) and veteran Pete Cave (29 & 27). The champions again deprive the Nursery of 'real sustenance' and beat them 6-1. Never mind, they are playing at home again next week. Neil Hunter hit a 149 for the club, but the big surprise of the week was the 5-2 home defeat of the Magnet by the resurgent Royal Oak. This team recently suffered the death of one of their players, Steve Gamble, at the early age of 33, but this tragic loss appears to have rallied the team and this latest win lifts them to the dizzy heights of ninth in the league. Well done to them. Winners on the night were Paddy Hackett and a 180, Alan Perkin, Darren Borthwick, Terry Clarke and my namesake John Taylor. Best darts of the match came from Derek Higgins for the Magnet, who won in legs of 21 & 16.

Well, it's that time again. Thanks for taking time out to read this article. See you soon - John Taylor.

Steve, Johanne, Molly &
sometimes Jess welcome you to

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7

CAMRA
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FOR
REAL ALE



New Seasonals

It's time for a new clutch of seasonal beers from our local family brewers who also of course historically produced some excellent winter warmers.

Robinson's new beer for November and December is a reprise of Robin Bitter, back for the third time and one of the more successful beers from Robbies. It is darker than the usual Best Bitter, a little stronger with a full body and malty dryness which makes for a satisfying yet easily quaffable beer. Of course this is also the real start of the Old Tom season – and this powerful strong ale seems to appear in more pubs every year. Try it in the brewery tap, the Spread Eagle on Hillgate where you'll get it in a 1967 vintage nip glass if you're lucky. Lees are also reprising one of their most popular seasonal ales. Plum Pudding is a 4.8% rich dark beer "brewed with a hint of fruit especially for the festive season". Yes, there are plums in it but they just add a subtle fruitiness rather than being overpowering. One of the most successful British fruit beers and worth seeking out – Rain Bar in the City Centre will certainly have it. Don't forget Lees regular strong ale, Moonraker (7.5%), which really comes into its own at this time of year, and of course there's the bottled Vintage Harvest Ale made from the new season's hops and malted barley. If you're very lucky you'll find it on draught but bottles are usually the norm – and be warned, it is a huge 11.5% alcohol.



The new one from Hydes is Winter Fuggle at 5%. Their November/December special is usually darker and stronger than those for the rest of the

year, so expect something special. Last year's Dutch Courage was particularly memorable. There's also a chance that Hydes may rebrew their famous XXXX Anvil Strong Ale this year.



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 Cumbria Way
 plus....
SNOWDON ALE



A WARM WELCOME IN A TRADITIONAL PUB

Holt's are sticking with the new Thunderbolt for the time being. This dark, rich 4.5% beer certainly seems to be dividing opinion. Some confirmed Holts drinkers can't stand the stuff but on the other hand OT knows of at least one confirmed Holts hater who thought it was great – "At last, a Holts beer I like!". So, you pays your money and takes your choice.



Micro Magic

As ever, our local micros have plenty of new beers to tickle your tastebuds. **Phoenix** – firm favourites Snowbound (4.3%) and Porter (5%) are due out soon but will be a little delayed this year as Phoenix are still involved with a Wetherspoon's promotion for the award winning Navy and will ale feature with the Beer Seller for November, too. Towards the end of this month look out for the seasonal beers Golden Glow (6.5%) and the mighty Humbug (7%). A new, as yet unnamed, festive beer at 5% will also be produced.

Phoenix are also celebrating Beer of the Festival wins for White Monk which picked up the honours at both Northwich and, further afield, the 13th Yapton Beerex in Sussex.

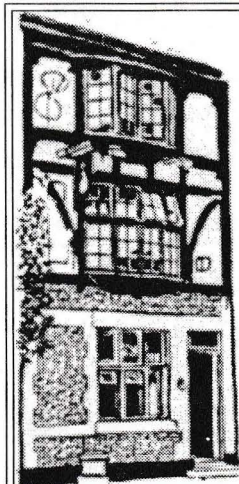
Boggart Hole Clough – As usual there are a clutch of new beers in the pipeline. Coming soon is Bogwater a 5.2% winter stout and, at the end of November, two beers for the Christmas season, Bogsleigh a 6% 'Irish' red' style beer plus a still-to-be-named 4.5% seasonal.

Bank Top – now settled in their new premises, there are no new beers scheduled for the immediate future although Santa's Claws (5%) will be back for Christmas. Bank Top is also helping the Old Laxey Brewing Co from the Isle of Man. They contacted John explaining there had been a disaster and the brewery was under three feet of water! As a result, John has brewed Old Laxey's Bosuns Bitter and when OT called was facing shipping out 15 18-gallon barrel from Heysham at 2.15am! For those who care about such things, this will presumably be a new 'tick' but since all the beer is set to be sold on the Isle of Man, a fair amount of travelling will be needed to get it.



Bazens' Brewery – seems to be going great guns. Navigator has been renamed Pacific Bitter but is otherwise unchanged. Both the Freshers beer and Best Bitter (4.5%) are selling very successfully and new beers are in the pipeline. Black Pig Mild will be out early this month and may be available at the Smithfield in Manchester. Orders are also in for the porter which will also be available soon. The name is to be Nowles Porter, named after the family which used to own the Agecroft mine.

Pictish – last month's special, Alchemists Ale, proved very popular and it has to be said it was a great beer. The Crown, Heaton Lane, shifted nine gallons in just 1 3/4 hours. There was also an 'extra' last month in the shape of Samhain Stout, bone dry and highly quaffable. This month there's another brand new beer, Z-Rod, 4.8%, pale with full malt flavours and the trademark Pictish hoppy finish. Richard Sutton tells us that business is booming to such an extent that he is having to turn away customers!



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The Pot of Beer

The Pot Of Beer (New Mount St, City Centre) has been a long-time favourite of this column, primarily down to the unusual Polish food menu which gained the pub something of a national profile. All that changed some six months ago and it was high time for a return visit to see how the replacement menu was bedding down.

The changes took place with the arrival as managers of Sue and Paul Higginson, who faced the task of rebuilding the pub's reputation after something of a roller coaster ride during the previous year. At the same time Wanda Ward, of owners Ward Taverns, felt unable to continue with her Polish food due to other business commitments. The additional loss of this unique selling point could have been another, perhaps fatal, blow to the pub's fortunes.

That the Pot is not only still with us, but is once again beginning to thrive, is a tribute to the steady dedication and hard work put in by Sue and Paul. Beer sales are clearly up and quality is as good as ever. The only regular cask beer is now Robinson's Dark Mild and this can be joined by up to four guests. The list of guest bottled beers is also worth a mention. Small, but perfectly formed perhaps sums this up, with the likes of Fraoch and Kelpie from Heather Ales side by side with more exotic offerings from overseas and traditional English ales like White Shield. Brooklyn Lager from the USA looks to be a recent addition as are the two new bottled beers, Northern Glory and Double Hop, from Robinson's.

But what of the food, you may ask. The plan six months ago was to feature simple, high quality meals using all fresh ingredients, hopefully making use of connections Sue and Paul had with North West Fine Foods, an organisation representing small and often specialist farmers.

And that is precisely what they have done with an interesting menu featuring a range of traditional dishes. These range from the exotic - Wild Boar and Pheasant Pie (£5.25), Venison in Red Wine (£5.50) to the more mainstream, for example Gammon and Egg (£3.50) of Galloway Steak & Kidney Pie (£4.25). I was seriously considering the Arbroath Smokie (£5.95) but the filthy weather outside pointed to something more comforting - so Wild Boar & Pheasant Pie it had to be. This was ordered with mash (from a choice of potatoes) and veg.

Side by side with the main menu is the sausage menu. Priced at £3.95 you get two sausages on a pile of mash with onion gravy and veg. Again the choice runs from the more mainstream to the likes of Duck and Orange, Pork and Black Pudding and, for veggies, Stilton Walnut and the oddly named 'Hot Lips', which is in fact Beetroot with chilli. My companion of this occasion chose the Duck & Orange.

There then followed quite a wait. Commendably, the Pot serves food until 9.30pm, Monday to Friday, but most of the trade is at lunchtimes so in the evenings most of your meal will be prepared to order, hence the delay. This did however give us time to enjoy the beers on offer and it must be said that the food was most definitely worth the wait.

The pie was a proper slice of pie, full of tender succulent game in a rich gravy. Excellent. The sausages were meaty and full flavoured and done to a turn. Both meals came with a pile of mash, flavour-some gravy and a huge pile of ribboned carrots. All first class, but the start turn was the mash. Creamy, sensuous but not at all heavy, this was mash to die for. The secret? "Oh, just lots of butter, double cream and some nutmeg", explained Paul. In fact he thought there might be less fat in his chips than the mash!

After this, I unusually had no room for pudding. This was a real wrench as the three on offer - Chocolate Sponge with Rum and Honey, Black Cherry and Amaretto Crepe, Minto Choc Chip Ice Cream, all £2 - £2.25, sounded rather special.

I've promised to go back and do the menu rather more justice (OK, for that read pig out on a pud) but I'm please to see this fine little pub once again firing on all cylinders. All it need now is lots more customers - with a quality operation like this, I'm sure they won't be long in arriving.

The Pot of Beer is on New Mount Street which is off Ludgate St which in turn is off Rochdale Road, between the Beer House and the Marble Arch pubs. Phone on 0161 834 8579.

Robinson's

COMPETITION

Old Tom Strong Ale is the award-winning winter warmer brewed using traditional methods and only the finest ingredients to produce a smooth, mellow ale with a dark winery colour.



As the long, cold nights set in, we're offering you the chance to give yourself an inner glow by winning a tray of Old Tom in our latest competition. Meanwhile, Ceri Dudley of Heaton Chapel receives a tray of Double Hop after winning our September competition.

To enter this month's competition, all you have to do is answer the following three questions.

1. To what abv is Old Tom brewed?
2. Which other ale in the Company's portfolio features a cat on its pump clip?
3. In which year did Old Tom last win the title:

Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain? SON'S

Send your answers by the end of the month to: Robinson's Competition, BHA, 94 Churchgate, Stockport, Cheshire, SK1 1YJ

Or by fax to 0161 477 0809 or e-mail info@barryhook.com
Normal competition rules apply

**HELP HOLD BACK THE NITROKEG TIDE!
JOIN CAMRA (PAGE 19) & DRINK REAL ALE**





CIDER & PERRY AWARDS

Mid-October saw a small group of branch members travel to the West country to present the awards for Cider and Perry of the Festival from this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival.



First stop was Hecks of Street, Somerset who won Perry of the Festival with their excellent Hendre Huffcap.



The next day was the turn of Denis Gwatkin at Abbeydore in deepest Herefordshire to get his Cider award for Yarlinton Mill. Out photographs show the winners with their well-deserved framed certificates.

A HEARTFELT APOLOGY

The Beer Monster™ and the staff of the Foreign Beer Bar at The CAMRA National Winter Ales Festival, held for the last four years at the Upper Campfield Market, Castlefield in January of each year would like to apologise for their non-appearance in 2003. Manchester City Council have seen fit to lease the hall to the local Aerospace Museum for use as a storage space, and have failed in their vague promises to offer us alternative sites. The 2003 National Winter Ales Festival has therefore moved, and will be held at Burton on Trent on roughly the same dates, sadly without our presence.

ADVERTISING IN THE 2003 STOCKPORT PUB GUIDE

This will be the third edition of Camra's Guide to Stockport Pubs, 'Viaducts and Vaults' - The first two each won awards and sold out and we are very confident that our new edition will be equally as successful. This edition will be published in early June 2003 with a print run of 2000 copies.

Advertising in the Guide will enable businesses in and around Stockport to promote their company within their local core market at highly competitive rates. Each reader will use the book time and time again bringing the companies who advertise and their products to mind each time. In order to maintain the integrity of the Guide no advertisements can be accepted from pubs.

If you are interested please ring Jim Flynn on: 0161 432 1816 (evenings) or write to him at: 66 Downham Rd, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, Cheshire, SM 5EG.

Closing date for advertising copy is the end of November 2002.

LOCAL PUBS GAIN TOP AWARDS

Two local pubs in the OT area have recently received prestigious awards. In the annual City Life Food & Drink Awards, the top honour was taken by the Queens Arms, Redbank, Cheetham. This is a particularly noteworthy win as their was strong competition from two other OT area pubs, the Marble Arch on Rochdale Road and the Royal Oak in Didsbury. Sue Price from the Queens described the occasion to OT:

"Last night I attended Manchester's Town Hall for a Tattiner champagne reception. This was the Manchester Food and Drink City Life awards. I do not think you would have recognised me as I wore a very posh dress and you know me, happy in jeans.

Following several glasses of champagne I sat down to a delicious 5-course meal. After this Tony Wilson hosted the awards ceremony. I was sat at a table that included our weekday cook Carol, John Henley and Phil from Marble Beer Co. The three nominees being the Marble Arch Rochdale Road, the Queens Arms Redbank (ourselves) and the Royal Oak at Didsbury. Our category was about four from the end and you can imagine the tension when this came up.



Sue and Dave Price at The Queens with the City Life Pub of the Year Award (and son)

John and I cheered very loudly as the presenter complimented the independent pubs. He read out the nominees and almost immediately opened the envelope. "The Queens Arms" he read. Well, I stood up and squealed with delight, then hugged everybody. I grabbed Carol's hand and dragged her on to the stage with me where the presenter got down on one knee to present the award (I presume it's the royalty aspect).

The frightening bit was the speech, which I kept very short, as I had not prepared anything, because I had no idea we had won this. I cannot actually remember the speech but the gist was to thank the hard work of the staff" Dave and Sue were still pretty gobsmacked when OT caught up with them but it has to be said it's great that City Life, a magazine which often seems more concerned with the latest café bars opening in Chorlton rather than the very strong city pub scene, has recognised the qualities of not only the Queens but also the Marble Arch and the Royal Oak, too. Well done to all concerned. Our photograph shows Dave and Sue with their award.

It was shortly after this award that news came of another tribute to the strong city pub scene. This time courtesy of the Good Pub Guide, which named the Britons Protection on Great Bridgewater Street as its Town Pub of the Year. The pub was lavished with praise by Guide readers who commented on the friendly, accommodating service and the sociable welcoming atmosphere. Again our congratulations go to licensee Peter Barnett and all at the pub.

CAMRA REGIONAL PUB OF THE YEAR

As reported in September's Opening Times, once again the Regional Pub of the Year is in our circulation area, this time being the Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year, the Porter Brewing Co. Railway in Portwood Stockport. Licensee Alex Lord is shown with his well-deserved trophy, presented on the 5th October last month.

