



# OPENING TIMES



Distributed throughout Stockport; Central, East & South Manchester; Tameside; N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield

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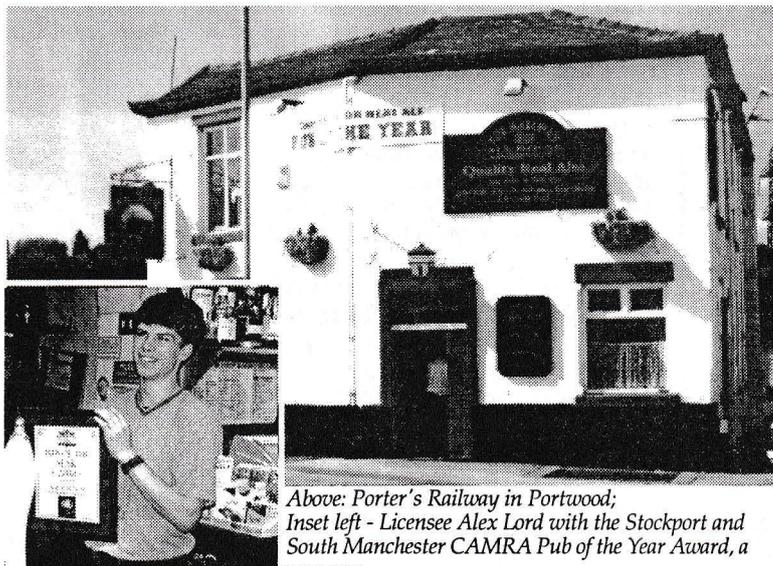
MARCH 2003 No:227

6,700 CIRCULATED THIS MONTH

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## RAILWAY IS NATIONAL PUB OF THE YEAR RUNNER-UP

Despite hopes that lightning would strike twice in the same place, Stockport's Railway didn't make CAMRA's National Pub of the Year. It made runner-up position, though, which is something of a victory in itself – both for Porter Brewing Co, Stockport's pub scene, and landlord Alex Lord.



Above: Porter's Railway in Portwood; Inset left - Licensee Alex Lord with the Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year Award, a year ago

The merits of the Railway are well-known to local drinkers, with the range of Porters cask beers supplemented by guest beers, real cider and up to 100 different bottled beers, many from Belgium and Germany.

Alex himself was very relaxed about the elevated position his pub now occupies on the national map. He told local paper the Stockport Express "We have a really loyal group of regulars, you can set your watch by the time they come in the pub. We are very proud of the high quality beer on offer here. Last year we were voted best pub in Stockport and the best pub in Greater Manchester."

Local CAMRA Branch Secretary Paul Moss summed up: "Alex runs an award-winning pub with an extraordinary variety of beers on offer, which are all kept in good condition. Most of the beer sold is real ale, and now the pub has three guest beers on pump. Alongside these drinks are real cider and a vast range of bottled beers."

The Railway narrowly missed out on being voted the UK's number one, the top award going to the Swan at Little Totham in Essex. It is however a remarkable tribute to the town's pub scene that for two consecutive years it has had a pub in the national finals. While Stockport cannot claim to have the most beers on sale at any one time, it can boast perhaps the best pub crawl in the country with an unrivalled collection of freehouses, heritage pubs, family brewer-owned pubs and micro-brewery tied houses.

The railway will be presented with its national runner-up certificate in the next few weeks, although it is intended to keep the ceremony fairly low-key many of the pub's loyal customers will doubtless be there to celebrate another milestone in its history.

### ALE TO THE RESCUE?

Interbrew's decision to sponsor the Cake Marque accreditation of some 2,000 cask Boddington's and Draught Bass stockists (OT, last month) is an interesting hint that the big brewers are rethinking their strategy.

And not before time. In recent years Whitbread and Interbrew have openly and actively set about substituting nitrokeg Boddies for cask. Today, cask Boddingtons accounts for just 10 per cent of the 750,000-odd barrels brewed each year; the rest is all either canned or "smooth" (much the same thing, only in a bigger tin).

As for Draught Bass, the way this once-great ale has been neglected is a scandal. It has been allowed to coast along unsupported while the challengers – London Pride, Abbot, Pedigree – have been heavily and successfully promoted.

The nitrokeg years have seen a catastrophic collapse in on-trade ale sales, down from 14.4 million barrels in 1992 to 8.5 million in 2001 according to latest survey results. But then why should Interbrew care? After all, it brews not only Boddies and Bass but also Stella Artois; so it wins whatever happens.

Not so. On-trade beer sales fell from 27.6 to 21.8 million barrels between 1992 and 2001 – but while the brewers sold far less ale, they didn't sell any more lager: in fact lager sales grew by only 300,00 barrels to 11.9 million, despite all the advertising.

Contrary to myth, drinkers want flavour. The alcopops that have seduced a generation are (again, contrary to myth) anything but flavourless. In fact they are very strongly flavoured, albeit with fruit not malt and hops. The growth area in wine sales is not in plonk but in wines of £7.50 a bottle and upwards. And the brewers whose sales are growing are the cask ale brewers, from regional giants such as Greene King down to the shoals of micros that are looking for bigger premises.

More worrying still for the big brewers is that the independents are winning in the key battleground – the pubcos. For all their faults, the fact is that the tenanted pubcos are constantly expanding their ranges to include more ales from independents. The bigger regionals are even beating the nationals in the managed chains, and not only JD Wetherspoon: Laurel may be chucking the micros out of the Hogshead chain, but what cask ales is it keeping? Not Bass or Boddingtons but London Pride and Deuchars IPA. Lager stagnating; bland, boring mass-market ales collapsing. The moral should be clear: well-kept top-quality real ales are the future...and it seems the big brewers are beginning to realise it.

This piece by Ted Bruning first appeared in What's Brewing, CAMRA's national monthly newspaper.

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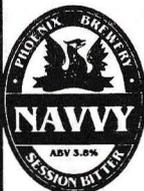
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**IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..**

CAMRA has hailed Gordon Brown as the consumer's champion following last year's introduction of duty cuts for microbrewers and our message looking forward to this year's Budget is "More of the same, please".

As part of its budget submission, CAMRA has presented the Chancellor with a dossier listing microbrewers who have been able to expand and invest since Progressive Beer Duty - which halves the excise bill for brewers of less than 18,000 barrels a year - came into force last June.

It was very far-sighted of the Chancellor to introduce this measure, which has been great for consumers and small brewers alike. Progressive Beer Duty has been a highly cost-effective measure which has delivered benefits out of all proportion to its cost. In allowing existing small brewers to invest and encouraging new ones to start up, it has delivered more choice for consumers, boosted small businesses and created new jobs.

What we now need though, is a review of the upper qualifying limit with a view to raising it in the not too distant future. Apart for the super-regionals, all independent brewers should be able to benefit from lower duty, and so help level the playing field with the national brewers.

We are also urging the Chancellor to apply the sliding scale to cider. Producers of 7,000 litres a year pay no duty, but CAMRA believes that producers of up to 150,000 litres should be eligible for reduced tax. Consolidation in the cider industry is squeezing small producers and restricting access to market. Progressive duty would enable them to invest in their companies without a large effect on government revenues.

*John Clarke*

**OPENING TIMES ISSUE 227**

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](mailto: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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**COPY DATE FOR MARCH IS FEBRUARY 22**

## PUB OF THE MONTH MARCH 2003

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					



**T**he Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for March 2003 is the Thatched Tavern on Stanhope Street, Reddish.

Hidden away behind Houldsworth Square, the Thatched is one of the few pubs still flying the flag for real ale in Reddish. It is probably the fact that it is off the beaten track that has enabled the pub to retain its character as a street corner local when most of the pubs in the area have suffered makeovers over the years. There is a well-appointed lounge, comfortable vault – with its crib tables made by the current licensee – and an anteroom to the vault for darts.

This however is not the original pub. Pictures in both the vault and lounge show the pub as it was in 1882, when it really was thatched. One picture shows some rural characters outside the pub in complete contrast to its current very urban setting.

The present licensees, Eamon and Mal, came to the pub after the unfortunate illness and untimely death of the previous incumbent had led to the Thatched's relative decline. Since then they have restored cask mild in the form of the superb Tetley Dark Mild – thus making the pub the only one in Reddish selling cask mild (and a welcome entrant on to next month's Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge). A recent introduction has been Boddington's Bitter to go alongside the Tetley Bitter, ensuring that this small local sells a larger variety of real ales than all of the other pubs in Reddish put together.

So, come along on 27 March when Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA thank Eamon, Mal and their staff for protecting one of the real unsung gems of the local pub stock and for so successfully promoting real ale when many round about have given up the ghost. The evening starts about 8.30.

The pub is well served by public transport. Buses 203 run from Stockport and East Manchester. The 373 also runs from Stockport and the 42A will get you there from South Manchester.

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

### OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

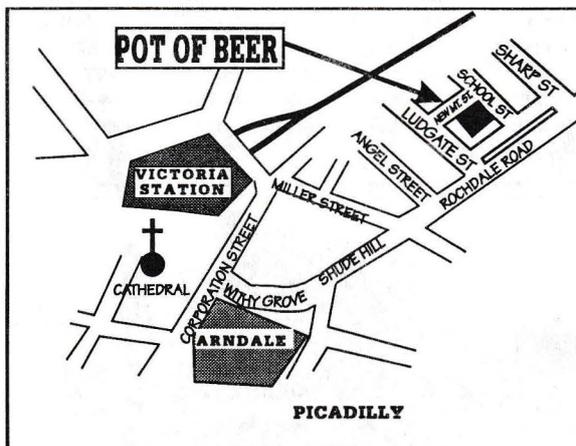
Column Widths, single 84mm, double 172mm. Image height 26cm. NB Advertisers who supply camera ready artwork designed for another publication that cannot be resized to our standard sizes will be charged the equivalent column/centimetre rate plus a surcharge of at least 30%. Adverts that require unusually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

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# STAGGER

with John Clarke

## Minibus Round The Suburbs

This month's Stagger is slightly different and one that certainly can't be completed on foot, being one of our occasional minibus tours round a number of pubs that perhaps wouldn't otherwise feature on one of these crawls. Leaving the Crown on Heaton Lane, with its usual wonderful collection of beers, our first stop was another Crown, this time on Ford Lane in Northenden. Once upon a time Northenden formed the core of one of these trips in its own right but since there are now just two real ale outlets in the whole village that's not an option. The Crown is a small, lively two-room pub that has long been a stronghold of Boddingtons Bitter, which remains the only cask ale available. It was redecorated a few years ago but is now looking a little frayed round the edges, although it's none the worse for that. At 7.30pm the pub was extremely busy, a testament to the enduring popularity of the fine little pub. The Boddies was also on good form and enjoyed by all of our party.

From the Crown, it's not far to Northenden's other remaining cask ale pub, the **Farmers Arms** on Longley Lane. In the hands of Lyn and Tony Kelly, this is a pub that has improved enormously over the years with a clear enthusiasm for real ale very much apparent. The pub has a rambling, comfortable interior and apart from the cask beers, also offers an impressive food operation until 8.00pm. Three cask beers are usually available, although due to brewery-related problems with the Greenalls Bitter, tonight there were just the two - Boddingtons Bitter and Taylors Landlord. No-one tried the Boddies, although by repute it's a very well looked after pint here, all going instead for the Taylors. This was in particularly good condition and turned out to be one of the best beers of the night.

Our next stop was the **Airport Hotel** on Ringway Road. This Robinson's pub is well-known for have a garden which sticks out into the taxiing area of Manchester Airport and is a favourite haunt for plane spotters in the summer months. There's a backroom with various machines and which seems to function as a family area while at the front there is now really just one large room, nicely decorated and furnished traditional style. It's just won a national clean air award, too. Three cask beers are available - Hatters, Best Bitter and XB. The first pints of XB weren't very good but were changed with no problem. The replacement pints were perfectly acceptable, as was both the Best Biter and the Hatters.

Another pub which can offer spectacular views of aircraft taking off and landing is the **Tatton Arms** on Trenchard Drive at Moss Nook, coincidentally another Robinson's house. It's an interesting pub this. Bits of it appear to be very old indeed with what appears to be 17<sup>th</sup> Century (or thereabouts) woodwork and fireplaces. It has quite a cosy feel and still retains something of a multi-roomed interior along with a large open-plan room for live entertainment. While recognising that it's obviously popular and well-run, I have to say that I've never quite taken to the place. I don't know why, but there you are. Two cask beers are available - Hatters and Best Bitter. Both were in good form with the Bitter in particular getting some very high marks.

It was time for some Holt's now, and the **Griffin** on the junction of Wilmslow Road and Finney Lane in Heald Green. The large modern pub dates from the 1960s, having replaced a smaller and older building on the same site. There are three rooms, a substantial vault, a large lounge-cum-snug and an even larger main lounge; all were packed but we still managed to find seats somehow. There had been a rumour that landlady Diane Davenport was retiring but we were pleased to learn that this was very definitely not the case. The two cask beers are Mild and Bitter and it has to be said that both were on stunning form. The mild was memorably good, as good as it gets in fact and gaining perfect ratings from several of our party.

Diving into deepest suburbia, our next stop was the **High Grove** on Silverdale Road, Gatley. This excellent modern pub was our Pub of the Month for February and didn't disappoint of this occasion either. Hydes' extended the pub a few years ago and there's now a restaurant area to complement the popular lounge and vault-games room. Management couple Brendan and Jan Adderley have made a huge impact here with both an enhanced menu for diners and an emphasis on beer quality for drinkers. There are four Hydes' beers available - the rare 'Welsh' (extra dark) Mild, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the current seasonal, which was Malt & Mash on our visit. Unusually none of us tried the Jekyll's but the other three beers were very enjoyable indeed with perhaps the Malt & Mash the most preferred of the three.

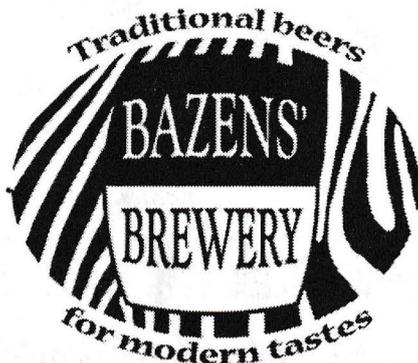
It was Hydes' again at our last port of call, the **Conway** on Turves Road, Cheadle Hulme. This is a recent acquisition by Hydes who bought it from Scottish & Newcastle. It's due a refurbishment soon and it has to be said that the pub needs it. The dead corporate hand of the various national chains to own this pub is very apparent in the layout and décor and in marked contrast to the original and high quality work that characterises Hydes' pub refurbishments these days. Hydes' new licensee has been making quite a name for himself with the high quality of the beer, however Sod's Law swung into action and we arrived while he was on holiday and the pub was in the hands of relief management. Hence both the Bitter and Jekyll's Gold were pretty ordinary and made for a slightly disappointing end to the night. For the record, it is only fair to report that the beer is now back on top form.

After that it was back on the bus and last orders in the now-heaving Crown, Heaton Lane - a tremendously good pint of Pictish Brewers Gold rounded of the night nicely.

As is always the case on these mini-bus tours, the pubs are carefully selected and it's rare to have a disappointing experience or a full pint, and so it proved tonight with the highlights - the Farmers Arms and the Griffin - being very good indeed. All of these pubs will repay a visit and are highly recommended.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 227:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Butler, Peter Edwardson, Phil Levison, Stuart Ballantyne, Frank Wood, Tom Lord, Pete Soane, Brian Taylor, John Taylor, Mark Mcconachie



Sea God 4.3% (Feb/March)  
 Pacific Bitter 3.8%  
 Flatbac 4.2%  
 Best Bitter/Flying Zebra 4.5%  
 Black Pig Mild 3.6%  
 Knowles' Porter 5.2%

Regular outlets include  
 The King's Arms and The Albert Vaults, Salford,  
 The Trackside, Bury, Waters Green, Macclesfield,  
 The Knott Bar, Manchester. For others and more info,  
 please see [www.bazensbrewery.co.uk](http://www.bazensbrewery.co.uk), phone

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or email [enquiries@bazensbrewery.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@bazensbrewery.co.uk)

# OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From 'Fred Straddles', President of the Keg Excellence Group:

*I've just seen for the first time, the magazine 'Opening Times'. Why no decent beer? We are KEG because we love our beer! We think your beer is for uneducated people.*

*Can I tell you about some of the amazing new smooth brews? For a kick-off, there's Blighty's Super Smooth Plus - it's just come onto the market. Golden, clean and has a head like freshly fallen snow! Beautiful! Next to come onto the market is Mr Kool. It is an Irish beer that can be kept in the freezer and sucked as a lolly, or store some in the fridge to pour out on a hot summer day. I tried a few in London at the launch and thought it were fresh and cool. You can't tell me you're not tempted to try it, because our members love it. I'll really, really love to send you some! Give us Extra-Smooth and Creamflow any day of the week. We know you lot call our beers "fizz"! Not everybody likes flat beer. We like a sparkle in a pint glass. Heh, who are you to tell us what to drink!*

*(Ho, ho, ho! In his more lucid moments, 'Fred' will also probably tell you that he believes in the Tooth Fairy and the Easter Bunny as well - Ed(1))*



If you experience problems in a pub, please first try to sort it out tactfully with the licensee, but if you need to take it further:-

Local Trading Standards Contacts are:

Stockport - 0161 474 4248, Manchester - 0161 234 5600  
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Cheshire - 01244 602500, Trafford - 0161 912 2274



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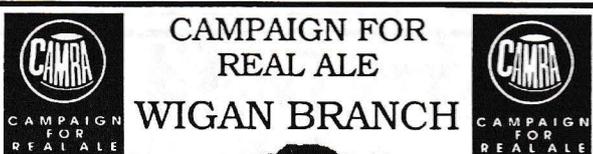


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Following the success of last year's competition, we have once again teamed up with the Stockport Express to bring you another Mild Challenge, and again we have stretched our wings to include parts of Manchester and Salford along with a few other pubs 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 5 April to Sunday 11 May and offers everyone taking part the chance to win something. All completed entries will receive either a free entry ticket for the 2003 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 Ultra** - 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. There's a new **Mild Challenge Extra** this year, too. Visit 36 participating pubs in 12 different areas, again using the card headings, and you will win one of our special Mild Challenge Sweat Shirts. Full details including a list of all participating pubs and an entry card will appear in next month's Opening Times.

**IF IN DOUBT - ASK IF IT'S CASK**



Dave and Sue Welcome You To  
**THE QUEENS ARMS**

HONEY STREET, CHEETHAM

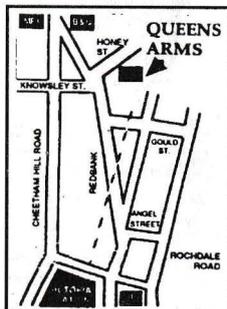
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Families Welcome

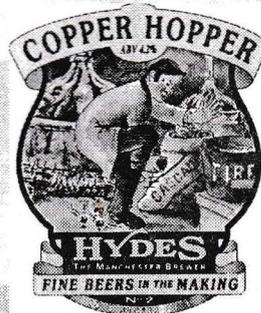
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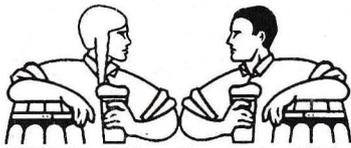
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## STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL

# Stockport's 17th Beer & CIDER FESTIVAL

STOCKPORT CAMRA TOWN HALL  
29TH-31ST MAY 2003

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 new comers 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 should again be coming from the highly regarded Pictish Brewery at Rochdale, so expect something, crisp, hoppy and refreshing. Cider lovers shouldn't feel neglected, though - while we no longer host CAMRA's National Cider & Perry Championship, 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 29<sup>th</sup> - Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> May. Get**

Mayoral Appeal 2002/2003

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# 17th CAMRA OLDHAM

28th and 29th March 2003

Queen Elizabeth Hall

Civic Centre

West Street

Oldham

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10 minutes from Mumps Railway Station)

**Entertainment**

Friday Evening - Roger Higgins Band (Blues / Rock)

Saturday Evening - Dark Horses (Country / Rock)

Foreign bottled beers - Traditional Ciders - Food at all sessions  
Disabled access - Family room at lunch times



Opening Hours:		Admission:	
Friday	12 noon - 4pm	Friday lunch	£1.00
Friday	6pm - 11pm	Friday evening	£2.50
Saturday	12 noon - 4pm	Saturday lunch	£1.00
Saturday	6pm - 11pm	Saturday evening	£2.00
CAMRA members free at all times			

Mayoral Appeal this year is supporting:  
Inskip League of Friendship, Terence O'Grady Club,  
Seagull Trust and Unity in the Community

7  
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FOR  
REAL ALE

*Steve, Johanne, Molly &  
sometimes Jess welcome you to*

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Sat: 7pm - 11pm;

Sun: 7pm - 10.30pm



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**Family Brewers Update**

There are new beers this month from all four of our local family brewers. Two are reprising beers from last year and two have brand new products out.



**Robinson's** seasonal beer for March and April is Stockport Arches, a copper-coloured beer which has proved popular over the past two years. It will nevertheless be a hard act to follow after what appears to have been the runaway success of Double Hop. There surely must be a case for making Double Hop more regularly available, given the general acclaim with which it was received – would it threaten the future of Frederics, though?

The other brewer reprising a beer from 2002 is Lees with a welcome return of Brooklyn Best, again for March and April. This 5% beer was brewed last year by Garrett Oliver from New York's Brooklyn Brewery, and this time around it still retains the huge bitterness and mouth-watering flavour that made it such a success last time.



**Hydes** and **Holts** are the brewers with brand new beers. **Hydes** have the second in their 'Fine Beers in the Making' range with Copper Hopper a 4.2% copper-toned beer brewed with a hint of honey and using Cascade hops, known for imparting quenching, citrus notes to beers. **Holts** are also using Cascade hops in their new beer, Blackwell Bitter. This is also brewed using a lager yeast so a pale and very refreshing beer is in prospect there.



**Micro News**

As is ever the case, there is plenty to report from the local micro-brewing scene with plenty of new beers. Again it wasn't possible to contact every brewer so apologies to those missed out.



**Pictish Brewery** at Rochdale have Dolmen out this month. This 4% beer is amber coloured with a fine hop aroma, biscuity malt flavours and the traditional Pictish lingering bitter finish. The Crown, Heaton Lane will be a guaranteed outlet on the reserved Pictish pump.

**Boggart Hole Clough** has just one new beer out this time. This is Humphrey (as in Humphrey Boggart...) a 4.3% pale ale. Last month's APA, an American-style pale ale was first class – if you still manage to find some do give it a try.



**Khean Brewing** in Congleton is still going strong with the beer appearing in many free trade outlets. In February a special, First Slip, was brewed and sold out in about a week. This 4.4% beer was more hoppy and floral than any previous Khean beers and has inspired Khean's Ken Newcombe to produce another new beer for March, although this had not been finally formulated when OT spoke to him. **Leyden Brewery** up at Nangreaves is producing Cool Shamrock for St Patrick's night and has also brewed a special house beer for the Trackside free house at Bury Bolton Street station. Penfold Paralysis is 6.4 % and was commissioned to taste like liquid Christmas cask, and so is a dark, malty, fruity and sweetish beer.



**Porter Brewing Company** has a second string to its bow. Apart from producing great beers sold in first class pubs, Dave Porter also installs micro-breweries. The products of these new concerns happily then feature as guest beers in Stockport's Railway. One brewer in particular has hit the right notes and that is the new **Leek Brewery**. This is the brainchild of Adrian Corke and his partner Sue Carline. The couple have installed a 4.5 barrel-plant in a shed behind their house and hope it will increase sales at their pub, the Good Beer Guide—listed Bull's Head in St Edward Street, Leek.

Three beers are currently in production – Staffordshire Bitter, Staffordshire Gold and St Edwards, all quite different from each other, and have created considerable interest amongst the pub's customers.



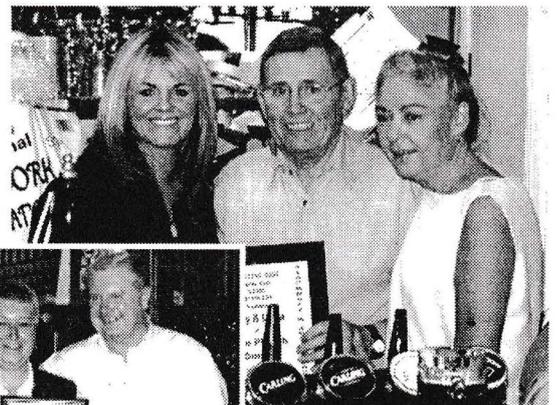
**Marble Brewery** – has relaunched Old Lag as 'Lagonda IPA' – and very good it is too. The beer is now a classic, pale gold premium brew with a distinct but elegant hoppiness and a long lasting quenching bitter finish. Worth tracking down in Marble outlets – the Marble Arch on Rochdale Road will certainly have it – but be warned, it's very dangerously drinkable (as you very own Ed(1) knows to his cost!)

**Phoenix Brewery** – just can't stop picking up awards at the moment. The latest triumph was at Fleetwood Beer Festival last month with top two places in the Beer of the Festival contest with Snowbound and Arizona coming first and second. New beers out this month include Resurrection (4.7%), Shamrock (4.3%) and March Hare (4.4%).



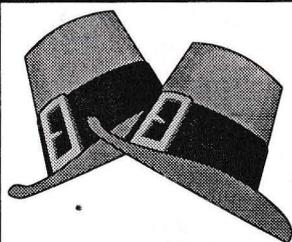
There will also be a special event in early April at the Barge & Barrel in Elland, West Yorkshire. To mark the 21<sup>st</sup> anniversaries of the pub becoming a free house and the first Phoenix (Oak as it then was) brew in Ellesmere Port, a special batch of Tyke Bitter will be launched at the pub. Tyke hasn't been brewed by Phoenix for a very long time and this will be a welcome return for an old favourite. Finally, Phoenix are gaining a new brewer. Alan Dibden joins the company from Boddingtons and will share brewing duties with current brewer Tony Firth.

**CAMRA PRESENTATIONS**



Amongst the presentations to licensees winning a deserved Pub of the Month Award in the last few months have been Tony and

Linda Lindsay of the Robinson's Plough on Hyde Road in Gorton (main picture) and Rita and Tony Morris of the Mawson on Kincardine Road, Chorlton On Medlock.



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Thursday Night Quiz Starts 9.30  
Meals Served Lunch & Evening





For those of us with an urge to try any new beer we see in front of us, even if we no longer travel hundreds of miles each month for the pleasure of doing so, the weekend that saw February hand over to March, a mere week ahead of the abstinence of lent (*abstinence, what abstinence? Ed (2)*) caused me to think more than once that "It's grim up North". Leaving aside the heady pleasures of Bradford Beer Festival where even the more pernicketty 'tickers' might have found about thirty brand new beers, the metropolises joined by the Ship Canal boasted about a hundred 'ticks' between them.

At least twenty-odd were located at the still excellent Ship and Mitre in Liverpool (*where sadly one brewery batch had to be condemned, alongside the Leadmill beers which (as ever) should have been - see OT's passim ad nauseam*), many of the remainder offering tastes to enliven a jaded palate. Closer to home, the Crescent in Salford offered up a festival range surpassing even Idy and Sal's consistently high standard (as I am told, did Saturday's beef stew). Plenty of golden bitters and pale ales to suit, the Phoenix Double Gold being particularly outstanding, but the best beer I tried here was a Treacle Stout, which was more a dark mild, but demonstrated that it was indeed made with real liquorice.

The "Four Corners" festival in the Northern Quarter was held between four pubs, the Beer House, Marble Arch, Pot of Beer and Queens. A very welcome minibus helped ferry the visitors around. It was nice to see the Beer House looking much like it did of old, with an excellent range on offer (though indeed the place has been gradually dragged back up by licensee Jeni, and with food on offer Tuesday - Saturday lunches in addition to an improving beer range - plus draught cider - I have always had a very pleasant experience on my visits this year). The two best beers I found were Burton Bridge's Damson Porter (just running out) at the Queens, and the Durham White Crystal at the Pot. In fairness to Charlie and Jim at the Marble, I should add that their guest beers were from Scotland, that the bar was nicely kitted out, and the beer was going down well until I encountered an excellent 8% beer and my recall after that is, er... patchy. Talking of things Marble, as covered elsewhere in OT, the well known "Old Lag" has gone to meet its maker (not, as many thought, named for an old Strangeways hand who frequented the pub, but for the more upmarket Lagonda motor). Its replacement is a very good Pale Ale (Lagonda PA) which features a quite exceptional attack, taste and mouthfeel, but - to my mind - drops off slightly with an abrupt clean finish. Many, I dare say, will love it to bits - *like Ed (1)*, but as a true friend of the hop, I would have liked a little more aggression and lasting bitterness in the aftertaste. Given the difficulty of pulling that off with Organic hops, I must say it's a pretty stunning formulation all round, a very good beer, and without doubt the best organic IPA I've tried. Well done brewer James Campbell. Nearly as good as the Ginger beer. Try it (and while you're at it, you really ought to also re-try the Cloudy Marble - now pale gold and crystal clear, tasting really good, and oddly, nothing like I remember it used to, not that it's also been reformulated, no, perish the thought...).

*To end on a slightly sour note. On Saturday at the Crescent, despite the pub heaving with trade, the staff were still rushing off to the cellar with orders for multitudes of halves of beers that were ready, but waiting for a hand pump to come on (clearly above and beyond etc.). Some hadn't even been formally priced, and some understandable and expected rounding up was going on. One clown from a local branch decided to make a fuss about the couple of coppers he decided he was short.... clearly nobody ought to expect a tip from him before Hell freezes over. I'll refrain from embarrassing him with a name but it's no wonder we sometimes get a bad name. This Human Rights Act has been nothing but trouble. I blame that Cherie Booth!*

## THE CASTLE

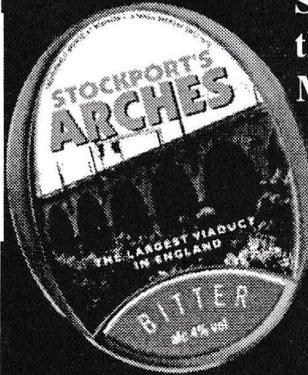
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NOW SERVING THE **COMPLETE**  
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Old Tom and Hartleys XB &

Cumbria Way  
and Snowdon Ale  
A WARM WELCOME  
IN A TRADITIONAL PUB



# Robinson's COMPETITION



Stockport's Arches,  
the seasonal ale for  
March and April, is  
a dark, full-bodied  
bitter with a crisp,  
dry finish.

With spring in the air, some minds may well be turning to playing a round or two of golf. To help you do it in style we're offering you the chance to win a branded golf umbrella, towel and balls in this month's competition. Graham Lloyd of Poynton, Cheshire, meanwhile, receives a tray of Double Hop after winning our January competition.

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

1. To what abv is Stockport's Arches brewed?
2. Which other beer mentions the Company's home town in its title?
3. What will be the seasonal beer for May and June?

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](mailto:info@barryhook.com)

Normal competition rules apply

**HELP HOLD BACK THE NITROKEG TIDE!  
JOIN CAMRA (PAGE 15) & DRINK REAL ALE**

# 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

### MARCH 2003

**Thursday 13<sup>th</sup>** - Branch Meeting: Gateway, Kingsway, East Didsbury. Start 8.00pm. 2003 Cask Champion Award will be discussed at this meeting.

**Friday 14<sup>th</sup>** - Trip to Bazens' Brewery, Salford. Minibus will depart Crown, Heaton Lane at 7.15pm. Book with Paul Formby (0161 612 0759 - after 6.00pm)

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>** - informal social at Orange Tree Beer Festival, Altrincham. From 2pm.

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup>** - Joint Social with Trafford & Hulme Branch at White Lion, Liverpool Road, Castlefield. 8.30pm onwards

**Friday 21<sup>st</sup>** - West Didsbury & Withington Stagger: 7.30pm Woodstock, Barlow Moor Rd; 8.30 Railway, Lapwing Lane

**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup>** - Pub of the Month presentation to the Thatched Tavern, Stanhope St, Reddish. From 8.0pm.

**Saturday 29<sup>th</sup>** - informal social at Oldham Beer Festival. From 12 noon onwards.

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April** - Visit to Ossett Brewery - book with Paul Formby (0161 612 0759 - after 6.00pm)

**Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup>** - **Branch Meeting and AGM: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Note change of day/date. All please attend this important meeting. Starts 8.00pm.**



### MARCH 2003

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

**Monday 10<sup>th</sup>** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Swan Inn, Kettleholme nr Whaley Bridge. Starts 8.30pm

*The Trafford & Hulme Branch covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester west of the M56/Princess Parkway, and a large part of the City Centre. They have notified us of the following events:*

**Saturday 15<sup>th</sup>** - Social at the Beer Festival to be held at The Orange Tree, Altrincham. From 2.00pm

**Monday 17<sup>th</sup>** - Social in The White Lion, Liverpool Rd Manchester with Stockport & South Manchester Branch.

**Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> April** - Monthly Branch Meeting: The Old Market Tavern, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm.

#### Regional Events

**Friday 7<sup>th</sup> March** - Under 26 Retro Crawl: 7.30 Sand Bar (Grosvenor St, all Saints); 9.30 Knott (Deansgate) Visiting a selection of Cafe bars serving real ale and imported beers. (meet under CAMRA sign)

**Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April - Regional Meeting and AGM:** Hare & Hounds, Shudehill Starts 1pm

To Do Address Notepad Camraversary CAMRA 93 Planner

10

CAMRA  
CAMPAIGN  
FOR  
REAL ALE

## CAINS

# BREWERY TOURS

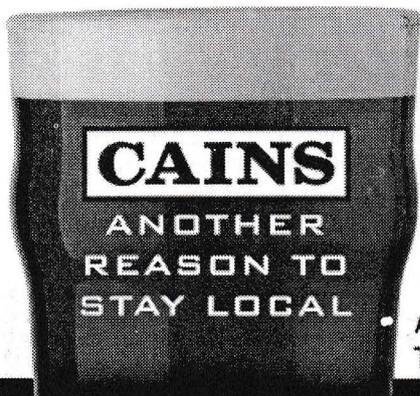
INCLUDED IN TOUR:

**2 FREE PINTS & finger buffet**

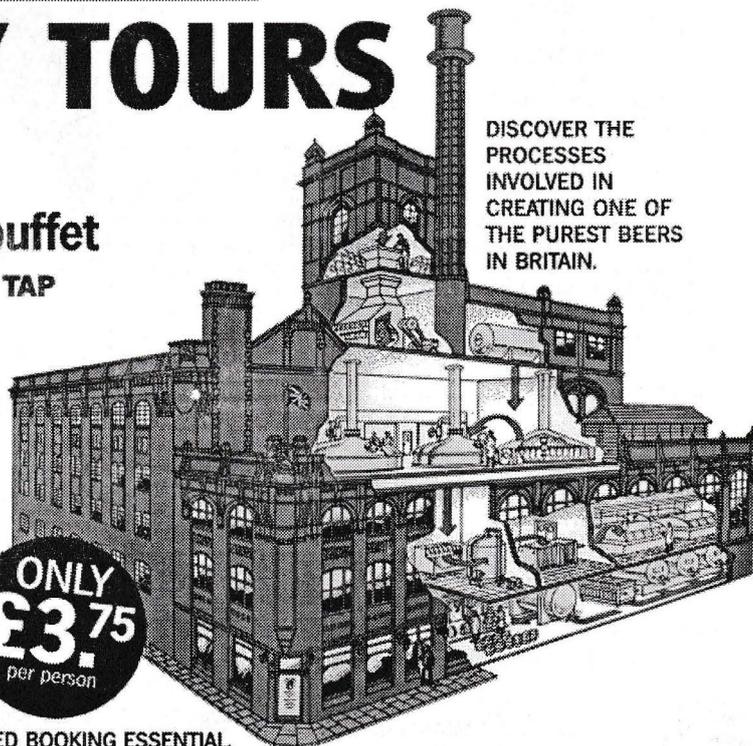
IN THE AWARD WINNING BREWERY TAP

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# 5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

MARCH '98

**T**axing Times' was the front page headline, and the first paragraph gave one or two interesting statistics and comments on the current situation at the time. "A third of the price of a pint of beer in a British pub is tax. We pay nearly seven times more tax on a pint than the French. Because of the Government's high tax policy, pubs and breweries are closing. Kent brewers Shepherd Neame claim that they have been forced to close 45 pubs since the Single Market came into force in 1992. In the last month alone we have heard of the closure of six small breweries. this affects jobs, local services, and choice for customers."

★ ★

A smaller section of the front page had some good news, for a change. "White Shield Saved!" Inly been the previous month Bass had stated categorically that Worthington White Shield, the biggest selling bottle-conditioned beer in the country, was to discontinue. Now, Bass National sales had struck a deal with regional brewer King & Barnes to brew it at their Horsham brewery and market it under license. It would continue to be available from Bass, while King & Barnes would build distribution through their own channels both in the UK and overseas. This arrangement came to an end when King & Barnes was taken over by Hall & Woodhouse and closed in August 2000. But there is a happy ending - Worthington White Shield has now returned to Burton-on-Trent, where it is produced by the Museum Brewing Co., based in the Bass Museum.

★ ★ ★ ★

Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar was High Peak & NE Cheshire Branch's featured pub for March. They described it as a long-standing favourite watering hole with beer drinkers and train spotters, (sorry - railway enthusiasts), and referred to the near death of the Buffet Bar which had been well-documented in the pages of Opening Times. Its survival had been due to a concerted effort by a great many people, including those from CAMRA, which paid off when John and Sylvia from the well-regarded Station in Ashton tool on the lease of the building, thus safeguarding its future. Tasteful restoration, and restrained readornment were phrases that had been used, and the quality of the work was recognised by the award of a heritage plaque by Railtrack.

★ ★ ★

There was a separate item on a Stalybridge "special", which was headed "Dorothy knows her station" - this announced the welcome return of Wye Valley Brewery Week, when 12 of the brewery's beers were to appear. These would include two beers specially produced for the event - Dorothy's Delight, and Dorothy's Dilemma. There was also a recommendation for visitors to get there early as the last Wye Valley "week" had only lasted four days.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Finally, two items of City Centre pub news. The Royal Central Hotel, or Cox's Bar as many still though of it, (at the back of the Free Trade Hall), was undergoing a major refurbishment - it looked as if real ale was likely to go. The Lass O'Gowrie on Charles Street was changing hands - Noel 'Joe' Fylan was retiring, but was staying on for another month to help the new licenses with the brewing process. They had come from the Flagg Inn at Bromley Cross.

# CURMUDGEON



## Class in a Glass

A distinctive feature of drinking in Belgium is that each brand of beer has its own unique design of glass, which gives that brew an individual identity and brings out its own particular character. In contrast, in the typical British pub, everything from cider to Guinness is served up in the same design of pint glass, and most bottled beers now just seem to be guzzled straight from the neck. At a time when beer is losing market share to wine and pre-mixed spirits, and is often seen as having a down-market image, this does it no favours.

Last year, the makers of Stella Artois, that well known imitation Belgian beer, decided to do something about this by introducing a unique design of glass with an etched logo. Now the success of Stella in UK owes far more to marketing than quality, but you have to admit they have a point. Cask beer loses out even more than kegs because it tends to be dispensed from a one-size-fits-all handpump rather than a unique font. It's naïve to believe that a good product will sell itself, and it could enhance the image of cask beer in consumers' minds if the regular brands had their own design of glass with the appropriate logo. It could also encourage pub operators to take a more long-term view of serving real ale if they knew that dropping it would make hundreds of glasses useless.

## Size Can Make a Difference

While we're looking at the design of glasses, perhaps the measures served should be considered too. Traditionally, people in Britain have drunk relatively weak beers of 4% ABV or less in pints, while most of the rest of the world has drunk beers of a standard strength around 5%, in measures of about a third of a litre, or three-fifths of a pint. Nowadays, even though many stronger beers are routinely drunk, the attachment to pints still remains. However, a lot of people who might be tempted by draught beer find pints a little overwhelming, in terms of both volume and alcohol content, while halves are just too tiny and namby-pamby. This must be a factor encouraging the drinking of bottled designer lagers and rubbishy pre-mixed spirits.

Currently draught beer can be legally dispensed in multiples of half a pint. It may also be sold in nips (a third of a pint), but for some strange reason not in multiples of a nip. But there's a very good case for also allowing measures of two-thirds of a pint to be served, slightly bigger than the commonplace 330 ml bottles and almost exactly the same as the 12 US fluid ounces that is usual in America. It would have enough size advantage over a half to seem a more worthwhile drink, but be sufficiently smaller than a pint to leave you considerably more sober and less bloated. It would also be appealing to drinkers in multi-beer alehouses who want to sample a range of beers without ending up under the table.

While total deregulation of draught beer measures would be confusing to customers and give pub operators an irresistible opportunity to raise prices, permitting measures of two-thirds of a pint would make a lot of sense.

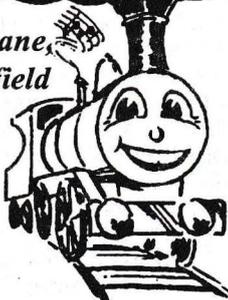
Curmudgeon Online: [www.curmudgeon.co.uk](http://www.curmudgeon.co.uk)



Dave, Jane and family welcome you to ...

## THE RAILWAY VIEW

Byrons Lane,  
Macclesfield



- 8 GUEST BEERS ☆
- ☆ QUIZZES ☆
- ☆ BAR GAMES ☆



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- ★ Lunches every day including Sundays for families in our Dining Room.
- ★ Beer Garden with Eating Area
- ★ Bowling Parties & Function Room.
- ★ Egon Ronay Guide, AA Best of British Gd
- ★ CAMRA Good Pub Food Guide
- ★ CAMRA Regional Pub of the Year 2001
- ★ CAMRA NATIONAL Pub of the Year



Brewers of  
Traditional  
Cask  
Beers

Always in  
good taste

# THE WHITE HART

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**CUBAN CUISINE**  
 & TAPAS  
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## THE SPORTSMAN

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 Geoff and Carmel Welcome You To

**CAMRA REGIONAL  
 PUB OF THE YEAR 1998 & 1999**

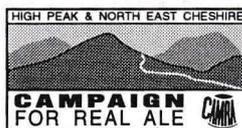


**A GENUINE FREE HOUSE  
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## FEATURED PUB

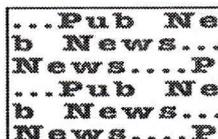
The Kinder Lodge,  
 Hayfield

Quietly establishing itself as a place to go for good beer and good ambience, since Graham Clarke bought the pub three years ago, it gives the village a third pub (along with the Royal Hotel across the road and the Waltzing Weasel the other way) that has guest beers, and virtually a pub crawl round the village with many different beers to drink in an evening.

Two years ago, the pub was gutted, more so upstairs, but many improvements were made in the pub too. This included bar fittings and four handpumps (getting to the crux of the matter) which dispense Adnams Broadside and Taylors Best Bitter (all the time) with guests which include Banks's Bitter, Marstons Best Bitter (fairly regularly) and normally a pump has a beer on from Storm Brewery at Macclesfield, on my recent visit being Storm Windgather. Bed and Breakfast accommodation is offered, being six rooms, all with en-suite facilities and also upstairs is a meeting room which takes around 20 people (we have just booked a Branch meeting there!). The pub actually opens up at 9am every day, for breakfasts and at £4 the locals speak highly of both the quality and the amount (good start to have one before a day's walk ascending Kinder Scout). Bar snacks are available 12-3pm daily and if in on a Sunday, a happy three hours from 4-7pm, gives you all the cask ales at £1.60 a pint. Inside, the pub has fairly low oak beams, a pool room just off to the right and a lounge area to the left. In the corner of the bar, a large screen is brought down for all televised Premiership matches and other sports being screened, popular with local villagers. At the front, there is a fairly sizeable patio area with benches on each side of the front door.

The Kinder Lodge is the base of Hayfield Football Club who play in the Hope Valley League on Saturdays and there are pool, darts and quiz teams which make it a popular communal place.

Although the branch line up to Hayfield closed in 1970, the station just behind the pub now being a car park and visitor centre for the Sett Valley Trail which is on the old railway bed, Hayfield can be visited easily by bus from Glossop (no's 361, 60 & 61 Mon-Sat) and 61a (Sun), from Stockport/Marple (358 every day) and Marple (355 Mon/Fri).



A big loss to the High Peak area this month is in Glossop where licensee Joyce Pilling has announced her forthcoming retirement from the Crown, a Good Beer Guide entry for 17 years. Joyce has been a popular landlady over the years and has kept at the helm of the pub, if not working on the bar she is always around the pub, with a cheery smile and greeting for her customers. Unfortunately, the timing of her departure means that with branch members currently surveying for Good Beer Guide 2004 and CAMRA rulings, it cannot be nominated this time round. I would like personally to thank Joyce for her efforts at keeping the pub such a treat to drink in, I have been a regular myself for 23 years and greatly like the place and the Sam Smiths beer and though it will be a sad occasion on March 1st when Joyce celebrates her 60th birthday, in what will be her last birthday there, I wouldn't miss it for anything.

Another change, this time in Old Glossop. Steve and Thea Hakes are due to leave the Bulls Head any time now. They introduced the authentic Indian Cuisine to the pub, probably one of the first to do this in the area, some seven years ago, and besides a run in the Good Beer Guide, were visited by Sue Nowak for an article in *What's Brewing* and also included in her Good Pub Food Guide for several editions.

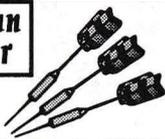
Letters to Opening Times: The Editor, Opening Times,  
 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport. SK3 9HD  
 or [johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com](mailto:johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com)

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# Stockie The che

By John Taylor



The Stockport Licensed Houses Super League season finished as was expected, with the top two teams both winning their final fixture. Champions Reddish WMC won 6-1 at home against the Copperfields 'B' with both Nick Kearns and Vic Clegg hitting a maximum. Best darts of the match, though, were by Mick Ellis for the visitors, who went out in legs of 18 & 15, including a 116 outshot. The Royal Mortar won their last match 7-0 against the league's bottom team, the Jack & Jill. Tony Daniels, John Hollins and Roly Mellor all hit 180s for the Hillgate side. These two results meant that the championship would now have to be decided by a play-off.

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Other results in the final week saw the Union Inn beat North Reddish 7-0, which included kills of 123 for Jack Cuddy and 101 for Tony O'Shea. That win ensured third place for the Union, which is the lowest position for these players in eight seasons. The Magnet finished fourth after a 5-2 win against the Copperfields 'A' with Derek Higgins their top throw, winning in 18 & 20. The Printers won by the same scoreline at home to Club Leisure. The turn up of the night came at the Bobby Peel where the Nursery Inn, needing a win to stand any chance of staying up, came away with a 4-3 victory. As it later turned out, though, only the Jack & Jill were relegated because of four new teams coming into the Premier Division for the start of the new season.

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Week 27 was set aside for any play-offs and so it was that we had the championship decider at the Bobby Peel, winner takes all. Who would be top dogs for the next 12 months? The games went as follows. Phil Butler for the Mortar, Neil Hunter for the champs to make it 1-1. Tony Daniels then put the Mortar in front again and John Hollins then made it 3-1. Reddish had escaped a few times this season and the question was would they do it again? Perhaps. Pete Day jnr pulled one back to make it 3-2, but he hero of the night Roly Mellor then won game six and with it made the Royal Mortar champions for the third time in four seasons. Well done to them.

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The following week the team knock-out final took place, and this time Reddish came good as they defeated the Magnet 4-3. The

week after that, the Union pairing of John McArdle and Barry Riley won the darts pairs for the second time in three years, against George Pike and Jeff Pearson from Gregg Street, and so the season finished as follows:

*Darts Champions - Royal Mortar; Runners-up - Reddish WMC*  
*Crib League Winners - Royal Mortar; Runners-up - Copperfields 'B'*  
*Darts Team Knock-out Winners - Reddish WMC; Runners-up - Magnet*  
*Crib Team Knock-out Winners - Sidings; Runners-up - Nursery Inn*  
*Promoted to the Super League - Gateway (Champions); Salisbury Club (Runners-up)*  
*Highest Kill - 161, Andy Proctor, Nursery Inn; Least Darts - 11, Tony O'Shea, Union Inn*  
*Most 180s - 13, Darryl Fitton, Royal Mortar*  
*Highest Crib Win - 68 holes, Alan Tallants & Alan Glover, Printers Arms*

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So another season draws to an end and it's the end for me as well. I am moving on to pastures new as they say. I hope you have enjoyed reading about local darts over the last year or so. I would like to thank the Editors of this very prestigious paper for allowing me to make my contribution to a sport which, remember, fills our locals during the week and which in turn allows these establishments to remain open. So keep up the good work and support your local darts team.

Thanks for reading.

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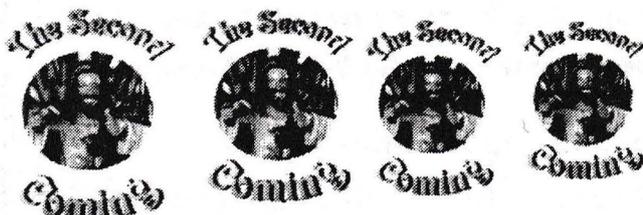
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# MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

*The short gap between this column and the last one have meant that I've not been able to get out and about as much as I would have liked. Having said that, though, I have had quite a few enjoyable pints in the City Centre recently....*

### Out On The Town

A visit from the Burton-on-Trent Branch was a welcome opportunity to show off a few of the City Centre's better drinking haunts.

We kicked off at **The Knott** on Deansgate - rapidly becoming one of my all-time favourites with both great food and beer - where a Durham Beer, White Bullet, just had to be tried and was certainly everything you expect from this well-respected micro.

Lees' **Rain Bar** was next and, as ever, more than held its own as a flagship for the Middleton brewers. I'm not convinced by their seasonal, Two Faced Janus, but the other beers were very good indeed. I'd not been to either the **Old Monkey** or the **Circus** for quite some time and both were well up to expectations with first class Holt's at the Monkey and both great Tetley and a terrific pub experience in the Circus. Greek George has certainly made the place his own and, if anything, the pub is more homely and welcoming than ever.

Northern Quarter highlights included the **Marble Arch**, which now does food, by the way - I'd completely forgotten this, much to my shame. The **Beer House**, had a handful of guest beers on alongside some more standard brews - I've not been in for ages (tending to prefer the nearby Pot of Beer) and have heard mixed reports about the pub. I think the problem is that it lives in the shadow of its history. If the Beer House was newly opened, everyone would be perfectly happy with the offering here. As it is... Another must-see was **Bar Fringe**, which was a huge hit with our visitors. I usually go for one of the many continental beers here but this time was tempted by the Boggart APA - an excellent American-style brew. Bar Fringe never disappoints, in my view, and must be an essential port of call for all visitors to the city who have any sort of interest in beer.

After that it was a quick one in the **Hare & Hounds**, Shudehill, the inter-war interior here really is an incredible survivor. Perversely, I found myself sitting there thinking how easy it would be to knock through! Perish the thought! A quick canter down Deansgate took us for a swift half in the **White Lion** on Liverpool Road and a farewell to our visitors who were planning to pause for refreshment in Macclesfield on the way back. On a separate occasion, I also had cause to pop into the **Briton's Protection** on Great Bridgewater Street. They seem to be getting a bit more adventurous with the guest beers here with a tasty dark beer from the Blackpool Brewery on sale when I called.

### And In The Suburbs

At the Royal Oak, Didsbury, Hazel and Rob will celebrate twelve months running the pub in March 2003 and are keen to thank their customers for support. The Royal Oak has recently been selling Nimos XXXX as a guest beer recently and very good it has been, too. I'm told that the pub's area manager has been pressing for the Royal Oak to put a television in every room but Rob has been able to avoid doing this so far. He certainly has my support on that score - some of these area managers just don't know when to stop in my experience.

At the Station, Didsbury, Paul and Irene Saxton have now settled in. They have a 21-year lease and have now drawn up their plans for 'improvements' that they want to make to the pub. These include axing Pedigree in favour of mild and removing the middle fire place / wall between the front bar and middle lounge to reduce the bottle neck and ease the flow between the two rooms creating a single bar as opposed to a bar and a serving hatch. Planning permission has apparently already been granted for this work and it is expected that the work will start soon (this month, perhaps).

Staying in Didsbury, the Nelson now sells Holts bitter plus a guest beer (which was John Willie Lees bitter at £1.40 / pt) when I visited. The guest beer will become mild during the forthcoming Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge.

Finally - I have just heard that brewing has stopped at the Lass O' Gowrie! Can this be true? More next month.

### THE TIME LORDS

The 'other' CAMRA magazine available in Manchester carries a short but interesting lead story on its March dated cover relating to the Knott Bar simplifying its name and the "launch" of the new Lagonda Pale Ale (covered elsewhere in this issue of OT). Apart from a slight confusion over the beer's name, we were delighted to discover that "the beer was well received at its launch... on 27th February". All of course, quite true.... the problem is (or was, or will be...) we were reading this on the evening of the 26th! Spooky, or what?





**National Notes**

We have previously reported the plans of Laurel to roll out a new image for the Hogshead chain, complete with staff known as 'hogggers' who will wait at table dispensing alcopops and shots. The revamp was initially inflicted on just five out of the 100-strong chain but there are now plans to roll it out across the whole Hogshead estate throughout this year.

Quite what all this means for the changing range of cask ales available in most Hogsheads has only now become clear - customer choice is set to be cut drastically, with only two real ales on the bar. Admittedly they are two good 'uns - Fullers London Pride and Caledonian Deuchars IPA (the current Champion Beer of Britain) - but this must still be regarded as a retrograde step. After all, it's not as though the current larger range of beers causes any quality problems in most Hogsheads.

Laurel's action is in sharp contrast to Spirit Group's new-look Firkins, which feature up to six real ales including several from micros. The format has been tested in three London pubs, and four more are due to open soon.

**Local News**

The Bishop Blaize on Hillgate, Stockport, reopened on Friday, 14 February, and OT paid it a visit shortly afterwards. The pub has been redecorated throughout, and with new carpets and curtains has a much brighter, airier ambience.

Real ales are Burtonwood Bitter and Top Hat, the latter a very reasonable £1.60. A guest ale from the Burtonwood list will also soon be available, changing monthly. The manager Dave Taylor has applied for al license to have live music in the main lounge. Live entertainment will be a feature of Sunday afternoons between 2 and 5pm. After recent ups and downs, the Bishop Blaize is back in business - go and see for yourself.

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Hydes' are running into some local flak with their plans to convert Millington Hall restaurant in Cheadle Hulme into one of their 'Heritage Inns'. In a classic example of nimbyism, the 'Cheadle Hulme Residents Against Millington Hall Development' are raising all manner of frankly unfounded allegations to stop the scheme. Riotous behaviour and traffic chaos are imminent it seems. Cheadle Hulme will degenerate into a 'pub mile' frequented by 'inebriated youngsters' and leading to more vandalism, litter and uncivil behaviour. Well, hardly. Apart from the fact that central Cheadle Hulme currently has just four pubs, two of which are very traditional locals, this all ignores that what is planned by Hydes is not some stand-up, youth-oriented bottle bar but a very traditional operation with an accent on food and cask ales. It's a safe bet that once the

pub is open, many of those currently objecting are likely to find themselves using the Millington Hall on a regular basis.

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The Beer House (Angel Street, off Rochdale Road, Manchester) has been in the capable (and very shapely) hands for the last few months of Jeni Bradley, 21 yes, only 21). So young is she that she is oft times mistaken as a mere member of the bar staff (by your author included). She told OT that trade was improving and now that lunchtime food was on once again, it was healthier still. The beers on offer consist of Greene King IPA and five others from the Innspired list, then there are a further six handpulls dispensing guest beers from people such as Freeminer, Titanic, Beartown, Coach House and other local micros; a mild is usually on and some Durham beers are promised. Add to this, two ciders - Thatchers and a guest (a further guest may be added); a good range of Belgian and German bottles, plus a truly enormous range of fruit wines, and surely everyone's taste can be satisfied here? Lunchtime food has now settled upon the hours 12 - 2 Tu - Fr, and 12 - 3 Sat with hot staples such as chilli, curry, sausage & mash, fish & chips and more being the fare. The upstairs room is in use for darts and for bi-monthly folk nights (the first and third Tuesdays of each month) - see pub notice board for more events. With such a range and a warm welcome the Beer House demands more than a second glance.

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In Macclesfield there are new tenants at the Railway View. Dave and Jane Hamilton took over on 1 January and are settling in well. Both have experience of the trade although this is their first tenanted pub. The operation of the pub remains essentially unchanged with Dave dealing with over 20 small brewers plus beer agencies to source the constantly changing guest beer range. Some 10-12 casks a week are sold and many small brewers now contact the pub with details of new beers. You will find eight available at any one time, with Cain's Dr Duncan's as the house beer. All beers are well priced at £1.90 with the Cains at £1.60. Robinson's and Boddies alternate every two weeks and these retail at £1.70. Since the pub operates mainly as an ale house, regular meals are no longer available, although owner, and former licensee, Graham still makes his famous pies for the pub. Still well worth a visit for both beer and pies!

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In brief - the Navigation, Lancashire Hill, Stockport, is adding a new string to its bow with the introduction of a new draught Belgian beer. This is the classic pale ale from Antwerp, De Koninck, which will be served in the traditional 'bolleke' glasses. The Trackside in Bury, reported in January's OT, continues to go great guns of the guest beer front and has now notched over 100 different beers since it opened in mid-December.



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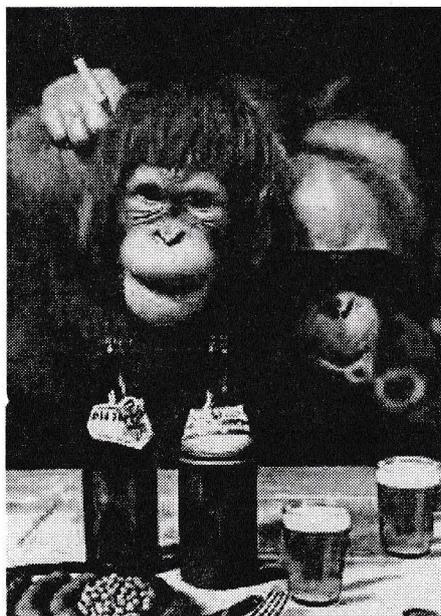
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We have also added a few new bottles to the fridge with Bruges,  
Judas and blonde and brun Grimbergen making appearances this month,  
alongside our normal selections.

At the end of the month look out for the start of our new season of midweek music-  
**Jazz** on the last Thursdays of the month, **Orbis** for something a bit more rocky  
(look out for some faces from behind the bar!!) on the last Wednesdays of the month  
and the popular **Paula Darwish** returning with the Country and Eastern band TBC  
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