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OPENING TIMES



The FREE CAMRA Regional Magazine covering Central, East & South Manchester; Stockport; Tameside; Trafford; N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield

LIES, DAMN LIES AND... CASK ALE PRODUCTION STATISTICS DISPUTED

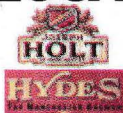
REAL ALE'S SHARE of the beer market is far bigger than statistics claim, says marketing expert Martyn Cornell in the 2004 CAMRA Good Beer Guide. While leading industry analysts AC Nielsen claim cask beer represents only 8% of the total beer market at around 2.75 million barrels in 2002, and is declining, many regional brewers report increased demand for their beers.

Martyn Cornell, managing editor of Martin Information, leading supplier of news and analysis for the leisure industry, says Greene King's volumes of Abbot Ale have risen by 20%, with Old Speckled Hen up 13%. Wolverhampton & Dudley is investing millions in the Burton-on-Trent plant producing Marston's Pedigree; Fuller's of Chiswick saw 2003 brewing profits rise by 18% & Shepherd Neame of Faversham, report sales of Spitfire bitter up 20%. Hardy's & Hanson's of Nottingham have seen a substantial increase in sales, while sales of Youngs of Wandsworth's Bitter were up 6.6% and Winter Warmer climbed 21%. Adnams of Suffolk reports Bitter sales rising by 11% and Broadside increased 15.5%. The reason for the gap between statistics and brewers' own figures lies in the retreat from cask beer production by the national brewers: Scottish Courage, Interbrew, Coors and Carlsberg-Tetley. ScotCo now owns the French lager brand Kronenbourg, Interbrew concentrates on promoting Stella, Coors owns leading lager Carling, while C-T brews Carlsberg in Northampton. ScotCo and C-T own the two biggest ale brands in Britain - John Smith's and Tetley Bitter - but put the overwhelming bulk of its advertising spends behind the "smoothflow" nitro-keg versions of the beers, not the cask versions. The declining amount of real ale brewed by the

nationals, who are responsible for eight out of 10 pints brewed in Britain, distorts the overall market statistics and seriously under-reports the real ale revival enjoyed by regional and micro-brewers. Martyn Cornell points out that AC Nielsen works closely with the British Beer and Pub Association (the former Brewers Society) which is funded mainly by the big brewers and pub companies. An independent statistical company, CGA, has drawn a startlingly different picture of real ale's share of the beer market. CGA's survey shows that cask ale sales are actually around five million barrels a year, and that cask in reality is more than 20% of total on-trade beer sales, making it the second biggest category after heavily advertised standard lagers.

Nielsen says the nationals' brands account for nearly half of UK cask ale sales but CGA claims the Big Four sell much less, only 27% of all the cask beer drunk in Britain, with 40 regional brewers accounting for 57% and 400-plus micros mopping up the final 15 or 16%. "Despite gloomy talk about a declining market overall, the number of outlets for cask ale is actually increasing," Cornell adds. "CGA found that compared to 2001 there were another 1,160 pubs stocking cask ale, a 2.9% increase, which means that 63% of pubs now sell at least one cask ale."

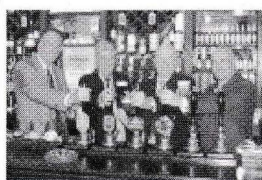
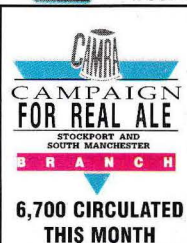
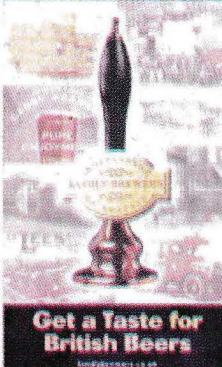
LOCAL BREWERS FIGHTING BACK



GREATER MANCHESTER'S four family brewers manned at stall in St Anne's Square, Manchester, as part of the Manchester Food & Drink Festival. Open between 11am and 3pm on 3 and 4 October, this had all the appearances of being a huge success with crowds thronging to sample Holts Bitter, Hydes' Jekyll's Gold, Lees Bitter and Robbies Best. As well as the free samples, the brewers had commissioned a leaflet that included a pen picture of each company together with vouchers for a free pint of each brewer's beer in 10 selected pubs from each of them. This

was a clever move which should attract new people into their pubs, sampling their beers.

THE INDEPENDENT FAMILY BREWERS OF MANCHESTER AND STOCKPORT



CAMRA 2004 GOOD BEER GUIDE - OUT NOW - PAGE 19

FIGHT TO SAVE BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL SUCCESSFUL?

POSTAL BALLOT THREATENS STOCKPORT'S BIG EVENT

In early October Stockport Council informed Jim Flynn, the Organiser of the Stockport Beer and Cider Festival that the 2004 Festival at the Town Hall was in serious jeopardy. He was told that it was likely that 'the Government will decide that the European and Local Elections will be run on a postal basis in the North West' and that 'the Chief Executive as Returning Officer, ... has to make contingency plans for such an eventuality.' The Festival is to be held 3rd to 5th June, the week before the elections and the Council say they have the Town Hall ballroom available to store the returned postal ballot papers if postal ballot.

Jim Flynn told Opening Times 'we were obviously very disappointed and concerned about the news and asked the Council to come up with another solution that would meet their needs but allow the Festival to go ahead. We pointed out that not only was this the largest event held each year at the venue but it was one that attracted many visitors to the town and provided income for the Council itself. Unfortunately they were unable to come up with an alternative or to give us a definite decision until December which is too late for us to successfully organise things.'

That was the bad news but since then the determined Festival organisers have spent much time and effort in trying to find an alternative. Discussions are well advanced with Stockport County Football Club to hold the event there and optimism is again to the fore. Jim Flynn again 'while negotiations are not concluded I am very hopeful. The venue does not have the splendid decor of the Town Hall but does have a far larger fire limit which will prevent the queues we have been suffering from in recent years and will allow for al fresco drinking, a real plus for customers in early June.'

So put the Festival dates, 3rd to 5th June 2004 in your diary and Opening Times will keep you up to speed with all the Festival news.

November's OPENING TIMES

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**PUB OF THE MONTH
NOVEMBER 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						



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for November is the Victoria on Wilmslow Road in Withington.

Sited in the centre of Withington, the Victoria, which has had a slightly chequered history in the not too distant past, has now very much found its role as the 'village' local. This welcome period of stability and all-round improvement to the pub is down to the arrival of Edgar Ambrose and Janice Oliver over four years ago.

Janice and Edgar took on the pub after a short period of closure and immediately set about changing its fortunes. Their background helped of course – Janice is very experienced in the trade, having worked at the Cross Keys in Adswold, and Edgar had previously worked in finance – but it has essentially been down to sheer hard work and determination that has seen the pub so markedly transformed.

The atmosphere is hugely better and, despite the mainly open-plan format, the pub is nicely broken up into a number of different areas giving the feel of a multi-roomed pub. Naturally, plenty of real ale is sold, too with Hydes' Mild, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the various seasonal beers all available on handpump and of top quality. Indeed such is the high standard of the beer that not only has the pub gained a 'Cask Marque' award, it has become a regular entrant in the national Good Beer Guide.

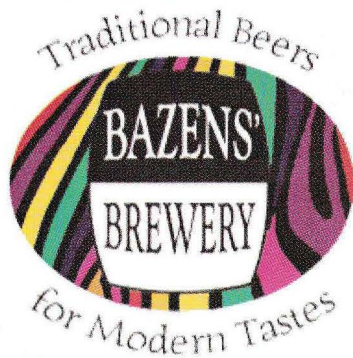
All in all, the Victoria is a tremendously improved pub and this very well deserved award will be presented on Thursday 27th November when an excellent night is promised.

Being on Wilmslow Road, the Victoria is well-served by public transport. From Stockport bus number 42 runs frequently and from Cheadle and Cheadle Hulme buses 157 and 45A run hourly.

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

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 235:
John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Butler, Peter Edwardson, Dave Burston, Mark McConachie, Paul Felton, Rhys Jones, Frank Wood, Tom Lord, Brian Taylor, Steve Bray, Robin Pendragon, Stuart Ballantyne, Dave Hallows

CHRISTMAS PRESENT IDEAS - PAGE 19



- Stinger 4.7% (October/November)
- FlatbaC 4.2% (Beer of the Festival, Stockport, 2003)
- Blue Bullet 4.5% Black Pig Mild 3.6%
- (Bronze Award for Mild, Champion Beer of Britain, 2003)
- Pacific Bitter 3.8% Best Bitter (new recipe) 4.3%
- Freshers' Special 5.5% (October-January)

Regular outlets include
The King's Arms, The Albert Vaults & The Crescent, Salford,
The Trackside, Bury, Waters Green & The Sun Inn, Macclesfield,
Corbieres, The Marble Arch, The Knott Bar, Bar Centro &
The Smithfield, Manchester, Stalybridge Station Buffet Bar,
The Marble Beer House, Chorlton-cum-Hardy.

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The Pub That Time Forgot

IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

While the doom and gloom merchants who produce real ale statistics constantly predict its terminal decline, out here in the real world, business appears to be booming. Certainly, there seems to be no end to the number of new micros setting up. Millstone has already had beer in the pubs, Three Rivers has just started brewing and there will soon be new ventures in both Miles Platting and Glossop. All producing cask beer – a product the statisticians will tell you no-one wants to drink any more. Perhaps the best news, though, is that the big producers are once more turning back to cask. This is particularly relevant here in the north west where Interbrew this month launch a new version of Boddingtons Bitter. It is important that this is a success and all credit to Interbrew for putting some advertising spend behind this. This time next month you won't be able to get the old version of Boddies on handpump and it will be interesting to see how the new, stronger beer is received. Make no mistake, it is potentially a very good beer indeed. Pre-launch tasting at the brewery were very well received and justifiably so. The new beer is fuller-bodied, but still 'sessionable' with a good dry bitter finish. All they have to do now is make sure it tastes like that in the pubs – in most cases it would probably benefit from about a week in the cellar before being served. It remains to be seen how many licensees will invest that amount of time and effort, but if they do then Interbrew could be on to a winner.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Many thanks to those who have been complimentary about our new look. We will improve and refine this over the coming months, although this will depend to some extent on the continuing support and generosity of our advertisers. Thanks to one and all – and please do get in touch if you'd like a colour ad!

John Clarke

Sorry, this is about whisky not beer.... What is it about big drink companies? The latest idiocy is being perpetrated by Diageo, who have created a **blended** 'all-malt' Cardhu whisky (formerly a 12 year-old single malt). Same name, same price, but adding in God-knows-what barrels of anonymous whisky they can produce 200,000 cases a year, and apparently the (mainly Spanish) consumers don't know/care they're being guiled. Personally I never liked Cardhu much, but these blasphemers also control Talisker and Lagavulin - and those I care about very much indeed.

Paul Hutchings

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 235

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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**MORE CHOICE
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2002
Wobbly Bob
Gold Medal



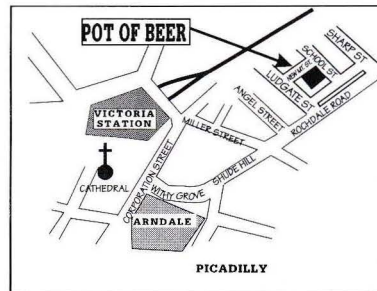
2002
Navy
Gold Medal



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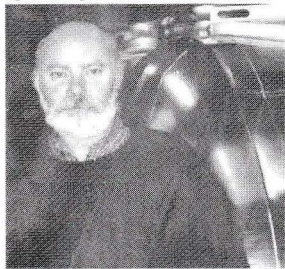
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FOCUS ON PHOENIX BREWERY

LOCAL MICRO COMES OF AGE

BEERS FROM PHOENIX BREWERY are a familiar site in the local free trade and guest beer market. They have a name for reliability and quality, too. But what of the company and people behind Phoenix?



Former Bass engineer Tony Allen moved from the big time to the tiny time when he took voluntary redundancy from Bass's giant (and now closed) beer factory at Runcorn to set up his own Oak Brewery at Ellesmere Port in 1982. In those days Ellesmere Port was something of a beer desert and Tony found most of his beer sales were in Greater Manchester and Yorkshire. A move seemed inevitable and in 1991 came the move to Heywood and the former premises of the old Phoenix Brewery which ceased brewing in 1939. In 1996 came a name change from Oak to Phoenix. Thus Oak/Phoenix is the oldest established micro in Greater Manchester and the second oldest in the north west, beaten only by Moorhouses who started real ale production three years earlier. And of course, 2003 sees the brewery come of age with 21 years of brewing history behind it.

The brewery itself must occupy one of the most impressive premises of any micro. While the old Phoenix plant was stripped out for the war effort in 1939, the rest of the complex remains substantially intact and is dominated by the old brewery tower with 'Phoenix Brewery' emblazoned in white tiles on all sides. This year has also seen considerable investment in the old buildings with roofs replaced and walls rebuilt. Indeed construction work was still underway when OT called in early November – we were shown two mummified cats 'Scared' and 'Stiff' found under floorboards as work proceeded!

Much of the complex is now given over to industrial units, with Phoenix Brewery occupying the former offices and workshops. Sadly the impressive brewery tower is now out of use. Production however is booming with annual production running at about 6,000 barrels a year and 11 people employed in the brewing operation. The Phoenix range consists of 13 regular beers, 24 seasonals and numerous one-off specials. Some of the specials have a habit of



becoming permanent – Black Bee honey porter was first brewed as a one-off for the St Albans Beer Festival, while White Monk was produced for CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival.

Each beer is very much a separate brew, evidenced by the brewery's use of no less than 10 hop varieties, from the UK, Slovenia, Germany, New Zealand and the USA (including the popular Cascade variety). Malt is basically Maris Otter, the classic pale ale variety, supplemented by darker malts where necessary and wheat malt, too. Much of the Phoenix range consists of pale and (often very) hoppy beers, basically, say Tony, because that is what people want to drink. Tony himself says he has an eclectic taste in beer with preference for no particular style.

The old Phoenix Brewery supplied about 120 tied houses. New Phoenix has about 400 regular free trade accounts and Tony says, has no problem selling its beer. The problems with pub companies buying up the free trade luckily isn't an issue as far as Phoenix is concerned. This is hardly surprising when the consistency and quality of Phoenix beers is concerned – the dedicated Phoenix pump in Stockport's Crown is testimony to that. In Manchester the Knott and the Marble Arch are also regular outlets.

Phoenix beers to look out for in the next few weeks include the superb Phoenix Porter (5%), Christmas Kiss (4.5%) and Golden Glow (6.5%). A particular treat for the festive season is the powerful Humbug (7%) which has already been brewed and is maturing at the brewery for release to the trade in December. So, raise a glass to 21 years of brewing history – the next milestone will 25 years in 2007, we're sure Tony is already planning the celebration specials!

The regular range of Phoenix beers includes:

- Bantam (3.5%)
- Navy (3.8%)
- Monkystown Mild (3.9%)
- Best Bitter (3.9%)
- Arizona (4.1%)
- Pale Moonlight (4.2%)
- Black Bee (4.5%)
- Old Oak (4.5%)
- White Monk (4.5%)
- Thirsty Moon (4.6%)
- Double Dagger (5%)
- Double Gold (5%0
- Wobbly Bob (6%)



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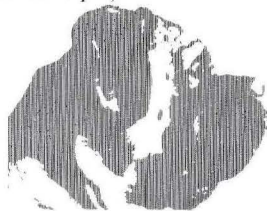
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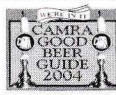
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THE ALL NEW BODDINGTONS



CAMRA INVESTMENT CLUB GETS EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW - ROBIN PENDRAGON WAS THERE

PERHAPS the first outside the brewery to taste the new Boddington's Cask Bitter were a group of Stock Exchange investors, also members of CAMRA Investment Club (CIC), who went on a tour of the brewery on Friday October 3rd.

Despite the fact that brewery shares have not been doing too well of late, a crowd on 21 CIC members turned out for the occasion, some having travelled from strange alien places like London and Bath.

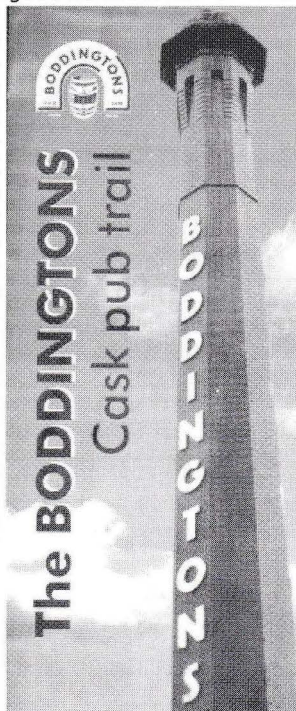
The tour itself was strangely truncated, most of the works being deemed to be out of bounds by the guides of 'Health & Safety' or 'Work in progress'. From what the Club members saw, the main difference between Boddington's and other craft breweries is that much of the process is computer controlled, rather than progressed by large chaps hauling on valves and suchlike. In addition the colossal fermentation vats are lidded to vent away the otherwise asphyxiant CO2 fumes courtesy of electrical fans whilst smaller breweries just open the windows. Finally the yeast separation process, also computer controlled, is a very careful operation featuring much cycling through sequences of stainless steel reactors at Boddingtons. The reason? The processed yeast ends up as the Marmite on your toast in the mornings!

A big surprise for many was the quality of the 'ordinary' Boddington's Bitter at the Brewery Tap pub in Strangeways, where the tour started and ended. Often the last choice in many pubs, given the frequency with which the beer appears as a tired, warmish, bland offering relative to the others available, the bitter at the Tap was excellent, bursting with life and very tasty.

The Club members were treated to a light buffet at the end of the tour and to samples of the new version of Boddington's Cask Bitter, which, from the end of this month, will be the norm for cask Boddingtons. The chief differences are a move to making the beer an all-malt brew (the 'old' version contains some wheat malt) and an uprating of the strength from 3.8% ABV to 4.1%.

The improvement in the beer for such apparently small changes is remarkable, the new product being drier, more bitter and detectably stronger than the earlier version. It really does deserve the adland appellation 'a bit gorgeous'. The CIC members were happy to continue sampling until 5.00pm whereupon many of the visitors went back to their hotels to recover before discovering what other beery delights there might be found around Manchester City Centre.

One highlight of the tour was when one delegate naively asked how many types of mild Boddington's produce these days, keeping his face perfectly straight as the other CIC members fell about laughing and the poleaxed guide struggled for a reply. Perhaps he made his point though? Boddingtons have produced a 'cask pub trail' leaflet - buy a pint of Boddies Cask at each of the 12 participating pubs, getting the leaflet stamped in each one, and then present it at the Brewery Tap to receive a pint of Boddingtons Cask and a trail t-shirt for £2.50. The trail runs until 31 December.



Buy one pint of Boddingtons Cask at each pub have this leaflet stamped then present it fully completed at the Brewery Tap to receive a pint of Boddingtons cask and a Trail t-shirt for £2.50. THIS OFFER ENDS 31st DEC 2003 or whilst stocks last



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VIADUCTS AND VAULTS 3 - OUT NOW!
A Celebration of Real Ale in Stockport's Pubs
DETAILS ON PAGE 19



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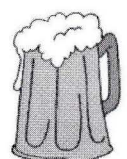
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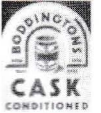
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NEW BODDIES CASK LAUNCH THIS MONTH



November 24 sees the launch of the 'new' Boddingtons Bitter throughout the North West. The new beer completely replaces the 'old' version so, from the end of this month if you ask for cask Boddies (as you should) then the new beer is what you will get. It's slightly fuller bodied than the old version with a long, dry bitter finish. Pre-launch tastings would certainly indicate that it should once again be a beer worth seeking out.

To coincide with the launch, Interbrew UK is giving Boddingtons a boost in the North with two pieces of activity - Boddingtons Darts Championship and a new Boddingtons TV advertising campaign - as part of its £14 million marketing support package for the year.

The second year of the darts tournament is bigger and better than ever with more than 900 teams - 200 up on 2002 - competing for a place in next year's final and the chance to win a total of £11,600 in prize money. The tournament is also proving a winner for pubs in terms of extra business: last year's event generated an average volume sales increase of 25% over the five months of the tournament.

Boddingtons is offering participating pubs the opportunity to host an exhibition night with the world professional darts champion, John Part. Licensees have to submit photos and stories of their personal highs and lows of the second round of the event. Interbrew UK is also launching new cask Boddingtons with a heavyweight TV campaign aimed to raise awareness and generate sampling. A new, 10-second cut-down of the existing *Pillow Talk* TV commercial has been produced featuring a topical end message - "Cask 4.1% Coming Soon" - to remind viewers of the arrival of new cask Boddingtons, which will be available to consumers from November 24th. The campaign is running for four weeks in and around Boddingtons' regional heartland of Granada plus Tyne Tees, Yorkshire and Border ITV regions and the Channel 4 North TV region. Colin Pedrick, Managing Director, On Trade Sales at Interbrew UK, says: "We are ensuring that as many people as possible know about the arrival of new cask Boddingtons. We want to encourage drinkers to sample the new brew which retains the traditional brewing methods but now has greater appeal to a broader range of cask ale drinkers."

FAMILY FAVOURITES

All four local family brewers have new beers out this month. The latest in their seasonal portfolios.

Robinson's welcome back Robin Bitter, the 4.5% full-bodied session beer that has to date been one of the best selling of their seasonal ales. And of course, the powerful Old Tom is now back on draught and making a welcome sight on local bars - a recent visit to the Blossoms, Heavily, was greeted by the sight of the traditional cask on the end of the bar. Robbies Bar & Cellar Competition is now moving into its final stages and we hope to have details of the finalists and, possibly, the winners next time.



Hydes have two new beers out this month. The latest, and last, in their 'Fine Beers In The making' range of craft ales is Rompers Rein. This 5% dark beer promises to be a seasonal treat with a combination of roast barley, black malts and hints of fruit and spice. Also from Hydes is the second appearance on draught of Manchester's Finest, a premium 4.7% beer, usually available only in bottle. Only once before has this beer been produced on draught in cask conditioned form. That was in spring this year and was overlooked by many, as its availability was not announced and it was produced in tiny volumes for a few free trade customers only, most of which were outside the OT area. Any of you that like trying rare cask beers should not miss this opportunity.

Lees welcome the return of Plum Pudding. This rich dark beer with a hint of fruit is a potent 4.8% and has featured as their Christmas seasonal in the past. A very moreish beer and an excellent choice for the festive season. Check out Rain Bar in the City Centre and the Lloyds in Chorlton for these beers.



Lastly **Holts** have now launched Patersons as their latest seasonal beer. It has the same strength as their bitter

and the price is the same, too, at £1.34 a pint. For each pint sold, 20p will be donated to the Christie Hospital. While Holt's Bitter is known as a very bitter beer, Patersons is very much the opposite, having a pleasant, 'sweet' taste, possibly deriving from the touch of honey used in the brew.

MORE MICROS

And still they come. There are plans to open a brewhouse at the Ace of Diamonds on Oldham Road, Miles Platting, early next year. Derek Adams, the owner and licensee and his brewing consultant, Julian Taylor of the Saddleworth Brewery, are setting up the Diamond Brewery. Derek is building a new brewhouse on the side of the pub which, incidentally, us a first time entry in the 2004 Good Beer Guide.

Following hot on the steps of Millstone Brewery at Mossley, Glossop will shortly become the fourth town in the High Peak Branch area to have a microbrewery (the others being Shaws of Dukinfield and Lowes Arms at Denton). The Glossop Brewery as we believe it will be known, hopes to start brewing early in the New Year and will be run by a local man who has a degree in microbiology. The plant is currently being assembled and the premises have been found. We will bring more news on this venture in next month's Opening Times.

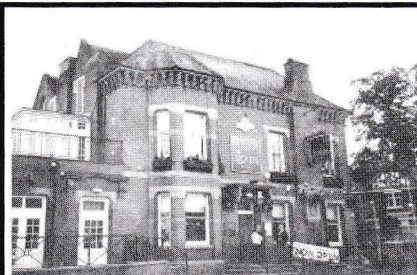
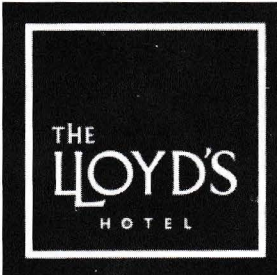
MORE MICRO NEWS

We are running features on some of our local micros this month and next and you will find the latest news from Phoenix on page 4 of this issue. Also the usual apologies to those breweries we were unable to contact this month.

Bank Top - no new beers out this month but they have produced their first beer to be bottled. A brew of the 5% Smokestack Lightning is to be sent up to the Sulwath Brewery to be bottled, although this will not be a bottle-conditioned beer. The powerful Santa's Claws (5%) will be available next month.



AN ARTICLE ON CHANGES AT PHOENIX BREWERY CAN BE FOUND ON PAGE 4.



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Bazens' – the next beer in the astrological series is Stinger (for Scorpio). This 4.3% beer is a pale gold brew made using Mittelfruh hops

from Germany. The plans for another joint beer with Facers have fallen through. This was to be a 'green beer' using new seasons hops but unfortunately the package of hops was mislaid for a month by the courier service and they were rotten on arrival!

Boggart Hole Clough – The special for November is Boggart Light at 4.5% and is described as light and fruity. A one-off special (Clough Brew – 4.1%) was also brewed for the beer festival held at Bar Fringe on Swan Street.

Facers – all the seasonal beers have a literary connection, hence the autumn beer is Keats ('...season of mists and mellow fruitfulness') at 3.9% - and very good it is too. The Christmas beer will have a Dickens connection and there has also been a bonfire night special, Smoky Guy brewed using a hint of smoked malt to give the appropriate flavour.

Leyden – the latest beer is Fore (or Four, depending on the pub).

This is a 4% beer and was brewed to mark both the fourth annual beer festival at the Hare & Hounds at Holcombe Brook, but also the fourth anniversary of brewing at the Lord Raglan. The beer itself is pale and bitter and is brewed with Challenger hops.

Marble – two beers make a welcome return this month. Out now is Uncut Amber (4.7%) an excellent red-brown beer with a full-

bodied taste and dry roast finish. In the pipeline is the superb Chocolate Heavy (5.5%), a rich full-bodied beer with dark and chocolate malts making for a very satisfying beer – this will be available until January. Marble are also celebrating getting all four of their tied pubs in the Good Beer Guide – the Marble Arch, the Knott. Marble Beer House and the Bar all feature in the 2004 edition. Is this a record?

Pictish – last month saw the return of the superb Samhain Dry Stout (5%) as a one-off brew. Catch it if you still can. This month's seasonal is Z-Rod, a 4.8% pale gold ale with full-bodied

flavour and a good balanced bitter finish. Very drinkable indeed.

Porter – this month sees the welcome return of the superb Porters Stout. A pitch black, bone dry beer, and dangerously drinkable at 5.5%, there are some who say this is the best of the Porters range.

Three Rivers – Stockport's new micro started brewing on 8 November. The first two beers, both pale and hoppy, will be GMT (named after the three rivers, Goyt, Tame and Mersey), a 3.8% session beers, and its premium stablemate Oxbow at 4.5%. We will be running a feature on this new venture in next month's OT.



IN NEXT MONTH'S SPECIAL MICRO FEATURE...



MILLSTONE BREWERY Mossley's new Millstone Brewery is the 15th micro-brewery in Greater Manchester and brings the

county's total number up to 21, of which all bar one produce real ale.

The names behind the brewery are Nick Boughton from Dudley and Jon Hunt from Birmingham. The aim is to produce full-bodied, bitter beers and two should be available by mid-November. Three Shires will be a 4% pale, hoppy beer with fruity aromas the second is Millstone Edge at 4.4%, a more copper coloured best bitter, again with three hop varieties – First Gold and Goldings as before, but this time with Fuggles as the third. Plans include beers at 3.8% and 4.2%. along with some specials.

RAMSBOTTOM BREWERY

The Ramsbottom Brewery came on stream late last year and is located in the back of an old kitchen showroom, occupying the premises of the old Ramsbottom Industrial & Provident Society. It is the work of Paul Robinson ("I couldn't really call it Robinson's!").

The core Ramsbottom range comprises the following beers: Old Ground Mild (3.8%) – a dark, rich beer, Holcombe (3.8%) - A light golden beer, Rammy Mile (3.8%) – a pale beer using pale Optic Malt - soon to change its name, Freefall (3.8%) - first brewed for a charity bungee jump, Tower Bitter (4%) – probably the main (bitter) beer, Provident (4.5%) – the premium bitter and Rammyversary (4.2%) A light golden beer.



...FULL DETAILS OF THE BREWERS, BREWERIES & BEERS

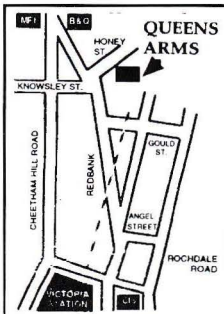


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STAGGER

with Dave Burston

THE 'THREE' HEATONS!

ON AN uncharacteristically rainy night in August, about a dozen of us gathered to check out some of the pubs in three of the Stockport Heaton, starting in Heaton Chapel and moving on to cover all of Heaton Moor and then the western side of Heaton Norris.

We met in the **George & Dragon**, an impressive brick and stone building on the corner by the traffic lights on Manchester Road in Heaton Chapel. It has a large lounge with a number of separate drinking areas including a raised no-smoking area, and was very busy for the time of night (around 7.30). Two cask ales were available - Charles Wells' **Bombardier** as a guest bitter and the regular **Boddingtons Bitter**, and both were rated above average. Bypassing the **Chapel House**, which had no real ale (though it may have by the time you read this - see September's *Opening Times*), we strolled through the rain into Heaton Moor, and our first stop was at the **Elizabethan**. This was formerly a young persons' keg-only pub, but a recent colourful refurbishment by the Orchard Pub Co. has turned it into the main outlet for cask beer in the village, complete with a Cask Marque accreditation. No expense has been spared in the refurbishment (a fact reflected in the beer prices), which seems to have used all the latest trendy ideas from those TV house design programmes you love to hate, including state-of-the-art gas fires. On this night these weren't required as it was very hot and humid inside and also very crowded for the time of night. We would have liked to make use of the benches outside at the front but it was still raining, so we found a few seats in the relatively large no-smoking area. There were 5 cask ales on offer, but the Green King IPA went off just as we arrived, so most of us settled for the **Adnams Broadside**, which was rated above average to good. No

one tried the **Boddingtons Bitter** here and the few who tried the **Bombardier** (again) and the **Old Speckled Hen** rated them ok. By now the rain had just about stopped, and we crossed the road to the **Crown**, the only traditional pub in Heaton Moor and the only one with a separate vault. Here our ranks were swelled by the addition of some members of CAMRA's Manchester Under 26 group, who had met elsewhere earlier and were now joining their first ever mainstream CAMRA event. The only cask ale on sale was **Boddingtons Bitter**, which got mixed ratings from the assembled company, some people rating it poor while others rated it average or above. It just goes to show that beer is an emotive subject and you can't even get a group of CAMRA members to agree on it!

A few doors away is the **Plough**, and this was our next port-of-call. This is another predominantly young persons' pub, although it has always been a real ale outlet and a few years ago had several on offer including a guest beer. Now it only sells **Tetley Bitter**, and we were also unable to agree about this, giving it mixed ratings from good, down to most around average.

We now faced a long walk to our next real ale pub, so it was just as well the rain had stopped. Avoiding the **Moor Top**, which has an unused handpump but no cask ale, we walked through the back of Heaton Moor to get to the **Nursery**, on the cobbled part of Green Lane in Heaton Norris. What can you say about the Nursery that hasn't been said already? CAMRA's National Pub of the Year in 2001, virtually unchanged since it was built in 1939 and justifiably on CAMRA's National Inventory of unspoilt historic pubs. Our party split up between the various rooms and some even went outside to stand in the dark by the bowling green at the back. The Nursery is a Hydes house, and as well as the **Bitter and Mild** (on electric pump, but none the worse for that), it has hand-pumped **Jekyll's Gold** and the current Hydes seasonal ale, which was called **Rack 'n' Ruin**. All the beers were rated good, although some found the **Rack 'n' Ruin** too sweet for their taste.

By various routes we then descended the hill to **Didsbury Road** in Heaton Norris, and the **Four Heaton**, another Hydes pub, until recently called the **Moss Rose**. This is a 1970s building with an unusual - even wacky - design. Although it could never be described as beautiful from the outside, it's a good homely locals' pub inside, well laid out with two separate rooms and benefiting from a recent refurbishment. In the far corner of the first room was a large TV screen showing "Sex in the City" which everyone was trying to ignore. The only two beers available were **Hydes Bitter** and **Light**, both on handpump, and both were rated pretty good.

It had been decided that our last pub would be the **Olde Woolpack** on Brinksway, which is not actually in the Heaton at all, being the other side of the river and the motorway, close to the



pyramid. This is an enterprising multi-roomed free house which always has some interesting beers from small independent breweries. On this occasion two were on: **Summer Breeze** - a seasonal from the **Crouch Vale Brewery** - and a 4% ABV beer from the **Cottage Brewing Co.** that had 'Ernie Ales' on the clip. Both were well liked, the **Summer Breeze** especially and was said by many to be the best beer of the night. Two other cask ales were available, but understandably no one tried the **Theakston Best Bitter**, and the one person who sampled the **Marstons Pedigree** (on special offer at £1.60 a pint) rated it above average.

As people dashed off to catch lifts or last buses home, everyone agreed it had been a good stagger, but of course these are just the opinions of one group of people on one night of the year, so why not try some of these pubs yourself and see what you think?



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5 Alternating Cask Beers

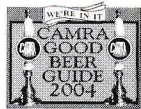
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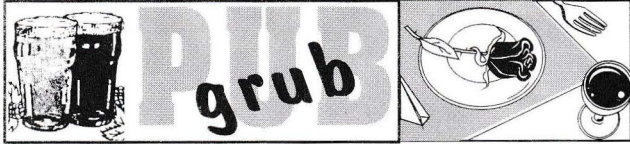
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THE ARDEN ARMS, MILLGATE, STOCKPORT

STOCKPORT'S ARDEN ARMS has long been something of an institution on the local pub scene, although its history in recent years is an object lesson on how even the best pub can lose the plot with the wrong people behind the bar and, happily, how the right people, with hard work and determination, can restore its fortunes.

Built about 1815, the pub boasts many original features with tiled floors, woodwork and sash windows all dating from Victorian times or earlier. The layout is pretty much unchanged, too, and apart from the opening out of a former kitchen, remains much as it has always



done. Of particular note is the small snug, only accessed by walking through the bar – a very rare feature nowadays. Other features include extensive stabling (horse trams were once stabled in the large yard which now features a superb beer garden) and, in the cellar, a mortuary slab, a throwback to the nineteenth century when, as was often the case, inquests were held at the pub. Needless to say Arden Arms is not only listed as being of historic and architectural interest, it also appears on CAMRA's National Inventory of classic pub interiors.

The décor matches the pub. It's warm and comfortable with many original features, including tables with central bell pushes, a magnificent sideboard and one remaining grandfather clock (there were three but the others 'disappeared' under some previous tenants).

I won't dwell on the pub's history in recent years – let's just say that the arrival of Joe Quinn and Steve King in late 1999 heralded a turn around in its fortunes and the story since then has been one of steady and constant improvement so that today we have a pub as good as it has ever been, Robinson's ales are served at their best, with usually a choice of Hatters, Best Bitter, the seasonal and, in winter, Old Tom. Quality is such that the pub is now a virtual fixture in the national Good Beer Guide. Joe and Steve have a background in the restaurant trade so it was perhaps inevitable that a high quality food operation would be established at the Arden and so it has proved to be. 'Restaurant food at pub prices' is the watchword and this is indeed what you get.

The menu splits into two. There is a regular range of bar snacks and light meals including home-made soup (available in both bowl and cup), sandwiches (bread, ciabatta or hot) from £3.25 to £5.25, a superb premium all day breakfast (three scrambled eggs, smoked salmon and toast) at £5.25 and a range of side orders such as garlic ciabatta, chips etc at prices from £1.50 to £2.25. One of our party, being of modest appetite, chose a cajun chicken ciabatta and was almost overfaced by the large, well presented sandwich, bursting with spicy chicken and accompanied by dressed salad leaves.

The Specials Menu, really does live up to its billing here. There are usually about five main dishes to choose from, invariably including a vegetarian option. Today the range included pork loin with cider sauce, Red Thai chicken curry and seared salmon fillet with white wine and parsley sauce, at prices ranging from £5.95 to £6.95. The remaining two options proved irresistible, though. Lincolnshire sausages (meaty and well-seasoned) came on a pile of mash and a generous serving of mushroom and ale gravy, garnished with parsnip chips.



Presentation and quality were top notch and this was good value at £5.75 The veggie option was even more impressive. Two large roasted onions came stuffed with sun-dried tomatoes, goats cheese and pesto and accompanied by a rocket salad and well sauced with a warm red pepper coulis. It was one of the best vegetarian dishes I have seen in a pub for a long time.

Sadly we had neither room nor time for pudding. A shame as the choice of four (all at £.25) included sticky toffee pudding, Dutch apple crumble, chocolate fudge cake and banana and toffee sponge, all with either vanilla custard or cream.


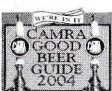
Very highly recommended – and in December there is a special Christmas menu available 12-2.30 Monday-Friday and 12 noon-4pm Saturday and Sunday. It's also available from 5.00-7.00p, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, too. At £15.95 for two courses and £18.95 for three this is a snip.

The Arden is at 23 Millgate, Stockport Telephone 0161 480 2185.



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