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OPENING TIMES



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

ARDEN ARMS IS LOCAL PUB OF THE YEAR



**TOP
AWARD
FOR
STOCKPORT
HERITAGE
PUB**

**...AND THE CROWN
IS RUNNER-UP**



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Year for 2004 is the Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport, a classic pub by any definition.

Apart from a sensitive alteration to bring an old kitchen into public use, this Grade II listed building has remained essentially unchanged for 150 years or more, and has been a well-loved pub for much of that time. In more recent times, though local drinkers watched as the pub entered a spiral of decline, culminating in the eviction of one set of tenants by Robinson's. Happily those days are now firmly in the distant past and the pub has been restored to its former glory – a much-used cliché which just happens to be true in the case of the Arden Arms.

Those responsible for this transformation are Joe Quinn and Steve King who took over the pub in late 1999. They made an immediate start with a thorough redecoration and spruce up, and followed this with a comprehensive programme of restoration which now sees the pub gleam and sparkle much as it did during its heyday under the long-term tenancy of Jack May. Real fires in the winter months only add to the timeless appeal of the superb local. Joe and Steve made their names when they owned That Café in Levenshulme, which became something of a gastronomic oasis under their tenure. Unsurprisingly then, a high-class food operation was introduced where well-cooked and imaginative food, 'restaurant food at pub prices', now adds to the pub's many attractions. Foremost amongst those attractions has to be the superbly kept Robinson's ales. Best Bitter and Hatters are the mainstays, although these are joined by Old Tom for the winter months and the current seasonal is also usually available. All the beer is invariably in immaculate condition and it is no surprise that the Arden Arms is once again a fixture in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide.

Joe and Steve's efforts in rescuing one of the town's classic pubs has been recognised by Pub of the Month awards in December 2000 and again in June last year. This time, though, they have gone one stage further to clinch Pub of the Year and are, understandably overjoyed. "This is terrific news" Steve told Opening Times. "We knew we were in the frame but to actually get the award is wonderful. We'd like to thank everyone for their support and hard work over the time we've been here, this really does make it all worthwhile." The award will be presented on the evening of Saturday, February 28th, marking the end of National Pubs Week, during which CAMRA's National Pub of the Year will be announced. The Arden Arms will now go forward to the Greater Manchester Pub of the Year contest as part of the next national Pub of the Year competition. Let's hope it goes all the way.

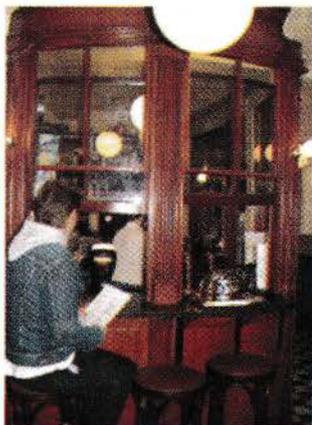
It is unfortunate that there really can only be one winner in the Pub of the Year contest, particularly when the field is as strong as it was this time, with several worthy contenders. However a special mention needs to be made of this year's runner-up, the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport.

It is perhaps no coincidence that the Crown graces the front cover of *Viaducts & Vaults 3*, the latest CAMRA guide to Stockport's pubs. Its striking location, almost underneath the town's famous landmark railway viaduct, coupled with the pub's deep commitment to quality cask beers, neatly sums up the two themes of the book.

Put simply, the Crown is one of Stockport's foremost cask ale houses now with 14 handpumped beers usually available, and accompanied by a cask cider to boot. The house policy is to always have a guest mild available, and more often than not there will be a stout or porter, too. Add in handpumps reserved for guest beers from Whim, Pictish, Phoenix and Bank Top breweries (and now the new Stockport micro, Three Rivers) and it is easy to see why the pub has become something of a mecca for many local beer drinkers. Quality goes hand in hand with quantity as well – this is a pub that will never knowingly serve a bad beer.

There's more to the pub than beer, though. The impressive façade leads to a multi-roomed interior retaining many original Victorian features and much of the layout, too. There are front and rear snugs (the latter non-smoking), bar, lounge and pool room. All this is topped off with a large outdoor area which is variously used as a beer garden, music venue and barbecue area – sometimes all at once! Music also plays a large part in the pub's activities with live events several nights a week featuring rock, folk, acoustic and more.

Responsible for this happy state of affairs are Graham and Jeanette Mascord whose dedication to quality runs through every aspect of the Crown's operation and which has gone a long way to make the pub the huge success it is today.



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FEBRUARY 2004

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The Thatched Tavern on Stanhope Street, Reddish, is the Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month for February 2004.

Were it not for the quality of the pub and its beer, it is very likely that even many Reddish residents wouldn't know where the Thatched Tavern was, hidden as it is behind Houldsworth Square. To describe the pub as a street corner local understates its attributes. Welcoming and well-lit outside, with a well-appointed lounge, a comfortable vault with crib tables, and an anteroom to the vault for darts and television.

The licensees, Duncan and Lennette Shenton, have lived in Reddish for the last 25 years, but this is their first pub. It has to be said that they have taken to the licensed trade like the proverbial ducks to water. In this they have been helped by their very experienced and loyal staff, many of whom worked for Duncan and Lennette's predecessors. The ladies toilet and the beer garden have both been refurbished and the next initiative is the pub website. How many street corner locals can say that?

There are three cask beers on handpump – superb Tetley Dark Mild, Tetley Bitter and the new Boddingtons Cask Bitter, all of which are very well-kept. A nice touch is that you will get your pint in a glass with the appropriate brewery logo. All of this points the way for many of the much larger pubs in Reddish which can't even give their customers one cask beer, let alone three.

So, come along on 26 February, during National Pubs Week, when we will be presenting Duncan, Lennette and their staff with this well-deserved award. While you are toasting the pub's success don't forget to check out the picture of the original Thatched Tavern, circa 1882, when it really was a thatched rural pub.

The Thatched Tavern is well-served by public transport. Buses 203 from Stockport and East Manchester will drop you close by. Service 373 also runs from Stockport and Heaton Chapel, while the 42A will get you there from Heaton Moor, Heaton Mersey and South Manchester. JF

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 238:
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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

Hearty congratulations are due to both the winner and runner-up in our local Pub of the Year contest. Both are excellent pubs in their own right and it says a great deal about the depth and quality of the local pub scene that not only the Arden Arms and the Crown but other pubs which in other parts of the country would walk the award, were also in the frame.

Our local winners have tended to have quite a track record in both the Regional and National Pub of the Year competitions, the previous three years producing three regional winners, one national runner-up and one national winner. Has the Arden Arms got that extra bit of star quality to go all the way? I think it may well have - we'll keep you posted.

★★★★★

This month we run a large feature illustrating how the national brewers are once again starting to produce and promote cask beers. For too long, the brewing industry has been split between the regional, family and micro brewers who care about cask beer (and who have seen sales and production expand) and the nationals who, by and large, don't (and have seen cask ale sale plummet). It is the decline of the national brewers' cask ale sales that has been behind the misleading 'cask ale in terminal decline' headlines and statistics. If the nationals can now grow their cask ale volumes then at last the statistics might start reflecting the reality - that there's a huge and growing demand for tasty, well produced and, most importantly, well-kept cask beers. This could be an interesting year on the real ale front.

John Clarke

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OPENING TIMES ISSUE 238

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).

OPENING TIMES ADVERTISING

Due to three major factors, our increasing circulation (again), the fact that we have upgraded the paper to a smoother high quality stock (to near universal approval) and the extra costs associated with higher quality photographs and the use of process colour, we have had to put some of our advertising costs up (for the first time this millennium). Existing advertisers on runs will be generally unaffected until 2005. NEW ADVERTISING RATES FROM JANUARY 2004: 1/8 page (60mm x 85mm): £30 (£60 colour); 1/4 page (120mm x 85mm): £55 (£90 colour); 1/2 page (horiz: 174mm x 120mm; vert: 250mm x 85mm): £90 (£150 colour); Full page (175mm x 240mm) £150 (£250 colour). Surcharges may apply for back page. Generous discounts available on adverts of 1/4 page or above for runs of insertions. Advert design & origination usually free of charge unless large costs involved. Ring 0161 477 1973 for details. Artwork should be submitted as hard copy (positive bromide) or PC COMPATIBLE (NOT MAC) *.jpg, *.eps, *.tiff or *.cdr (Corel Draw versions 3, 5 or 7 - please state which AND you MUST include hard copy back-up). For colour adverts please ring for details first.

**COPY DATE FOR MARCH ISSUE OF
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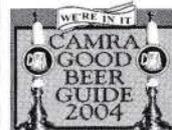
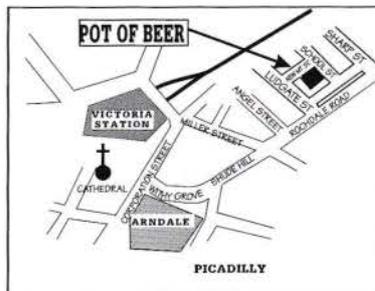
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SLEEPING GIANTS WAKE UP TO REAL ALE REVIVAL

ARE BRITAIN'S MEGABREWERIES BEGINNING TO LOOK SERIOUSLY AT CASK BEER ONCE AGAIN?

ROGER PROTZ ASKS THE QUESTIONS

LIKE nervous swimmers about to take their first dip in the pool, Britain's national brewers have finally heeded the call from their smaller regional brethren: "Come on in, the ale's lovely!" After a decade or more of neglect, the nationals - Carlsberg-Tetley, Coors, Interbrew and Scottish Courage - have woken up to the fact that the real ale sector is showing encouraging signs of growth - and they want a share of it.

Suddenly, they are investing in cask beer. Interbrew, the global giant of Belgian origin, now owns half of the old Bass and Whitbread groups, and is throwing money at its cask brands, spending £3 million is being spent on promotions for Boddingtons Cask and Draught Bass.

Last month, 48-sheet illuminated posters advertising Draught Bass appeared at railway stations in London and the South-East. There will be further promotions in the spring and autumn. This is a conversion of Damascene proportions. Draught Bass in its heyday was worth between two and three million barrels a year. Today it's down to 150,000 barrels, level-pegging with Marston's Pedigree.

Graeme Mitchell, ales marketing manager for Interbrew, says there was a short-sighted attitude to Draught Bass in the dying days of the Bass empire, when most investment went into Caffreys, the first major nitro-keg product, and alcopops. Interbrew has owned Draught Bass since 2000 and is only now getting behind the brand as a result of a complex distribution deal with Coors, the American beer giant that owns the rest of the Bass and Whitbread brands and breweries.

Interbrew has terminated the arrangement with Coors and is now the sole distributor for Draught Bass. For the moment, Coors continues to brew the brand in Burton-on-Trent but Interbrew has said publicly that it will move the beer to a new site, "possibly in the Burton area". This raises the intriguing possibility of Draught Bass being produced alongside Pedigree in Burton's last remaining "union room" system of fermentation.

And of course "new Boddingtons" has been unveiled. A cask-only version has been up-rated to 4.1 per cent ABV from 3.8 per cent, and is being supported by TV advertisements in the beer's North-West heartland, where 70 per cent of cask Boddies is sold. But why? Mitchell says that not only is the cask beer sector flattening out after years of decline, but it has also been looked at too negatively. "There are positive things happening. The ageing population is in cask's favour. People are more health conscious and cask is seen as fresh and healthier," he says. "And we're also fed up with seeing how well the regional brewers are doing with cask. We want to lead the sector. Our target is drinkers aged 35 and over who lead very pressured lives and who, when they have time for leisure, have high expectations."

TETLEYS ON BOARD.

though it's second behind John Smith's Bitter when cask and nitro versions are combined. "We've invested more in cask beer than any other national," he claims. "Cask Tetley accounts for 30 per cent of the brand's production. "We haven't forgotten the art of brewing just because we're big. Tetley is still fermented with two yeasts in Yorkshire squares and dry-hopped with Northdown. The pump clips state clearly that it's cask conditioned." Other cask brands, all brewed at Leeds, include light and dark Tetley Mild and Ansell's Mild and Bitter.

Imperial, a famous Leeds premium ale, has been relaunched at 4.3 per cent and Mr Britton expects demand to grow to 2,000 outlets within 18 months. There's a bottled version as well. And the superb Draught Burton Ale has also made a welcome return. At present it's only available in 400 pubs nationwide but it's part of C-T's Tapster's Choice portfolio of beers available to 3,000 pubs and Mr Britton is confident demand will grow.

COORS JOIN CASK ALE PUSH

Scott Wilson, brand director for Worthington and regional ales with Coors, says the focus on the cask sector's problems has masked the fact that the keg sector is in much faster decline. He points to cask beer success stories, such as Greene King's brand building of IPA and Abbot Ale.



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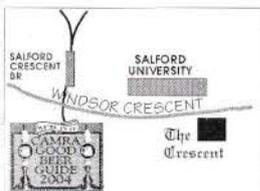
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"People don't realise that a third of the 650 million pints of beer consumed annually in Britain is cask," he points out. "The sector is standing up well and the rapid growth of the bottled beer sector shows the opportunities that exist for cask."

Coors brews 70,000 barrels of cask beer a year. The Burton-based American giant is also a major distributor. It handles a total of 150 real ales and focuses on 30 cask beers in its specialist CaskMasters portfolio.

Its biggest brand by far is Worthington Bitter, known as Best Bitter in nitrokeg form. It concentrates the mind when you discover that the cask version accounts for just 10 per cent of total Worthington production.

Mr Wilson says he wants to build a stronger commitment to cask beer among drinkers. He will do this by stressing the regional differences between brands. As a result of the Bass fallout, Coors owns M&B Mild and Brew XI, Stones Bitter and Hancock's HB, beers produced under licence by Highgate, Everards and Brains respectively. The main drive will be to build awareness and sales of the Worthington brands. As well as the 3.6 per cent standard Bitter, Coors has introduced the premium Worthington's 1744. Coors is also pleased by the success of the legendary bottle-conditioned White Shield, now re-branded as William Worthington's White Shield. The Museum Brewing Company brews the beer for Coors: Museum is owned by Coors but has a large degree of independence. Head brewer Steve Wellington can develop and market his own brands, but Coors handles sales and distribution of White Shield. Wilson aims to double the capacity for White Shield, which may mean moving it from the small Museum plant into the main Coors brewery. The beer has been given a new bottle design and label, and the image now stresses the beer's heritage by calling it India Pale Ale.

Coors' campaign to build consumer awareness of its real ales will include personalising the brands. Much will be made of the fact that head brewer Paul Wharton won a silver medal in the most recent International Brewers' competition held in Burton, while Steve Wellington was named Brewer of the Year by the British Guild of Beer Writers in 2002.

BUT LUKEWARM ScotCo

Andy Neal, consumer marketing director for Scottish Courage, the brewing division of Scottish & Newcastle, says that while ale may be in decline, there are pockets of interest that have a rosy future. He claims that ScotCo is the biggest supplier of cask beer in the country and John Smith's Bitter is twice the size of its nearest competitor, though the brand is heavily skewed towards nitrokeg. He disputes that cask Tetley Bitter is a bigger seller than John Smith's but doesn't back this with any statistical evidence. Among their other cask brands, John Smith's Magnet will be treated as a regional beer in Yorkshire. Those once mighty Cockney classics, Courage Best and Directors, now brewed at Tadcaster, are declining by 7 or 8 per cent a year but the decline is not as fast as other brands, according to Neal. As part of a new campaign to boost local beers, they will be labelled Local Heroes in their regions.

In Scotland, ScotCo's last remaining cask beer, McEwan's 80/-, is to get some support, with new packaging planned; but the overall message is more downbeat than those of ScotCo's competitors. S&N is now a global player, outright owner of Kronenbourg, and has massive interests in Russia and the Baltic. "Taste and flavour are important to only a small group of people," Neal says. "Most drinkers just want a cold beer."

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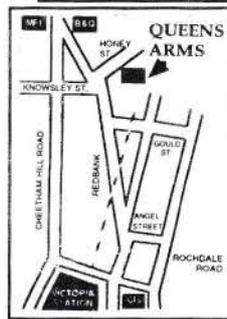
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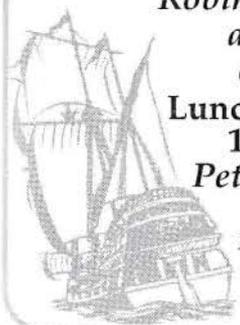
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There are new beers to try from our local family brewers with Hydes, Lees and Robinson's are now in the second month of their 2004 seasonal programme. There's Hunky Dory from Hydes, a 4.8% premium beer with a slightly fruity finish which drinks well, from Lee's there's Vulcan, a 4.1% full bodied wheat beer and from Robinson's - Enigma, a 4.7% premium ale brewed using Saaz hops.

Family Favourites

Next month sees the next seasonal beers.



Hydes beer for March/April is Fine & Dandy, continuing the 'Feeling Fine with Hydes' theme of this year's craft beer programme. This is a 4.2% beer and features 'a luxury blend of the finest malts' to produce a Spring beer that is 'full-flavoured and enticingly aromatic'.

Lees next beer is the return of a firm favourite. Brooklyn Best is a 5% premium beer, first brewed at Lees by Garrett Oliver of the Brooklyn Brewery in New York. This is a hugely hoppy, full-bodied beer which had been very well-received.



Robinson's are also reprising another favourite - Young Tom, one of the best received of the seasonal beers, and at 4% a more sessionable sibling of the powerful barley wine.

Finally, Holts have now brewed the last of the Patersons and this is to be replaced by Thunderholt, a seasonal from last year, and very successful.



CAINS

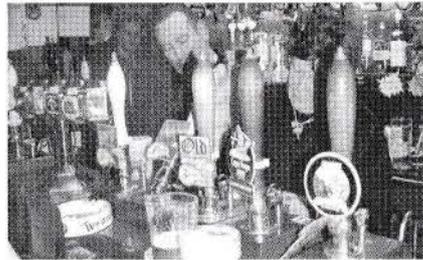
The other family brewer with a presence in the Opening Times area is Liverpool-based Cains, who own the Gothic Bar in Gatley. The brewery has refurbished the flagship Brewery Tap pub at its Stanhope Street site and plans to roll out a refurbishment program on its existing nine pubs during 2004. Cains is still actively seeking new pubs throughout the North West to add to its estate. The Brewery Tap scooped an award from the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) the last time it was refurbished over 10 years ago and brewery owners Sudarghara and Ajmail Dusanj are hoping that the new look pub will be a hit with regulars and visitors.

Micro Magic

As ever the region's micro brewers are going great guns. Here is our monthly round-up - as ever apologies to those we didn't manage to contact this time.



Three Rivers - the brewery staged a successful launch night on 23 January, at the Crown, Heaton



Lane, Stockport. Seven 9-gallon casks of Three Rivers beers were despatched in 3 1/2 hours and the beers were very well-received. The Crown is to install another two handpumps (bringing the total to 14) and these will feature Three Rivers beers, with the 3.8% GT on one and the rest of the range rotating through the other. Oxbow (4.5%) and Old Disreputable (5.2%) are about to be joined by the 4.2% Manchester IPA, a bitter beer brewed using some hops actually grown in Manchester. The brewery is also looking at another 'launch' this time with the involvement of BBC GMR - this could be in the third or fourth week in February.



Leyden - two new beers are out from this Nangreaves, Bury, based micro. Manana is a 4.4% pale copper bitter while Sumo is a 4.1% porter, dark and medium dry. Look out also for Knickerdropper glory (!), a 3.8% beer brewed for St Valentines Day - this appeared last year but this time has been brewed to a new recipe.



Khean - based in Congleton, Khean is experimenting with bottled beers. A bottled version of the stout, Caught Behind (4.2%) has sold very well and will be repeated and more of the range is also being considered for bottling. A new beer is Fine Leg (4.2%), a copper-coloured traditional tasting bitter, balancing malt, hops and fruit flavours.

Millstone - this new brewery is going from strength to strength. The new A Miller's Ale (3.8%) has sold well. A light and hoppy brew with Fuggles and Goldings hops, it has been another hit for

Millstone. Next up is Grainstorm, a 4.2% pale and full-bodied beer. The hop varieties to be used hadn't been decided when we contacted the brewery but look for it in the trade by the end of the month. The brewery is now getting a good number of repeat orders for its beers, some pubs now ordering the beer in 18-gallon casks. The Millstone Edge recently sold out in record time at Bar Fringe!

Shaws - the new Golden Globe (4.3%), pale and very hoppy has sold so well that it is has been rebrewed. Apparently Stalybridge Buffet Bar shifted 9 gallons in two hours! Best Bitter was out as we went to press with another, as yet unformulated, beer due out later this month in keeping with the brewery's policy of producing a new beer every two weeks.



Bank Top - nothing new at the moment but is bottling another batch of Smokestack Lightning. The brewery is having problems keeping up with

demand at the moment.

Boggart Hole Clough - last month saw the production of Traggob (that's Boggart backwards!) a 3.9% pale ale and a dark beer, the 4.5% Old Hob. This month sees two more beers - Gobbart (that's an anagram of Boggart!), a 4% light session ale with a lemon citrus finish and a pale winter ale, Winter Su, 4.6%.

Bazens' - News this month is that Richard Bazen will be brewing a new beer called Riverside at the end of February/beginning of March. It will be 4.5%, medium amber in colour and will use Challenger hops. The brewery has had some very positive feedback about the eXSB and will be brewing it on a regular basis due to popular demand. The brewery's expansion which we mentioned last month is now set to go ahead from mid-February.

Facer's - Prancing Pony (Tolkein Special, 3.9%) is going well and will continue prancing on till the end of February. David Facer



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is doing a one-off special for Valentine's Day; continuing the 'Greats of English Literature' theme it's called 'Balcony Scene'. The beer uses two hop varieties for bittering and for aroma. One has a very nice floral aroma with lavender notes, the other has a lovely 'new-mown hay' nose. David tells us "it will be the perfect beer for lovers - the modest 4.2% abv should ensure that the dreaded 'BD' is not a problem, and a high mash temperature will ensure a satisfying residual sweetness for that all important lover's energy boost." If the beer goes well there may be a variant for May 1 called Lady Chatterley.



Pictish - the new beer this time is Dolmen (4%), an amber coloured beer with delicate hop aromas and the trademark Pictish bitter finish. Blue Moon (6%) was being brewed early February and this should be out by the end of the month, and look out too for a reappearance of the brewery's honey beer. Pictish have picked up two more beer of the festival awards with Alchemists Ale winning the festivals at Woking and Alloa. **Phoenix** - remains one of the most productive and reliable of the local micros. Out late January were Jovian (4.2%) and Massacre while this month sees the welcome return of Shamrock (4.3%). Work progresses well at the brewery with a new malt room recently kitted out.



Coming in March... Franconian Beer and brew-pubs
Coming in April... Our Eight Page Mild Challenge Pull-out

NATIONAL PUBS WEEK

ANYONE WHO thinks February is a quiet time for pubs will have to think again after CAMRA's second National Pubs Week later this month.

Thousands of pubs have signed up for the second annual event, which kicks off on Saturday 21 February. And this year's event is fast becoming the biggest-ever promotion of British pubs.

CAMRA Press Manager Tony Jerome said the organisation had dispatched 'substantially more' press and display promotional packs than last year. Many pubs and CAMRA branches had already posted details of their activities on CAMRA's website, www.camra.org.uk, he said. But it wasn't too late to join the party. "There's still time to get involved," said Tony. "National Pubs Week has been designed to help pubs at what is normally a quiet time, and I would urge publicans to get their orders in now." A highlight of the week will be revealing this year's National Pub of the Year. The finalists are the Crown & Thistle, Gravesend, Kent; South Western Arm, St Denys, Hants; Marquis of Granby, Granby, Notts; and the Taps, Lytham St Anne's, Lancs.

LOCAL EVENTS

Both the Stockport & South Manchester and High Peak branches of CAMRA are holding events in National Pubs Week. Stockport will be presenting their February Pub of the Month award to the Thatched Tavern in Reddish in Thursday 26th and on Saturday 28th the Arden Arms,



21-28 FEBRUARY 2004

Stockport, will be receiving the local 2004 Pub of the Year award.

High Peak, though, are really pushing the boat out with a week of events in Glossop. The timetable is:

21st Feb: Evening quiz at the Labour club on a beer and pub theme. Free drinks to the winners of each round!!

22nd Feb: Old Glove Works: live entertainment from 4.00pm

23rd Feb: Globe Inn: Folk Evening 9.00pm

24th Feb: Star Inn Quiz night 9.30pm and Quiz night at the Oakwood 9.00pm

25th Feb: Globe Inn: Quiz night 9.00pm

26th Feb: Glossop Folk Train 6.55pm from Piccadilly. Folk music on train then to the Glossop Labour Club for folk evening until 9.30pm. Globe Inn: Live music John Ottway and Richard Holgarth 9.00pm

27th Feb: Oakwood: live band Faze 2; Globe Inn: regular Blues night 9.00pm

28th Feb: Celebratory Glossop pub crawl: Star Inn 6.30pm, Friendship 7.00pm, Globe 7.30pm, Oakwood 8.15pm, Glove Works 9.00pm, Labour Club 10.00pm.

On Tuesday 24th the CAMRA Greater Manchester Region are holding an event to mark all four Marble Brewery Pubs appearing in the Good Beer Guide at the Marble Arch

Rochdale Road, Manchester from 7.30pm.



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STAGGER

with Mark McConachie

CITY CENTRE WEST

The first stagger of 2004 began on a rainy night at Kro2 - the newer sibling of the successful and award-winning Kro Bar on Wilmslow Road.

This bar has been created out of the former ground floor colonnade of the National Computing Centre, so what was once outside the building is now the inside, it being sheathed in floor-to-ceiling glass. With its visible ceiling trussing and open ducting on display, this is a very modern bar painted entirely in white. It has a central, island bar surrounded by the seating areas - a mix of wooden chairs and tables, together with sofas and such. A competent food operation runs throughout most of the day too. To the right of the building is a very large outside drinking area shaded by mature deciduous trees and canopy-covered seating, each table being provided with lighting and heating - ah, the luxury. The place was busy and abuzz with conversation, making it difficult to be heard (must be an effect of the stark décor?) Four cask beers were on offer tonight - Taylor Landlord, which everyone liked; Hydes Jekylls, which went untried; Theakston Cool Cask, deemed good; and lastly, London Pride, also judged to be good. All beers were noted to be on the cool side, but none the worse for that. On draught too, was a wheat beer from Munich brewer, Paulaner.

Out into the rain again, and towards Oxford Street where the Salisbury sits low-down in a cobbled area by the back steps to Oxford Road BR station and in the shadow of the rail viaduct that runs east to west. Four beers were available - Theakston Best and Courage Directors, both thought no better than average, whereas Bombardier and Theakston Old Peculier achieved a comfortable above-average score. The pricing provoked a few comments from our party - the beers of four percent or below were £2,

whilst above that everything was £2.30, hence some of our party drinking Old Peculier so early in the evening. The Salisbury has seen some considerable change throughout the last few years, it is now quite a well-appointed and likeable pub that has an even mix of customers; a lot enjoy the rock music that dominates the play-list later in the day. Accommodation consists of a snug, a pool room, and a lounge bar area divided by glazed screens; décor is muted with old photos of local landmarks such as Central Station adding a suitable nod to the past. The exterior is a truly splendid sight of brown and cream glazed brick and tile loudly proclaiming the pub's existence.

Having all duly supped-up, we again had to cross a wet Oxford Road, and onto Charles Street (down the side of the BBC's Manchester studios and offices) where the Lass O'Gowrie awaited us. The Lass

has, perhaps, one of the most lavish glazed tile and brick exteriors in the city - advertising the qualities of the then liquid offerings of Ale, Stout, Porter and so on. Having undergone a transformation to a brew-pub and ale-



house some years back, the interior of the pub is far less in keeping with the outside, but that does not detract from the appeal of the place as a very good multi-beer pub. Gas-lit in part, the décor is in the 'plenty of period photos and breweriana' school, then there's the excellent etched-glass windows, the part bare brick walls and a number of wooden casks arranged casually above the bar. Some noteworthy changes have occurred, the viewing windows into the former brewing cellar have been covered up and the hopsacks that provided ceiling decoration have been replaced by embossed wallpaper painted a deep red - an alehouse cliché perhaps, but missed on your author's part. It was very busy when we called with the exception of the side room, designated as non-smoking by the way, which had only a couple of folk in. Food is available daily 12 to 8. The Lass was to have the largest selection of cask ales of any pub on the night; three beers went un-sampled - Boddies, Old Speckled Hen, and Caledonian 80/- . This left our party to try the house brew, Lass Ale (brewed by Titanic of Burslem), Black Sheep Bitter, Springhead, and Nethergate Augustian. All of these were judged to be in comfortably above-average condition, with the Lass Ale just taking the honours.

On to Princess Street next, where it is sad to report that all of the pubs were only selling keg products, these were Sofa (formerly Joshua Brooks), The Garratt (formerly the Old Garratt) once a fine cask ale house, Overdraught and O'Sheas. Also keg and, seemingly forever shut, was the Granby. We passed the New Union and the other 'Village' pubs, as apparently, they form part of another city centre foray. So it was that we found ourselves in the Fab Café on Portland Street. This is the self-styled 'cult Sci-Fi and TV bar' that is set in the basement of a building that also houses a very good Chinese buffet restaurant. For all of its wacky and way-out style, Fab Café happily persists in selling cask ale. It used to have a deal with Hydes, but on our visit it was offering Hook Norton Old Hooky, an interesting choice which our party generally thought the quality of to be very good. Fab's style is unique; you are greeted by an eight-foot high Ice Warrior



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Ye Olde Vic

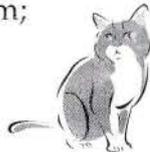
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Hop, Old Tom, Hartleys XB,

Cumbria Way



A WARM WELCOME FROM

KATH & IAN - GREAT BEER IN A TRADITIONAL PUB



(a character from TV's Doctor Who), as you walk into an ultra-violet and lowly-lit room. The bar is to the right (with model StarChaser rocket), a Dalek and other Sci-Fi objects to your left with plenty of tables and chairs in between; other seating exists at the front and to the back. TV screens show old Sixties shows and the sound system plays old TV theme tunes to really get you in to the mood; all tremendous fun. The audience seems to have changed to a more mainstream one from the original nerdy, geeky types that it used to attract when it first opened, which is great to see. Why, I even met my Barber, Captain Fido (of Tib Street), in there. The lucky chap was surrounded by a bevy of lovelies (how do you do it, mate?)

Continuing along Portland Street next, to its junction with Oxford Street brought us to a pub a whole world away from that of Fab, Wetherspoon's (JDW) **Paramount**. Set in a new building that opened around three to four years ago, this is a very large pub within a vaguely wedge-shaped space. Large ground floor area set on differing levels with bar and non-smoking area, whilst a mezzanine occupies the rear upper space. Whatever you may think of JDW pubs, they are popular, and this proved to be no exception - it was packed. It took most of us around ten minutes to get served with either Taylor Landlord, Bass, Directors or Spitfire - opinions ranged from below average to very good, the latter especially for the Landlord. I was told a guest beer had been seen, but that it had 'gone off' when ordered. Time was getting on, so we headed north up Mosley Street to the **Seven Oaks**. This is set on the very edge of the Chinatown district on Nicholas Street; it is a former Whitbread pub with a striking white exterior constructed from terracotta blocks - these are set off with some ornamental ironwork at the building's corners and fenestration features. The pub has two floors, however the first floor area is generally closed except at lunchtimes and when catering for functions. The ground floor bar is quite a small space decorated with wood panelling, a peacock-motif wallpaper and, very appropriately for the season, Chinese lanterns - Chinese New Year, the Year of the Monkey, was imminent. Two beers are normally available - Boddies and Tetley bitters; today though, the former was not on, so Tetleys it was, all round. Most of us were of the opinion that the beer was respectably good.

Our final call was Tetley's **Circus Tavern** on nearby Portland Street, although one soul had time to nip into Hydes' **Grey Horse**, a mere ten yard scamper away, where he found Jekylls Gold to be on truly fabulous form. Meanwhile, back at the Circus (a Tetley Heritage House and a grade II listed building) to order wonderful pints of some of the best Tetley bitter served in the city centre that you will probably encounter. The place was comfortably busy and we were speedily ushered into the small rear room to a table by one of the waitresses in order to keep the bar area and the narrow corridor free of the clutter of people. This is a very sound policy by landlord 'Greek' George as it ensures quick, hassle-free service; both of the small and cosy wood-panelled rooms are utilised, and everybody is happy at the very busy weekend times in this tiny, gem of a pub. Our waitress for the evening was a very pleasant and efficient girl called Gina with good-looking, curly, auburn hair (sorry to a certain critic from Clifton, but I always think it worthwhile mentioning such good service...) The Tetley was just short of being the beer of the night, that particular accolade going to the Lass Ale in the Lass o' Gowrie. Notwithstanding that, it proved to be a most fitting end to a stagger and a most enjoyable one too. Of course these views are my own, and the same stagger held on a different night may evoke an entirely dissimilar outcome.



STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL MOVES TO NEW HOME

AFTER MONTHS OF NEGOTIATION and uncertainty, Stockport's Beer & Cider Festival is moving to a new venue for this year's event.

The Festival will now be held at Edgeley Park, home of Stockport County and Sale Sharks. This follows the decision to make the north west one of the pilot areas for all-postal voting in this year's European and local elections. This has led to the Town Hall Ballroom being used to store and count the ballot papers over the two-week period leading up to the election date.

Festival Organiser Jim Flynn told Opening Times "This is a fresh challenge for the organising committee, which I am sure they will rise to. I am very optimistic that this move will bring new vitality to the Festival. It will mean the end of queues for the evening sessions and provide plenty of room for a pleasant day or evening's drinking." He also explained that a real plus is that for the first time customers will have the option of drinking outdoors at what will be the start of the summer.

Don't forget to pencil in the Festival dates - 3-5 June - in your diary, and the new venue, Edgeley Park. For those who don't know, it is less than 10 minutes walk from the railway station and the A6. For more details see future editions of Opening Times, check out our web site on www.stockportfestival.fsnet.co.uk or nearer the dates see our adverts in the Stockport Express who are again sponsors of the Festival itself.

VIADUCTS AND VAULTS 3 - OUT NOW!

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DETAILS ON PAGE 17

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THE BELGIAN BELLY

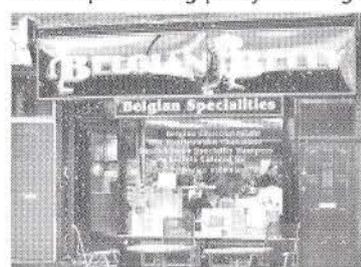
THE OPENING TIMES AREA is already blessed with one of the best Belgian bars in the UK, La Trappiste on Greenwood Street in Altrincham. It has now been joined by what is likely to be one of the country's top Belgian beer shops, the Belgian Belly on Wilbraham Road in Chorlton.

The Belgian Belly is the UK's first shop dedicated to all things Belgian, including cheeses and chocolates, and is a family enterprise run by Jason Barker and his sisters, Sandra Crowe and Susan Rothwell. And while the sweets and savouries are of great interest in themselves (and these extend to tempting Flemish dishes and waffles which can be either taken home or eaten at the table at the front - and outside - of the shop), it is the beer stocking policy which will be of most interest to readers of Opening Times.

At first sight the range appears relatively small for a specialist shop, with perhaps 30-40 beers on display at any one time. Appearances are deceptive, though.

Closer examination reveals that the range covers all Belgian styles and majors on some very good beers indeed. The policy is in fact to feature at least one of every beer style brewed in Belgium and the range changes almost every week. The lambic range is permanently impressive, featuring gueuzes and krieks from Drie Fonteinen, Hanssens, Boon (the top of the range Oude Gueuze and Kriek, Girardin (the rare black label unfiltered gueuze), Cantillon, and even the new and rare De Cam.

All the trappists feature, including the rare and superb Westvleteren and there is a good abbey range, too. Factor is an extensive and eclectic purchasing policy covering almost every Belgian brewery



(Fantome, Regenboog, Kerkom, Dupont give a flavour of the range and depth) and you have a beer shop par excellence. The only beers you won't get are 'label beers' and the products of Interbrew.

This all down to the knowledge and enthusiasm of Jason, a huge Belgian beer fan who has been visiting



the country for 17 or 18 years. He is particularly keen on small family brewers and micros, and says his buying policy is simply to seek out 'good beer in its style'. He can, and does, source beer from virtually any Belgian brewery and most is sourced direct from the brewers, and indeed he is the sole importer for the Roman Brewery in East Flanders.

Jason is in fact a real expert and is happy to both discuss the finer points with Belgian beer aficionados and also to share his extensive knowledge with the novice. His aim is to get more people to try different beers and to this end a tasting was hosted at the shop in December. As a fan of matching beer with food, he is also running a gourmet beer dinner in Huddersfield this month and in Manchester later in the year. Jason and his sisters certainly seem to have identified a niche in the market as business is booming. In the run up to Christmas they were selling between 60 and 100 cases of beer a week and even in January 25-plus were selling. You don't have to buy by the case (though that will get you a 15% discount off the already keen prices), you can just buy the odd bottle. All the bottles carry a small deposit which is refundable if you return them. For anyone with even the slightest interest in Belgian beers, the Belgian Belly is almost a compulsory visit. **JC**
The Belgian Belly is at 514 Wilbraham Road, almost opposite the excellent Lloyds Hotel. Phone 0161 860 6766.



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DEEP-FRIED RAGS WITH St SIXTUS

Opening Times' cook Ken Birch brings us another beer-influenced slant on a traditional dish. Remember to check out the suggested accompanying beers.

INGREDIENTS

- 12oz unbleached flour (with a pinch of salt)
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1-1½ litres of vegetable oil (for frying - quantity depends on size of pan)
- 4oz caster sugar
- 3oz icing sugar
- 1 33cl bottle of St Sixtus 12 or a very strong barley wine

METHOD

1. In a large mixing bowl blend the flour, eggs, olive oil, salt and half the beer by this method. Make a well in the centre of the flour, add the eggs and fold flour from the edges over the eggs. Repeat this until all the liquids have been added.
2. Turn the dough out onto a large wooden or plastic board and knead vigorously for 20 minutes. Get your breath back then return the dough to the mixing bowl, cover it with a warm damp cloth, sit down, have a gag and drink the rest of the beer - you've earned it!
3. After an hour, turn the dough onto the board and roll out until about 2 inches thick and then cut it into strips, 1½ by 4 inches.
4. Heat the vegetable oil in a deep fryer and fry your strips until golden brown - about one minute. Try and fry them individually but in any event don't try to fry more than three pieces at any one time. Remove from the oil, drain on kitchen paper, sprinkle with icing sugar and serve.

SUGGESTED ACCOMPANYING BEERS

Try a peche, belgian wheat beer or perhaps an American-style ale such as Roosters Special, Bazens' Flatbac or Phoenix Arizona; or why not let me have your own choice. Whilst we're on the subject, I do get the occasional bit of feedback on recipes but more would be appreciated.

A final footnote - the cooking with beer taster at the Kings Arms went splendidly and I will definitely run a full course. My address and telephone numbers are: 31 Rock Bank, The Cliff, Salford, M7 2EX. Call 705 0836(h) or 661 7356(w).

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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries
Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak and Macclesfield

Diary

FEBRUARY 2004

Monday 16th - Social: Ye Olde Vic, Chatham St, Edgeley. From 9.00pm.

Friday 20th - Stagger: Cale Green/Heaviley/Hillgate South. Meet Adswode Hotel, Adswode Lane West 7.30pm; Royal Mortar, Higher Hillgate 8.30.

Thursday 26th - Pub of the Month: presentation to Thatched Tavern, Stanhope St, Reddish. From 8.00pm.

Saturday 28th - Branch Pub of the Year presentation to the Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. From 8.00pm. Let's have a good turnout at this important event.

Thursday 4th March - Brewery Visit - Hydes Brewery. Book with John Clarke (477 1973) or Paul Formby (612 0759, after 6.00pm). Names also taken and details of trip at February Branch meeting.

Thursday 11th - Branch Meeting: Kingsway, Levenshulme. Starts 8.00pm. Cask Champion award will be discussed at this meeting.

Friday 12th - Informal Social: Poynton Royal British Legion Beer Festival. From 8.00pm-ish.

Saturday 13th - Opening Times Abroad: afternoon/early evening in Ashton-u-Lyne. Meet Caledonia, Warrington St, 12 noon.

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

Saturday 14th - Social night at Le Trappiste, Greenwood Street, Altrincham

Monday 16th - Branch Meeting: Kinder Lodge, Hayfield. Starts 8.30pm

FEBRUARY 2004

Monday 1st March - Committee Meeting: Lane Ends, Marple Bridge. Starts 8.30pm

Monday 15th - Branch Meeting: Cheshire Ring, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following:

Monday 23rd - Bollington pub crawl. Start 8pm at the Holly Bush. Then visiting the Queens, Meridian, Church House & Poachers.

Sunday 29th - Sunday lunch: Davenport Arms, Marton

Monday 8th March - Business Meeting: George & Dragon, Higher Hurdsfield. Starts 8.00pm

Monday 22nd - Social: Plough, Eaton. From 8.00pm

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 advised us of the following events:

Thursday 19th - Good Beer Guide 2005 final selection. - meet at The Orange Tree, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm.

Thursday 26th - Sale Survey / Social: - Kings Ransom 7.30pm; Legh Arms 8.30pm

Thursday 4th March - Branch Meeting: The Orange Tree, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm

Thursday 18th - City Centre Survey and social: meet Peveril of the Peak, 7.30pm.

REGIONAL EVENT

Tuesday 24th - Presentation at Marble Arch to mark all four Marble Brewery pubs appearing in the 2004 Good Beer Guide. From 7.30pm.

To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA Planner

12



CAINS

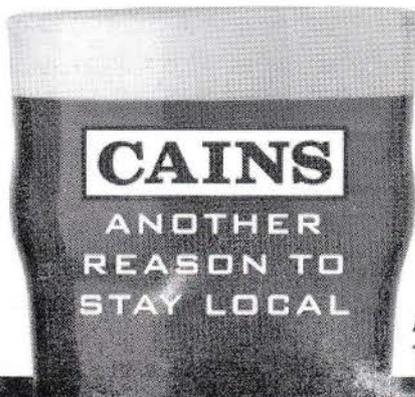
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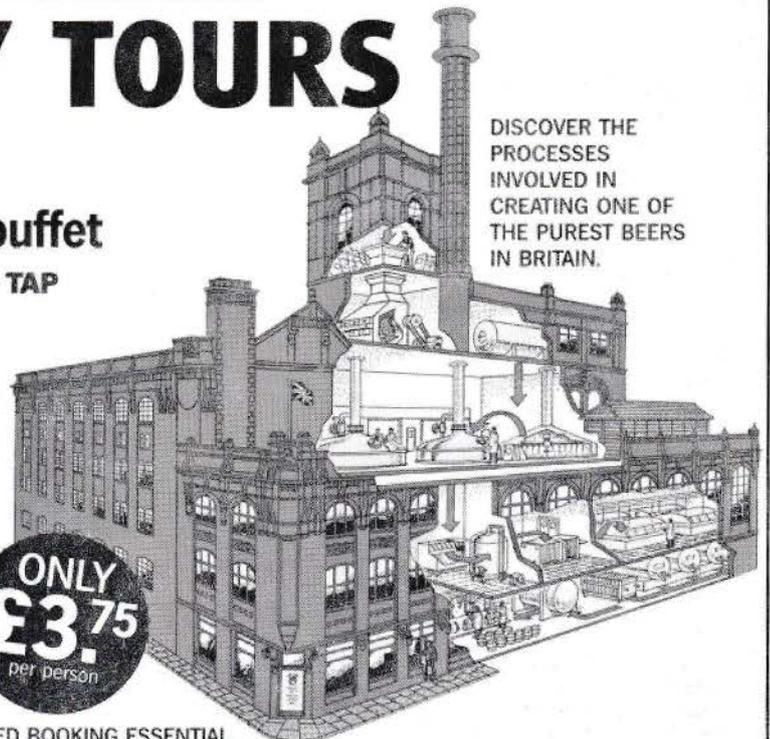
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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison **FEBRUARY '99**

It had become something of a tradition for the Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA voting for the Pub of the Year to be a close-run thing, and this time was no exception with just one vote between the winner and runner-up. However, there could only be one winner, and this time the honours went to the Blossoms, a traditional Robinson's pub on the corner of Bramhall Lane and the A6. There was a special mention for the runner-up, the Crown on Heaton Lane, (runner-up again this year!) which had come through a difficult year, starting in the ownership of Greenalls followed by a succession of possible buyers. The year ended with the Crown in the apparently safe hands of the Ale House Pub Co, with Steve and Lorraine James signed up as managers.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

January 1999 also saw the National Winter Ales Festival held in Manchester for the first time, at the Upper Campfield Market. It was judged a sell-out success, perhaps too much so, as the beer ran out by 7.30pm on the Saturday night. Apologies were offered to anyone who turned up later, and had to be turned away. The event was certainly to be held in Manchester again the following year, and with an increased beer order.

It seemed too good to be true - Manchester with its very own beer festival. But nothing stays the same for ever, and during 2001 rumours had started to circulate that the 2002 festival might be the last in Manchester. Sure enough, once the 2002 festival was over, Manchester City Council announced that they needed the venue for storage purposes, and the festival moved lock, stock, and barrel to Burton-on-Trent. But the news is not all bad - there is a possibility that the festival *may* be back in Manchester for 2005.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

There was more information on Bridgewater Ales - the men behind the operation were Ken Birch, former local licensee, and his business partner, brewer Richard Bazen. Their first brew, Delph Porter, had been on sale at the National Winter Ales Festival, and it had been produced at the small brewery at the Old Pint Pot in Salford. However, the brewery shortly relocated to what was to be its permanent home in Chapel Street, in the shadow of the old Cook St Brewery tower.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

There was another item from the Brewery News column. Joseph Holts had finally flung open the brewery doors, but only for a short while. To help celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the company, and raise funds for the Christie Hospital Appeal, the directors had reversed their long-standing ban on brewery visits to allow the brewers to run tours for members of the public. The tours were for groups of 12-15 people, during March to May, and the cost was £10 a head, with the proceeds going to the Christie Hospital.

COPY DATE FOR MARCH ISSUE - FEBRUARY 28
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OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

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LIVE AND LET LIVE

I received a report in tones of disgust of how a group of friends had turned up at a well-known city centre pub at twenty to eleven on a Friday night, only to find the doors firmly shut, even though there were people drinking inside. "How can CAMRA give any support to pubs that treat customers with such contempt?" But it didn't seem too unreasonable to me - why shouldn't the regulars who have been in the pub most of the evening be spared invasions from rowdy groups just before last orders? If you couldn't give recognition to any pubs that ever offended potential customers, you'd end up with little apart from a handful of the less boisterous Wetherspoons. Anywhere that banned people in hats, or had a rude landlord, or smelly toilets, or sometimes tolerated the bar staff smoking in the hatchway, or refused to admit motorcyclists, would have to be excluded from every pub guide. Indeed, if you combined the pubs that offer a dusty welcome to families with those that break the law by allowing children in bar areas, you'd probably rule out every single pub in the country. It might even be said that no pub is truly good unless someone can't stand the place.

MILLERS' KITCHEN

I was standing at the bar of a well-known chain pub at a busy time when it was taking up to five minutes to get served. Yet, on the other side of a counter, a girl was occupying herself moving glasses from one shelf to another, apparently oblivious of the hordes of thirsty punters. It's impossible to believe that job couldn't have waited until later. Some pub staff, especially at the younger end of the scale, seem to do their utmost to avoid actually serving customers - slicing lemons or restocking the fridge always seems a far better option. The record I've spotted is eight members of staff milling around behind a bar, and only one doing anything that involved serving drinks.

It's also interesting how this phenomenon appears to be almost exclusively confined to themed outlets and managed pubs. When your own livelihood depends on it, you rarely have any trouble understanding the concept of customer satisfaction.

THE EFFINGHAM ARMS

If you're a frequent pubgoer, it doesn't do to be a shrinking violet. Robust language and forthright opinions are commonplace, but what's acceptable at one place and time might not go down too well across the board. One Sunday lunchtime I was in what can only be described as a rather genteel pub, when a group of lads came in to have a meal. They proceeded to engage in a conversation that nobody else in the room could have failed to overhear, liberally laced with four-letter words and including detailed accounts of their sordid holiday exploits that left little to the imagination. They weren't at all threatening, and this was nothing that would have been out of place in a city centre at ten o'clock on Friday night, but in an environment where there were pensioners just wanting a quiet drink, and families eating lunch with children, it was distinctly jarring. Surely in a situation like this the old-fashioned landlord would have come into his own with a well-timed intervention of "come on lads, mind your language!"
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Starting this month with a resume of Hayfield news, we start with the Waltzing Weasel, which is still taking Kelham Gold as a permanent beer alongside the Marstons Bitter. Further into the village, the Kinder Lodge still has four handpumps, often including Taylors Best Bitter and Adnams Bitter, Storm beers and occasionally Shaws, with more commercial beers such as Marstons Bitter. A 'find' however in the George, on the main street. For the next three months, they are taking Moorhouses Black Cat mild alongside the Burtonwood Bitter. I timed my visit just as the first barrel was progressing, in late January and the beer was superb. The Royal still has guest beers, though several members report that the choice has not been as wide of late. Up Kinder Road, the Sportsman has Thwaites Bitter and Lancaster Bomber.

Over the hill in Glossop, the Queens now has Witchwood Hobgoblin permanently due to its success in the past few months. Up at the top of Whitfield, the underrated Beehive now has two guest beers alongside the Marstons Bitter. I recently spent a full afternoon up there with work colleagues and am determined to make the long walk uphill out of Glossop more regularly.

Still in Glossop, Mysingen Midwinterol (6.2%) from Sweden continues to be popular in the Globe, though Golden Globe from Shaws was extremely popular during the first few weeks of January. The Star & the Gloveworks have been selling beers from Millstone Brewery on a fairly regular basis for the last two months.

Full marks to the Hatters in Marple, who put free bottles of champagne on every table and put on an excellent spread of curries, chilli and barbecued food on for free on New Years Eve (a little late mentioning, but worth the praise).

In Hollingworth, the Royal Oak has its lease up for sale. On my Derbyshire Guide surveys, I was surprised to find that the Royal Oak at the bottom of the Snake Pass (on the outskirts of Glossop) takes Tetleys Dark Mild on a regular basis. Thought worth reporting.

Mother and son, Cynthia Bradley and Brian Flood, have teamed up and taken over as tenants of the Hunters in Chisworth. Their move to the Robinson's pub is a long held ambition and the first time they have worked together. Both are bringing their own particular strengths to the business with Brian being a fully trained chef and Cynthia having business administration skills and previous experience of bar work. "We will be building on the Hunters



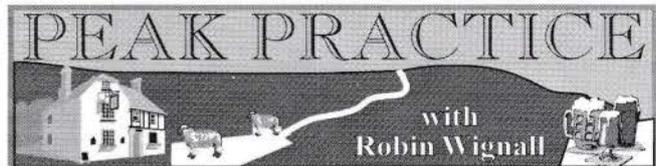
strong reputation for it's a la carte menu, which Brian is developing, and we also provide a good selection of freshly prepared specials and bar snacks," says Cynthia. The pair are supported in the business by Cynthia's husband Dan, who, having recently retired from the brewery, is already well acquainted with the licensed trade.



Denton's award winning Masons Arms has seen the arrival of Keith and Susan Barlow, who have taken over as tenants of the Robinson's pub. The couple are well aware of the enviable reputation held by the Stockport Road pub and will be putting in a 100% effort to ensure that standards are maintained. "We have lived in the area all our lives, and as regulars of the Masons Arms, we know that it is a past winner of Robinson's annual Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition", said Keith, who has previously worked at the pub as a barman. "At first I worked for a few hours each week but more recently I have stood in as a relief manager for the previous tenants, Syd and Jenny, when they were away on holiday,".



Qualified chemists, Suzanne Hart and Stephanie Birtles, have taken the bold step of giving up their established careers to take over as tenants of the Dandy Cock at Disley. Their move out of the laboratory and into the Robinson's house is their first venture into the licensed trade. Having got to know each other as colleagues over the past few years, while working in Bredbury on the testing and analysis of medicines, it became apparent that we were both looking for a new challenge. So rather than just talking about our ideas, we took the bull by the horns and pursued our ambition of taking on a pub of our own," explained Suzanne. The pair agreed on the Dandy Cock because, as a long-time resident of Disley, Suzanne knew the pub well and after a couple of visits Stephanie, from north Manchester, agreed that the friendly local had the kind of customer base and business potential that they had been looking for. Since taking on the pub the pair have not looked back, and to mark their first Saturday at the Dandy Cock, Suzanne's husband Dave played guitar to a full house at the pub with his band 'Top Banana'. "We are now actively getting to know our customers and talking to them to make sure that we provide the entertainment that they want. We both believe that the pub is the centre of the community and are working hard to ensure that as well as serving a well kept pint, we provide a warm and friendly local where all are welcome," said Suzanne.



BUXWORTH is a stone's throw from Whaley Bridge, and it is at the end of a branch of the High Peak Canal, where there was an interchange with the Peak Forest Tramway. Here stands the Navigation Inn.

Buxworth was formerly Bugsworth, as shown on an 1898 OS map on the wall of the pub, the name being changed after a referendum some years ago. The canal basin is presently undergoing another repair/refurbishment/restoration, and is a Mecca for industrial archaeologists.

The Navigation lies alongside the canal basin. A former Wilson's house, that company's chequerboard logo can still be found on tiles in the gents toilets, the pub is now a free house. Over the years it has expanded into adjoining cottages, and is now a popular venue for a range of customers. The various rooms and areas include a vault, drinking/dining areas and a larger, separate dining room/restaurant. The Navigation has a reputation for good food, for which it is popular with locals, walkers and car-borne trade. It is very much a local's local. Once canal renovation is complete presumably the canal fraternity will return in numbers. The pub is also race HQ for Eccles Pike Fell Race, when runners gallop up and down a nearby hill one evening in late August.

Local photographs, pictures and artefacts adorn the walls. Naturally there is a canal theme, but also included are local football and cricket teams, and other aspects of social history. In all this history, beer could be forgotten, if only briefly. The Navigation has four beers on offer. Websters Bitter, Taylor's Landlord and Marston's Pedigree are regulars, and there is a rolling programme of often interesting guest beers. Breweries represented recently include Storm, Archers and Beartown. The Navigation is not the easiest place to find. Walking the canal towpath from Whaley Bridge, Bridgemont or Furness Vale works. By road the B6062 from the A6 at Bridgemont leads to Chinley via Buxworth, and a sharp right turn is needed downhill to the pub. The Navigation is another High Peak pub well worth finding.



PUB NEWS

The Farmers Arms in Congleton, which has been closed for a complete refurbishment, should be open by the time you read this. It is reported that a sum in the region of £125,000 has been spent on the improvements. The George & Dragon in Holmes Chapel (a Robinson's pub) is also being refurbished. Another refurbishment has taken place at the Bull's Head, Mottram St. Andrew. This time the name of the pub has also changed to The Bull's Head - Country Pub & Dining Rooms (catchy little title), however the beer is very expensive at £2.30 for Pedigree. In Bollington, the landlord of the Spinners expects to leave by the end of February, the landlord of the Holly Bush has handed his notice in to Robinson's and the landlady of the Lord Clyde is looking for someone to buy her lease off her.



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British Meat Steak Pie of the Year 2001 - second place.

British Meat Steak Pie of the Year 2002 - runner up.

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From: Patrick Harrison, Camden:

I am a Northerner living in exile in London, and am an avid reader of Opening Times, it is very useful having the newsletter stored on your website. The local CAMRA Group where I live, have a newsletter which comes out randomly and is hopeless. OT is a brilliant guide to drinking in the North West and has the latest news straight away. My parents live in Macclesfield, The Railway View being my Dad's local, so when I pop up to see them I can get to sample the finest selection of pubs using your publication.

I particularly enjoy the articles in Opening Times, and last week used the article on Tales from Vienna Brewpubs by Phil Booton to plan a long weekend break with my partner to Vienna. The article was published some time ago in Opening Times, and luckily none of the pubs we visited had shut down. I would just like to pass on my thanks to Phil for his excellent article, which made us choose Vienna for the weekend and guided us around the city letting us sample an outstanding array of Austrian Beer. I'm amazed how many pubs that Phil managed to visit, as we only managed half of what he visited in the same time.

Could I perhaps ask for a favour too? Some years back the BeerMonster published an article to Munich Pubs and Beer Gardens, unfortunately I have lost the article. I was wondering if you or the BeerMonster had a copy which you could e-mail me. After the success of our trip to Vienna, we are thinking of planning a pub-crawl around Munich next.

Can I thank you for putting together such an excellent publication. Opening Times must take up a lot of time to prepare, but the effort is worth it. I'm sure I speak for many that really look forward to reading the next publication.

(Many thanks for those kind words - Ed(1). We will try to dig out a copy of the (updated) Munich article which was spiked last year! Ed(2).)

From: Matthew Taylor, Idaho, Chorlton:

Thanks for the article in last month's issue. Just to let you know that we have had Anchor Steam on draught in again, although it has just run out, we have Anchor Liberty Ale in it's place although stocks are limited. James Clay, the importer are expecting more stock direct from the USA (the last consignment was imported to and kegged in Holland). We have the last remaining stocks of Rogue beers, the current importer has decided not to continue with this product.



SMITHFIELD EXCELS (AGAIN!)

Truncated (again) due to the apparently wise but clearly wordy thoughts of Colonel Protz, I can concentrate on only three things. First last month's festival at the Smithfield (Swan Street, Manchester). Well it wiped me out. Trying to deliver several hundred OT's and pop into the Smithfield every hour or so for a couple more new beers was too much even for my hardened constitution. The problem was the beers. I don't know where Terry and Jenny found them (well actually I do if I look at the list....) but one after another, tasty, hoppy beers that renewed a rather increasingly jaded view of some of the more recent micros. The pub is always excellent, but its festivals, now attracting visitors from Scotland, Reading, London - and even New Zealand this time, are truly exceptional. Kudos.

FRINGE BENEFITS

I am getting a bit irritated with some of the articles herein praising various offies and quasi-restaurants in out-of-town locations as 'probably the best Belgian Bar/Off licence ever...' etc. They seem to forget the ongoing presence of Bar Fringe, also on Swan St. Designed by owner John Henley as a simulcrum of a Belgian 'Brown Bar', it is still going strong, and has acquired 4 micro cask ales and a traditional draught cider on route (and annual appearances in the Good Beer Guide). Presumably this concession to British (and CAMRA) tastes somehow counts against it. Well not with everyone. A well-known Belgian Company is so impressed with the operation they're spending a lot of money by way of congratulation to allow John to spruce up the outside (end of the month). So - good on Interbrew! More and interesting bottles and a March beer festival are promised. Much more next time.



FOND MEMORY

Finally I must end on a sad note. Fang, the popular (and large!) pub dog of Idy and Sal at the Crescent (Salford) and formerly one of the most popular staff at the Beer House during Idy & Sal's tenure) died in January, aged 13 1/2. Fang suffered from arthritis for some time but bore this with his customary stoicism. Fang posthumously won the 'Best Pub Animal' award in What's Doing. Raise a glass to Fang's memory at the Crescent Beer Festival, 26 - 29 Feb.



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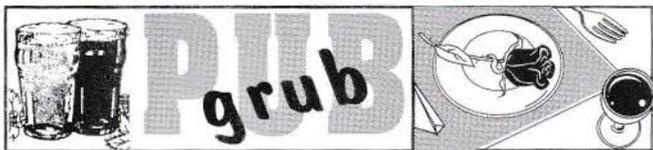
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THE RAILWAY, PORTWOOD, STOCKPORT

The Railway is one of the best known pubs on Stockport's thriving pub and beer scene. It's not always been such a good pub, though.

It started life as the Railway but in those days it was a pretty dull Wilson's house. Then followed a number of years during which it underwent an increasingly strange series of incarnations - Byrons, Cheekies (anyone remember the hanging buttocks pub sign?) and ultimately 'Docs & Slingsbacks'. This latter venture didn't in fact get off the ground, the pub being overtaken by insolvency and closure. Luckily, Rossendale-based brewer Dave Porter was looking for a Stockport outlet and, having been gazumped on the Stanley Arms, lighted upon the Railway.

Since becoming a Porter Brewing Co tied house, the pub has scarcely looked back, and is now well established as a centre for good beer. Alex Lord is the licensee and takes hard work almost to the level of hyper-activity at times. Efforts much appreciated by both the pub's loyal and large band of regulars, and visiting drinkers from far and wide.

Apart from the full (and extensive) range of Porter Brewing Co beers, the Railway also features three guest beers every weekend. Some of these are brand new beers from brand new breweries, the installation of which is a Dave Porter sideline, but others some from longer-established micros across the UK. Add to these 40 or so foreign beers, mainly Belgian, German and US, plus real cider and the appeal of the Railway becomes immediately apparent. Awards and beer guide entries have of course come thick and fast.

Less well-known is the pub's food operation. On the left-hand wall of the pub are two black boards advertising a range of meals, combining pub grub stalwarts with one or two unusual options, all at or around £3.50 a time.

It is when the food actually arrives that the quality of the offer becomes apparent. Huge platefuls of well-presented, well-prepared, good honest pub grub. We tried both the Spicy Pork and the Lamb & Mint Pudding. Neither disappointed. The pork was presented in a dish with creamy pepper sauce featuring red peppers and mushrooms; the pudding was tasty and moist with a generous filling. Accompanying both were large portions of salad (no mere garnish here) and huge portions of the pub's trademark home-made chips, arguably the best in town. Rice or 'half and half' are available where appropriate and an alternative to the chips.

There can sometimes be a wait for the food as, true to form, Alex also runs the kitchen single-handedly. It is perhaps for this reason that the Railway doesn't make more of this excellent value-for-money aspect of its operation. So while the food here is highly recommended, don't all rush at once! JC

The Railway is on the corner of Avenue Street and Great Portwood Street, Stockport, opposite the Peel Centre. Food is available 12-2(ish), Monday-Saturday. Call first on 0161 429 6062.

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Further to our 'Back To Cask' front page lead last month, there's another gain to report. The Rudyard in Heaton Chapel has had a makeover and has been renamed the Heaton Chapel. Part of the makeover has seen the return of real ale in the shape of Boddingtons Cask. Well done!

On 15 March, after two years at the Adswood Hotel, Stockport, Deborah Torkington and her boyfriend Lan Brehaut are moving into retirement - from running a pub that is. We wish them well. Taking over at the Adswood will be Stephen Barber from the Unity on Wellington Road South. He will be continuing the Adswood's participation in the forthcoming 'Mild Challenge'. We welcome to Stockport and the Unity Patrick Byrne from Barrowford, near Nelson, Lancs. We wish him every success in his move.

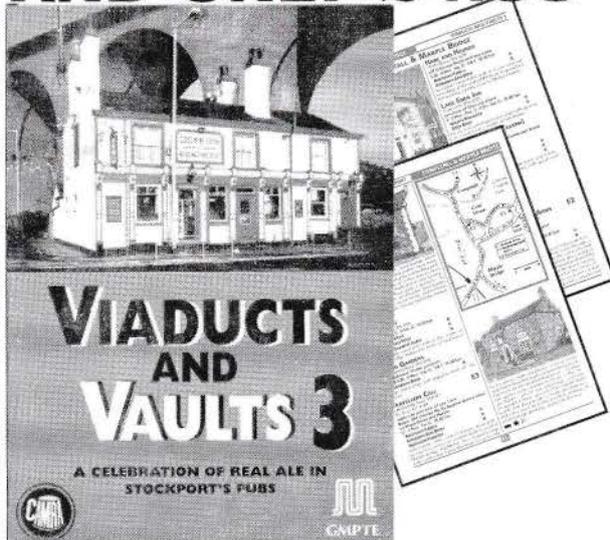
The Golden Lion on Middle Hillgate has reopened under the new management of Ian and Bev McMahon. When OT called the two handpumps were waiting to be connected up - if the 'Yellow Cat' is indeed returning to the real ale fold, this will be good news indeed.

There's a new manager at the Hinds Head in Heaton Chapel, where Jay Boyd took over on 2 January. The pub's owners has been concerned at some perceived drift in the pub's operation in recent times and Jay, who has previous experience of the pub, has a remit to take it back to the way it was (in previous years the pub was a virtual fixture in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide).

The emphasis will be on quality throughout and a return to traditional values. No more 'banging' music, for example and an emphasis on quality in beer, food and service. The cask beer range has been reduced to four, to maintain throughput and quality, and now comprises Taylor's Landlord, Caledonian Deuchars IPA, John Smiths Bitter and the new Boddingtons Cask. Once quality has stabilised a guest beer may be introduced. When OT called, the beers were certainly on good form. Look out too, for a new menu, which will be available in both the restaurant and the bar.

A Guide to the best pubs for 2004

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MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

WHAT'S DOING IN THE CITY CENTRE

Starting off with some bad news from the city. The roof of the **Crown & Anchor**, Hilton Street was destroyed by a fierce fire that took hold in one of the upstairs rooms in early January. Naturally, the pub is closed while builders assess the damage; I believe the pub may have been about to change ownership too, so the future of the venture seems to be uncertain.

Across town, the **Millstone** is now under the ownership of JW Lees. The building has been decorated in the brewery's livery and both Lees Bitter and GB Mild are available on handpump. Nothing has changed inside so the Millstone still has its 'local feel'. This puts Lees back up to three City Centre pubs, with this new acquisition replacing the John Willie Lees in the recently demolished half of the Arndale Centre. The Millstone is also a real ale gain as the pub's previous owners only had the proper stuff now and again - and on my few visits of dubious quality, too.

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I was informed by a learned source, that Enterprise Inns now own both the **Seven Oaks**, Nicholas Street and **Unicorn**, Church Street. Kath Smethurst at Robbies' Castle on Oldham Street told me that since Frederics had been discontinued, sales of its replacement, Double Hop, were up, like-for-like. I had very nice pint of the seasonal Enigma in there too. The Castle hosts a monthly acoustic music session called N/4 Acoustica on the fourth Thursday of the month for those who enjoy that sort of thing.

On Deansgate, the Hogshead has now become the **Hog's Head**. A move which has involved a substantial redecoration inside and out and an attempted move up-market. The sign on the door now bars those in workclothes. There are now just two cask beers on sale but they are both good 'uns - Fullers London Pride and Caledonian Deuchars IPA.

Just round the corner from the Hog's Head is the **Bridge** on Bridge Street. I was quite dismissive of this place when it opened but it looks as though I was rather too quick to judge. The pub has been taken on by Robert Owen-Brown, the chef previously behind the food at Sam's Chop House He is already working his magic on the pub food, gaining plaudits all over the place. Three cask beers are to be installed too, including Taylor's Landlord. I understand Ed(1) is planning a food review when this happens.

NEW BAR IN TOWN

There's me saying nothing much has happened over the Christmas and New Year period and what happens? Another new bar has opened in the Castlefield area of Manchester, this time though with cask ale on offer.

Just to prove the point, it's actually called **Cask**. This is at 29 Liverpool Road, on the corner of Barton Street and across the road from Upper Campfield Market, erstwhile venue of the National Winter Ales Festival.

Cask is a new venture, created out of a building that had stood derelict for many years. Originally a Georgian weaver's cottage, it's now a Grade 2 listed building on account of its fine brickwork (Flemish Bond, apparently). Internally it's open, airy and light, with pale wood laminate flooring. There's a small beer garden at the back, in an enclosed courtyard laid out with wooden decking.

While trade builds up the range of cask ales is a little restricted: currently John Smith's Bitter and Charles Wells Bombardier, both at £2 a pint. The pub can take other guest ales from the brewery's approved list and in the longer term it is hoped to feature beers from local micro brewers. As you'd expect in a building of this age, there is a good sized cellar for casks to mature in.

The landlord, Rob Loyeau, once worked at the Sandbar on Grosvenor Street, and his business partner is still involved with Morgen Rot Chevalier, the noted beer importers. Not surprisingly, foreign beers feature largely: German and Belgian bottles, plus De Koninck Antoon Blond, Dentergem Wit and Krombacher on draught. There is also a respectable range of wines.

The main entrance is a slightly cramped pair of doors, reminiscent of a Western saloon, on the corner of the building. They opening onto steps into the street - there was no room to create ramped access here. If you use a wheelchair, you'll find that the decking of the beer garden extends through a passageway at the side of the pub and into Barton Street. Unfortunately this street has very uneven cobbles and high kerbs so you might want to get a taxi to and from the pub. Inside of course there's a fully accessible loo at ground floor level, with more lavatories in the cellar.

Opening hours are 12 noon to 11 pm, Mondays to Fridays, and 4 pm to 11 pm on Saturdays. The pub is closed on Sundays for now but will probably open seven days a week from Easter. Food is limited to lunchtime sandwiches, Mondays to Fridays.

For those who like their pub crawls to have maximum beer and minimum travel, the Castlefield area is very rewarding now. The Knott, the Ox and the White Lion all offer a wide range of cask ales within a couple of hundred yards, and Galvins on Deansgate (formerly the Crown) stocks cask Theakstons.

OUT IN THE SUBURBS

Out of town now, in Beswick, **Summerbee's** has been closed for six weeks. Perhaps it was just too flash for locals or maybe too pricey? One thing's for sure, you cannot run a pub solely on the income from football crowds who only visit once a fortnight. In Clayton, the **Sir Humphrey Chetham** should have re-opened by the time you read this, but I doubt it will have any cask beer on.

I also hear that in Abbey Hey, the **Abbey Hey Hotel** is closed and set for a change of use.



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Forename(s) D.O.B	
Partner Title / Surname (If applicable)	
Forename(s) D.O.B	
Address	
Postcode	
Tel No.	
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NATIONAL WINTER ALES

FOR THE SECOND YEAR running, CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival was held in Burton on Trent and again the Stockport & South Manchester and Trafford & Hulme branches ran a joint minibus to the event.

The festival is held in the Victorian surroundings of Burton town hall and according to the organisers, attendance and sales were well up over 2003. It was certainly busy enough with huge range of beers of all types – quality was very high and the whole set-up a credit to the organising committee.

The highlight of the Festival is of course the Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition. This year 'Old Freddy Walker' from Moor Beer, Bridgwater, Somerset was named as Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2004. It is a 7.3% ABV Barley Wine named after an elderly real ale lover in the village of Ashcott, near Bridgwater, described in the 2004 Good Beer Guide as a



Familiar face behind the Cider Bar

'Rich, dark, strong ale with a fruity complex taste, leaving a fruitcake finish'. Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns, congratulated Moor Beer on their victory. "It's an incredible achievement for everyone at Moor. There are many hundreds of old ales, barley wines, stouts, porters and other winter beer styles so the competition is always stiff. I am sure there will be

plenty of beer drinkers eager to give this fantastic tipples a try!" Arthur Frampton, owner of Moor Beer, was overjoyed. "It's a great result and a reward for all the hard work we have put in at the brewery." 'Old Freddy Walker' is where the brewery is based. Silver went to Gales for their superb 'Festival Mild'. and Bronze to Shepherd Neame for their 'Original Porter'.

CATEGORY WINNERS

Old Ales & Strong Milds - Gold – Gales Festival Mild (Hampshire); Silver - Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild (West Midlands); Joint Bronze - Spectrum Old Stootwobbler (Norfolk) and Theakston Old Peculier (North Yorkshire)

Stouts & Porters - Gold - Shepherd Neame Original Porter (Kent); Silver - O'Hanlon's Port Stout (Devon); Bronze - Crouch Vale Anchor Street Porter (Essex)

Barley Wines - Gold - Moor Old Freddy Walker (Somerset); Silver - Robinson's Old Tom (Stockport); Bronze - Big Lamp Blackout (Newcastle upon Tyne)

LOCAL CAMRA AWARD



Denise and Grant Saunders of the Victoria, Hall Street, Offerton standing alongside Stockport & South Manchester Branch Chairman John Clarke (right) with the January 2004 Pub of the Month award.

BAR

BACK TO THE FUTURE



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