

No: 250

**CAMRA NEWSLETTER OF THE YEAR 2003**

# OPENING TIMES

Volume 21 Issue 2

FEBRUARY 2005



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



## BODDINGTONS BREWERY 1778 - 2005 R.I.P.

### BODDIES SHUTS AT LAST

**T**HE LAST BREW of Boddingtons Bitter had been produced as this was written. The historic Strangeways Brewery will now close despite a valiant, but ultimately doomed, campaign to save it by unions, local press, the City Council and CAMRA.

Mike Benner, Chief Executive of CAMRA said, "Beer has been brewed at Strangeways since before the French Revolution and global owners InBev have lost their heads if they think the people of Manchester will treat Boddingtons brewed in Lancashire and Wales with the same fondness. Manchester's beer drinkers have made it clear to InBev what they think about the closure, but their views have been ignored and this viable brewery is to be lost forever in the name of corporate greed."

CAMRA is calling on the management of InBev to ensure that the real cask-conditioned Boddingtons Bitter, which will now be brewed at Hydes Brewery in the city, will be promoted throughout the UK and not be sidelined by promotion of the keg version of the beer which will be brewed in Lancashire and Wales. The group has criticised InBev for its lack of commitment to traditional British beer since it bought the brewery from Whitbread in 2000.

Mr. Benner added, "We wish Hyde's luck in their attempts to brew cask Boddingtons, but their efforts need genuine committed support from InBev to promote the real version. It would be all too convenient for InBev to fail to market the cask version and then axe it in the future blaming lack of consumer demand. This is the only version of Boddingtons which can still be called the 'Cream of Manchester', and the World's biggest brewer owes it to Manchester to keep brewing it here."



#### In FEBRUARY's OPENING TIMES ...

Pub of the Month	..... 2	Stockport Supping	..... 9	Peak News	..... 14
Witchwood Saved	..... 3	OT 1978 - 2005	..... 10	Macc Pub News	..... 16
Editors View	..... 3	Real Ale in a Bottle	..... 11	Tasting Panel	..... 17
Letters	..... 5	CAMRA Calling	..... 12	Angie's Ambition	..... 18
Brewery News	..... 6	Curmudgeon	..... 13	Mcr. Matters	..... 19
Stagger	..... 8	5 Years Ago	..... 13	Pub of the Year	..... 20

### DOUBLE GOLD FOR ROBBIES

FESTIVAL GLORY FOR LOCAL FAMILY BREWER

**STOCKPORT'S** family brewer, Frederic Robinson Ltd, is basking in glory after Old Tom won two top awards at CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival, held at Manchester's New Century Hall last month.

The legendary 8.5 per cent alcohol-by-volume strong ale, which has been brewed continuously since 1899, not only won the barley wine category but then went on to win the overall title of 'Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain' by a panel of tasters including beer writers, brewing industry professionals and officials from CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale. The competition was split into three categories, stout and porter, old ales and strong milds, and barley wines. The judging panel then had to narrow down the selection to just two beers from each category before selecting the supreme champion.

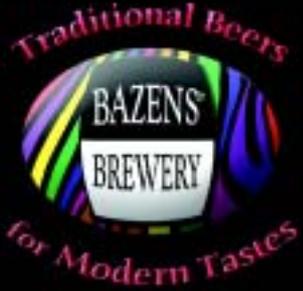
At the announcement, Steve Prescott, Organiser of the National Winter Ales Festival congratulated Robinson's on their victory. He said, "Old Tom is no stranger to awards. It's a fabulously rich beer and thoroughly deserves the top prize."



Oliver Robinson (front) & Chris Hellin celebrate the win

Before the results were announced Robinson's commercial director Oliver Robinson had almost convinced himself that this year the Robbies team would be going home empty handed. The double award was therefore a wonderful surprise. "It goes without saying that we are over the moon with the award, but significantly, it puts the company in a strong position to promote Old Tom. The brand has been in almost constant production since 1899 and still has a great future ahead of it. I would particularly like to thank our head brewer Chris Hellin for the hard work that he and his team put into the brewing process, but also everybody at the Company for helping us to achieve this award," he told us after recovering from the shock. Stockport Beer Festival Organiser Jim Flynn was equally delighted. "Although Old Tom is perhaps a winter beer, for years now our customers have enjoyed it just as much in June! It just goes to show the quality will always sell. Well done Robinson's!" Quite a few local Robinson's pubs have been selling Old Tom this winter - outlets such as the Tiviot, Tiviot Dale; Spread Eagle, Hillgate and the Blossoms, Heaviley are regularly reliable outlets.

**STOCKPORT & SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA CHOOSES 2005 PUB OF THE YEAR - SEE BACK PAGE FOR DETAILS**



Blue Bullet 4.5%  
 Flatbac 4.2% [Beer of the Festival, Stockport, 2003  
 & BIA Bronze Medal Winner 2004] eXSB 5.5%  
 Black Pig Mild 3.6% [Bronze Award for Mild,  
 Champion Beer of Britain, 2003]  
 Pacific Bitter 3.8%  
 Flying Zebra Best Bitter 4.3%

Our permanent local outlets include:  
 The Albert Vaults, The Crescent, The King's Arms, Salford  
 and Corbieres, Manchester. For other outlets, please visit  
[www.bazensbrewery.co.uk/pub\\_list.html](http://www.bazensbrewery.co.uk/pub_list.html)

For more info, please see [www.bazensbrewery.co.uk](http://www.bazensbrewery.co.uk), phone  
 0161 708 0247  
 or email [info@bazensbrewery.co.uk](mailto:info@bazensbrewery.co.uk)

# PUB OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY

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					

2005



**The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month for February 2005 is Sand Bar, Grosvenor Street, Manchester.**

Bang in the middle of the University area, the Sand Bar is unashamedly a 'student' and 'young persons' pub. As a result, it has from time to time been a little neglected by mainstream CAMRA aficionados. This is a great pity for two main reasons. Firstly, young people ARE the future real ale drinkers, albeit at their current stage of development, they might seem a tad noisy and bumptious. We should celebrate them, especially those with sufficient nous to reject alcopops and advertised Brit-fizz lagers, and choose instead, well-presented high quality products from British independent breweries, and quality imported European beers, for that is what is on offer in the Sand Bar, and has been for all of its nine year life. And this is the second reason that Sand should not be neglected. Three cask ales, with enough throughput to guarantee good quality, with Phoenix Navy as a house beer, and two guests - most recently Robinsons Double Hop (rare indeed in Manchester Centre - only the Castle is a regular stockist) and the very fine Abbeydale Absolution. No less than seven imported European beers, and at Sand the emphasis is on German rather than Belgian, which makes an interesting alternative - Krombacher, Dortmunder, Fruh Kolsch (a top fermented pale beer from Koln) and Paulaner (hefe) Weiss. A very reasonable range, matched by the largest bottled German range in the city. Packed most evenings (especially weekends) - though the room on the left is often less busy - it can be a quiet haven in the afternoons. Stews, soups and sandwiches are popular lunchtimes, as is the excellent coffee and tea. Stephen Gingell's team (the emphasis is very much on teamwork rather than any one individual) run an eclectic but excellent example of what can be done with a true 'bar' concept, from the use of wall space for upcoming artists exhibitions, to the mix of wooden tables, stools and chairs that give a true cafe atmosphere. The award is to be presented on Thursday 24th February, around 9pm. So come along, enjoy some great beer and meet some younger beer drinkers. Most of them don't bite! (well not often!). Buses 50 & 197 and anything along Oxford Road stop within 100 yards. If you can't make it that evening, Steve is promising a month long 'Made in Manchester' cask ale festival throughout March, featuring a constantly changing range of beers from local breweries.

**CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 250:**

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Butler, Paul Moss, Ruth Andrew, Steve Bray, Glen Mason, Jeremy Hinks, Jim Flynn, Peter Edwardson, Robin Wignall, Phil Levison, Frank Wood, Tom Lord, Geoff Jonhson, Richard Cleverley, Chris & Karen Wainwright.



## Facer's Brewery Two New Specials from Facer's

Cold Comfort (3.9%)

Classics of English Literature Series (Available till the end of March)



Cupid (3.8%)

Dry-Hopped Valentine Special



And The Regulars....  
 Twin City (3.3%) - Dark Slightly Spiced Mild  
 Northern County (3.8%) - Pale Session Ale  
 Crabtree (4.3%) - Mid Range abv  
 DHB (Dave's Hoppy Beer) 4.3%  
 - Dry-Hopped Mid Range Beer  
 Landslide 1927 (4.9%) - Premium Strength  
 0161 792 7755 dave@facers.co.uk

## WITCHWOOD SAVED



**THE WITCHWOOD** in Ashton-under-Lyne, has had a last minute reprieve from the CPO. Pauline, Ben and Dan heard in the middle of January that the developers will re-design the plans to include The Witchwood, and have now received the official exclusion order that puts it signed and sealed in writing!

It's been a hard year since all this started and Pauline tells us the relief is really incredible - but one thing which they have gained out of all of this is a feeling that they have an amazing extended family of people who have fought alongside them and offered support. Pauline and the team feel that without that support they could show to prove that The Witchwood is loved and shared by so many people of all ages of all different types across such a wide area, they wouldn't have been allowed to stay. As they said you can move a building but not its heart and soul, and it would not have been possible to recreate it elsewhere as was suggested at one stage. Pauline, Ben and Dan threw a huge weekend-long party to celebrate the pub's survival. Given the almost unique way the Witchwood combines being a multi-beer free house and an almost iconic live music venue, its survival was crucial for the local beer and music scene. Only rarely do pubs emerge unscathed when faced with this type of threat and it's a tribute to all involved that on this occasion the Witchwood did so.

## IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

Despite a few glitches (not least running out of beer rather too soon), last month's National Winter Ales Festival should be judged a success, I think.

Of course all those involved were on a learning curve with the new venue and clearly there are improvements to be made next year. However let's not allow that to cloud the fact that this was a sell-out event with over 6,500 drinkers consuming large amounts of beer, cider, perry and foreign beers in a trouble-free atmosphere.

Given the recent media frenzy about binge drinking and its associated problems, the trouble-free success of the National Winter Ales Festival is a real good news story. We'll be back next year, bigger and better than ever.

Congratulations are also due to Robinson's for their double gold award for Old Tom. It is really good news to have one of our local family brewers honoured in this way. And of course, Old Tom will now also go forward to the Champion Beer of Britain competition, held in August at the Great British Beer Festival. Will they make it a double win?

Robinson's could be in the news again before long. As we went to press we were awaiting the results of CAMRA's National Pub of the Year contest. Amongst the four finalists is Stockport's Arden Arms, one of Robbies flagship pubs. The Arden is up against pubs in Ipswich, Somerset and the West Midlands - a win would be a superb achievement so here's hoping.

Finally, you may notice that this issue is another landmark for *Opening Times* as it is our 250<sup>th</sup>. Our thanks go to all concerned with OT over the years. There are so many involved it would be invidious to name names but I would just like to pay public thanks (and I am sure Paul, Ed (2), would echo this) to the founding editor of *Opening Times*, Humphrey Higgins. Without his dedicated efforts in the early days OT would neither have got off the ground nor survived to become what you read today. Cheers, Humphrey.

*John Clarke*

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**to All our customers**

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*for Real Ale Drinkers -*

*come and try the cask version*

**plus TETLEY BITTER**

**& DARK MILD IN CASK**

*Local CAMRA Pub of the Month, Feb 2004*

*Dave and Sue Welcome You To*

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*independent brewers in their excellent free house!*

*CITY LIFE Food & Drink Festival*

*PUB OF THE YEAR 2002-3*

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**Taylor's Landlord Championship Beer plus**

**6 Ever Changing Cask Ales**

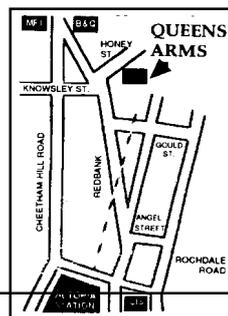
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12 noon - 10.30 p.m. Sunday



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*9.30pm start*

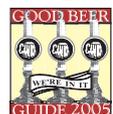
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REAL ALE

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TO HIS MATES.**

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# OPENING TIMES LETTERS

**From Joe Fylan, via e-mail:**

*Just to jog your memory, you will remember I was licensee at the Lass O' Gowrie during the 80's and 90's when I brewed and sold LOG 35 & LOG 42. You visited on many occasions, and from time to time we enjoyed a drink together whilst bringing each other up to date on current pub, brewery and personnel topics at the time.*

*I noted your front page article about gas lighting in "The Lass" and was sorry to read that it had been done away with. Because it was so unusual to have gas lighting it was not only a talking point but lent much to the ambience and atmosphere within the pub. They were lit every evening during my tenure and the only problem I encountered was on very rare occasions, customers not believing it was gas lighting, turned the odd one off, then not knowing how to re-light it very sheepishly went to the bar and owned up. I might also add that there was never a problem obtaining a fire certificate for their use. Although it is some years since I visited I still like to know what changes have or are being made and the photographs in your publication of both the lamps and hogsheads brought back some very happy memories.*

*I trust all is well with you and am glad you still fight the good fight for real ale. If any of the above is of any use to you then please feel free to use it.*

**(Great to hear from you again Joe - as you say the gas lighting was quite a feature of the pub for many years - Ed(1).)**

**From Peter Powell, via e-mail:**

*Further to a previous correspondent regarding animals in pubs, the late lamented Stanley Arms on Newbridge lane, Stockport (now a furnishings shop) had quite a 'menagerie' of animals. Mike the landlord, kept in his back yard a couple of goats (I don't quite know why) and two Bull Mastiffs. The slops went down into ashtrays on the floor at chucking out time and in came the dogs to devour them with much relish.*

*The star of the show however was the 'off white' fox terrier. Off white because it had the freedom to roam and liked nothing better than to go next door to the old Burrel Colours works and down the rabbit holes. Sometimes it came back to the pub dyed a shade of green and at other times red. Yes folks! this is perfectly true, it also had a hacking cough like some of the pub regulars and liked nothing better than to play "nicking and ripping" beer mats with the regulars. Ho Hum! those were the days!*

*Having enjoyed a good day out at the National Winter Ales festival in Manchester it beggared belief that the manager of Wetherspoons, Manchester Piccadilly had been ordered **not** to turn the many pump clips round when a particular beer had run out. All clips were still "customer facing" in spite of all real ale having run out at 5:00 p.m.*

*No satisfactory answer was forthcoming (unless it was to impress visitors of the "potential" range) and pubs should not advertise or imply that a product is for sale when it has run out. This practice is deceitful, inconvenient and misleading.*

**(Oh yes, I recall may happy hours spent in the Stanley Arms. As for Wetherspoons, this is a common cause for complaint with many of their pubs, just what their idea is with this policy, I don't know. Ed (1). They do have extra 'sorry not available' clips but seem disinclined to use them. Ed(2).)**

## OPENING TIMES ISSUE 250

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BEER  
GOGGLES!



LOOK OUT FOR  
OUR MARCH  
BEER FESTIVAL

CHANGING DRAUGHT  
MICRO CASK ALES,

DRAUGHT TRADITIONAL  
CHEDDAR CIDER, (CELLAR COOL)

MORE GENUINE  
FOREIGN BEERS THAN YOU CAN  
SHAKE A STICK AT!



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WE MUST BE MAD!

BAAAH!





## LOCAL MICROS GAIN SIBA SUCCESS

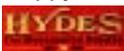


**T**he Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA) recently staged its northern championship, resulting in a clutch of awards for our local micro brewers. Facer's Northern County came second in the Session Bitters category, Millstone came third in the Best Bitters category with Windy Miller while 3 Rivers also gained a bronze for Old Disreputable in the Strong Ales class. Bank Top came second in the Porters, Old Ales and Stouts class for Port O'Call. Congratulations to all.

### FAMILY FAVOURITES



**Robinson's** – Stockport's family brewer are of course basking in the glory of their double win with Old Tom at the National Winter Ales Festival. It's good to see such a classic, and locally brewed, beer picking up such prestigious awards. Meanwhile they also have a new seasonal beer out this month, in the form of Enigma (4.7% ABV), making a welcome return from last year. Next month look out for a brand new beer, England's Champion (3.9% ABV), described as full-bodied and crisply hoppy.



**Hydes'** – the theme for this year's craft ale programme is 'Made in Manchester' and the current beer is Perfection (4.8% ABV), a robust dark beer marking the meeting of Rolls and Royce. Next month look out for Satisfaction (4.2% ABV), a smooth and satisfying beer marking the production of 500 million pints by Hydes since their foundation in 1863.

**JW Lees** – the current seasonal is Icebreaker (4% ABV) a clear wheat beer with a clean, spicy taste. An excellent antidote to the Christmas excesses. Next month sees Dragons Fire (4.5% ABV), another brand new beer, described as a rich amber ale. Look out for these in pubs such as Rain Bar in the City Centre, the Lloyds in Chorlton and the Urmston in Urmston.



**Holt's** – also have a new seasonal out. This is 'Nearly Holt Upright' (4% ABV) which seems to have been dividing opinion. While some drinkers are enthusiastic about what is described as a full drinking bitter, others have thought it almost undrinkable! Seek it out and decide for yourself. Next month this will be replaced by Thunderholt, a strong, dark beer which has won plaudits in the past.

**Cains** – Liverpool-based Cains is another family brewer trading locally via the Gothic in Gately. They are currently celebrating winning two top awards. Cains Dark Mild won a Silver Award at the Society of Independent Brewers' North-



ern region beer competition, whilst Fine Raisin Beer beat over 250 other ales to be named 'Champion Beer of the Festival' at the sixth annual Worcester CAMRA Beer and Cider Festival.

Cains Dark Mild and Fine Raisin Beer are already award-winning ales. Cains Dark Mild has previously won a Gold medal in the International Brewing Industry Awards and is a three-times Bronze medal winner at the Great British Beer Festival. Fine Raisin Beer won the coveted Tesco Autumn Beer Challenge in 2003 and since its launch has won a number of CAMRA accolades, including 'Beer of the Festival' at the Liverpool CAMRA Festival 2004. Cains joint managing director, Ajmal Dusanj, said: "Fine Raisin Beer has gone from strength to strength since its launch in 2003 and we are delighted that it has once again scooped a prestigious CAMRA award. Cains Dark Mild is one of our best-selling ales and the award from the Society of Independent Brewers further strengthens its appeal."

Review of January's National Winter Ales Festival is on page 15



Tel/Fax: 01706 522227 Mobile: 07970 177 306

### BEERS FOR FEBRUARY

**Brewers gold**  
A.B.V. 3.8%



A refreshing thirst quenching pale golden session beer. Malty undertones and a powerful spicy hop aroma combine to produce a dangerously moreish beer.

**claymore**  
A.B.V. 4.5%



A light refreshing straw coloured ale with clean crisp malt flavours and a powerful spicy hop aroma.

**celtic warrior**  
A.B.V. 4.2%

A full bodied mid brown premium ale. Malt flavours dominate the palate with delicate hop aromas in the well-balanced finish.

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## MORE CHOICE BETTER BEER

**International Brewing Awards**

1998 Wobbly Bob  
2002 Navy  
2002 Wobbly Bob  
2004 Wobbly Bob

**MICRO MAGIC**

As usual the local micro brewers have lots of tasty treats in store. As usual, apologies to those we were unable to contact this time around.

**Bank Top** – following the installation of new fermenters to expand the brewery's capacity, John Feeney is looking to produce some new beers. In fact it will be the return of some old favourites, the 'Knights of the Round Table' series, which proved so popular last time. All 12 beers in the series will be re-brewed – more details when we have them.



**Bazens'** - Not much news at the moment. Due to demand, they will be concentrating on brewing only their main range of beers until April so that they can keep everyone well stocked up. There will be a Spring special but details haven't yet been formulated. Bazens' porter season is coming to an end - they brewed two separate versions this year - the 5.2% Knoll St Porter as before and a 4.5%, just called Porter. Both proved very popular and they plan to do the same next year.

**Boggart Hole Clough** – two new beers are out. Bog Heart is a 4% ABV beer for St Valentine's Day. This is a pale hoppy ale, bitter with blackcurrant undertones. Also look out for the oddly named 'Wee Bam' a 4.2% well-hopped, copper coloured beer with a slight roasted nut aftertaste.



**Facers** - The current Classics of Eng Lit beer is Cold Comfort (3.9%) – a light bronze colour with orange citrus palate and nose to match - a tribute to



Stella Gibbons' Cold Comfort Farm (available until the end of February. There is also a version of Northern County (sorry, 'the award-winning Northern County'!) dry hopped with East Kent Goldings as a Valentine Special. Called Cupid it's 3.8% abv and will be available around the middle of February (obviously enough!). For those interested in such things, the pump clip shows detail from 'Allegory with Venus and Cupid' by Agnolo Bronzino (1503 – 1572). The real thing is in the National Gallery, London. The new Mild (Twin City, 3.3%) has gone well and was attracting approbatory comments at the Winter Ales Festival. Dave is hoping to generate enough demand to keep it as a regular part of the portfolio.

**Greenfield** – two more beers for your delectation. Stupid Cupid, a Valentine's Day special, is a 4.2% ABV light bitter while Castleshaw is a very light (in colour) session bitter at 4.2% ABV. Greenfield has also taken a new partner in the business and will now be looking to expand sales into other areas, including Stockport.

**Merlin** – the Merlin Brewery has been set up on the Victoria Street Industrial Estate in Leigh. The equipment came from Beecham's at St Helens and regular brews are Astley Gold (3.8% ABV), Vision (4.2%), Legacy (5%) and Cannonball (5%). The brewery is apparently named after the owners' grandson (it's his middle name).

**Millstone** – the new 5% ABV beer, True Grit, is out at last and won rave reviews when it premiered at the national Winter Ales Festival last month. It really is a magnificent beer with an immensely quaffable bitterness coming from



the use of American Chinook hops. With sales of the existing beers booming, no new products are in the pipeline at the moment.



**Phoenix** – March Hare, a 4.4% hoppy beer will be out by the time you read this. The popular West Coast IPA (4.6% ABV) has proved so popular that it has been added to the extensive portfolio of permanent Phoenix beers.

**Pictish** – the special for February is Claymore (4.5% ABV) A light refreshing straw coloured ale with clean crisp malt flavours and a powerful spicy hop aroma. Next month look out for Dolmen (4% ABV), an amber coloured ale with a delicate hop aroma, biscuity malt flavours and a lingering bitter finish.



**Ramsbottom** – Paul Robinson's Ramsbottom Brewery is still going strong and has a new beer out. Tomfoolery (also seen at the National Winter Ales Festival, where it was much appreciated)

is a 4% ABV pale hoppy beer brewed with Cascade hops for a grapefruity finish.

**Shaws** – brewed the Festival Special for the National Winter Ales Festival. The well-received 'MEN Festival Bitter' at 4.5% ABV is now also being supplied to the local free trade The Manchester Evening News also ran a competition with the winner being brewer for the day at Shaws. The winner cried off, though, and a local CAMRA member Eric Gatley filled the gap and the resulting beer ESB (Eric's Special Bitter), a 4.4% ABV dark, traditional beer is also available in local outlets.



# Poynton Easter Beer Festival

March 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>

## 20 Real Ales from all over Britain

Free Admission

Ploughman's Lunches, Curry, Hot Pot.

Pinball, Darts, Skittles

### At Poynton Royal British Legion Club

George's Road West. Poynton

Ring 01625 873120 for details

# STAGGER

with Jim Flynn

## HILLGATE FOR CHRISTMAS

The journey up Hillgate is the traditional pre-Christmas stagger for local Camra members and as such, as far as the pages of *Opening Times* are concerned it is a case of familiarity breeding contempt.

The first pub on Hillgate itself is the **Spread Eagle**, which is really Robinson's brewery tap. Despite the fact that unfortunately the pub is a temple to Robinson's designers of the past, I have a soft spot for the very awkwardness of the layout probably due to its welcoming community feel. The beers, Hatters, Unicorn and Old Tom were on good form as well.

Some of us took a slight deviation from Hillgate to the **Royal Oak** on High Street (Robbies Hatters and Unicorn I reasonable nick) but the rest proceeded on the straight and narrow to the **Bishop Blaize**, which proudly proclaimed that it was under new management. On entering this historic pub (it was where the Irish riots started in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) however we found that it had run out of cask beer. One of our number then reported that he had a pint earlier, but just before we were overcome with envy, he told us that the beer had been barely drinkable.



So it was perhaps with some relief we moved on to the ever popular **Red Bull** which was, as usual at this time of year, full to bursting point. There is a bit of country pub feel to the Red Bull, I always think, with stone steps leading up to the entrance, the stone floor, the

bench seating in snug and small rooms and niches around the central bar. However, it is the bar, for all its appeal, that is the pub's weakness at this time of year as it is so close to the entrance that it causes a bottleneck. Despite that, the pub is a real gem and the Hatters and Unicorn were reported being of fine form.

Just off Hillgate, on Waterloo Road opposite the site of the Stockport air crash is the **Waterloo**, a good Robinson's local which has retained its character despite the best efforts of brewery in the seventies and eighties. The beer, Hatters and Unicorn, was again in reasonable form and it was with some regret we left the lounge (there is also a vault) to go back on to Hillgate to the **Black Lion**. This pub has a superb vault and in the past has sold a very good pint of cask beer but tonight there was no real ale and very few customers.

Over the road then to Holt's **Sun & Castle**, which meant a change from Robinson's for the first time. We went into the large well appointed lounge and after getting our pints we sat down in the pleasant snug type area at the front which the hand written signs proclaiming it is now a non-smoking area. The pub was relatively busy but I have to say I have found it busier on previous staggers. The Holt's Mild and Bitter were well received. The Thunderbolt was also available.

Next door to the Sun and Castle, the **Big Lamp** is now a bistro and the **Golden Lion**, further up Middle Hillgate on the other side of the road is still keg (can somebody tell why Burtonwood don't put in cask beer please!). Next stop is the **Crown**, aka the Corner Cupboard. The place had been shut for a while and so it is good to see somebody trying to make a go of it. We sat in the front room, which is welcoming if a little worn, with the locals but there was nobody at all in the back room, although trade is clearly building up again. The beers on offer were Draught Bass and Boddingtons. We all tried the Bass because for most, like me, it had been a while since we had tried the beer. I have to say it was not how I remembered it but I put that down to the passage of time and the dulling of my palate over the evening. However, it was a good enough pint in its own right and augurs well for the future of this great little local.

Onwards and further up the hill we reached the **Star & Garter**, a large corner building which is unmistakably a Robinson's pub. The place has been opened out but despite the separate areas in the lounge it doesn't quite work for me. The beer was variable, those who had the Unicorn found it good but those like me who tried the Hatters found it a tad tired. I decided not to try to finish mine and proceeded up Higher Hillgate, resisting the temptations of Stockport's lap dancing club.

Next stop was the **Flying Dutchman**, which had no lap dancers but plenty of customers, in comparison with the Star & Garter at least. This one roomed, well-lit pub is also a Robinson's house but this time there was no Hatters on, a temporary blip I hope. We all tried the Unicorn, which while not the best of the evening was reasonable enough. As we left we saw that the **Royal Mortar** was still boarded up, sad considering the improvements that had been seen in the place over the last few years.

Round the corner then to the **Bowling Green** and what a contrast again to a few years ago, this time in a positive way. The place was buzzing with karaoke on in one of the two rooms. We sat in the other and found that it was strictly a misnomer to describe the pub has having two rooms as they meet up on the far side of a horseshoe bar. Nevertheless you could get away from the entertainment if you wished although we went to see the 'singers' perform and found it cruelly entertaining. The only cask beer is Boddingtons which was certainly in good form on our visit.

On then past the **Wheatsheaf**, which was regrettably, all keg and on to our final port of call, the **Blossoms**, on the junction of Hillgate, Bramhall Lane and the A6. This 18<sup>th</sup> century, multi-roomed pub has real character and is certainly one of the pubs you should visit if you only have a limited time in Stockport. We sat in the pinball room, as it was the one room where we could get a seat. As well as the Hatters and the Unicorn, which were on the usual fine form many of tried the Old Tom as a final drink of the night.

Altogether a good end to night of pubs and beers of varying standards.



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Not a lot of news, this month, but I do have a few snippets.

**FREE HOUSE NEWS**

The **Railway**, Portwood, has extended its foreign beer range. There's a Belgian beer of draught, the excellent Maredsous 6, a quaffable blond beer, plus some interesting additions to the bottled beer range. These come courtesy of the Belgian Belly in Chorlton, and include Vichtenaar, a sourish red ale, Waase Wolf, a strong (6.5% ABV) dark, wheat beer, Witkap Stimulo, a pale refreshing ale, and two traditional gueuzes – Drie Fonteinen Oude Gueuze and Girardin Black Label, the latter being considered by many to be the best of the style available today.

At the **Crown** on Heaton lane, there is a new 'skinflint night' on Mondays evenings when the cask beers retail at £1.75 a pint. Well worth dropping in for.

Finally, the **Three Shires Wine Bar** has been hit by a fire and is currently closed for repairs. Luckily this welcome new addition to the local cask ale scene should be open again by the end of the month or early March

**REDDISH RAMBLES**

A gremlin truncated my Reddish piece last month, so here it is again:- A trip round Reddish is a case of the curates egg, good in parts but unfortunately the bad outweighs the good away from the centre of the town.

North Reddish is a sorry state of doom and gloom with the **Bulls Head**, the **Reddish Vale** and even the newly reopened **Railway** selling no cask beer. At the **Fir Tree** there is Tetley Bitter on handpump which to give them their due they are selling at £1.59 as a promotion. Having said that if you are a real ale drinker in North Reddish my advice is either to catch a bus to the centre of Reddish, Gorton or the Dane Bank in Denton...or move house.

In the centre of Reddish on first sight things look little better with the **Houldsworth** up for sale, with an air of being past its sell by date and no cask beer. Look a little further a things show a definite sign of improvement. At the **Thatched Tavern**, hidden away behind Houldsworth Square on Stanhope Street, the pub goes from strength to strength with excellent Boddingtons Bitter, Tetley Bitter and my personal favourite Tetley Dark Mild, the only cask mild in the area. A quick trip down Broadstone Road towards Heaton Chapel brings the **Union** and the **Grey Horse** along side each other. The Union with its loyal band of customers is the only pub owned by a local independent, Robinson's, in the area. I found the Unicorn, the one cask beer, on more than reasonable form on my visit.

The **Grey Horse** has just re-opened, or should I say partially re-opened as the vault is still shut, and on my visit the Boddingtons Bitter was in good nick. As I went in who did I meet but Mike Hitchen from the nearby Three Rivers Brewery, delivering some of his beers as they were running short of cask beer following the opening night. It would be interesting if this was to become a permanent feature rather than a stopgap. Reddish has its own brewery and Reddish drinkers should have the opportunity to support it. I wait to see if the new owners can pull the pub up and make a real go of it. Let's hope so.

Moving into South Reddish the one pub is the **Carousel**, which briefly dabbled with cask Boddingtons. The handpump is still there, but beer is isn't. My advice is don't go in but proceed down to the **Navigation** for a decent pint.

**OTHER BITS & PIECES**

The town has another new outlet for real cider. The **Thatched House** on Chestergate now has Weston's Old Rosie on handpump – a welcome addition to the town's real cider circuit. Not far away at the **Pack Horse** on the Market Place, I am told that sales of Copper Dragon beers are booming. There's always a Copper Dragon beer on here as a guest and it is now comfortably outselling the Tetley Bitter, I hear.

The **Emigration** (Robinson's) on Hall St, Offerton got new licensees on 6 Dec 2004. They are David and Brenda Sherratt, formerly from The Greyhound in Edgeley. No major changes seem to have been made to the operation of the pub.

In Hazel Grove, I have received two reports that the cask John Smith has been taken out of the **Bulls Head**, leaving the pub with no real ale. Nothing, sadly, too unusual in that you might think. However, a twist to this story is that the cask beer was taken out on the instructions of the pub's area manager? Can this be true? Surely not...

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Angel Inn, 197 King Street, Dukinfield  
Bamford Arms, Buxton Road, Stockport  
Bank at Sale, 70 School Road, Sale  
Barsh, 65 High Street, Cheadle  
Barton Arms, 2 Stableford, Worsley  
Bishop Blaze, 708 Chester Road, Stretford  
Boathouse, Ferry Road, Irlam  
Bollin Fee, 6 Swan Street, Wilmslow  
Bulls Head, 155-157 Broken Cross, Macclesfield  
Bulls Head Hotel, 28 Buxton Road, High Lane  
Calvert's Court, St. Petersgate, Stockport  
Church House Inn, Church Street, Bollington  
Coach and Four, 69-71 Alderley Road, Wilmslow  
Cotton Bale, 21 Market Street, Hyde  
Cross Keys, Adswold Road, Cheadle Hulme  
Crown, 81 High Street, Cheadle  
Dog & Partridge, 665-7 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury  
Duke of York, Stockport Road, Romiley  
Eccles Cross, 13 Regent Road, Eccles  
Farmers Arms, 209 Stockport Road, Stockport  
Farmers Arms, Manchester Road, Swinton  
Fletcher Moss, 1 Williams Street, Didsbury  
Football, 35 Swinton Hall Road, Swinton  
Four Heaton's, 63 Didsbury Road, Heaton Norris  
Friendship Inn, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield  
Gateway, 882 Wilmslow Road, East Didsbury  
Gothic Bar, 61 Church Road, Gatley  
Governor's House, 43 Ravenoak Rd, Ch'dle Hulme  
Great Central, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield  
Hanging Gate, Higher Sutton, Macclesfield  
Harbord Harbord, 17-21 Long Street, Middleton

Hare & Hounds, Dooley Lane, Marple  
Harrys Bar, UMIST, Sackville St Manchester  
High Grove, Silverdale Road, Gatley  
J P Joule, Northenden Road, Sale  
Jar Bar, SilkHouse, 4 Park Green, Macclesfield  
John Gilbert, Worsley Brow, Worsley  
Kings Hall, 13 Station Road, Cheadle Hulme  
King's Ransom, Britannia Road, Sale  
Lloyds No 1, The Printworks, Manchester  
Loves Arms, 301 Hyde Road, Denton  
Moon Under Water, Deansgate, Manchester  
Oddfellows Arms, 73 Moor End Road, Stockport  
Old Plough Hotel, 56 Green Lane, Sale  
Old Wellington, 4 Cathedral Gates, Rusholme  
Osborne House, 32 Victory Street, Rusholme  
Paramount, 33 Oxford Street, Manchester  
Poachers Inn, 95 Ingersley Road, Bollington  
Porters Ale House, Prince Roe Street, Macclesfield  
Q Bar, 3-5 Market Street, Stalybridge  
Rising Sun, 22 Queen Street, Manchester  
Ryecroft, Turves Road, Cheadle Hulme  
Sam's Chop House, Black Pool Fold, Manchester  
Sedge Lynn, 21a Manchester Road, Chorlton  
Society Rooms, Macclesfield Park La, Macclesfield  
Society Rooms, Grosvenor Street, Stalybridge  
Stalybridge Buffet Bar, Stalybridge Rail Station  
Star Inn, 13 High Street, Cheadle  
Tim Bobbin, 41 Fixton Road, Urmston  
Victoria Hotel, 438 Wilmslow Road, Withington  
Waterhouse, 67 Princess Street, Manchester  
Wetherspoons, 47 Piccadilly, Manchester  
White House, 1 Water Lane, Stalybridge  
Wye Bridge Inn, Fairfield Road, Buxton



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# OPENING TIMES 1984 – 2005

PHIL LEVISON LOOKS BACK  
OVER 250 ISSUES

**I**SSUE NUMBER ONE of *Opening Times* appeared in June 1984, but it was very different from the magazine you are now reading. More details of those early days follow, and how things have changed over the years, together with a brief description of the 'original' *Opening Times* from the mid-seventies.

During late 1983 and early 1984 it seemed that *What's Doing*, the 'Manchester beer drinkers' monthly magazine', wasn't covering adequately the news from the South Manchester Branch (as it then was) of CAMRA. So early in 1984, Branch Secretary Humphrey Higgins suggested that the branch should produce its own news sheet, which would be distributed with *What's Doing*. A single sheet insert was costed at £9 per 1000, and the original plan was to produce it every other month for a trial run of three issues.

Members provided items for this new South Manchester newsletter, to be known as *Opening Times*, and the final draft of the first issue was eventually circulated at a committee meeting, when Humphrey was congratulated on his good work. The total cost had been £10.32, which was paid for by adverts, and the main front page story posed the question as to what had happened to Boddington's Bitter, under the heading 'Beautiful Boddies?'

## MORE PROFESSIONAL

Up to 1985, *Opening Times* had been provided free with *What's Doing*, which cost 15p, but the first major landmark came with Issue 20, in December 1985. That month *Opening Times* moved to more professional printing, and broke free from *What's Doing*, which ceased to be generally available in the Stockport & South Manchester area.

Circulation was still less than 1,000 a month but the first editor, Humphrey Higgins, had the satisfaction of seeing the new baby grow into an extremely healthy infant, and it was in May 1988 when John Clarke took over as Editor, with Issue 49. His first, and unenviable, task was to say "We're Sorry" with an apology for the famous "beer festival without a licence" (or not) at Stockport College.

Another major change came about with Issue 89, in September 1991. Paul Hutchings joined the team, initially as production editor, and later as co-editor, thus becoming Ed.2, to John Clarke's, Ed.1.

Paul's involvement saw an immediate improvement in the presentation and look of *Opening Times*, and then in 1994 the magazine won the first ever CAMRA Newsletter of the Year award. Since then it has been a story of steady progress. Circulation has increased to 7,000 a month, and neighbouring CAMRA branches also contribute to, and distribute *Opening Times* – thanks go to High Peak & North East Cheshire, Macclesfield & East Cheshire, and Trafford & Hulme branches for their continued efforts.

## REMARKABLE YEAR

Perhaps the most remarkable year in *Opening Times*'s entire history has been the 12 months or so from April 2003 to April 2004. This started off at the CAMRA AGM in Exeter where it picked up a special award marking 10 years of continuing excellence since the inaugural Newsletter of the Year award was presented. Then came another production landmark in October 2003, with the move to colour printing and vastly improved paper quality. In April 2004, the year was rounded off with a second CAMRA Newsletter of the Year award, making *Opening Times* the only newsletter ever to win twice.

To mark these 20 years of success, the production team commissioned a special beer from Bazens' Brewery named '20 Not Out' – it was a 'special' for Stockport's 18<sup>th</sup> Beer & Cider Festival, held at its new Edgeley Park venue. It was also made available to the local free trade, where it proved so popular that a second brew was produced.

A reference here goes back to what might be described as the original *Opening Times*, which some older readers and CAMRA members may remember. It appeared in the mid 1970s, and an issue dated September 1976 contained details of many Stockport pubs, and some of the prices are eye openers – Boddingtons Mild at 18½p, Robinson's Best Bitter at 25p. I wonder if anyone remembers when Turners Vaults had Tetley Mild and Bitter on electric pumps. And what happened to Anna Greenhalgh who was the editor at that time?

## CAMPAIGNING

Although originally described as a pub news sheet (which of course it still is) there has always been a strong campaigning element to *Opening Times*, on both local and national issues. Some features have appeared in nearly every issue – Pub of the Month is one of the examples, and there does tend to be a pub crawl every month. Sometimes the crawl has been supplemented by Round Britain Drinker, and even Round Europe Drinker. Out of Town was a thinly disguised pub crawl, together with Holiday Ale. Pub of the Year makes its annual appearance, as do the Pub Vandalism Awards, in which CAMRA speaks its mind on demolitions and 'ruinations'. There are always comments on the regular country-wide prices survey, which nearly always names the north west as having the cheapest ales. Winter Ales crop up in season, and other series have included Old Breweries, New Breweries, Home Brew, Pub Grub, Ken's Kitchen and Rhythm & Booze. There are always readers letters and news items covering every facet of the local drinking scene.

Following its inauguration in June 1984, it took eight years for *Opening Times* to reach its 100<sup>th</sup> issue and the Editor thanked all who had been involved "and of course, you our readers, and here's to the next 100". Issue 200 appeared in December 2000, and there was little mention of the landmark although there was reference to Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA having dragged itself into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by setting up its own website.

The price of a pint is a subject that never fails to attract comments, and another one is "how much should there be in a pint?" The argument was, and is, ongoing. There are currently further attempts being made to legislate on just how much beer makes a pint. If this produces results you will no doubt read about it in *Opening Times*.



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## CAMRA ASKS RETAILERS TO SHOW SOME BOTTLE!

### SUPERMARKETS RISE TO REAL ALE CHALLENGE

Over 100 independent off-licences and a national supermarket chain are backing a scheme to enable consumers to spot real ale on shop shelves. To showcase the great taste and the variety available, CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, held a tasting for a select invited audience on 27 January, at the National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester to celebrate the launch of this accomplishment.



"As part of our programme to promote real British Bottled Ales, we recruited 20 people from a media competition", said CAMRA's Marketing Officer Georgie Howarth. "The intention was to use the tasting as a fun way to illustrate a serious point - many of the participants indicated they didn't know how to select real ale from shop shelves. We aim to give them a brief explanation on the quality of the tastes and the range of beers styles available."

The tasting was part of CAMRA's Real Ale in Bottle Accreditation Scheme, piloted last August, whereby eligible brews can opt to use the logo "CAMRA says this is real ale on their bottle labels. The idea is consumers can understand what type of beer they are drinking, as often the real ale enjoyed at the pub, can be different altogether once bottled.

Ms Howarth continue, "The Real Ale in a Bottle Scheme has come a long way since its infancy in August last year, and seems to have captured the imaginations of brewers and retailers alike. In less than six months CAMRA has signed up over 47% of all eligible breweries. Almost by demand, we are pleased to announce that we have launched a Retailers Scheme to show our commitment to the breweries who have participated, and most importantly to educate consumers about this exciting, quality beer category."

Similar to the level of brewery interest, the Retailers Scheme has encompassed both large and small companies.

"We are delighted that from the 26 January to 22 February that Sainsbury's, as part of its drinks festival, is placing an emphasis on real ale in a bottle. They will be providing shelf-edge information from the scheme, and the accreditation logo, at the point of sale in 350 stores across the country. They will also stock many bottle-conditioned beers exclusive to Sainsbury's during that month."

### WHAT IS REAL ALE IN A BOTTLE?

Real Ale in a Bottle (RAIB) is the bottled equivalent of the draught real ales you enjoy at the pub. The beer is unpasteurised and contains yeast and enough fermentable sugars to allow for a slow secondary fermentation in the bottle. Care should be taken when pouring a RAIB to ensure that the yeast remains in the bottle and the refreshing flavoursome beer ends up in the glass.

It is important to note that though a particular beer is real ale in draught form this is not a guarantee that the bottled version will be real also. Most real ales will be clearly labelled but a quick check to see if there is any yeast sediment will confirm if the beer is a RAIB. There are over 600 bottled real ales brewed by over 143 breweries in the UK. For further details on Real Ale in a Bottle Scheme visit [www.realaleinabottle.org](http://www.realaleinabottle.org)

## STOCKPORT BEER FESTIVAL

Just an early reminder (and the first of many) that this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival will be held from Thursday 2 June to Saturday 4<sup>th</sup>.

The festival, once again sponsored by the *Stockport Express*, will be the nineteenth and will be back at Edgeley Park, home of Stockport County and Sale Sharks, for the second year running. The beer order has been upped by 10 per cent, given the early sell-out last year. Get those dates in your diary now!



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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, Macclesfield and Trafford & Hulme

Diary

### February 2005

**Saturday 12<sup>th</sup>** – Trip to York and York Brewery. Minibus departs Crown, Heaton Lane at 9.00am.

**Friday 18<sup>th</sup>** – Stagger: Stockport Market Place. Meet Bakers Vaults 7.30pm; Boars Head 8.30pm.

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup>** – Presentation of Pub of the Year Award to the Legh Arms, Ashton Old Road, Openshaw. From 8.00pm. Minibus leaves Crown, Heaton Lane 7.30pm. Book with David Sharpe on 0161 483 3708.

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>** – Pub of the Month Award to Sand Bar, Grosvenor Street, Chorlton-on-Medlock.

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March** – Mild Crawl. Meet Four Heaton, Didsbury Road, 7.30pm; Pineapple, Heaton Lane, 8.30pm.

**Thursday 10<sup>th</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Kingsway, Moseley Rd, Levenshulme. Starts 8.00pm. NB – guest speaker CAMRA Chief Executive Mike Benner.

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

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Hyde. Starts 8.15pm

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March** – Committee Meeting: Lane Ends Inn, Glossop Road, Marple Bridge. Starts 8.15pm

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup>** – Branch Meeting: Stalybridge Station Buffer Bar. Starts 8.15pm.

### February 2005

*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 events:*

**Saturday 19<sup>th</sup>** – Macclesfield Pub Crawl: Porters 12 noon, Queen's 12.45 (food) Waters Green Tavern 1.30 (food) featuring the presentation of our "Outstanding Contribution to Real Ale" Award to Brian Mc Dermott. Nag's Head 2.30.

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup>** – Good Beer Guide selection and campaigning meeting: Victoria Club, Holmes Chapel. Starts 8.00pm.

**Thursday 24<sup>th</sup>** – Bollington Pub Crawl: Dog & Partridge 7pm; Holly Bush 8pm; Meridian 8.40; Crown 9.20; Poachers 10.10

**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March** – Winter Pub of the Season. Details to be confirmed.

*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:*

**Thursday 17<sup>th</sup>** – Oxford Road Crawl: meet 8pm at The Font, New Wakefield Street; 9pm The Salutation, Ormond Street, Manchester.

**Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> March** – Branch Meeting: Town Hall Tavern, 20 Tib Lane, Manchester City Centre. Starts 8.00pm

#### Regional CAMRA under 30 social group

**Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March** - Visit to Three Rivers Brewery, Reddish. Minibus £4 (booking essential) Details - Dave Hallows [davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:davehallows2002@yahoo.co.uk) 07931750108 (mobile)

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**GENIUS IN A BOTTLE**

CAMRA is currently co-operating with a long list of brewers to promote British bottle-conditioned ales (or BCAs), with a logo on the label saying "CAMRA Says This is Real Ale". When it comes to packaged beer, BCAs are the peak of the brewer's art, and deserve wider appreciation. But I can't help feeling that this particular campaign may end up misleading potential drinkers and in a sense even do these fine beers a disservice.

For a start, a defining feature of draught real ale is that, compared with kegs, it isn't fizzy. But a good BCA will have an unmistakable natural carbonation resulting from the secondary fermentation in the bottle, making it just as "fizzy" as many brewery-conditioned products, albeit in a more subtle and complex way. If a BCA is flat, it's a bad sign.

Also the fact that a beer is bottle-conditioned is no guarantee of quality. Some draught real ales are very indifferent, but there is little available on keg that doesn't fall into the category of mass-produced pap. If you want to drink good draught ale, you will drink real ale. In contrast, there are many brewery-conditioned bottled beers produced by independent breweries that are of considerable merit, even if falling short of the standards of the best bottle-conditioned ones. On the other hand, some micro-breweries have decided to jump on the bandwagon and thought that basically they can produce a BCA simply by bottling some of their draught beer together with its yeast - something that is inevitably going to produce inconsistent and disappointing results, as I know to my cost.

Bottle-conditioned beers should stand or fall on their own merits, rather than being yoked to something else which really isn't quite the same at all.

**A NICHE TOO FAR?**

An interest in pubs and beer inevitably leads you to try out a lot more new pubs than most people, particularly when on your travels. Back in the old days when pubs were actually owned by breweries, you could tell what beer a pub was likely to sell, but you couldn't tell anywhere near so easily what kind of pub it was. So inevitably you would make a few mistakes and end up in places that weren't your cup of tea. But sometimes you were pleasantly surprised, and sometimes you discovered a rare beer, a classic snug or some good conversation in a pub you might have had your doubts about from the outside.

Now everything has changed. All the big brewers have sold their estates to pub companies, so in general you have no idea what kind of beer you're likely to find before you venture inside. It's made very clear, though, whether its target market is upmarket diners, or students, or young circuit drinkers, or big-screen football fans, or even real ale buffs. So, if doesn't look like your type of place, you probably won't even consider crossing the threshold, and if you did you might receive some funny looks. It would be obvious that a pensioner couple would be out of place in a brash theme pub, or a group of dedicated drinkers in an adult dining venue.

So the end result is that the number of pubs that the potential customer is likely to try is greatly reduced, as are the chances of an unexpected find, and the old-fashioned pub that appeals to all comers is getting harder and harder to find. It could even be argued that the branding of pubs has, overall, made them much less welcoming to the casual customer.

Curmudgeon Online: [www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk](http://www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk)

**5 Years Ago**  
by Phil Levison **JANUARY '00**

"**O**ld Tom Hits Gold" was the headline. Stockport's family brewer, Frederic Robinson Ltd, was purring with success after Old Tom had scampered off with the top award at CAMRA's National Winter Ales Festival, held the previous month at Manchester's Upper Campfield Market. The legendary 8.5% ABV strong ale had been brewed continuously since 1899, and was singled out as 'Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain' by a panel of tasters including beer writers, brewing industry professionals and CAMRA officials. History has of course repeated itself, as Old Tom again won the top award at this year's event.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA had announced the results of their Pub of the Year competition. The winner was Ye Olde Woolpack on Brinksway, Stockport, a classic example of how a failing pub could be turned into a successful enterprise. Licensee Bob Dickinson took on the closed pub 12 years previously since when it had not looked back. The runner-up was the famous Circus Tavern on Portland Street, Manchester City Centre. Once a Tetley pub and now owned by Punch Taverns, licensee Terry Corless had been in charge for 29 years, and he had been talking of retirement.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The attempt by Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries to foist their unwelcome Banks's Bitter on to pubgoers in place of the popular Marston's Bitter appeared to be failing badly. There had been reports of consumer resistance to the change, and this had been confirmed by the attitude of locals in several Macclesfield pubs - quite simply, "No thanks to Banks's". The dropping of Owd Roger (7.6% ABV) on draught had been another of W&D's plans - so it was all the more surprising to find it large as life, on handpump in the Market Tavern, Amlwch. Anglesey (hardly a real ale drinkers' haunt) just before Christmas 2004 at the truly remarkable price of £2.04 a pint.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Romper at Ringway had reopened after a major refurbishment. The last time this had been done was under the control of Jessie and Harry Curran, when the changes looked minimal, with the opening up of a back room, making the pub into a four roomer, three of which had real fires. The advertisement blurb now claimed that the Romper was a pub "440 years old, beautifully restored to its former glory" and "offers the atmosphere of a truly traditional pub". Nonsense - it had been gutted, and had become a Chef & Brewer eatery with a bar attached. It was originally the Red Lion, but the locals thought the animal on the sign looked like a "romping kitten" so it was always known as the Romper. So, to add insult to injury, it had no been rechristened the Romping Lion of Altrincham.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

There was news of a new micro brewery for Greater Manchester. Richard Sutton had been brewer at Manchester's Footage & Firkin, but after the Firkin breweries were closed by Punch Taverns, he moved to become brewer at Phoenix in Heywood. He had quit that job, and had bought the brewing plant and casks from the former Firkin brewery in Dundee (at a bargain price) and he was now on the lookout for premises in Rochdale.



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Ambitious plans are afoot for the Oakwood at Glossop with George Mosley, the new licensee at the helm. The move marks a return to the licensed trade for George who last worked in the business over 30 years ago.

"Initially I'm concentrating on getting the basics right which obviously means serving a decent pint and looking after our customers. But by Easter, I intend to offer a full bed and breakfast service which will bring more regular business into the area," he explained. In addition, to ensure that his residential customers, as well as the people of Glossop, are properly cared for, the Oakwood will also be offering lunchtime and evening meals.

"I have spent most of my life working outside as a landscape gardener, but with the support of my partner Ann Cocca, whose family kept a pub, and has years of experience of the business, we can really put the Oakwood on the map," said George.

For the couple, the Robinson's house is the perfect place to make their mark, for George has played for many football teams in the area as well as having been a local amateur boxer in the past, and so has many friends who are now his customers.

"This is a real change from working alone, and one that I'm thoroughly enjoying," he said. "However, I will still be putting my landscaping know-how to good use when I convert the yard behind the pub to a secure play area for children so that we can comfortably cater for the family business that we aim to attract."

**The Beehive, Albion Road, New Mills has not been selling a regular guest beer since last summer, just having the usual Boddingtons Cask and Storm Ale Force. However over Christmas the third handpump was in use with (at least) a couple of different festive ales including Storm's Looks Like Rain Dear.**

The Crescent, Market Street, New Mills is set to have closed by now. A notice in the window over Christmas stated it would close at the start of January and will become an Indian restaurant. The notice implied this move was against the wishes of the current landlord who, since taking over earlier last year, seemed to be trying to improve the image of the pub and promote cask beer, a board advertising forthcoming winter ales was on display but the pub has also spent quite a bit of time closed recently. It is a shame, New Mills needs more than just the Beehive to provide a somewhere in between the many Robbies locals and those places that attract the under-25 alcopop drinking hoards.

**At The Pack Horse, Mellor Road the new restaurant extension has finally opened which hopefully will ease the lack of seating, the Pack Horse has been a victim of its deserved success at times. On my Xmas eve visit the curry and beers were on top form as always.**

In Mossley, the Billy Goat, the first pub you come to as you drop towards the market place coming in on Stamford Street (coming in from Ashton) is up for sale (currently sells cask John Smiths). The Hartshead, a little way down the same road heading back for Ashton (its down a steep slope on the right) is now selling cask Boddingtons as its only real ale.

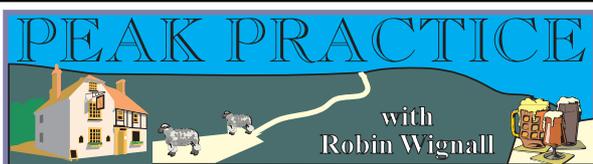
**In Hadfield, the New Lamp has settled down with cask ale after quite a while without. On recent visits, our reporter says Adnams Broadside and Deuchers IPA have been on good form.**

All gains and good news so far, but on the downside, the Talbot in Hyde is now flattened and again in Hyde, the Bankfield Hotel (Robinson's) looks like it has called time for good, being boarded up and looking sadly a bit bleak and in Ashton the Buck & Hawthorn appears closed

**Pubs up for grabs in the area at the moment include the Bike & Hound is Hyde, which has appeared in the trade press. The Robinson's website shows that several High Peak branch pubs have tenancies available. These include the Albion, Dukinfield; Junction, Mottram; railway, Whaley Bridge; Rock Tavern, New Mills, Wheatsheaf, Dove Holes and Shoulder of Mutton, Chapel-en-le-Frith.**

Finally, the landlord of the Snipe in Dukinfield, who recently bought a Vulcan bomber from Squires Gate airport, to put on his pub land, appears to have struggled to get planning permission and if and when he does, then the cost of stripping it down and transporting it to the site may have been underestimated hugely.





As far as I can see from browsing through those old Good Beer Guides, the 'real fire' symbol first appeared in the Good Beer Guide in 1984, signifying those pubs where as well as good beer, drinkers might find in the depths of winter, a warm welcome in the form of a real fire fuelled by coal, logs or smokeless solid fuel.

In the late eighties the Solid Fuel Advisory Service helped to sponsor the Good Beer Guide, and they were followed by British Coal in the early nineties, and as recently as 2000 by Homefire Smokeless Coal. Obviously real fires and real ales go together. Naturally enough a trawl through old Good Beer Guides reveals lost locals, lost beers and lost breweries all of which are of continuing concern. It is however interesting to note some of the pubs that were making the Good Beer Guide up to 20 years ago, and of course many of them still do. And some of them of course boasted the Real Fire symbol as one of their facilities.

In that 1984 edition the Nag's Head at Edale and the Old Hall at Hope appeared with the symbol, as did the Pack Horse in New Mills (back in the Good Beer Guide again more recently including 2005), the Devonshire at Peak Forest (in its days as a Wards house), the Lantern Pike at Little Hayfield in Watney-Wilsons days, and the probably ever-present Shepherds Arms at Whaley Bridge, still serving beer in very good condition with the welcome of a warm fire in each room on the coldest of winter evenings.

Over the years amongst other pubs in the High Peak which have appeared in the Good Beer Guide offering a real fire, are the Railway at Dove Holes (sadly no longer a pub, but in its day probably the most westerly Hardy & Hanson pub), the Three Stags Head at Wardlow Mires, which does seem to have limited opening hours at the moment, and the Roebuck in Chapel-en-le-frith, which is still worth a call for the quality of ale served. The list continues with the Board Inn (Robinson's) at Whaley Bridge and the Goyt (in its fairly brief days as a Vaux house). At Hayfield, Thwaites Sportsman, Burtonwood's George and the Royal have all been Good Beer Guide entries with a warm welcome, as has the Fox (Robinson's) at Brookbottom near New Mills and the Navigation at Buxworth.

In the worst days of winter, beer drinkers might hesitate to travel too far. However a list of recommended pubs with good beer and the warm welcome of a real fire includes the Shepherds Arms in Whaley Bridge where Banks's Original, Marston's Bitter and Pedigree, and a seasonal or guest beer are available. The Cock in Whaley Bridge is a welcoming Robinson's house with Hatters and Unicorn in good form. The Goyt continues to keep customers warm and to serve well kept Tetley Dark Mild and Bitter, and Greene King IPA and Abbot. Along at Bridgemont, the Dog & Partridge often offers two fires as well as Cains Dark Mild, Tetley Bitter, Abbot, Speckled Hen and Deuchars IPA.

These four pubs are easily reached by bus (199) or train from Stockport. A bit more detached but worth the effort is the Navigation at Buxworth where you can warm up and enjoy Websters Bitter, Theakston's Bitter, Marston's Pedigree, Taylor's Landlord and an ever-changing guest beer, sometimes from a micro brewery. If you can be tempted out into the dark and cold of winter try a pub with a real fire, and of course real ale. You might even get the chance to put a log or a lump of coal on the fire. Perhaps it's best to ask first!

### OPENING TIMES ADVERTISING

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, or \*.tiff AND you MUST include hard copy back-up). For colour adverts please ring for details first.

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## NATIONAL WINTER ALES

### SELL OUT SUCCESS & LESSONS FOR NEXT YEAR

Huge crowds managed to drink dry this year's National Winter Ales Festival almost three hours early resulting in the festival calling time at 7.00pm on the Saturday night, having shut the doors earlier.

Despite hailing the festival's return to Manchester as a sell-out success, many of the organisers agreed that demand had been underestimated. Sponsorship manager Jim Flynn said "It just shows what a huge success it was. Unfortunately it was a victim of its own success. It's incredibly difficult to get it right and accurately predict demand.

Though we have staged the festival in Manchester before, this was in effect a new event because it was held at the recently refurbished New Century House. It was a real learning curve for us." Others pointed out that it would have been very difficult to get much more beer stillaged in a single hall.

The event witnessed large queues on the Friday night and also on the Saturday lunchtime, when a bumper crowd led to some complaints about lack of beer choice and difficulty in getting round the festival. (possibly caused by the average CAMRA member being slightly larger in circumference than the average non-CAMRA customer! - Ed(2)). While the reduction in the beer range as Saturday afternoon went on was an inevitable consequence of the crowds, the organisers will be looking to hire the second (lower) hall next year to spread the customers more thinly, and increase the beer range. Interior signing will be another issue to be addressed following what all seemed agreed was a steep learning curve at this popular new venue. It would also have helped if the promised air conditioning had been available. Hopefully the venue administration will fix this for 2006.

However the overall verdict from both organisers CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, and many happy customers was that the event was a major success, laying the foundations for the prestigious event to make its home in Manchester.

Apart from over 120 cask beers, there was the introduction of a Real Ale in a Bottle (RAIB) bar with a range of bottle conditioned beers, drawn largely from previous competition winners from all over the country and North West Regional micro-breweries, many of whom are now trying their hand at the style. At least these were all served cool. Also featured was an interesting range of traditional cider and perry (so popular that the stall had to be completely restocked during the course of the festival) - including two ciders from Merseyside and a Somerset Cider called Rooney's Wreckage.

Not least was a huge (no, not THAT large! - Ed(2)) foreign beer bar featuring the largest range of draught German micro-brewery beers under one roof this Millennium (or so the bar manager asserts) - around 40 - some of which have never made it more than 20 kilometres from the brewery before, let alone out of Bavaria! - along with a large number of Belgian specialities, including four draught Christmas ales (the Gouden Carolus was exquisite!). If it hadn't been for this, the festival would have sold out even sooner. (Though the foreign beer bar manager has asked me to point out that HE had enough beer to last until the official close at 10.30pm!)

An annual highlight of the festival is the judging of the Champion Winter Beer of Britain, with competition beers divided into three categories. Here are the results:

### OLD ALES & STRONG MILD

- Gold - Bath Festivity (Somerset)
- Silver - Gales Festival Mild (Hampshire)
- Bronze - Theakstons Old Peculier (North Yorkshire)

### STOUTS & PORTERS

- Gold - Batemans Salem Porter (Lincolnshire)
- Silver - Big Lamp Summerhill Stout (Newcastle)
- Bronze - Spectrum Old Stoatwobbler (Norfolk)

### BARLEY WINES

- Gold - Robinsons Old Tom (Stockport)
- Silver - Woodfordes Headcracker (Norfolk)
- Bronze - Moor Old Freddy Walker (Somerset)

The top two from each category went through to the finals where Old Tom emerged top of the heap with Bath Ales' Festivity runner-up and Woodforde's Headcracker with the bronze. This years winner will also be considered (for the first time) for the overall Champion Beer of Britain Competition to be held at the Great British Beer Festival at Olympia in August. JC



15





## PUB NEWS

Calling in the Brewers Arms with OT, I was very impressed with this pub. Graham, the landlord is a very friendly guy, and has a good knowledge of cask ales, the atmosphere in the pub is really first class, and talking to some of the regulars they have come back to this pub because real ale has reappeared from keg only. On my visit he had, Tanglefoot, by Badger, this was not tried, they also had, Wychwood Christmas Pudding in a glass which was first class., The regular Deuchars IPA was on top for, too. Graham tells me that over the Christmas period he managed to sell a cask of Orkney Dark Island in just two days! The pub is a worthy winner of the Macclesfield CAMRA 'Conversion to Cask Award', which will be presented on Monday 8 February. *Opening Times* will be there – look for our feature in a forthcoming issue.

**The Three Crowns on Mill Lane in Macclesfield has being taken over by the ex-landlady from the Queens Hotel, the pub also a Holts house, is well worth a visit. When OT called in the beers were Holts Bitter, and the seasonal guest Joeys, (there was no mild on and the pump clips were turned around). I tried the bitter and this was on good form - the atmosphere in the pub was also very good.**

Andrew Miller has returned to his home village, having travelled around the world while working on cruise liners, to take over as tenant of the Holly Bush, Bollington, and has many ideas from his time overseas for the picturesque Robinson's house. "The first and most important change is to react to customer demand and offer all day opening," Andrew stressed. The Holly Bush is on CAMRA's National Inventory of historic pub interiors, but Andrew is also determined that the Holly Bush should be recognised for its dedication to serving real beer by winning a listing in the CAMRA *Good Beer Guide*. His background is in the catering and hospitality business and he says, "I'd like to establish the Holly Bush as the heart of the community, and I will soon introduce a menu that includes dishes from around the world as well as a range of cocktails to increase the choice that we offer to our customers." With the help of his wife, Julie, he is beginning to make the changes. "In the true community spirit the Holly Bush is already home to the golf and cricket societies and we would like to recruit members for a darts and pool team. It is important to us both that the pub is a melting pot for customers of different ages and with varied backgrounds, so we are working hard to ensure that we put something back into the community and have something to offer to everybody," he says.

**In Bollington, as well as the Holly Bush, there are new licensees at the Cock & Pheasant, and the Church House (which is now open all day Saturday and Sunday). Longer opening hours are also being tried at the Waggon & Horses (which is doing food between 12-2) and the Cotton Tree (Noon on Wed, Thur & Fri). The Crown is open once more after a very nice refurbishment that includes comfortable sofas in front of a real fire. It is selling Black Sheep and Bass. The Lord Clyde has also had a refurbishment and is now open again - with a > no smoking policy throughout.**

Just up the hill in Kerridge, the Bulls Head now does food 5-8pm weekdays and 1-4pm weekends, a two course meal costs just £5.95 or two meals for £10. The food is all home cooked and portions are generous.

**Moving to Macclesfield, the Queens Hotel on Sunderland Street has had a massive refurbishment (cost around £350,00) and is open again with a smart dress policy, large TV screens and Holts Mild & Bitter. Also in Macclesfield, Maxwells has re-opened as the Town House - no more information available at present.**

At the Ship at Wincle, Fullers' refurbishment has taken place and they now have a new oak bar and display shelving behind - with an attractive display not only of wines but also of Chimay, Orval and three of the Copper Dragon beers. Apparently the joists under the floor of the bar were so rotten that Giles was amazed he and Chris hadn't gone through weeks ago!. Beers on - London Pride and Moorhouses' bitter are to be the regulars, at the moment going turn and turn about with Landlord. The guest was Christmas Cheer from Tring - not dark but very palatable - coming soon a Dark Stout from Copper Dragon.

**Wild Boar, Wildboardclough - Completely redecorated, gone is the shop, rooms opened out after a five week closure (originally to be two). With the fake ceiling gone our reporter describes the refurb as 'stunning' with 'a lovely blazing real fire'.**

Black Swan, Lower Withington changed hands some months ago and the good news is that the number of handpumps has quadrupled. At the last visit beers available were Theakston's Bitter, John Smith's Cask, Marston's Pedigree and Storm Tornado.

**Debbie Bracegirdle has taken on the tenancy of the Travellers Rest, Sutton with the help of her husband Glyn. She has many fond memories of the pub having known the previous tenants since she was a teenager, and then going on to work behind the bar and even celebrating her 21st and her wedding at the Robinson's house. Debbie, who has now given up her job as a care assistant, said of her decision to change careers: "My parents ran a pub back in the 80s, and since then its something that I've always wanted to do. I know the regulars and the pub so well that when the tenancy became available it seemed the perfect opportunity to work for myself by starting a new career. I also get to make all the decisions and spend time in the company of friends." Debbie and Glyn have put a lot of hard work into forging their new business which also includes a five-bedroom B&B, and they are now enjoying the challenges of meeting their customers' needs. But as for making any changes to the Travellers Rest, Debbie commented that: "The pub is already very popular and just the way our customers like it, so making any changes could be detrimental. We are going to keep the live music each Friday and karaoke on Saturdays which both go down a storm. But there is still opportunity to build on our lunchtime business and so we will soon be launching a new menu."**

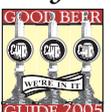


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**Those of you who attended the recent National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester may be aware that CAMRA launched the latest stage of its Real Ale in a Bottle (RAIB) accreditation scheme at the festival. You may even have sampled one or two at the Real Ale in a Bottle bar. Time, we thought, for the Tasting Panel to revisit this type of beer.**

Real Ale in a Bottle is beer which has live yeast in the bottle so that the beer undergoes a secondary fermentation, just as cask-conditioned beer does in the barrel, thereby – hopefully! – creating a better and more complex beer than can be achieved if the beer is filtered and pasteurised, as is the case with many bottled beers.

We did not get off to a good start. Although the beers had been kept in a cold garage, the first beer frothed vigorously from the bottle, so that the panel received decidedly cloudy samples of amber beer, thanks to the yeast sediment which had been disturbed. We carried on regardless, though noting that we would not be getting this beer at its best. The aroma offered some malt, a sweet toffee or honey note, and a distinct impression of orange marmalade. One taster found a hint of whisky. In the mouth, the body was thin, and the overall flavour was exactly what you would expect from the aroma, though badly tainted by the taste of yeast. Despite a slightly dry finish, the Panel thought this a disappointing beer. It was **Pitfield East Kent Goldings Light Ale**, 4.2% ABV and £2.15 from Unicorn in Chorlton.

★★★★★

The next bottle behaved itself rather better, and we received glasses of a very dark red - almost black – beer which proved clear when held up to the light. The first impression on both the nose and the tongue was of roast notes, followed by an earthy fruitiness, described as berries in the aroma and vine fruits – even prunes – on the palate. We found malt, but surprisingly little sweetness, and there was a distinct hint of chocolate. We enjoyed this beer, which was revealed to be **Brains Dark**, 3.9%, £1.70 from Sainsbury's, and a rare example of a bottle conditioned mild.

★★★★★

Beer number three was an appealing gold colour, though the servings from one bottle were slightly hazy. The aromas were of grassy hops – similar to some lagers - and bananas. In the mouth, the beer was quite spritzy and light-bodied. The taste showed more fruit – bananas again, and also oranges. There was a slight sweetness balanced by a moreish dry finish, and a warm spiciness – coriander and cloves were suggested. The fresh, grassy impression was still there, and we guessed – correctly, it turned out – that this could be a wheat beer. Overall, we thought this was a very good beer – enjoyable and refreshing. It was **St. Austell Clouded Yellow**, 4.8%, £1.58 from Tesco, and described on the label as a Bavarian-inspired wheat beer flavoured with vanilla, cloves and coriander.

★★★★★

Our fourth beer poured absolutely bright and was an rich bronze colour. There was much to find in the aroma – malt, fruit, caramel and hops – and this complexity followed through on the palate, where we all found a rich burnt marmalade flavour and a full-bodied mouthfeel. A couple of us found an assertive bitterness, whereas the rest of the panel described the beer as dry rather than exceptionally bitter. In any case, we all agreed that this was an impressive beer. There was some surprise when this was revealed to be **William Worthington's White Shield** (brewed by Coors), at 5.6% ABV, price £1.49 from Tesco. My experience of previous versions of this beer had certainly not led me to expect anything quite so good, though I'd always heard fond recollections of how wonderful it had once been.

★★★★★

Our next beer once again gave our host some difficulty – the beer exploded somewhat from the bottle (“insanely frothy”), resulting in another rather cloudy glassful. The colour was a rich, deep gold, and the aroma was predominantly of citrus hops, though

there was some underlying malt and fruit, and a distinct smell of yeast from the disturbed sediment. The yeast was also noticeable in the flavour. Once again, there was an orange fruit character, and the beer was significantly dry and bitter – to the point where some of the panel found it somewhat harsh and astringent. The beer was **Gold Miner**, 5% ABV and brewed exclusively for Co-Op by **Freeminer** using a single variety of hops - First Gold. Selling price is £1.79.

★★★★★

The next beer poured clear, and was a rich deep red colour. The aroma was full of malt, hops and alcohol. In the mouth, the beer was very full-bodied, and the flavour was hugely complex. Masses of malt and fruit – morello cherries? – were balanced by a large dose of bitterness, and there was bitter chocolate in the finish. A superb beer, we agreed – the best of the evening. Indeed, the label claimed this to be Britain's favourite bottle-conditioned beer: **Fuller's 1845**, 6.3% ABV, and yours for £1.59 (or four for £5) at Morrisons.

★★★★★

Our final beer also poured clear, and was bronze in colour. Fresh, resinous hops dominated the aroma, but there was also malt and fruit – oranges, yet again. The flavour was again very complex - though this beer was less rich and full-bodied than the Fuller's - and followed the aroma very closely. It was fruity, hoppy and resinous, and there was plenty of bitterness, particularly in the aftertaste. At least one of the panel had already guessed that this must be **Young's Special London Ale**, 6.4%, price £1.70 from Tesco. A very good beer, we thought.

What conclusions to draw, then? I would simply say this. A good cask ale will always outshine its keg (filtered, pasteurised and artificially re-gassed) counterparts, and ever one evening's tasting demonstrates that the same is true of beers conditioned in the bottle. Seek them out, try them, and you will find a world of flavours to explore. Look out for out for the "CAMRA Says this is Real Ale" logo on many examples. Happy drinking!



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## ANGIE ACHIEVES AN AMBITION

CAMRA member Angie Taylor achieved an ambition when she became the licensee of her local, the Urmston, a large roadhouse on Stretford Road in Urmston, writes *Stuart Fish*. Angie started working there a couple of evenings a week in early 2001 and was pleased when the pub was bought by J W Lees three years ago this month. "It was a happy coincidence," recalls Angie, "because at the time I was also the secretary of Stretford Cricket Club, who had been with Lees brewery for a couple of years. I had become a big fan of Lees bitter there and this crystallised my interest in running my own pub."

After a number of training courses, Lees offered Angie a job as a relief manager and she started at the Travellers Call in Bredbury in March 2003. Over the next eighteen months she did reliefs at several Lees pubs, including the Old Boar's Head in Middleton, the Welcome in Orsdall and several spells at the Urmston. "I enjoyed working at different pubs, seeing how each one did certain things and I got some good ideas. Then out of the blue, Urmston licensees Bill and Barbara decided to leave the trade and I applied for the job."

The Urmston itself was one of a number of big pubs in the area built in the thirties by Wilsons. Others in this group included the Moss Vale, Red Lion, and Garrick's Head, all of which were transferred to Chef and Brewer in the eighties. Chef and Brewer as a company was taken over by Scottish & Newcastle, who sold the Urmston to Noble House, a small pub chain. Traditional beer had always been on sale but the handpumps were taken out by Noble, so it was good news for cask bitter lovers when Lees came along a month later and put them back in. A year after buying the pub, Lees gave it a long-overdue refurbishment and it now has a comfortable lounge and a separate, thriving vault.

As a new and enthusiastic licensee Angie Taylor has already started to put her plans into operation. New menus have been devised, the wine list has been revamped and the bottled beer range extended. It is her intention to make the pub busier, attract more lunchtime diners, appeal to all age groups and really be a community pub. The popular Quiz Night on Thursdays will carry on as usual and live football and rugby (Angie supports Manchester City and Sale Sharks) will still be on the big screen in the vault only - there's no TV in the lounge.

Apart from Lees Bitter, Angie will be taking each Lees seasonal beer as they come along, and the strong Moonraker will be available on draught as often as possible. She would like to see Opening Times listing her pub alongside the Rain Bar and Lloyd's as a banker for the seasonal beers (*done - Ed(1)*). Her stated aim is to be listed in the Good Beer Guide and she is determined that the quality of the beer will achieve that. As she says herself: "The beer's got to be right because I drink it!"

*The Urmston is on Stretford Road, Urmston and is open 11-11 Monday to Saturday, 12-10.30 Sundays. Food is served 12-2 and 4-7 Monday to Friday, 12-6 Saturdays and Sundays.*

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# MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

**ONLY A FEW isolated snippets this month. Hopefully normal service will be restored next month.**

I've been told about some real ale losses in the Wilmslow Road area. On recent visits there was no cask beer at either the **Whitworth** on Moss Lane East or the **Varsity** on Wilmslow Road and was also surprised to see that all of the pumpclips were reversed on the bar of **Jabez Clegg** on Dover Street, though this was apparently due to the fact that the new term had only just started and so most of the student clientele had yet to return as three beers are the norm here. I keep hearing very odd things about the **Briton's Protection** on Great Bridgewater Street. The story is that owners of the pub are planning to "do a Shambles" and move the pub to the left against Jury's Inn hotel and then sell the spare land around the pub (which they own) for redevelopment! This sounds completely bonkers and I must say this is all third-hand, although my source is pretty reliable, as, in turn, is his. Even if there is some truth in this, let's at least be thankful they are planning a "Shambles" and not a "Tommy Ducks". And speaking of demolitions, another famous old City Centre pub bit the dust in the first week of February. The old, and long-closed, **Coach & Horses** at the bottom of Piccadilly Station approach has finally been knocked down. It spent its last years as a computer shop but for many years was one of the few free houses in the City Centre. The seminal pre-CAMRA *Manchester Pub Guide* published in 1975 described it thus:

"The Coach and Horses is one of the few free houses in central Manchester....the owner has taken full advantage of this and stocks a very good range...The interior is roughly decorated and seating consists of plain chairs and stools. The other feature of the pub is the variety of clientele. Working men, bus crews, and all types of railway travellers combine to produce a friendly atmosphere..." Of course, in its later years as a pub it did almost define squalor. Particularly memorable were the foetid gents toilets. Catching them on a night when the already malodorous atmosphere was 'enhanced' by the extractor fan from the kitchen of the neighbouring Indian restaurant was a challenge to the most cast iron of stomachs. Ah, happy memories...!

On a happier note, I was pleased to learn that **Mr Thomas's Chop House** on Cross Street has been voted the Punch Taverns national Pub of the Year. Well done to all concerned. The pub has been gently refurbished, too. The bar has been slightly moved and replaced - the new fitting is a splendid wooden period piece - and the glorious tilework has been spruced up. The Black Sheep Bitter was on fine form when I popped in at the end of January.

## LOCAL CAMRA AWARDS & PRESENTATIONS

Time to catch up with two local Pub of the Month Awards - the first (right) to Paul Prunty and Jeanette of the Rising Sun, Hazel Grove in December, and (below) Paul and Susan Robson of the Railway, Openshaw with Stockport &



South Manchester Committee member Mark McConachie at the January 2005 Pub

of the Month celebration. Pictured (right), Stockport Beer & Cider Festival Organiser Jim Flynn (on the right) presents Beechwood Cancer Care with a cheque from the monies donated at the 2004 festival. More awards next month.



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# LEGH ARMS IS LOCAL PUB OF THE YEAR

## TOP AWARD FOR EAST MANCHESTER LOCAL

**T**he Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year for 2005 is the Legh Arms, Ashton New Road, Openshaw, an oasis in a beer and pub desert..

The Legh Arms is situated on Ashton Old Road 200 yards east of Alan Turing Way, opposite the Openshaw Campus of MANCAT (that's Openshaw Tech to older readers!). This area has seen wholesale destruction of both its manufacturing base and housing with a consequent loss of many of its pubs. Apart from the keg only Queen Anne, the next nearest pub is half a mile away in an area which would have previously boasted a pub on every other corner.

When David and Tracey Britnell took over three years ago there was a solitary hand pump selling Boddingtons Bitter. David has encouraged his regulars to try other real ales and now has three handpumps selling a variety of ales (he would like more pumps, but this would involve major alterations). One hand pump is semi-permanently dedicated to David's best seller, Black Cat, that excellent dark mild from Moorhouses. It is no surprise that it sells so well around these parts, being a close match to Chesters (fighting) Mild. The second pump usually dispenses Marston's Old Empire when David can secure some from his suppliers or Pedigree when it is unavailable. The last pump takes a variety of guest ales. Real cider is also sold, served direct from the fridge.

Real ale and amicable surroundings are not all that is on offer. The Legh Arms has teams in the local darts and cribbage league (matches Tuesday nights) and pool league. Of note is that the darts are played not on the standard London board, but on the rare (except for Gorton, Openshaw, Bradford and Clayton) Manchester log end. To achieve all of this in such a relatively short time and in East Manchester, where the pub scene has been decimated



in recent years and where most of those pubs remaining offer only keg beers, is an astonishing achievement. Once again it has been shown that a well-run pub will succeed almost anywhere and is an indictment to those pub operators who seem to have given up on the less advantaged parts of the city. Needless to say, David and Tracey are over the moon at the award.

The award will be presented on the evening of Saturday, February 19<sup>th</sup>, marking the start of National Pubs Week during which CAMRA's National Pub of the Year will be announced. The Legh 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.

Two pubs very nearly tied for the runners-up slot in the 2005 voting. The Royal Oak in Didsbury, where the famous cheese and pate lunches are as good as ever (along with the beer) under the excellent Hazel and Robert Long, and the Navigation, on Lancashire Hill, Stockport, run in exemplary fashion by Angella Lindsay.

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