

OPENING TIMES

JUNE 1992

CAMRA
FREE

No:
98

Regional Brewers Swap Beer Less Customer Choice as Brands are Axed

The changes gripping the brewing industry are filtering down from the national brewers to the larger regional concerns as breweries large and small seek to grab a share of the market and push their high-profile beer brands.

One of the latest in a spate of arrangements involves two concerns that trade locally - Burton based Marstons and Wolverhampton & Dudley, who trade locally under the Banks's banner. It is the biggest deal of its kind so far between independent regional brewers and industry observers believe that it could be followed by similar deals by other companies.

From 1st June Marstons Pedigree will be available to Wolves pubs while Marstons will do the honours with Bank's Mild. The initial intention is for 300 pubs in each company's estate to take part in the scheme although it may be extended to more pubs in the future.

Marstons brewing and brands director John Dunsmore said that the deal would add a mild to his company's range of brands which up to now had not had its own mild brand. He seems to be forgetting the (admittedly forgettable) Mercian Mild and (far superior) Border Mild beers that Marstons do in fact produce. Whilst it was hoped that this deal was not the beginning of the end for these two products, the brewery announced this week that production of no less than three brands was to cease. John Marstons is also for the chop. At the same time, Marstons announced a second beer swap deal with Scottish & Newcastle. This will see the ubiquitous Pedigree available in the S&N estate throughout the North & Scotland, in return for which Marstons will introduce 3 S&N products (McEwans Lager, McEwans Export and 'draught' Becks) into their estate and for free trade distribution.

As far as Banks's are concerned it is difficult to see Pedigree selling with any great success in their Black Country heartland where the big volume seller is mild, but Banks's have been rapidly expanding out of their historic trading area for some time now and they

doubtless have many pubs where the introduction of this premium beer will be successful. Certainly it will probably be cropping up in numerous of their local pubs in Manchester - the Station at Cheadle seems an obvious choice.

Pedigree is already the second biggest premium bitter in volume of sales, and Marstons are clearly after the number one position.

Banks's also have another premium bitter string to their bow as earlier this year they took over the Camerons Brewery in Hartlepool and it has been made clear that the Marstons deal will not halt current plans to introduce the powerful Cameron's Strongarm into their estate later in the year. Whether we see Pedigree and Strongarm competing side by side remains to be seen, although Opening Times will keep you posted with developments.

A less welcome side to the regional shakeout also revealed itself last month with Suffolk brewer Greene King bidding for Oxfordshire based Morlands with the express intention, if successful, of closing the Morland Brewery in 1993. The fate of this fine brewer appeared almost sealed by the news last Saturday that Whitbread Investments (the money arm of the predatory mega-brewer) were backing Greene King's bid.

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PUB of the Month June

Su	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for June is the Tiviot on Tiviot Dale in Stockport town centre. One of the few problems about Stockport town centre is that there are so many good pubs that even pubs of great merit can easily be overlooked.

With its traditional multi-roomed layout and well-kept (and remarkably cheap!) Robinsons beers, the Tiviot is certainly a very good pub.

Perhaps the most notable feature, though, is that indefinable but instantly recognisable attribute - a really good pub atmosphere. Whether it's busy or quiet when you enter (and it's more likely to be busy), this is one place that somehow always feels just right. This surely has much to do with licensee Dan Walker's long years of service in the pub - he took over the licence in 1978 on the semi-retirement of his father, who had taken the place over way back in 1966. Stockport has seen many changes since then - not least the immediate environs of the pub - but the Tiviot stands as an enduring example of the best of the town's pub tradition.

Join Dave and Jill, their regular customers, and CAMRA members for the Pub of the Month presentation on Thursday June 25th; it's sure to be a highly enjoyable night out.



The following extract from the Cork Examiner's obituary column was sent into the Daily Telegraph by a reader:

"Donnachie's Bar, Cobh. Due to the sad death of Paddy, the Bar, to all intents and purposes, will remain closed during our grief; but so as not to inconvenience our esteemed customers, the door will remain ajar. 'Tis what Paddy wanted. Thank you, The Donachie family."

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CAMRA CALLING!

After the excesses of the Beer Festival, the social scene is a little quieter this month.

On the 8th June there is a two way social starting at the Gardeners Arms, Northgate Road, Edgeley at 9.00pm and moving on to the Bulkeley Arms, Brinksway at 10.00. This is followed on Thursday 11th with the monthly branch meeting which will be at the Kings Arms, Helmschore Walk, Chorlton-on-Medlock. We start at 8.00pm.

On Monday 15th June, the social will be at Rabinskis Wallet, Wilbraham Road, Fallowfield. As with all Monday socials, this starts at 9.00pm. This is followed on Friday 19th with our monthly Stagger, this time around Abbey Hey. We will be starting at 7.00pm at the Waggon & Horses on Hyde Road or you can join at 8.30 at the Royal Oak, Cross Street.

On Monday 22nd the social is at the Park, Newbridge Lane, Stockport and this is followed on Thursday 25th by Pub of the Month at the Tiviot (see page 2). And finally, rounding off the month, there is a social on Monday 29th in Clayton - 9.00pm at the Victoria, Croft Street and 10.00pm at the Grove, Ashton New Road.

For more details about any of the above or our activities in general, phone Tracey Clarke on 456 6354.

If you live in the Romiley, Woodley, Bredbury and Marple areas, you fall within the area of the High Peak branch who will be holding their monthly meeting and AGM on Monday 8th June at the Bowling Green, Stockport Road, Marple. On the 19th June there will be a social at the Little Mill in Rowarth. Finally advance warning - all volunteer workers for the CAMRA Beer Tent at the Ashton Canals Festival should attend the High Peak Branch Committee meeting on 6th July at the Dog & Partridge, Denton. For more details about High Peak CAMRA activities phone Geoff Williamson on 0663 765634.



It was very pleasant in mid-May to encounter three traditional Devon ciders at the Stanley Arms in Stockport - Tinminers Dry from Holne, and both sweet and medium Green Valley from Clyst St Mary. It seems licensee Mike Belsham had been on a "beer run" to Devon and decided to also bring back some of the longer-established local tipples.

Stockport cider drinkers are now hoping Mike's next few beer runs take him to Somerset, Gloucestershire and Herefordshire; alternatively, of course, he could use the services of one of the cider wholesalers serving the area. Either way, we hope these three ciders, presented in tip-top condition, are the harbinger of future delights at the Stanley.



PUB OF THE YEAR 1992

The King's Arms

HELMSHORE WALK
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FIND THE FIRST TIME!**

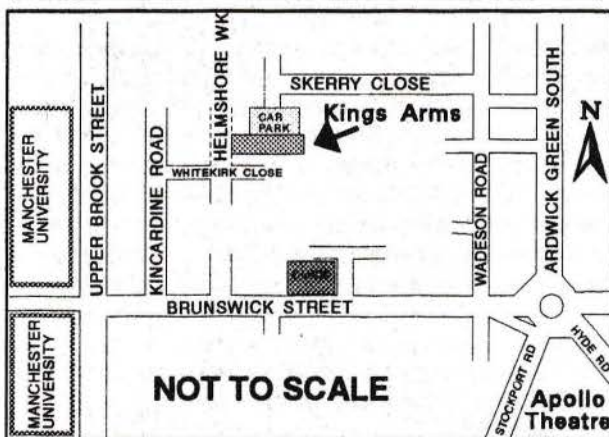
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Some of you may be reading this at, or shortly after, the Stockport Beer & Cider Festival - I hope our wide selection this year provides something for everyone. Amongst the many visitors, we hope to welcome one of the more characterful figures on the local drinking scene, namely John Turrell who writes a delightfully idiosyncratic beer column for the local Reporter Group. Whilst John's column is always an interesting read, he does occasionally overstep the boundary between idiosyncrasy and absolute tosh, usually where Stockport Beer Festival is concerned. This year he went so far as to suggest that we always use plastic glasses - of course the fact of the matter is that we wouldn't give them house-room. But we at Opening Times are forgiving souls - just get it right next time John.

In the Editor's View

by John Clarke

This month we feature the growing concern surrounding the pub renovation policies of Joseph Holts. Some people seem to think that Holts are some sort of CAMRA icon and whilst it's true that the price and quality of their ales are second to none, the same can't be said of what they are doing to too many of their pubs.

The brewery's reaction to this criticism is to get spokesman Tom Demsey to go around rejecting this and refuting that (and, of course, we mustn't forget the team of french polishers). Unfortunately, Demsey can refuse until he is blue in the face, the evidence of the despoliation by Holts of some of their pubs is plain for all who have eyes to see.

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Peter Rowe:

Over the years Boddingtons and Whitbread have justifiably been criticised for their attitude towards real ale. The time has now come to welcome them back into the fold. Apart from the introduction of guest beers, a very human face is to be seen. The Unicorn at Dean Row has a ramp for wheelchairs and a toilet for the disabled and now the Ladybrook in Bramhall is similarly equipped, together with priority parking. It is very unlikely that sufficient extra beer will be sold to pay for these improvements.

I suggest that CAMRA members search through the Good Beer Guide and count the number of pubs in their area that have the "Wheelchair" symbol. The fingers of one hand are going to be sufficient in most areas of the country. I make no comment other than to say that it is deplorable.

Apart from Pub of the Month/Year could we also see recognition given to pubs and breweries that show a face that is not simply that of the accountant.

(Editor's note - Peter raises a number of complex issues. Certainly the Boddington PubCos guest beer schemes are to be welcomed. On the other hand, many of the guest beers offered by Whitbread are nothing of the sort, being generally poor replicas of former breweries' products now brewed by Whitbread themselves, usually at Cheltenham or Sheffield.

The greater attention paid by pub designers to the needs of the disabled is certainly to be applauded - Holts usually distinguish themselves in this area with their new pubs.)

From Peter Soane:

I've heard that the Anchor in Hazel Grove is charging £1.20 for a pint of bitter. Is this a record for the area? (If only it was - Ed.)

Letters for publication should be sent to:
The Editor, 'Opening Times'
45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport, SK3 9HD

From Jim Bracken

I should like to compliment Chris and all at the FLEA & FIRKIN for their recent, well run and enjoyable BEER FESTIVAL. An excellent range of well kept beers were served, at reasonable prices, in addition to the distinctive cask conditioned beers produced by Chris himself.

With such a large number of students and younger drinkers amongst the clientele here, an opportunity for them to sample real milds, bitters, stouts, porters and strong ales must be very good from CAMRA's point of view. After all, if our campaign is to have a future, it is precisely this age group that must be weaned off the massively advertised fake British lagers, and the extortionately priced bottled 'badge' brands that the big brewers want them to consume.

I was surprised, however, not to see more CAMRA members supporting the event. Although there were several Stockport & South Manchester and Merseyside members who came, I never saw anyone from another Manchester branch. Perhaps they came when I wasn't there? I'd like to think so.



Pub In The Peak

The rolling, wooded countryside between Ashbourne and Wirksworth, just south of the National Park, is some of the most attractive on the fringes of the Peak District. The last few years have seen a dramatic change brought about by the construction of the giant Carsington reservoir. After many delays the dam has finally been completed and the lake is now filling up to its full expanse of two square miles. However, just a mile north of the lake a much more unchanging scene can be found at the Olde Gate Inn in Brassington.

Brassington is an old lead mining village built of grey stone and clustered haphazardly on a south-facing slope. Once there were up to a dozen pubs to slake the miners' thirsts, but these have now been reduced to two, the appropriately named Miner's Arms, and the Olde Gate, standing a couple of hundred yards further out, on the road out of the village to the west. Both are Marston's pubs - the Miner's Arms is worth a visit, but the Olde Gate is definitely something special.

It's a long, low building, set down from road level. It originally dates from 1616, and while the exterior has little to suggest such great age, inside the pub is full of historic character. On the left as you go in through the main door is the dark, cosy snug, with a serving hatch, an old, black-leaded range and unusual curved, high-backed settles. To the right is the larger public bar, the heart of the pub, which has a tiled floor, scrubbed-top tables and a huge fireplace covering the whole of the end wall, with another ancient range. There's an abundance of old dark wood and genuine beams, and every surface seems to be festooned with antiques and curios, including a

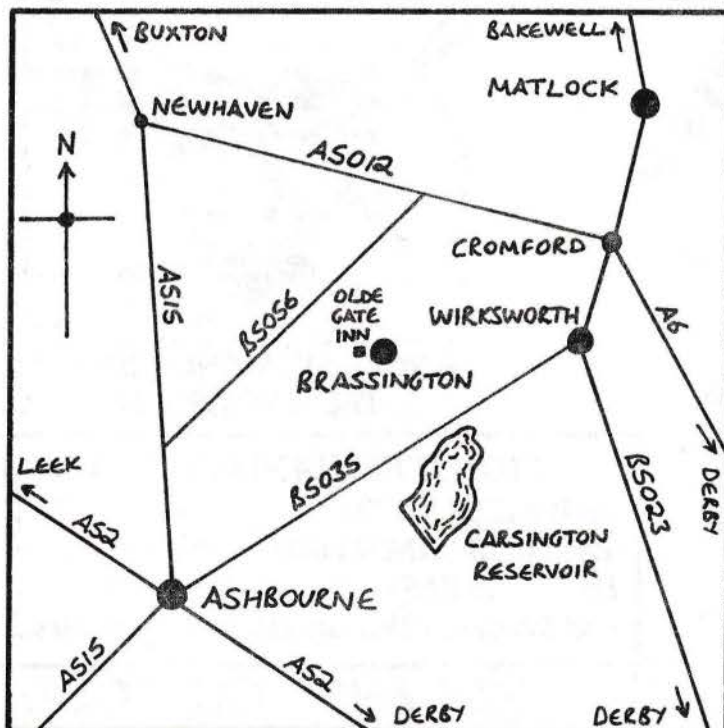
fearsome six-foot blunderbuss, which looks as though it would probably be more dangerous to the marksman than his target! At the back of the pub is a sunny, south-facing garden, a very pleasant place to while away an hour or two on a hot day.

The handpumps aren't immediately obvious, being at the side of the servery, facing the front door. Pedigree is the staple drink, as in all Marston's pubs in the area, and it certainly seems to taste better here than in most outlets in Greater Manchester, where too often it is pulled through a tight sparkler which doesn't suit it. At least one other Marston's beer is usually available, on a recent visit including the strong Merrie Monk mild direct from the cask, and, surprisingly, Border Exhibition light mild on handpump.

The menu, chalked up on blackboards in both snug and bar, contains a variety of interesting and unusual dishes, including "Derbyshire Fidget Flan". The meals, it must be said, are not cheap, most main courses being about £5, although in such a tourist area you can pay as much for standard pub grub in far less atmospheric surroundings. Food is served every session apart from Sunday and Monday evenings.

About forty miles from Stockport, Brassington is not exactly on the doorstep, but the area is certainly well worth a day out, and not only for the delights of the Olde Gate. As well as looking around Carsington reservoir, you can walk along the High Peak Trail, converted from the old Cromford & High Peak Railway, running only a mile north of the village, to the preserved steam winding engine at Middleton Top. The old market town of Wirksworth contains many historic buildings and a fascinating Heritage Centre, and is surprisingly under-appreciated, perhaps to its benefit, by the tourists who throng nearby Matlock.

Peter Edwardson



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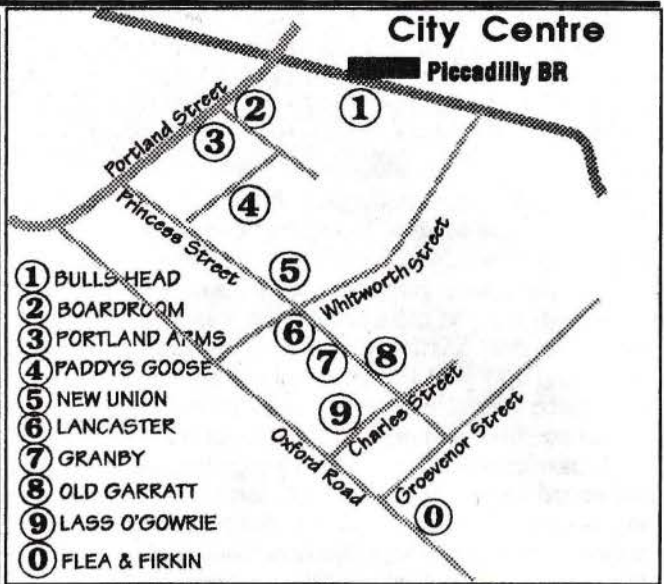
with Paul Felton

Our latest stagger was around the branch's (limited) section of Manchester City Centre. Unfortunately, this took place on Good Friday, so apologies to those who couldn't make it, and I won't bore the reader with a list of the pubs that were closed!

Seven o'clock saw us hammering on the door of the BULL'S HEAD, on London Road. This is a small Burtonwood pub (one of only three in the branch area). It has two rooms: a vault on the left and a wedge-shaped lounge on the right (the slightly peculiar shape caused by the fact that the pub is virtually an island surrounded by various roads!). The bitter, at £1.17, was good; the mild, at £1.14 was very good. The Bull's Head is opposite Piccadilly Station - well worth a visit before (or after) your train.

Next was the BOARDROOM, on the corner of Portland and Aytoun Streets. It was the first time that many of the party had been in the place, and we were not overly impressed. It's just one room, quite plush, with numerous prints on the walls, and some distinctly dodgy bunting and art deco lampshades over the bar. Two beers were available: Websters Yorkshire Bitter and Ruddles Bitter. The latter was on sale at £1.36 a pint: interesting, given that on every pump clip was a sticker saying 'price freeze until 4th May'. As well as being notably expensive, it was notably poor.

The PORTLAND ARMS is almost opposite. And while it looks rather characterless from the outside, this belied its attractive interior: split level, with much green decor and wood, and a nice bar. Two beers were on sale: Tetley



Bitter at £1.20 and Inde Coope Burton Ale. While the former was poor, the latter was definitely off; it was replaced immediately. A new barrel was put on, which gave a much better pint.

Things were then confused by the fact that the 8.30 meeting place was shut, so we ventured into the self-styled gay 'village' behind Chorlton Street bus station. PADDY'S GOOSE on Bloom Street was next. This was another rather attractive pub, set out in a flattened 'U' shape (which meant that it was rather difficult to get from one half of the 'U' to the other). The etched windows were rather spoilt by one large pane having been 'removed' and replaced with reinforced safety glass. Another 'price freeze' pub, this one offered a decent pint of Wilsons bitter for £1.26.

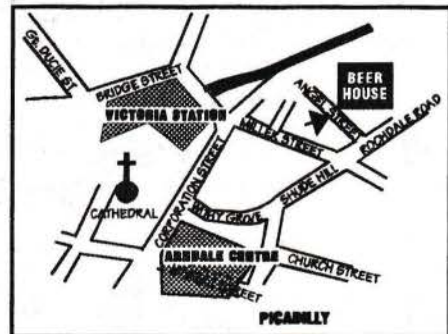
We were then misguided enough to try to get into the REMBRANDT on Sackville Street, one of the few Lees pubs



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HOT AND COLD FOOD

in the branch area. This is well known as a gay pub (in the evenings at least), but still it came as something of a shock to be refused entry by two shaven and polished-headed bouncers on the grounds that we were NOT GAY. Can you imagine the furore that would have ensued had a party of gays been refused entry to a pub because they WERE gay??? These sort of 'positive discrimination' double standards do no one any good, and yet the very same happened at the next pub we attempted to enter, MANTO'S.

We feared the worst when the side door of the NEW UNION on Princess Street was also manned by two penguin-suited bouncers, but thankfully the front door was unpatrolled and so we ventured inside to try a second Burtonwood pub in the evening. Again, this is something of a gay pub, particularly the back bar, the front area seems to be more 'mixed'. It's a pub with several rooms, split levels and loud music. Only Burtonwood bitter was available, at £1.17 a pint; it was okay, but not up to the standards set earlier by the Bull's Head. And I think that this can only be about the second pub I've been in where you get a receipt for your beer!

The LANCASTER was just up the road, on the corner of Princess and Whitworth Streets, it was something of a culture shock suddenly to hit a 'student pub'. It's one large room, with a wooden floor, exposed brickwork, and an enormous amount of green decor (green lamps, green seating and green flock wallpaper). It is also a live music venue (equipment was set up even if no one was playing during our brief visit). Three bitters were available - from Tetleys, Jennings (£1.15) and Peter Walker (£1.13). The first-named of the three was not tried, but the other two were okay. One minor cause for criticism though - some rather dodgy vase-type glasses.

We then made another mistake by wandering into the GRANBY on Princess Street, which boldly declared itself to be a 'free house'. Really? It is below street level, has a tiled floor, and on the night we visited it was almost completely empty. Two beers were available on handpump - Boddingtons bitter and Marstons Pedigree, the latter at the astronomical price of £1.60. Though the handpumps were pulled, they appeared to activate electric motors (unless of course someone's hearing lied to them). Perhaps the pub has a rotating beer policy, for several pump clips from Whitbread's uninspiring range were visible behind the bar. Neither beer even managed to scrape up into the 'average' class.

Virtually across the road is the OLD GARRATT. This has always struck me as a curious place, with the pleasant 'lounge' set-up of the left of the pub contrasting markedly with the bare-boarded emptiness of the bar area. Nice windows, though. The Garratt has a remarkable array of handpumps (it was designed to sell all beers brewed by Boddingtons' various breweries), but that evening only two beers were available, Boddies bitter and Theakston's Best Bitter. All the party had the latter, at £1.22 a pint, and it wasn't bad.

The LASS O'GOWRIE on Charles Street is one of three brewery/brew pubs in a very small area. This one, however, is owned by Whitbread, operates using malt-extract only, and produces by some way the worst beer of the three. One interesting note is that you can see the brewery plant; another is that it is one of the few pubs in the branch area that serves real cider (in this case rather good Bulmer's at £1.48). Mitigating evidence should be

put forward on behalf of the brewers that the Lass O' Gowrie is much patronised by students and is usually extremely busy, with the result that the beer may not have sufficient time to mature: but both the Log 35 and Log 42 (the latter at £1.38) were notably poor.

We finished up at a second of the three brewery/pubs, the FLEA & FIRKIN on the corner of Grosvenor Street and Oxford Road (it used to be Riley's snooker hall). (The third is of course Brendan Dobbin's West Coast brewery underneath the Kings Arms on Skerry Close). The Flea & Firkin is another pub popular with the student population, and it offers live music most nights. But the beer is of particular interest, for brewer Chris Lewis is a real enthusiast, who has been known to try virtually anything - such as a variation on a Belgian wheat beer, stout, a popular ginger-beer, green beer for St. Patrick's Day - almost anything. It should be mentioned that Chris' brews are all full mash affairs, and though some of the standard house beers (Scratch, Grosvenor and Dogbolter) are sometimes tank beers (in vacation they are all cask) even the tanks will soon be using nitrogen rather than co2 blankets. As you can never be entirely certain which are on tank, ask. Most of our party tried either the Full Mash Mild (at an outrageously expensive 75p a pint) and the rather wonderful Eclipse Stout. Both were rather good.

It was unfortunate that the evening was somewhat spoilt by our being unable to get into several pubs, for the various reasons outlined above; but a good time was had by all. As ever, the views expressed are just those from one particular night: try the pubs yourself and make up your own mind!

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RHYTHM and BOOZE

By Chris Stone and Sue Tittensor

This month's Rhythm and Booze concentrates on a pub which has been strong in its support for live music over many years, but has not yet featured as our venue, despite its prime position in Stockport Market Place. We speak, of course, of the Boars Head, a Sam Smiths hostelry and former Good Beer Guide entry, which has recently been tastefully refurbished. The Boars Head features live music many nights of the week, when the bands perform in a separate room to the main bar, although there is no admission charge levied.

Many of the bands play residencies here, such as the Best Band (Wednesdays) and the Rise (Fridays) but we visited one Saturday evening to see a band who appear regularly, if not frequently, once a month. Clive Stewart and Turn Up and Play have been at the Boars Head in their present format for only a few months, but previously as Clive Stewart's Funky Love-In were regular visitors. Turn Up and Play are a seven piece band whose musical style is "soul - definitely, with a touch of rock/blues". The band play instrumentals mostly, cover versions from the likes of Anita Baker, John Sanbourne, Tina Turner and Johnny Gill.

When we arrived, the bar area was very crowded but the music room, with its new decor and prints of Jazzmen to complement the old faded photographs of Blues heroes, was surprisingly empty. By 9.45, however, the room was packed with an expectant audience, who were obviously more adept than us at timing the arrival of the band. We weren't sure what to expect, but were very pleasantly surprised.

The saxophone of Clive Stewart takes control over the performance, but there are huge contributions to the complete sound by the guitar of Hughie Thomas and the keyboards of Luke Smith, while the array of exotic percussion instruments (Paul Laydon and Paul Morgan) adds an extra dimension to the music. It was a while before we realised there was no vocalist - which must be a testament to the skill and complexity of the sound.

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We were surprised to hear that the present line-up has only been together for such a short time. The key to success is perhaps that the performers don't take appearances at the Boars Head too seriously - "Turn Up and Play" sums it up exactly. The band has a kind of relaxed professionalism that comes from playing for enjoyment rather than as a chore. Also it can be explained by the experience that each member has. "Turn Up and Play" is a sort of hobby activity for drummer Tim Franks, who is used to playing with Jack Bruce and Norman Beaker, while Luke Smith recently toured with Distant Cousins, supporting Lisa Stansfield. Pete Morgan (bass) along with brother Paul and some of the others is a keen Gospel musician in Manchester.

"Clive Stewart and the Funky Love-In", a more heavy duty soul outfit, is a 10 piece band featuring four horns. On the other hand, to show how versatile he can be, Clive regularly leads a Jazz quintet which plays mostly in Manchester. PJ Bells and the Flying Dutchman (Salford Quays) are also regular haunts, so there are plenty of places to catch them in action.

The gigs at the Boars are very well attended, but as always, if you have an interest in live music, our advice is go along and support some local talent which really deserves it. Please also remember that many bands don't get paid for their efforts and only receive the takings from the pint pot which is passed round at the interval - so give generously. It's a shame that some breweries don't realise what a crowd-pulling asset good live music really is.



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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JUNE 1987

The whole of the front page was taken up by an Election Special - CAMRA asked the question - "Where do the parties stand on the drinkers biggest threat: Brewery take-overs and mergers?" Whilst it is not proposed to attempt to summarise the proposals of each party, it may be vaguely interesting to look back on who was giving the information. Michael Howard spoke for the Conservatives in his role as Minister for Corporate and Consumer Affairs. Labour's spokesman on Industry and the City was Robin Cook, whilst Ian Wigglesworth, Trade & Industry, represented the SDP Liberal Alliance. Perhaps it should be explained here that Opening Times hadn't suddenly acquired a political editor at Westminster - Roger Protz had been doing the interviewing for CAMRA's national newspaper "What's Brewing".

The month's pub crawl had been described as a ramble along the banks of the River Goyt, with the comment that whilst Portwood lacks something of the scenic delights that can be found further upstream, it makes up for it in the variety of its real ales and pubs. Among the Bass, Boddingtons, Wilsons and Robinsons houses was the Midway on Newbridge Lane, which had been the only Free House in Stockport for a number of years until it was joined by the Olde Vic, Shaw Heath. Beers available at the Midway that night came from Tetley, Boddington, Thwaites, Burtonwood and Marston. (The Midway, alas, is no longer a Free House, but it still retains a certain distinction with its "rare for the area" Courage Directors, John Smith's Bitter and Magnet Ale. The only other major alteration, and this time very much a change for the better, was the conversion of Wilson's Stanley Arms (also on Newbridge Lane) to a Free House which now has a wide ranging selection of beers from the new small, or micro-breweries, including House beers and "Specials."

There was news of work being carried out by Robinsons in the Stockport area - the original Grapes at the end of Waterloo Road had been swept away in a new road scheme, and now work was in hand to replace it. Over on Hillgate, the Flying Dutchman was boarded up and it was understood the plan was to move it back

about 2 feet. Rumours about the pub had been circulating for years, and the critical comment was that "almost anything would be an improvement." A bit further afield, Holt's had started work on their new pub in Broom Lane, Levenshulme. In Rusholme, the Clarence had suffered fire damage, and whilst Bass had promised a complete re-vamp of the layout, they forgot to mention whether cask beer was likely to appear. Finally, there was the news that Mr. Thomas's Chop House on Cross Street, Manchester was a welcome convert to real ale, with its Thwaites Best Mild and Bitter.

Watch out for a special look back at the first 100 issues of OPENING TIMES in our forthcoming century issue in August!

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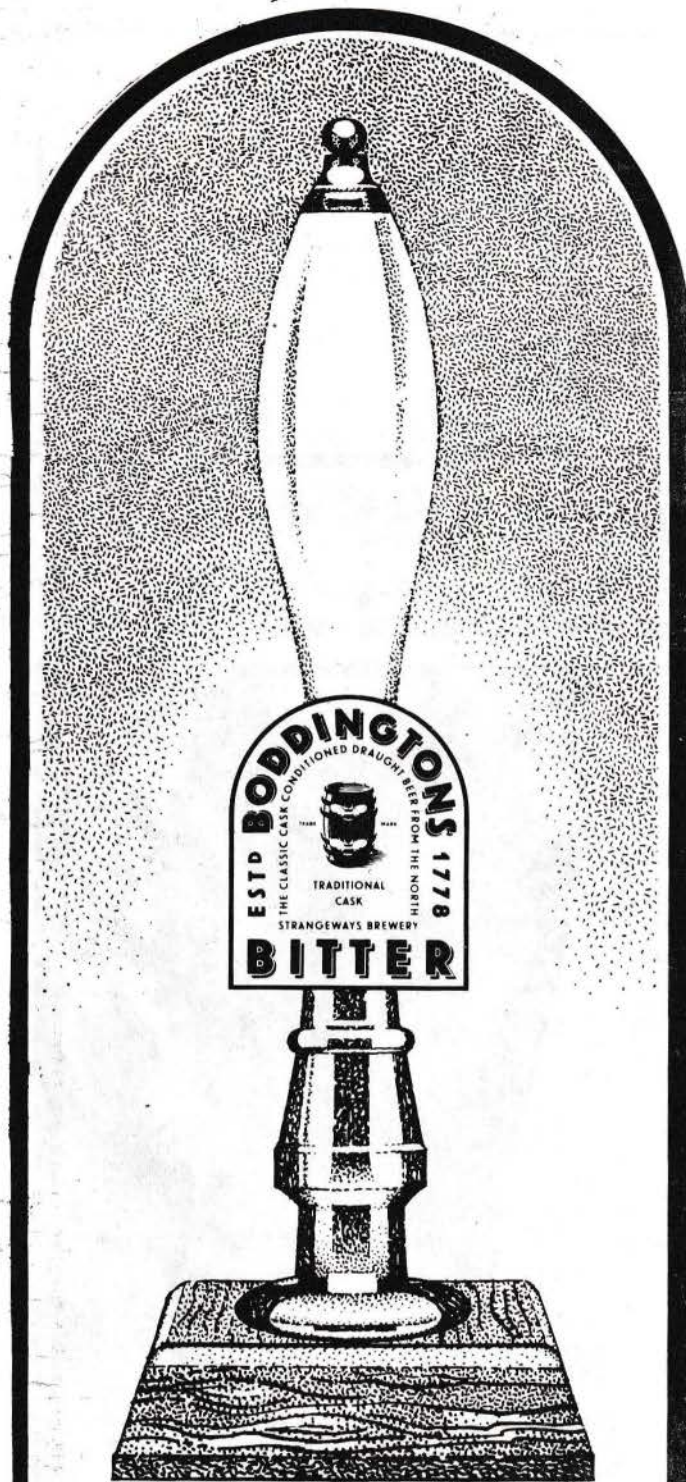
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JUNE
1992

Pub of the Month

This month we feature the Rising Sun in Bredbury which stands adjacent to the railway station. This end of terrace pub is one of the older public houses in the area. Butterworth's 'History of Stockport' of 1827 for example makes mention of the pub which was then kept by a Charles Oldham.

Like many other pubs, the Rising Sun then used to brew its own beer. Ogdens 'History of Stockport Breweries' (Richardsons 1987) notes the existence of a brewhouse, stable and gardens in 1841. Incidentally, the pub was then still occupied by the same Charles Oldham.

The present landlord, James Booth, has been in residence since the early 1980's and during this time the pub has become a thriving and welcoming local which attracts a good mixture of age groups.

The small, low-ceilinged rooms provide a comfortable and intimate atmosphere and they are complemented by a good games room at the back.

The Rising Sun was amongst the first pubs in the area to take in Holts bitter as a 'guest' beer. A decision which clearly has paid off. Recently John Smith bitter has been added to the range and early reports seem to be favourable. Wilsons mild and Websters Yorkshire bitter are also on offer. All beers are dispensed by handpump.

Food is available at lunchtimes, no culinary surprises but good basic pub fare at affordable prices.

There is a large, well lit British Rail car park at the back of the pub, public transport to and from Stockport is good, bus stops are within yards of the pub. (The last 330 bus leaves for Stockport at approx 23.25 p.m.)

All in all, the Rising Sun is one of the better pubs in the Bredbury, Woodley and Romiley area. Well worth a visit. FACTS: Stockport Road East; Telephone 430-4326; Open 11.30-3.00 5.30-11.00 Mon-Sat. Normal Sunday hours. PRICES: John Smith Bitter £1.12, Holts Bitter £1.02, Yorkshire Bitter £1.15, Wilsons Mild £1.10. N.B. Price lists are very clearly displayed, a nice change from some other pubs.

Simmondley Beer Fest

Connoisseurs of obscure beer festivals (of which last year's at Bigrig in the depths of the Lake District must be a classic example) will soon be able to enjoy something a little closer to home as Saturday and Sunday, 20th and 21st June, sees the Hare & Hounds at Simmondley Village, near Glossop, host another "International Beer Festival".

The star of this year's show will be "Kostrizer Schwartz Bier", never before available in the UK and imported specially for the event by licensee Don Grundy. In addition Belgian brewery Corsendonk will be providing the "largest" bottle of beer in the world which will be raffled to raise funds for Guide Dogs for the Blind.

10 cask beers will be on sale and these will include Ringwood's Old Thumper, a former Champion Beer of Britain. An all day barbecue will provide solid refreshment and special festival glasses will also be available. Definitely a date for the diary.

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HIGH PEAK & NORTH EAST CHESHIRE



The Squirrels at Chinley is now regularly stocking traditional draught cider. First to go on was ever-popular prizewinner Wilkins of Mudgeley, Somerset, but a changing range can be expected - is it too much to hope for a draught perry, at least occasionally?

The Duke of York in Romiley is selling keg Scrumpy Jack Cider on fake handpump. At a time when removals of this fakery have started to outnumber installations, leading to a near future when the Scrumpy Jack "handpump" will serve chiefly as a useful warning of a lazy or uncaring licensee, it's sad to see an otherwise good pub such as this participating in the deception. We look for an early end to this practice.

Boddington PubCo's Spread Eagle in Romiley has added Marstons Pedigree to its range.

Once again an attempt to serve "Hartleys" XB in Stockport has come to nought. The latest enterprising pub to take it was the Pineapple in Marple but following poor sales it has been removed from sale.

The Sportsmans in Strines, at present tied to the Courage/Wilsons/Websters range (but always with an interesting guest beer as well), is due to go completely free of the tie in October.

Over in Hadfield we hear that the Anchor is yet another of the recent pub purchase by Vaux. No details yet of the beers available following the change-over.

Hydes have purchased the Jolly Hatters in Denton. This is in fact next door but one to their other Denton outlet, the Red Lion on Stockport Road.

Railway Back on Track ?

When the next issue of *Opening Times* comes off the press, the 'Railway' in Woodley should have changed hands from Bass to Robinsons.

A handpump has appeared in the lounge, presumably in anticipation of the arrival of Robinsons' beers.

Although this will be a welcome real ale gain for the area, it seems a shame, nevertheless, that this pub could not have gone to one of the other Manchester Independents, since Robinsons already have a dominating presence in the area. Lees, for example, could have had a ready replacement for the doomed Traveller's Call in Bredbury.

Although the 'Railway' is in obvious need of repair and redecoration it is to be hoped that Robinsons will treat the interior in a sympathetic way. The vault especially is worth preserving.

Watch this space for developments.

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Nice Beer - Shame About the Pubs !

"Nice Beer, shame about the pubs". That is becoming the increasing refrain as far as local brewers Joseph Holts are concerned.

Whilst no-one can criticise Holts for the quality of their mild and bitter beers, nor indeed their pricing policy whereby the price of a pint can still be under 90p, even in their most plushly refurbished pubs, it is those very refurbishments that are giving widespread cause for concern.

The fate of the Seven Stars in Ardwick, whereby an excellent local was largely destroyed for the sake of an ill-thought out and poorly used extension, has been well-documented in these pages. It isn't just the Seven Stars that has been spoilt, though, and neither is the concern restricted to CAMRA. The Victorian Society, an eminent national conservation body has written to the brewery pointing out that local members have noticed "with concern" work that "runs the risk of destroying or compromising (your pubs) Victorian character." Apart from the Seven Stars, other examples quoted include:

Roebuck, Flixton - "Modernisation here has involved the gutting of a multi-room pub which had some interesting features; the front has been sandblasted and there is bright outdoor lighting"

Coach & Horses, Astley - "Removal of a corridor wall has opened out two rooms and destroyed some original wall tiling"

Church, Whitefield - "This was a small, intimate little pub that has now had walls removed in a most insensitive manner."

It is of course true that, apart from rare examples, pubs cannot be treated like museum exhibits and some, sensitive alterations are sometimes needed.



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The Victoria Society point to good work on pubs like the Leigh Arms in Sale Moor and suggest that this work "makes it the more regrettable - and puzzling - that in other instances there has been unsympathetic handling of buildings of character."

The response of Holts to all of this has been petulant and banal. As usual they have trotted out their team of French Polishers, this time to be photographed for the Evening News, no less - which of course conveniently misses the point that it's all very well having a nice glass and mahogany bar, but that it is the structural work that is the main area of concern. In addition, brewery spokesman has been refuting his head off and has even gone so far as to suggest that Holts customers laugh at such criticisms - perhaps he ought to speak to some of his brewery colleagues before sounding off in future; certainly one source at the brewery has expressed mystification at some of the work being carried out.

When the company do reply to correspondence on the subject, they tend to be evasive and make no mention of their policy towards messing about with the Victorian and Edwardian buildings which is the main issue here. As "What's Doing", the CAMRA paper for North Manchester points out: "the buggers need watching!"

But Praise Where Praise is Due...

Joseph Holts have come in for a fair amount of criticism recently from both CAMRA and the Victorian Society, writes Jim Bracken, regarding some of their pub alterations. Rightly so, in my opinion, in the case of the Roebuck, Umston and the Church, Whitefield.

However, I do feel they deserve praise for the work that has been done to the Griffin, Heaton Mersey. Because this is such a popular pub (often it is just too full), it had to be extended. The new extension has been tastefully done, both exterior and interior, where, presumably at great expense, the new bar in the extension has been built to match the existing curved mahogany bar and its glass screens. Moreover, the original part of the pub has been virtually unaltered structurally, thus retaining the character and ambience for which the pub is famous. It also remains mercifully juke box and "muzak" free.

Holts also seem to do well with their newly built pubs. Whilst they may be "samey" they do work as pubs. All are at least two-room pubs with a vault being one of the rooms. Whilst the interior decor may not be all that it could, it is plain and comfortable which is really all that is needed, and certainly avoids the "bric-a-brac"-isation which seems to inflict so many new pubs these days. Facilities for the disabled are also usually provided which is another major plus point. A good example is the Sidings in Levenshulme which was highly commended in the New Pub category in CAMRA's Pub and Design Awards. (The Griffin was in fact about to officially re-open as we went to press - look for a full report next month - ed.)

MANCHESTER MATTERS

by Rhys Jones

One could be more enthusiastic about the two pubs on the A6 that have returned to the real ale fold if their handpumps dispensed anything more exciting than Websters Bitter. For the record, they are Fiddlers Green in Levenshulme and the Crown in Longsight. The Crown is reputed to have good Irish music sessions at weekends - you could always drink Guinness. There's better news in Ardwick where that splendid little pub the Union is now run by Burtonwood, with mild and bitter on handpump. Round the corner, the Stage is once again closed, and boarded up this time; regular readers will be aware that it sold real ale for only a brief part of its 3-year life.

The influx of Courage Directors into the former Wilsons pubs continues - it's on handpump at the Ducie Bridge in the City Centre (where it replaces Websters Choice) and the Vale Cottage in Gorton. It will be interesting to see how what is one of the better of the national brewer's beers fares in a region which has traditionally been slow to take to premium-strength bitters. Staying in Gorton, the Vulcan now has handpumped Boddingtons Bitter.

The Imperial in the City Centre, mentioned here last month, is still closed and is understood to be in the hands of the Central Manchester Development Corporation. That body has produced no firm plans for the area and is approaching its own dissolution - a sad case of planning blight at the hands of a body ostensibly charged with the task of reviving the area.

Finally, a word on the Marble Arch empire. It's hoped that the recent change in management - not ownership - at the City Centre pub will reverse what had become a marked decline in standards, while a recent sighting of the Chorlton-cum-Hardy "World Beers" off-licence off-shoot found Marstons Pedigree, Oak Wobbly Bob, and Biddenden Cider on draught. (Many readers will also wish to know of the separately owned home-brew shop three doors along.)

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editor: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ 477 1973 (home) 831 7222 x 3411 (wk). News, articles and letters welcome. All items © CAMRA: may be reproduced if source acknowledged.

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'Why doesn't somebody try Magnet, probably the best beer from John Smiths Tadcaster Brewery?' we asked last month. Well, they have - at the Conway in Cheadle Hulme this tasty premium beer and its stablemate John Smiths Bitter went on sale last month.

The Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport is also installing John Smiths Bitter as an additional guest beer - Cains Bitter remains on sale and continues to sell well.

Yet another pub has replaced Boddingtons Bitter as its guest beer. The Crown on Stockport's Hillgate has taken out the Strangeways brew and replaced it with Banks's Bitter. Wilsons Bitter has also gone to be replaced by Websters.

At the Parrswood in East Didsbury, John Smiths Bitter has replaced former guest beer Cains Bitter. The range at this pub is now Boddies Mild and Bitter, Theakstons Best Bitter and John Smiths Bitter, the latter retailing at £1.16 a pint. The Parrswood is now featuring Jazz every Tuesday night.

We welcome new licensees Austin and Loretta Flood to the Railway, Wellington Road North, Stockport who arrive from the Pack Horse in Openshaw. Austin has introduced cask mild into the pub and is very pleased with sales so far. The pub is now open all day and food is available from 12-2pm.

More Real Ale in clubs to report. At Owens Park University residential complex in Fallowfield, the conference centre and function venue has Flowers Original, Ind Coope Burton Ale, Tetley Bitter and Courage Directors all on handpump. Unfortunately the glass is slightly taken off by the fifth product on handpump - yes, you guessed - Scrumpy Jack keg cider.

The Gardeners Arms in Offerton recently tried Innkeepers Special Reserve as a guest beer and Burton ale has also been tried. No news of any current guest though.

Harry Curran at the Romper, Ringway, is going to take full advantage of the Boddington PubCo's new guest beer scheme. This will add a third guest beer to his range. The two current guests, Draught Bass and Theakstons Bitter will remain, the newcomer will be changed at frequent intervals.

As we went to press two of Stockport's freehouses were featuring real cider. Both the Stanley Arms and Ye Olde Vic had pycasks of the real thing behind the bar.

At the Seven Stars on Ashton Old Road (Holts) we welcome new licensee John Bacon. Early indications are that the house's high standards of service, friendliness, and beer are being well maintained.

It's rumoured that Holts have bought two pubs in Macclesfield from Allied Breweries - the Queens on Waters Green and the Three Crowns on Mill Lane, the main road to Leek. It seems final transfer may not take place until late this year - could this be to do with the national breweries' disposal timetable under the Governments Beer Orders?

The Boddington PubCo's guest beer scheme continues to make ground. The new licensee of the George & Dragon, Heaton Chapel, Dave Richardson, tells us that he is currently featuring a guest beer every Friday night. The beer goes on sale between 6 and 8pm and usually sells out that night. Currently only the one barrel (9- or 18-gallon) is purchased but hopefully if the success continues we might see the scheme extended to other days in the week. Beers featured so far have included Jennings Snecklifter, Brains SA, Wells Bombadier, Eldridge Pope Royal Oak and Taylors Landlord. All retail at a standard price of £1.35 a pint so there are some bargains to be had. Dave is also hoping to run a mini beer festival later in July - more news on this next month.

The Ladybrook, Bramhall is now in the 'Cask Ale Club' and guest beers are appearing on a regular basis. During one week, Ind Coope Burton ale and Cains Formidable Ale were both available. The Burton was very drinkable, but the Formidable ran out on Tuesday night. With a very strong Boddingtons following, it may take some time to persuade the regulars to forego their regular tipple.

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