

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING TIMES

CAMRA
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AUGUST 1994

Arthur's Back!



Last month saw the triumphant re-opening of the Royal Oak in Didsbury, fully restored after the devastating fire at the end of May.

Marstons have done a first class job in restoring the pub to its former glory. Indeed, as one regular put it 'it just looks as though it's been decorated'. Even the flock wallpaper is back - probably the first time that's been used in a brewery restoration job for about 20 years. Whilst much of the old theatrical memorabilia has been destroyed, many of the other old artefacts are back, as good as new, including the impressive collection of pottery spirit barrels which seems to have escaped the blaze largely unscathed. Licensee Arthur Gosling tells us that more is on the way following restoration.

And that of course brings us to the final piece in the jigsaw, Arthur himself. Shortly after the fire he was very dispirited and even wondering whether he would be able to continue. Happily he is once again ensconced behind the bar as ebullient as ever. "It's been phenomenal", he told Opening Times "better than our wildest expectations". Certainly regular Didsburywatchers report that since re-opening the pub has been busier than ever, if that is at all possible.

Congratulations are due all round - we look forward to seeing Arthur at the Royal Oak for many years to come.

Good News at The Romper

Good news too, at the Romper, where the future of the pub was threatened by a drop in trade caused by the erection of a security gate at the cargo terminal, cutting off much of the pub's custom. The airport authorities have now agreed to the installation of a smaller personnel gate in the security gate, albeit on a trial basis. Licensee Harry Curran is naturally delighted. Not only that, but the cost of the gate will be met, not by him but by the Boddington PubCo, bless 'em.

THEN & NOW



Readers will remember the devastation shown in June's Opening Times. Happily as can be seen from these pictures, normality is now restored!



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PUB of the Month August

The Britannia, Beswick

The landscape of the Bradford and Beswick area of East Manchester is changing daily. While the gleaming new velodrome presents a hopeful image of renewal, the disappearing factories display the negative side of change, while all too often the only thing seemingly being renewed is the red netting protecting the sprawling roadworks.

Amidst the chaos stands the Britannia on Rowsley Street, a beacon of stability. You might expect a pub in such surroundings to be haemorrhaging trade by the week, but not the Brit. The cosiness of the two small rooms, and the excellence of the Lees draught beers, ensure that the pub remains popular with customers who willingly pass other pubs to spend an evening here. No genteel haven, this is a pub where strangers are expected to hold their own with the banter and respected for doing so - all part of its character as a great old-fashioned Manchester working-class pub.

This is the third time the Britannia has received the Pub of the Month award, and we present it this time to licensees Tony and Pauline Griffin, who, assisted by their friendly and helpful staff, have played the key role in maintaining the Brit's vibrant success when so many local pubs struggle.

Join then, their regulars and CAMRA for a great evening out on presentation night Thursday 25th August. The presentation itself is likely to take place around 9.30pm, but get there early for a seat - it's only a small pub!

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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison **AUGUST '89**

"Short measure from Lord Young" was the front page headline, and it referred to his humiliating climbdown from his originally stated intention that he was "minded" to implement in full the Monopolies and Mergers Commission report on the brewing industry. One recommendation had been to limit the brewers estates to 2,000 pubs, but this was watered down to "half the pubs owned over 2,000 to be leased as free houses" - this would affect some 11,000 pubs. There was to be no action on local monopolies, takeovers, or the sliding scale of duty aimed at helping new small brewers. Although being generally unhappy with the outcome of the report, CAMRA thought it would bring about three improvements - more choice for the consumer, more opportunity for small brewers, and a little less power for the giants.

Somewhat ironically, in view of recent events, Pub Grub featured the Royal Oak in Didsbury, and there were extremely favourable comments on the wide variety of cheese available, the value for money aspect, and landlord Arthur Gosling running a tight ship behind the bar. (The Royal Oak is happily now restored and re-opened and busier than ever - see other articles in this issue.)

There was news of major alterations planned at Holt's Seven Stars on Ashton Old Road, including expansion into the shops next door owned by the brewery. Hopes were expressed that the wealth of etched glass, mahogany and tilework would be incorporated into the new design.

CAMRA members had carried out a random survey to investigate the problems associated with different types of dispense and glass sizes, which affected the size of the "pint" served. Alastair Walker discussed the results of the survey, which he summarised as follows:-

"If your local uses electrically metered pumps you are almost certain to get a full pint every time. If your pub uses handpumps and brim measure glasses you stand a 1 in 10 chance of getting a "pint" more than a quarter of an inch under measure, and a 1 in 40 chance of getting one more than half an inch under." It was thought that North Western drinkers were getting a better deal than suggested in the regional and national press.

A final item, headed NOT GUILTY - Guinness had written to Brendan Dobbin at the King's Arms, Chorlton-on-Medlock, accusing him of passing off his own Guiltless Stout as their product, and demanding that he should withdraw the name. Brendan politely told them to get lost.

IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW...

This month we lead with some good news for a change. The restoration of Didsbury's Royal Oak is a tribute to both the determination of licensee Arthur Gosling and also brewers Marstons. Arthur must have been very tempted to take early retirement after the devastating fire, and indeed made comments to that effect in its aftermath. Marstons, who we believe would dearly like to put a manager in the pub, may perhaps have been tempted to encourage him in this respect. The fact that this evidently didn't happen shows commendable restraint on their part. The likes of Innpreneur would have acted very differently, we fear.

The pub itself largely looks as though it has just been redecorated, but even then the flock wallpaper is just as before although due to the destruction of Arthur's collection of theatrical memorabilia rather more is visible than was previously the case! When we are continually being bombarded by surveys and pundits predicting the end of the traditional British pub it is heartwarming to see such a staunchly traditional local as the Royal Oak once again rise from the ashes.

Good news too at the airport where the threat to the trade of the Romper appears to have been resolved. Still on the horizon, though, is the longer term threat posed by the airport's expansion plans. That is a battle still to be fought.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The new wave of micro-brewers shows no sign of receding - this month we report on three new ventures. The question has to be asked, though, whether the market is reaching saturation point for this type of operation. The 1st micro-boom in the early eighties was followed by the disappearance of something like two-thirds of those ventures that had started up. While it is too early to make such predictions this time round, the cessation of Atlas at Preston and Lions Original Ales at Blackburn, together with the change of direction mooted by West Coast may be straws in the wind.

Certainly, I think to succeed now a new brewer will either need to have at least one tied house or perhaps be located in a rural area where there is less competition and the prospect of a locally brewed ale is attractive to the local free trade. Luckily the three ventures we report on this month all fall into those categories and we wish them well.

John Clarke

Copy Deadline for Next Issue - 24 August

Tom Thumb's

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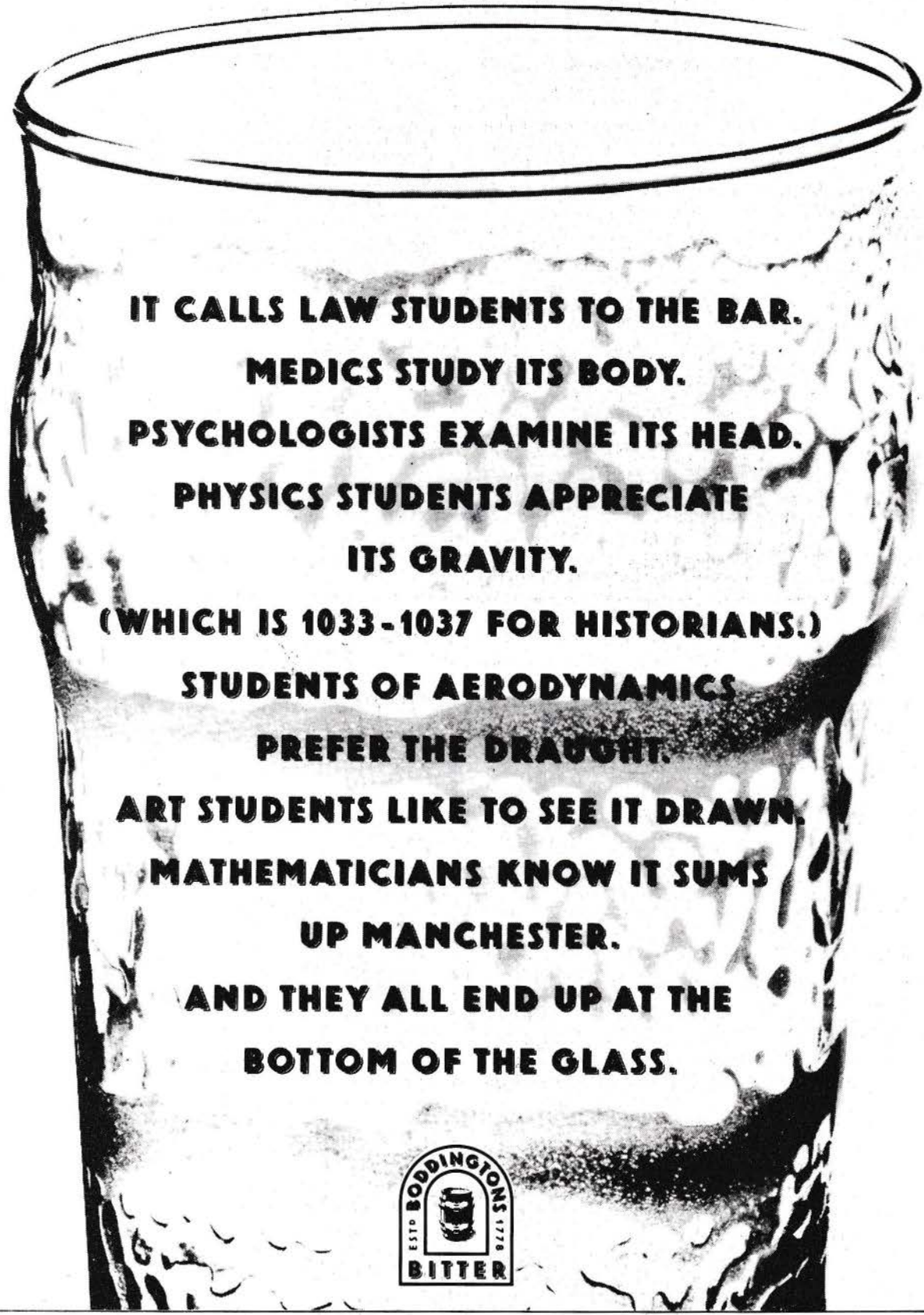
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The Hinds Head

Many of Opening Times older readers may remember the Poco Poco night club in Heaton Chapel - a cabaret club which is fondly remembered as it used to entertain us with such giants in the music business as Black Lace, Agadoo etc. This type of entertainment from the 70's has since dropped in popularity and subsequently the Poco Poco club entered a terminal decline, finally being demolished a few years ago. Now in its place stands the Hinds Head - a pub where popular licensee Alan Preston is currently involved in a long-running dispute with brewing giants Whitbread over his livelihood.

The Hinds Head is a purpose built country style pub and restaurant and as such it is pleasant place to eat and drink. It comes complete with a glass conservatory dining area extension with cane/bamboo tables and chairs and ornate Austrian blinds. To my mind the blinds are a little overdone and the cane seating arrangements quite impractical. Not only are the tables too small, but you cant get your legs underneath because of the wide base, consequently you have to sit some way from the edge of the table and eat with your arms out stretched. It is asking too much of fate for food not to drop into the cavernous gap that is created between the diners stomach and the edge of the table. It soon became obvious which diners had eaten at the Hinds Head before, as they quite sensibly elected to sit in the adjoining part of the restaurant which has much more practical seating arrangements.

The lounge may only be one room but it is split into discrete drinking areas and the restaurant is not unduly obtrusive to people not eating. On this occasion I was joined by three friends and unusually for a pub grub article, we had decided to make this an evening meal. We had all deliberately eaten little earlier in the day in order to enjoy our meal to the full.

To wet our appetite we first had a drink at the bar. The real ales on sale included Chesters Mild (£1-30), Chesters Bitter (£1-34), Castle Eden (£1-48), Marstons Pedigree (£1-59), and today's guest beer, Fullers Chiswick Bitter. During the course of the meal we tried all of the last three beers and each was found to be in good condition.

The menu at the Hinds Head is extensive. It is so extensive that I can only mention a few of the dishes in the space available here. Starters begin at £1-25 for Chefs Soup of the Day, with other starters including Breaded Mushrooms (£1-95), Tiger Prawns (£3-50), and Frogs Legs (£3-65). The main courses include a daily specials board which listed Beef & Tomato Soup, Deviled Kidney and Chilli Con Carne. There are also choices of fish dishes including Breaded Haddock (£4-95) and Seafood Platter (£5-75), meat dishes including Barnsley Chop (£5-50) and Lamb Cutlets (£5-30), and steaks including Serloin (£7-95) and T-Bone (£8-95). In addition there are speciality vegetarian dishes at £4-75 and other lighter meals such as salads and platters (from £2-95) and various sandwiches, toasties and burgers.

For those with young children there is a special childrens menu, details of which are available on request. As you would expect with such a comprehensive menu choice there are also sweets available (from £1-75), and for those that still have room, a selection of cheeses from the cheese board (£2-25).



We decided to try starters with two of the group opting for breaded mushrooms, another potato skins, and I chose soup of the day, a thick tomato and beef soup. The potato skins (a type of thin chips) and the breaded mushrooms came with mint and garlic dips. We all agreed, the starters were excellent.

The arrival of the main meal posed a problem for the waitress. How do you fit four meals with all the plates, drinks, and side dishes etc on such a tiny table? Somehow with unrivaled dexterity she managed to do it. You couldnt of course then move anything on the table without picking something else up first, but we managed to live with this without too much undue inconvenience.

For main courses we chose Royal Lemon Sole (£5-75), Steak and Kidney Pie (£4-25), Deviled Kidney in a paprika sauce, and a Ploughmans which included both Stilton & Cheddar (or Cheshire) cheeses (£3-25). The first three dishes came with a selection of vegetables, new potatoes, and salad. At this point we began to wonder if it had been wise to opt for a starter as the helpings were enormous and it would be a challenge to finish our meals. With little difficulty we soon reached a unanimous verdict, the food was well presented, good quality and well cooked. The helpings were generous and represented good value for money.

In April of this year, the Hinds Head was deservedly given the CAMRA Pub of the Month award in part because of its excellent quality beers. What was not considered at the time was the quality of the pubs cuisine and if my recent visit is anything to go by this is also excellent. Definitely worth a try if you like well prepared good food.

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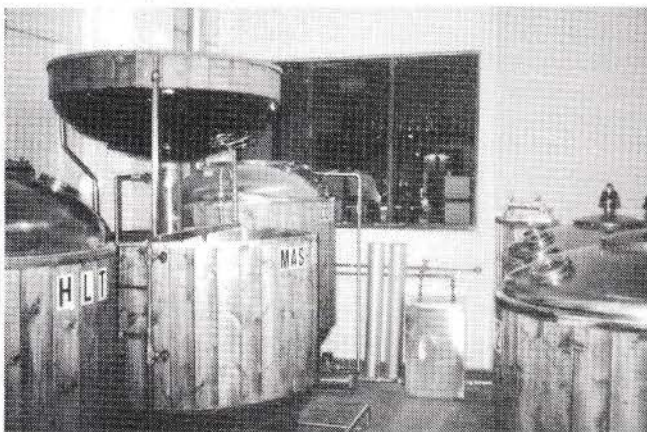


Well, Failsworth to be exact. A couple of years ago Dave McConville, owner of the Strawberry Duck in Clayton bought the closed Failsworth Arms on Ashton Road West with the idea of eventually installing a brewery on the site, as reported in Opening Times at the time.

Initially the pub was a cavernous place, too open and very 'unpublike'. All that has changed now, the whole pub has undergone a vast transformation. It is now the Millgate and has two well appointed rooms (large split level lounge and smaller vault), a restaurant (The Old Wharf) at the rear which offers reasonably priced meals, a conservatory-cum-family room and a safe enclosed play area for the kids. The beer range consists of Holts Mild and Bitter plus Boddies Bitter and this month they will be joined by an in-house brew - 'Willy Booth's Bumper of Stingo', brewed right there on the premises. The odd name for the beer (although anything outrageous goes these days) originated from a poem of 1854 by local Newton Heath writer Elijah Ridings.

The brewery was installed by Brewcare of Bromsgrove and can be seen behind the bar in the lounge. When Opening Times called Dave was waiting for Brewcare to return to give him a few brewing lessons and he is hoping that his new beer, at 4% ABV, will be on stream later this month. He hasn't decided on the precise formulation yet although he will be aiming for consistency. Once he is into his stride the one house beer may be complemented by the occasional special brew.

The pub itself is already a roaring success with licensee James MacCormick and wife Sue rushed off their feet. A license to serve food all day Sundays has just been gained and meals are also served every lunchtime and evening. Apart from the introduction of the house beer a function suite is also about to open. It seems a recipe for success, let's hope it goes well. More news on the beer itself when we have it.



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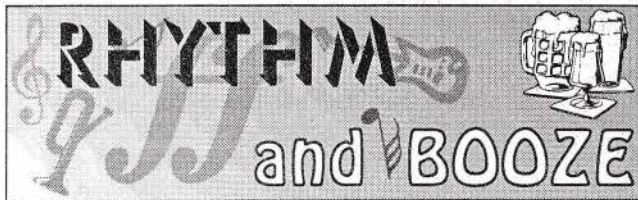
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TRADE ENQUIRIES WELCOME

OPENING TIMES AUGUST 1994

RHYTHM and BOOZE



by Richard Hough

Thursday nights are Swinging nights in Manchester, and nowhere is this more true than at the Swinging Sporran. There's pool, pinnie and the infamous juke box downstairs, while upstairs plays host to the Banshee Alternative Disco (that's BAD). This is the one your parents warned you about: a dodgy darkened room, flashing lights, and weird people having a good time with that awful modern music being played far too loud. And if parents disapprove, it's gonna be GOOD.

The Sporran is home to arguably the finest Theakstons beers in the whole of Manchester, thanks mainly to the hard work and commitment of Cliff the landlord, who is doing a terrific job in the face of overwhelming adversity from both Scottish & Newcastle and UMIST; Best Bitter, XB and Old Peculier grace the bar. Upstairs there is no Old Pec. but this is more than compensated for by the great music.

There's stuff to jump around to - "Crash" from the Primitives, "She Bangs" from the Stone Roses. Stuff to shake your head to - Jane's Addiction or "The Power of the Lord" from Lard (an incredibly long song that gives the DJ chance to go to the bar). Stuff to wave your arms about to - New Model Army, Levellers. Stuff to pogo to - the Lurkers, the Jolt or "New Rose" from the Damned (the first ever punk single from way back in '76). 'New Wave' tunes from Blondie, Adam and the Ants or the Jam. The odd one from old stagers Iggy Pop (and the Stooges) or the Stones. And other stuff like the Sugarcubes, Specials or Senser. [You are at an advantage if your band starts with 'S' it appears].

The whole thing is held together by DJ Fred who has done the Alternative Disco at the Sporran since March this year. Prior to that he did the Friday 80's night at the Banshee for a while (remember that?). He says he has always been a compulsive record collector and has accumulated 'a moderately huge collection over the years.' At home he listens to all sorts of stuff, and not necessarily the stuff he plays as a DJ; for instance he cites the old acoustic numbers from Roy Harper, Neil Young and Al Stewart etc. Jethro Tull are his music gods, and Chumbawamba his gig of the year.

The dancefloor is rarely empty; if Fred's got it, and you request it, he'll play it. It is free to get in, and has a late license until 2am. And therefore it is a must for anyone who enjoys a late-night drink, and good tunes. Real music for real people in a great pub with good beer. All four do still exist! And nowhere is this more so than at the Swinging Sporran on Thursday nights. Kicking.

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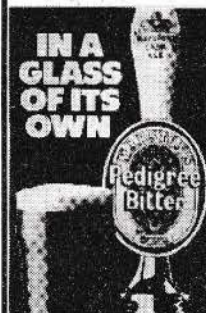
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CURMUDGEON



July's "Opening Times" reported the opening of O'Sheas in Manchester City Centre as part of a growing trend towards Irish theme pubs across the country. Without doubt, there's much to be said for the Irish pub on its home territory - the excellent Guinness, Murphy's and Beamish, the genuine, welcoming hospitality, the widespread and often superb traditional music and the indefinable quality of the "crack".

But Irish pubs have their downside too. The standard of food and the general attitude to serving meals is at least twenty years behind England. If you want a half, you are likely to be charged well over half the price of a pint, and that's dear enough already. And the lack of enterprise shown towards the range of beers on offer is lamentable. Real ale is unknown, and across the whole of the Irish Republic, it's difficult to find any ale-type beer other than Smithwick's, a sweet, gassy keg about on a par with Red Barrel. What little imagination there is seems to be expended on offering a choice of different standard lagers. Hopefully these aspects of the Irish pub will not be taken up by their emulators on this side of the Irish Sea.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Does your local suffer from the phenomenon of "pillocks at the bar"? Personally, I've never really understood the attractions of "perpendicular drinking" in pubs - I much prefer to enjoy my pint sitting down - but I recognise that some people do like to stand up at the bar. However, all too often they display a total lack of consideration for other customers, blocking narrow passages and hatchways, refusing to let people get through to the counter to be served, and reacting rudely if politely asked to make way. They can just as easily be Hooray Henries as shaven-headed yobbos, but is there something in the nature of stand-up drinking which breeds ignorance and offensiveness? I'm certainly convinced that encouraging more customers to sit down is a good way of improving the atmosphere in pubs, and reducing the chance of trouble.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Talking of trouble, what are bouncers, sorry, "doormen", supposed to be for? To stop trouble, you may imagine. Yet what conclusion do you come to if you see a doorman outside a pub? That's right, this is a pub where there's likely to be trouble. If you run your pub along proper, traditional lines, to appeal to a mixed clientele of all age groups, there's no need for doormen except maybe in a handful of city centre "clubland" locations on Friday and Saturday nights, and even that's arguable. All too often, the presence of a doorman is a sign of poor management, and inappropriate targeting at a volatile youth market.

Exhibition Hits Town

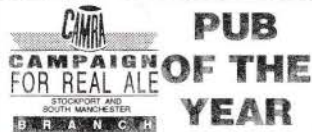
As we reported a couple of months ago, Scottish and Newcastle have once again introduced a cask conditioned version of their flagship north-east beer, Newcastle Exhibition. So far it has mainly been available on its home ground but on 18th July it was launched in the north-west.

The beer is brewed solely at the Tyne brewery in Newcastle and is a typically malty and full-bodied north-eastern beer. It will therefore be interesting to see how it fares in this area which has a tradition of lighter, hoppier beers. It is being marketed as a premium product (4.3%ABV) and will retail at around £1.30 - £1.40. Seventy-five pubs and clubs in the region will be taking the beer initially and these have been selected on the basis of their ability to keep and serve beer in tip-top condition. Local outlets will include the Woolpack in Stockport and the Beerhouse in Manchester.

A number of CAMRA officials were in fact invited to a launch on 21st July, (your editor amongst them) when it must be said the beer was indeed impressive. As was the hospitality, spoilt only by the company's parting gift to the assembled throng - a four-pack of 'Draught Exhibition', you guessed, in a can!

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Drinking Al Fresco - in Stockport?

Given that the Manchester area at times has more rainfall than the average Brazilian rain forest it is perhaps not surprising that outdoor drinking is not particularly well catered for.

Fortunately, however, there are some notable exceptions. The Nursery on Green Lane, Heaton Norris, a regular in the Good Beer Guide, has a bowling green at the back of the pub, (a rarity these days.) There are plenty of benches and tables around the green, no traffic noise or fumes and it is an excellent place to enjoy the afternoon sun (and a pint of Hydres!)

The Griffin on Didsbury Road, Heaton Mersey, also a Good Beer Guide regular has a large garden behind the pub which is fully enclosed by walls and a hedge making it a safe place for children to run around. Look out for the hop growing wild in the hedge. Unfortunately, the bench at the front of the pub has gone, I used to enjoy sitting there with a foaming pint of Holts bitter while red-faced motorists rushed up and down Didsbury Road.

Still in the Heaton, the Hinds Head, Heaton Chapel, a fairly new pub which won an award for its architectural enhancement of the area, is surrounded by well kept and well laid out gardens. Although more open than the first two gardens it is still a very pleasant place for a summer-time pint.

The Strawberry Gardens, Offerton, a very old building dating from around 1620 has a huge garden behind the pub with plenty of trees and shrubs. On my last visit I'm sure I saw a children's slide in the form of a Pink Elephant....I think.

At Great Moor on Buxton Road (A6) is the Crown, a Robinsons house. This is one of Stockport's bigger pubs, with pleasant gardens at the rear of the pub and also a bowling green. Barbecues are held here occasionally.

The Old Mill, Mill Lane, Adswold is off Ladybridge Road behind the garden centre. The pub only opened in 1987 but careful use of recycled materials has produced a pub which looks like a conversion of a real old mill. Tetley, Burton, Jennings and guest beers are available here and the pub has regular beer festivals. All these different beers can be consumed in the extensive gardens in an almost rural location by Ladybrook stream.

The Midway on Newbridge Lane by the River Goyt sells John Smiths and Courage Directors which may be drunk in the pleasant though small garden at the front of the pub. Although only a short walk from Stockport Town Centre the

Midway always feels to me like a country pub surrounded by trees and grassy areas with Woodbank Park nearby. Also worth noting is the small terrace at the rear of the pub overlooking the river. I even saw a couple of ducks there once!

I mentioned benches earlier, a couple worth noting are the one at the front of the Woolpack, Brinksway and at the Crown, Heaton Lane. An amazing array of unusual beers are on tap at these two excellent pubs and what better way to sample them than sitting in the sunshine watching the rest of the world go by?

Next month I'll take a look at Manchester.

Pete Soane

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STAGGER

with Peter Edwardson

Pickled Eggs, Hammond Organs and Malt Whisky: The Heaton Norris Stagger.

An unseasonably cold May evening saw a group of CAMRA members gather for an exploration of Heaton Norris, an area which, considering how close it is to the centre of Stockport, is surprisingly off the pub-crawling beaten track.

Our first call was the **Bridge Inn** on Georges Road. Outwardly a striking white-tiled 1930's building, inside it's a surprisingly small pub which has been opened out a little over the years, but still retains a traditional feel. After queuing behind customers for pies and pickled eggs we were served with hand-pumped Robinsons Best Mild and Best Bitter, both of which were above average but not quite reaching good. We had our first sighting of the new pumpclip for the renamed Hatters Mild. The licensees here obviously cultivate an individual, not to say eccentric, atmosphere with some success - evidence of this included the top 40-free vintage jukebox and the copy of the "Fortean Times" behind the bar alongside much ghosthunting literature.

Moving on up the A6 brought us to the **Midland**, nominally a Whitbread pub but serving Boddingtons and Stones bitters, both of which were slightly above average. We were pleased to note that the misleading handpump for Keg Scrumpy Jack cider spotted on a previous visit had now disappeared. This was a decent enough pub, pleasantly

refurbished, with a main bar area and lounge and pool room opening off. A poster advertised "laser karaoke" later that evening - what exactly is "laser karaoke", some of us innocently wondered.

Only a few yards up from the Midland is the **Magnet**, bearing Wilsons signs. This comprises a small vault and an odd three-part lounge broken up by distinctly tacky arches, looking as though it has been extended piecemeal over a period of time. Tonight there was clearly no need for any extension as it was very quiet indeed. A handpump advertised Wilsons Mild, but this wasn't on, leaving the only real ale available as Holts Bitter, the guest beer at a very reasonable £1.06 a pint. Opinions varied on this, some thinking it was pretty good, while others found it lacking the distinctive Holts taste.

On the opposite side of the road is the **Railway**, a Greenalls pub offering handpumped mild and bitter, both above average but served rather too cold. This is a surprisingly big pub inside, comfortable and smartly refurbished, with two lounges and a vault-cum-pool room at the back. A real piano was being played and there was also a genuine Hammond organ to entertain the customers.

Passing Bass' keg-only Hope - a pub with a very impressive exterior incorporating old Hardy's Crown Brewery signs - we turned up Belmont Way to reach Robinson's **Silver Jubilee**, a modern estate-style pub. This was very busy, with more customers than the previous four put together, and gave the impression of being a thriving community local, with a good contingent of pensioners in alongside the youngsters, although the atmosphere was a little smoky for some. Unfortunately, there weren't enough bar staff to cope with the level of trade, and service was slow. We noted trays of free range eggs on sale behind the bar at £1 a dozen, and also two

David & Paula and staff welcome you to

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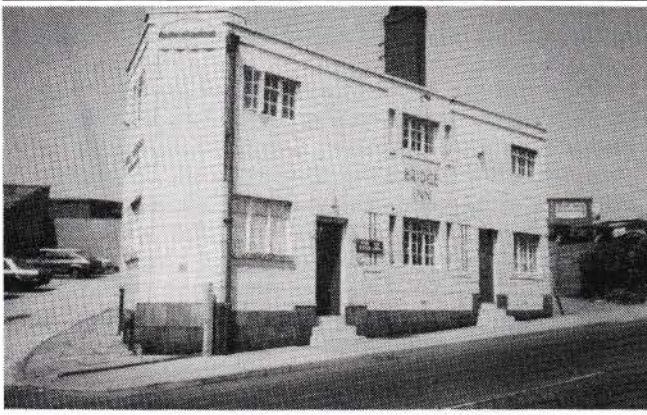
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The Bridge Inn

of the less common malt whiskies on optics - Tamdhu and Highland Park - both signs that this is a pub that tries to offer something a little out of the ordinary. Robinsons Best Mild and Best Bitter were dispensed from electric pumps into oversize glasses (another plus point) - the mild was about average, the bitter rather better.

Next came a descent into Pub Hell in the form of the **Roundhouse**. As the name suggests, this is a round, modern building with a one-bar interior, incorporating several raised seating areas. A loud disco was in progress, accompanied by plenty of flashing lights. There was a Websters Bitter handpump, but a request for this beer produced only the keg version. Some of us tried the Beamish Stout, while others asked for tomato juice - and they didn't even have that. Every other pub we visited had a Stockport Beer Festival poster prominently displayed - we asked the DJ if he could give the event a quick plug, and he replied "What, is it here then?" Somehow I think not.

Reeling from this experience, we tumbled into the **Grey Horse**, to be greeted by the sight of a Youngs Bitter handpump on the bar alongside the Greenalls Bitter. Pints of Youngs were rapidly ordered, and it proved an excellent antidote, being judged between good and very good - maybe the contrast with the last pub affected our judgement, but I'm confident it really was a good beer on good form, and qualified as the best of the night. The pub itself wasn't quite so memorable, but it's a perfectly good two-room street corner local, with some distinctive stained glass panels above the bar.

We then pressed on to the **Grapes**, a Boddingtons pub also offering Robinson's Best Bitter as a guest beer, although the handpump for this was in the vault and not immediately obvious from the lounge. The Robinson's was judged pretty good, slightly better than the Boddingtons Bitter. This was probably the busiest pub of the night and had an excellent, lively atmosphere.

The next three pubs were all affected by the closure for refurbishment of the Lancashire Hill flats and it would probably be unfair to consider our experience to be representative. The **Navigation** is a Wilsons pub, almost totally rebuilt a few years ago, to the extent that it looks like new. The decor is now a little frayed at the edges and the only real ale available was Websters Bitter, which frankly was poor, the worst real ale of the night, and indeed compared unfavourably with the keg Websters in the Roundhouse.

Picking our way through the building site around the flats we descended to the **Nip Inn** on Penny Lane, a huge estate-style pub offering Boddingtons Mild and Bitter, both of which were above average. The lounge was about half-full of customers being entertained by karaoke, but the vault was

completely deserted, and it must be said that this wasn't a pub that gave the impression of being very welcoming to strangers.

Further down Penny Lane where it rejoins Lancashire Hill is the **Nicholsons Arms**, another modern estate-style pub, this time in typical 1970's Robinsons decor. This was very quiet indeed - we didn't try the Mild but the Best Bitter was about average. A positive point was the use of oversize glasses. The pub's one claim to fame is that it was the only Stockport pub included in the first edition of the Good Beer Guide in 1974, the result, we think, of someone making a quick car trip from Manchester and choosing the first Robinson's pub he found. Not that it's a bad pub, but then, just as now, you could do better without going too far.



The Tiviot

Which is precisely what we did, dropping down to the bottom of Lancashire Hill to finish off in the Tiviot in Tiviot Dale. This is one of central Stockport's most overlooked pubs, an excellent traditional Robinson's local which has been opened out a little but retains a multi-roomed layout with a number of distinct areas. Oversize glasses again, and both the Best Mild and the Best Bitter were pretty good.

As always, the opinions expressed in this article purely reflect the experiences of a group of individual CAMRA members on one particular night. And in response to those small-minded critics who have written to "Opening Times" suggesting that these articles should concentrate exclusively on beer quality, I would say that, yes, the beer is important, and it rightly gets pride of place, but beer is only a part of the pub experience. We take pubs as we find them, and I make no apology whatsoever for references to pickled eggs, Hammond organs and malt whisky.

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Germany was once a Land of Ales

by Alastair Hook

So many people seem to be under the impression that Germany is a country where beer is worshipped and the quality and choice is second to none. It is the country where unlike our own the beer drinker is untroubled by the producer led commercial pressures that mean a consumer never gets what he wants but what the brewery wants to sell him. This however is not the case..... all that glitters is not necessarily good beer.

The beer culture is clearly very strong in Germany and it might seem churlish to knock a country that has done so much to maintain the art of brewing in the light of so many national and international commercial pressures. However at times I do so because I tire of the increasing amount of bland insipid German wheat beers that I find wending their way not just to our supermarkets but throughout many areas of the German leisure industry.

Wheat beer you say? A top fermented beer? Surely you should be more concerned about the quality of those luscious bottom fermented lagers? Well, contrary to common opinion, wheat beer represents real German brewing heritage. It is often forgotten that bottom fermented beers are only a phenomenon of the last one hundred years.

Wheat beer represents hundreds of years of brewing art in Germany. It was one of the original Bavaria beers that during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries was the great Bavarian beverage. Its halcyon days that could be compared

with those of the great days of Porter in London during the eighteenth century. The demise of wheat beer, towards the mid nineteenth century, came as a result of the changed preference to the fast improving monastery brewed Brown beers (top fermented beers too!) Only in the last thirty years has this once ubiquitous brew regained a significant market share. The growth from 3% of the market in 1970 to 30% of the market today has meant many of the larger successful Lager brewers have started to flood the market with their own interpretations of wheat beer.

Wheat beer is not lager. It is a top fermented, warm conditioned, bottle conditioned product that is as close to our very own cask conditioned ales in style as Belgian trappist beers. The large breweries in Germany are finding however that they are sustaining the unprecedented growth and profitability of this product by filtering it, chilling it, using bottom fermented yeast to stabilise it, pasteurising it and maintaining its colour as lager like and lager light as possible. In many breweries it is no longer fermented in the distinctive open top fermenters of yesteryear. Sounds like our Keg revolution all over again and that is exactly my point. The quality of wheat beer, I feel, can be seen as a barometer of the German beer culture's well being. Rather similar to the status of cask conditioned ales here at home.

If you are asked what you think of a particular wheat beer look for the positive attributes that you often seek in real ale plus a few of those that are quite specific to the style itself. The character of wheat beer owes as much to the mystical nature of the fermentation process as the thirst quenching qualities imparted by the wheat. The top fermenting yeast generates an array of fruit and spice flavours that give the beer its 'confectionery' appeal. It should have a profusion of



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A History Lesson

by Duncan Geddes

The proliferation of 'free' houses and the availability of many different beers within the Manchester and Stockport area, lead the area to be regarded by many as the real ale mecca of Britain. A well-deserved title which initiated my thinking back to the bad old days (beer wise) of the seventies, and particularly the three years I spent in Manchester as a student from whence my liking for real ale grew.

Even in the seventies, Manchester was regarded as a real ale mecca; and with good reason. Beer was supplied by local independent breweries including Boddingtons, Robinsons, Lees, Hydes etc. along with the nationals including Wilsons, Tetleys, Bass etc.

In 1977, if memory serves me correctly, the local CAMRA branches published details of a city centre stagger featuring beers from ten different breweries, which was pretty good going for the time. The following details may not be exactly correct because this is taken purely from memory, but it is somewhere near the original :-

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Old Garratt, Granby Row | Boddingtons |
| 2. The Rembrandt, Sackville St | Lees |
| 3. Circus Tavern, Portland St | Tetleys |

continued from previous page

esters, vanillas, phenolics (clove-like), confectionery like fruits and in some delicate wheat beers light but fine hop notes can be detected. Look for the raisins and nuts, pepper (lightly smoked) and chocolate, apples and pears....even bananas and peaches. The most lasting effect of the yeast however is the rolling effervescence that generates a fabulous rocky head in the glass. It should be served at cellar temperature, and if it isn't wait a while and the fabulous flavours of this most noble of beers will soon enliven your senses.

Alas, there are few wheat beers that are authentically produced and available on the British market. The products of the Schneider brewery and Hopf brewery to name but a few. However the circulation of these beers is gradually increasing. The return of the cask conditioned ale to the British pub gives hope to the genuine wheat beers because it shows the consumer is waking up and expecting a lot more from the brewer. Long may this trend continue.

Alistair Hook is a free lance beer writer and brewing consultant. He trained and worked in Germany as a brewer and is currently a director of a specialist beer importation company based in London and Liverpool (081-673-9797).

- | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------|
| 4. Grey Horse, Portland Street | Hydes |
| 5. The Castle, Oldham Street | Robinsons |
| 6. Crown & Kettle, Oldham Rd | Wilsons |
| 7. Burton Arms, Swan Street | Bass |
| | Worthington |
| 8. Smithfield Vaults, Swan St | Greenall Whitley |
| 9. Castle & Falcon, New Mount St | Marstons |

Many of these pubs are still standing, and some of them even still serve beer!

It must be remembered that at this time all pubs belonging to Whitbread, S & N and John Smiths sold only keg beer, and it was to be another year or so before such names as Pollards and Saxon Cross were to appear.

This history lesson would not be complete without a mention of such excellent pubs as the Jolly Angler on Ducie Street, the Coach & Horses on London Road, and the Boston Arms on Massey Street.

It is interesting to note that while often the quality, and certainly the choice of beers have improved, the quality of the pubs has often gone the other way. A useful and interesting reference work published in 1975 is the Manchester Pub Guide by Evans, Vanes, Huzzard and Varley

Why not try some of these pubs for yourselves, well, the ones still functioning anyway.

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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

Fenney Bentley - Brewing Capital of Derbyshire

Rural Derbyshire is fast becoming a centre of the micro-brewery movement. Whim Ales are already well-established at Hartington and now we have news of two more brewing ventures in the village of Fenney Bentley, a few miles to the north west of Ashbourne on the Buxton Road.

As you travel towards Buxton it is difficult to miss the imposing Bentley Brook Hotel, set back in its grounds on the junction with the Bakewell road. The pub has been owned by the Allingham family for 16 years but only recently has the running been taken on by brothers Chris and Bill. The pub already boasts an impressive array of facilities and about four months ago a two-barrel brewing plant was installed in one of the outbuildings, trading as the Leatherbritches Brewery.

The brewing is carried out by Bill Allingham and his assistant-cum-trainee brewer John Cockain. Unlike many newcomers to the brewing industry, Bill has no previous record of homebrewing but went down this road because "I like drinking beer and I sell a lot of guest beers so why not put my own brewery in?". A basic training course was provided by Brewcare of Bromsgrove who also installed the plant, since when Bill and John have been refining their beers. Two are currently produced, Belter at 4% ABV and Bespoke at 5%, with a third, Tarebrain (6%) in the pipeline. The beers are all full-mash all malt brews using the popular Maris Otter variety. Whole hops are also used, mainly Progress, Fuggles and Styrian Goldings. They are currently brewing 3-4 times a week and virtually all of this goes into the pub. The free trade isn't courted and those wanting to sell Leatherbritches beers will have to collect themselves and also supply their own



A dapper Bill Allingham at Leatherbritches Brewery

casks. The beers are hoppy and fruity with more than a nod towards the Burton-style which is popular in the locality.

There are plans to convert the area next to the brewhouse into an outdoor drinking area with illustrations of the brewing process and views into the brewery. Bill is also nursing plans to instal similar operations in a variety of local pubs over the next few years. If this scheme takes off this part of the world will start to rival Bavaria for the number of breweries per head of the population.

Not that they're doing so badly at the moment. If you carry on towards Buxton past the Coach & Horses pub and then turn left into Ashes Lane you will eventually come to Ashes Farm, home to Jane and Michiel Peach and, since April 1st, to the Black Bull Brewery.



Michael Peach in his new Brewhouse

Unlike Bill Allingham, Michiel Peach was a keen homebrewer and decided to go commercial two years ago, spurred on by both the enthusiasm of friends for his beers and also the Governments Beer Orders which, in theory, should have opened up the market for guest ales.

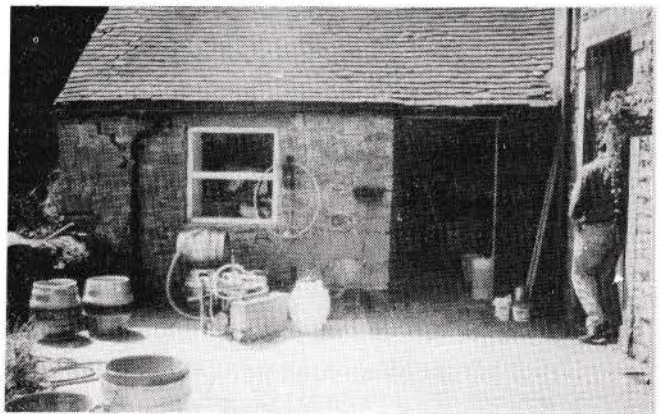
He has been at Black Bull Farm for three years and comes from a variety of jobs although his family have been butchers and farmers. The brewery is sited in an outbuilding adjacent to the farmhouse and boasts magnificent views over the surrounding countryside. Interestingly, it seems that many years ago the same building was used as a brewery by the farmer's wife - an old local has told Michiel that he can remember helping with the harvest and then returning to the farm for beer brewed on the premises. Indeed, when the building was renovated, an old copper, possibly a relic of the original brewing equipment, was found in the corner.

The beer is again an all-malt brew using mainly the Halcyon variety together with whole Fuggles hops. Just one beer is currently produced, Black Bull Bitter at 1040og/4% ABV although there are plans for a 5.5% winter ale.

The beer is produced on a 2 1/2 barrel plant, again installed by Brewcare, and a third fermenter has just been put in to keep up with demand. Whilst this is essentially a free-trade brewery the aim is to stay local and not use beer agencies. There are half a dozen pubs taking the beer on a regular guest basis and there are also three permanent outlets which include the aforementioned Coach & Horses (which sells a creditable seven 9-gallon barrels a week of Black Bull) and Ashbourne British Legion. The beer is softly hoppy and fruity, very much in the Burton style.

The two breweries co-operate well (they share the same yeast strain) and each has carved out its own niche in the local market. Indeed both the Bentley Brook Hotel and Ashes Farm provide accommodation so a weekend away enjoying the superb countryside and excellent locally brewed ales is more than a possibility.

Leatherbritches can be contacted on 033 529 278 and Black Bull on 033 529 581.



Brew House at the Black Bull

Phil Lewson's Letter from Anglesey

Robinsons have 11 tied houses on the Island, and during the last week in April, the new premium bitter appeared in 4 of them - the Bulkeley Arms in Menai Bridge, George & Dragon in Beaumaris, Breeze Hill, Benllech, and the Marquis in Rhosybol. They all said it sold very well, at prices ranging from £1.50 to £1.56 a pint; the Marquis will have it again occasionally, but the other three re-order it on a regular basis.

Regarding method of dispense - until about a year ago, there were no handpumps in Robinson's Anglesey pubs, with one notable exception - the Gazelle at Glyngarth on the Menai Strait, where until very recently the lone handpump served Old Tom all the year round. Handpumps have now appeared in several of the pubs, including the George & Dragon and the Marquis, so the Frederics pump clip looks quite at home. But at the Bulkeley and the Breeze Hill, the electric dispense has been retained, and a dummy handpump installed

complete, of course, with Frederic's pump clip.

Complete list of Robinson's Anglesey pubs.

George & Dragon, Beaumaris - Best Bitter, Frederics (H)

Gazelle, Glyngarth - Best Bitter (H)

Bulkeley Arms, Menai Bridge - Best Bitter, Frederics (E) (both with dummy handpumps)

Four Crosses, Menai Bridge - Best Bitter (E) (dummy handpump)

Breeze Hill, Benllech - Best Mild, Best Bitter, Frederics (E) (only Frederics has dummy handpump)

Kimmel Arms, Moelfre - Best Mild, Best Bitter, Hartleys XB (E)

Pilot Boat, Dulas - Best Mild, Best Bitter (H)

Marquis, Rhosybol - Best Mild, Best Bitter (H) - Co2 Aspirator

(Frederics is available occasionally)

Trecastell, Bull Bay - Best Bitter (E)

Sportsmans, Caergeiliog - Best Mild, Best Bitter (E)

Foundry Vaults, Llangefni - Best Bitter (E)

NOTE. The mild at Pilot Boat and Marquis had the Hatters Mild pumpclips.



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**Glossop
Walkers**

A smaller band of Glossop Real Ale Walkers than usual tackled the Etherow Valley Way, an eleven mile route from Woolley Bridge near Glossop, to Stockport, recently. As this is a beer magazine and not a walking, one I will not harp on, apart from mentioning the terminus.

We tried out the Stanley Arms and its excellent range of Ryburn beers - I was surprised at how busy it was compared to my last Saturday lunchtime visit - then came the exotic dancer to give me the reason! The Arden Arms was as splendid a drinking house as ever, my colleagues were very impressed with its unchanged atmosphere.

Unfortunately the Boars Head and Turners Vaults don't open Sunday lunchtimes so on we went to the ever impressive Crown on Heaton Lane where we voted Dobbins Green Bullet the nicest tippie with Freeminer Ginger Beer not far behind. Other recent visits after our Sunday walks have been a crawl round Disley, Simmondley Beer Festival, the Andrew Arms at Compstall and Tameside Canal Festival CAMRA Bar.

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From : Peter Edwardson

The article in your July issue on drinking in York gives the potentially misleading impression that the city's free houses are its main attraction for the drinker. While the Maltings, the Spread Eagle and the two Tap & Spiles are all good pubs and worthy of a visit, to my mind the most interesting and distinctive features of York's drinking scene are the original and unspoilt 19th and early 20th century urban pub interiors, particularly Vaux's Blue Bell on Fossgate and Sam Smith's Wellington on Alma Terrace. You can now drink a range of ten real ales in a Tap & Spile or its equivalent in almost every sizeable town in the North, but places like the Blue Bell and the Wellington are truly special. They're both in the 1994 Good Beer Guide too!

STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

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HIGH PEAK & NORTH EAST CHESHIRE
With **TIM JONES**
CAMPAIGN CAMRA
FOR REAL ALE

Well, I did promise more news from the High Peak area this month and sure enough more news has been forthcoming.

First of all I should mention the **Beer Tent** at the Tameside Canal Festival. Good sunny weather blessed this event and the pressure on the supplies of beer and cider was obvious from the first session. Extra supplies were needed and **McGuinness** in Rochdale came to our aid at short notice. The beer supplied was in excellent condition. A big thanks from the organisers,

Another thank you is due to all those who staffed the bar during the weekend in hot and hectic conditions. A fuller report on the event is being compiled for next month.

Now before we get to the news as such I'd like to mention a beer I sampled recently in the now refurbished **Victoria** in Bramhall. What, you may say was a member of High Peak doing in the Vic? Well it's one of my old locals from many moons ago and I thought I'd check it out now that it has finally got the Bramhall treatment. By the way the refurb's not bad but I did somehow like the idea of a down to earth boozier (as it was back in the seventies) in the heart of Bram Hall Village. The only tattoos you see in there now read "Mater and Pater" and "Get off my property". But I'm getting sidetracked.

Rymans Reserve Wheat Beer, a Whitbread product from a man better known for his wine, was "recommended" and at

£1.60 and 4.2 ABV I was expecting something a bit special. To say that I was a little disappointed would be an understatement. The beer was crystal clear (after a warning at point of dispense that it should carry a slight haze) and almost totally devoid of flavour. What flavour there was - more reminiscent of bland British "cooking beer" and not the complex flavours to be found in one of the most refreshing styles of beer around.

Others I've spoken to have not been as disappointed as I was but they haven't been singing its praises either. It seems a shame that such a good idea has fallen so flat, to coin a phrase.

Anyway on to matters more in line with the title of this column.

A mini pub crawl of Dukinfield was well attended on a sunny Saturday evening recently and a good selection of different brews were sampled.

It kicked off at the Angel on King Street with the promise of a pint of Holts Bitter to go along with the John Smiths. Both were priced at £1.05 a pint and were in reasonable condition though the Holts was lacking its usual bite with only hints of its famed character. Still not at all a bad start.

Next the **Commercial**, a Tetleys pub on the corner of Astley Street and King Street. The rather garish exterior is a bit deceiving. The pub is welcoming and busy with a lively vault (world cup on the TV) and a comfortable lounge where there is much wood panelling and an interesting ceiling similar to the one found in the more famous Britons Protection in Manchester.

We were all looking forward to a pint of the Dark Mild but were informed that it was no longer available! So disappointed LEY, we all had the bitter concluding that the



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Bulgarian landlord was still in mourning after their recent defeat at the hands of the Italians.

From the Commercial we walked up Astley Street to the **Newborough**, a small, modern Hydes pub reminiscent of a sixties estate pub. The light mild was on good form as was the Bitter. At this point the crawlers split into two groups; those who wanted a sit-down (poor souls) and a chat and those (me included) who actually hadn't had enough of the World Cup and were keen to see the first-half highlights (Sweden vs Bulgaria).

From here we did an about turn to try out the Gardeners Arms, a small Robinsons pub which had recently gained a new landlord.

The Best Bitter was good but the Best Mild, sorry Hatters Mild was in excellent condition and was probably the reason the crawl ended here. The new landlord has brightened up what was considered by local members to be a rather dark and uninviting pub in the past. He is also an RAF enthusiast as can be seen from the amount of flying memorabilia on the walls. He is the chairman of the Swinton RAF Association so he knows his stuff much to the delight of one of the party who immediately engaged mein host in a detailed conversation about Lancaster bombers!

As a footnote one impatient member of the party having contrived to arrive in Dukinfield early managed to fit in an extra couple of pubs, whether this was worthwhile I'll let you decide.

The **Astley Arms** (top Astley) a Robinsons pub was the first port of call and was described as average after a pint of best bitter had been sampled. This was followed by a visit to the **Old General** at the top of Astley Street,

The **Chesters Mild** was returned to the landlord as undrinkable but better luck was had with the **Boddingtons bitter** which was described as "undeniably adequate"!

In the same neck of the woods the **Bee Hive** on Commercial Brow is on the market - this Marstons outlet having recently undergone a refurbishment.

In **Marple**, the **Pineapple** is alternating **Hartleys Bitter** with (wait for it) **Old Stockport!** This is a welcome new outlet for the ordinary bitter and it is to be hoped that it will catch on and become a regular feature of the range. Has the re-marketing of this somewhat forgotten beer in the Robinsons range borne fruit already?

In **Glossop**, what was formerly the **Carters Club**, down the road from the Moon and Sixpence (formerly the **Fleece**) has been acquired by the Glossop based pub-owning group **Royal Free Houses** and is to be opened soon as a blues venue. Let's hope that real ale will be the main refreshment. It's amazing how many clubs don't cater for good beer and good entertainment. Perhaps a leaf could be taken out of the **Witchwood's** book.

Finally, it was noticed that beer from the beer tent purchased from **NORA** was invoiced from **Jennings!** Now whether this is old news I wouldn't know, but it does raise the question, are some of the regional brewers getting on the guest beer bandwagon. If they are it can only be a good thing if the unimaginative range of "in-house" guest beers provided by the Nationals is anything to go by.

The **High Peak CAMRA** branch contact is **Ralph Warrington** (061) 236 2131 (w) 0625 572221(h)

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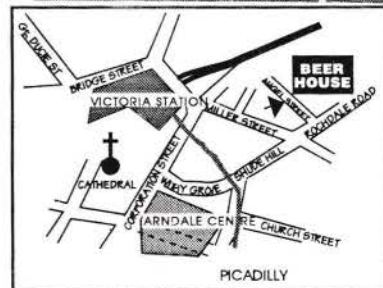
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August Featured Pub

The Fairfield Arms, as already mentioned in earlier editions is a new Boddington's Pub Co. house which has been the subject of much speculation over recent months since work began on its refurbishment - the building having previously been converted into a pub and restaurant.

Dating from 1881, this impressive red brick Victorian house sits elevated above Manchester Road opposite the busy junction with Ashton Hill Lane and with its own grounds (now car parking) and mature trees it commands attention.

Up close the detailing is characteristic of the period with steep slate roofs, blue brick frieze, ornately sculptured fascia boards, finials, stone lintels and sills, etc. There is even a dove cote incorporated in the stable/garage building to the side.

Now to convert a large house into a pub will always involve a great deal of alteration and much of this was already done when Boddingtons bought the building.

What is important is the way that it is done and Boddingtons can be thankful to the previous owner for the careful work that was originally done in converting this to a pub.

Once inside it is obvious that Boddingtons have taken a great deal of care in additional work they have carried out. Many original features have been retained and it is clear that the policy was to leave well alone if at all possible.

The main entrance at the front - up impressive stone steps - emphasises how little work was required to make an immediate impression. The magnificent long, beautifully tiled hall

is relatively intact with fine original panelling and wood detailed ceiling. Stairs lead up to private rooms via a landing area the backdrop to which is a beautiful stained glass window.

To the left is a small (original) wood floored room which boasts such fine features as (original) dado and picture rails, cornices, skirting and light rose.

To the right is the main bar where the bulk of the work has had to be done. This runs the full depth of the house and leads on to what is bound to become a big draw, the extensive conservatory which will catch the evening sun. New work in this area echoes rather than mirrors the original features and whilst obvious does not really detract from the overall feel with original cornices and an original fireplace helping the blend. Old photographs and mirrors complete the appearance.

Another feature already in place was the low ceilinged cellar bar and this has been amended simply by the introduction of patio doors (only a half cellar) and windows to allow more natural light. The bar is a simple wooden affair with exposed brickwork in the main room and plain white-painted plaster walls in the smaller room beyond.

The standard pews and kitchen tables are used to good effect again enhanced by the retention of an original feature this time a stone-framed kitchen range.

The upstairs is by far the plusher of the two areas and will be angling at the foody market. Boddingtons described this as a pub serving food and not a food pub and perhaps this will be achieved if the eating area is distinct, say in the conservatory, among similar lines to the Cheadle Hulme (Holts). I'll hold judgement on that one.

Beers (about blood time an'all) will be Boddingtons Bitter, Castle Eden and one rotating guest, all on handpumps.

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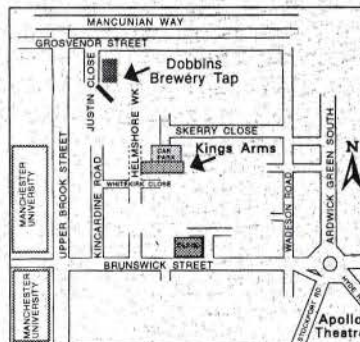
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The licensee will be Ann Connell who will be known to some readers as she was previously in charge at the Parrswood in Didsbury. Oh yes! The Fairfield Arms opens (opened) on August 4th. and it is intended to open the cellar bar only at weekends initially.

You might have guessed that I like this pub and I hope it will be a success mainly because the work on what is a fine building packed with original features has been carried out with a great deal of care. I for one could put up with some food orientation and the slight possibility of a few pence on a pint if all "conversions" were as successfully carried out.

Whether this is a financial success is in the hands of the punters but I hope Boddingtons not inconsiderable investment pays off.

Beer Festival in Glossop

The Saturday and Sunday of the Bank Holiday weekend will see a beer festival held at Glossop Rugby Club, which is on Hargate Hill Lane at Charlesworth (on the Marple Bridge / Glossop Road.

Beers will come from Whitbread but there should be one or two outside beers as well. There will be Morris Dancing, Fell Racing and all manner of festivities. It's open from 12 noon each day and there may be a Sunday Afternoon extension. For more details phone 0457 864553

The Station ticket collectors fed up with The Station Master, + the Porters hogging all the gas light, have decided to present:



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WARRINGTON STREET ASHTON-U-LYNE

100 Years of Hatters Mild



The Vine Tavern, Birch Vale, Derbyshire hosted a double birthday celebration with a difference for Jack Woolfenden (90) and Cyril Arnfield (86). The pair have drunk Robinsons Hatters Mild for 100 years between them!

"It was called Robinson's Best Mild then," says Jack. "I think a pint was threepence halfpenny at the Vine when I first came in. I moved to Birch Vale in 1951 from Gee Cross. I tried a couple of other places, but decided to make the Vine my local."

I've been drinking Robbies all the time I've been living."

At 86 Cyril is the younger of the two, but he has been drinking at the Vale the longest. He first visited the pub in 1937.

"I've not bothered with another pub since," he says. "I've seen the pub and everyone in it grow-up."

Paul Robinson, son of David Robinson, director of Frederic Robinson Ltd, was on hand with cut glass presentation tankards for the veterans.

"Back at the brewery we've worked out that Jack and Cyril have drunk at least 36,500 pints which is about 20 tonnes of Hatters Mild," Paul Robinson told the party.

By tradition, the pair visit the Vine every Thursday and Saturday arriving at 8pm and leaving at 10.30pm. Robinsons Best Mild was rebranded Hatters Mild earlier this year.

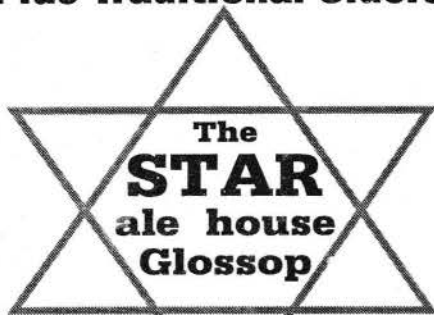
Untrue Brews

House beers are not always what they seem. Many Tetley houses now have a handpumped "house beer" named after the pub - but these are all the same beer, a 3.3% ABV affair from Inde Coope in Burton!

Already seen in such diverse places as Ormskirk, Atherton and Bury, it seems likely to hit OT's circulation area before long. Drink with discretion - while it is real ale, it is not, despite appearances, unique to the pub in which it appears.

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Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



Vaux have entered the world of dart sponsorship. They have put up a guaranteed five hundred pounds of prize money to be shared between the eight finalists of the Vaux Stockport Individual Open Championship.

The competition is run on the usual format of eight weekly heats, the winner of each heat going forward to the final. Weekly heats are already taking place at Cale Green Social Club, Dundonald Street, Cale Green.

Already confirmed heat winners, at the time of writing, are Brian Darbyshire the 1992 Gorton Open Champion and Cheshire player John Hollins.

Brian beat Tony O'Shea in the final of the first heat in 17, 18 and 22 darts, although Tony rattled in a maximum in a brilliant second leg, in which he hit his double in just 12 arrows.

John Hollins, the second qualifier, beat Cale Green colleague, Yorkshire Classic Champion, Darryl Fitton, in 21, 18 and 14 darts. It was a cracking game as Darryl replied in just 14 and 15, making the final game the decider.

A particularly pleasing part of the second heat was the performance of Sue Hambleton, the town's top female dart player. Sue, a Cheshire county 'A' regular, reached the semi-final of the heat. Only two tremendous 18 dart legs from Darryl stopped her from progressing further.

It was good practice for Sue, as the following day she reached the final of the Cheshire Open. Darbyshire and England stalwart Sherrie Dodd was the eventual winner of the title.

The final of the Vaux tournament takes place on Friday September 2nd at 8.30pm at Cale Green Social Club. But every Friday before that, all players are invited to enter for the weekly heat.

★ ★ ★

The second season of the Stockport Central 501 has got under way at the second time of asking. A couple of teams dropped out hours before the planned start, so the organisers buckled to, recruited replacements and re-scheduled the fixtures.

This league is quite innovative in Stockport, as instead of awarding the usual two points to a winning team, a point is awarded for each game of the night. Therefore a team winning 7 - 0 would pick up nine points, a side going down 3 - 4 would still take three league points. This means that each game is vitally important and everyone keeps their interest up right through the match.

As well as 501 and crib, the Central League also includes a game of 701, played as pairs, to round off the night. This must be welcomed by the licensees as it tends to keep the visiting team at the pub almost until last orders.

★ ★ ★

The latest idea to boost the image of darts comes from the British Darts Organisation. They have recruited the likes of Bobby George to tour schools, giving exhibitions and talks to the pupils.

As the game demands some mathematical skill, notably in working out finishes, the scheme has some merit.

But it is at youth level where the game needs an injection. Especially in the north. The Southern Counties have a well organised youth league in operation. But there is little in the way of competitive play up here for those under 18.

The Northern heat of the Red Dragon Youth Classic was held in Reddish earlier this year. It attracted hundreds of young players from all over the country, including several home grown players like Lee Richardson and Geoff Millward.

For the good of the game, someone must come up with competition for the younger players if the game is to survive into the next century.

Major Renovations at Thatched House

Major changes have taken place at the Thatched House just off Stockport Market Place, and more could be on the way.

The bar has finally been moved into the corner of the lounge from its former central position. This has created much more space and has enabled a stage to be installed in one corner. As a result there is now regular live entertainment at the 'Thatched' as it is becoming known. In a welcome extension of the already thriving market place music scene, the Thatched now offers RnB on Thursdays and Rock & Blues nights on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. There will be a couple of special events later this month - Thursday 23rd will be a Cajun night and on Bank Holiday Monday (29th) there will be an all-day music extravaganza with nine bands appearing between 12.30 and 11.30. £1 will get you an all day pass and all proceeds go to the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

There are plans for brewers Vaux to spend about £35,000 on the pub to extend the current pool room, turning this into a separate lounge and vault. The current lounge would then become a live music venue/concert room. "Stockport's equivalent of the Witchwood" according to licensee Bryan Allred who runs the pub with girl-friend Hazel Tranter. It certainly sounds promising.

Apart from the entertainment, another attraction at present is the cheap beer. There are two cask beers available, Thorne Mild and Vaux Samson and Bryan has recently reduced the price of both to £1.05 and £1.20 respectively. Worth a visit.

Deadline for September Issue is August 24

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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

Once again there is a wide range of activities this month starting on Monday 8th with a social at the newly reopened Royal Oak in Didsbury. In common with all Monday socials, this starts at 9.00pm. The same week sees the monthly branch meeting on Thursday 11th. This will be at the Blossoms, Buxton Road, Heaviley and starts at 8.00pm.

On Monday 15th August the Social is a two-way affair, starting at Porky Pigs Pie Shop at 9.00pm and moving on to the Imperial at 10.00. Friday 19th sees the monthly Stagger and this time it's Hazel Grove starting at the Rising Sun at 7.00pm and calling at the Three Tuns for 8.30. On Sunday 21st August we will be having a late afternoon event at the Sir Robert Peel, Castle Street, Edgeley to mark both the anniversary of longer licensing hours and also the failure to move to

all-day opening on Sunday. More about this at the August Branch meeting or from the contact (Paul - 442 3143).

On Monday 22nd the social is at the Friendship on Hyde Road, Gorton (between the Reddish Lane Junction and the Wagon & Horses). This is followed on Thursday 25th with our Pub of the Month presentation to the Britannia (see page 2). A minibus will run to this - phone Paul if you want to go.

Just a few September events to mention, now. On Friday 2nd we will be running a new members trip to Titanic Brewery at Burslem. For more details phone Chris and Sue on 486 9256. On Monday 5th the social is in Heaton Moor and covers the Plough at 9.00 and the Crown at 10.00. Two diary dates for later in the month - Saturday 17th a trip to Whim, Black Bull and Leatherbitches breweries; Saturday 24th a trip to Denbigh Beer Festival, Denbigh Brewery and (hopefully) the new micro-brewery in the Rhyl area. Phone Chris and Sue if you want to go on either (or put your name down at any branch event in August or early September).

If you live in the Marple, Romiley, Bredbury or Woodley areas you will come under the High Peak and North East Cheshire branch of the Campaign. High Peak will be holding their August branch meeting on Monday 8th at the Tollemache in Mossley. Aim to get there for about 8.30. On Friday 19th there will be a pub crawl in the Romiley area starting at the Cherry Tree on Compstall at 8.00pm. The September Branch meeting will be on Monday 12th at the Crown in Hyde. For more details of High Peak activities contact Tim Jones on 371 9006(h) or 330 5555 ext 5252 (w). Members of both branches are of course more than welcome to attend each other's events.

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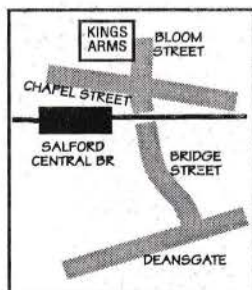
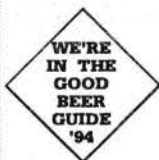
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MANCHESTER MATTERS

by Rhys Jones

The Wellington on Hyde Road in Ardwick now sells handpumped Boddingtons Bitter - the handpump, unmarked on my visit, sits next to a keg Boddingtons fount, but it is handpumped beer that you get.

Nearby the Apsley Cottage on Apsley Grove is another real ale gain, with handpumped John Smiths Bitter - hours can be restricted here though, as trade comes largely from concerts at the Apollo. In Beswick, the Honeycomb on Campion Walk has returned to the real ale fold with handpumped John Smith's Bitter (a much more sensible choice than the Magnet previously offered in cask form), while the Clock Face on Wynne Close has Boddingtons Bitter on handpump.

True to form, though, there's also some bad news from East Manchester. The Star in Ardwick (shame Banks's!) and the Corner Shop in Beswick are now keg; however I suspect few will mourn the closure of the Olympia in Gorton following a recent fire. Also in Gorton, the Lord Nelson has replaced Worthington Bitter as its handpumped guest beer with Boddingtons Bitter, while the Cotton Tree has lost Websters Green Label. In Clayton, Bass Light at the Church Inn has been replaced by handpumped Tetley Bitter.

Moving to central south Manchester, the Birch Villa in Rusholme has gained handpumped Stones Bitter. The Salutation in Chorlton-on-Medlock has lost Burton Ale but gained Tetley Mild and Cains Bitter on handpump; also, most creditably, it no longer serves pressurised Addlestons Cider on handpump. And in Fallowfield, the Queen of Hearts has until October to be converted into another pub in the Firkin chain (working title, so they say, the Fresher & Firkin!); a brewery is not planned for the site, so presumably it will be supplied from the Flea & Firkin.

In the City Centre, Branagan's has become the Exchange Cafe Bar. Despite enthusiasm in the pages of "City Life" (usually a danger sign in my experience) the changes here seem to be more cosmetic than real. There's still a range of mainly boring national beers on handpump (Websters Bitter, Tetley Bitter, Boddingtons Bitter, Theakstons Old Peculier, and "Grays Landlord's Choice" from Mansfield) there's keg Scrumpy Jack cider on handpump, and as it that wasn't enough to put you off, on my visit the combined efforts of one manager and two barstaff were not sufficient to produce a drinkable pint.

Also in town, the Boardroom has replaced Ruddles Bitter with handpumped Theakstons Bitter. With the Circus a short stroll away in one direction, and the Crown & Anchor/Beer Engine not far off in the other, this switch doesn't seem to have brought the customers rushing in - I wonder why.

New Brew News

Don Burgess of Freeminer Brewery has been telling us about the brewery's latest product, Shakemantle Ginger Beer. Technical details involve the use of powdered ginger in the copper and root in the cask ('dry gingering' as Don put it). Pale Malt is used in the brew and there is also a hint of Yakima hops. In short it is a typically well-crafted Freeminer beer which is a deceptive 5% alcohol by volume. It has been well received in the free trade and locally has been available at the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport and the Kings Arms, Bloom Street, Salford. Mansfield have stopped brewing Old Shilling Bitter for the Boddington PubCo who are consequently on the lookout for a replacement. PubCo believe that there is a market for a quality but 'cheap-priced' beer and they are undoubtedly right. An interim replacement has come from Jennings and goes by the name 'Great Cockup' (after a mountain in the Lake District). We understand that negotiations are underway with several companies for a permanent replacement.

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I / We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale Limited, and agree to abide by the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Campaign.

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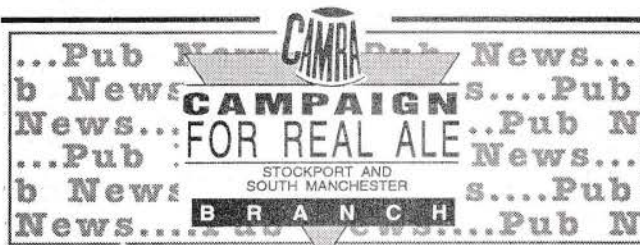
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those wishing to join CAMRA who live in the Marple, Bredbury, Woodley or Romiley areas, should write instead to: Tom Lord, 5 Vernon Drive, Marple, SK6 6JH

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Sunday visitors to Stockport's Market Place have often been puzzled to see the Boars Head closed. On enquiry they discover the reason - the pub is built on church land and when it opened in 1811 the church authorities insisted on a six day licence. However, historical research by one of the pub's regulars has revealed that the restriction expired in 1974. As a result licensee Phil Sharples duly applied for his seven-day licence and last month saw the first Sunday pint pulled in the pub for 183 years.

John Parkin, licensee of Edgeley's Bobby Peel and owner of the nearby Prince Albert tells us of a price promotion he is running in both pubs. Each week two or three products are cut back in price, resulting in vastly increased sales. When cask beers are included they are typically sold for £1 a pint - Stones Bitter and Greenalls Mild have already been on offer and more will follow.

Welcome to new licensees at the Parrswood in Didsbury where Martin and Jean Riley, formerly of the Jubilee in Salford have now taken over. Martin is hoping to offer a slightly more interesting range of guest beers in the pub.

In Stockport, Tom Thumbs on King Street West has added Marstons Pedigree to the range of beers on offer. On the Reddish/Gorton border, the Pomona remains closed after, we hear, running into financial problems.

Two reports in last month's OT seem to be coming together quite nicely. We reported that the former plumbers merchants opposite the Flea & Firkin had been bought by either Whitbread or Tetley with a view to conversion into a public house. We also reported on the development of a chain of 'Scruffy Murphys' Irish theme pubs by Allied-Lyons Retailing (Tetley pubs, locally). We now have confirmation that the purchaser is indeed 'Tetley' and that the site is to be converted into an Irish theme bar. Looks like this is to be Manchester's Scruffy Murphys then. Remember, you read it here first.

At the Smithy in Cheadle Hulme there has been a welcome increase in the range of real ale available. For some time Websters Yorkshire Bitter has been the lone cask conditioned beer at £1.29. This has been joined by John Smiths Bitter at £1.30, and by a guest beer. This was Theakstons Bitter when OT called and

on that occasion was thought to be the best of the three beers. However at £1.44 a pint customers might prefer the cheaper choices, and in the long term quality could suffer.

Increased choice seems to be the aim in some parts of the Grand Met. estate. At the Magnet on Wellington Road North, Stockport two cask milds are available, both at £1.19, Websters Green Label from Halifax and Wilsons Mild from the Morland Brewery. Websters Yorkshire Bitter sells at £1.20 and the Magnet is one of many Grand Met houses selling Holts Bitter at £1.06.

The Plough, Heaton Moor has been one of the Carlsberg-Tetley houses involved in the Tapsters Choice. This has thrown up the odd curio amongst what are presumably one-off brews. Allsopps IPA was a fairly bland effort whilst the most recent Allsopps Single Malt at 4.1% had much more to recommend it. Most unusual was Allsopps Gold Cross cask conditioned lager. There was not a lot of taste, but there were hints of a 4.5% brew. The Plough has also recently won a Carlsberg-Tetley award for all round quality of service and customer care. Congratulations to Alan and Kath.

Real Ale in clubs. Cheadle Labour Club on Councillor Lane had 3 real ales on a recent visit, all from the Courage stable, Websters Bitter, John Smiths Bitter and Courage Directors.

At the Three Crowns, Heaton Norris, Boddingtons Mild is no longer hand pulled. The free-flow electric font proclaims cask conditioned mild, but OT wonders if this might be the thin end of the wedge and might keg mild soon be on the way.

Robinson's newest pub, the Three Bears at Hazel Grove has acquired Frederic's premium beer, served by electric pump though announced by a handpump mounting, complete with pumpclip, on the bar - the label attached to this, however, does make admirably clear what the dispense system actually is. A fine pint of Frederic's (well, more than one) was recently enjoyed here, and the £1.56 price tag, which some may think hefty, didn't seem to be discouraging custom. Mind you, anywhere that advertises sucking pig for two at £20 presumably has at least a few free-spending customers - perhaps O.T.'s food writer should be sent to investigate?

Burtonwood's Royal Oak in High Lane is now in the capable hands of Peter Abel, sometime licensee of Holts' Grafton in Manchester's university quarter. Having vowed to leave the trade for good, Peter was, we understand, lured back through a chance conversation in a chipshop. Early reports suggest he is fitting in well with the High Lane community.

Whitbread's Red Lion on Gatley Green has had the "ale house" treatment, with half a dozen or so handpumps on the bar and room for a couple of casks on chilled gravity dispense behind the bar. On a recent visit, one or two of the beers could have done with a couple more days in the cellar, while some of the more interesting choices ran out during the course of the evening. While an offer of six real ales at any time is probably over-ambitious, a selection that included beers from Clarks, Hadrian, Hook Norton and Taylors has much to commend it if quality is maintained. First priority, though, must be to get rid of the "handpump" for keg Scrumpy Jack cider; this is clearly misleading and as a matter of principle CAMRA withholds any recognition or recommendation from the pub while this remains.