

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING

CAMRA

No:
131

TIMES

MARCH 1995

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Bang To Rights!

Courage have agreed to amend their policy on guest beers, which small brewers claimed was shutting them out of the market. The Office of Fair Trading intervened, following complaints from CAMRA and small brewers.

The specific complaint addressed by the OFT was South Yorkshire Brewery in Barnsley. However CAMRA believes the problem is much more widespread.

CAMRA warmly welcomed the news of the Courage decision. "This should strengthen the hand of tenants who want to take a genuine guest beer from a small brewery," said CAMRA Campaigns Manager Stephen Cox. "It should mean a wider choice of more interesting guest beers."

"The OFT were right to intervene, as in CAMRA's opinion, the Courage policy contravened the guest beer legislation."

It appears that discounts on various products would be removed if the tenant chose to take a guest beer from an outside supplier. CAMRA believes such a policy could breach the 1989 Beer Orders (the guest beer legislation) which seeks to prevent such discrimination. Clearly, very few tenants will stock guest beers if by doing so they receive worse terms on a whole range of other products.

CAMRA urges smaller brewers, tenants and drinkers to forward similar cases to the OFT, which has shown itself willing to act on such complaints.

Planning for this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival - again sponsored by the Stockport Express Advertiser - is now well advanced.

Although last year's was the most successful yet, further improvements and changes are being planned for this year. On the food front we are aiming to tailor the food to the music, so, for example, Latin Music will be accompanied by food with a South American flavour. We are also aiming to ensure that there is a better range of vegetarian food available. We are also hoping to indicate which of our beers are suitable for vegetarians, but more on that in a future bulletin.

The music is set to see the return of some of last year's favourites plus some acts new to the festival, including a headline Zydeco band for Saturday night. There will be many new beers too, alongside festival favourites. The list was still being put together as we went to press, so more on that in a later issue.

With our usual wide range of ciders and perries, the ever popular tombola, CAMRA membership offers and the legendary CAMRA shop this is an event you won't want to miss. Those important dates for your diary - 1st to 3rd June.

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PUB of the Month

MARCH

The pub of the month award for March 1995 goes to a pub whose contribution to the local real ale scene has changed by leaps and bounds over the last few years. The Olde Cock on Wilmslow Road in Didsbury now sells one of the most extensive and varied range of cask conditioned beers available anywhere in the area, and all kept in superb condition by licencee Bryn Rothwell, ably assisted by wife Jo.

Bryn and Jo have now been in the pub for around two years, prior to which they ran the Volunteer Arms at Bromley Cross. Bryn firmly believes in real ale and indeed he told OT recently that he considers "cask beer to be the future". In a way it's a good job that he does, as having to look after a turnover of up to fourteen different cask conditioned beers every week is no mean feat. Traditional cider drinkers are not forgotten either as Bryn has introduced everchanging tubs of the real stuff.

With such a choice of beers, it is quite likely that from time to time beers will appear that people have not tried before. This is not a problem as bar staff will offer a no obligation to buy, small taster. If you don't like it, you don't buy it. This helpful

attitude has succeeded in converting many people from over-priced keg beers and lagers to the real thing. In addition Bryn will try and get your suggested favorite guest beers (within reason) wherever possible.

OT readers that have visited the Olde Cock will know that it is a large and busy pub. This is particularly true when local students are in residence. Students are of course (as is everybody) made welcome in the Olde Cock. Bryn ensures everyone is kept happy with special events occurring regularly, such as Tuesday folk nights and events arranged to raise money for local charities.

If you would like some food to accompany your drinks the Olde Cock has an extensive menu with its own chef. Food is available seven days a week both at lunchtimes and in the early evening.

The date for the presentation is Thursday 30th March. Why not join us for what promises to be a great night (if a very hectic one). I have it on good authority that anyone wishing to join CAMRA will be able to do so there with a generous discount offered to students.



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New Ale from Vaux

Vaux have launched a new beer, the unusually named 'Waggle Dance'.



Launched on February 1st, this is a new addition to the range of 5%ABV golden beers which are becoming so popular. Described as a 'light coloured, golden ale with a smooth rounded character and a blend of Challenger and Fuggles hops giving a final touch to its distinctive taste', the selling point is that it is brewed from a selected blend of honey.

Hence the odd name, the Waggle Dance is something a bee does to communicate a nectar source to other bees (yes, really). Local outlets include Cale Green Social Club, the Britons Protection in the City Centre and the Jolly Crofter in Edgeley. Some of these will only be taking the beer as a guest, of course, so permanent availability can't be guaranteed.

Fullers IPA

Launched a few days ago, London brewer Fullers have also joined the IPA bandwagon with a pale golden brew just under 5% ABV. Typical for the Chiswick brewery's products there is a sharp hoppy and tannin nose, which becomes gentler but firmly dry all the way down to the bottom. Similar in some ways to Robinsons new(ish) Frederics, this beer is very full flavoured and robust, without being as overpowering as the magnificent Fullers ESB. So far found only in selected tied outlets in the South, it is destined to hit the free trade very soon - so look out for it!

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Spoilsports

The campaign to save the Sportsmans on Market Street has been lost.

The final nail in the pub's coffin was hammered by the CIS (that's your caring sharing Co-op for those who remember the old ads) who surrendered the lease on the building to Tesco's developers.

The lease expires at the end of June and this means that there will be no compensation for either brewers Lees or licensee Brian McCausland. The last day is 27th June although Brian tells us he may well have a couple of 'last night' celebrations (if that's the right word) before then.

When Opening Times spoke to Brian he was unsure of his future plans although he would be speaking to the brewery. One thing he doesn't want is anything to do with the replacement pub which could well be built into the new development - we wouldn't be surprised if Lees were negotiating, though.

Whilst the prospect of a replacement pub is welcome, what a shame that the old place has to be lost for such an unnecessary development - that, we suppose, is what is termed progress these days.

FOR SALE

Run of WHAT'S BREWING (the National CAMRA members Newspaper) From August 1994 to December 1982 (four missing). Best Offer secures. Contact Bob Burchell c/o Opening Times, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW...

The Office of Fair Trading's move to prevent Courage abusing the guest beer legislation is welcome news.

The threat to remove discounts if pubs exercised their guest beer rights and bought outside the Courage approved list was plainly wrong and needed stopping. Naturally Courage has denied that it was breaching the Government's Beer Orders, brought in following the 1989 MMC probe into the brewing industry. They claim this was simply a matter of 'a different interpretation' of the guest beer rules. We think a more accurate response would be 'it's a fair cop, guv'.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

It is of course the activities of Courage and Intrepeneur, that have sparked the latest official probe into the brewing industry. This is to look at different prices charged to tenants and free-traders by the "larger" brewers. The enquiry follows a complaint by tied Intrepeneur leaseholders to the European Commission about the price they were paying for Courage beers,

although the practice of offering huge discounts to the free-trade (to effectively tie it up) is common amongst the national brewers and any change could cause a minor earthquake in some parts of the industry. Prices to tied pubs might come down. More likely prices to the free trade will go up which could be a boon to many of the smaller brewers who have often argued that they are effectively frozen out of much of the free trade as they are unable to match the big boys' discounts.

Really sweating must be the new breed of pub owning chains who rely on these discounts to survive, collecting the discounts from the brewers but not passing them on to their tenants. This could be a welcome day of reckoning. Too many of these pub chains just happened to negotiate supply agreements with the national brewers who sold them their pubs. Purely coincidentally, of course, but a gaping loophole in the guest beer rules (tenants of pub chains have no guest beer rights, so their pubs remain effectively tied to one or more national brewers, albeit at one stage removed) which has been abused for far too long. We await developments with interest.

John Clarke

LETTERS OPENING TIMES

From : Richard Hough

I get quite frustrated when at the bar, and as soon as the change lands in your hand, the member of staff who served you immediately diverts their attention to their own drink, cigarette, counting their tips or playing the fruit machine. You try in vain to get their attention, in order to get a top-up, query your change, get 10p for the phone or whatever. But as far as they are concerned they have finished serving you until your glass is empty once more. This is really to do with social attitudes, and providing the paying customer with a proper service rather than goods for cash. If some pubs can manage it, why not others?

From : Lisa Weaver

I enjoy reading Opening Times every month, but sometimes have difficulty getting a copy. I wonder if it is available in any pubs in Altrincham, and if not could it be so in the future?



CIDER CORNER



For those of you reading OT in the first half of the month - there is a major Cider Festival at the Beer House in Angel St, Manchester from 8 - 12 March (and possibly a couple of days longer). If you miss it, well, you'll just have to wait for the Stockport Beer & Cider Festival on 1 - 3 June!

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STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

STAGGER

with Rhys Jones

January's Stagger covered the stretch of Hyde Road between Belle Vue and Reddish Bridge, though we actually started just off Hyde Road at the Longsight. This 10-year-old Banks's pub stands on Kirkmanshulme Lane and was built to serve the housing developments on the site of Belle Vue Zoo. It's a large building, with two spacious rooms - vault and lounge - plus a family room at the side. Despite a few gimmicky touches, it's appointed in a tasteful and workmanlike manner and is wearing well. Disco equipment was in evidence, ready for later in the evening, but when we called at 7 o'clock the pub was ticking over fairly quietly. The beer range is Banks's Mild and Bitter, served on electric pumps in accordance with the brewery's usual practice. Bitter was rated only average, but the mild was better - both could have done with being rather less cold.

A short walk skirting the cinema brought us to the **Coach and Horses**, one of two Robinsons pubs on Hyde Road since the demolition of the Horseshoe. The handpumped beers here are mild, best bitter and Old Tom. The mild was very well spoken of (one of our number thought it "even better than the Pheasant at Blackley" - evidently praise indeed) and turned out to be the best beer of the night, while the bitter wasn't far behind. This is a fine and friendly two-bar local which never disappoints. We thought it best to avoid the Old Tom at this stage of the evening, as we did have several more pubs to visit!

After a brief look into Bass's Midland, where real ale turned out to have been removed, we made for the **Pineapple**, and the third independent brewery of the evening - Hydes. This is a modern estate pub with an impressive timber ceiling which was felt to give it a vaguely Scandinavian air. Though it's really just one big room, there is a discernible distinction between the vault-

like area near the entrance, with television and pool table, and the quieter area behind, which boasts a piano (though I'm not sure if this is ever used). Like Banks's, Hydes favour electric pumps, used here to dispense Bitter and the darker, "standard" Mild (despite the presence of posters on which beer-writer Michael Jackson sang the praises of Hydes Light!). Both were comfortably above average, with the bitter being very slightly preferred.

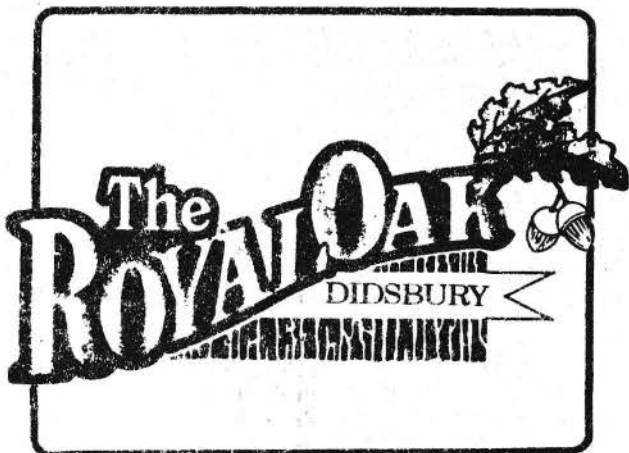
Next pub, within sight as we left the Pineapple, was the **Suburban**. And this brought us yet another independent brewery - Lees. We entered by the front door into the original part of the pub, which now functions as the vault (a new lounge has been built onto the side of the pub in recent years). With little in the way of frills, this room has a pleasantly down-to-earth atmosphere, with television, darts, pool and table football competing for attention. Off this is a small and pleasant area known as the Morris Room after its photographs of Gorton Morris Dancers (also featured on the pub sign), and it was here that we found seats. The real ales here are Lees Mild and Bitter. The mild was not enjoyed (perhaps a comment on the beer's intrinsic quality, rather than its condition here), but we thought the bitter above average.



The Plough, now a listed building has long been under threat from Manchester's rapacious road planners. With the Hyde Road widening scheme being reassessed because of financial constraints there is now a slim hope for its long term survival.

Next it was back to Robinsons, at the **Plough**. This splendidly traditional pub is always worth a visit, and certainly didn't let us down tonight. We sat in the spacious vault, surely one of the finest pub rooms in the North-West, and soaked up the warm glow from the varnished timber. We also soaked up some rather good beer - Robinsons mild and best bitter, on electric pumps. Both were comfortably above average, the mild being preferred. Let us hope that the promised re-think of the Hyde Road widening scheme allows this fine pub to continue serving its community for many years to come.

However, most of the younger end of the Gorton drinking community were seemingly being served in the next pub, the **Lord Nelson**. This had possibly as many customers as all the previous pubs put together, and a good half of them were swigging Budweiser from the bottle. Websters Bitter was thought to be average for what is at best an insipid beer, Boddingtons was very poor indeed - some of us couldn't even finish a half.



After this, what a relief to tread the short and slightly muddy pathway to the **Vale Cottage**. Busy but not brash, this had its usual atmosphere of relaxed and unstuffy comfort. Though I should have like to have seen it 25 years ago when, I believe, it still had flagged floors, the Vale consistently maintains its niche in the market as a classy, country-style pub in the heart of busy Gorton. Classy beer too - Taylors Landlord was comfortably above average, while Wilsons bitter was also pretty good (Marstons Pedigree and Websters Bitter were also available on handpump).

Across the road now to the **Waggon & Horses**, a typically large Holts pub on a corner site. This was a little quieter than I's have expected at 10 o'clock on a Friday, but still comfortably filled. Both beers were above average, the mild being preferred, though we did feel that they both lacked something of their old aggression - this has been noted in numerous Holts houses, and so seems likely to be a brewery problem.



Marstons Friendship a recent branch CAMRA pub of the month

Time now for the last pub of the evening, and it would be difficult to find anywhere more pleasingly traditional than the **Friendship** (Marstons).. A choice of rooms - vault for dominoes, lounge for singalong, back room for quieter drinking - plus stand-up drinking in the lobby summed up the appeal of the old-style pub at its best, and it was a pleasure to see an excellent local confounding the Jeremiahs who regularly foretell the death of the pub. Though Banks's Mild and Marstons Bitter was also available, we all went for Batemans Mild. Opinions differed on its quality, but most found it above average. It certainly made a fine end to a crawl which, for quality and variety of beer in a range of fine pubs, must be hard to beat anywhere in the country.

As usual, this Stagger simply reports the opinions of one group of drinkers on one particular evening - it shouldn't be taken as a definitive judgement on either the beers or the pubs. You are more than welcome to follow in our footsteps - I reckon you'll enjoy it!

**COPY DEADLINE FOR
APRIL ISSUE
THURSDAY 23 MARCH**

STOCKPORT AND SOUTH MANCHESTER CAMRA

Are you Ready?

Are you ready to meet the Stockport Mild Challenge?

After the great success of last year's event, this is again the chance to support that important part of our drinking heritage, cask mild, and at the same time have a chance to win some great prizes in the process.

All you have to do is drink 12 pints (or halves) of real mild in 12 different participating pubs over one month. This will get you free entry to Stockport Beer & Cider Festival on Thursday night plus an entry in a prize draw for pewter tankards, sweatshirts and many other prizes. For those who want to branch out this year we are also offering free mild challenge T-shirts for those who get their cards stamped by pubs in 12 different areas of the borough. About 50 pubs in the town will be taking part and the challenge runs from 10th April to 14th May.

Once again the Challenge is being sponsored by the Stockport Express Advertiser to whom many thanks.

So, are you up to the Challenge?

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Wilson's - Decline....and Fall?

If the trends revealed by an Opening Times survey continue, beers bearing the Wilsons name could soon be a thing of the past.

This will be a sad end for what is, or rather was one of the great names in the Manchester brewing industry. Historically based in Newton Heath, brewing commenced in 1834, although it wasn't until 1856 that the business was bought by Henry Charles Wilson, not incidentally a Mancunian but a businessman from Middlesex.

Expansion was slow but steady until the 1890's when the company took the title Wilsons Brewery Ltd and was floated on the Stock Market with share capital of £400,000. This was the springboard for a series of brewery takeovers which saw a rapid expansion of the tied estate. Included on the takeover trail was the old Stockport concern of Joseph Worrall whose Edgeley brewery (near the site of the Windsor Castle pub) was bought out in 1896. Takeovers continued between the wars and this period also saw the introduction of the famous draught board trademark in 1925.

In 1949 Wilsons merged with Walker & Homfrays of Salford, giving a tied estate of over 1100 pubs. Despite the loss of numerous houses in the slum clearance programmes of the 1950s, a large concern such as this was bound to attract the attention of those brewers with national pretensions and so it was in 1960 that Wilsons were acquired by London-based Watney Mann. Although many could not see it at the time, Wilsons fate was effectively sealed from then on. During the 1960s Watneys began a standardisation programme which saw the gradual disappearance of the Wilsons name. However Watneys themselves were swallowed up by Grand Metropolitan in 1972 and four years later there was a reorganisation which restored the regional brewery names, Wilsons included. Things continued to improve for Wilsons and in 1983 there was a major relaunch of both Wilsons draught and bottled beers accompanied by a TV advertising campaign promoting the company's long brewing heritage. Over 700 tied pubs were supplied with Wilsons beer at the time.

Much of the detail in this piece has come from Neil Richardson's history of Wilsons, published in 1984 to commemorate 150 years of brewing at Newton Heath. Paradoxically it was soon after this that the rot set in. The first straw in the wind was the non-appearance of a much-touted premium bitter, Wilsons Gold. Then came yet another internal reorgani-

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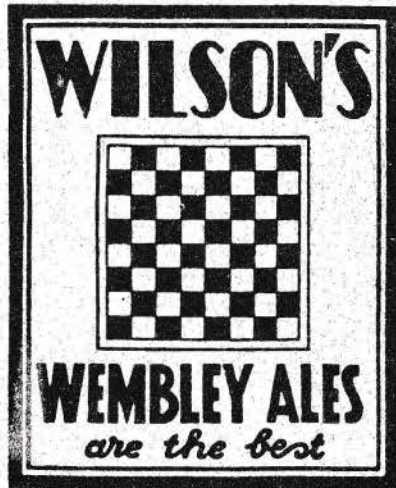
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sation and the merger with Websters of Halifax to form Samuel Websters & Wilsons Ltd. The launch of a Websters premium beer, Websters Choice, was an indicator of which way the wind was blowing and the end came soon after. Wilsons closed in August 1986 with the production of the 'Wilson's' beer transferred to Halifax. The beers, which prior to the closure had been very good indeed, perhaps at their best for some years, immediately declined in quality - the bitter little more than a thin Websters clone and the mild barely disguised caramel water.



Coupled with these events came a dramatic decline in the availability of beers under the Wilsons name. Our survey reveals that in the Stockport and central-south Manchester area there were 122 outlets for cask bitter in 1986/87. Today that has shrunk to just 21. Mild has fared just as badly. In 1986/7 real Wilsons mild was served in 62 pubs, down to just 11 today. The latter is a particularly sad figure as the mild has improved markedly in quality in the last couple of years since production was contracted out to Morlands of Abingdon, better known for their Old Speckled Hen premium bitter.



So where now? 'Wilson's' beers seem set on a terminal rather than a downward trend. Admittedly beer mats have recently appeared promoting "Wilson's from Courage Manchester" but this is 'promotion' at its most minimal. Some won't be sorry to see the Wilsons name disappear



It may still say Wilsons - but its unlikely to serve any!

from our bars, given the pale shadow of their former selves that these beers are. But can or should we really take such a detached view as we witness part of our local beer heritage reduced to nothing more than a fading name on a public house wall?

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Drinking in Dusseldorf and Kolsching in Cologne

Using British Airways from Manchester, Dusseldorf is only one hours flying time away and with BAs recent price offer, reasonably affordable for a long weekend. Within easy reach of Dusseldorf is Cologne and either makes a good base to sample the beery delights of these unique brewing cities. Dusseldorf and Cologne are roughly the same distance apart as Manchester and Liverpool with a similar fierce rivalry, but while both our home cities boast fine brewing heritages, it is the individual beer styles to be found in both Dusseldorf and Cologne which set them apart.

Cologne is perhaps the more rough and ready of the two, with some of its best drinking establishments handily scattered around the main railway station and under the towering presence of the Dom, Cologne's unique twin spired gothic cathedral which miraculously survived the intense bombing of the 2nd World War. The nearest is perhaps the most famous of the three home brew houses - the Colner Hofbrau, known to one and all as PJ Fruh. Gruff but efficient service from the blue shirted and aproned staff brings the typical small cylindrical glasses of Kolsch - the generic name for the pale golden Cologne style of beer. Fruh 's is a fine example with a faint lactic aroma and a jolt of hops and balancing grainy malt. Within two hundred metres is the Sion Brewery, more pubby than Fruhs with a stand up bar and separate dining area. The beer was one of my favourites with a hoppy nose and a wonderful balance of malt and hops, with hops predominating through to the clean sharp finish. The third homebrew house is some distance along the inner ring road but well worth the walk. Brauhaus Paffgen is a cavernous multi roomed establishment,

a shrine to the Kolsch drinker, which when we went there at 5.30 on a Friday, was full to bursting point with all quaffing the local beer. The beer like its rivals at Fruh and Sion is unpasteurised and served at lightning speed straight from surprisingly small wooden barrels. Waiters dash about with trays of beer and replace empty glasses with full ones pausing only to mark your "score" on the edge of a drip mat. Paffgen is another fine hoppy example with a peppery and citrus taste leading to a short but very bitter finish.

One point to note is that while beer is served in lined glasses the 0.2 litre standard is rarely reached, chronic short measure being the rule rather than the exception. Prices are steep with a 0.2l glass typically costing DM 2.10 or about £2.50 per pint! Food is available in all three home brew houses and is reasonably priced with the emphasis being on pork in various forms. With the exception of the ubiquitous sauerkraut however, vegetarians will have a rough time of it

Cologne is a fine modern city with the Rhine flowing through it and fairly good shopping. Apart from the home brew houses there are many bigger breweries selling Kolsch although the quality varies.

Dusseldorf is said to be the most prosperous city in Germany. With its broad tree lined avenues and fur shops it does indeed exude wealth. Fortunately the average Dusseldorfer likes to have a beer as he or indeed she, shops so the four main homebrew houses are all in or around the main shopping area between the railway station and the Alt Stadt (Old Town). The beer on offer this time is darker, more like an English Bitter and is known as Altbeir. Like Kolsch this beer is top fermented but here the similarity ends. A good first stop for the thirsty is at F Schumacher between the new and old towns, near the railway station. Boasting a smallish front bar with scrubbed deal tables and cheerful service, this is an excellent, rather genteel tavern with a beer that had malt and hops aroma and an earthy malty body, which reminded me very much of Sam Smiths OBB. As a contrast Zum Urige is a raucous, noisy cavernous, multi roomed establishment which attracts all types. Standing room may be your only option with your tally of beers consumed being chalked on special blackboard style tiles on the wall. The beer here is assertively hoppy and bitter with some fruitiness. At the nearby Zum Schlüssel, right in the heart of the shopping area the beer is more flowery and hoppy, reminiscent of a fine Burton Pale Ale. The last of the home brew houses Zum Fuschen is more studenty and more of a pub. The beer is dry, big bodied with lots of mouthfeel, though not as hoppy as the others.

Another tip for the happy shopper is to visit the basement of the Carsch- Haus Department Store at Heinrich Heine Platz No 1. A beer bar there purveyed Pilsner Urquell and Budvar from the tap and had a wide selection of bottled beer from throughout Germany at (for Dusseldorf) very reasonable prices. Both Budvar and Urquell were less cost effective being DM 3.9 for 0.3l (£2.82 pint.). The other attraction is the fine range of food on sale with anything from curries (yes) to superb sandwiches, danish pastries, coffee etc.

In Dusseldorf there are also many larger commercial breweries but apart from Hannen and Frankenheim, you may like me, think them to be poor imitations of the beer found in the home breweries.

Finally the measures in Dusseldorf are 0.25l usually costing DM2.3 or £2.20 per pint. (DM-£= 2.38). Undermeasure is again omnipresent.

For the beer drinker who likes big cities, excellent beer houses and ease of travel Dusseldorf and Cologne rate very highly indeed. *Fares from Manchester from £119 + tax.*

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I dont know if you have noticed, but there has been a mini revolution in the pub trade since "D" day. By "D" day of course I am not talking about the Normandy landings, but about the more recent "Deregulation Day" - when licencing laws were relaxed in England and Wales following a successful trial in Scotland. To nobodys surprise, this did not result in the streets becoming full of marauding drunks at all hours of the day and night, but to many pubs seizing the opportunity to open when trade was there, rather than when the licencing authorities chose to let them open.

I have no doubt that some licencees were suprised at how this improved their turnover and, that it got them thinking. If the business is there in the middle of the afternoon surely it must also be there before eleven in the morning? And they are, of course, quite right. Whilst pubs cannot sell alcohol before 11:00 am there is nothing to stop them selling food and soft drinks. Why keep the doors of a large and expensive business, like a pub, locked and bolted (and empty) when there are droves of people passing by outside that are probably both thirsty and hungry? Enter ... the pub breakfast!

There are a number of pubs in OT's circulation area that now sell breakfasts, and this article attempts to review two of them. Well, at least two was the intention, but Rothwells on Spring Gardens in Manchester, which I had been led to believe would be open and serving breakfasts, turned out not to be open. With OT's copy date fast approaching there was not enough time to make alternative arrangements. For this article then I chose to review the Sir Robert Peel on Castle Street in Edgeley.

Breakfasts at the Bobby Peel are served from 7:30 until 11:00, daily. The breakfast is traditionally English, with egg, bacon, baked beans, two sausages, two tomatoes, two slices of toast, and a mug of tea or coffee. Simple stuff I know, but at just £1.75 it represents astonishing value for money. I challange anyone to cook the same at home for less (remember you have to do the washing up afterwards as well). For those that cannot face such a plateful, smaller snacks such as bacon barmcakes and egg on toast are also available at even more reasonable prices. Our meals were well cooked, well presented, and just the job to line our stomachs for the riggers of the day ahead.

Here at Opening Times Towers PLC, I for one would be interested in learning of other pubs in OT's circulation area that sell breakfasts. If you know that your local actually sells breakfasts, then please get in touch. If there are enough with enough variety, it might be worth a second article. SB

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Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak. Needless to say members of both branches are welcome at each other's events!

Diary	March 95	March 95
	<p>Thursday March 9 - Monthly branch meeting in the upstairs room, the Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Possible guest speaker from Tetley-Walker. Starts 8.00pm.</p>	<p>Thursday 30 - Pub of the Month presentation to Olde Cock, Didsbury. (see article on page 2).</p>
	<p>Monday 13 - Social, Three Tunnes, London Road, Hazel Grove. Starts 9.00pm.</p>	<p>Monday April 3 - Social, Sportsmans, Market Street, Manchester. Starts 9.00pm.</p>
	<p>Friday 17 - Levenshulme Stagger. Start 7.00pm Wheatsheaf, Stockport Road meet 8.30 Union, also Stockport Road.</p>	<p><i>High Peak branch cover Romiley, Marple, Bredbury, Woodley and all points north. They have advised OT of the following events:</i></p>
	<p>Monday 20 - Social, Woodstock, Barlow Moor Road, West Didsbury. Starts 9.00pm.</p>	<p>Monday March 13 - Monthly branch meeting, Station, Warrington Street, Ashton-under-Lyne. Aim to get there by 8.30.</p>
	<p>Thursday 23 - Robinsons Brewery Visit. Meet 7.00pm Red Bull, Hillgate or 7.30 brewery hospitality room (entrance at rear of brewery on Apsley Street (NB this was full as we went to press but phone 477 1973 for cancellations and/or reserve places).</p>	<p>Monday 20 - Membership meeting, Pineapple, Marple. Starts 8.30.</p>
	<p>Saturday 25 - Bus trip to Leek (including Whim brewery's first tied house, the Wilkes Head). 201 to Derby, departs Chorlton Street 11.45, Stockport 12.10.</p>	<p>Regional Events</p>
	<p>Monday 27 - Social, Little Jack Horners, Wellington Street, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.</p>	<p>Wednesday March 8 - Regional Meeting, Beer House, Angel St Mcr (off Rochdale Road) 8pm (coincides with first day of Cider Festival)</p>

FORTHCOMING BEER FESTIVALS

Mar 31 - Apr 2 Oldham Beer Festival, Werneth Park Music Room, Frederick St. Fri 6 - 11, Sat 12 - 4 & 6 - 11, Sun 12 - 3. 35 Real Ales & Ciders.

Apr 28 - 30 Rhyl Beer Festival, Rhyl Town Hall, 45 Real ales from North Wales & South West England. Thurs, Fri, Sat 6 - 11 & 12 - 4 Fri & Sat



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The Vanishing Tap Room (Part 1)

Picture this scene, a foul Winter night, wind howling, rain and sleet hammering down. As you get your coat on you are met with, "You're not going out tonight?", with the emphasis on tonight! You reply, "Well, you can come too if you want." not minding what answer you get. It does not matter, the call of the pub and the good old tap-room in particular is too strong, and out you go.

You make it to the pub door and in you go. The warmth envelops you and you wipe the rain off your face. Shove your way to the bar, get your pint and head for the tap-room (some know it as the vault or public bar), as per normal.

Why is it that a good local and especially a traditional tap-room should be such a magnet for drinkers of all ages and generations. Grandson and granddad often drink in the same tap-room and desire no other.

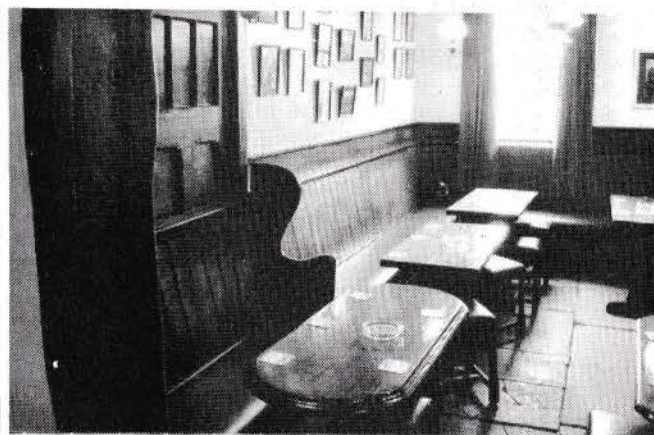
In there you settle down and greet your mates like you have done countless times all year round, year in and year out. You get stuck into cards, darts, dominoes, deep conversation, or just warm your backside against a real fire (if your pub is lucky enough to have one).

The surroundings are familiar, plain and straightforward; the tap-room has no pretensions to being a cosy lounge; its traditional furnishings often being much older than its current regular inhabitants. You are in a traditional tap-room which gives a sense of permanence to the place. No-nonsense seating; (often basic bare wood); easy to clean floors; scrubbed wood tables; smoke-darkened ceiling; dartboard, maybe other tradi-


tional games such as 'shove-halfpenny' or 'devil among the tailors' - all comfortable and easy to live with. No pool table or electronic games in this tap-room! - but time-honoured snooker or billiards if the room is large enough. The 'social notice-board' on the wall (next to the calendar from 1993), team sheets, and pontoon charts full of names are a sure sign of a thriving tap-room.

You feel at home here, like you have for all the years that this has been your and your friends regular tap-room. There is an ageless quality to good tap-rooms; a sort of in-built resistance to change which you only really start to value when it is threatened or you have lost it, and your tap-room is no more and has become a 'smart' lounge or part of some architect's open-plan pub nightmare.

The traditional pub tap-room has served generations before you as it serves you now. Surely it must be worth protecting for those who want only to drink their beer in genuine unchanging surroundings which cannot be described as a



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'leisure experience'. It is the passage of time and generations of use which creates a traditional tap-room with its air of comfortable shabbiness; it cannot be created overnight in a pub renovation. A fact which many breweries seem to overlook when the old tap-room disappears and a new 'games area' takes its place. Odd really that they are trying to create the atmosphere of the thing they have just destroyed! A mere 'games room' doesn't make a tap-room.

This idyllic tap-room does not exist you may say. But it does. Such tap-rooms do still exist, although declining in number. Their last bastions may be the back street local in industrial areas and pubs deep in rural England, less susceptible to fashionable change; consumer pressure, or the need of brewers to attract identified socio-economic groups to more upmarket pubs.

These pubs, which cherish their taprooms, along with their customers are worth fighting for when threatened, for God forbid that we should be robbed of centuries of tradition.

I have known some excellent tap-rooms in the Marple area which alas are no longer with us. The Crown in Hawk Green was a classic example. This was a tap-room without equal. It had all the qualities outlined plus waiter service. How many tap-rooms have you known which had a waiter service? As is common with many pubs the downfall of this tap-room was the retirement of the long-serving landlord, who knew the place and what most of its customers wanted, and he was rewarded with loyalty.

The brewery wants the pub 'up-marketed' and often the vault does not figure in their plans and disappears. Many of the tap-room's regular users also move on as the pub changes character.

Those pubs that can maintain a good thriving traditional tap-room whether urban or rural would do well to protect its qualities and guard it against change.

Many of the best pubs in the area have done just this (try the Shepherds Arms in Whaley Bridge!) It is their resistance to change which makes them stand out and stick in the memory, amid the proliferation of pubs which have lightly tossed away their character at the whim of an architect or at the dictates of whatever passing fashion is the trend at the time.

Good tap-rooms are in decline, but they are part and parcel of our drinking heritage, and if a pub wants to retain something characterful which sets it apart from the herd of easily forgettable look-alike pubs, then bucking the trend and striving for the good old tap-room is a positive start.

In a future issue we will conclude by looking at some of the reasons for the tap-room decline and counter-arguments for its survival.

Tom Lord

Here Comes Summer

Isn't it always true that the sun only has to appear from behind the clouds, and out come the sunglasses, the Bermuda shorts, the flip-flops and sun-tan oil? In short, people think that Summer's come. And because British summers are too short, people go overboard to make the most of them.

Last year I did my first beer garden on St Patrick's Day, March 17th. That is, it was warm enough to go outside, take your coat off and relax over a pint. And for me, that is a good sign that summer is on its way. This year, on February 3rd, there were people sitting at the tables outside the Woodstock in West Didsbury until at least 9.30 in the evening. Blame the government, or even the weather if you must, but it does appear that summer starts earlier and earlier.

How better to spend a balmy summer's evening, than enjoying good beer in the garden of a pub? The problem is that while the beer may be fine, the service swift and friendly, and the company stimulating, the environs of the beer garden itself may leave a lot to be desired.

It is for this reason that we (well, I) have decided to take a look at beer gardens in the local area, with a view to commending the best (and slating the worst?) at the end of our glorious summer. We live in hope....

The fact remains that there are some fine beer gardens out there that are often missed because people don't know about them. As such, if you know of any pub that has a worthy out-door drinking area, contact me and I can give it the publicity it deserves. And until the (ever-approaching) summer, happy drinking!

Richard Hough, Opening Times, (Stockport Beer Gardens), 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. 0161 477-1973

New Prices Probe

The Office of Fair Trading is to look at beer prices.

About time too, you might say, but this isn't a look at the price of your pint. Well, not directly. The investigation follows complaints that the bigger brewers (and this could include regionals like Vaux and Banks's) are charging their tenants more for their beer than free-traders. This means that, for example, a tied pub might be paying £60 a barrel more for the same beer that is supplied to a freehouse down the street.

The practice is widespread throughout the industry and has been going on for years. It is only in recent times that a problem has arisen, mainly due to the activities of the national brewers (led, it must be said, by Courage) offering grotesquely inflated discounts in a scramble to tie up as much of the free trade as possible.

While the probe has been criticised by the nationals, complaints have also come from the Independent Family Brewers of Britain, who, surely, would have more to gain from a level playing field, as indeed would many micro-brewers.

Oldham Beer Festival

Werneth Park Music Room, Frederick St.

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Following the sell-out success of last year's CAMRA guide to central Manchester pubs, a fully revised and up-dated edition is set to appear at the beginning of April.

To more accurately reflect the drinking scene in the City Centre the guide has been retitled "Manchester Pubs and Bars" and with the constantly changing pub scene in the City Centre this will once again be an essential purchase for anyone who visits the City, be it every week or just a few times a year. If this year's edition is as much a success as the last one, this guide could feasibly become an annual publication, thus becoming an authoritative benchmark for the City pub and bar scene.

The cover price is just £3.50. CAMRA members can get it for £2.50 or £3 by post from Roger Hall, 123 Hill Lane, Manchester M9 6PW. Any cheques should be made payable to CAMRA North Manchester. OT will be reviewing the guide in a future issue.



Curmudgeon Backs Kids in Pubs Shock!

As from February, it's now legal for pubs to allow children under 14 in bars, if they obtain a children's certificate from the licensing justices. You may imagine that this is a development strongly condemned by this column, but not so. I have gone on record before in saying that, while I was against a free-for-all, there was a good case for a modest reform of the law to allow children in some pubs, at some times. While the new legislation isn't exactly what I would have wanted, it's a lot better than it might have been.

The licensee will have to make a specific application for a certificate - it won't be available automatically. He will have to show the pub provides a "family atmosphere" and a range of soft drinks, and serves food at all times when children are admitted. Children will not be permitted to stay after 9 p.m. This will undoubtedly be attractive to pubs in tourist areas, and to Brewer's Fayre-type operations in towns and suburbs.

It's unlikely, though, that many town-centre boozers, backstreet locals or estate pubs will be tempted to apply for a certificate, the requirement to serve food at all times is likely to prove a particular deterrent. So children will be allowed in suitable pubs where there is a genuine demand, but parents won't be able to drag them into pubs which have nothing to offer them, which is in the interest of neither the children nor other customers.

While giving a guarded welcome to this change in the law, I'm very sceptical whether it will be properly enforced, given that much other pub-related legislation - such as that on price lists, short measures and smoking behind the bar - is routinely ignored. Can we also hope that the availability of children's certificates will reduce the temptation to flout the current law and allow children in bars anyway? This happens far too often, yet if you complain to the licensee that he is breaking the law by allowing children into his bar, it's much more likely to be you who is shown the door than the offending infants!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

We're often told how pubs are struggling today, and beer sales are down, yet paradoxically, with the "guest beer revolution", most pubs serving real ale now offer a wider choice than ten years ago. Up to a point, this is a good thing, but it's now often reached the stage, particularly in pubs owned by the big breweries, where the number of beers on offer exceeds the pub's ability to sell them quickly enough to keep in good condition. I have been in pubs, at lunchtimes or evenings early in the week, where there were six beers and twelve customers, half not even drinking ale. Under those circumstances, what chance have you got of a decent pint, especially if you want to drink anything other than the standard bitter?

CAMRA must take its share of the blame, as over many years there has been a tendency to put "handpump counting" first and beer quality second. Too many indifferent ten-handpump free houses with variable beer quality have been included in the Good Beer Guide, and not enough good two-beer locals where the beer is consistent throughout the week. Not surprisingly, the big brewers have followed this example and gone for a policy of "never mind the quality, feel the width", which does no favours for real ale's long-term prospects.

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

MARCH '90

Just as Opening Times No.71 was going to press, speculation was rife that Grand Met was to sell its brewing division to Elders IXL, the Fosters lager group owned by John Elliott. This meant that Grand Met, trading locally under the Wilsons/Websters and Chef and Brewer banner, would swap its breweries for the 5000 Courage and John Smith's pubs owned by Elders. The deal would result in Grand Met sidestepping the Government's May 1st deadline for introducing guest ales into Big 6 pubs - the rules wouldn't apply to Grand Met, as it would cease to be a brewer. There were problems with the Office of Fair Trading, as the deal would create a single company with 20% of the beer market, and a single pub owning company with anything up to 10,000 pubs.

Prospects seemed bright last month that BodPubCo pubs would be offered a choice of guest beers, but it transpired that this would only involve Warrington based Tetley Walker - so Boddingtons would take on Tetley Bitter and Castlemaine XXXX lager throughout its estate. Boddingtons had always attracted a loyal brand following locally, and it remained to be seen how Tetleys would fare against the competition.

There was a rather depressing report from Paul Thompson on the availability (or lack of it) of Worthington White Shield, brewed by Bass. This was described as "one of the very few genuine British traditionally brewed bottled beers." It is by no means universally available in Bass off-licences (or pubs) yet they seem to have no difficulty in supplying imported foreign beers to these same off licenses. If Bass cannot supply a traditional British product now, what chance do they have when the Single European Market is introduced in 1992?

Finally, two items of news from the back page which are reminders that nothing stays the same for very long in the pub trade:-

Higson's Bitter had been dropped from the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport because nobody was drinking it. Landlord Jim Mulvey said that he couldn't drink half a barrel a week himself.

Midsummer Leisure's "Firkin" home-brew set up in Riley's Snooker Hall at All Saints was unlikely to proceed. (To become the Flea & Firkin)

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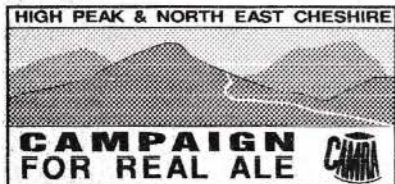
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MARCH Featured Pub

The Royal Oak High Lane

Local CAMRA members with long memories may recall a branch party night more years ago than most would like to admit when Burtonwood's celebrated the accession of new landlord Jack Polkinghorn to the Royal Oak. We also celebrated something else which my failing memory refuses to summon up - reintroduction of real ale? Down all the years since there has continued to be real ale and the Royal Oak has thrived.

I know little of its history but, like all the pubs in High Lane, it sits squarely on the A6. This is an ancient Roman Road (the Aqua Armentia) and once linked the ferts of Manchester and Buxton. Coal was discovered in the area around 1750, the canals arrived and early industry brought more people to this traditional farming land. It would seem a fair assumption that, like most pubs along this main road, it served as a half-way coaching house for traffic between Derbyshire and Manchester in those golden days for coaches in the first half of the last century.

There has always been something going on at the Royal Oak - groups, bands, sing-alongs. The tradition continues today: they reckon to have about 12 or 14 live musical acts rotating around the regular music nights of Tuesday and Friday including folk groups and jazz bands. Wednesday is quiz night and very slick it is too with jackpot and raffle prizes. Peter Abell the landlord has been here for about a year and is well-known to many CAMRA stalwarts after stints as a Holt's man at the Grafton, Chorlton-on-Medlock and the Rose Hill Tavern, Westhoughton. He is determined to succeed here and keep up the energetic approach of recent landlords.

The long rectangular lay-out is somewhat in the style of a hunting lodge and there are beams a-plenty - some more authentic looking than others. The walls are decked with memorabilia of all sorts - old beer bottles, plaques, brasses, old local photographs, ancient adverts and prints and an interesting set of Victorian sheet music. The only alteration in recent years has been the bar; it has been moved back and completely refitted in dark wood. The change has been a success; there's a more mellow and roomy feel to the bar area now. You can play darts or pool and eat at lunchtime, afternoon or early evening and perhaps most important for our readers take a rare opportunity for the area to taste Burtonwood's Dark Mild or Bitter (handpump) - and it's in good nick.

The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch Contact is Tim Jones (0161 371 9006 (h))



The Royal Oak, High Lane

Marple Review

A few months ago in an article on a Romiley pub crawl I said that we would take a look at the beers available in Marple centre. Let's start with a run down of Marple centre pubs and the beers currently on offer:-

Railway, Stockport Rd, Rose Hill - Robinsons Mild/Bitter (electric pumps)

Bowling Green, Stockport Rd - Holts Bitter (handpump), Webster Bitter/Wilsons Bitter (handpump)

Jolly Sailor, Stockport Rd - Courage Directors, usually a guest beer also (Hook Norton Old Hookey at the last time of calling)

Hatton Arms, Church Lane - Robinson Mild/Bitter (handpump)

Navigation, Stockport Rd - Robinson Mild/Bitter (handpump)

Bulls Head, Market St - Robinsons Mild/Bitter (electric pump)

Ring o' Bells, Church Lane - Robinsons Mild/Bitter (electric pump)

Otters Lodge, Cross Lane - Boddingtons Bitter, Marstons Pedigree, Flowers IPA (handpumps)

Pineapple, Market Street - Robinsons Mild/Bitter, Robinsons Frederics Bitter, Hartleys XB/Robinsons Old Stockport alternating (all handpump)

Corkscrew Wine Bar, Stockport Rd - Stones Bitter (handpump)

As might be expected Robinsons dominate the central Marple area with six of the ten outlets. Particular commendations must go to the Bowling Green for reintroducing Holts Bitter; to the Pineapple for being the only pub in the area to serve all Robinsons draught beers (Old Tom currently excepted), and the Jolly Sailor for its 'guest' beer.

The fringe areas of Marple have a few bright spots, the notable ones being:-

Sportsmans Arms, Strines Road - Mitchells Bitter, Batemans Mild, 2 regular guest beers changing weekly on average (Everards beers are currently next up)

Romper, Marple Ridge - Boddingtons Bitter, Theakstons Old Peculier, Marstons Pedigree, Coach House Bitter, Innkeepers Special Reserve (handpump)

Travellers Call, Lane Ends, Marple Bridge - Robinsons Mild/Bitter (handpump)

Spring Gardens, Compstall Road - Boddingtons Bitter, John Smiths Bitter, Pedigree (handpump)

Little Mill, Rowarth - Camerons Strongarm, Banks Bitter, Robinsons Frederics Bitter, Hansons Bitter, Pedigree (handpump) There is therefore a reasonable selection of beers in the area, but those members whose drinking ground this is would welcome a few more guest beers in the centre of Marple.

Next time we will take a look at High Lane and Disley.

Well let's start with an apology. Last month some keen eyed readers noticed that we had fabricated a refurbishment in the Romiley/Marple area. It was erroneously reported that the Hare & Hounds was being refurbished by Boddingtons. This should have read The Spread Eagle (the Hatherlow bit was correct). Anyway whilst we are on the subject it would now appear that this alteration is to make room for (another) of Henry's increasing collection of tables! Another popular pub bites the dust to make way for the ever profitable food monster. Enough of me grinding my axe!

In Glossop, rumours abound about the future of the Boddington Ale House, **The Star**. Amid various (and varying) reports about the beer quality and the fact that the pub has had four different licensees in the last twelve months the chances of the pub staying in Boddingtons hands are now the subject for conjecture. It is hoped that the pub will stay as it is, an "Ale House" and the to-ing and fro-ing of landlords can be resolved so that Glossop drinkers can still sample the range of traditional beers which can only be provided by pubs such as this.

I wish I could make up my mind about Boddington PubCo!

Also in Glossop, the Prince of Wales has recently gained a new landlord. The landlord of the GBG listed Oddfellows (Chinley) has moved to take over the Prince, and is highly delighted. But as there is no new licensee at the Oddies he is splitting his time between the two. Seems like hard work to me.

Finally, for Glossop, **The Whitely Nab** is expecting Vaux's new Honey Beer "Waggle Dance". This is due to be on sale on the weekend of 25/3/95. By the way did you know that the "waggle dance" refers to the movements of a bee when it is informing the rest of the colony, in bee-speak, of the whereabouts of a new source of nectar. It's a bit like the uncontrolled twitching of a Beer Spotter when he hears a new brew! By the way, I hope I've got the date right. You know how mardy twitchers can get if they miss a big one!

Over in Denton at the Red Lion (Hydes) the current landlord is about to move on to a fresh challenge. He is to be the licensee of the Roebuck in Moberley (free) and he intends to introduce Hydes Bitter into the range of beers. We wish both the new and old licensees every success in their new ventures.

In Bredbury, the long time keg-only Bass pub, the **Queens** (Lower Bents Lane) is now serving Worthington Bitter on handpump. OK so it's not the most inspiring of traditional beers, but the landlord is to be congratulated on taking this decision. Let's hope the locals make this a success. You never know, in time the range may increase and guest beers may appear. I'm feeling all dizzy now!

In Stalybridge, in the Old Fleece, both **Boddingtons Bitter** and **John Smiths Bitter** are being sold for £1.00 a pint. This is probably a reaction to the abundance of good beer which is available in this locality with the **Q and Rose & Crown** as neighbours!

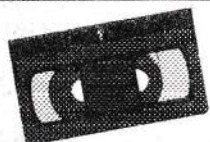
Finally on a more serious note, the licensee of **The Sportsman** in Strines has been seriously ill over the last few weeks. We all wish him a speedy recovery and look forward to seeing him behind the bar (giving out his orders) soon.

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VIDEO REVIEW



"The Best of British - 30 Classic Great British Pubs"

You may see this video in the 'General Interest' section of your local video store. I picked mine up at HMV in Manchester, intrigued by the title and at 100 minutes you get a lot of video for your £13.99.

After the first viewing, I was fully intending to completely trash this video but others have looked on it more favourably and a second run-through brought me to a more considered view, it's really a curate's egg, good in parts but, to be honest, generally not very good at all.

The opening scene shows the three presenters, Kate Bellamy (of whom I know nothing), CAMRA stalwart Roy Bailey and...Johnny Morris, yes, that's right, the Johnny Morris of 'Animal Magic' fame who, the cover tells us, adds 'his own magic' to the pubs reviewed. This scene gives the initial impression of being set in a pub with the three grouped round a table drinking beer; closer inspection reveals it to be someone's house, you can see into the kitchen in the background. This sets the tone for what is to follow.

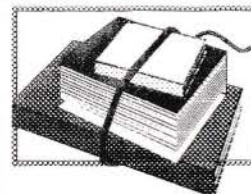
The selection of pubs is very uneven and, with one or two notable exceptions the vast majority are in the southern third of the country, with just a couple in Scotland (one of which seems to be more of a country house hotel than pub) and only a sprinkling in the north, with just one in Manchester, the Peveril of the Peak, and one in Liverpool, the Philharmonic. Fine pubs both but what about Liverpool's Vine, the Lamb in Eccles, the Circus in Manchester or even Stalybridge Buffet Bar? The answer I think, is cost. The features on those pubs north of Birmingham generally have no presenter on screen but rather a voice over from Bellamy, who comes over like a B Movie version of Judith Chalmers, you just can't help feeling that the nearest she has been to these pubs is the script she is reading from. Off-putting, and supremely irritating after 100 minutes, is the twee background music that accompanies all the little pub portraits. Even when there is an on-screen presenter, there is generally no background noise from the pubs, just this damn music, which apart from anything else gives you no feel for the atmosphere of the pubs featured. Mind you that is perhaps just as well, for when the mike is turned on the sound quality is often terrible.

And what of the other two? Roy Bailey mugs shamelessly to CAMRA but he is genuinely enthusiastic and gives some life to his spots. Which is more than can be said for Johnny Morris who at times seems to have trouble getting his words out. At least he doesn't attempt to give his pints funny voices.



The pub reviews are punctuated by brewery visits which are informative and cover a cross section from micro Bunces to the huge Boddingtons plant at Strangeways. Unfortunately these are usually accompanied by interviews with the brewers which seem either forced or appear to be strangely cut short. There is a sequence filmed at CAMRA's Great British Beer Festival which includes a good plug for the campaign, although CAMRA's Steve Cox seems to be wearing a jacket several sizes too big.

The production values are lousy too. I've already mentioned the sound quality. The lighting's poor, the editing is haphazard and the post-production is even worse. The graphics are crude and they don't even manage to spell some of the pub names right. Edward D Wood, eat your heart out - well, perhaps it's not **that** bad and, to be honest, it's certainly worth a viewing if you've a rainy afternoon to spare. It's **not** worth £13.99, though - if you want to look at it, borrow it off some mug who's already splashed out....like your's truly.



BOOK REVIEW



West Lancs Real Ale Guide, CAMRA West Lancs Branch, 96 pages, £3.50

In the wake of 1992's CAMRA guide to the pubs of Preston in Guild Year comes this new guide to the entire area covered by CAMRA's West Lancashire branch.

Centred on Preston, Leyland and Chorley, the guide goes east to the outskirts of Blackburn, west to the outskirts of Southport, and up into the hills as far as Longridge and Chipping - however the Ormskirk area, although West Lancashire for local government purposes, is not covered.

Every real pub gets a paragraph of description, with facilities indicated by symbols (generally subtly different from those in the Good Beer Guide). The (surprisingly many) keg pubs, largely drawn from the former Matthew Brown estate, are relegated to a list at the back, showing just name, address, and owner. The editorial items include, as well as the standard stuff, a detailed run-down on the area's brewing history and a good page on misleading dispense systems.

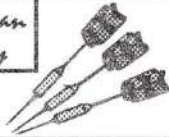
A recent field-test in Preston revealed the descriptions to give a good impression of the pubs, although inevitably there have been a few changes since surveying closed. The maps are simple but usable, though they would have been improved by making a distinction between major and minor roads, and Preston's northward sprawl means that too many of its pubs are indicated simply by arrows pointing off the map. There should, however, have been rather more maps - just Preston, Chorley, and a sketch map of the area is not really enough. Some basic public transport information would also have been helpful.

Nevertheless, this is a workmanlike, well-written, and attractive guide, well worth buying. It's likely to be on sale at CAMRA festivals in the North-West - Preston has its own, at St Walburga's Parish Centre (near the tall church spire), on 24th and 25th March.

Items intended for review should be sent to the Editor at the address on page 5.

Fistful of Arrows

By Brian Carey



Is Darts a sport? Or is it just a pastime? The debate rears its head at the start of every year, to coincide with the T.V. showing of the Embassy World Championship.

It is usually sparked off by an often ill-informed and one sided argument in one of the "quality" papers. The game makes for easy knocking copy during what is a quiet season for the papers.

The truth is that the word "sport" is notoriously difficult to define. The New Penguin English Dictionary says that the word means "a source of diversion or recreation." No problem there. Darts certainly comes under that.

But the Oxford Dictionary of Current English states that sport should be "an outdoor game, usually requiring physical exertion". Which would rule out indoor games like basketball, ice hockey and indoor athletics. And pastimes requiring little physical effort would go. I can think of snooker, bowls, target shooting and even golf, that could be conveniently classed under that banner.

There is a school of thought that subscribes to the belief that a sport should derive from basic human instincts, like hunting and warfare. This would only include running, jumping, fighting and throwing pursuits. As darts has its origins in Archery practice, then under those terms it qualifies.

The fact of the matter is that it matters not what one person holds as an ideal.

In the UK three million people are registered as competitive darts players and many of us treat it as seriously as any cricketer, footballer or tennis player. And if anyone believes that there is no skill involved, then I suggest they offer to play a game against one of the top local players, like Darryl Fitton, Tony O'Shea or Phil Kerr. Maybe one of those journalists who decry the abilities of dart players should have a go, too.

There are two local leagues who are currently accepting new teams for their new season.

The Stockport Central 501 are nearing the end of their current season and are looking to increase the size of the league. Anyone interested in fielding a team in this competition should contact John Parkin, the landlord of the Sir Robert Peel, for further information. The Stockport & District Darts and Crib league are also coming to the conclusion of their own season. Any team interested in joining that league should

attend the AGM, to be held at Cale Green Social Club, Dundonald Street at 8.30pm on Monday 20 February. The new season gets underway on Tuesday 14 March. Secretary Ken Brown can be contacted on 0161 494 0088 prior to the meeting.

Local players and many from further afield, are flocking to play in the Bobby Peel Classic. Heats are being held on Friday evenings, with eight qualifiers going on to contest the final.

Players from Macclesfield and Leicester were among the entrants for the first heat, when local man Tony O'Shea claimed his final place. He beat Warwickshire county player Jez Porter in a highly contested final.

The final eight players will share in the prize fund of five hundred pounds. A couple of quid will gain you entrance into the competition. Heat losers can re-enter and every entrant is included in the draw for a week's free accommodation in Torremolinos. Toe the oche at 8.30pm Friday nights at the Bobby Peel.

Finally, I can shed light on the case of the empty trophy cabinet at Heaton Chapel's George & Dragon (OT - January).

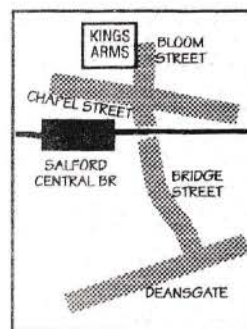
The trophies, photographs and pennants belonged to Carnforth FC. The George & Dragon has been the team headquarters for a number of years. However, the club has recently found a new ground and part of the deal was to use the social facilities at their new home. Obviously they had to take their memorabilia with them.

The trophy cabinet won't be empty long though. The mixed darts team were runners-up in the team knock-out cup in their first season, and also picked up a crib trophy.

With men's, ladies and mixed Darts teams enjoying some success this current season, and having one of the strongest snooker teams in the area, the cabinet won't be empty for long.

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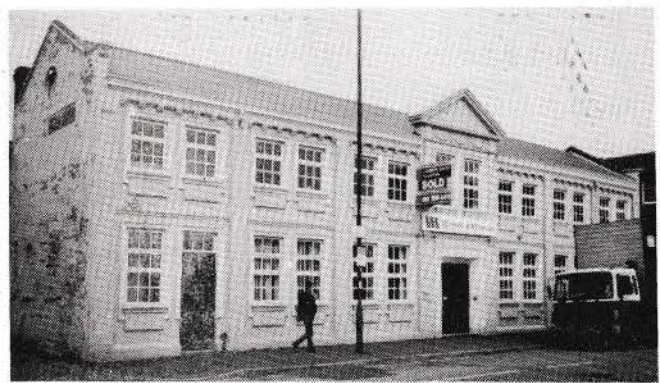
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Welcome to Joe and Margaret Maher, new licensees at the Prince of Wales in Gatley. They have moved from another Hydes pub, the Windmill in Runcorn where they were for seven years. During their time there they brought the pub up to Good Beer Guide standard and are certainly a welcome addition to the area.

The mild at the Comfortable Gill, King Street West, Stockport, is now keg. Yet another victim of slow sales. Boddies mild is certainly becoming thin on the ground - apart from the Greyhound in Edgeley do any other pubs in the Stockport or South Manchester area sell it? The Comfy Gill, meanwhile still continues to sell a fine pint of Boddies Bitter.

A recent trip round Edgeley revealed the demise of two more fake handpumps for keg Scrumpy Jack. At the Royal Oak on Castle Street, Scrumpy Jack had disappeared entirely while at the Swan on Shaw Heath it is now sold via the truncated 'handpump' and keg switch. Well done on both counts.

The 'Irish' bar boom along the Wilmslow Road corridor continues. The former Harrison & Killey building on Grosvenor Street (opposite the Flea & Firkin) is now in the throes of conversion into "Scruffy Murphys" by Allied-Domecq (that's



The proliferation of 'Irish' pubs continues with the new 'Scruffy Murphys' opening opposite the Flea and Firkin in the old Harrison & Killey building. Contrary to rumour the Guinness will be English brewed with the new gas mix, and not the real unpasteurised Dublin stuff. A wasted opportunity.

Tetleys to you and us) and is slated to open by the end of this month. A similar development at the old Queen of Hearts in Fallowfield will open a week or so later. This latter will also incorporate a student bar offering guest beers.

Meanwhile, after the briefest of incarnations as the 'Cafe Bar International' the former 'Old Steam Brewery' was set to reopen at the end of February as 'McNallys', which is apparently to be a sports club with, you guessed, an Irish theme.

Down in Fallowfield BodPubCo's 'Irish' bar, **Durty Nellies**, was featuring a house music night when OT popped in recently - very Irish (or then again, perhaps not...)

Back in Stockport, the excellent **Gladstone** on Hillgate is currently closed. We understand that this is due to a financial disagreement between Burtonwood Brewery and the licensees. Let's hope it's not too long before this fine pub reopens.

In Stockport's Mersey Square the site of the closed 'Ups N Downs', or whatever its last name was, has made for a depressing sight. The pub has struggled to succeed for many years, hampered by the terrible internal layout and decor installed in the mid-seventies. There have recently been signs of activity and we believe that it is to reopen as a bar and restaurant. Let's hope a move up-market enables it to shed the former troubled reputation.

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MANCHESTER MATTERS



by Rhys Jones

First of all, apologies to the Bank in the City Centre, which a gremlin transformed to XXXXX in last month's column - as I said, it has Tetley Bitter, Greenalls Original, and a guest beer on handpump. Still in the City Centre, the Rising Sun now has guests from the Whitbread guest beer list, often including Timothy Taylors Landlord. This

is a first and very welcome sign of improvement in the Magic Pub Company's motley local estate - and the even better news is that the licensee who introduced the guest beers, to which I understand there is a firm commitment from Magic management, has recently returned to his former pub Paddy's Goose where similar if not more far-reaching changes are planned. Clearly one to watch.

In Gorton, the Vale Cottage no longer sells Marstons Pedigree - but is looking for an alternative guest beer to replace it - this will presumably have to come from the Courage list as they already sell one "free choice" guest beer in the shape of (usually) Taylors Landlord.

In Rusholme the Welcome has added handpumped Tetley Bitter and the Gardeners Arms is now owned by Paramount and has Wilsons Bitter on handpump. Very regrettably, however, the Whitworth now has keg Scrumpy Jack cider on fake "handpump". There really is no excuse for this - non-misleading dispense is readily available and indeed is in use in certain Marstons houses locally, and it really is time that Marstons joined the growing band of regional independent brewers (including most recently our very own Robinsons) who protect their reputation by banning the fake handpump from their pubs. In many ways a decent pub, the Whitworth had recently been touted as a possible future Pub of the Month; there can of course be no question of this, or of any other CAMRA recognition, until the offending article is removed.

But let me finish on a note of praise. I recently visited the Friendship in Fallowfield for the first time since its refurbishment, and was much impressed. The work has been sensibly

low-key and maintains a proper distinction between the pub's two main areas, staff was friendly and efficient, and a balanced mix of students and locals was attracted to a clearly well-run pub. But what really caught my eye (and may well be unique) is that all THREE generally available Hydres beers - Bitter, Mild and Light - are on sale. Congratulations all round - not least to the brewery for having the self-confidence to stick to electric pumps rather than pander to the ignorant assumption that if it's not out of a handpump it can't be real ale.

Small Brewery News

Snowdonia Brewery's planned move to Four Crosses in Montgomeryshire has fallen foul of problems with the intended site, and the brewery is at present still located at the Bryn Arms, Gellilydan. But not for much longer. The pub's lease seems to have reverted to Courage (or one of its trading arms) and relations between Martin Barry, the brewer, and Courage have been strained for some time.

Martin has apparently been given only a few weeks to move the brewery. At the recent Llandudno festival, Martin told Opening Times that a move to the Shrewsbury area is on the cards some time in the coming months. Meanwhile Snowdonia have a new beer, Black Star Stout (5%ABV) which is well worth seeking out. With the move to England it is difficult to see the Snowdonia name not undergoing a change - more news when we have it.

Some Lancashire microbreweries are moving too. In Preston, the Little Avenham Brewery is to move from its current home in the cellar of Gastons Wine Bar to a new home in part of the warehouse of its parent company, Preston Wine Company, on Hawkins Street in the town. The move was expected to have been completed by the time this issue appears.

Preston's second brewery, Hart Brewery, is still operating without planning permission from the brewer's garage in the Ribbleton area of the town, and is not now expected to move to the Cellar Bar pub in Blackburn, a regular outlet for the beers. Instead, the brewery is to move to the Cartford Arms at Little Eccleston, a well-known freehouse where rumours of an imminent brewery have been circulating for a year or more.

Finally, as advertised elsewhere in this issue, Leatherbritches Brewery (Fenny Bentley, Derbys) are having a beer festival at their pub, Bentley Brook Inn, May 26 - 29.

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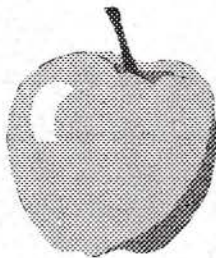
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