

OPENING TIMES



5,500 CIRCULATED
EVERY MONTH

CAMRA NEWSLETTER OF THE YEAR - November 1995

DOUBLE WHAMMY Allied axe Warrington while Greenalls grab Boddies

No sooner had last month's Opening Times hit the streets than the local brewing and pub scene was shaken to its foundations by two major announcements. First came the news that Carlsberg-Tetley were to close their Warrington brewery with the loss of 240 jobs, bringing an end to 130 years of brewing at the Dallam Lane site. The brewery will close by October next year, and while final details are still sketchy, it looks as though the Tetley Bitter supplied to North West pubs will now come from Leeds while most of the other beers brewed at Warrington, notably the Greenalls, Shipstones and Davenport's beers brewed for Greenalls Group will go to the former Inde Coope brewery at Burton-on-Trent.

A major upheaval had been on the cards since Carlsberg-Tetley announced a major review of their operations last year. The general view, though, was that smaller plants at Wrexham and Alloa could be the most vulnerable. Warrington, brewing at something like 90% of capacity and producing 500,000 barrels a year, was seen as one of the most efficient of the group's breweries.

The closure decision has been regarded as a sign of desperation by some observers. Just days before the closure was announced, stockbrokers Smith New Court issued a damning report on Carlsberg-Tetley's performance and urged Allied Domecq (who own all the former Allied Breweries pubs) to sell its 50% stake in the venture to Carlsberg for a nominal sum. It is being assumed that even this drastic surgery may not be enough and that further reviews could even threaten the existence of major plants such as that at Burton.

If all this wasn't enough, the very next day saw the announcement of an agreed bid for Boddington Group by Greenalls. Again firm details are still not clear but what has been made certain is that there will be up to 500 job losses and all the existing Boddington Group offices would close.

CAMRA is opposing the takeover and is making a submission to the Office of Fair Trading demanding that the deal should be

referred to the Monopolies Commission. CAMRA's opposition is on three grounds:

- * the erosion of competition, particularly here in the North West where the combined group would have a 15% market share.
- * concentration in the wholesale market - both groups have built up substantial operations in the area - which would squeeze the profit margin available to regional and micro-brewers to the point where some might become non-viable.
- * the anomaly of a tied estate of well over 2000 pubs not being subject to the beer orders, allowing tenants a guest beer of choice.

Greenalls have indicated that some of the more marginal pubs could be disposed of but Boddingtons have spent the last few years unloading these - so the worrying prospect is that pubs that just don't fit in with the perceived corporate image will be either sold or closed adding yet more uncertainty to an already troubled local pub scene.

In NOVEMBER's OPENING TIMES

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Masterclass

Burtonwood is the latest brewery to produce seasonal, or special-edition ales. The first in this Masterclass series is Almond's Original Stout with an ABV of 4.2%, and it's available until the end of the year. This will be followed by Tom Thumper ABV 4.5% "a full bodied, malty hoppy bitter" which will be on sale from mid March '96 until 31st May. Finally, Hoppers Bitter at 4.2% will be available from 1st July to 30th August. The brewery say "it represents the finest Burtonwood tradition and is the result of a painstaking search for the very best ingredients."

In the past, Burtonwood's beer range has always been somewhat limited, and it was only after the completion of a new brewhouse in 1990 that things started to change. The first new beer to appear was James Forshaw's Bitter, soon joined by the cask version of Top Hat, and then came the 5.2% Buccaneer. By this time Burtonwood were also brewing two beers for Whitbread - Chesters Best Bitter, and OB Bitter - the latter being originally from Oldham Brewery which was bought by Boddington's in 1982, and closed in 1988.



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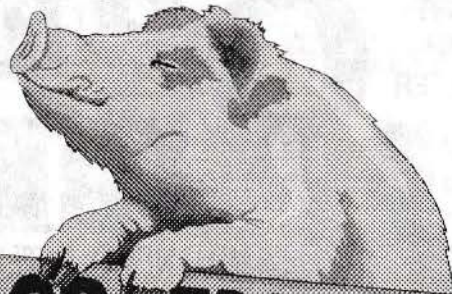
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Pub Of The Month NOVEMBER



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for November is the Old Monkey on Portland Street in Manchester City Centre.

Sited on the corner of Princess Street, the Old Monkey is one of only a handful of Holts houses in central Manchester and only one of two in the City Centre (the other being the Crown & Anchor on Cateaton Street). What distinguishes the Old Monkey, though, is that despite appearances, this is a brand new pub, built on the site of an old pub that closed many years ago.

There are bars on both the ground and first floors, with the downstairs bar perhaps having more the feel of a vault, but both are pleasant and comfortable. Dark wood and comfortable seating make this a popular city watering hole and the etched glass and mosaic tiling on the bar add a touch of class not seen in every city centre pub, and make for a very traditional feel.

Clientele ranges from traditional Holts drinkers to besuited and power-dressed office workers all attracted by the winning combination of good beer, warm hospitality and Holts traditional low prices (both mild and bitter still sell for less than £1 a pint!

Landlady Diane was previously at the Griffin, Heaton Mersey and since her arrival the pub has become a true city centre flagship for this most traditional of our local brewers. Join us as we pay tribute to the hard work of Diane and her staff when we present our Pub of the Month award on Thursday 23rd.

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**Copy Date for December Issue of
Opening Times is November 20**

CAMRA CALLING!

Thu 9 Branch Meeting, Florist, Shaw Heath 8.00pm
(Selections for New Stockport Pub Guide)

Mon 13 Recruitment Social, Woodstock W Didsbury
9.00pm

Fri 17 Stagger, Brinnington/Portwood 7.00pm Farmers
Arms, 8.30pm Park, Newbridge La

Sun 19 Lunchtime Trip to Station Beer Fest, Ashton. Bus
330 from Stand U, Stockport Bus Sta, 11.15

Mon 20 Social, White Swan, Green St, Ladybarn. 9.00pm

Thu 23 Pub of Month, Old Monkey, Portland Street Mcr

Sat 25 Day out to 5 Yorks, (Wortley Arms, Elsecar and
Concertina plus Cask & Cutler Beerex) Book on 477 1973

Mon 27 Recruitment Social, Crown, Heaton La,
Stockport. Starts 9.00pm

Wed 29 Lees Brewery Visit. Leaves Crown Heaton La
6.00pm, Royal Oak, Didsbury 6.15. 477 1973 to book.

Fri 1 Dec (Additional Stagger), Chorlton. Meet 7.00
Spread Eagle, 8.30 Beech

Mon 4 Social, Union, Levenshulme. 9.00pm

Sun 10th Xmas Shopping in Bradford, (and Curry) Trains
10.15 and 11.15 from Victoria. Meet Rams Revenge
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW

The past month has been dominated by the flapping of the wings of chickens coming home to roost, with a vengeance.

What can sensibly be said about the decision to close the Warrington brewery? 240 jobs and one of the most well-utilised and efficient breweries in the Carlsberg-Tetley group axed in what is looking more and more like a panic measure.

Ever since the old Allied Breweries decided to concentrate more on retailing and hived off 50% of its brewing interests to Danish giant Carlsberg, a spiral of decline seems to have set in. Carlsberg-Tetley's profits have crashed from £120 million in the first year of operations to a projected £40 million next year. Allied are reportedly keen to sell the remaining 50% they still hold and doubt has even been cast on whether the supply agreement to the Allied Domecq pubs will be renewed when it expires in 1997. Without this agreement, some commentators have suggested that the company is virtually worthless.

It is against this background that the closure decision was made. Long term planning or short term thrashing around in a desperate attempt to survive? Is this a question which really needs asking?

The Boddington Group's decision to go belly up in the face of overtures from Greenalls is hardly surprising. Two companies which happily sold their brewing heritages down the river are obviously tailor made for each other.

OPENING TIMES

From : Richard Hough

With the head debate still bubbling on and people still foaming about paying for air (especially in the wake of the awful "head detector" card issued to all CAMRA members), I wondered how we stand on this issue: I enter the pub and order a pint. It is electric dispense into oversize lined glasses. The sparkler on the nozzle is set very tight to "get a good head" (whatever a good head might be), and as a result the beer overflows. When the "pint" has settled, the beer doesn't come up to the line on the glass. Indeed it is well short of the 95% of a pint we are legally entitled to.

Can I, the consumer, (and person paying for the beer, air etc.) ask for a top up? And if so, how is this achieved? Hopefully not from a stale half secreted under the bar for just such mithering customers! While campaigning for oversize glasses is admirable, surely full pints either in brim measure or 22oz (oversize) glasses is of more importance. In short, while brim-measures almost certainly mean some shortfall (however minute), lined glasses should guarantee a full pint.

From : Pete Soane

So, it's finally come to this, Boddington Pub Company has been taken over by Greenalls Group (J.C.B.) Plc. The brewery of course is already in the hands of Whitbread so they can't close that down, but given Greenalls track record, Wem, Davenport, Simpkins and Shipstones and their own Warrington brewery closed and Tommy Ducks bulldozed overnight, a lot of licensees must be feeling distinctly uneasy right now.

My association with Boddingtons goes back 30 years, in fact my first pint of beer was Boddies bitter, a wonderful combination of initial sweetness followed by a long, dry, hoppy finish. I was hooked! For the next fifteen years or so I drank little else, in fact my drinking habits revolved around the availability of Boddies bitter. I thought nothing of travelling miles for a pint of the straw coloured stuff.

Sadly though the taste changed and the beer seemed to lose some of its sweetness, it became thinner and the dry, hoppy taste did not fit quite as well with this. Nowadays I wouldn't cross the road for a pint of Boddies and the famous two bees sign, once so welcoming, means nothing now.

I suppose this is the first nail in the coffin for a famous Manchester name, over 200 years old. I will remember many enjoyable evenings in the Crown, Heaton Moor and the George & Dragon, Heaton Chapel not least because of the efforts of Harry & Doris, and Ron & Pat. Goodbye

That apart, let us hope that BodPubCo's best practice is taken on board by Greenalls - as we have commented before, Boddies have tended to lead the way in many areas, be it pub refurbishments, guest beers or even multi-ale houses. It would be a tragedy if Greenalls were to learn nothing from the company they are taking over, although given their track record in the past you wouldn't want to bet on it.

And for those of you still surprised by this turn of events, let me take you back six years to OT November 1989, when we had this to say about Boddingtons selling their breweries to Whitbread: "It is doubtful that this is the end of the story. At the EGM to approve the deal, Dennis Cassidy spoke of the brave new world of the 1990's leisure industry and how the breweries were little more than a lame duck as far as the company was concerned. What he didn't mention was the growth of national pub-owning chains....Most of these new companies have already picked up a brewery, what they want now is more outlets, and what a tempting prize the new-look Boddingtons must be..." It gives us no great pleasure at all to say we told you so.

Finally, some apologies. Opening Times this month is (a) slightly late, (b) slightly short, (c) lacks the promised Internet Guide and (d) is a little rough around the edges. Every single person involved in the production has been smitten with various flu bugs, viruses and bronchial infections, the laser printer has gone sick and the computer trashed its hard disk. We are all very much below par, and OT's appearance at all is something of a minor miracle. Back to normal in December.

Boddies, it was fun.

PS The nearest equivalent to the Boddies bitter I remember is probably Bathams Best bitter from a small West Midlands brewery.

From : Rhys Jones

According to the Manager of the Griffin, Heaton Mersey, (Letters, Oct.), some of his customers, while hiding behind a mask of anonymity, also manage to stick out like sore thumbs! Who are these paradoxical and chameleon-like individuals. I think we should be told.

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Contributors to this edition: John Clarke, Rhys Jones, Paul Hutchings, Richard Hough, Phil Levison, Peter Edwardson, Stuart Ballantyne, Keith Egerton, Tim Jones, John Hutchinson, Brian Waite, Rebecca Pendlebury.

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Hydes Anvil

The latest in the range of special beers, Forge Ale, was produced until the end of last month. Some should still be available in the tied estate and if you haven't tried it yet, do so before it's too late.

What will be of interest to many is the possible re-introduction of XXXX winter warmer. In response to a perceived demand the brewery are currently test brewing, but not at the 8% ABV that many remember, but at 6.8% which was the original recipe and at which it was brewed for far more years than the stronger version. If this beer does appear this winter be sure to try it, and even better let the brewery or CAMRA's Liaison Officer* know what you think of it. If it does become available this will be partly in response to Hydes customers and CAMRA pestering the brewery for it. So make sure you give it a fair chance and prove that the demand is there for this style of beer and thus ensure that it once again becomes a regular seasonal beer.

(*Letters to the brewery should be sent to Tony Phillips, Hydes Anvil Brewery, 46 Moss Lane West, M15 5PH. CAMRA's Liaison Officer is Keith Egerton and he can be reached c/o Opening Times)

Beartown

Congleton's Beartown Brewery are celebrating a successful first 6 months in business and are adding a third beer to their range. Bruin's Ruin is a 5% "well hopped beer with a smooth distinctive flavour" they tell us. Given Beartown's impressive track record so far, this is probably a fair description. It will be available for the first time at Congleton Beer Festival (Congleton Town Hall, November 8th-10th) and to pubs from 10th November.

Whitbread-Boddingtons

As expected, the successful Boddingtons Export (5%), currently only available as a processed bottled beer has finally made its appearance on draught, at the Parrswood in Didsbury. The beer was, however, keg, presumably aiming to compete in the Caffreys market. As the demand for cask-conditioned, pale golden beers at this strength continues to rise, Whitbread are sure missing a golden (as it were) opportunity here.

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Porters

Dave Porter tells us that he has now discontinued his Porters Stout - apparently it proved over-optimistic trying to sell both Porters Porter and Stout in the brewery's pubs and he is anxious to maintain throughput and hence quality of the Porter which has become one of his trademark beers. A new beer is to be launched, though. Rossendale Ale (4.2% ABV) will be launched early this month. What will it be like? "Delicious" says Dave, with customary modesty. He does promise lots of hops, though! Having now tried it last week (in superb nick) at the East Lancs festival in Blackburn, I can attest that it is a fine addition to the range

Joseph Who?

Who is Joseph Worrall? That has been the question on many lips since Edgeley's Windsor Castle was renamed after the gentleman.

There has in fact been a pub on the site for almost 200 years and in common with many pubs in the last century, the old Windsor Castle brewed its own beer. After a succession of owners the pub and brewhouse were bought in 1871 by... Joseph Worrall who went on to develop the business, rebuild the brewery and even acquire a small estate of tied houses. Many of the old Worrall pubs have long since closed but those remaining include the Pineapple and Sir Robert Peel in Edgeley, the Crown on Higher Hillgate and the Horseshoe in Levenshulme.

JOSEPH WORRALL,



WINDSOR CASTLE BREWERY,

The brewery seemed to thrive but Joseph Worrall devoted more of his time to public duties (he was a town councillor) and in 1896 he sold out to Wilsons Brewery. The pub was rebuilt in the 1930s and the old brewery demolished, presumably at about the same time.

As Edgeley readers will know, the pub has had something of a chequered history over the last few years. First came an ill-fated conversion into 'Sports' and then a reversion to the old name but something of a poor reputation. Today, though, attempts are being made to retrieve the pub's reputation, with the vault converted into a dining area and a variety of events taking place. It's also an outlet for Richard Cobdens Bitter.

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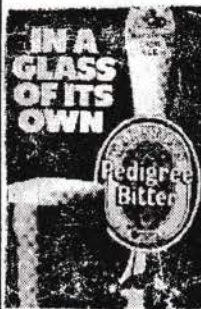
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STAGGER

with Guest Beer Writer Rebecca Pendlebury

Being a new (and somewhat unofficial) member of the local CAMRA scene, I never expected to be writing any article, let alone this, for O.T. Oh well, it just goes to show what a little bullying at the tail-end of a Monday night social can achieve.

This month's Stagger was around my home stomping ground - Stockport town centre. But despite my familiarity with the area, the pubs we visited were for the most part unfamiliar or little visited by me.

The 8 or so Staggerers assembled at the **Unity**, a rather light and blue Robinson's affair on the A6. This pub was one of the first I had seen with a traditional Manchester "Log End" dartboard. You think ordinary darts is tricky? Just try playing on one of these! The pub was reasonably busy for the time of night, serving Best Bitter and Hatters Mild. Opinions on the bitter ranged from quite good to average with the mild found to be reasonable verging on sweet.

A quick nip round the corner took us to **Little Jack Horner's** on Wellington Street. This is an excellent little Vaux pub consisting of three rooms on three levels. It was fairly empty when we called but not lacking in atmosphere thanks to the cosy size of the rooms. The Wards bitter was very good with the Vaux Samson being thought a little on the cold side.

Next on the agenda was the **Blarney Stone** on the corner of St Petersgate and Duke Street. Formerly the Imperial, this

pub was recently refurbished and has become Stockport's first "Irish" theme pub. On walking into the large back lounge of this pub, the overwhelming impression I had was of flowers. The decor is a little over-the-top with too many flowery patterns for my liking. The brewery haven't gone overboard on the Irish theme, as happens all too frequently in many "Irish" pubs, with only the obligatory Guinness posters and large paper shamrocks on the walls to give the game away. Coming back to this country, likewise the Webster's Yorkshire Bitter was its usual not very impressive self, and I shan't mention the John Smiths nitro keg.

We met with the worst service of the night in the **Stockport Arms** on St Petersgate where the bar staff seemed to be trying their best to ignore us - probably the largest gang of thirsty people they has seen all night judging by the number of people in there. Two beers were sampled - Tetley Bitter which was served so cold that any taste was all but lost, prompting the comment "What beer!" The Greenalls Bitter was also well on the chilly side, and despite having infinitely more taste than the Tetley was still not well received amongst our party.

Worse things were to come as we headed down the road to the **Egerton Arms**. Since re-inventing itself after a period as Porky Pigs Pie Shop, the "Edgie" is now attracting a very mixed clientele with many of its old regulars once more frequenting it. However, its sole real ale, John Smiths bitter, was very bland and boring.

Thank goodness for the fine bitter and mild in the **Royal Oak**, a Robinsons house, situated on High Street right opposite the brewery. This is a quiet but welcoming little three roomed local, with excellent service and the best beer of the evening so far - Best Bitter and Hatters Mild. And being such, it was a good place to pick up reinforcements; with 3 or 4 other Staggerers joining us here.

Doubling back on ourselves almost, we found ourselves in the **Spread Eagle** right next door to the brewery. Not surprisingly another Robbies pub, but with the curious addition of Turkish pop music playing on the jukebox. This is a small two roomed pub with a strange layout. You have to walk through a small pool room to reach the main lounge and bar. This room is segmented by several part walls to reduce the feeling of openness. The beer - Best Bitter and Hatters Mild - was pleasant enough without being outstanding, with the Mild felt to have the edge on the Bitter.

While the rest of the group headed for the **Queen's Head** (known locally as Turner's Vaults) two of us did something rather unexpected for a CAMRA pub crawl and popped in **Winters Wine Bar** on Underbank. Winters is the sort of place that caters for the under 30's who enjoy loud dance music and lager, but it does sell cask Tetley Bitter in sufficiently large quantities to give a rather decent pint. Also noteworthy was the fact that although the place was full to bursting (and indeed had burst out into the street) the service was immediate.

On leaving Winters, we found the rest of the party supping in the splendid "horsebox" room of the **Queen's Head**. This pub has been enthused over many times within these pages so I won't go into great detail. I will just mention that the Sam Smith's bitter was its usual excellent self.

Due to the high quality beer in the **Queen's Head**, our group was split due to latecomers, demands for more beer, and those eager for pastures new. Some of us stayed a wee while longer while the scouting party headed for the **White Lion**. This pub is a very large, spacious Whitbread Cask Ale House, furnished with mismatching wooden furniture and numerous chalkboards, at the junction of Chestergate and Underbank, and was so poor on this occasion that the advance party returned to the **Queen's Head** to dissuade any further investi-

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Ring for details and order before you arrive

gators. This wasn't so much due to the uninspiring beer on offer, as to the sheer deafening volume of the disco.

Anyway, onward to the **Chestergate Tavern** on - you guessed it - Chestergate. This is a very impressive building which fortunately escaped demolition when the Merseyway Precinct was built but is not a particularly impressive pub. The large bar area is situated a few steps below the smaller "lounge" area where we sat. The beers on offer were Theakstons Best and XB, Wilsons Bitter and Websters Yorkshire Bitter. None were particularly good, with the best of the bunch - the Wilson's being OK but not remarkable.

The penultimate pub of the night was the **George** on the corner of Heaton Lane and the A6. A large, one-roomed building, this pub is popular with those on their way to Coco Savanna's for the night. If you are going to sample this pub, a word of advice - avoid Friday and Saturday nights - you won't see it at its best. The Boddingtons Bitter was not up to much.

And finally to the **Swan With Two Necks**, on Prince's Street. An unusual little pub with somewhat erratic opening times. We were in luck tonight - it was open and serving very

good Robinsons Best and above average Hatters Mild. We sat in the back lounge which is popularly regarded as one of the three best pub rooms in Stockport - the others being our earlier perch in the "horsebox" room in the Queen's Head and the snug in the Arden Arms. What a super little pub this is.

Nearly half the party deserted us at this point to continue to the Crown on Heaton Lane. The reasons for this are not known but it may have something to do with wanting a greater variety of beer. The beers weren't very varied on this Stagger (there were 5/12 Robinson's houses) and they ranged from poor to excellent, but taking the good with the not so good, an interesting and enjoyable evening was had by all. But more importantly (?) some of the lesser known pubs in Stockport have been sampled and whatever you think of a pub, one is never quite like another; tonight just goes to show what a wide variety there can be within half an hour's walk of each other.

As usual, this article only represents the opinions of one group of people on one evening and can't be taken as a definitive and unbiased guide to the pubs visited.



Starting this time in the depths of Derbyshire - the Manchester Arms, Buxton (A515) has changed hands from Bass to Devonshire Pub Co, from Skipton, Yorks. It has been refurbished from a "grotty hovel" (note the quotation marks!) into a pleasant pub selling (yawn) Theakstons Mild and XB, Boddingtons Bitter and Stones Bitter on handpump - there is also a regular guest beer available. The refurbishment has revealed a lot of stone walls and has introduced wooden chairs (aren't they all wooden?) with a fireplace taking centre stage. And finally Esther - it has reverted to its original name - the Blazing Rag.

Back in Glossop, Roxy's Fun Bar (formerly Rose & Crown) has now become a "Holly's" in the same ownership as the "Holly's" (formerly Forrester's Call) in Ashton-under-Lyne - and is also very noisy.

The Sparrows has a new landlord and it seems to have changed hands from Boddalls PubCo to Bass as it now serves Worthington Best Bitter instead of Boddingtons Bitter.

In a remote branch area recently annexed for a week, there appears to be a similar tale to tell as one closer to home. In Bamberg, Northern Bavaria, there appears to be a rash of Irish bars (himmel) a Scruffy Murphys, a Mulligans and an Emerald Isle (all carefully avoided) and just when the holidaymakers thought the coast was clear they bumped into an O'Shea's in Nuremberg. Well, it took a while for the German Beer Purity Law's EU instructed relaxation to take effect - but if there ever was evidence.....

And There's Another One

Although not in our geographical area the River Head Brewery & Tap opened to the public on Friday 6th October. Just three stops from Stalybridge on the rattler this latest brew pub is a short walk down the hill from Marsden station. On Peel Street the former grocery store is instantly recognisable by the Hot Liquor Tank in the front window. Five beers are on offer, Sparth Mild 3.2% ABV, Butterlay Bitter 3.8% ABV, Black Moss Stout 4.3% ABV, Marsh Haigh Special 4.3% ABV and Red Brook Premium 5.5% ABV. When I called the Mild was still in the fermenter but the other four beers were all in first class condition, Black Moss Stout being my personal favourite. By the way the beers are named after local reservoirs.

A lot of planning and money has obviously been spent and has resulted in an excellent brewpub, light and airy with plenty of wood and no T.V., juke box or electronic wizardry to spoil the convivial atmosphere. Despite being the weekend of the Marsden Jazz Festival, brewer and joint owner Philip Holdsworth found time to show us his 2 1/2 barrel plant in the cellar. Philip chose this sized plant to enable him to brew the full range of beers plus occasional brews.

While Philip plays in the basement his wife, Judith, was in charge of the bar. There is an open staircase up to a second bar on the first floor.

Current opening times are: Mon -Fri. 5.30 to 11pm. Sat. 11.00 - 11.00pm. Sun 12 - 3.00pm and 7.00 - 10.30 pm.

River Head Beers are only available at the Brewery Tap at the moment due to an acute shortage of casks but I am sure they will soon earn their rightful place in the free trade when this can be rectified. All beers are full mash and after conditioning in the brewery are served from casks in the cellar. Let the train take the strain and enjoy a pint or three in this excellent addition to the growing micro market.

CAMRA CALLING!

High Peak Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and All points North. They have notified Opening Times of the following events.

Fri 10th - informal branch trip to Bury Beer Fest. Meet at Festival 1pm.

Sat 11th Pub Crawl in Stockport. Start Olde Vic 8pm, Comfy Gill 9pm, Finish Crown.

Mon 13th Branch Meeting at Q, Stalybridge 8.30pm

Sun 26th Woods Walk. Circular walk from Peel Arms, Padfield. Meet at Pub, 9.45am

Sat 2nd December Pub Crawl in Hyde. Start Clarkes Arms 8pm. Crown 9pm

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Greenalls Ales

plus

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Bottled Beers
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Your hosts Lorraine & Steve James
Heaton Lane, Stockport



I thought I'd bring you something a little different this month, but hopefully still of interest to you lovers of 'pop' both musical and alcoholic. October is traditionally a big month for beer festivals, and this year I decided to make the pilgrimage across the Pennines for the 19th Nottingham Beer Festival. It has an enviable reputation for being one of the biggest and most successful festivals outside the Great British, and I was eager in anticipation.

Nottingham is famous for many things; Boots the Chemist, lace, the Sheriff, the Goose Fair, amongst others, but not least for Home Brewery. Following the takeover of Courage by Scottish & Newcastle, the future of the last major brewery in the city hangs in the balance, the result of a "review of existing assets". It was good to see the 'ROBIN' campaign (retain our beers in Nottingham) given high profile at the festival.

The three day event was launched with Springhead Brewery's beers - Leveller, Roaring Meg and the new 3.6% ABV wheat beer, Hersbrucker - arriving by barge. While this was one of many local breweries to feature, there were ales available from as far afield as Guernsey, the Kings Head in Plymouth and the Orkney Brewery. The evening started, though, with a taste of Mallard's Bitter, a new 3.8% ABV brew from what could be Britain's smallest brewery. Although it is brewed very close to the festival site, it was the first time it had been seen in Nottingham. It turned out to be dry and hoppy, and popular with the punters, although still perhaps a little 'home-brewish' for me.

North-Western breweries were well represented in the 210-strong portfolio, with milds, not surprisingly, taking a slice of the action. Burtonwood Mild, Lees OB Mild, a couple from Black Bull, Cains Dark Mild, Coach Houses Gunpowder, the full quota of Hydes beers, two from Little Avenham, two from Passageway, two from Townes and two from Wilds to name but a few! Also of interest on the beer front were the 6.2% ABV Black Bear Stout and hop-hop-hoppy Hartington Bitter (beer of the festival at Stockport this year) both from Whim, and the champion beer of Britain, Norman's Conquest from Cottage.

Part of the final night at a beer festival such as this though, is the live music. On this occasion, Five Go Off In A Caravan were the main attraction. I was a little taken aback when six blokes took the stage at one end of the large, airy Victoria Centre; I found out later that there never have been five in the band! After numerous pops and squeaks they eventually got going at the third attempt. Some of the crowd were understandably agitated by the delay, and a few were uninhibited enough by this stage to throw a few paper darts in the direction of the Five (or six). But the band took it all in their stride, having played many a beer festival or similar event. When they did get into gear, we discovered that they can play. What they play is traditional folk rock, with a strong English flavour, which is where it differs from the Cajun, for instance, that appeared in OT in September. Besides which it was music to entertain the drinkers rather than attract them.

Between them the six play about fourteen instruments, and there was plenty of swapping around between songs. Melodean, harmonica, banjo, sax, mandolin, fiddle and English concertina (more of a squeeze box than other nationalities) were the prominent instruments, and the sound created was a lively jig. However, the first hour didn't impress the assembled masses too much (myself included). A few beers later we all loosened up, and the second set was much more what we were after. By the time the six (or five) got to "Twisting" there was a fair crowd dancing at the front.

So ended a highly successful Nottingham Beer Festival. Thanks are due, of course, to all involved in the festival to make it what it is. You can bet I'll be back for more next year, and guaranteed Five Go Off In A Caravan won't be far away. They might even play....

MANCHESTER MATTERS

Early October saw the opening of the City Centre's latest bar, the Rat & Parrot on the corner of Old Bank Street and Half Moon Street, in the premises of the former Barnaby Rudge steak bar. This is yet another branded operation - in this case the brand was initially developed by Scottish & Newcastle and there are now numerous examples of it in



by Rhys Jones

London, though this is the Manchester region's first taste of it. It's more upmarket than the facetious name might suggest, with a considerable emphasis on food (an international menu - fish and chips through tagliatelle to balti - is served throughout opening hours, and breakfast starts at 7.30 am). The beer range is predictable - Theakstons Bitter & XB, Courage Directors, John Smiths Bitter, all on handpump - and when I called quality was acceptable if not outstanding. They will top up your pint, but only if you ask - at £1.77 for XB, I suggest you do. This unexciting new outlet in no way compensates for another round of closures of real pubs - the Honeycomb in Beswick (closed and boarded), the Cornbrook in Cornbrook (closed and demolished), and both the Dolphin and the Nag's Head in West Gorton, though it's possible that one or both of these last two may prove to be temporary closures only. Also in West Gorton, the Aces has rationalised its handpumped range to just Boddingtons and Holts bitters, and is to be congratulated on removing "handpumped" keg Scrumpy Jack, while the Birch Arms no longer sells Courage Directors. Further along in Gorton, it's hats off to the Gardeners Arms, another pub to have got rid of Scrumpy Jack, while the Hare & Hounds is selling Whitbread Old Henry, from the Castle Eden Brewery, on handpump.

In Levenshulme, Hennigans no longer sells Marstons Pedigree; in Chorlton-on-Medlock, the Mawson has dropped Burton Ale; but in Ardwick, the Wellington has gained handpumped John Smiths Bitter - and, to its shame, "handpumped" keg Cidermaster.

In the City Centre, Sinclairs has perforce dropped Museum Ale (no longer brewed), while the Harp & Shamrock, one of numerous Marstons pubs nationwide up for sale, is, perhaps courageously, selling Banks's Mild on handpump.

Finally, at the Queen of Hearts in Fallowfield, reported on elsewhere in last month's issue, Burton Ale should be added to the list of beers sold on handpump.

CURMUDGEON



Euro-Sceptical

This month will see what has now become the annual ritual of both CAMRA and the brewers urging the Chancellor to cut beer duty to save the British brewing industry from foreign imports, and Mr Clarke (the Chancellor, that is, not the Editor of "O.T.") doing precisely sweet F.A. about it.

British beer duty is certainly a lot higher than that on the Continent, and that's indefensible. But, despite the lower duty, bar prices in Belgium, Holland, France or Germany are generally no lower than in this country for beers of equivalent strength, and are often higher. Take-home beer on the Continent is normally only about a third the price charged in bars, with the result that the majority of beer is drunk at home, and most people only drink outside the house when going out for a meal. Britain still has the highest proportion of on-sales in Europe. There's already a lot of evidence that the ever-increasing gulf between on and off licence prices is killing the British pub, and a cut in duty might accelerate this trend. No doubt we would see the full reduction take effect at the off-licence, to try to win back the Calais booze-runners, while pubs would be much more selective, with the busy, prosperous ones taking the opportunity to rebuild their margins. The gulf would widen, and the market share taken by pubs would fall still further. A duty cut could well turn out to be a Pyrrhic victory for CAMRA, leading to more pub closures, not less.

You may not think Euro-scepticism has much to be said for it as a political creed (and I certainly don't intend to get into that debate), but you can't avoid the fact that opening up our borders is doing nothing to help the British pub.

Fake Pies

Why is it that, when you order what is described as a "pie" on a pub menu, so often what you end up with is basically a bowl of stew with a puff pastry topping? A proper pie should have a pastry case both top and bottom, and the whole thing should be cooked together, allowing the juices of the meat to soak into the pastry, rather than the pastry being added as an afterthought. Do they put up with these fake pies in Wigan, I wonder?

Odd Hours

Leafing through the 1996 edition of the Good Beer Guide, I was struck by the many and varied patterns of opening hours adopted by pubs after deregulation. This year, I spotted pubs in various places with standard hours of 3-11, or thereabouts. I'm a bit puzzled as to what the social factors are which mean there's no trade at lunchtime, but enough during the normally slack mid-afternoon hours to justify opening before tea-time. One thing for certain, though, is that eccentric opening hours of whatever kind put across a very clear message - this is a pub where locals come first, and casual callers will at best be grudgingly tolerated if they happen to chance on the place when it's open.

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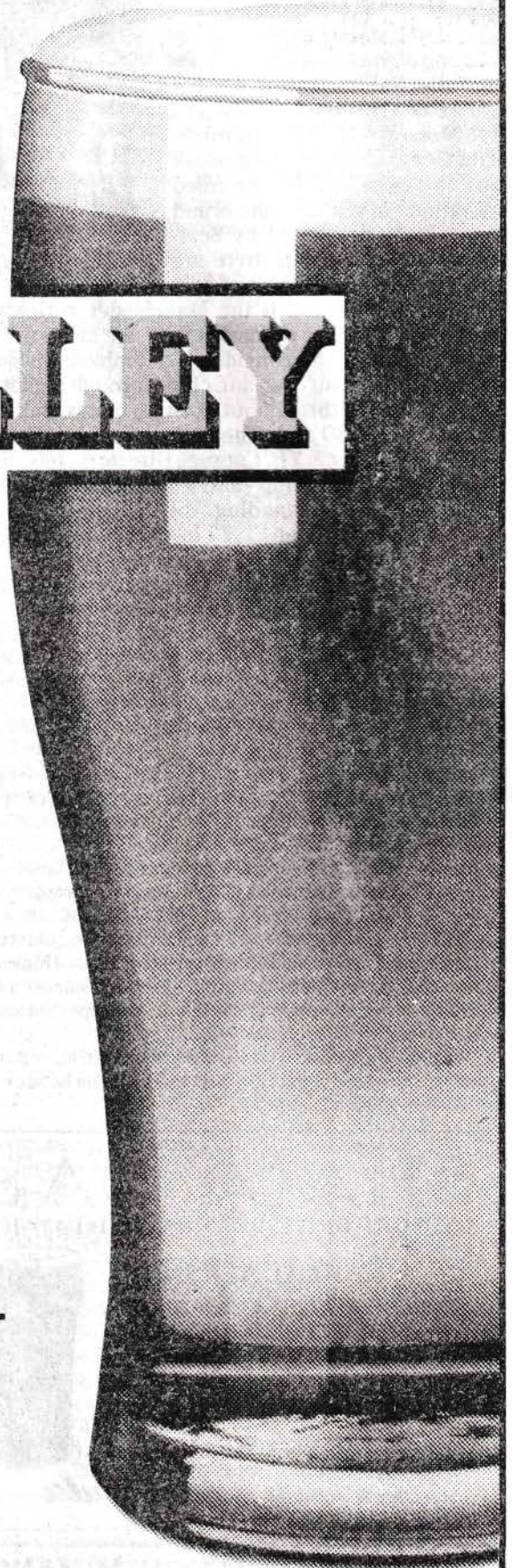
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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

NOVEMBER 1991

The Monopolies Commission had ruled that the proposed merger of pubs and brewing interests by Grand Met. and Courage was not in the public interest, although it seemed likely that the scheme would still go ahead. The original plan had been for the brewing side of the two companies to be transferred to the control of Courage, with the pubs being run by Grand Met, through a new company, Innpreneur Estates. Quite stringent conditions had been laid down initially, but the Government had watered down the proposals, and it seemed there would be no problems in coming in with an acceptable package. So how would local drinkers fare? Perhaps a few more "free" houses (but how free?), almost certainly less choice, with Courage promoting their own beers rather than the ones they were taking on. It also seemed to herald the long predicted demise of Wilsons - a sad end for a once proud name.

Burtonwood launched a new cask beer, James Forshaw's Bitter, named after the brewery's founder - it was hoped it would be more successful than the two previous new bitters, Almond's Bitter and JBA. Perhaps the problem had been that in the case of the predecessors, premium prices had been charged for not very premium beers.

There was a double page campaigning spread all about CAMRA, and why people should join the Campaign. It had been formed in the early 1970's by a small group of beer lovers who were appalled by

the heavily promoted keg beers that threatened to replace traditional draught ales. (Now, in 1995, it's all happening again with the new generation of keg beer, or "nitrokeg".)

The Royal Oak, Wilmslow Road, Didsbury had a small advert on the front page - "No music, No machines, No children, No dogs." There can't be many of them about, at least not as successful as the Royal Oak.

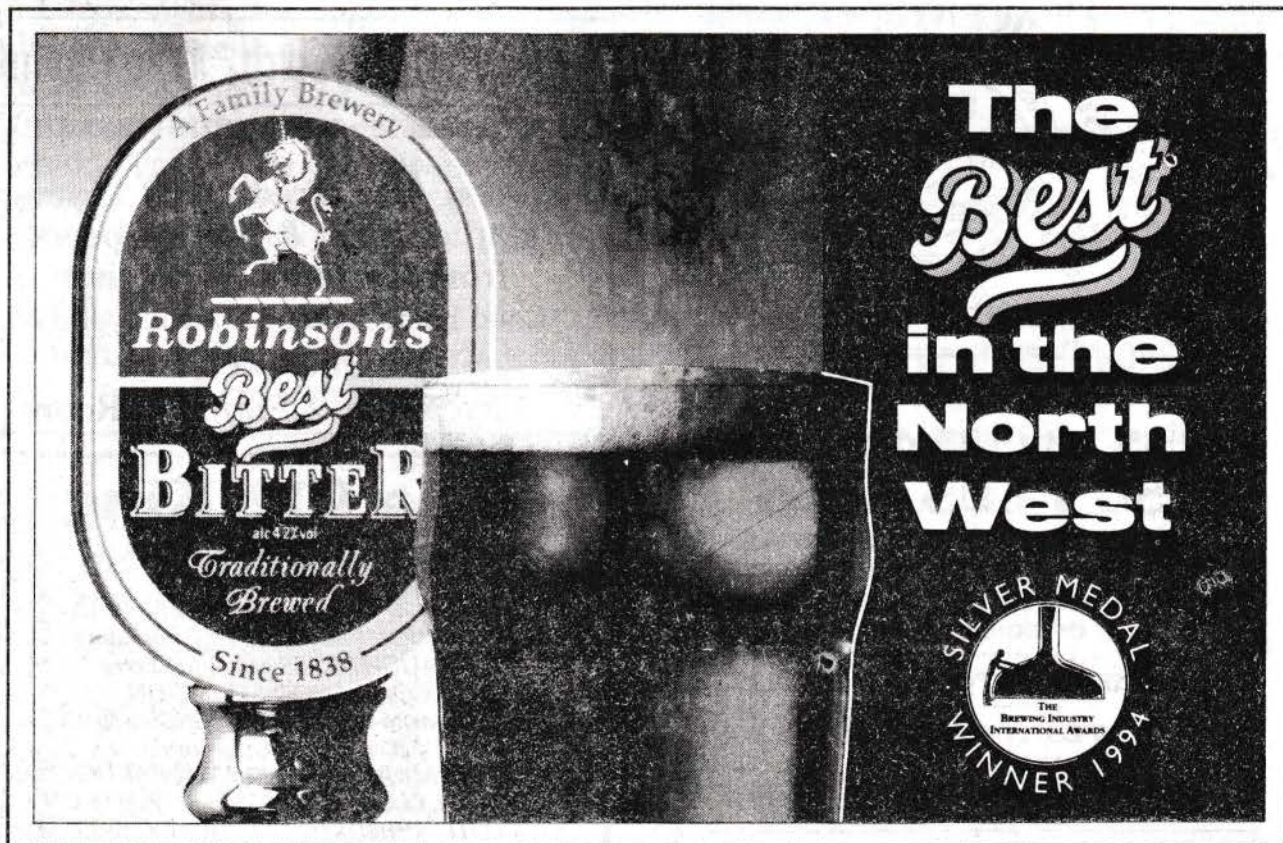
There was a different theme for another advert - Patios, Windows and Doors - but with an unusual twist. With his free estimate, a genuine enquirer got a voucher for 5 pints of real ale redeemable at the Railway, Gorton (CAMRA Pub of the Year for 1989) or at Ye Olde Woolpack, Stockport (CAMRA Pub of the Month Jan. 1989).

There was reference to the fact that more Stockport pubs had been lost through road schemes in recent years than for any other reason. So it made a pleasant change to report some good news for once. The Florist had been under the threat of a CPO for about 17 years as part of an Inner Relief Road scheme, but the line of the road had been changed, which meant that the pub would be left unscathed.

OPENING TIMES ON THE INTERNET - 5 LAUNCHED!

The Opening Times Pages are available at:

[<http://www.u-net.com/camramcr/>] - due to pressure of space and the entire production team having flu the pull out guide could not be included in this edition of OT. All things being equal it will feature next month! E-mails of encouragement can now be sent to the official letters page at otletter@opentime.u-net.com. Complaints to me at pbh@opentime.u-net.com! Warning, don't drink and surf! CAMRA HQ page is now "imminent". Hmm....



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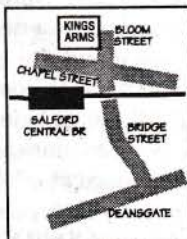


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b News... ys... Pub
News... CAMPAIGN... Pub N
...Pub ? FOR REAL ALE News...
b News... SOUTH MANCHESTER s... Pub
News... BRANCH... Pub N

Work is underway at the Hole I' th' Wall near Stockport Market Place. A new bar and staircase have been fitted. More news as we get it.

Also in the throes of a major refurbishment is the Round House which is undergoing a much-needed gutting. One rumour circulating locally is that this is set to be one of a national chain of gay bars run by Allied Domecq - this can probably be discounted as they do not, to our knowledge, own this pub.

And still it goes on - more refurbishment, this time at the Strawberry Gardens on Offerton, all the exterior signing had been removed as we went to press, and new carpets and a new bar top were being fitted.

Work is also underway on two local Hydes pubs. The Cross Keys in Adswold should be finished by the time you read this and on a larger scale, the Crown in Cheadle is undergoing a complete transformation at a cost of some £85,000 and will include extending the present catering facilities. This will be the first time that Hydes have closed a pub during refurbishment, normally allowing customers to have the advantage of being amongst the work in progress.

In our report of the Rusholme Stagger, we wondered why the Gardeners Arms was signed as a Greenalls pub but just sold Wilsons Bitter. Landlady Rose O'Halloran tells us that this is because the pub is now owned by Paramount who had not yet got around to resigning the place. Incidentally the strange mix of music we encountered was due to a music quiz taking place - Sundays are the nights for music in the Gardeners with live Irish music every week.



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Locally in Stockport and South Manchester Branch we pride ourselves on being amongst the most active campaigning branches in the country, with a social side to match. If you want to join, or have been thinking about it, then now is the time, as anyone joining at one of our special nights gets £2 off the normal rate. (Students get an even better deal and can join for half price - just £6). For your tenner you can get:

- ★ Discounts on CAMRA products - including future Good Beer Guides
- ★ Whats Brewing - CAMRA's information packed monthly newspaper.
- ★ A Free Members Handbook, plus a local handbook for Stockport and South Manchester Members
- ★ Reduced or Free Entry to Beer Festivals - including Stockport, of course
- ★ The chance to get involved in local campaigns to save local pubs
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Just come along to one of our special membership nights:

Monday 13th November - Woodstock, Barlow Moor Road, West Didsbury

Monday 27th November - Crown, Heaton Lane. Stockport

On these nights, the fun begins about 9pm. In addition, those joining will get a free pint plus the chance to pick up the brand new 1996 Good Beer Guide for the members price of £6.50, compared to £9.99 in the shops.

If you can't make either of these special evenings, then just clip out the membership form below. If you want a Good Beer Guide at the same time then the address to send it to is Jim Flynn, 66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, together with a cheque for £16.50 (membership £10 + Guide £6.50) made payable to CAMRA (Stockport and South Manchester)

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to take advantage of the combined membership/GBG 96 offer tick here

and send with cheque for £16.50 to Jim Flynn, 66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport SK4 5EG
(and fill in your details below) (OT139)

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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I / We enclose remittance for individual/joint membership for one year: INDIVIDUAL **£10** JOINT MEMBERSHIP £14

STUDENT or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £6

Lorraine York, 54 Lime Grove, Cheadle, Cheshire, SK8 1PF

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.



STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £6



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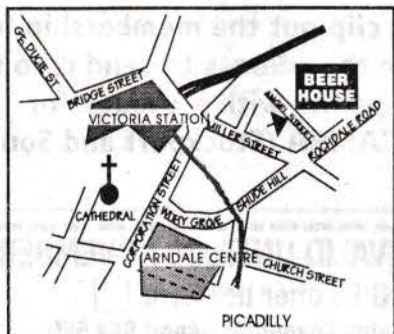
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