

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING



No:
144

TIMES

APRIL 1996

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EVERY MONTH

Bass Chase Tetley

Just 12 months after we were predicting the appearance of Scottish-Courage as the new giant of the brewing industry (a move which has already seen the axe fall on two breweries) yet another new brewing monolith is on the horizon as Bass seek to purchase the brewing interests of Allied Domecq.

That may not mean a great deal to many readers of OT; its leading brand names will be more familiar, though, as it is the latest incarnation of the old Allied Breweries, and takes in such famous names as Tetley, Ind Coope and Ansells. If the deal comes off the new company would control in excess of 40% of the UK brewing industry, and so achieving Bass's long-undisguised aim of reclaiming its number 1 spot in the brewing hierarchy.

Not that the move would be without its problems. With a potential 40% market share, the deal would almost certainly be referred to the Monopolies Commission and the new group would undoubtedly be required to sell off chunks of its operation.

However the problems encountered by Bass would pale into insignificance when compared to the implications for the consumer. Once again breweries would close and possibly not only the smaller operations. Bass has breweries in Tadcaster and Sheffield, Allied one in Leeds. One of these would surely get the chop, as would smaller plants like the Wrexham Lager Brewery and the Arrols plant in Scotland. Even the unthinkable could be on the cards - there would be two giant breweries in Burton-on-Trent, Bass and Ind Coope. Would both be safe in the long term?

There would be just two brewery groups controlling some 70% of the market, the situation that is found in a number of

European Countries. This would give massive opportunities for squeezing the loan-tied free trade, brand manipulation and ever increasing prices. Smaller pubs would be ruthlessly weeded from their tied estates and local beer brands would be axed. We would look back on the days of the old 'Big Six' with a warm glow of nostalgia.

Worryingly, Whitbread might also be 'in play'. City rumours abound that Whitbread, feeling that they would be savaged by such a 'big two' split, might be offering their brewing interests to Bass, to pre-empt or accompany the suggested Allied sale. Whitbread themselves deny all such rumours (well they would, wouldn't they!) and the hope must be that they put faith in their heavily promoted brands to sustain them. If Whitbread were to stay independent though, they would need to grow rapidly, probably by snapping up a batch of the weaker regionals (Greene King and Vaux always seem to be mentioned).

Whatever happens, its going to be bloody, and very, very bad news.

Stockport Beer Festival

Planning for this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival is now well under way. Once again we are being sponsored by the Stockport Express Advertiser so many thanks to them.

This month OT brings you a brief preview of the entertainment on offer and this year it's better than ever. Thursday night sees the relaxed sounds of The Society Hot Shots easing us into the festival weekend. Formerly known as the Harmony Hounds, they have been popular at the festival for the last two years. Stylish both in dress and in their music, they play jazz and dance sounds as it would have been heard in the dance halls and clubs of 1920's America.

On Friday lunch we welcome the Angry Penguins. They are a duo who combine sax, violin, guitar and vocals to make for funk, stomping gaelic blues, soul and a sprinkling of folk. Friday night sees the Southgators, a five-piece band who, besides playing cajun, feature US Country, zydeco, blues, skiffle, Scots folk and Appalachian dance. A very versatile quintet who play mandolin, accordion, fiddle, banjo, bass, harmonica and others too numerous to name. "A fun band worth seeing" entertainment manager Lorraine York tells us.

Lunchtime Saturday and we debut Andrew Stones. A piano player since aged 5, Andrew is classically trained and has been playing in public since he was 15. As a 'background' pianist and as a solo performer, he has an extensive repertoire. His versatile vocal ability blended

with his light hearted and humorous personality offers a varied and entertaining piano based performance.

We go out in style on Saturday night with The Winchesters. Known as the Crackpot kings of blues and western swing, they are well known on the circuit. They have played at Band on the Wall and have performed on TV's Pot of Gold, BBC radio in the East Midlands, BBC Manchester and Jazz FM, the north's own jazz and blues station. They went down a storm at the Burnley Blues Festival, so much so, they were invited to headline their own show at Burnley Mechanics and returned the following year to top the bill. An exciting band to look forward to. Something for everyone, we think. Plus good ale, good cider and good food.

The 10th Stockport Beer & Cider Festival - don't miss it!



OPENING TIMES 144

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

News that Bass are contemplating a purchase of Carlsberg-Tetley, the brewing arm of Allied Domecq, sends a chill down the spine. As we spell out on our front page, this would create carnage in the industry as breweries were axed, and ever-increasing prices and ever-decreasing choice in our pubs.

What can be done? In truth, probably very little. Any proposed deal would certainly go to the MMC but, given the Government's past record - the Scottish-Courage merger was waved through with minimal strings attached - very few restrictions are likely to be placed on the new company. In a sense, both sides have been clearing the decks - Bass have sold the small Highgate Brewery to its managers, and Carlsberg-Tetley have closed down their small Plympton & Holt, Plant & Deakin breweries. The Warrington brewery is of course due to close in October. However the new group will still have plenty of excess capacity so some famous names, or at least their breweries, could be for the chop. And where do Whitbread fit in with all of this. They were reportedly also in negotiations with Allied Domecq, but have pulled out. They also lost out in the battle to purchase Courage. They maintain that the company will remain in both brewing and retailing but it is difficult to see where they can go from here. They may try and snap up a couple of vulnerable regional breweries (Greene King and Vaux are invariably mentioned at this juncture) and/or some of the more high profile pub chains - Wetherspoons is also often mentioned as a bid target. As things stand they are set to become the minnow of the brewing giants.

Things will have come to a pretty pass if we are put in the position of having to regard Whitbread as the plucky underdog fighting the might of the giants of the industry.

John Clarke

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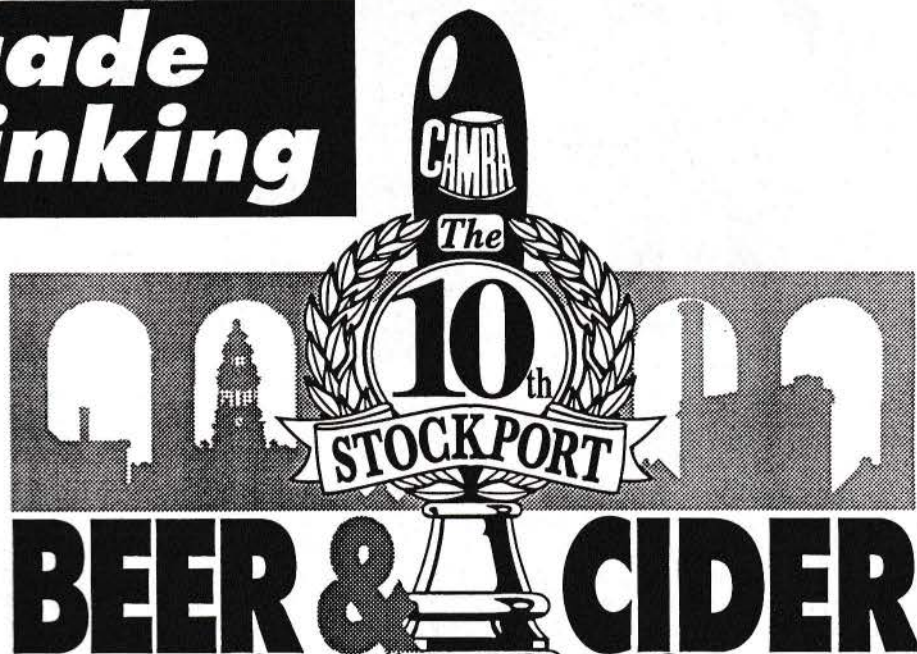
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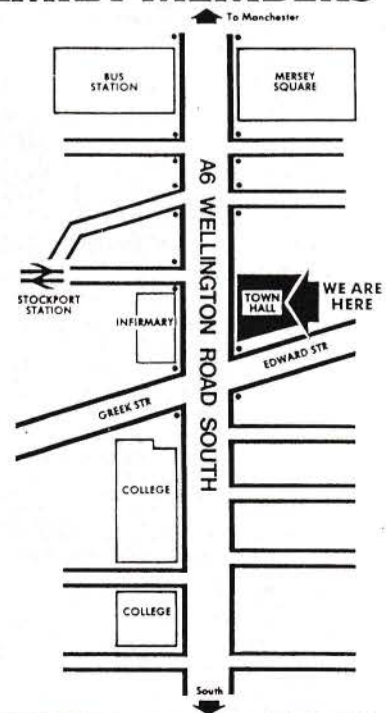
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28	29	30				

Pub Of The Month APRIL 1996

The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month for April is the Gladstone on Middle Hillgate, Stockport. The Gladstone is a special pub for several reasons. On a historical note it has a footnote in history as the starting point of the Stockport Riots in the early 19th century when the pub was known as the Bishop Blaize. To see the pub today it would be easy to forget its early origins as it was completely refitted in the 1930s and, remarkably, has remained virtually unchanged since then. This also makes for a remarkable pub - intact examples of inter-wars pubs like this are very rare. There is a wealth of period features - tiling and stained/leaded glass exhibit early art deco influences, the woodwork is in the pale oak so typical of the period and the bench seating in the superb vault, arguably the best room in the pub, is clearly influenced by the Arts & Crafts movement. Just look around next time you're in. However, it isn't historic or architectural details that make a pub of the month. That depends on what the pub is like today, as a pub. The remarkable preservation of the Gladstone can probably be put down to the long tenure of licensee Jessie Holehouse who was born in the pub and lived there 60 years until her retirement in the 1980s. The success of the pub today is down to the current incumbent, Keith Sutton. Readers may know that the Gladstone's history in recent times has been somewhat chequered and has involved two periods of closure. Keith, though, has been involved with the pub

since May last year and has steered it through difficult times, all the time respecting the pub's character and serving superb quality beer. The pub is now owned by Burtonwood, of course, and Keith serves three beers out of the complete Burtonwood range at any one time, including the new seasonal beers and the premium Buccaneer which have been particularly successful there. His only regret is that the mild is keg as turnover makes cask unviable, even using the smallest barrel size available from the brewery. If the pub continues on its successful path Keith hopes to both redecorate and return the pub to its original glory. Our Pub of the Month award, then, is not only to recognise Keith's efforts, initially in difficult circumstances, but also to flag up this excellent pub to both readers of Opening Times and Burtonwood themselves. Come and celebrate this excellent pub with us when the presentation is made on Thursday 25th April.

4



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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From : Peter Edwardson

In March's "Opening Times", your reviewer speaks of the Hungry Horse as managing to walk the difficult tightrope between pub and restaurant. I would question whether this particular tightrope is worth walking at all, as, in my experience, the best establishments are those which unequivocally set out to be either one thing or the other.

From : Rhys P Jones

Tom Lord's article on drinking in and around Bamberg brought back happy memories (and anticipations) of my explorations of that part of the world. As Tom says, half the fun is the lure of the unknown - what will the next village bring?

However, for those who wish to do their homework, a guide is available in the shape of the excellent FRANKISCHE BRAUEREIKARTE produced by beer-loving publisher Stefan Mack of Nurnberg. Far more than than the map implied by the title (though a useful map is included), this is a substantial book of over 200 pages, with an entry for each of Franconia's nearly 400 breweries and brewpubs, giving details of the beers sold, where to drink them, and even the dreaded "Ruhetag". My edition is dated 1990, though there may well now be a later one - price and other details from Verlag Stefan Mack, Christian-Wildner-Strasse 82, Nurnbeg, Germany.

And whatever you do, catch the rail journey from the Nord-Ost station in Nurnberg to Grafenberg while you still can - a timewarp fifties branch line experience followed by an incredible small hilltop town with three breweries. The Friedmann's brewery tap is an unpretentious gem that typifies the area.

From : William Shippon

My response to Dave Sheldon is to get real AND get angry (OT, March). I agree it is a bit late to start campaigning for the Imperial. The Development Coirporation took steps to safeguard the neighbouring Joshua Hoyle building and deliberately allowed the Imperial to deteriorate but we could all see this happening. The sudden flurry of research and campaigning activity in response to the planning application to demolish should have been planned well in advance. These days the funding partnership for even relatively small schemes such as this involve some powerful forces and us small fry need to be well prepared and well coordinated or we might as well not bother.

I take issue with Dave Sheldon's linking his reasoning to the nearby Coach & Horses though. It is still legitimate to get angry about the Coach and Horses because in this case we HAVE been well prepared, well coordinated and have invested a large amount of money, commitment and moral energy. We should be angry that the Development Corporation did not formulate a strategy and commit some resources to this area 7 or 8 years ago. Why have they neglected the important Piccadilly Gateway area while lavishing attention and money on Whitworth Street and Castlefield? Also we should be angry that no less than three English Heritage listing inspectors at different times have recommended the Coach & Horses for listing and yet it has always been passed over.

It looks as though nothing short of a miracle will save the Coach & Horses now but to write it off as just 'another eyesore' is to play into the hands of any owner or planning authority who has an 'inconvenient' historic building which they wish to be rid of. Finally I would like to remind David Sheldon that CAMRA campaigns FOR beer and, increasingly these days, FOR pubs and not AGAINST eyesores.



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STAGGER

with Rebecca Pendlebury

This month's Stagger was definitely designed with simplicity in mind. All the pubs are on the same road - no chance of getting lost! Our little stroll took us down the A6 from Hazel Grove to Heaviley - no mean feat for one evening.

It was a cold, blustery Friday when we kicked off the night in "The Grove" in the Grove. This is basically your average Hazel Grove Robbie's house - average pub, average beer - nothing too special. But for 7 o'clock it was fairly busy with various groups of people scattered throughout the bar area, large lounge and pool room. One member of our party commented on how lacking in atmosphere the place was - then 'BINGO', as if by magic the juke box started up and a bit of atmosphere kicked in. Beerwise - the standard Robinson's range of Best Bitter and Hatters Mild were both found to be decidedly on the ordinary side.

Taking our lives into our hands - our little band stood precariously balanced on the white line in the middle of the London Road trying to cross to the Anchor - directly opposite. Another Robinson's pub, again with Best Bitter and Hatters Mild, but with the distinction of being the only pub in Hazel Grove selling Old Tom on draught. The Old Tom was well received amongst those of solid constitution able to handle 8.5% barley wine at 7.30pm. The Bitter was above average and quite acceptable

with the Mild faring slightly less well. The Anchor is a friendly, welcoming little pub with a nice buzz in the air. Although now open plan, it still retains three distinct areas plus the bar.

A mere stones throw down the road is the Woodman. It was fairly quiet when we arrived, but dead on the dot of 8 o'clock, BOOM - the disco was up and running and our eardrums exploded! The Woodman is another Robinson's pub consisting of a nicely furnished main bar area and a smaller dining room. The only real ale on sale was Best Bitter which was described by some of our number as tasting strangely of tangerine or play-doh (depending on your point of view).

We encountered the only non-Robinson's pub on our itinerary in the George & Dragon; a long, white building on the corner of Bramhall Moor Lane and the A6. A Whitbread house in their Beer Engine chain, we were tempted tonight by Boddington's, Flowers Original and IPA, Castle Eden and Pedigree. The standard Whitbread range - nothing outstanding. There is usually at least one guest ale on, but this was not in evidence tonight. The George & Dragon is very popular with the younger clientele, boasting Sky Sports, a pool table and a loud juke box. It was packed out as usual when we called. The pub is a veritable "blackboard city" with imposing boards flanking the bar heralding beers which were not on offer and forthcoming beers. Beers were average and slightly on the dear side, around £1.30-£1.60.

Then down to the Crown Hotel in Great Moor. This is a large pub set back slightly from the A6. Don't be put off by the outward lack of life - it always seems to look closed. If you venture inside you will find two small lounges, a vault with a pool table (50p per game, very pricey) and a large bar area dominated by an imposing horseshoe shaped bar. The bar in turn is dominated by a shiny antique cash register. Well worth a look. The till was apparently rescued from disuse in a fish shop and is once more in daily use. Robinson's again. The Best Bitter was found to be slightly better than average and the Hatters Mild also reasonable.

A short walk and another dare-devil crossing of the A6 took us to February's Pub of the Month - the Traveller's Call. This pub not only has great novelty value with various items of street furniture in the beer garden and around 180 bells of varying shapes and sizes adorning the interior; but it sells good beer - with Old Tom (yes, on draught) disappointing slightly. Well, it was (apparently) the end of the barrel.

It was a bit of a trek (and another crossing of the road) down to the Dog & Partridge. Another Robinson's pub but with a slight difference. It is one of only two managed Robinson's pubs in the area, and as such has to sell what the brewery dictates. Hence Frederics was available. The pub is fairly open plan but still retains the aura of a multi-roomed local. The low, beamed ceiling and orange lighting combine to create a warm, cozy ambience. Most of the party plumped for the Frederics and supped in the no-smoking room. The Frederics was up to scratch and went down well, the Hatters Mild was OK and the Best Bitter was felt to be a little less good than the other two. Crossing the road again, we called in the Duke of York in Heaviley. Although you appear to be in an ordinary pub, you are actually in the public bar of a working hotel. The pub is much the same as the Dog & Partridge in appearance and atmosphere. Quite a pleasant place to drink. The fake handpumps disguising (quite proper) electric measures dispense Robinsons Best Bitter and another changing Robinsons beer - Hartleys XB tonight. Both beers were found to be perfectly OK.

Then we crossed the road for the final time and headed for the Blossoms on the corner of Bramhall Lane and the A6 in Heaviley. A popular and relatively unspoilt family run Robinson's pub serving the full Robinsons range. There is a central bar

6



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CAMRA PUB OF THE MONTH MARCH 1995

area and three smaller rooms - a lounge, a vault and a pool room. It was about 10.30pm when we arrived and the pub was busy and buzzing. Robinsons Best Bitter and Hatters Mild were tasted and both found to be on excellent form.

The die hard members of the party with cast iron stomachs continued the beer sampling over the road in the Balti House, and we just had to have curry while we were there. The trials one has to endure in the name of research!

To conclude, once again these views are of a personal nature only and do not represent more than a small sample of people, and can only reflect the pubs and beers as we found them on one particular night. Robinson's, Robinson's, Robinson's may not be everybody's cup of tea (or pint of beer) but we certainly enjoyed our expedition. Why not follow in our footsteps and try these pubs yourself.

Tables Turned at Pub of the Year



A good turn-out of local CAMRA members ensured that the Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year presentation at the Davenport Arms went with a swing. The presentation marked a double celebration since the day chosen, March 16th, also marked CAMRA's 25th birthday. Licensee Yvonne Hallworth marked the occasion by springing a surprise on local members - after receiving her framed certificate from local member Peter Edwardson, the tables were turned as Yvonne presented Peter and local Chairman Rhys Jones with a CAMRA Birthday cake!

Our pictures show Yvonne and Peter with the Pub of the Year certificate, with Robinsons David Chadwick looking on, and Rhys and Peter receiving the surprise cake. Our thanks go to Yvonne and all at the Davenport Arms for a superb night with splendid hospitality.



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Castlefield Capers

Apart from the re-opening of the Oxnohle (see this month's Pub Grub), March saw two other re-openings in the Castlefield area. Greenalls unveiled the new-look Pack Horse. This is on that part of Deansgate which goes round the back of the station and so is something of a backwater. The pub had been pretty run-down for years and you would think anything would be an improvement. Don't you believe it. After several barmy ideas were mooted - including a Cockney theme for God's sake, Greenalls seem to have settled on something akin to an 'alehouse' approach with lots of bare boards and bric-a-brac. It probably cost a fortune but just looks cheap and nasty, the bar is particularly unpleasant although it's given a good run for its money by the grotesque lighting columns. There is even an old red telephone box inside the pub. Tacky and cliched just about sums the place up. The beer's not much cop either. There are several to choose from, though - Greenalls Mild, Bitter and Original, Tetley Bitter and Boddingtons Bitter. Yawn. The best way to have a look at the Pack Horse is from the terrace of Atlas across the road - the beer's not much better but it's altogether a more pleasant place to eat and drink. However, Greenalls activities at the Pack Horse pale into insignificance beside the horrors wreaked upon the former Head of Steam round the corner. Having failed as a freehouse for railway buffs it's now called the Rocket Bar and is aimed at.... well, who? The railway memorabilia's gone, the old furniture's gone, even the carpet's gone. In come pool tables, sixties reject furniture and a bare concrete floor painted grey. In fact everything seems to be painted grey, although there is the odd flash of orange here and there. It doesn't open until 5.00pm but seems aimed at a pre-club crowd. Unfortunately for the Rocket, today's pre-clubbers expect more in the way of style and comfort than is on offer here. Real ale is still sold, it seems, but frankly who wants to drink it in this sort of surroundings. I'll give it six months.

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Devonshire Cream?

Founded some 5 years ago, the Devonshire Pub Company is so far a little-known name to local pub-goers - but they could be a name we'll be hearing more of. Set up as a partnership between a licensee and a builder (which means that building work can be taken on in-house), the chain already has 60 pubs, with ambitions to double that number over the next couple of years - indeed, another 10 sites are already being looked at, mostly in the Greater Manchester area.

Although HQ is in Skipton, all the company's pubs so far are in the North-West as broadly defined, which is seen as the core operating area. Many are in Lancashire and Cumbria, with some in the Bolton and Atherton areas, a handful on Merseyside, and just one - the Glynn Arms, Hawarden, in North Wales. Three of the pubs are in OT's circulation area: the Wheatsheaf in Levenshulme, the Sun at Audenshaw, and the Grey Horse in Romiley. All 3 have been thoroughly renovated since their purchase - a particularly impres-

sive job has been done on the Wheatsheaf, where the once drab lounge has been converted into an attractive area for live entertainment and big-screen TV.

Most if not all of the houses sell cask beer, the lead supplier being Scottish & Newcastle (so there's plenty of Theakstons); beers from Bass (Stones - not to mention keg Caffreys) and Whitbread (Boddingtons) also feature. Guest beers seem to be rare, although the Blazing Rag at Buxton does feature them. The Grey Horse at Romiley briefly blotted its copybook by selling keg Scrumpy Jack cider on handpump, but it seems a change of licensee will shortly see this practise abandoned.

All in all, Devonshire seem to be making a decent job of reviving under-performing pubs without silly gimmicks such as nonsensical names or garish colour schemes. While their beer policy could be a little more adventurous, their presence is to be welcomed; we shall watch future developments with interest.

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10

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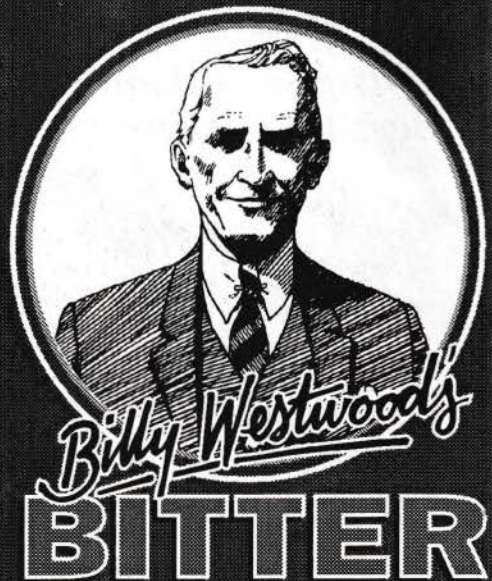


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CONTACT: ERIC SCOTT, FREE TRADE DEPARTMENT

HYDES' ANVIL BREWERY LTD. 46 MOSS LANE WEST, MANCHESTER M15 5PH. TEL: 0161 226 1317



The original destination for this month's column was to have been Scruffy Murphy's at All Saints, but, no sooner had the ink dried on the paper than the place went keg. Since it is not the policy of OT to devote valuable column inches to fizz emporia, somewhere more deserving of our attention had to be found post haste.

As it happened a high-profile pub promising all manner of gustatory goodies re-opened in Castlefield so OT hotfooted it to the Oxnoble, the only pub in the country named after a potato. The pub had been in decline for several years, arguably never properly recovering from 1970s gutting so thorough that the building was structurally weakened - amply demonstrated when the bar fell into the cellar!

This time, though, Whitbread seem to have got it right despite an even more extensive gutting this time around, with only the four external walls remaining from the original pub. The total cost of the new-look Oxnoble is put at £450,000 with some £70,000 of that coming from new leaseholders Alan and Carol Mawdsley, whose first pub this is. Not that either are inexperienced in the hospitality field, though, having run hotels of varying sizes.

Inside there is now a central bar which serves 3-4 distinct areas, including a particularly inviting 'snug' with a gas-primed 'real' fire, and furnished throughout in a country style with lots of wood, kitchen tables and odd chairs. Bric-a-brac has been kept to a minimum and while the walls are covered in old pictures and advertisements, they are all relevant to Manchester and the Deansgate area. Superficially it's much like many other 'traditional' refurbishes but the difference here seems to be that money has visibly been spent and thought has obviously gone into the way the pub looks; a production line example of fake Victoriana it most certainly is not.

Five cask beers are on sale - Boddingtons Bitter, Bentleys Bitter, Old Speckled Hen and two guests - Fullers London Pride and Everards Tiger on opening, Taylors Landlord to come on when OT called. The London Pride at £1.60 was a decent enough pint.

Apparently Whitbread's catering advisors helped draw up the menu and it must be said that it is quite expansive with some interesting dishes, although the florid language used does the menu no favours. Starters range from soup, sorry that's 'Tureen of Soup - wholesome, rich and nourishing and served with the staff of life, a baguette (sic) gently oven warmed', at £1.50 to spare ribs at £3.45. There are dips, enough for two, at £3.95;

pasta dishes £4-ish; sandwiches, which the menu promises with 'bread cut thick enough to satisfy a Bridgewater bargee'; salad bowls and the house specialities, the char-grills. These range from a variety of fish (swordfish, tuna and snapper), lemon garlic chicken and beefsteaks (probably not a lot of demand for them at the moment...).

Since I had to leave room for pud (of which more later) I passed the starters and just went for the main course. Lemon Garlic Chicken at £3.95 seemed reasonable. 'Breast of chicken chargrilled with a sweet lemon and merest touch of garlic' gushed the menu. It wasn't half bad either. The chicken came covered in a creamy lemon sauce and yes, with just a hint of garlic. Accompaniments were roast spuds (although chips or rice were available as alternatives) and carrots and cabbage, both done to a T, that is to say with a bit of bite still there and not the soggy mush you often get. All in all a good plateful. Well it would have been if the plate wasn't so damn big. The meal was served on what appeared to be an oval meat plate so while it was undoubtedly a reasonable portion it seemed a touch lost amidst the vast expanse of white porcelain. Pud next. These are chalked up on blackboards around the bar. There are apparently some speciality ices but the carrot cake caught my eye. At £1.95 this seemed reasonable. Shortly another huge plate arrived and sitting in the middle was a pretty sizeable wedge of an aristocrat amongst carrot cakes (and I speak as something of an expert here). Good texture, not too stodgy and wickedly sweet. Whipped cream completed the air of decadence. Certainly £1.95 well spent.

All in all highly recommended. Food is served from noon until 6.00pm although this may extend to later in the evening if they get another chef. You can also go for breakfast from 7.30am - the 'full Lancashire' at £4.50 sounds like a bit of a gut-buster. Still you could always pop down the road to the Y club and work it off.

The Oxnoble is at 71 Liverpool Road, Castlefield. Tel 839 7740

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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

APRIL '91

The front page story gave details of the GrandMet and Fosters tie-up with their pubs-for-breweries swap. The two companies, trading locally as Webster/Wilsons and John Smiths had reached an agreement whereby Fosters would control 20% of the UK brewing industry, and quit running pubs, while Grand Metropolitan would become the UK's biggest pub operator. A new, jointly owned company, Intntrepreneur Estates, would own 8450 pubs (these were Fosters and GrandMets previous outlets), and Fosters had a deal to supply the Intntrepreneur Estate for 7 years. There were also some complicated conditions imposed by the Office of Fair Trading - 1100 of the pubs were to be sold initially, and a further 2470 to be leased from the tie before 1992. There were also to be restrictions on the number of pubs in the scheme in each licensing district.

Still on the merger theme, Allied and Whitbread were hotly denying press reports that Whitbread were to take over some of Allied's brewing interests, leading to a conglomerate with over 75% of the national beer market.

Plans for the first ever beer festival in East Manchester were announced - this was to be held at Openshaw College in October, and arrangements had still to be finalised. On a new site like this, there was a distinct feel of "sticking our necks out a bit", so the appeal was for local drinkers to turn out and give their support.

In the two years that Brendan Dobbin had been brewing at the Kings Arms in Chorlton-on-Medlock, the pub had often been referred to in the pages of Opening Times. The latest item reported that the 4.5% ABV Chinese style pilsener, Yellow Mountain Beer, previously only available in Chinatown, would also be sold at the pub. Also Simon Finch was to take over as the tenant at the Kings Arms. (He had previously been the licensee at the Beer House in Manchester, but it had now been sold to local free house owner Graham Rawlinson.)

An unfavourable budget for drinkers has "knocked them for six" with the combined effects of increases in the duty and the VAT rate. Boddingtons, which was once one of THE cheap beers in the country, had gone well past the £1 mark. With the usual exception of Holts, it seemed likely that a pint for less than a pound would soon be difficult to find in any part of the Stockport & South Manchester branch area.

...Pub Ne b News... News...P ...Pub Ne b News... News...P	HIGH PEAK & NORTH EAST CHESHIRE WITH TIM JONES CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE CAMRA
--	---

After a bit of a break High Peak pub news is back. OK don't get carried away!

In Stalybridge the Good Beer Guide listed 'Q' (Free) is being extended into the shop next door. A testament to the success the pub has had since its re-opening a few years ago. Let's hope thae extension doesn't distract from the cosy atmosphere the small drinking areas have created. Also in Stalybridge, the Rose & Crown (Vaux) has got the builders in. The small back room, recently described, not unfairly as "poky" is to be introduced to the rest of the pub. It would be nice to think that this will be done sympathetically to create a quiet and welcoming area and not just an extension to the bar. Over in Hyde there have been some gains and losses. The Wellington, one time tap to the short-lived Failsforth Brewery and more recently troubled outlet for Burtonwood beers has been granted planning permission for conversion to a private house. This seems to be the end of the line for this pub, the existence of which seems to have been jinxed for a good few years.




Further up the road The Crown (Robinsons) is undergoing a major refurbishment which will probably result in a totally new bar with the loss of the "snug" at the front. Whilst it could be said that the work is overdue, it would be a shame if the result was an opened out barn like what resulted when the Bush up the road was "improved". In the case of the Bush all the character of a fine street corner local was lost, along with fine panelling, separate rooms and a large proportion of the loyal local trade. Let's hope the Crown fares better.

Up on Werneth Low the other pub (?) The Werneth Low Stake House has reopened complete with a small public bar. This sports John Smiths Bitter, Websters Green Label (for how long?) and Courage Directors all on hand pump. Finally in Hyde the King Bill, or rather licensee Jean Ditchfield and Peter Manwell have won a Bass/Gibbs Mew national award for "best retail standards". So congratulations. Let's hope this is for the cellar and not clean tills!

In Dukinfield, the Wheatsheaf (Marstons) is being "totally" refurbished although details are sketchy at the moment.

On Astley Street the Chapel House is one of the 10 pubs Holts acquired from Greenalls. But as it is rumoured that Drabs only want half of these perhaps it would be a good idea to get in before the beers change again!

12

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Boddingtons Bitter plus 9 ever changing Guest Beers Real Cider or Perry always available Many Interesting Continental Bottled Beers Home Cooked Lunchtime Food <i>Your hosts Lorraine & Steve James</i> Heaton Lane, Stockport		

In Disley the White Lion has gone on the market and in New Mills the Squirrels is also up for sale. Completing the triumvirate the Wheatshaf in Old Glossop is likewise in need of a new owner.

Also in Glossop, the Nags Head now has a polypin of cider on the bar, competing with the Star which devotes a permanent handpump to real cider.

In Buxton, the Duke of Devonshire at Fairfield had just been selected for the Good Beer Guide when the licensee announced his imminent departure (this month, in fact), thus forfeiting the pub's selection.

High Peak Featured Pub

APRIL 96 by Frank Wood

High Peak's choice as Pub of the Month for April is.....The Bakers Arms on West Road, Buxton. Geraldine and Mark Nicholson have been at the pub for some years now, gaining a regular Good Beer Guide entry. They work hard as a team to ensure high standards at this small, unspoilt, characterful pub. This further recognition is fully deserved.

Externally, the Bakers is ivy clad and inside there are two small rooms, both oak-beamed. The tap room is quarry-tiled and seating is partly provided by old Samuel Alsop 5 gallon wooden barrels (each fitted with small cushions). Regulars play cards and dominoes and there are popular monthly quizzes. The most unusual game is "Chapo" which is very popular in the tap room - Mark often gets involved in this game (which is played with dice) at the bar.

Lunchtime trade tends to be steady, with local business men using the pub. Freshly prepared sandwiches and the occasional stews are hugely popular but other than that it is all "wet" trade. The lounge is a similar size and both rooms are beamed, with quiet background music providing a comfortable, relaxing atmosphere for conversation.

The beer is Tetley Bitter, Ind Coope Burton Ale and, currently, Tetleys Tapsters Choice - proving yet again that a pub does not need an array of beers to receive an accolade. Opening times are 12.00-3.00 and 6.00-11.00 (Saturday 7.00-11.00/Sunday 7.00-10.30).

Several other pubs in this part of Buxton are worth a visit if a trip is made to what is often referred to as the highest market town. The Sun, Cheshire Cheese and The Swan are all within a two minute walk. Regular trains run to Buxton from Manchester (every hour) and Trent Buses wind their way here via Whaley Bridge and Chapel-en-le-Frith to the market place.

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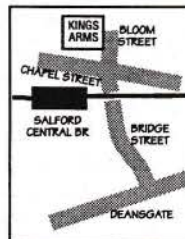


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The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch Contact is Ralph Warrington

(0161 368 3624 (h) 0161 439 7502 (fax))

Holts Move Inn



As we reported last month, Holts have purchased ten pubs from Greenalls, and a pretty mixed bag they are, too. The geographical spread is pretty wide as well, taking this most traditional of brewers into new areas.

Five are large managed houses and will fit into the estate, seamlessly. They include the Kingsway, Levenshulme (pictured); the Brooklyn, Great Lever; the Abbey, St. Helens; and perhaps surprisingly, the Angel in Knutsford and the Cock o' Budworth near Great Budworth. Holts meet the Cheshire Set - the ultimate culture clash?

The remainder are small tenancies and it is likely that Holts will be monitoring the performance of these pubs with a view to either disposal or turning over to management (they are phasing out tenanted pubs from their estate). Again these are well spread out including as they do the Pack Horse in Openshaw; Duke of York, Chorley; Railway, Moses Gate; Volunteer, Darcy Lever and the Chapel House in Dukinfield.

Holts took over the Kingsway on 26th March and the pub is now selling real ale for the first time in years, although thrifty old Holts also made sure the previous stocks of keg beer were sold out before their own mild and bitter went on sale.

New Faces at Old Mill

A belated welcome to Jon and Judi Laidlaw who took over the management reins at the Old Mill, Cheadle Hulme, on November 4th last year.

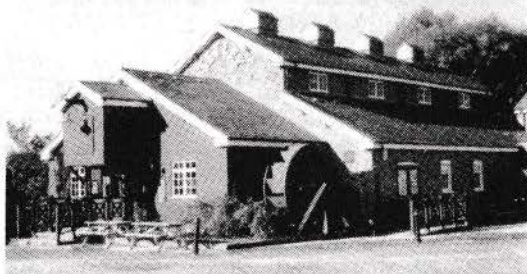
Jon brings 16 years trade experience with him including 14 months on relief with Allied-Domecq, owners of the Old Mill, and 9 years with Bass's Scottish arm, Tennants. During this spell, Jon and Judi often acted as troubleshooters, being sent in to sort out some of the more difficult pubs in Glasgow. Not surprisingly, they are finding the more genteel atmosphere of Cheadle Hulme something of a contrast!

The main priority has been to rebuild trade which suffered under the previous management and so far results in this direction are very promising. Jon is also taking a more long-term view as he and Judi would like to spend at least 5-6 years in the pub after their more nomadic existence in the past.

It's a 'Big Steak' pub and from the 4th of this month food will be available from 12-9, seven days a week. There are interesting developments on the beer front, too. When OT called, Jon had just received permission to source his guest beers, there are four or five available at any one time, from wherever he wants. These will all retail at £1.62 a pint, a price set centrally by Allied-Domecq, and Jon will therefore be looking at the premium products so as to offer better value for money.

All in all, the Old Mill is certainly worth a visit once again - and OT is back in the pub so you'll have something to read with your pint as well!

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Now Under New Management with your hosts
Jon and Judi Laidlaw

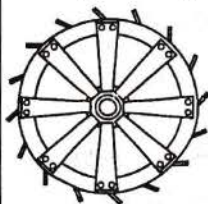
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HIGHEST QUALITY GUEST ALES**

CURMUDGEON



Genius Loci

Imagine this scenario: "Rising costs are to force the closure of the famous Macallan distillery in Scotland. The distinctive malt whisky will now be produced at a giant computerised plant in Glasgow, which had previously only made grain whiskies. A company spokesman assured drinkers that there would be no change to the character of the whisky." Unthinkable? Absolutely.

Scotland has seventy or eighty small malt whisky distilleries, whose products each draw their unique and distinct character from the particular location where they are made. If a distillery closes - and a few have in recent years - then its whisky dies with it. All that's left to remember it by are the dwindling stocks laid down when it was still working. Nobody would contemplate distilling Laphroaig alongside the Glenlivet, and even if you tried, it just wouldn't work.

Yet almost every time a brewery is closed, the beers it used to brew are moved somewhere else, often hundreds of miles away, and the brewers pretend nothing's changed. We have the ludicrous spectacle of Higsons being brewed in County Durham and Wilsons Mild in Oxfordshire. Usually, these transplanted beers are markedly inferior to the originals, sometimes they may be better, but one thing's consistent; they're never the same. Maybe the effect is less than with whisky, but beer too certainly does take on a distinctive character from the surroundings where it is brewed. You can't shift production around the country as if it were crisps or soap powder.

If a brewery really does have to close, then they should do the decent thing and bury its beers at the same time. Surely it's preferable to sell a different but authentic product in pubs,

rather than a bastardised travesty of the original. And perhaps, if this principle was generally accepted, it might persuade the brewers that it's worth keeping a few more plants open for the sake of the brands they produce, as brands seem to count for more on the balance sheet than people's livelihoods.

Ecstasy vs. Booze

There have been a number of tragic cases recently in which young people have died after taking only one, unadulterated, Ecstasy tablet. At the same time, there has been a notable dearth of stories of people being killed by a single pint of beer. Yet we still hear media pundits, who really should know better, talk of alcohol and Ecstasy in the same breath, as if the risks and dangers were the same. A few months ago, I even read one Charlotte Raven in the Observer, in one of the most irresponsible pieces of journalism I have ever seen, state that she would be happier for her children to use Ecstasy than to drink alcohol, conjuring up images of happy kids dosed with E's dancing the night away, compared with drunken yobs on the rampage.

In fact, though, the two are not equivalent at all. The risk of death from one drink, or even one drinking session, is non-existent. While you can kill yourself drinking, it's extremely hard work. And, over a long period of time, alcohol will do no damage to health unless you consistently drink at a level way above the official "safe" limits. On the other hand, it has been clearly demonstrated that every single tab of Ecstasy you take carries a slight risk of fatality, and regular "social" use is likely to cause real and lasting harm, and may in the long run kill you. So, if you hear any commentator bracket the two together, don't imagine that they're making a serious or worthwhile point. Unless they're hopelessly naive, they're either trying to excuse their own use of illegal hard drugs, or they've got an axe to grind about alcohol. You have been warned.

15



J D WETHERSPOON CHAMPION OF THE GUEST ALE CAUSE

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Thursday 25th April ~
Sunday 28th April 1996

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Copy Date for May Issue of Opening Times is April 26

CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

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

Diary

April 96

Thursday 11th - Branch Meeting and AGM, the Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. All members should attend this important meeting.

Monday 15th - Two-way social in Openshaw. Grove Ashton Old Road 9.00pm; Railway, Manshaw Road, 10.00pm.

Wednesday 17th - trip to Weetwood Brewery. Minibus departs Royal Oak, Didsbury 6.30pm; Crown, Heaton Lane 6.45pm. Phone 477 1973 to book a place.

Friday 19th - Cheadle Stagger. Meet Cafe Bar 7.00pm, Star 8.30. Both on High Street.

Monday 22nd - Social, Griffin, Heaton Mersey. Starts 9.00pm.

Thursday 25th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Gladstone, Middle Hillgate, Stockport. See article on page 3.

Monday 29th - Social, Osborne House, Rusholme. Starts 9.00pm.

April 96

Friday 3rd May - Visit to Bank Top Brewery, Bolton. To be confirmed. Phone for details and to book.

High Peak branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:

Tuesday 9th - Monthly branch meeting, Royal Hotel, Hayfield. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 20th - Mystery social coach trip. Contact Frank Wood on 01457 865426.

Saturday 4th May - Brewery trip to Fenney Bentley. Contact Frank for details.

National Event

Friday 12 - Sunday 14th April
CAMRA National AGM, Guildhall Potrsmouth. Election of National Officers and Motions for Debate. A very important AGM that may well decide the future of Traditional Cider promotion by CAMRA

To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Plans

16



THE Robinson's COLLECTION

BEST BITTER (4.2% ABV)
- pale and bright with a full bitterness derived from choice aroma hops.

FREDERICS (5.0% ABV)
- light and golden in colour and packed with flavour. Named after the brewery's founder. Also available in bottles.

XB (4.0% ABV)
- a smooth bitter ale with a malty taste. First brewed in the Lake District.

HATTER'S MILD (3.3% ABV)
- brewed from quality malt and hops, it's the best cask conditioned, light mild around.

OLD STOCKPORT (3.5% ABV)
- rich golden body with a refreshingly hoppy taste and lightish alcohol content.

OLD TOM (8.5% ABV)
- smooth, dark and mellow. Brewed from a recipe almost as old as the brewery itself.

CHOICE BEERS

MANCHESTER MATTERS



Contrary to reports in our fitfully accurate contemporary "What's Doing", the Pack Horse on Deansgate in the City Centre has reopened, not as a restaurant, nor yet as a Cockney theme bar, but as an attempt at an alehouse-style pub. It's reasonably well done, with wooden floor and plenty of Manchester memorabilia, but with

by Rhys Jones

a lacklustre range of handpumped beers - Greenalls Mild, bitter and Original, Tetley Bitter, and Boddingtons Bitter - it is essentially an alehouse without interesting ale - which rather misses the point.

Round the corner, the Head of Steam has been drastically altered to become the Rocket Bar. Stripped right down to the concrete floor, it now forms a cavernous drinking space, sparsely furnished and dimly lit - rather like drinking in an enormous garage. The handpumped beers are Bass, Worthington Bitter, and a guest - I had good Summer Lightning at a reasonable £1.59. The pre-club crowd may make the place their own, but after three failed ventures you have to wonder whether this is the most auspicious site.

Still in the City Centre, the Captain's Bar (formerly Mama's) on Rochdale Road has been selling real ale for some time. There are usually around 3 handpumped beers on sale, often from small breweries. I enjoyed a fine pint of Alesman, from Keighley's Worth Brewery, for a bargain 99p.

In Gorton, the Gorton Arms has at last been put out of its misery. Sadly but inevitably it's closed and boarded. A less dramatic but equally regrettable real ale loss is the All Saints branch of Scruffy Murphy's, where Tetley Bitter is now "smoothflow" keg. At the Owens Park branch, however, the Tetley's is still exclusively cask, and was in rather good form when I called in mid-March.

Didsbury will shortly be getting a stage-Irish pub of its very own, when Times Square becomes O'Neill's - Manchester's first example of Bass's Irish themed chain. Reports of O'Neill's conversions in London suggest that real ale is likely to remain.

The Wheatsheaf in Levenshulme has gained Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. As to the identity of "Old Tubthumper", also sold there, there is still no on-the-record comment - could it, perhaps, be a re-badged version of one of the beers in the Scottish & Newcastle portfolio? Further north on the A6, the Farmers Arms in Longsight has become the Farmer's Kipper! As if the silly name weren't enough, the garish green and orange colour scheme confirms this as a Magic Pub Company house, and it completes a quartet of their pubs along this stretch of road - the others are Reilly's Tavern (formerly the Crown), Biddy Mulligan's (the Midway), and the Little Vic (the Victoria). Internally, this is probably the most successful of the four - there's plenty of tat, but good use has been made of mirrors and wooden seating to create a warm, "pubby" atmosphere that feels much more welcoming than the old pub used to. The jukebox is heavy on country'n Irish, and the pub contains signposts to half the towns in Ireland. A "recommended real ale cellar" is advertised - sadly it holds only Boddingtons Bitter and Stones Bitter, both of which are served on handpump.

Last but not least, the Travellers Call in West Gorton, which has not up till now been selling the seasonal beers from Hydes, has Billy Westwood's Bitter on electric pump. As you'd expect in this regular Good Beer Guide entry, it's been on very good form, and would make a splendid addition to the range should the brewery decide to keep it on permanently.

Ghostly Moves

Stockport Ghost Society are on the move. Their monthly meetings at the Arden Arms have proven so popular that they have outgrown the place. So, from Wednesday 3rd April they have been meeting in the upstairs room at the Carousel on Reddish Road, South Reddish. The meetings start at 8.00pm. The venue for informal meetings and trips will remain the Ardeen Arms, though.

For those unfamiliar with the new venue, it is a fairly open-plan pub/restaurant with three handpulled beers - John Smiths Bitter, Theakstons Mild and XB. The Theakston Best Bitter is keg, though.

The Society tell us that with the bigger room they hope to accommodate all their members on group nights which are every first Wednesday, and also to welcome new faces, if the spirit moves them!

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There are new faces at the Spread Eagle, Robinsons brewery tap, on Lower Hillgate. These are Val and Noel Jones who hail from Offerton and who come to the Spread Eagle as their first pub. Val had wanted a pub for many years and having been Spread Eagle regulars for about 18 months, they duly applied to Robinsons for the pub when it seemed it would become available. Obviously they were successful and duly took over on 5th February. The main changes are likely to be cosmetic at the moment with the intention of making the pub brighter and more generally welcoming. With this in mind the pool table has been moved to the front room on the right and so is no longer the first thing that greets you as you walk into the pub. Noel also hopes to get some proper lighting outside the pub, too, to make it stand out more. All in all a promising start and we wish them well.

It's new faces but no change at the **Queens Head** (Turners Vaults), Underbank, Stockport. Dave and Paula Harris have been succeeded by licensee Mat Burns and his partner Nicola Hamilton. Both have 2-2 1/2 years experience in the trade, indeed Nicola has worked in the pub for that time, and both have also been trained up by Dave and Paula. This being so then it is no surprise when Mat tells us that the watchword is 'continuation' with the aim being to follow their predecessors' high standards. The only minor changes planned are a possible Sunday lunchtime opening and the introduction of early evening food from 6-8-ish. Mat is also very much an OBB fan and this has held in the high quality of the beer. Mat and Nicola certainly seem to have the right idea and it looks as though Turners is set to continue its success of recent years.

Didsbury news, now. Firstly the terrible Times Square is closed for refurbishment and when it reopens (possibly by the time you read this) it will be O'Neills which, you may gather, will be yet another Irish theme bar. Now, there's a novelty. O'Neills is the standard Bass Irish bar 'brand' and a fuller report will appear next month. We expect real ale to remain, though, across the road; the Station was scheduled for closure and refurbishment between 18th and 30th March. The work will apparently include a new bar and redecoration. Opening hours will be more restricted when it re-opens, we hear. More next time. Finally the overall refurbishment at the Parrswood has been put back until the autumn. However the state of the gents toilets is such that they are to be tackled immediately. This is not before time, our local correspondent tells us. It seems that the water supply to the urinals was disconnected before Christmas and at times the stench has been disgusting (I hope no one is eating while reading this - ed). Indeed we hear that licensee Martin Reilly threatened to quit unless something was done!

At the **Crown** on Valance Close in Gorton, which sadly missed last month's Pub of the Month award owing to the earlier than expected retirement of licensees Jim and Betty Ollerenshaw, first impressions under new licensee Derek Shawcross, late of the Talbot in Fallowfield, are distinctly favourable. While there have been a few changes of policy - longer opening hours, and live entertainment on certain evenings - the pub seems as well

kept as ever it was, with much of the old decor remaining in place. The beer's been good, too, so all in all this looks like a successful transition.

The **Nip Inn** on Penny Lane, Stockport, is a pub with a chequered history of late. Last month whilst appearing blacked out from the outside it was in fact still trading with handpumped Flowers IPA. However a complete refurbishment is planned and the place will open under new management as the Phoenix Social Club. From first impressions it looks as though this will favour big screen TV and plenty of pool tables.

In Rusholme, Alan and Alyson at the **Osborne House** have moved to another Hydes house, the Cock & Bull. No news yet of their replacements. Meanwhile, Bev and John, formerly at the Good Beer Guide listed Orion in Withington are now at the Griffin, Heaton Mersey. Their replacement at the Orion has been Bruce from the Sidings in Levenshulme.

The **Old House at Home**, on Burton Road, Withington, is now selling an extended range of guest beers, three to be precise. When OT last called these included Thwaites Craftsman, Double Dagger and Buchanans from the Federation Brewery. On the way were Charles Wells IPA, Burtonwood James Forshaws and Robinsons Frederics. This is a pub that has shown continuous improvement on the beer front in recent years and is well worth a visit.

In the City Centre, the **Land of Cakes** on Great Ancoats Street has been refurbished but not as a Tap & Spile 'freehouse' outlet as inaccurately reported in another publication last month. It's still a Whitbread pub and the beers on sale are Boddingtons Bitter, Chesters Mild and one other beer from the Whitbread range.

After a lapse of a few years mild makes a return to the **Plogh in Heaton Moor**. Tetleys Dark Mild is on sale in its keg form and is proving popular. If sales take off then cask conditioned mild could become a real prospect.

Opening Times welcomes, a little bit late, Les and Pauline Brown who became the new management team at the **Three Crowns**, Heaton Norris shortly before Christmas. They previously ran the Church in Higher Broughton. Two real ales are on sale - Boddingtons Bitter and Old Henry from Castle Eden. The latter sells at a bargain price of £1 a pint. Food is on sale Mon-Fri, 12-2. There is live entertainment at weekends with singers on Friday and Saturday nights and a band on Sunday.

As reported last month, **Mike and Lynn Belsham** have moved from the now-closed Stanley Arms to the **Bulkeley Arms** on Brinksway, Stockport. The pub has been nicely redecorated and refurbished, largely by Lynn. The vault and lounge have been swapped over and it is hoped that the lounge will also work as a concert room - there is a small stage for live performers. All the seating has been re-covered and the pub is now bright and pleasant. Real ale is back too. There are four cask beers - Boddingtons Mild and Bitter, Whitbread Castle Eden Bitter plus another changing beer from the Whitbread range. When OT called Whitbread Best Bitter had just gone off and was to be replaced by Higsons. The Bulkeley Arms has been in the doldrums for some time now but Mike and Lynn look set to bring about a much-needed revitalisation. We wish them well.

Alan Preston, Licensee of the **Hinds Head** in Heaton Chapel, is planning his first mini-beer festival next month - details next issue, and on the same subject the **Beer House** in Manchester is to repeat last years mega West Country Festival. The **Station** in Ashton is also festivaling from 2nd till 6th May.

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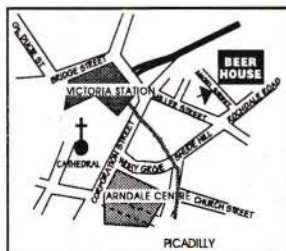
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