

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING



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FREE

TIMES

SEPTEMBER 1996

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The Bad News - And The Good

Guest Beers Under Threat

In bizarre, and potentially extremely damaging, proposals, the European Commission last month threatened to undermine the guest beer provision, which allows tenants of national brewers to buy one cask-conditioned beer from outside the tie. Then, possibly realising the enormity of what they were about, began to beat a hasty retreat.

The controversy originated here in the north west in the shape of one Andrew Ronan who ran a business importing Bavarian beers into the UK. Unfortunately he found that many pubs couldn't sell them since they had either no guest beer rights or, if they did, these were restricted to a cask-conditioned beer. This forced him out of business and in 1993 he duly complained to the Commission that blocking lager as a guest beer contravened the Treaty of Rome in respect of the free passage of goods between European Union countries and prevented his ability to trade on an equal footing. It now seems that the Commission is inclined to agree and has ruled that the guest beer ruling discriminates against other European brewers and the provision should be extended to include draught beers brewed in continental Europe, claiming that cask conditioned beer is unique to the UK. This is nonsense in fact but nevertheless the Government has some 40 days to respond otherwise the case would be referred to the Court of Justice. If the Government complied it could mean either a widening of the provisions to include all beers, which would defeat the object, of, more likely it would be scrapped.

Not surprisingly this ruling has caused dismay and howls of outrage. The Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association summed up reactions: "The Guest Beer provision has helped make the British beer market the most open in Europe. If it was scrapped, it would lead to less consumer choice and threaten jobs in many breweries. We will be looking for the UK government to make a robust defence of the British brewing and pubs industry."

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Porter Comes Home



In one of the most exciting developments on the Stockport pub scene since the opening of the Crown Ale House, local man Dave Porter, owner of the award winning Porter's Brewery, has bought Byrons on Great Portwood Street as his third tied house.

The pub, which will revert to its original name of the Railway, has had a chequered history in recent years. Some readers will recall its phase as "Cheekies" and the infamous bare bum pub sign. It didn't fare much better as Byrons, being something of a twilight pub with a mixed clientele. Closed and up for sale since January it now looks set for a new lease of life.

The Railway will be run by Paul and Bev Stanyer who come from a successful stint building up Porter's second pub, the Albion in Clayton-le-Moor, although some readers will remember Paul as the barman in the Crown, Heaton Lane a few years ago. In common with the other Porter pus (the other being the Griffin in Haslingden where the brewery is based) this will be run on no-nonsense traditional lines - that means no pool tables, no juke box, and no gaming machines but conversation, laughter, good food (when the kitchen is sorted out!) and, of course, good ale.

It is of course here that the Railway will come into its own. The quality of Porter's beers is well known; they are regularly category winners at Stockport Beer Festival and Porter's Porter has been Beer of the Festival twice, most recently this year. The beers score not only on quality but price - Mild will be £1.05, Bitter £1.10, Rossendale Ale (4.2%) £1.20, Porter (5%) £1.40 and Sunshine (5.3%) £1.45. The pub will also sell the various seasonal and special brews from the brewery.

No major structural changes are planned but the pub need a thorough clean and redecoration. This means that although possession (and the licence) were only obtained on 8 August, the Railway should be open for business on Friday 13 September. No superstitions here!

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Contributors to this edition: John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Rhys Jones, Tim Jones, Frank Wood, Ian Openshaw, Andrew Foll, Geoff Johnson, Stuart Ballantyne, Brian Carey, Mark McConachie, Peter Edwardson, Phil Levison, Jim Bowden, David Hughes, Henry Skwarczynski, Brian Kemp, John Hutchinson, John Tune, Ted Bruning

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THE HINDS HEAD

Your hosts Alan and June Preston invite you to call in and enjoy their friendly atmosphere and service

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

An obscure former importer of Bavarian beer may well, if a micro-brewery representative is to be believed, be responsible for the closure of no less than 200 breweries in Britain. How? By forcing the abolition of guest 'cask beer' rules for tenanted pubs. A particularly idiotic EC ruling has given the British Government 40 days to respond to the (now) declared illegality under competition rules of the one successful aspect of the Governments review of the brewing industry. CAMRA, who point out that the 'guest beer' policy was cleared with the EC originally, are opposing any change root and branch. Whilst I would be the first to agree that the current system should remain unchanged, I think a sense of proportion should be maintained.

The government has four choices. (1) Abolish the guest beer rules. This is easy, spineless, and would be seen as 'giving in to Brussels', so would sit uneasily with the euro-sceptics - BUT - Parliament is in recess, so it could happen. (2) Open the guest 'cask' beer to all beers, which would mean, as our lead article points out, yet another heavily promoted identikit keg beer instead - the worst of all worlds - but very easy for the Government. (3) Do nothing. After 40 days the matter would be referred to the European Court, and they might well deliver a final ruling by 1998 - well after the General Election. A fairly easy option. (4) Come up with a new form of policy that satisfies the competition complaint, but improves choice. Difficult, but not impossible. "British Cask conditioned beer OR a beer brewed in another member state and dispensed by a method traditional and authentic to that country" or something like that - opening the gate to genuine European products, but closing it to brit-fizz. Alas, much too difficult, I expect.

In all this a sense of proportion is necessary. Tenancies are sadly a dying form, and now represent less than 1 in 8 pubs, and only 7% of the total "on" trade. The number who choose (because of cellar loan ties / brewery policy) to have a genuine guest - as opposed to a brewery imposed one - is about 1%. Bavaria with a population of about 13 million, supports over 700 breweries. Micros may well find it tougher, but the most successful will follow David Porter's route and slowly build up a small pub estate (see front page). In any case, the EC review of the brewery tie, next year, is a much more serious threat - that could mean the end of regionals such as Robinsons, Hydes and Lees - and that is what we and the industry should be concentrating on. Hopefully Mr Major will do nothing, and leave this one for the next government.

Paul Hutchings

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continued from page 1

Phil Freakley of the Society of independent brewers was more succinct "It's madness, this could be the difference between life and death for UK small brewers." Certainly, a large number of brewers are dependent for volume on agreements with individual tenanted pubs through wholesalers (or indeed direct) or with other breweries in 'approved lists'. The 'brewery approved' guest beer would in theory, be unaffected by any change of policy since it is outside the spirit of the rules in any case, and is entered into out of a profit motive, not anything else, but the temptation to stop such arrangements would be there, if some marginal improvement in the bottom line was anticipated. Consumer choice is not high on the agenda.

The ruling is particularly bizarre given that the cask-only aspect of the guest beer law was cleared with the Commission before it was put into place. Perhaps realising this, and almost certainly taken aback by the ferocity of the opposition, it now seems possible that Brussels might be preparing to back down. A report in the trade paper *Licensee & Morning Advertiser* indicated that the EC had admitted to being "embarrassed" by the row and was now seeking talks with UK brewers and the government sometime this month to resolve the issue. An official is quoted as saying "The last thing that Europe wants is to become entangled in an expensive legal row. They are genuinely embarrassed - and surprised at the strong reaction from the UK brewing community."

A compromise has been suggested which would involve guest beers coming from small brewers making "less than a certain quantity per year or with an annual turnover below a certain threshold." CAMRA has condemned this as unworkable, pointing out the bureaucratic monitoring which would be necessary to ensure brewers remained below the set limits.

CAMRA takes the position that the only solution is to leave well alone. If the guest beer law is widened, it will simply reverse the success of the ruling: widely available national brands will dominate. Drinkers will not have their choice improved. It may also lead to the abolition of the guest beer altogether. If you care about your beer choice act now to protect it. Write in protest to your MEP, MP and direct to the European Commission at the following addresses:
MEPs: 2 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1H 9AA.
MPs: House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA
EC: L Gonzales Vaque, Head of Unit DGXV, European Commission, Rue de la Loi 200, Brussels, B-1049 Belgium.

Bad News 2 - Bass Completes Take-Over

As anticipated in last months OT, Bass have agreed terms to take on the Carlsberg Tetley brewing operation. This would in theory give Bass 40% of the UK market.

The new group have stated in an internal memo that all brands will be maintained for 18 months. (*A Likely Story* - ed.) Warrington Brewery's last brew is in process as you read this, so all Tetley bitter will come from Leeds, but the Walkers beers will be brewed on contracts.

Whilst there is a possibility of a Monopolies reference, nothing much will happen, but after clearance (which given the governments record is likely), a massive rationalisation programme will be put in place. Very few of the new giant's plants are at anywhere near capacity, and advertising dollars will not be spent on competing brands so half the breweries and a significant number of minor Allied and Bass beers are threatened. With Bass the most committed of the bigger breweries to Nitrokeg (Caffreys), and the least interested in Cask Ale (look at the way Draught Bass and Stones have deteriorated), and with a head brewer who has told CAMRA that nitrokeg is just as good (if not better) than cask ale (and at a CAMRA AGM, no less!), there is little hope of sanity.

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Pub Of The Month SEPTEMBER



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month award for September 1996 goes to the Unity on Wellington Road, South, Stockport.

The Pub of the Month award can be given for many reasons but in essence the winning pub has to be essentially a traditional pub serving traditional beer. Not only does the Unity do this extremely well, it does it in a spot - opposite the Grand Central complex - where it would be very easy to either cater simply for the youth market or simply be a town centre dining pub.

The Unity does neither of these - although the lunchtime food is of both good quality and good value - and remains a staunchly local pub with a loyal and appreciative bunch of regulars. This is largely down to continuous family involvement in the running of the pub over a period of years - current licensees June and Pete Bennett took over six years ago from June's mother

and father - and the realisation that a good base of regulars secures a pub's long-term future more securely than bowing to flash in the pan gimmicks.

The pub caters for all ages and types, young and old alike. Indeed, the Tuesday afternoon pensioners recently presented June with a cake to mark her efforts for them. The beer, Robinsons Best and Hatters Mild, is top-notch and the Unity is a good place to enjoy it. In short, it's a damn fine pub which works well all round and as such is a worthy winner of our monthly award. With Cake and coffee afternoons, Monday and Thursday, Pensioners sandwiches and a raffle and Bingo on Tuesday afternoons, Darts on Tuesday and Thursday evenings and a 10% off happy lunchtime on Sundays the pub goes out of its way to attract a wide range of customers. The presentation will be made on Thursday 26th when a great night is promised.

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

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Stalybridge Buffet Saga Draws to a Close

After years of campaigning started by CAMRA High Peak and taken on by The Friends of Stalybridge Station the uncertainty surrounding this much treasured buffer bar seems to be drawing to a close. Tenders on the lease for the buildings were opened at the end of July with the news that John Hesketh and Sylvia Wood of the Station in Ashton-under-Lyne (long time regular in the GBG) were the successful bidders.

This good news, however, signalled the end of the buffet's long connection with the Redfern family. Dot Redfern ran the bar for years when the bar first became famous. After her sad death, husband Ken took over and was joined by Ken (jnr.) and the buffet went from strength to strength. A good range of draught beers was

supplemented by an excellent choice of foreign bottled beers. Plans for the re-opening of the buffet are well under way with a re-opening date of the beginning of November being mentioned confidently.

These plans involve the opening up of the previously private rooms beyond the existing bar. The former private lounge is to become a general eating and drinking area with a room for functions and meetings beyond which was in the past a waiting room. The kitchen will be extended and refurbished, the conservatory refurbished and ladies toilets will be built in one of the bedrooms.

The much loved granite bar top will be retained as will the open fire and indeed other fires in the extended areas will also be open. The bar back fittings will be retained ("what's left of them"); the aim being to retain the Victorian theme and keep the buffet much as it was even to the extent of replacing the signs - which proliferated - in the same locations. The railway memorabilia will be added to from John's own collection.

The beer range will be as ambitious as at the Station with the intention to have 6 handpumps as a minimum and hopefully up to 8. A tie-up with a brewery is being considered from which it is intended to take two beers with a popular and prominent regular such as Timothy Taylor's Landlord; the rest of the handpumps accommodating ever changing guest beers.

Whilst the plans for the "pub" side of the venture are much to the fore the other function of the buffet has not been overlooked. Sylvia intends to open the buffet from 7.30 to 9.15 weekday mornings. The other opening times will be from lunch time until 11pm on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays with the weekday opening to be decided. John and Sylvia's intentions for the bar seem to be keeping it much the same with the hope that when people walk in for the first time after its re-opening their reaction will be that nothing has changed. A lot has changed however, and we can now look ahead with optimism to the future of this much loved institution.

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STAGGER

with Dave Hanson

The evening started at the *Alexandra Hotel*, not with our usual two stalwarts, but with a magnificent eight bodies (and that in a Robbies pub!). Was this good turnout due to the scenic potential of the route, the ease of reaching the venue or the good weather? The evening was so warm and sunny that we drank our bitter outside on the benches provided. Not that the interior should be missed, there are a multiplicity of rooms ranging from the well hidden snug/vault with its original wall bench seating to the pool/billiards room. Most of the interior fittings date from when the pub was built at the turn of the century. The hazy lazy days of summer had set in, and it was only the commanding voice of our leader which made us progress to our next venue.

A short walk further along Northgate Road brought us to the *Gardeners Arms*. We were greeted by a single large room which had a raised drinking area in front of us and the bar in the far corner. Websters Yorkshire Bitter and Green Label were on offer, and both were as expected, ie unremarkable. As the landlord would like to encourage more ale drinkers it would be nice to see a more exciting range of beer. A suggestion is Wilsons or Chesters Mild in place of one of the bitters. Although the pub was quiet when we visited (7.30pm), live entertainment was advertised for the Saturday evening.

Along to the bottom of Northgate Road and into the *Bulkeley Arms*. Contrary to the Boddington/Whitbread range announced by Viaducts & Vaults 2, the full range of Burtonwood beers were on offer. The mild, bitter and Forshaws were tried and proved to be best so far (though the Forshaws was a little too warm). As we arrived during happy hour the beers were 90p/pint! Around the back entertainment was available for younger readers in the form of a slide, rocking horse and paddling pool. For the rest of us a half completed barbecue was available (or was it complete but only half built?).

We now had to retrace our steps to reach the *Hollywood* on Bloom Street. This is a very large pub consisting of a cavernous main room with a small vault off to the side. Maybe because of its size the pub felt empty, even though there were many drinkers. The only real ale on offer was Theakstons Bitter at 70p/half, contrast that with the Bulkeley Arms. Perhaps this explains the extensive range of designer beers on offer in the cooler. The Theakstons was gauged as being very green and so not rated very highly. Time was pressing, so down to the Woolpack on Brinksway our 8.30 meeting point were we picked up some extra revellers.

Upon entering *Ye Olde Woolpack* the clutch of awards displayed over the bar announced that we were in an outstanding pub. Certificates including CAMRA Pub-of-the-Months and Cellermanship awards boded well for the quality of the beer. Unfortunately our timing didn't as the guest beer ran out as we walked in. Never mind we could still choose from Theakstons and Tetleys bitter, Marstons Pedigree and Thwaites mild. We sampled the last two and they were rated very highly only just failing to be voted the best beers of the night.

There is plenty of outside seating available at the Woolpack now that Brinksway Bridge has been pedestrianised. You can drink your pint whilst watching swallows swooping over the Mersey, see herons fishing and even catch a glimpse of a kingfisher! If you don't want to commune this closely with nature the inside is no less interesting. The interior has been

carefully opened up into a single area, but is still broken up into nooks and crannies by low dividing walls.

Enough of a good thing, and reluctantly we departed for the *Bridge*. Outside the building is very interesting, with extensive use of ornate brickwork announcing its construction date and ownership by Robinsons. Inside the karaoke was overpowering, so we retreated into the beer garden/back yard. The beer quality was underpowering, the bitter being acceptable, the mild poor and the Frederics being poured down the drain! Around the corner and into the deceptively large *Comfortable Gill* and a choice of Boddingtons bitter and a guest beer. When we visited this was Charles Wells Bombardier, which was highly rated. The landlord informed us he will be trying out other guest ales in coming months so keep an eye on this pub. Having recommended the Woolpack for twitchers, the *Comfortable Gill* is the pub to frequent if you are a bus spotter. You can gaze into the bus garage from the comfort of your seat and watch the drivers downing a pint or two (*after coming off duty I hope*).

It was only a short walk along King Street West to *Tom Thumbs*, a modern estate style pub, without a matching estate. A two roomer with lounge and karaoke straight on, vault and quiet to the right. Both John Smiths and Boddingtons bitters were on offer, and both were rated as par for the product. For a pub who's previous landlord had sat on his roof in a bath of custard, the night we visited turned out to be very sober.

A brisk climb up the hill brought us to the *Olde Vic*. Several beers were on offer and we sampled Goose Eye Summer Jack, which was rated average and Timothy Taylors Landlord, over which opinions varied (one good, one bad). A pint of Slaters was requested, but when served proved to be both cloudy and off. When returned to the bar, staff did offer an alternative, but left the Slaters on sale. The evening was still warm and muggy, so we retired to the garden where the third and final barbecue was spotted. This once lively pub seemed to have lost its way in recent times, but has now been sold. We await developments with interest.

As time was pressing the party split in two, some going to the *Blue Bell*, the rest to the *Church* (a dedicated two did both!). The *Blue Bell* is an imposing brick edifice which can not be missed when leaving the back entrance to Stockport rail station. "A damn good pub" is how one person summed it up. Wilsons and Stones bitters were offered, the former being rated as acceptable, the latter unsampled.

Tucked away behind the *Blue Bell* on Moseley Street is the *Church*. A small, basic, no frills, friendly local which served good pints of Robinsons mild and bitter by hand pumps. "I sell more mild than bitter" the landlord informed us, a rare occurrence these days. We questioned his assertion that he did most of his trade was during the day, as the pub was still well populated on that evening. You could tell it was nearing closing time by a conversation overheard at the bar. "Two pints of bitter". "192". "Is that the price or the number of my bus home?" We all met up again in the *Greyhound* on Bowden Street. A friendly enterprising two room (lounge and vault) pub with offers two Boddingtons beers and a diverse choice of guests. Boddingtons bitter, which is specially matured in the cellar for 7-10 days, was highly rated, and the very rare cask conditioned Boddingtons mild is also available. Of the guest beers we sample Tisbury bitter, rated very good and Ridleys Rumpus rated excellent, just beating the Woolpack for best beers of the night. We couldn't try the Dogs Bollocks as it ran out on us (the beer not the dog!) As the night was getting on, and my handwriting was getting illegible, I cannot do the *Greyhound* the justice it deserves. (*Plug - see Viaducts & Vaults 2. Ed*)

Obviously these observations are those of one group on one night and are not definitive. Why not try the pubs yourselves and see how far you (dis)agree.



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From now on, forever, or until I get bored, this column will feature Beer Festivals, both CAMRA and Pub run, from the point of view of the festival goer. It will not be the usual blind eulogy, but tend to a more critical approach. I also hope to list forthcoming festivals when the regular column gets underway next month. A fuller version will be found on our Web pages from 1st October, which will cover some festivals we don't have room for in the magazine. As a taster, some thoughts on the Great British Beer Festival.

GBBF 6-10 August, Olympia London.

Definitely the biggest, but is it the Best? Frankly it depends on your point of view. Certainly it is the biggest in terms of cost to the punter. A desperate but multi-colour glass, in both halves and pints at a mere £3. An expensive programme that is glossy, says virtually nothing interesting about the beer, has comparatively little campaigning material (compare to Stockports!) and is basically a set of brewery ads. Beer quality? This year, very good indeed. Last year (the heatwave) it was sludge. Last year seemed to put the punters off slightly because numbers were down on some sessions (more tourists though). Beer range? Well, vast...but frankly rather uninspiring. GBBF do not promote the newer micros, and there was a lot of rather similar best bitters and blandish mild beers. Service? Execrable. Far too few staff, bars deep with thirsty punters. Food? Apart from Melbournes excellent German Sausages (300 plus in the queue at one stage), expensive and crap. The staff behind the Thai food stall were barefoot and seemed not terribly clean, and much of their product seemed to be abandoned on tables and the floor. Foreign Beers? Terrific range, far too few staff (many totally ignorant of their subject. Huge waits. Ratings:

Cost ££££; Beer Range ★★☆☆; Beer Quality ★★★★★; Food ★☆☆☆; Entertainment ★☆☆☆; Foreign Beer ★★★★★; Campaigning Value ★☆☆☆; Overall ★★☆☆ (Less £ and ☆ and more ★ the better). Next month: Peterborough, Burton possibly Norwich and Birmingham and Manchester Pub Festivals.

Pubfile

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

CHOICE BEERS

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison **SEPTEMBER 1991**

The front page main article covered that ever present problem, the price of beer. Evidence had emerged to back up what had been obvious to drinkers for a long time - brewery price increases were leading to a serious drop in Britain's beer consumption. A report from Mintel said that drinkers gave "money" as the main reason for their drinking less. The report also suggested that the total beer market could fall by a million barrels over the coming five years, and with the take-home sector increasing rapidly, up to 10,000 pubs could close during the next two years. Local drinkers were lucky in being able to choose from a variety of independent brewers, with good quality beers at sensible prices - Robinsons, Hydes, Lees, West Coast (bitter 90p. in its one tied house) and of course Holts, still leading the pack with managed house prices of 79p. For Mild and 81p. For Bitter, all offering better value than the national brewers.

Now that the bouquets had been handed out (to Sam Smiths for their excellent refurbishment of Turner's Vaults), it was time to let fly with the brickbats, with the Pub Vandalism Awards of 1991. The first award, sub-titled the "Scorched Earth Award" for wholesale urban destruction, went to Manchester City Council for their impressive array of road schemes which threatened over 20 pubs in the East Manchester area. The next award, the "Golden Sledgehammer" for sensitive refurbishment, went to Joseph Holt for what they did to the Seven Stars on Ashton Old Road - removal of a wealth of Victorian tiling, mahogany and etched glass in favour of a new extension, which for the most part appeared to be barely used. Although renowned for selling quality beers at low, low prices, Holts were not so good at conserving some of their finer pubs. The back page carried a sketch of what Holt's Griffin, Heaton Mersey, would look like after it had been extended - CAMRA said

they would be keeping a close eye on what appeared to be a fairly innocuous development.

Finally, there was a comment about a high priced beer that was appearing in the local free trade - Coachman's Bitter (OG 1038) from the new Coach House Brewery in Warrington, was selling in the Marble Arch at £1.35 a pint - another free house had refused to take the beer because of the price.

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

Starting in the rarely mentioned area of Mottram, the White Hart has transformed into an Irish Bar! It is now known as the Innisfree Irish Bar. We are not sure if there have been other alterations inside and I must admit I'm not expecting a rush of up-date reports.

In Hayfield, The Kinder Lodge has started taking Guest Beers from the Tapsters Choice range. On a recent visit the guest was something that gloried in the name Samuel Allsops Golden Summer Ale. The Nags Head in Glossop (Whitbread and guests) is undergoing some refurbishment. The vacant building next to the pub having become unsafe has had to be demolished. Taking advantage of this unavoidable disruption the pub is building a new conservatory and restaurant. The car park is being reorganised, making space for a beer garden.

More beer than pub news.... Black Bull beers (from Fenney Bentley) are making an appearance in the High Peak Branch area. These fine beers have been in the Station (Ashton), The Little Mill (Rowarth), The Royal (Hayfield) and the Q and White House both in Stalybridge. They are expected to be in the Sportsmans in Hyde and Strines.

Whilst on the subject of the Sportsman in Strines, long time landlord Ken Moon will be leaving at the end of September after over 30 years in charge. We wish him well in whatever he chooses to do and I'm sure the many beer lovers who enjoyed the many and varied beers offered over the years would like to thank him for many good nights.

Not wishing to be left out, the other above-mentioned Sportsman has started taking Plassey Best Bitter on a regular basis and at £1.25 it's a bit of a bargain. Anyone who calls in for a pint will also notice a fine checker board tiling running the length of the bar and down to the back of the pub. These brown and white tiles have remained covered by carpet for about 20 years and are in very good condition. OK so it does not improve the beer (which is very good) but it is pleasing to see such traditional features where they still exist.



The Crown (Robinsons) in Hyde is coming along steadily and contrary to reports in this column recently has remained open for the bulk of the time the refurbishment has been underway. The work is coming to an end and on a recent visit the extent of the changes could be appreciated. Work on the pub was overdue and whilst the changes have been comprehensive - moving the stairs from one side of the building to the other for example - the general layout remains basically the same. A larger bar serves a games area where the small "vault" used to be and has extended into the pool area which has in turn moved to the underused back room. The room to the left, where fish tanks were located is much as it was with access through the old door (frame retained), but no sign of the fish! Purists may mourn the loss of the old Crown, but many changes had been undertaken piecemeal over the years and this refurbishment does utilise the space available much better.


DUKE OF YORK, FLAGG

In the last issue, Frank Wood reported that this pub was closed and for sale. Peter Robinson of the Brewery has pointed out that this is very much NOT the case, and the Duke of York is open, busy, thriving and very definitely NOT for sale. We unreservedly apologise for the error in our information. The informant will be disciplined.

8

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The Waters Green Tavern

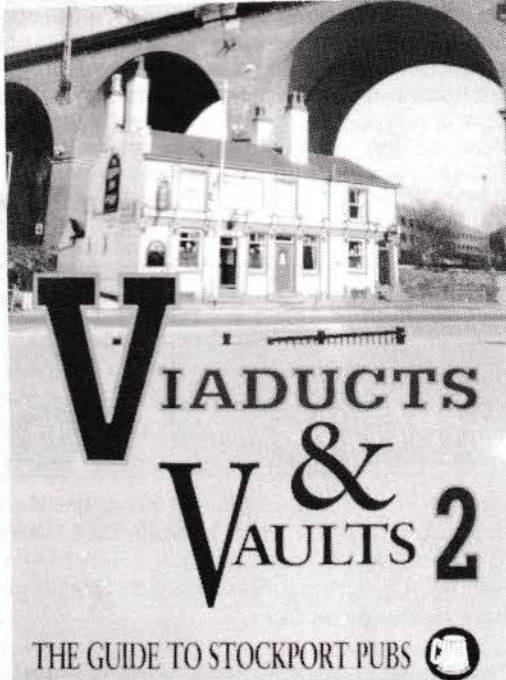


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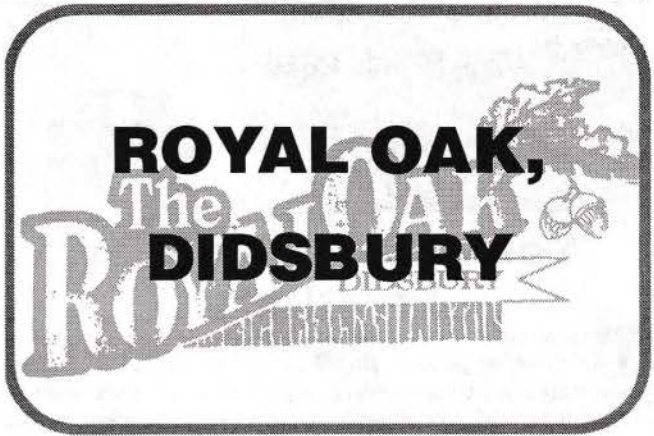
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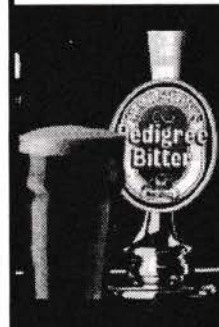
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Jo and Pat from the NELSON INN Didsbury

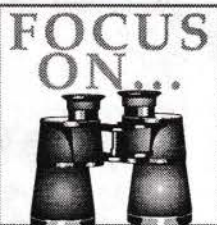
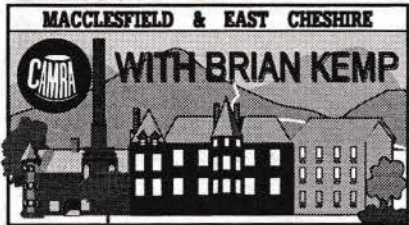
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The Admiral Rodney, Prestbury

This month I should like to feature what is probably one of the best pubs in the Macclesfield & East Cheshire branch area. An added attraction for Opening Times readers is that it is easily accessible by train from Stockport and South Manchester. Prestbury is only fifteen minutes from Stockport on the train and the Admiral Rodney is less than five minutes walk from the station.

Come out of the station, turn left down the hill to the centre of the village and the pub is on the right opposite St Peters church. It is an attractive building in a stone terrace. Landlord, Peter Brady, may be known to longer standing OT readers as his previous pub was the Horsfield Arms in Bredbury opposite Robinsons bottling plant. Having successfully strived for some time to gain a Good Beer Guide entry for the Horsfield Arms he immediately moved here and quickly repeated the trick with the Admiral Rodney. Let me start by courting controversy and displaying my petty prejudices. Prestbury is not my favourite place. It attempts to exude the aura of a rural village of Olde England when, in fact, it is a large up-market housing estate within easy commuting distance of Manchester and the airport. The Parish Council have resisted the installation of street lighting on the main road to retain the appropriate atmosphere in spite of the fact that the village centre

contains several expensive restaurants which disgorge late night diners onto its busy unlit street. This road has become much busier since the opening of the A34 Handforth bypass. However woe betide any local farmer (are there any?) who decided to regularly drive a herd of cows down the main road in the morning rush hour. The aforesaid organisation would be down on him like a ton of bricks. Call me an inverted snob if you wish but that's how I feel. However, none of this can detract from the Admiral Rodney which is a splendid pub. Very comfortably furnished, it has a fair-sized main bar with a small room off to the right and a larger room at the end of the corridor leading to the kitchen. It sells Robinsons Best Bitter and Hatters Mild. The quality of both is never anything short of outstanding thanks to Peter's cellarman skills. In fact the brewery could easily use the Rodney as a training school for new tenants just entering the trade. Express an interest in the cellar and you could easily find yourself taken on a guided tour! Snacks and light meals are available at lunchtime but not in the evening. Unusually the pub has recently seen a surge in sales of mild. The pub is named after a famous British naval officer who would have held a much greater place in British history had he not been a contemporary of Horatio Nelson whose deeds tend to overshadow him. Interestingly in the centre of Macclesfield is evidence of their joint fame - two adjacent terraced streets built about two hundred years ago are called Nelson Street and Rodney Street. The pub is unusual in that it is in fact back to front. What is now the front of the pub on the main road was originally the back whilst what is now the little lane at the back was at one time the road through the village with the pub facing it. Anyway, if you fancy a trip out invest in a return train ticket to Prestbury and see what you think for yourself!

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Phil Welcomes You To The Arden Arms

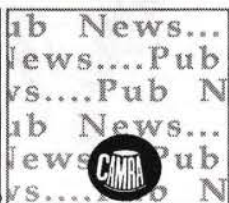
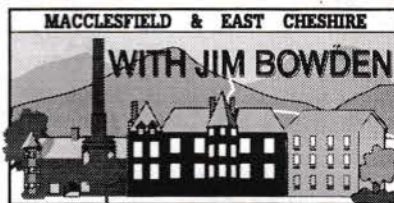
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There is a new pub in our branch area, the Rectory at Station Road, Wilmslow. Food is available 11-8pm Monday - Wednesday, 11-7pm Thursday - Saturday and 12-7pm Sunday. Up to press date, Draught Bass is available and there is one guest beer.

The Durham Ox, Hurdsfield Road, Macclesfield which has been closed for over three months is to re-open soon.

The Peels Arms, Peel Street, Macclesfield, a keg pub for many months has now brought back real ale in the form of Tetley Bitter on handpump.

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Graham &
Vera welcome
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CHESHIRE PUBS

by Peter Edwardson

The Rising Sun, Tarporley and the Traveller's Rest, Alpraham

Very few pubs have achieved the distinction of appearing in every edition of the Good Beer Guide, and the only one in Cheshire is the Rising Sun at Tarporley. Situated in the middle of the western half of the county, Tarporley is a small town or large village with an elegant Georgian high street, once busy with main road traffic, but now thankfully bypassed.

The Rising Sun stands on the high street near the centre. From its low ceilings and the shape of the windows, it probably dates back to the 17th century, but, in the old cliché, has been much altered over the years. At the rear is a large free public car park next to an attractive development of modern mews-type houses built from recycled brick - much preferable to building new houses on undeveloped land. The front of the pub is enlivened by hanging flower baskets and in summer they manage to put a few chairs and tables out on the pavement.

Inside, the best part is undoubtedly the main bar area at the rear, with high-backed settles, a wood-panelled bar counter, old fashioned cream-painted bottle shelves and a real fire in winter. This room is kept clear of diners so there's still a chance of getting a seat even when the pub's busy. At the front by the door there's a cosy alcove in front of an old range, and a pleasant, airy lounge where food is served. The same menu can be sampled in more of a restaurant atmosphere in a separate dining room.

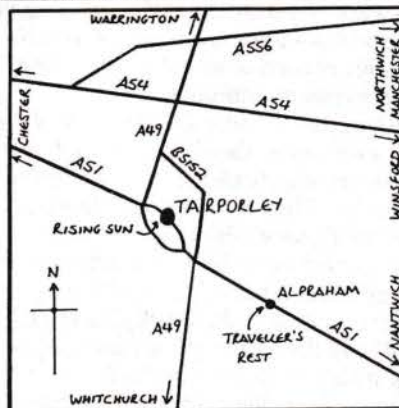
It's a Robinson's pub, offering the usual Hatters Mild and Best Bitter, on handpumps, at prices a little higher than usual in Stockport but even so probably the cheapest in Tarporley. On our visit the Best Bitter was absolutely superb - but there again, they should know how to look after it by now, and Robinson's do seem to have produced some unusually good brews this summer. Possibly they are missing the opportunity of offering another beer from the Robinson's range - surely Frederics would go down well here.

The quality of the food matches that of the beer, and the pub features in CAMRA's Good Pub Food Guide. There's a standard menu of snacks and meals, a long list of blackboard specials and an unusually extensive vegetarian selection. Main course prices are in the £4 - £7 range with quite a good selection under £5, and the portions are more than adequate. Despite the length of the menu, most of the food seems to be home-made, including all the vegetarian dishes. There's also a magnificent selection of puddings, and those we sampled were extremely good too.

Tarporley is a prosperous place, and so are many of the Rising Sun's customers, but it remains a proper, straightforward pub which offers a welcome to all, and gives due attention to both food and beer. And they get their priorities right and reserve the best part for drinkers! Not far away, about 3 miles down the A51 towards Nantwich, is another classic pub of a very different kind, the Traveller's Rest at Alpraham. This is one of the precious and dwindling band of pubs which seem to be stuck in a timewarp, in this case the 1950s. Outwardly it's an unremarkable brick-built cottage pub with hard standing at the front and a bowling green to the rear.

Inside, there are four rooms, a small, chintzy lounge at the back with flock wallpaper, and a kind of three-part public bar area at the front. There's a plain entrance room, another containing the bar counter, and a further room reached through a bead curtain, with the incongruous combination of dartboard and wicker chairs. The decor's plain, with vinyl seats and formica-topped tables, and little seems to have changed for forty years, but everywhere's neat, clean and tidy. The most notable item is a fine old Ind Coope and Allsopp mirror.

It's a free house, serving Tetley Mild and Bitter and McEwans 70/- on handpump, perhaps not the most imaginative selection, but no doubt what the customers prefer and what the pub has served for many years. The quality's consistently good, and the pub has been in the Good Beer Guide for many years. There's no food, it's only open in the evenings, apart from at weekends, and whenever I've called it's been quiet.



The Traveller's Rest may not ooze historic character, but it's a rare and obviously cherished survivor of the kind of small, unassuming country pub that was once common before commercial pressures led to so many of them being knocked through and turned over to "family dining". Savour it while you can, because surely the time will come when the owners decide to sell and it will possibly go the same way.

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Spoilt by Progress

The motto of Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries, the company that owns Banks's, is "Unspoilt by Progress", and up until a few years ago they could proudly declare that to be true. A much bigger company than Holts, they couldn't maybe pursue quite such an individualistic path, but even so they had many of the same characteristics - high-quality beer, plain Mild and Bitter, cask-conditioned in every outlet, sold at prices notably below the local competition, in straightforward unassuming pubs which were immune from the passing fads of pub decor. The formula worked, too, and was reflected in the most impressive record of sustained growth of any stock-market listed brewery company.

This made them, for a time, the darlings of the financial markets, and ever since, they seem to have lost their way, maybe because in trying to please the City they've taken their eye off the basics. They closed their Hanson's brewery at Dudley, killed off Hanson's Bitter and turned Hanson's Mild, once widely regarded as the best beer in their portfolio, into a cheap economy brand. They relaunched Banks's Mild as plain "Banks's" - but everyone in the Black Country still asks for "a pointer mould" and if you just ask for Banks's in one of their pubs you'll probably get bitter. They've lost a lot of goodwill in their home areas by selling off small tenanted pubs, often delicensed.

They moved into this area and spent vast sums building new pubs, but none of them have really hit the mark, and the Four in Hand in Didsbury is an object lesson in how not to convert a Victorian house into a pub, especially in comparison with the nearby Woodstock. They have flirted with nitrokeg, both as "draught-in-a-can" and in pubs - there are now Banks's houses

offering nothing but. They've even had a go at seasonal real ales, but only seemed to be toying with it, and the beers haven't been up to much. And they've started applying daft theme concepts to what were once perfectly decent locals, with predictable fake Irish bars and ludicrous "Fast Eddie's Pool Lounges".

All this has been reflected in much more inconsistent financial results, and a share price which has yo-yoed up and down but never gone anywhere much. More importantly, they've lost a reputation for straightforward quality that took many years to build up. The cobbler should stick to his last, they say, and independent breweries shouldn't waste their energies chasing after every fleeting fad. Let's hope Holts don't start having fancy ideas, though somehow I doubt it.

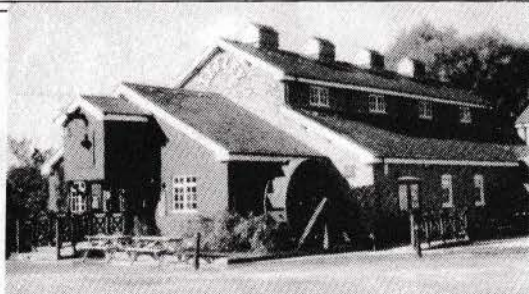
The Best in the North-West

On a hot, humid summer evening, we had a pint of Robinson's Best Bitter that was absolutely superb, cool, clear and bursting with fruit, malt and hops, undoubtedly one of the two or three best pints I'd tasted this year. But this only served to underline how disappointing Robinson's beer, and in particular the Best Bitter, generally is in their pubs. A few keep it consistently well, and you can find most of them in the Good Beer Guide, but the rest are average at best. If it's capable of being so brilliant, and it certainly is, why can't it be at least good more often?

The Great Chip Debate

Thin or thick, straight or crinkly, crisp or soggy, there's no consensus on what makes the ideal chip, as the correspondence column of "OT" has shown. Pub chips are something of a lottery, and whatever your preference, you're seldom satisfied. Given the vast quantities of the things they sell, it surely can't be beyond the capabilities of pubs with a busy food trade to offer their customers a choice between French fries and chunky chips, and even between "rare" and "well done".

12



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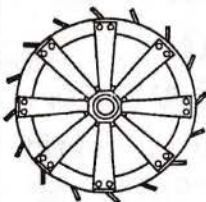
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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries
Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak and Macclesfield. Members of all branches are welcome at each other's events!

<p>September 96</p> <p>Friday 6th - New members social to Passageway Brewery. If you have joined CAMRA in the past few months, this is for you. Phone 477 1973 for details.</p> <p>Monday 9th - Social, Queens Head (Turners Vaults), Underbank, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.</p> <p>Thursday 12th - Monthly branch meeting at the Waldorf, Gore Street, Manchester City Centre. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <p>Monday 16th - City Centre Social: 9.00pm Waldorf, Gore Street; 10.00 Crown & Anchor, Hilton Street</p> <p>Wednesday 18th - First meeting to plan Stockport Beer & Cider Festival 1997. All interested parties please attend. Starts 8.00pm, Florist, Shaw Heath, Stockport.</p> <p>Friday 20th - Reddish Stagger. Starts 7.00pm Pomona, Gorton Road; 8.30 Thatched Tavern, Stanhope Street.</p> <p>Wednesday 25th - Presentation night at Hydes brewery. Fully booked.</p> <p>Thursday 26th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Unity, Stockport. See article on page 4.</p> <p>Saturday 28th - Minibus to Keighley Beer Festival. Phone 477 1973 to book a seat.</p> <p>Monday 30th - Social, Crown, Valance Close, Gorton. Starts 9.00pm</p>	<p>September 96</p> <p><i>High Peak Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:</i></p> <p>Monday 9th - Branch Meeting, Sportsman Hyde</p> <p>Sunday 15th - Woods Walk, 9.45am. Meet at New Mills Town Station, Ending at Navigation, Buxworth</p> <p>Saturday 21st - Hope valley Pub Crawl, contact Frank Wood</p> <p>Sunday 6th October - Woods Walk 9.45am - meet at Hyfield Info Centre, Ending at Royal Hotel (Beer Festival) <i>Apart from Macclesfield and Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have advised us of the following events:</i></p> <p>Monday 2nd - Pub Crawl Commencing 7.00pm Church house, Bollington</p> <p>Monday 23rd - Branch Meeting - white swan, Rodney Street, Macclesfield - starts 8pm</p> <p>Regional Events in September</p> <p>Wednesday 11th - Regional Meeting - Sportsman, Hyde</p> <p>Monday 23rd - Feasibility meeting for Manchester Beer Festival, 7.30pm, Beer House, Angel Street. All welcome</p>
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WE'RE IN THE GOOD BEER GUIDE '96

Irene and Staff welcome you to
The Greyhound



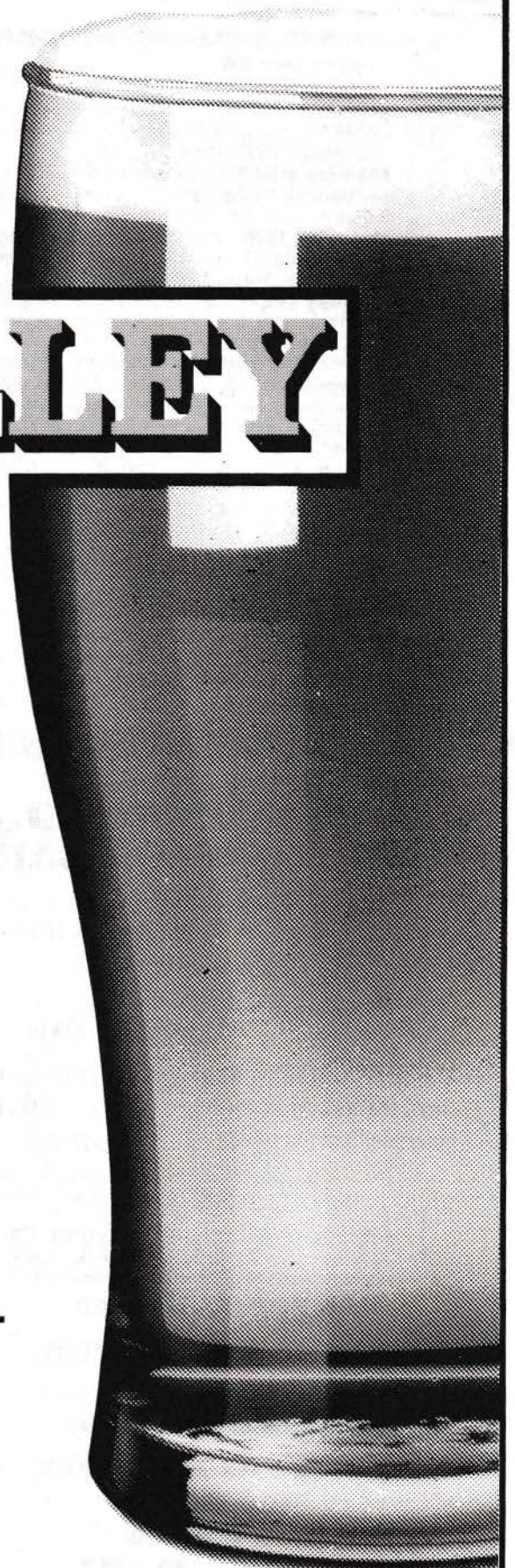
Bowden Street, Edgeley
Boddingtons Mild & Bitter
and Ever Changing
Guest Beers
changed weekly
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★ OPEN ALL DAY ★

WE'RE IN THE GOOD BEER GUIDE '96

LOCALLEY

TETLEY
BITTER

BRITAIN'S BEST
LOVED BITTER



MANCHESTER MATTERS

In an area where pub stock has been savaged, it's good to see a high quality refurbishment at the Legh Arms, Ashton Old Road, Lower Openshaw. Tiled floors and natural materials combine to give a rustic-style interior with an atmosphere which is classy without being either uninviting or gimmicky. The handpumped beers are Chesters Mild and Whitbread Trophy.



by Rhys Jones

In Beswick, the Honeycomb on Windcroft Close has re-opened as the New Honeycomb, but with keg beer only. The Brunswick in Central Manchester was being gutted in late August, though with no word on what would emerge. The City is surely overdue to have a T. & J. Bernard's (the alehouse conversion style developed by Scottish and Newcastle, as they then were), and with the recent improvements in beer range at the nearby Crown & Anchor and Waldorf, the Brunswick could be just the place for it. Sadly, though, no-one would bet against its re-opening as yet another Irish bar - we shall see. We should already be able to see what's become of the Harp & Shamrock, for this famous little pub was due to re-open on August 22nd as the Pot of Beer freehouse. More on this next time. Finally, the new regime at the Olde Cock in Didsbury has very regrettably withdrawn the pub's traditional cider. The Marble Arch on Rochdale Road, Bar in Chorlton and Sand Bar in Grosvenor St, All Saints, are holding a major joint beer festival, being billed as the 'Manchester Beer Festival'. Whilst there will be a good range of European beers on offer, the concentration is very much on British beer, with the Marble Arch covering the North and Scotland, The Bar/Bar2 covering the South and the Sandbar dealing with beers from the midlands. The fun starts on the 12th September, for a fortnight, and a shuttle mini-bus will link the three sites on opening night. There is an extensive range, from some regionals, but mainly micro-breweries, and as the beer is being served through handpump, it is likely to change daily throughout the festival.

END OF AN ERA

August 27th saw the end of an era on the Stockport pub scene when Kay Ord said farewell to the Olde Vic on Chatham Street, Edgeley.

While it has had its up and downs over the years, Kay's reign at the Vic will be fondly remembered by all real ale fans for its pioneering of guest beers. The Vic was the very first pub in the town to sell a constantly changing array of beers from a whole range of brewers, covering the whole spectrum from family independents to new-wave micros and was also the first to sell Taylors Landlord on a regular basis. Despite the pub being on the market for about two years the variety of guest beers didn't falter at any time, although sadly the quality did suffer a little in recent months as trade fell of when the 'for sale' sign finally went up and turnover went down.

But that shouldn't detract from Kay's superb achievement over ten years at the Vic - two Pub of the Month Awards, a Pub of the Year award and numerous Good Beer Guide entries are testimony to that as are the fond memories of many local drinkers. The leaving bash on 18th August included a barbecue and five beers on tap, including a mild together with Batemans Bitter and Mansfield Bitter at special bargain prices and was an emotional time for all concerned.

As well as her memories, Kay also took with her two boxes and four holdalls of pumpclips and stickers! While she may get rid of them eventually, Kay told us that she wanted to keep them for the time being as something to hold on to from the pub. The reason for Kay's departure is that she wants to devote more time to her family - Lewis is about to start school - but does that mean she has left the trade for good? "Well, when Lewis is older, you never know" Kay told us.

New owner is Glen Geldard. Glen is Stockport based and also owns a construction business - he noticed the pub was up for sale when calling at the builders merchants opposite. We don't know what his plans are but we do understand that he has brewery backing from Matthew Brown. These are the local trading arm of Scottish Courage and another source tells us that they are currently doing their damndest to tie up their free trade with tight barrellage agreements. If they have pulled the same stunt here then ten years of guest beers could be superseded by the likes of Theakstons, John Smiths and Websters. Given the local competition it would be difficult to see how this could restore the pub's customer base. JC.

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IS SEPTEMBER 20

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APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(OT149)

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.

NAME(S) DATE

ADDRESS
.....

POSTCODE

SIGNATURE TELEPHONE NUMBER(S)

I / We enclose remittance for individual/joint membership for one year: INDIVIDUAL £12 JOINT MEMBERSHIP £14

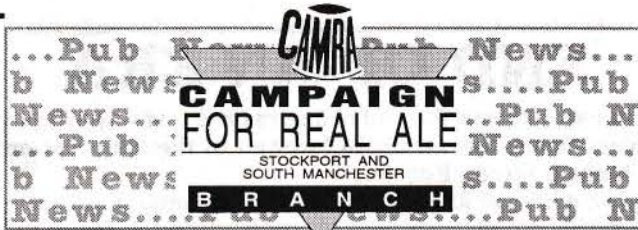
STUDENT or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £6

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £6

Steve McCarley, 32 Howden Close, North Reddish, Stockport

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.





The concept of extended 'happy hour' has reached the *Three Crown*, Heaton Norris. From 12-7, Monday to Friday, Boddingtons Bitter sells at £1.14. The best bargain at the Three Crowns is 4% Old Henry at £1 a pint, all day, every day.

The *Thatched Tavern*, Reddish, has 11-4 extended happy hour Monday-Friday with the price of Tetley Bitter marked down. Another bargain at the *Crown*, Heaton Moor Road early last month was the sale of Boddingtons Mild at £1 a pint. This is not all good news as this might lead to the demise of Boddington Mild in the *Crown* with Chesters Mild as a likely replacement.

As reported previously, the *White House* in Offerton re-opened a couple of months back after a period of closure caused by the bankruptcy of the previous licensee. The pub is now run by an outfit called 'Team Management' and they have had quite a good job of the place. It's decked out in pretty standard Victoriana but it's not over-done and is very easy on the eye. All in all it's a pleasant, comfortable pub. The beer range is a bit disappointing, though. When OT called the three cask beers on sale were Theakstons Bitter, Websters and (as a guest beer?)...Robinsons. This was £1.45 and no better than average.

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At the *Friendship* in Gorton, we welcome new licensees Alison and Pete Adamson. Coming from another Marstons

pub not too far away, the *Coach & Horses* in Denton, Alison and Pete see no reason to change a winning formula, although some redecoration has taken place in the upstairs club room. On the beer front, all four handpumped beers are set to remain (albeit with the addition of Marstons "smooth" keg bitter - seemingly the brewery's flavour of the month).

Mild drinkers, however, will benefit from a massive price cut on Batemans Dark Mild to just £1 a pint - the same price as the "own label" Friendship Bitter. Alison and Pete had a big success with Batemans at the *Coach & Horses*, and the new low price should give this magnificent beer just the boost it needs in the Friendship.

Disley News

The *White Lion*, which has been on the market for several months, is reported to have been sold to the Magic Pub Company. If this information is correct it is particularly interesting in view of the recent acquisition of Magic Pub by Greene King. Was the sale of the *White Lion* agreed prior to the purchase of Magic Pub, or is Greene King allowing Magic Pub to operate as an independent division? Previously the *White Lion* was known for loud music and regular live bands, on the beer front its recent offerings have been disappointing, with only Websters Yorkshire Bitter and Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. If the *Ram's Head* (already owned by Magic Pub) is to be used as a model for the *White Lion* then little is likely to change and although the beer range may alter it is not expected to be any more exciting. Meanwhile rumours continue to connect the Magic Pub Co. with the Albert - are they attempting to buy up all Disley's pubs? If so, thank goodness for Robinson's, who own three out of the total of eight.

COME TO THE ALL YEAR ROUND BEER FESTIVAL



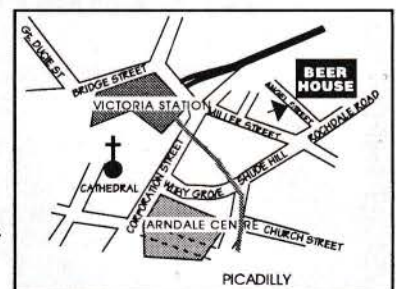
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