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CAMRA

No:
153

OPENING



FREE

TIMES

JANUARY 1997

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Mash & Air

As 1997 sees the 30th anniversary of Star Trek and the 20th of Star Wars, it is perhaps appropriate that *Opening Times* finds itself covering the opening of a brewpub which could easily pass for a discarded set from either production. Mash & Air, Oliver Peyton's £2 million conversion of an old cotton warehouse at 40 Chorlton Street in the City Centre, finally opened its

doors to the public on December 19th, after several delays and false starts, and a VIP 'opening' the previous week which saw the usual celebs rubbing shoulders with the builders and dodging leaking ceilings.

Air is a restaurant, pure and simple and occupies the upper floors. Mash, a bar-cum-bistro covers the first and second floors, with the lower floor being a dedicated bar area and the upper one a bistro, served by its own separate bar counter. The centre-piece of both of course, is the in-house micro-brewery which looks very high-tech with its steel orange-clad vessels. It's only the brewery though that introduces a feeling of reality to the place as the rest is a highly (perhaps over-?) designed exercise in 21st century minimalism that is perhaps unique in the country. It's also very green - that's green stairs, green floor, green bar, green ceiling. All set-off by the white walls, dark blue furniture and orange fonts that protrude through the bar counter to dispense the house brews, the only draught products available.

Ah yes, the house beers. It's here we have a problem. They are not and don't pretend to be real ales, being served under a mixed gas system that leaves what could be some intrinsically good beers rather gassy and flabby. There are four in total - Mash Beer

(4.75%), for me the best of the bunch, a crisp well-made product; Peach Beer (5%), lightly fruity but lacking in something; Black-currant Porter (5.3%) which frankly doesn't seem to work at all and promises far more than it delivers. The fourth beer is 'Mash of the Month' which will vary in style and strength from brew to brew. All of this is doubly disappointing as 'Brew Master' is Alistair Hook, trained at the Munich Brewing School, founder of London's Freedom Brewery (which produces mainly lager) and a brewer of no little repute or capability. And then there's the price - all of the house beers retail at £2.40 a pint. That's right, £2.40. There are also a handful of quite good bottled beers available but these are equally expensive (the Belgian classic, Orval, for example is a mere £3.20 a bottle...).

It's difficult to see just who Mash & Air is aimed at. The customers you would normally expect to patronise a brew-pub (or even a brew-restaurant) will be put off by both the 'non-real' beers and the ludicrously high prices. On the other hand the money-is-no-object smart set which would seem to be the target audience are unlikely to appreciate or understand the beers which are being and will be produced. In fact the inclusion of a micro-brewery in the set-up would seem to serve no purpose other than as a fashion accessory to the eating and drinking experience on offer, rather than be a serious attempt to enhance the city's beer and brewing scene.

For the serious beer lover this is simply an exciting concept spoiled by its execution. Not that this judgement will cut much ice with the people behind Mash & Air who will doubtless rake it in.

Bass to face MMC

Bewing giant Bass will face an uphill struggle to get its take-over of Carlsberg-Tetley past the Monopolies & Mergers Commission without substantial changes. The bid was referred to the MMC last month by Trade Secretary Ian Lang. That's the prediction of City observers, who say the prospect of a brewing combine with nearly 40% of the market has aroused powerful opposition.

CAMRA is pledged to fight the take-over. Campaigns Manager Stephen Cox said it would extinguish effective competition and clear the way for further take-overs. "If this is allowed, what's to stop S&N bidding for Whitbread?" he said. "Allowing it to go through at the cost of a few cosmetic pub sales won't be enough to stop further concentration in the industry - a line must be drawn in the sand right here."

Mr Lang has signalled his "concern" that the power in UK brewing is now being concentrated into too few hands - hence the decision to initiate a full-scale inquiry. Despite these welcome noises, suspicions remain the referral had as much to do with political opportunism and the approach of the general election as it had with real concern at concentration in the brewing industry. Would this government really stop the merger if the MMC said it should? That will be the acid test of Mr Lang's commitment. The MMC have been told to report by March.

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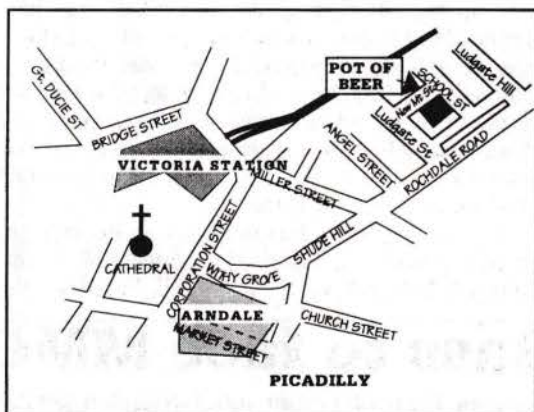
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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

As we enter 1997, many of the problems that have faced the brewing industry over the past 12 months remain unresolved - beer duty remains too high, the European Commission has still to pronounce on the guest beer rights of many pubs and the general EU review of the tie, whilst postponed until 1999, remains a cloud on the horizon. Add to that the attempted merger between Bass and Carlsberg-Tetley, the proliferation of nitrokegs and alcopops, the continued closure of pubs in many areas, the increasingly high price of your pint and the threat to the fabric of many pubs due to insensitive refurbishment and you have perhaps a gloomy prognosis for the coming year.

There are however many positive signs to cheer the lover of good beer and good pubs. Small breweries continue to proliferate, some in the most unlikely places - although this month we are, rightly, critical of some aspects of the Mash & Air operation in the City Centre, even five years ago it would have been unthinkable that such a development would include its very own brewery. The established family and other small brewers go from strength to strength, the past twelve months has seen the new Porter's Brewery pub in Stockport and continued improvements from Hydes' Anvil to name just two.

There is also a greater appreciation of our public house heritage and an increasing realisation that the best of our heritage pubs must be preserved and fought for. Whilst that message may not yet have percolated to the highest reaches of all our local brewers this is clearly the way the wind is blowing.

So, whilst the need for CAMRA remains greater than ever (and if you've not joined yet, why not make it a late New Year's Resolution to do so - membership form on the back page), let's not completely wallow in doom and gloom. Let us also celebrate the many remaining positive aspect to the pub and brewing scene.

Happy New Year!

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editor: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. % (0161) 477 1973 (home) and (0161) 831 7222 x 3411 (wk). News, articles and letters welcome. All items may be submitted in most popular WP formats or ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!). Articles for publication can be submitted by e-mail to jclarke@opentime.u-net.com. Compuserve users can mail the deputy editor at 100662,12. Letters to the editor on otletter@opentime.u-net.com.

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Pub Of The Month JANUARY



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	31	

The George & Dragon, Heaton Chapel, is described in *Viaducts & Vaults 2* as "a fine multi-roomed local". This is the venue for Pub of the Month on Thursday 23 January, and promises to give an excellent start to the New Year.

The George & Dragon boasts a busy vault, a large best room, with separate side room and a further room with a welcome no-smoking area.

Terry and Penny Moores have successfully managed the pub for over two years now. Terry is keen to serve good quality ale and his regular beers are Whitbread Boddingtons Bitter and Chesters Mild (these days brewed by Everards in Leicester). He has also successfully ventured into guest beers. Something interesting is on the cards for the presen-

tation night, with the possibility of a second guest beer. The pub is a popular locals' local. Darts and cards are played and an interesting attraction these days is the upstairs snooker table. Whilst big screen TV football might not be everybody's cup of tea (or pint of beer) it is certainly a popular attraction at the George & Dragon, and actually helps to build up the atmosphere of a thriving, friendly local, well deserving of Terry and Penny Moores' first Pub of the Month award.

Get there early as a busy evening is in prospect. Buses 12 and 42 stop at the door, whilst the A6 is only two minutes away for the 192 and others. **RW.**

The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.

3

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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Rhys Jones

Ron Elder (*Letters, Dec*) objects to OT's coverage of, and CAMRA's involvement in, cider and perry. He is labouring under three delusions and exhibits an offensive attitude.

Mr Elder's first delusion is the strange notion that CAMRA has somehow been "hijacked" by a band of alien cider-drinkers. CAMRA's involvement with cider dates back to 1977, so it's taken Mr Elder a while to notice. If there were any substance to this claim, one would expect to find cider activists, for example, objecting to awards being made to deserving pubs until such time as they sold real cider. I can assure him that I don't go in for any such nonsense, nor do any of the CAMRA cider drinkers I know across the country. Almost without exception, CAMRA activists who care about cider drink far more real ale than real cider, and spend most of their CAMRA time on beer-related issues - if only because there's so much more of the stuff about! If this is a hijack, it must be the first one in aviation history in which the hijackers have the same destination as the crew.

Secondly, Mr Elder appears to believe that the "fake handpump" issue is confined to cider. If only! Back in the 70's, one of the first reports I remember reading in CAMRA's national newspaper "What's Brewing" concerned a campaign against a London pub - *Courage's Anchor Tap*, I seem to recall - for selling keg beer by handpump. Twenty years on, Manchester pubs are selling keg John Smith's Chestnut Mild by handpump as I write this. Far from diverting our focus, the firmer line now being taken on misleading dispense - for beer AND cider - may well have dissuaded major operators from a new wave of "nitrokeg on handpump" conversions. You'd have thought Mr Elder, whose concerns over nitrokeg I fully share, might see this as positive - strangely, he doesn't.

Delusion no. 3 is the idea that the purpose of CAMRA's policy on misleading dispense is to exclude pubs from the Good Beer Guide. In fact, its purpose is precisely the reverse - to use the prestige of CAMRA's flagship publication to ensure that pubs do not mislead their customers. If any pub has to be excluded from the Good Beer Guide over fake handpumps CAMRA has failed - and this very often happens where branches don't take the issue seriously enough to set out the policy calmly to licensees who may be affected.

Finally, I turn to the question of Mr Elder's attitude. May I remind him that CAMRA is a voluntary organisation whose members are free to participate in their own choice of activities within the broad spectrum offered by the organisation. Some of us are into pub preservation, some delight in working at festivals, some are fund-raising or recruitment geniuses - and yes, some of us promote real cider. I don't seek to dictate Mr Elder's priorities - how dare he presume to dictate mine?

Guardian Praise for Beer Bible

CAMRA and the Good Beer Guide were singled out for praise last month in the Guardian's review of the best paperbacks of 1996.

Writer Nicholas Lezard said: "The 24th edition of the bible, ie the book that tells you where all the pubs that sell good beer are. Of course, if you're the kind of pinhead who thinks that Caffrey's is a beer, or that Diamond White is a cider, this won't be for you. But then you might need this book more than anyone.

"As for CAMRA, I propose the Millennium celebrations be handed to them, along with lots of money. Hosanna in excelsis."

Is The Price Right?

Mid November saw the annual CAMRA price survey of Manchester City Centre and the results produced both good news and bad.

The best news is that there is a greater choice than ever of real ale (although it is notable by its absence in many of the new cafe bars) and it can still be obtained at a reasonable price. The cheapest pint was supplied by the Wetherspoon's outlets with Youngers Scotch Bitter at 95p a pint although several other pubs will sell you a pint for around a quid or so (all the Holts pubs, Blob Shop and the White House to name but a few). Real mild is also still available at a surprising number of pubs and from all four of our local brewers, Hydes (Grey Horse), Holts (all of them), Lees (ditto) and Robinsons (the Castle on Oldham Street sells both light and dark versions) plus Burtonwood (Wheatsheaf, Oak Street). Indeed, the local brewers came off best for value as well.

The bad news is that the £2 pint has arrived with Dukes 92 (at Castlefield) charging this for Taylor's Landlord and guest beers. Close behind were the Victoria Station bar with Boddies at £1.99 and Quo Vadis on King Street West with Tetley Bitter at £1.90. And of course since then we have Mash with the, admittedly premium, house beers all at £2.40.

Many pubs still don't have visible price lists. Surely the Trading Standards people should do something about this - perhaps next year offenders should be duly reported. Bar staff also seem reluctant to reveal prices and in one disgraceful incident (at the City on Oldham Street) someone claiming to be the licensee followed our surveyors out into the street and assaulted one of them, resulting in the police being called. Let's hope the license is revoked.

Short measure doesn't seem to be a problem, at least in the City Centre (unless you know differently, of course) and only one pub served less than a full pint which was topped up when asked. Few notices offering a top up seem to be displayed, though and perhaps this is another area where Trading Standards need to get moving.

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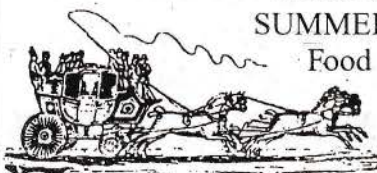


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STAGGER

with Stuart Ballantyne

This Stagger was slightly different from most, consisting as it did of a minibus tour round a few selected pubs in the East Manchester area. We began at the **Railway**, on Manshaw Road, just off Ashton Old Road and right on the boundary between Tameside and Manchester. The pub is famous for the historic and impressive lamp over the entrance but less well known for the "orrible" murder that took place in the pub many years ago. I am pleased to say that over the last few years Holts have actually spent a bit of money on the place and consequently it has been transformed from its previous sorry state into a pub that both the brewery and the regulars can be proud of. Having said this, it is still a shame that the Holts Mild is so poorly promoted here. No mention on the price list and the lack of a pumpclip ensure it is not the obvious choice for most customers. Despite this it was rated as comfortably above average and the bitter was considered to be quite good.

It was the first time I had visited our next pub, the **Pack Horse** on Ashton Old Road. Following a recent acquisition from Greenalls, it now sells Holts, and is a basic but friendly pub which was undergoing refurbishment when we visited. With the vault closed and being worked on, we headed for the large L-shaped lounge at the front of the building. Despite being strangers we soon got chatting with the lively, if not boisterous, locals. Having quickly determined that we were on a pub crawl they soon also sussed out that we were also from the local CAMRA branch. Well, so what you might say, but the tables were about to be turned on the normally fame-shy Stagger group when we discovered that the couple we were chatting to were in fact the landlord and landlady of the pub. What followed was an impromptu tour of the pub cellar. I could not help but be impressed by the warmth and hospitality of this couple who seemed to make that all too rare effort and try and strike up a good relationship with customers. Opinions on the beer were very similar to that for the Railway and as such this pub deserves to do well.

Next on to the **Hare & Hounds**, a Boddingtons pub on Abbey Hey Lane. Tonight the pub was not very busy with a 60's juke box seemingly playing (in every room) to a less than enthusiastic group of regulars. Boddingtons Bitter was on but the Wadworth's 6X was definitely not, despite the prominent pumpclip. I was told that 6X was off and the Old Henry should have been on, but that wasn't on either. Never mind, it was Boddies Bitter or Boddies Bitter which scored a consistent good rating. Somehow I felt a little disappointed. With a pub whose fabric is so good, surely the beer range could be a little more adventurous, especially at the weekend.

Although we had planned our next stop to be the **Vulcan** on Gorton Lane, news reached us that Tony the licensee had left and the pub was closed (it has since reopened - see this month's Manchester Matters). Alternative plans were quickly formulated and we decided to move on to the **Crown** on Valance Close (off Gorton Lane). This pub has a strong local following and as such ought to be good. Whilst I did not take to the plasticity nature of the pub, its low ceilings, its piped music or its silent TV which seemed to serve little purpose as no-one appeared to be watching it, my views did not seem to be shared by the loyal and enthusiastic regulars. To be more positive, the pub had a

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relaxing and friendly atmosphere and everyone looked to be enjoying themselves. The beers on sale were Chesters Mild and Boddingtons Bitter both of which were comfortably above average.

Time to move on now to our next stop, the **Seven Stars** on Ashton Old Road, a large multi-roomed traditional Holts pub. Tonight it was busy with a disco playing a Beatles medley in the lounge, and regulars playing cards and dominoes in the bar. This pub seems to cater for mixed age ranges with something to please everyone and this perhaps explains why it is so successful. Both Holts beers, Bitter and Mild, were well received being considered good and better.

Our final port of call for the evening was the **Coach & Horses** on Belle Vue Street (off Hyde Road), a Robinsons pub now basking in the success of its recent entry into the new 1997 Good Beer Guide. It has not always been this way of course, as some twelve or more years ago when I moved to Manchester I seem to remember that the beer was sometimes all but undrinkable. Now run by a diligent licensee, the beer quality is invariably second to none and tonight proved to be no exception with both Hatters Mild and Best Bitter comfortably being rated between good and excellent. This being the case it was disappointing to note that on our visit the pub was not packed to the gunwales. Perhaps a little money spent on sensitive internal renovation would not go amiss here.

And so ended our East Manchester Minibus Stagger. Looking back on the Stagger and the pubs, it is obvious that the area has some of the best and most unspoilt pubs in the whole of Manchester and that sadly too many of these are under utilised. Pubs like these need our support - there will be no bringing them back once they've gone.

Of course, this article can only be a snapshot of what we found on one particular night and cannot therefore be taken as a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers. Why not try them for yourself and see how much you agree or disagree?

Next month's Stagger looks at the pubs of Heaton Norris.

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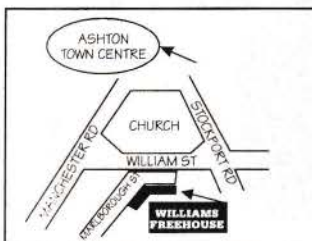
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CURMUDGEON



Eyes off the Ball

In the 70's and 80's, regional brewers wasted a great deal of time and effort developing their own lager brands for sale in their pubs - remember Grunhalle, Slalom and Kaltenberg? In many cases, these were actually better than the big brewers' counterparts, but that did little to help their sales prospects. Those misguided people who actually wanted to drink a bland, characterless beer tended to feel more comfortable with a familiar nationally-advertised brand than with an obscure local alternative. These lagers made no headway in the free trade, and even in tied pubs customers were heard to bemoan the absence of Carling or Heineken.

Not surprisingly, in the "opened-up" beer market of the 1990's, most of these brands have died the death. But are the independent brewers in danger of repeating the same mistake all over again with nitrokeg? It seems like there's a new one every month, with Lambton's from Vaux, Marston's Smooth Brewed, Usher's Milligan's Mist and Jennings' Old Smoothy, and plenty of others.

While there may be some demand for Caffrey's as a distinctive brand, it's hard to believe there's any demand for nitrokeg as a generic product, as there is for real ale. Old Smoothy won't bring a single extra customer into a Jennings pub, nor will it encourage their existing customers to drink a single extra pint. All it will do is to take sales from their existing real beers. It could even be that nitrokeg, far from being the saviour of independent brewers, might in some cases prove a fatal distraction from their core business of real ale.

Small independent brewers have limited resources, and they would be much better advised to concentrate on what they do best - brewing distinctive, high-quality real ales, and promoting them as vigorously as they can. It's reassuring to see that none of our local independents - Holts, Hydes, Lees and Robinsons - have shown the slightest sign of jumping on the nitrokeg bandwagon. If anything does deserve more management time, it's encouraging better standards of cellarman'ship to weed out those tired pints of real ale which can so easily drive drinkers to choose the bland but consistent alternative.

Drinkers vs. Diners

It was good to read in a newspaper article that the Three Tuns in Bishops Castle, one of Britain's historic brewpubs, was open and brewing again. But then I came across the dreaded words "the other bar has been set aside for dining". I'm not against pubs having separate restaurants, and I'm all in favour of pubs serving food. However, to separate out part of what you'd normally consider to be the bar area for eating is wrong, particularly if it isn't justified by the balance of the trade. It happens all too often that you just pop in for a pint and can't get a seat because a vast area of empty space has been roped off "for diners only".

The Nursery Inn



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432 - 2044

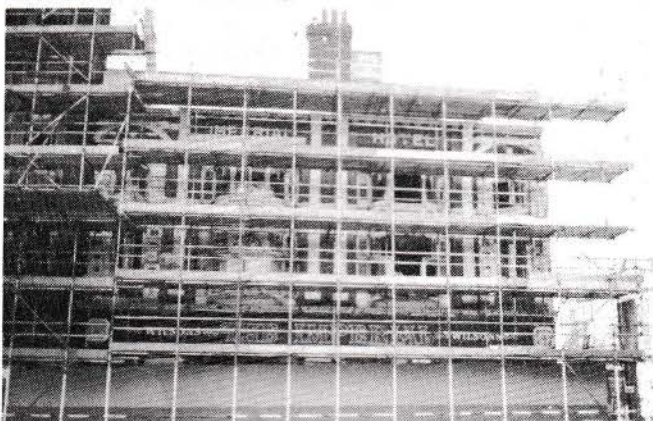
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Pubgoers don't naturally fall into two classes of "drinkers" and "diners", and pubs should be inclusive rather than putting their customers into pigeonholes. Those eating one day may well just go for a pint some other time. And what if you go in, order a round of drinks, sit down in the dining area and then decide you don't like the look of the menu? Or the beer's so good you decide to stay for another couple of pints after your meal? And does it mean you can't eat your meal in the rest of the pub because it's for drinkers only? People eating meals in the bar areas of pubs should take their chance of a seat along with the rest of the customers, and I don't think in general they object to that. Maybe part of the problem is that a lot of pubs have too much carpet and not enough seats to start with.

End of Empire

It was just under a year ago that we reported on the plans to flatten the Imperial, London Road, Manchester, the pub which saw the birth of both Manchester United and the Professional Footballers' Association. Well, now the end is nigh.



Just before Christmas scaffolding went up around both it and the adjacent Joshua Hoyle Building (which is to become a hotel) and this month will see the demolition of the old pub to make way for the hotel's foyer and entrance court. Campaigners fought to the bitter end, though. Architect Ian Finlay, who spearheaded most of the battles over the Imperial devised a scheme to at least save the pub's ornate facade. The idea was to get the PFA to stump up some of the cash for its removal and re-erection in a footballing museum. Sadly, they declined and now a significant part of the city's sporting heritage is to be reduced to rubble. Perhaps they'll at least have the decency to put a plaque on the new building commemorating its illustrious predecessor, or will we have to campaign for that as well?

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COPY DATE FOR FEBRUARY ISSUE IS FRIDAY 24th JANUARY

Sorry . . .

Due to the uncertainty of the opening date of our new venture, Salybridge Buffet Bar, (sometime in November is our hope, Railtrack permitting!), we're postponing the Porter's Festival until late January.

However this will now be . . .

The **2** STATION Festival

STARTING THURSDAY, JAN 30TH
UNTIL SUNDAY EVENING

There will be a selection of 50 plus beers, split between the two venues. The usual selection of food and festival glasses and T-shirts will be available.

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**THE STATION • WARRINGTON STREET
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10

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JANUARY '92

The ever present problem of "full measure" was the subject debated on the front page. A previous article, in June 1991, entitled "Are you getting enough", had highlighted the fact that, in pubs using brim measure pint glasses, drinkers were typically receiving at least 5% less than what they had paid for. The Institute of Trading Standards Administration had estimated that drinkers were being short-changed to the tune of £225 million a year. Now, after pressure from CAMRA and drinkers up and down the country, the Government had announced its intention of implementing Section 43 of the Weights & Measures Act, requiring a pint to be a pint of liquid, excluding the head. (But in 1997, not only has it not been implemented, it's actually been abolished as a supposed 'deregulation' measure - and there are still a lot of brim measure pint glasses in use.)

The Castle & Falcon club had reopened in November at 15 Dantzig Street, less than a stone's throw from the Castle & Falcon pub on Bradshaw Street, off Shudehill. The future of the old pub itself was still in doubt, as the cellars had been built beneath an adjacent warehouse, which had been demolished to make way for Metrolink. (But after a number of reprieves, the Castle & Falcon was finally demolished in July 1996, after the City Centre bomb blast moved it sideways. It seemed to be a case of knocking it down before it fell down.)

The month's Stagger took on a slightly different form, with a minibus hired to explore the outer regions of the Branch area. Not much more than a handful of pubs, but aptly described as an excellent selection of "real" pubs. The Davenport Arms ("Thief's Neck") at Woodford; the Romper next to the Airport's perimeter fence; the Tatton Arms at Moss Nook; the less well-known High Grove, one of Hydes' modern estate pubs; then two more Hydes' pubs in Gatley, the Prince of Wales and the Horse & Farrier.

There was the usual selection of pub news - the Egerton Arms in St Petersgate, Stockport, had re-emerged as Porky Pig's Pie Shop; phase two of the Jabez Clegg project was due to open on 7th February and finally, two "in-house" beer festivals - the Stanley Arms in Stockport and the Flea & Firkin in All Saints, Manchester.



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Stockport & South Manchester

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Chapel, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 5EG

Shady Practice Ends

We are pleased to be able to report that the fake handpump for keg Cidermaster has now gone from the Shady Oak on Redford Drive in Bramhall. Another plus point for visitors to the pub is the replacement of the dreadful "Berlin cushions" on Ringmore Road by conventional flat-top road humps. Had it not been for a change of licensee, the Shady Oak would have appeared in the 1996 Good Beer Guide. Since then, there has been a succession of short-term managers and the lack of continuity has led to a fall-off in trade. Since September, the pub has been in the hands of Tony and Maggie Pecconi (good old Geordie name, that, says Tony) and we wish them well in restoring stability to a pub which has plenty of potential. Pressing Allied Domecq to get rid of the fake handpump is certainly a good start. It's hard to avoid the thought that, if the Shady Oak had been owned by one of our local independent brewers, they would have shown more patience with the managers of the pub and set them more attainable targets, which in the longer term would have been to the benefit of its trade. PE.

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THE RAILWAY VIEW

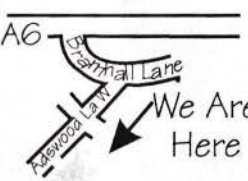
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WITH TIM JONES
CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE CAMRA

The Crown (Sam Smiths), Glossop, has won the 1996 "Cellar of the Year" award. This is a competition between all the Sam Smiths pubs in the country so it is no mean feat. Our congratulations to Dave and Joyce Pilling who received their award at Tadcaster in December. Also in Glossop - Paddy Mulligans has reopened and is trading. Early reports indicate that alterations have been minimal - one internal wall demolished and the mosaic floor tiles have been boarded over, which is better than ripping them up.

In Ashton-U-Lyne, the Theatre Tavern has been sold and is now owned by the pub-owning group 'Friendly Inns' from Openshaw.

In Dukinfield, the Chapel House which was recently the subject of a pub swap and was managed for Holts has been sold to the tenants. It is to be a free house but no firm news regarding the beers at this moment.

Over in Stalybridge, the Station Buffet is up and running and is to be fully reopened on January 16th. Eight handpumps are serving a good range of beers with Wadworths 6X and Flowers IPA as regulars. The appearance is broadly the same but lighting has been improved and in my opinion the bar is already looking more welcoming than it had recently. Full report in the next issue.

Down the Bredbury now, and the Yew Tree is still up for sale. This John Smiths pub has been on the market for some time and anybody taking it over will need to redecorate at least.

In Hyde the Sportsman has added Taylor's Landlord to its range of beers and there have been reports that Wetherspoons are planning to open a pub. Mind you, Wetherspoons are planning many pubs at any one time so only time will tell if a large building (Town Hall this time?) will become a large pub. Finally - not really pub news - in May High Peak Branch will be running a BEER FESTIVAL at Glossop FC. The festival will coincide with the end of season celebrations of the football club and the player of the year awards. The dates will be 24th and 25th May (a nice warm up for Stockport Beer Festival the following weekend - ed.). More news nearer the time.

New York Brewpubs Info.

Following its recent week-long visit to New York City, High Peak Branch has up to date information on the fifteen homebrew pubs in the city itself and three of the five on Long Island. The information consists of the location of each brew-pub, the brews to be found and those which produce cask conditioned beers, two of which use handpumps. Details can be obtained from Tom Lord (427 7099 [h], 837 4474 [w])

The Victoria

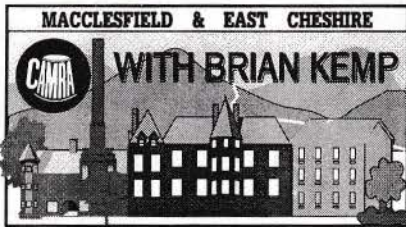
Hall Street, Offerton

Greenalls Mild & Bitter,
 Stones Bitter

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The British Flag, Coare Street, Macclesfield

In a foolish moment I agreed to write a piece for OT on the British Flag which stands on Coare Street in Macclesfield. Now as I sit staring at a blank sheet of paper I am really wondering what I am going to write. Still, here goes!

Approaching Macclesfield on the old main road (not the new Silk Road) from Stockport you will eventually see a pelican pedestrian crossing at the top of Beech Lane next to the Volvo garage. Coare Street is the last turning on the right before this crossing. The Flag, as it is known to the locals, is about 100 yards down the road on the left. A brick-built corner-terrace building it is just down the road from King's School Science Block and has something of a reputation as the King's School 'Brewery Tap' as it has long been frequented by staff from the school. Strictly outside school hours, of course!

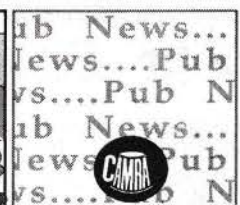
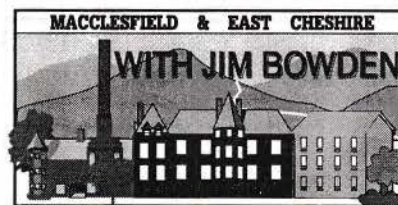
Between 1975 and 1980 when I lived at this end of town, to say that I visited it regularly would be an understatement. It is a cosy little pub of the sort that I like. From the front door you enter a short passage with small rooms off to the left and right. The bar is further down on the left in the larger main lounge area which nowadays is equipped with a large screen television which is popular for satellite broadcasting of sports events. Beyond the bar what used to be private living accommodation has now been converted by the current landlord into a well-appointed pool room. This is a well-thought-out facility that is a perfect example of how to accommodate a pool table in a small pub. Rather than dump it in the middle of the main lounge area, as so many pubs tend to do, ensuring that drinkers and players are constantly getting in each others way, it is well out of the way to the benefit and comfort of both.

It is a Robinsons pub, as so many in Macclesfield are. Selling Best Bitter and Hatters Mild on handpump and often Old Tom on gravity during winter months. The mild was reintroduced relatively recently after a number of years' absence and, I am told by current regulars, is proving popular. No description of the Flag would be complete without mention of the previous landlady, Joyce, who had a predilection for ornaments that was

nothing short of heroic. If there had been a Guinness Book of Records entry for the greatest number of ornaments in a pub lounge, Joyce would have held it by a mile. Not only that, she knew each one personally to the extent that when on one occasion somebody moved one for a bet, she had spotted its absence within minutes and instituted a personal search for its recovery. (By the way, if you read this Joyce, honest it wasn't me!). If you think this is an exaggeration then think again!!

Coare Street used to be part of the main route for traffic passing from Stockport through to Knutsford, Congleton and the M6. In those days the pub would regularly vibrate to the sound of passing HGVs. In fact it was not unknown for wagons to demolish the pub sign in passing. Now, as a result of the construction of a number of new roads, it is a quiet 'Access Only' backwater, making the Flag a much more peaceful place. Why not give it a try? It is very close to Sainsbury's if you happen to have occasion to go there.

Well, there, I've surprised myself and managed to fill a whole page!



The landlord of the **Prince of Wales**, Roe Street, Macclesfield has left and the pub is being refurbished.

The **Angel**, Knutsford, a Holts pub recently purchased from Greenalls, has reopened. A separate report is elsewhere in this issue of Opening Times.

The **Egerton Arms** at Chelford, a free house, has been refused planning permission for an extension by Macclesfield Borough Council because the changes "were not in keeping with the character of the building".

The 17th century inn, **The Hanging Gate** at Higher Sutton, a free house, is up for sale at £230,000. The owners have tried for four years to sell it as a pub but if they can't it will be sold as a house. The pub has spectacular views over the Cheshire Plain and is worth a visit before it possible closes. On the last visit Ruddles County, Courage Directors and John Smiths Bitter were being sold.

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

Column Widths, single 84mm, double 172mm. Image height 24cm. NB Advertisers who supply camera ready artwork designed for another publication that cannot be resized to our standard sizes will be charged the equivalent column/centimetre rate plus a surcharge of at least 30%. Adverts that require unusually large amounts of design work will have the extra work carried out by a studio at full commercial rate.

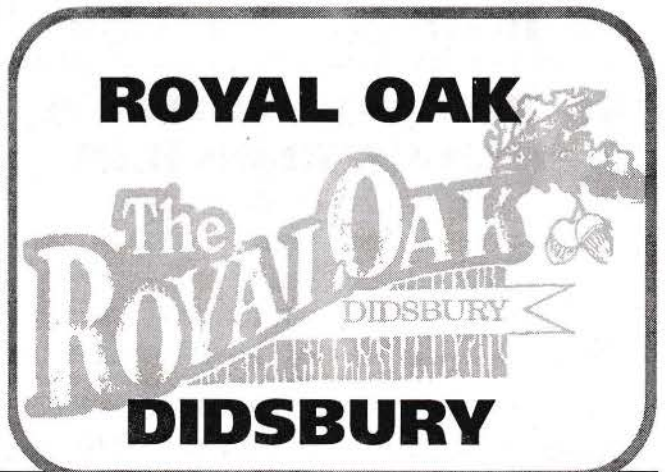
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Angel, Knutsford

The Angel, on King Street in Knutsford was one of the ten pubs that Holts acquired from Greenalls and like some of the others has been the subject of an extensive refurbishment. The new-look Angel opened its doors on 11th December and the result is very impressive to say the least.



Previously a rather run-down one-room pub, the Angel now has high-quality rooms separated by a central bar. At the front of the pub is a smart lounge, divided into two rooms and decorated and furnished in the style of a country house, with comfortable seats and wood panelling. At the side is a long vault which one commentator has suggested has the air of a baronial hall(!).

Work is still underway on a function room and seven letting bedrooms. Food of a no-nonsense sort (steak & kidney pie when OT called) is available and despite the up-market ambience and location the beers still retail at Holts bargain prices of 96p for mild and £1.02 for bitter. Quality is tip-top, too. As indeed it should be as the licensee is none other than Diane Davenport from the Good Beer Guide listed Old Monkey on Portland Street in the City Centre. She leaves the Monkey with our best wishes.

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A CLASSIC PUB



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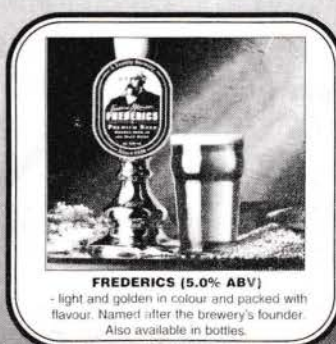


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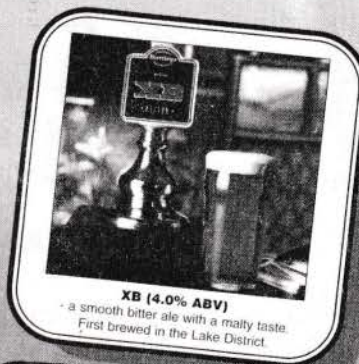
BEST BITTER (4.2% ABV)

- 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.

C H O I C E B E E R S

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!

Diary

January 97

Thursday 9th - Monthly branch meeting, Kingsway, Levenshulme. 8.00pm.

Saturday 11th - Branch Anniversary Meal, Southlands Hotel (Copperfields, Adswold Lane West, Stockport. Guest speaker Phil Burke from Passageway Brewery, guest beers, buffet meal and grand raffle. Phone 477 1973 for details.

Monday 13th - Social, Ye Olde Vic, Chatham Street, Edgeley. Starts 9.00pm.

Friday 17th - City Centre Stagger meet 7.00pm Bulls Head, London Road; 8.30 Lass O'Gowrie, Charles Street.

Saturday 18th - Regional Meeting and AGM, hosted by Stockport & South Manchester branch. Kingsway, Mosley Road, Levenshulme. Starts 12.30pm.

Monday 20th - Social, Crown, Hillgate, Stockport. Starts 9.00pm.

Thursday 23rd - Pub of the Month presentation to the George & Dragon, Manchester Road, Heaton Chapel. See article elsewhere.

Sunday 26th - Evening Curry Crawl in Rusholme. Meet 6.00pm Welcome, Rusholme Grove (off Dickinson Road); 7.30 adjourn for curry; 9.00pm Albert, Walmer Street for live Irish music.

Monday 27th - Social, Wheatsheaf,

January 97

Levenshulme. Starts 9.00pm.

Friday 31st - Trip to Phoenix Brewery, Heywood. Minibus leaves Royal Oak, Didsbury 6.45; Crown, Heaton Lane 7.00pm. Phone 477 1973 to book a place.

Monday 3rd Feb - Social, White Swan, Green Street, Ladybarn. Starts 9.00pm. *High Peak Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:*

Wednesday 8th - Minibus trip to J W Lees brewery. Details and booking from Frank Wood on 01457 865426.

Monday 13th - Branch meeting, George Hotel, Great Norbury Street, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm

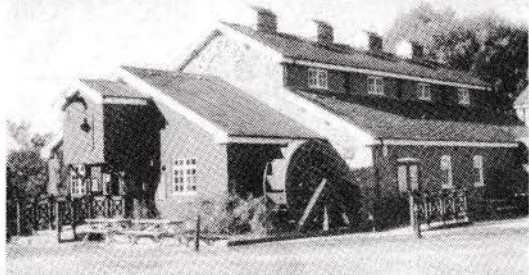
Apart from Macclesfield and Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow and Knutsford down to Congleton. They have advised us of the following events:

Sunday 12th - New local Guide meeting and the 1997 Macclesfield Beer Festival discussion. At the George & Dragon, Higher Hurdfield starting 7.30pm.

Wednesday 22nd - Knutsford survey. Starts 8.00pm, Lord Eldon.

Monday 27th - Branch AGM, Baths, Green Street, Macclesfield. Starts 8.00pm.

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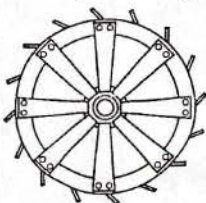
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MANCHESTER MATTERS

As expected, HR Fletcher's in the City Centre reopened as Bar Coast, a garish affair with no real ale. Two pubs on Oldham Street have also lost their real ale - the Shelter (now renamed the Lazi Pig), and the City (not so far renamed, though readers may wish to suggest a nickname). And in Rusholme, the Clarence no longer sells real ale.



by Rhys Jones

While none of the above save Fletcher's is much of a loss, it's a shame that no fewer than four of the cafe bars that opened in time for Christmas deny their customers the choice of real ale. They are the Temple of Convenience (or Temple of the Winds as I prefer to think of it), in a converted toilet at the junction of Oxford Street and Great Bridgewater Street in the City Centre; the Polar Bar on Wilbraham Road (almost opposite The Bars) in Chorlton; and Solomon Grundy and Kaleida, nearly opposite each other on Wilmslow Road in Withington. As I've said before, the cafe bar sector will have to do better than this if it's to be taken seriously by those who care about what they drink.

Happily, though, there's a fair amount of good news to report as well. In the City Centre, the long-closed Old White Bear on Swan Street confounded many expectations by re-emerging as Bar Fringe, an agreeable place in bare-boards style which seems to pin many of its hopes on attracting customers en route to the nearby Band on the Wall and Frog & Bucket, whose gig lists are liberally distributed within. The handpumped beers are Boddingtons Bitter and Morlands Old Speckled Hen, and

Bar Fringe observes full pub hours apart from daytime on Saturday, opening at 7pm on that day.

Aside from Mash & Air, though (for which see separate report - this was written shortly before its expected opening), December's biggest splash in the City Centre was made by the new branch of Yates's on Portland Street. Strangely insubstantial in external appearance (I kept wanting to peer round the corners to check if there was anything behind the facade), internally it's a standard modern Yates's, with plenty of blackboards and mottoes. The real ale range is disappointing - just John Smiths and Boddingtons bitters on handpump - but you could always have a blob. The place seems to be competing broadly in the Wetherspoons market, but with less emphasis on food (which finishes at 7pm) and more on "a night out" complete with the pub's in-house DJ.

Gorton has seen two welcome re-openings, both on Gorton Lane. The Birch Arms reopened in mid-December, and should be selling handpumped Boddingtons Bitter by the time you read this, though the beer hadn't arrived when I called a couple of days after they opened. At the Vulcan, however, new licensee Alan Carter, who brings to the pub considerable experience in the trade, most recently at Newton Heath Labour Club, lost no time in getting his feet under the table; and the good news is that nothing of importance has changed. The layout of the place is the same as before, and the handpumps still dispense Boddingtons Bitter alongside Wilson's Bitter and (now rare) Wilson's Mild. With a good pint of mild when I called, Alan seems to be off to a fine start.

Finally, a brief round-up of some minor changes. At the King in the City Centre, the real ale range is now Tetley Mild and Bitter plus Marstons Bitter; the Travellers Call in West Gorton has stopped selling Billy Westwood's Bitter, though Hydes Mild and Bitter remain on good form here; and at Clynes in Hulme, the introduction of real ale is on hold until a refurbishment of the pub promised for the Spring.

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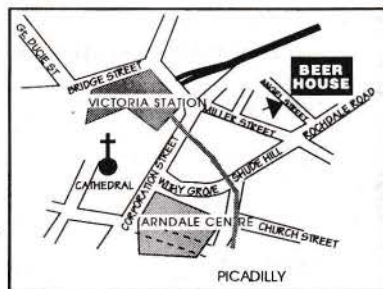
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SOMETHING FOR EVEN THE MOST DISCERNING TASTE



A warm welcome to Gary and Bev Parker, who have taken over the **Orion**, Burton Road, Withington. They arrive from the Higher Broughton Conservative Club, a cask ale outlet where Gary introduced a guest beer policy. Gary and Bev have ten years' experience in the trade and this has certainly showed at the Orion where the Holts Mild and Bitter have improved enormously. **JH.**

At the **Comfortable Gill**, King Street West, Stockport, newish landlord Peter Belfield has been busy since his move from the **Crown**, Heaton Moor. Boddingtons Mild has now been reintroduced in cask form. This was always one of Peter's best lines at the **Crown**, so some good mild drinking is promised. Two darts teams, mens and mixed, have been established alongside 2 pool teams. When OT called 'happy hour' operated Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday 4-7 pm and Sunday 12-3pm, with Boddingtons Bitter at £1. **RW.**

A slightly belated welcome to Malcolm Warburton, new licensee of the **Britannia** in Beswick, who took over on 8th November last year. Formerly a bus driver (Queens Road depot), Malcolm, whose first pub this is, is well aware that the pub has endured a fallow period of some 18 months under a succession of transient and frankly unimpressive licensees. He sees it as his job to restore this characterful Lees pub to its former high repute, and his hard-working attitude is a refreshing contrast to recent incumbents. A visit is recommended to enjoy fine handpumped mild and bitter in a pub which is rapidly rediscovering its high standards of old. **RPJ.**

Burtonwood Mild at the **Gladstone** in Stockport is now keg. A fair effort was made at selling the stuff in cask-conditioned form, but unfortunately the custom just wasn't there. **Batter** keg mild than no mild at all, some will say - and certainly, better keg mild than cask mild in poor condition due to slow sales. The other **Burtonwood** beers are in fine form and a visit is recommended. **RPJ.**

Burns Night celebrations at the **Dog & Partridge** in Didsbury will run for three days this month - from Thursday 23rd to Saturday 25th. There will be all sorts of topical events and traditional food. Good news is that Westons Old Rosie is selling well and is to be made permanent and a second cider added to the range. Less good news is that the beers sold from the casks stillaged at the back of the bar are still sold under a blanket of gas, albeit at quiet times only. **SB.**

The **Albert** in Rusholme will be hosting a charity night on behalf of the **Rainbow Trust** (the festival charity at Stockport Beer Festival in recent years) on Jan 14. A pile of pennies estimated to contain £1000 will be pushed over (at about 9-9.30pm). Coronation Street stars and City players will attend, with lots of traditional Irish music to ensure the event goes with a swing. A **Rainbow** trust night is also planned at the **Royal Oak** in Didsbury this month. **JC.**

Taylor's Landlord is now a regular beer at the **Hinds Head** in Heaton Chapel, alongside the four existing regulars and the guest beer. On a recent visit this was on magnificent form. **JF.**

Jim and Lynn Pearson are the new licensees at the **Pomona** in Gorton. Although this is their first pub, they have previously worked in the trade. They plan to expand both live entertainment and the beer range - presently **John Smith Bitter** and **Websters Green Label**, both on handpump. The **Pomona** has suffered from a lack of stability in recent years and **Jim and Lynn** have assured OT that they have a long-term commitment to the pub. We wish them well. **JF.**

In Didsbury, **Carringtons** beer and wine shop goes from strength to strength. When OT called after Christmas, three draught beers were available to take away - **Fraoch Heather Ale**, **Salopian Brewery's Minsterly Bitter** and **Wood's Shropshire Lad**. In addition some serious Belgian beer was available - proper sour **Kriek** and **Gueze** (Oud Beersel, probably) in 75cl bottles and **Carringtons** now sells bottles of **Dunkerton's** superbly crafted traditional ciders - **Medium Sweet**, **Medium Dry**, **Traditional Dry**, **Organic**, **Court Royal** and **Kingston Black** are all available. **JC.**

The **Crown** on **Heaton Lane**, Stockport, continues to go great guns on the guest beer front. Look out for **Cains Bitter** and **FA** now available on a weekly basis at specially reduced prices (£1.45 for **FA** is a snip). **Tetley Bitter** is also permanently on sale for those of a less adventurous disposition. **JC.**

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A National Festival!!

The biggest real ale Festival in the world is changing this year. **CAMRA's** Great British Beer Festival, held in the Grand Hall at London's Olympia for the last five years, this year moves into the National Hall as well. This Hall also dates from Victorian times and is a smaller version of the Grand Hall.

The National Hall will host the stage (previously in the Grand Hall) enabling visitors to drink around the main bar with more peace than in previous years. But those who are real ale drinkers need not miss out on the music for there will be a number of small bars from various brewers in the National Hall.

The dates for the Festival are 5th-9th August. And of course, besides the real ale, there will be a huge range of imported beer, cider and perry. Something to suit everyone!

APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

VALID FROM JANUARY 1 (OT153)

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £8

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 £14 JOINT MEMBERSHIP £17

STUDENT or OAP or REGISTERED DISABLED £8

Steve McCarley, 32 Howden Close, North Reddish, Stockport SK5 6XW

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.

