

STOCKPORT
AND SOUTH
MANCHESTER
CAMRA

OPENING TIMES



No:
155

FREE

MARCH 1997

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Fury Over Short Pint Scam

Publicans and brewers have reacted with predictable fury to the renewed media exposure of the short-pint scam. The scandal came back into public view in January, when CAMRA's national newspaper What's Brewing revealed a Shropshire County Council survey which found 23 out of 25 publicans cheating their customers.

More than half of the pubs served pints short even of the 19 fluid ounces regarded as a pint by the Brewers Association, while two of them served pints 12.5% - or 19p - short.

A subsequent survey of 25 North London pubs by BBC2's Food & Drink programme and Camden trading standards officers found only three 20-ounce pints.

A Daily Mail survey of the same number of pubs spread across Newcastle upon Tyne, Bristol, Cardiff, Birmingham and Scotland was lucky - it found eight full pints.

Food & Drink star Jilly Goolden described the missing beer as "a complete rip-off," adding; "A pint should mean a pint."

Not surprisingly, the publicans who are benefiting from the scam to the tune of an estimated £250 million a year don't agree. Trade newspaper the Licensee quoted one publican as "being sick and fed up of people and organisations who know nothing about our trade but like to think they do making false accusations to the public."

And a Brewers Association spokesman was reported as being fed up with the repeated allegations.

Trading standards officers don't accept that their accusations are false but feel shackled by recent court rulings making successful prosecutions of the rip-off merchants almost impossible.

While many pubs locally avoid the problem by using metered dispense from electric pumps (particularly Hydes' and Robinson's), only one brewery in Britain is totally committed to an honest pint - Banks's of Wolverhampton which also owns Camerons.

The company uses either metered dispense or oversized lined glasses in all its pubs, and brewing director Richard Westwood said: "We are passionate about giving our customers fair measure."

According to Banks's, even following Brewers Association guidelines and serving a 19-ounce pint costs the customer 7p a pint and allows the publican to sell 300 'pints' per 288-pint barrel.

CAMRA's National Executive member Bob Jones summed up: "We will continue to lobby for over-sized glasses to be used throughout the industry...In these days of high duty, customers are more concerned than ever about fair measures."

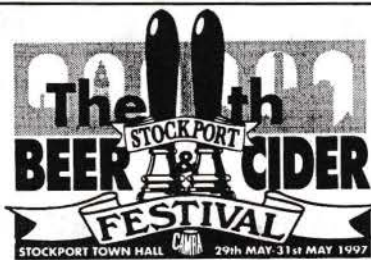
Guest Beers - Progress?

Without wanting to prejudice the issue, it SEEMS that common sense might prevail on the issue of the guest cask ale allowed in tenanted pubs. After the EC told the government that it felt the restriction to 'cask conditioned (Real) ale' prevented Euro brewers from competing (as Real Ale is almost exclusively British), a compromise has been suggested (which the EC are apparently minded to accept) that should satisfy everyone. In addition to the draught real ale, tenanted pubs will be free to stock a bottled conditioned beer from anyone as well - and bottled conditioned (and very high quality) beers are produced throughout Europe.

Whilst CAMRA's aim throughout has been to preserve the Guest Ale, and prevent the 'guest' category being widened to permit its substitution by some appalling mass produced lager substitute, the addition of a guest bottled conditioned beer is a real bonus, as it will stimulate a market for an excellent category of beers produced in Britain and abroad!

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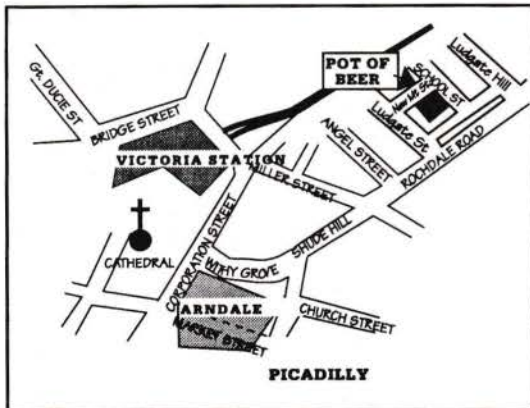


The Bands are booked (more about that next month) and the beer & cider orders are well on the way to being completed. The bar and cider managers promise a stunning variety with last years Cider and Perry of the Festival returning by popular demand. Dont forget to put 29 - 31 May in your diaries. The Stockport Beer & Cider Festival is sponsored again this year by the Stockport Express Advertiser.

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

No apologies for returning to the thorny subject of short measure this month. Why? Because it's a problem that just won't go away.

Many pubs, indeed most pubs, serve a full measure, or as near as dammit, most of the time. Short measures are topped up without asking or with good grace when you do ask. But what if it's busy and you don't feel like asking. What about those pubs that always sell their customers short or bar staff who greet requests for a top up with a scowl or some sarcastic comment along the lines of "don't you like a head on your beer then?"

Well, yes it can. It would have been possible to implement Section 43 of the Weights & Measures Act which said that a pint of beer was a pint of liquid excluding the head. . Indeed before the last election the government promised to do just that. And after they were re-elected they did take action on Section 43. Unfortunately they abolished it in the name of deregulation. Surely some mistake?

So, what else can be done? It's a problem isn't it - as a licensee pointed out in the pages of CAMRA's national newspaper, when a pub's busy customers aren't prepared to wait for their beer to settle and be topped up. If CAMRA can show him and his staff how to pull a full pint every time we would be most welcome, he challenges. Well, how about this:

1. First take a lined glass.....er, that's about it, I think.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Whilst not wanting to count our chickens.... a fit of common sense appears to have overtaken both the EC and the government over the 'uncompetitive' aspects of the guest beer rule (which allows tenanted pubs to stock one draught real ale from another brewery, but keeps out other EC beers because they are seldom 'real ale'). The EC are apparently satisfied if it is extended to include (additionally) a 'guest bottle conditioned beer', examples of which can be found from craft breweries throughout Europe (and the UK). Jolly good too.

John Clarke

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Pennine Ale - and Cider!

Pennine Ale is the name of a new venture supplying traditional cider and cask ales to the local free/guest beer trade. Based at the Sportsman, an increasingly impressive freehouse in Hyde, wholesaling traditional products has come as a natural extension of selling them through the pub.

If there are enough local pubs interested in traditional cider, Pennine will gladly make regular trips to Somerset and one is planned in the next week or two. Local pubs that have already taken advantage of this service include the Nags Head, Glossop; Wheatsheaf, Old Glossop; Moulders Arms, Hyde; Wellington, Hyde; Cheshire Cheese, Broadbottom, the Witchwood in Ashton and the White House and Buffer Bar in Stalybridge.

On the beer front regular trips for cask ales are made to Kelham Island in Sheffield (home of the excellent Pale Rider) and Plassey in North Wales. Owner Geoff Oliver tells us that they are equipped with suitable vehicles to transport hundreds of gallons - providing they can find the customers.

So, if you're a licensee reading this and fancy trying some decent cider or quality guest beers then give Geoff a ring on 0161 368 5000.

Training Programme from Robbies



Robinson's have launched a new training course designed to prepare new managers and tenants for the modern-day demands of running a pub. The course is the brainchild of Bob Lloyd Jones, a Robinson's licensee of some 15 years standing, who is leaving the Dusty Miller in Wrenbury to become a full time consultant, and Robbies chairman, Peter Robinson.

The five-day programme is aimed at raising standards and satisfying licensing magistrates' requirements for proof of professional competence. Verified by the Institute of Innkeeping, it covers all aspects of the business and prepares delegates for the British Institute of Innkeeping National Licensee's Certificate exam, which they sit on the final day.

Participants, many of whom have little or no experience in running a pub, learn about everything from accountancy to the handling of cask beers. Subject to availability, places on the monthly held courses are open to anyone, as well as Robinson's licensees, who wants to take the Institute of Innkeeping exam. Our picture shows Lorraine Bean, one of the new licensees, receiving her training certificate from Peter Robinson.

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Pub Of The Month

MARCH

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
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30	31					

The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month for March is the Greyhound on Bowden Street in Edgeley. The phrase 'classic community pub' is in danger of becoming overused in these pages but if there is one pub that deserves the description it is the Greyhound. Outside it might look like a fairly ordinary estate pub, although the hanging baskets and widow boxes perhaps give a clue that this is a particularly well cared for pub and once you walk through the door you instantly know that it's something special.

In short the pub has class. There's an L-shaped lounge divided into two and a separate, well-used vault. All looking very smart following a restrained refurbishment two years ago. You will see a TV in the corner and a juke-box on the wall but very often the noise in the pub is of conversation and laughter. It is well used by all sections of the local community from pensioners in the afternoons to football supporters when County are at home. A pub for everyone - which is what all pubs once were but now few are. There is no food or other gimmicks - the Greyhound is a beer pub, plain and simple. And what beer - Boddies Mild and Bitter (the latter some of the best around) are complemented by up to three guest beers from the Greenalls list, all in

tip top condition. It is hardly surprising that the pub is now a regular in the Good Beer Guide.

The driving force behind this, as is the case with any good pub, is the licensee, Irene Morris. It is Irene's no-nonsense enthusiasm that has turned the Greyhound from a good pub into a great one and which makes this award especially well-deserved. The presentation will be made on Thursday 27th March when a great night is promised. JC.

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

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Neither Seen Nor Heard

-Jim Flynn on the problems of getting Children's Certificates for pubs

For the discerning drinker with a family, the great promised freedom over the last two years, to drink a decent pint in a public house with your children with you, has come to almost nothing. Flicking through the 1997 Good Beer Guide, it is difficult to find a pub with a children's certificate. In fact only 4% of pubs in England and Wales have been granted one. Is it because there is no demand? The big brewers obviously don't think so as they are busy opening family pubs which bear a closer resemblance to a Happy Eater with alcohol than they do a real pub. No, the real reason is that in general licensing magistrates have put such constraints on the granting of children's certificates that most licensees either can't meet the requirements or have been put off even applying. The attitude of magistrates over the country has varied wildly from the most minimal conditions being applied to some which are so stringent they are virtually impossible to meet. Why some benches are taking such a strong line is a mystery. Do they prefer parents to drink at home in front of their children without any supervision or constraints rather than in the controlled environment of a well-run pub? Or perhaps it's that they really believe that fathers should always go alone to the pub and leave the little woman behind with the children.

Whatever their motives, some licensing authorities have seriously got it wrong and are standing in the face of the intentions of Parliament and the views of society at large. The law must be applied consistently, fairly and reasonably and if this does not happen (and it's not at the moment) then Parliament needs to reform the law to make sure that it does. CAMRA itself needs to actively campaign for such a change, as the main advocate of drinkers' rights and the long-term well-being of the public house. It's time for change! *(The question of children in pubs is always a contentious one and some OT readers might prefer things to stay as they are - letters to the usual address - ed.)*



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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Rhys Jones:

I'm terribly sorry to have misunderstood Ron Elder (Letters, Feb). He now tells us that the main point of his original letter in December was that "cider and perry are predominantly southern drinks". I have re-read his original letter with great care, and have to tell you that no such statement appears in it. True, he does make the related but different statement that most CAMRA members in the north are "not all that interested" in cider - an interesting assertion which I look forward to discussing with fellow CAMRA cider enthusiasts in such places as Sheffield, Newcastle, and Glasgow. Not only would Mr Elder's arbitrary Shrewsbury-Ipswich line exclude all of Norfolk's numerous cider-makers and most of those in Suffolk - there are now at least two cider-makers in Yorkshire, and (whisper it!) cider has even been made sporadically in Scotland in recent memory.

But anyway, what does it matter where the stuff comes from? Mild is virtually extinct in South-East England, yet CAMRA rightly sees its preservation and/or revival as a national concern. And is it suggested that Scotch whisky cannot or should not be appreciated south of the border?

Let me assure Mr Elder that I don't find it in the least offensive for him to express his views (though I could wish they had a less tenuous connection with reality). What does offend me is to be lectured as to what priorities I should adopt in my own CAMRA activism - and his original letter, opposing as it did the very mention of cider and perry in a CAMRA publication, did precisely that. I'm pleased that he now accepts my right to campaign for cider - but if the topic is not to be mentioned in publications, I take it he expects such campaigning to be carried out by telepathic means.

Since Mr Elder admits to enjoying the occasional real cider, I'd like to suggest that he attends one of the CAMRA festivals where a wide range is available - if Stockport's too far south for him, Leeds in late March is sure to have a splendid range. If he talks to the staff, he will discover that CAMRA cider people are neither ogres nor entryists - just ordinary CAMRA members who believe that the organisation will only flourish if it espouses the values of diversity and tolerance.

From Peter Barnes:

I would like to reply to Peter Robinson's letter in February's Opening Times.

I will make my point another way. Why does Peter Robinson do the right thing in some of his pubs and not others? CAMRA's National Inventory of Nationally Outstanding Pub Interiors, published in the Good Beer Guide, includes five Robinsons pubs:

Arden Arms, Stockport

Alexandra, Stockport

Swan With Two Necks, Stockport

Hatters, Marple

Black Horse, Preston

A provisional Regional Inventory includes a further 10 pubs, such as the Armoury, Stockport and the Davenport Arms, Woodford - currently Greater Manchester's Pub of the Year.

Most of Robinson's stock of pubs were at one time as

distinctive as these Inventory pubs but too many have been spoilt by inept, insensitive changes. Sometimes it happens all at once such as the hatchet job on the Bush, Hyde a few years ago, or the wreck of the Printer's Arms, Cheadle. More often it is an insidious, gradual process which cumulatively robs the pub of all features which give it individuality and transforms it into a "bland box" (not my words, but used by others on many occasions to describe Robinsons refurbishments). It is exactly this process which I described as happening to the Albion and the Buck & Hawthorn in Ashton.

I do not understand how Peter Robinsons can delude himself into believing that these are "small alterations" or that "great care was taken to retain much of what was there". Also I do not know why he wants to attribute the changes to his tenants. Is he responsible for what happens to Robinson's pubs or not?

Of course, this degradation of our pubs by brewers and pub companies has been fairly widespread and widely criticised by many (I am certainly not in a minority of one) but Robinsons really do take the biscuit. At the other end of the scale is Sam Smiths who take good care of their special pubs, recognising when they have something of distinction and nurturing it. I think Peter Robinson could learn much from them.

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CAMRA Pub of the Month
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STAGGER

with Dave Maynell

The first Stagger of 1997 took us to the London Road/Piccadilly area of Manchester.

A small group met at the **Bulls Head** at the junction of London Road and Fairfield Street. Its tiled exterior disguises a fairly small, cosy interior. The main room with timber floor, open fires and raised drinking areas was reasonably busy considering it was early on a Friday evening, with a mixed age group enjoying a variety of Burtonwood beers. Those sampled included Burtonwood Bitter, James Forshaws Bitter and the premium Buccaneers and seasonal Heartwarmer. All were considered well above average and set a standard that was going to be hard to beat on the rest of the night.

A short walk along London Road took us to **Monroes**, a first visit for me and a total contrast to the previous pub. It had the atmosphere more of an American coffee bar than a pub with the obvious pictures of Marilyn adorning the walls everywhere - to be honest it didn't appeal to me at all. This is a Whitbread house offering Boddingtons Bitter, Flowers IPA and, as a guest beer, Bentleys Bitter. Most of us wanted to try the Bentleys (*what?! - ed.*) but unfortunately it had run out. We all ended up with Boddingtons which was OK and at £1 a pint nearly the cheapest of the night. No-one tried the Flowers.

Our next call was to be the **Overdraft** on Princess Street but to our dismay this has now lost all its real ale so we moved swiftly on to **O'Sheas** on the corner of Whitworth Street. Considering it was still only 8.00pm the place was very busy with loud music and judging by the numbers arriving while we were there, I imagine it would have been heaving by nine. Previously the Lancaster Tavern, O'Sheas was Manchester's first Irish theme pub and is typical of the bare board, open-plan design that is so popular with breweries today. Although popular with the younger crowd, there was a mixed age group in when we called. Beers are mainly nitrokeg but handpumped Tetley Bitter is also available and, on our sampling, well kept. A band was setting up as we left - one of the main attractions of the place is live music every night and I will make a point of returning when the music is on.



Two of our party called in at the **Old Garratt** on Granby Row (corner of Princess St) and reported that since their previous visit, there had been a definite improvement, with the pub reasonably busy and the beers considerably improved at this former Boddington PubCo (now Greenalls) house. The two guest beers tried were Mitchell's Lancaster Bomber and Wychwood Special Bitter and both were above average.

Next on to **Joshua Brooks** on the corner of Charles Street, a converted printworks next to the River Medlock and reasonably busy with a youngish clientele. With an American-style layout, the main focus at the time of our visit was the large screen TV showing live football. The Tetley Bitter and Flowers IPA were only average but the Hoegaarden Wheat Beer was very good.



We moved quickly on down Charles Street to the **LASS O'GOWRIE** where we picked up a few more bodies. An obviously popular watering hole, I thought the place was packed but being out of touch with Manchester drinking, was advised that this was only steady and would be busy (elbow to elbow) later on. A Whitbread owned brew-pub, the Lass has been brewing its own beer since 1983 but has recently been branded a Hogshead which has led to more in the way of guest beers to supplement the house brews. These latter are Log 35 and Log 42, both only considered average on this occasion, but the Batemans XB was rather good and the Bulmers "Old Hazy" draught cider, very good indeed. Out of the hot air and into fresh air to our next venue, the **New Union** on the corner of Princess Street and Canal Street. Well known as one of Manchester's gay pubs, the place was very busy with mixed ages and distinctively different drinking areas, very loud music at the far end and quieter near the front with a pleasant raised drinking area. Burtonwood Bitter was the only handpumped beer available and was only average compared with that served in the Bulls Head earlier.

A short hop to Bloom Street took us to **Paddy's Goose**, a former Wilson's pub (20 years ago!) and a recent acquisition by the Magic Pub Co. (Now owned by East Anglian brewers Greene King). Quieter and with an older age group than the previous pubs, but still reasonably busy. The atmosphere was pleasant with no music and conversation was easy without having to shout. The Boddingtons Bitter was above average; Greene King Abbot Ale, very good and Greene King IPA only average. Websters Green Label was also available but not tried. When a complaint was made that one of the beers was too warm, it was replaced without fuss.

It was getting late now and our last lap took us to Portland Street with a trio of pubs very close together. The first call was to the **Old Monkey** on the corner of Princess Street, which is one of the newer Holt's pubs built on the site of a Chinese bakery. The layout has been tastefully done with wood panelling and local memorabilia adorning the walls. An unusual feature of the pub is its two-storey layout with the vault on the ground floor and the lounge upstairs. Holts pubs seem to have an atmosphere all of their own and this was no exception, being very busy with a mixed clientele enjoying the mild and bitter. The former was thought to be only average on the night (but definitely the cheapest beer at 96p) with the bitter rather better.

Well worth a visit is the **Circus Tavern** next door. This Tetley heritage pub is a little gem with the smallest bar I have ever come across - only 2 1/2 feet wide, just enough for the barman to stand behind. There are only two small rooms connected by a narrow passageway running past the bar; simply decorated but pleasant places for conversation without interruption by music. Only Tetleys Bitter is available on handpump - there is no room for anything else on the bar - and was very good. This was the only pub of the night to appear in the 1997 Good Beer Guide - don't miss it.

Three doors further towards Piccadilly is the **Grey Horse**, the only Hydes' house of the night. Reasonably busy with a pleasant atmosphere. I was advised that there has recently been a substantial improvement in the interior decor and the pub now has a traditional look with a large number of paintings, prints and plates adorning the walls. Both Hydes' Mild and Bitter were tried and rated above average.

Our final stop took us back towards Piccadilly Station and the **Waldorf** on Gore Street. This Whitbread pub has been modernised but not spoiled and although quieter than most of the previous pubs it retained a pleasant atmosphere. Being in a rush to catch the last train I didn't have a lot of time to do any looking around, however the beers sampled included Chesters Mild, enjoyed by those that tried it, and Taylor Landlord which in most people's opinion was one of the best beers of the night. The pubs we visited only represent a small proportion of those in the city centre and the opinions in this article a just those of a small group of drinkers on one particular night. Why not have a trip to Manchester and judge for yourselves.

The Second Request Stop Beer Hop

After last year's success, Wednesday 19th March - Sunday 23rd will see the second Beer Festival at the Bhurtpore Inn, Aston near Nantwich - arguably one of the finest freehouses in Cheshire.

Although situated in the heart of the Cheshire countryside, the Bhurtpore is easily reached by train, being 12 minutes walk from Wrenbury Station which is served by local trains on the Crewe-Shrewsbury line. Wrenbury is a request stop - you have to tell the conductor you want to get off there, and coming back put your hand out to signal the driver to stop, as you would a bus. A beer festival with a difference, then.

Travelling from Manchester and Stockport would normally involve a change of train at Crewe. Following last year's successful festival when an incredible 105 people used the station on the Saturday of the festival, the Crewe and Shrewsbury Passengers Association have arranged with South Wales and West railway Ltd that on Saturday 22 March the express train to Cardiff, departing Piccadilly 10.33, Stockport 10.42 and Wilmslow 10.50, will make a special stop at Wrenbury. For returning festival goers, an express for Wilmslow, Stockport and Manchester will stop at Wrenbury at 17.03. Cheap day returns are available Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday costing £8.90 from Manchester, £8.60 from Stockport and £7.20 from Wilmslow. A 25% discount is available for parties of 10 or more - phone 0345 125625 for details. Members of the association will be on hand to help with train times etc. on the days of the festival.

At the festival, 60 real ales are promised in addition to the Bhurtpore's extensive range of continental and British bottled beer and first class food to keep you going. Last year's festival was an excellent event and this time around it promises to be even better. JRC.

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BANKS'S BREWERY

Introduction

This month we take an in-depth look at Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries, better known as Banks's and, despite being a major player in their Black Country heartland, a relative newcomer to the local beer scene.

Banks's have only had a local presence for about ten years or so when they bought a job lot of pubs from Wilsons together with the old Longsight which occupied part of the gatehouse at Belle Vue (both long-since demolished). Formerly run-down pubs were brought back to life and new pubs were built - the 'new' Longsight, the Milestone in Burnage and the Tollgate at Trafford Bar for example. The brewery won plaudits for its commitment to community locals, real ale and full measure (and the latter remains true to this day: Banks's are almost alone in insisting that all their beer is dispensed into over-sized lined glasses guaranteeing a full pint every time). Then something seemed to go wrong. The brewery clearly lost interest in many of its ex-Wilsons pubs which were more or less left to their own devices, and indeed several have now either been sold on or are up for sale.

There have been problems on the beer front, too. The 1986 Good Beer Guide was able to proclaim that Banks's were famous for 'serving cask beer in their 800 tied houses' and the company was known for the fact that most of its production was of mild ale, and 'real' mild at that. You'll be hard pressed to find cask mild in many of Banks's local outlets today - in fact you have a better bet of finding this in a Marstons house with whom Banks's have a trading agreement - and some of them serve no real ale at all.

So, has something gone wrong?

Banks's - A Brief History

The Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries was formed on 14th May 1890, from an amalgamation of three local businesses, Banks and Company (who had been brewing at the Park Brewery in Wolverhampton since 1875), George Thompson and Sons of the Dudley and Victoria Breweries and Charles Colonel Smith's brewery at the Fox Brewery, Wolverhampton.

George Thompson of George Thompson and Sons, had a son, Edwin John Thompson, who was a manager at the formation of the company in 1890, becoming Managing Director in 1894. His great grandson David is Managing Director today.

The company has grown by acquiring other companies, prominent among which are Julia Hanson & Sons of Dudley in 1943, the Broadway Brewery at Shifnal in 1960 and Cameron's of Hartlepool in 1992. The Broadway Brewery was closed immediately but Hansons continued to brew until 1991 and its 150 houses continue to bear the Hansons name and Hansons Mild is still brewed separately at Wolverhampton.

The purchase of Cameron's, famous for their Strongarm premium bitter, rather than being a prelude to closure probably saved it from extinction. Since Banks's came on the scene there, the beers have improved enormously and a tied estate of over 100 pubs has been built up. Strongarm sometimes appears in Banks's pubs and is actively promoted as a 'ruby red ale'.

The trading area of the company today extends as far north as Alnwick, south west to Weston-Super-Mare, East to Corby and west to Aberystwyth in Wales. The company own about 950 pubs over half of which are managed and the rest traditional tenancies.

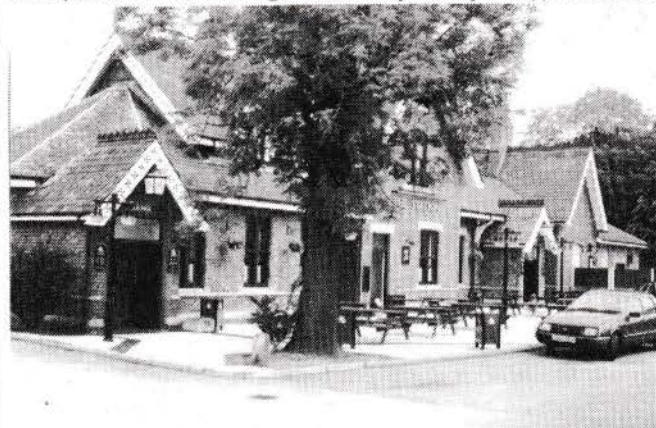
Banks's - The Pubs

The first article I ever wrote for Opening Times, writes Paul Felton, was in autumn 1988, a review of a minibus trip around the branch's eight pubs belonging to Wolverhampton & Dudley, more commonly known as Banks's. Some of the eight were quite recent purchases from Wilsons; all served both cask mild and bitter. Notable events of the evening were a quite superb pint of mild at the Royal Oak in Openshaw, and being refused entry to the final pub of the evening, the Station at Cheadle, by the friendly doormen.

So who better to write up the return journey? Although frankly, I wasn't much looking forward to it. Whilst a ninth pub had opened, the Four in Hand at West Didsbury, at least three of the remaining eight, including the site of that superb pint of mild, were now thought to sell only keg beer, while the likelihood of seeing any cask mild at all seemed to be non-existent.

Indeed, the whole trip came about as a result of a Curmudgeon article in Opening Times which basically accused Banks's of losing the plot. As a result of this curmudgeonly article Banks's had invited us on a visit to their brewery in Wolverhampton followed by a trip round some of their best pubs in that area; the counter was made, why not send someone from the brewery on a tour of our Bank's pubs and see them respond to our concerns and criticisms. And to give them credit, a friendly young chap from their PR company did come along, and listened and argued sensibly with what we had to say; someone from marketing should also have turned up, but was apparently defeated by the M6 traffic (it was a Friday night).

But to the pubs. Given our inability to get into the place as a last port of call, the Station at Cheadle seemed a sensible first visit. This is a quite narrow pub which extends a long way sideways from the bar next to the door. The previous time I had called in here had been a Sunday lunchtime around a year ago when it had not shown up well: poor beer and furnishings in need of some attention. Whether or not natural light had made things appear worse, or some money had been spent on the pub in the past year, it was much improved on a dark February evening; as indeed was the beer (only cask bitter, the mild was nitro-keg, like so many other places), which was



rather good, if rather pricey at £1.55, and your writer's favourite beer of the evening.

I confess that I had never visited the **Four in Hand** at the cross-roads of Palatine Road and Cavendish Road in West Didsbury. It's a large building, basically open-plan but with several areas and levels, perhaps lacking in its amount of seating given the considerable floor space, which often seems to be the way with this kind of design. Here we found the only non-Banks's beer of the evening on sale, Marstons Pedigree, alongside Banks's Bitter (notably 10p cheaper

*Some
people
say...*

than in the Station). Average beer and aiming rather too up-market for my tastes, but to its credit the beer was on handpump into oversize glasses, a laudable practice.

The **Milestone** on Burnage Lane in Burnage used to be my local in the late eighties and early nineties, built around eight years ago and split between lounge and vault. While the vault seemed to be doing okay, the lounge was very quiet indeed; well, when I say quiet, it was very noisy indeed, with a DJ pumping out all sorts of rubbish at excessive volume. Am I alone in wondering whether this sort of 'entertainment', rather than attracting more customers to a pub, only serves to alienate those who do frequent the place? Again, the only cask beer available was bitter, and it wasn't very clever. The **Tilted Falcon** on Kincardine Road in Chorlton-on-Medlock was the only pub we visited in the evening which did not sell any cask beer; time defeated us even had we felt inclined to visit the others. While selling only keg beers was not a crime, doing so while an electric cask bitter pump could still be seen sat on the bar could undoubtedly be seen as misleading. Your writer took the plunge and had the smoothpour mild. Too cold and almost completely tasteless. Interestingly, a request for mild had resulted in a keg Hanson's bitter being poured. Curious.

The **Longsight** on Kirkmanshulme Lane is immediately identifiable as a Bank's pub to anyone with even a passing familiarity to their architects' designs from the late eighties; it looks pretty much the same as the Milestone inside and out. The lounge playing host to a loud disco or similar, we took refuge in the large TV-haunted vault. Yet again, the mild was nitro-keg, and one has to wonder if the decision to remove cask mild was as a result of poor sales resulting in poor quality or because of company policy. The bitter at a reasonable £1.29 was rather good, with most people rating it the best beer of the night.

The **Gorton Arms** on Gorton Lane was the real shock of the evening, if only in that it was open. It's had a history which has been chequered to say the least (including a spell of selling canned beers only), and the last I'd heard it was shut again. But no, someone has taken it on again, and damn good luck to him. That being said, it was desperately quiet (only two people sat at the bar plus the barmaid when we arrived just before 10pm). BUT BUT BUT two beers were available, bitter and mild, both cask and both on handpump. The bitter was a mere £1.25, mild a splendidly cheap £1.10. Given the turnover, neither beer was exactly superb, but both were drinkable, and credit must be given for that. If you live in the area, please think about giving it a try.

Given the limited appeal of visiting one of the other three Banks's pubs (two believed to be keg, the aforementioned Royal Oak and the (up-for-sale?) Star in Ardwick, the other possibly so (Hickey's, the former Gransmoor, on Ashton Old Road), we bottled it and headed for a local Robinsons pub. I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the beer in several of the pubs, and to see cask mild at all, let alone on handpump, was a thing of great joy.

Banks's - the brewery

Opening Times visited Banks's brewery in late February on what the reception centre noticeboard tellingly described as "CAMRA PR visit". Expecting therefore a marketing white-wash we were pleasantly surprised when this largely didn't materialise.

Our hosts for the evening were Marketing Manager Andrew Gillespie, Brewing Director Richard Westwood and Head Brewer John Doherty. This being so we learned more about the beer than the operation of the pubs, one of our main areas of concern.

So, the beer. The first thing to say about Banks's is that it is big but that's not to say it resembles one of the beer factories of the national brewers - it is very much a traditional brewery, albeit on a large scale. There has been considerable investment at the brewery - two

Porter's
 PORTER
 (Beer of the Festival,
 Stockport 94 & 96)

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new coppers are about to come on stream, each of 450 barrel capacity, and another development has been a new yeast plant (the brewery's yeast culture is 50-100 years old).

Three cask beers are produced - Banks's Mild, Bitter and Hanson's Mild, the latter in a self contained unit using the original yeast from the now closed Dudley brewery. Traditional ingredients are used throughout - malt is a combination of the Maris Otter, Halcyon and Pipkin varieties and these are kilned in the company's own maltings at Langley and Lichfield. The maltings use the old "floor malting" process which is all natural. Hops come in pellet form and 80-90% are the traditional Fuggles and Goldings varieties. The malt is augmented by about 7-8% of brewing sugar which has historically been used at that level. Water comes from the brewery's own well at Tettenhall, nearby and is piped exclusively to Banks's.

Total output is 18 million gallons a year and the vast bulk of this is cask conditioned beer with mild outselling bitter in a ratio of 2.5:1 (20 years ago this was 4.5:1 which shows how the market has changed even in the mild drinking heartland of the West Midlands). Keg beer in fact accounts for about 12% of total production

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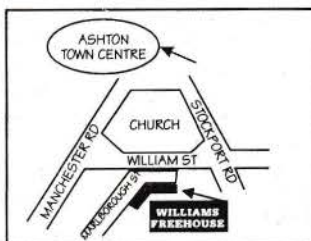
<p>HOPWOOD Pale coloured bitter, clean tasting session beer with a bitter hop finish.</p>	<p>BANTAM Pale brown bitter. Slightly nutty, full flavoured beer.</p>	<p>BEST BITTER Tawny coloured, with a hint of sweetness in the full bitter palate. A fresh but dry hop finish.</p>
<p>OLD OAK Well balanced brown beer. Malt and hops balance the strong fruitiness in the aroma and taste. The finish is malty, fruity and dry.</p>	<p>THIRSTY MOON Light brown bitter. Strong hop aroma. The slight maltness is dominated by a full crisp bitterness giving a dry and satisfying finish.</p>	<p>BONNEVILLE Light brown bitter. Malty character with a soft rounded hop balance.</p>
<p>DOUBLE DAGGER Pale brown bitter. Full flavoured boggy bitterness. More pleasantly dry and lighter than its gravity would suggest.</p>	<p>WOBBLY BOB Amber beer. Malty fruity aroma. Strongly malty and fruity flavour. A slight sweetness yields to a dry finish.</p>	

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and only 10% of mild production (which runs at 5000 barrels a week).

With all this emphasis on tradition we naturally had to tackle them about 'smoothpour' nitro keg mild. Banks's have a problem. Their mainstay is mild and this is on the decline, even in their core trading area. Nitro keg is therefore seen as a way of attracting younger drinkers to the style rather than abandon them to lager or the likes of Caffreys. Whether it's a solution that will work remains to be seen. It was put to us that 'smoothpour' is simply a different method of dispensing the same product which harks back to the tired old 'all ale is real' arguments. The fact remains that smoothpour is a different product - it might have the same ingredients but it's filtered, pasteurised and gassed up. Hardly just a method of dispense, you might think.

And what about the disappearance of cask mild, or even all cask ale, from their local pubs. This is down to quality control. The brewery stipulate that a pub must turn over three containers of beer a week if it is to have that beer in cask form. This is because Banks's beer deteriorates rapidly if it isn't sold within 2 1/2 days of going on sale. To make it easier for pubs to reach this target and so keep cask beer Bank's have invested £600,000 in firkins (small 9-gallon barrels). We therefore have to assume that none of our local pubs can turn over 27 gallons of mild a week.

Lastly the pubs. We were assured that gimmicks like 'Fast Eddies' (we have been spared locally) are few and far between and likely to stay that way. New pubs are mainly new builds and some £65 million is to be spent on the tied estate this year, half of it on the company's 'community pubs'. The least satisfactory response came from Andrew Gillespie when I put to him that many of the original Manchester acquisitions had virtually been left to rot. "Most of those pubs were turning over less than £1000 a week" was his sole reply by way of explanation. Even in a company as traditional as this one, the balance sheet still rules. JC.

Banks's - In Conclusion

This feature started by posing the question - has something gone wrong. In fairness, the answer must be a qualified no. That's not to say that everything in the garden is rosy but some of the main areas of concern have been addressed. What comes across loud and clear is that Banks's are committed to traditional draught beer in a big way (£2 million will be spent on TV advertising this year) and that bottom line commitment is something we can all agree on. They also realise that the key to successful cask beer is quality cask beer and hence the tight minimum sales requirement for a beer to be supplied in cask form (and the investment in smaller casks to help more pubs stay on cask is very positive). 'Smoothpour' mild will remain a bone of contention but at least there is apparently no promotional emphasis on this (perhaps they really do believe that it's just another way of dispensing the same product!) and the reasons for its introduction do sound plausible. Similarly with renaming mild just 'Banks's'. This has attracted hoots of derision from some quarters but it does make sense when viewed as a way of promoting a beer when the style it represents is in decline.

On the pub front. Well it's here that tradition runs up against the commercial reality of being a quoted company which has to bring year on year increases on shareholder returns. The mainstay of Banks's has been its small community locals but with the odd exception (like the excellent Mitchell Arms in Ancoats) these seem likely to remain in their heartland. We will see more Banks's pubs but they will be large and prestigious new builds - one is already planned for Castlefield. The writing off of most of their original Manchester purchases does stick in the throat - it will be interesting to see how they fare in the free trade. At least we haven't got a Fast Eddies fun pub yet...

Is better
than
Porter's





America by the Ship Canal

The new "shopping city" currently being built at Dimplington, next to Barton Bridge, is apparently to have an unprecedented 23 alcohol licenses, and to feature "globally themed" streets of restaurants and bars within its "Orient Leisure Dome". The report I read didn't say whether any of these outlets would remotely resemble a traditional pub, but I wouldn't put too much money on it.

The whole idea of these US-style shopping and leisure malls, designed to attract car-borne trade from a wide area, runs directly contrary to encouraging pubgoing as we know it. This particular monstrosity will result in increased pollution and congestion on already overcrowded roads. It will drain the lifeblood out of the shopping centres of nearby Urmston and Eccles, and hit the trade of towns for twenty or thirty miles around. If you're in any doubt about that, just go and see how the similar Merry Hill Centre in the West Midlands has effectively killed the town centre of Dudley. Planning guidelines have now been tightened to discourage any more of these developments, but for the area surrounding Dimplington, it's too late. I've spent too much time sitting in queues trying to get through Newbury to have much sympathy for that particular anti-roads protest, but if the tree-and-tunnel people had set up camp at Dimplington they would have found a surprising amount of public support.

Long Life and Laughter

It's already well established that moderate alcohol consumption is likely to prolong your life by protecting against heart disease. Now a new report has shown that it also has a beneficial effect on longevity by encouraging laughter and thus promoting a general sense of well-being. So, rather than taking it at home like a medicine, you're much better off enjoying it with your friends down the pub. It's interesting how these boffins get the funding to carry out research projects to prove the bleeding obvious, but even so it's good news that what we all felt to be true is now supported by proper scientific evidence.

In the same week, another report came out which showed that the regular use of Ecstasy is likely to lead to serious clinical depression. While it gives a short-term boost to the levels in the brain of serotonin, the chemical compound that stimulates pleasure, over the longer term it significantly reduces serotonin production. It doesn't take long before weekend users of Ecstasy start to suffer from pronounced "midweek blues".

Taken together, these two reports give a crystal clear message that one substance, in moderation of course, positively does you good, while the other, in any quantity, is extremely dangerous. As far as Ecstasy is concerned, "one pill can kill", and in the long run it poses a major threat to the nation's health. But we'd all live longer and happier lives if we had a few laughs and a couple of drinks in the pub two or three times a week. And anyone who suggests any equivalence between Ecstasy and alcohol is either a fool or downright malicious.



Old Tom, Robinsons strongest beer, has been given a new look. Robbies say that the new label, which also appears on pumpclips and drip mats, is true to earlier designs and, hopefully, will give the beer greater appeal to younger drinkers. The beers has also been branded as a 'strong ale' rather than a barley wine, although nothing about the beer itself has changed. Old Tom is the last of the Robinsons beers to get a new image in what has been a generally successful rebranding operation, certainly sales of the

former 'ordinary' bitter have improved markedly since its re-designation as Old Stockport Bitter.

Last month we reported a sighting of a nitro-keg font in Robinsons hospital-ity room. What can it mean, we asked.

The answer is...not a lot. Apparently the brewery has experienced some demand from the club trade for a "smooth" beer and as an experiment a keg of Fellrunners Gold (already a keg beer) was 'nitrogenated'. It remains to be seen whether this appears in the trade.

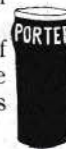
Hydes' Anvil have responded to CAMRA fears for the future of Hydes Light with a reassurance that sales remain buoyant within the tied estate with only 1.1% in volume separating Light and Mild, with the Mild being ahead. The excellent Light is in fact available in 25 Hydes' pubs over a wide area.



We hear reports that Burtonwood have discontinued regular production of their 5.2% Buccaneer and that this will now be a seasonal brew. This is a great shame as the beer was distinctive and highly quaffable. At least it hasn't gone for good.

Cumbrian brewers Jennings, known locally for their powerful Snecklifter, which is only one in a range of quality beers, have branched out to the south snapping up five 'pub dining houses'. Most are to the north of Manchester but one is in leafy Cheshire - the Red Fox at Tarporley, which will be the brewery's southernmost pub by a long way. As well as capitalising on the food operations, Jennings have also said they intend to work on increasing beer barrelage.

More new brews from Porters Brewery. A re-brew of Sleighed (this time at 6.4%) was on sale last month and the end of March will see a welcome reappearance of Porters Stout as a one-off.



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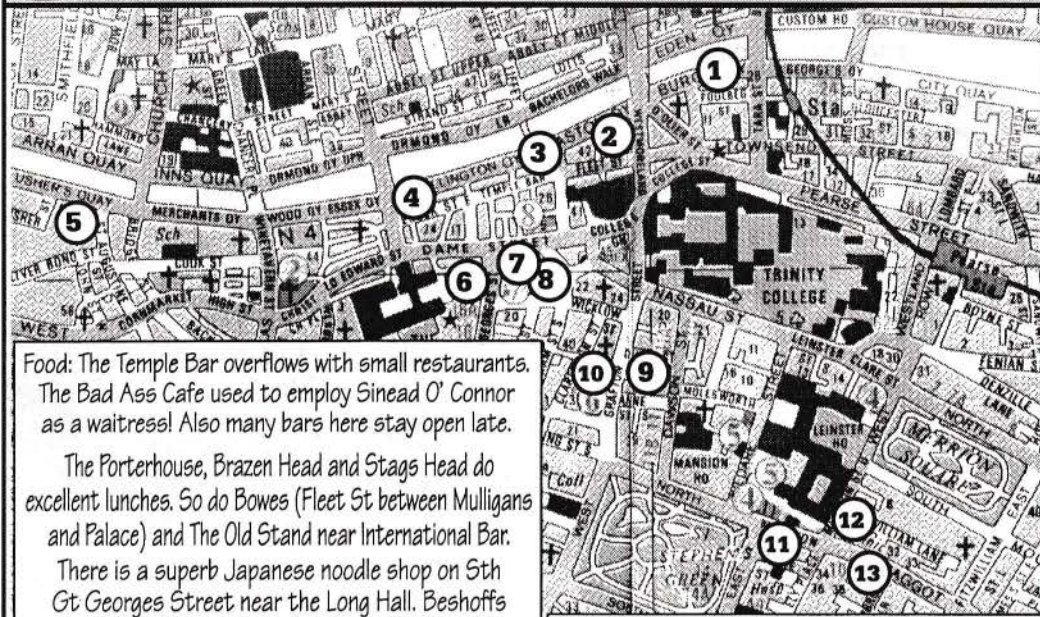
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the pubs

- 1 John Mulligans
- 2 Palace Bar
- 3 Temple Bar (see Text)
- 4 Porterhouse
- 5 Brazen Head
- 6 Long Hall
- 7 Stags Head
- 8 International
- 9 Kehoes
- 10 McDaid's
- 11 O' Donoghue's
- 12 Dohney & Nesbitt
- 13 Toners

Food: The Temple Bar overflows with small restaurants. The Bad Ass Cafe used to employ Sinead O' Connor as a waitress! Also many bars here stay open late.

The Porterhouse, Brazen Head and Stags Head do excellent lunches. So do Bowes (Fleet St between Mulligans and Palace) and The Old Stand near International Bar.

There is a superb Japanese noodle shop on Sth Gt Georges Street near the Long Hall. Beshoffs on Westmoreland St (near Palace) does excellent Fish & Chips. In early evening Davy Byrnes on Duke St (off Grafton St) does fine meals. (see text)

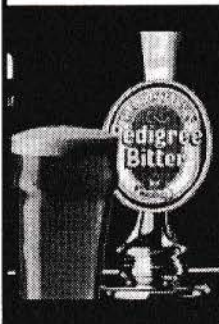
Time taken: All Day (start about 11.30).
NO HALVES (or glasses as the Irish call them)
as these are very much more expensive than Pints.
Allow for four pints in Porterhouse.

12

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Well, here it as (as promised last issue!)...

This heritage tour usually takes me all day (and I do miss out the odd pub from time to time. The walking is not arduous and it is solely 'southside' city centre. I have a rather longer North Side crawl but that is for another year....

There often seem to be as many pubs in Dublin as people. Like most city centres, there is a severe dose of 'bar-itis' at the moment, and the ultra-trndy temple bar area resembles a sort of upmarket Deansgate. The good thing about Dublin though, is that it retains more than a fair share of classic atmospheric boozers. For many Brits this is only spoiled by the dearth of real ale, though to some extent things are looking up on that front as we shall see when the tour reaches the excellent Porterhouse.

Mostly you will be drinking Guinness (which in these pubs REALLY IS GOOD), and this is going to set you back between £2.15 and £2.35 a pint (January prices). The ghastly keg and nitro-keg products (Smithwicks, Killkenny, Beamish Red, and, sadly Caffreys) are the same price but disgusting. One Nitro beer though, the new Becketts Ale from Dublin Brewery Co. is hoppy, and excellent (though FAR too cold!!!) and is worth seeking out. It should be into about 60 pubs as we go to press. They have just launched a new stout which should be looked for too. (Try the Stags Head or Palace among others). Beamish and Murphy's Stout are widely available.

Porter's Stout

Returns for a limited period only...



(1) John Mulligans on Poolbeg St. features in James Joyce's the Dubliners more than once (the original bar is the one on the left). Dark and atmospheric, I once said "arguably the best pint in Dublin" in a newspaper article.

When the regulars saw this...there was an argument. Result, I got barred (and I wasn't fighting!). Still, its pint one and it will be very hard to beat.

Then through the main streets to Fleet Street (pasing only for a quick one in Bowes if the mood takes you) to the Palace Bar. (2). This is truly a classic pub. Full height screens divide the bar into sections, there is a comfy lounge at the back, and the bar furniture is exquisite. Electric rather than gas lighting is now used (I remember...) but otherwise utterly unchanged. Ehich alas can also be said of the Gents in the basement. Proceeding right out of the door you enter the Temple Bar area (3). With so much building work going on, it is impossible to know what will be open from one month to the next. Within a hundred yards (on the same road) are The Norseman, The Auld Dublin, the Oliver St John Gogarty and the Temple Bar itself. At least one will be open, all have individual atmospheres.

The Porterhouse (4) (further along) is new, it brews, and it is utterly superb. REAL ALE. (a bit cold maybe, but excellent, from handpumps behind the bar. Plain Porter (usually nitro only) is utterly outstanding. Wrasslers XXXX Stout is very dry and often on cask. Porterhouse Red (malty bitter) is usually on cask and keg. Loads of beers. Try FOUR. The Brazen Head (5) a slight trek along the quay and then next to the lighting shop is Dublin's oldest pub. The original bit (quite super) is on the right side. Back up to Dame St and to the market area, up Sth St Georges St to the Long Hall (6) a superb and genuine, Art Nouveau pub, though it has lost some good features recently. Back across the road (with a passage to it from Dame Street indicated by a mosaic in the pavement, is the Stags Head (7). Stained glass to die for. Good food, good toasties. Back up to Wicklow St and left to the International Bar (8), a bar furniture classic, and MUCH busier in the evenings.

Then a short walk to Grafton Street (carry on along Wicklow Street then right). First major-ish road on the left is Anne St, where you will find Davy Byrnes. Mentioned in 'Ulysses', very posh, VERY expensive beer, and the best loos in Dublin. Turn right and Right again up to Kehoes (9) on Duke Street. Utter classic pub. Great Snug, great atmosphere.

Back across Grafton Street to McDaid's (10), once VERY republican, now mildly so (except Sat nights). Up Grafton St to St Stephens Green, left along the green to Merrion Row, and O'Donoghues (best pub in the world). See the flying barman, see more Guinness poured in a tiny pub than you thought they brewed in total. You may never leave of course, but it will be very



busy and noisy with the craic. The final ports of call are the rugby pub (Doheny & Nesbitts opposite - nice snug, great if noisy pub- 12 - right out of O'Ds and 50 yards along on the other side) and the fine pint house Toners further aong Baggot St (same side as O'Ds) which has classic atmosphere, great features and the strangest Guinness Font taps I have ever seen.... If you're still with me, well done! The loos are awful, but the pubs are great.

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BEER ALERT. HEAD OF STEAM (Euston London) 11 Irish Beers in Cask form, Porterhouse, Dublin, Kildare etc. March 17 -20 (nb London Drinker Festival across Euston Road at Town Hall 19-21 March, he, he...)

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

MARCH '92

The front page was headed "The case for the prosecution", described as "a critical look at a well known cask beer". So what was all this about? The first paragraph gives an idea. "There is a brewery located in one of the Riding Towns of West Yorkshire. Advertised widely on television, you might be led to think that its flagship beer is mainly drunk by horses (got the picture yet?) This product has long been the bane of real ale drinkers - many say it is the type of beer to give real ale a bad name, generally being bland and utterly characterless. It does however display other characteristics which make you wonder...it never, ever seems to be cloudy, even at the end of a barrel, and while it can display an unpleasant, acrid and sulphury aftertaste, it is never vinegary (i.e. "off")."

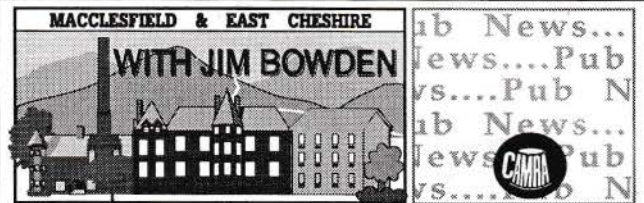
It was suggested that residual yeast in the beer was insufficient to support a secondary fermentation, raising the fundamental question as to whether it was really "real ale". Also, the addition of preservatives gave the beer a longer life, but gave the beer an odd aftertaste. Because yeast filtration and preservative addition were not uncommon among the big brewers, some good advice was given - stick to high quality real ale from local breweries.

There were preliminary announcements for two regular festivals - one at Wigan, and the other at Stockport, which had been renamed as a "beer and cider festival", to reflect the growing interest in cider and perry.

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There was evidence of a growing interest in so-called "in house" beer festivals. The Stanley Arms on Newbridge Lane, Stockport, was to have 75 beers available, whilst the Beer House off Rochdale Road, Manchester, was advertising "over

60 beers". The Flea & Firkin at All Saints (just recently re-opened as the Footage & Firkin) was holding a second festival, after the previous years was such a success - for good measure, there was also to be a special St Patrick's Day celebration. Finally, it was reported that the Old Mill at Cheadle Hulme had just run a very successful two-week beer festival. Several Allied pubs had tried this during the previous year or so, but it was thought that the Old Mill was probably the biggest and the best to date. 25 beers were on offer, and also tours of the pub's cellars (reported to be absolutely spotless).



Chris May, ex-landlord of the **Millstone** in Waters Green, Macclesfield, is moving next door to the **Bull & Gate**. We wish him well.

The **Angel**, Knutsford has been chosen to be in the 1998 **Good Beer Guide**. Other notable entries are the **British Flag**, Coare Street, Macclesfield and the **Boarhound**, Brook Street, Macclesfield. Of course these entries are subject to there being no change in their present status. The **Cotton Tree** in Bollington has new tenants and has been refurbished.

The **Evening Star**, James Street, Macclesfield, a **Marstons pub**, is up for sale at £95,000.

The landlord of the **Wild Boar**, Wincle is leaving in April.



Missing from last month's *Opening Times* was this scene of the official opening of **Stalybridge Station Buffet**. The Mayor of **Tameside** cuts the ribbon while owner **John Hesketh** looks on.

STALYBRIDGE STATION

ORIGINAL BUFFET BAR

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Homecooked Food inc.
THE FAMOUS BLACK PEAS

CONSERVATORY AND
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BUFFET IF REQUIRED

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SUNDAY LUNCH & 7pm - 10.30pm

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Graham &
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you to ...

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PLATFORM ONE

6 GUEST BEERS ☆

☆ QUIZZES ☆

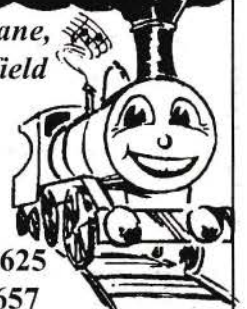
☆ BAR GAMES ☆

REAL ALE £1.20 MON NIGHT

COMEDY NIGHT EVERY SUNDAY FROM 7.30

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Awards and Other Ceremonies

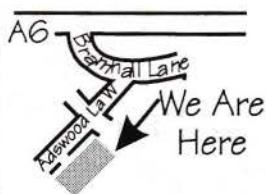
Awards galore were dished out last month. First off the mark was the Griffin in Heaton Mersey which received the Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year award on 15th and our picture shows licensees John and Bev Bonyng with their certificate. One week later and celebrations were at the Davenport Arms in Woodford for a double award - CAMRA's Regional Pub of the Year for 1997 and ten consecutive years in the Good Beer Guide. Yvonne Hallworth and sister Allison were presented with commemorative cake by the brewery and ran two happy hours with beer at 1987 prices. Our picture shows Yvonne and Allison with their two certificates.



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. Please note: Sizes are the same for Stockport beer Festival Programme. Advertising Rates are detailed on page 2.

SOUTHLANDS HOTEL & COPPERFIELDS BAR



- ★ FUNCTIONS
- ★ 29 BEDROOMS, 16 EN-SUITE
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- ★ FREE HOUSE
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EVENINGS

5 Different Cask Ales
Live Entertainment Saturdays

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

In Buxton a lot of comings and goings (well mainly goings). Landlords are leaving at the Prince of Wales (Marstons); Devonshire (Hardy Hanson); Sun, Blazing Rag (Free). The Ashwood Park Hotel is up for sale and landlord Barry Stead of the Devonshire in Ashwood Dale is leaving not only the pub but also the business.

In Hyde the Commercial on Commercial Brow is closed and the recently re-opened Wellington - Bass Free - has no real ale but has got real cider - at the time of the visit it was Coombes.

The Rock Inn on Glossop Road, Chisworth, is now a Banks's pub and was serving Camerons and a guest! The Rock was previously Theakstons and used to serve up belly dancers!

More news on the cider side - in Old Glossop the Wheatsheaf (free) has begun serving the real stuff and at the time of the report this was Wilkins.

A bit of "no news" news - in Kettleshulme the Bulls Head is still up for sale - an offer is thought to have been agreed back in Spring '96 but finance seems to be the problem.

The Hare & Hounds on Dooley Lane (between Romiley and Marple) has started serving a guest beer.

Droylsden News

Vaux's (earlier Wilson's) Old House At Home on Fairfield Road has re-opened under the odd name of the Horse & Frog, complete with attractive painted hanging sign, and the bar of this long-time keg pub has sprouted a couple of handpumps. When OT called, however, the pumpclip for Wards Bitter was reversed; and when Vaux Mild was ordered, the barman scuttled off to a far-away keg fount (invisible to a customer standing in front of the handpump), and one of those depressingly familiar conversations ensued ("Could I have it from the handpump please?" "No mate, this is better". "Well, maybe - but it isn't what I asked for."). It turns out that the pub never sells mild in cask form, and it seems very doubtful whether it ever in fact sells any real ale at all. Nought out of ten for retail skills and customer service. **RPJ.**

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STOCKPORT PUB GUIDE VIADUCTS & VAULTS 2 IS NOW AVAILABLE ORDER FORM

Please send me:

- Viaducts and Vaults 2 @ £3.95 each (inc p&p)
- Good Beer Guide 97 @ £10.99 each (inc p&p)
- Nine Towns Bitter @ £3.25 each (inc p&p)
- Manchester Pubs & Bars @ £3.50 each (inc p&p)
- History of Whitefield Pubs @ £7.95 each (inc p&p)

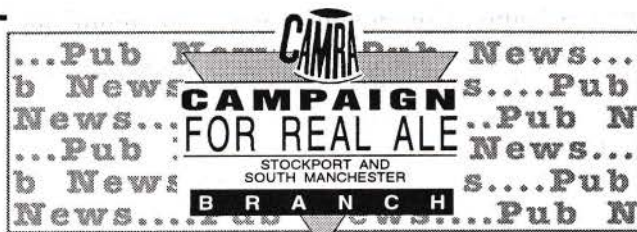
I enclose a cheque for £ _____ made payable to CAMRA

Stockport & South Manchester

Name: _____

Address: _____

Please send to: Jim Flynn, 66 Downham Rd, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 5EG



Allied Domecq (who trade locally as Tetley) has announced the disposal of 69 pubs from its northern operation following an internal review. The company said it had looked at its future trading needs and was "off-loading houses in areas where demographics no longer fitted its criteria". Pubs in the OT area included in this total are the **Chequered Flag**, Hulme; **Cock & Bull**, Ardwick; **Garibaldi**, Gorton and the **Golden Lion** in Macclesfield.

Ye Olde Vic in Edgeley has once again started taking guest beers. It's just one a week at the moment but expect some interesting brews to appear as they are being largely sourced by the enterprising Phil Spencer of Openshaw. When OT called early last month Tisbury Peter Austin's was on sale, and very good it was too. Previously featured had been Northumberland Castles Bitter and Beartown Bear's Arse (!) with RCH PG Steam and Exmoor Ale in the pipeline. Owner Glen Geldard says that so far they have gone well and he is encouraged by this toe in the water.

Charity news now - *Ye Olde Cock* in Didsbury recently handed over a £800 cheque to Gladiator Warrior for donation to the Christie Hospital. The money was raised by donations taken at the door on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

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Not too far away, the *Parrswood* is now featuring live Irish music on Friday nights, when anything from two to six musicians arrive for an impromptu session from around 9.00pm. Easter Sunday night will see an Easter Bonnet parade at the pub.

In Clayton, the **Church** on Clayton Lane has been resigned as a Gibbs Mew house, following that company's purchase of previous owners, Centric Pub Co. No change to the beer range, though, which remains as Bass Toby Light and Stones Bitter, both on handpump. Nearby, the **Victoria** on Croft Street was set to re-open as we went to press. The pub had been closed for some time following a fire late last year.

Some of you will have noticed that OT was a tad late this month. This was due to the Editor being a little behind schedule and subsequent difficulties in the brain of the production editor. Sorry. Back on schedule in April, promise!

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Ever Changing Guest Beers including:
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Your Hosts Brian and Tracey
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The Victoria

Hall Street, Offerton

Greenalls Mild & Bitter,
Stones Bitter

All Cask Conditioned

BAR SNACKS AVAILABLE

Your Hosts

Ian & Christine

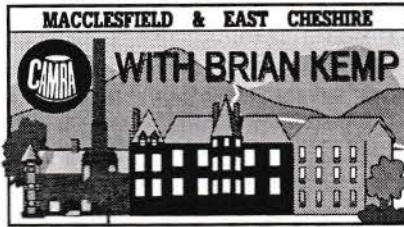
Tel: (0161) 480 3983

Holts have completed their refurbishment of the *Pack Horse* in Openshaw. Inside the pub has been redecorated in Holts traditional but unfussy style and outside the pubs has been repainted and re-signed. It looks better now than it's done for years and looks set to be a success. Both Mild and Bitter are on handpump at the usual keen prices. Not so good news across the road, though where the long-closed *Wrexham* has been demolished. A fine little pub in its time, and utterly unspoilt inside this is a serious loss to our stock of heritage pubs.

Another slant on extended happy hour has been seen at the **Three Crowns** in Heaton Norris. During the week, from opening time on Monday morning until 8.00pm on Friday evening, Boddingtons Bitter sells at £1.05 and Old Henry at a real bargain 97p. During the weekend, price increases to the normal £1.35 and £1.07. The Old Henry produced a good quality bargain when OT called in early February.

Cains Mild has been restored to the *Crown*, Heaton Moor, a welcome return selling alongside Boddingtons Bitter, Thomas Greenalls Original and a guest beer. Recent guests have included relative rarities for Stockport, Shepherd Neame Best Bitter and Ridley's Rumpus.

Whitbread's Hogshead chain continues to impress with the enterprising brews on offer. The first three weeks of this month see five special beers brewed for the Five Nations Rugby Championship. Named after the national anthems used in the tournament, the beers include Sweet Chariot (4.4%, brewed by Young's of Wandsworth), Flower of Scotland (4.1%, Caledonian of Edinburgh), Bread of Heaven (4.8%, Brains of Cardiff), Molly Malone (4.6%, Hilden of County Antrim - a 'true' cask conditioned Irish Red Ale) and the real surprise, Marseillaise, a cask conditioned French beer from the Brasserie des Deux Rivières in Normandy (brewed with a mixture of Bavarian, French and English hops, but with the character of an English Ale - in fact although the hops are mostly aromatic and the bite is all malt it really is rather good! - *The Beer Monster*). Easter will see the Hogsheads - which include the **Lass O'Gowrie** in the City Centre - taking a special brew, again from Young's, Double Chocolate Stout. One or two of them will also have supplies of edible chocolate body paint to go with it! So buy your carry outs and make of that what you will!



The Franklin Inn, Steeple Street, Macclesfield



As regular readers will know, I divide pubs into two principal categories, viz., those that are suitable for wives and girlfriends, and those that are not. My preference tending to be with the latter. Last month's feature on the Angel in Knutsford was definitely at one extreme end of this spectrum in that it would even be suitable to take your mother-in-law! (As mine has taken to reading these little articles I'm sure I will get some comment on that!!) This month we go to the opposite end of that spectrum and visit the Franklin Inn on Steeple Street on the fringe of Macclesfield town centre. The Franklin is what is known in Good Beer Guide parlance as 'basic'. That is not to say that it does not sell good beer because it does; Robinson's Hatters Mild and Best Bitter to be precise. It is only a handy trolley-dash from the local Tesco Superstore if you need reviving after doing your shopping! It is typical of many Macclesfield pubs in that it stands unpretentiously amongst rows of terraced cottages and is overlooked by the local gasholder. It consists of three rooms. A small tap room on your left as you enter. A larger darts room on your right with the main bar area and L-shaped bar straight ahead. The main bar is rather dominated by a pool table. It used to be the

only pub I had come across that boasted two dartboards. I even scored 180 on one of them many years ago! Whether it still has two I am not sure. I did not notice when Jim and I were in there last Sunday.

The Franklin has not changed in 22 years to my certain knowledge and to be honest Robinsons could spend a few bob on some modest refurbishment without destroying its undeniable character. I had my stag night here back in 1980 and my one lasting memory (I'm surprised I have any!!) was of the then landlord, Paul Quinn (later of the George in Compstall) getting fed up pulling pints for us and filling a two-gallon plastic bucket with Best Bitter and standing it in the middle of the floor. Somebody then produced a small plastic duck from somewhere and floated it on the top! Or am I imagining that part? Anyhow, the Franklin is an honest backstreet, working-class boozer and deserves to be enjoyed for that alone.

THE CASTLE
 OLDHAM STREET, MANCHESTER
 NOW SERVING THE COMPLETE
 RANGE OF ROBINSONS CASK BEERS!
 Old Stockport Bitter, Best Bitter,
 Hatters Mild, Dark Mild,
 Frederics, Old Tom and Hartleys

A WARM WELCOME
 AND FINE BEER IN
 A CLASSIC PUB

T H E
Robinson's
 C O L L E C T I O N





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

March 97

Monday 10th - Social, Thatched Tavern, Reddish. Starts 9.00pm.

Thursday 13th - Branch Meeting, Waldorf, Gore Street (just down from Piccadilly Station heading into towards Piccadilly), Manchester City Centre. Starts 8.00pm.

Saturday 15th - Fallowfield Stagger - Starts 7.00pm Kingsway; 8.30 at the Friendship, Wilmslow Road.

Monday 17th - Social, Angel, King Street, Knutsford. Starts 9.00pm.

Friday 21st - Minibus to Beer Festival at Bhurtpore Arms, Aston. Depart Royal Oak, Didsbury 6.15pm; Crown, Heaton Lane 6.30. Phone 477 1973 to book (NB full at time of going to press but reserve places may become available).

Monday 24th - Social, Blossoms, Buxton Road (A6), Heaviley. Starts 9.00pm.

Thursday 27th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Greyhound, Bowden Street, Edgeley. 8.00pm onwards.

Monday April 7th - Social, Vulcan, Gorton Lane, Gorton. Starts 9.00pm

March 97

High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:

Saturday 8th - Social trip to Stockport. Start Railway, Great Portwood St at 8.00pm and move on at 8.30 to the Arden Arms. Finish in the Crown, Heaton Lane. Details from Tim Jones on 0161 371 9006.

Monday 10th - Monthly branch meeting at Stalybridge Station Buffet. Starts 8.30pm. **NB all GBG surveyors must bring completed forms back tonight.**

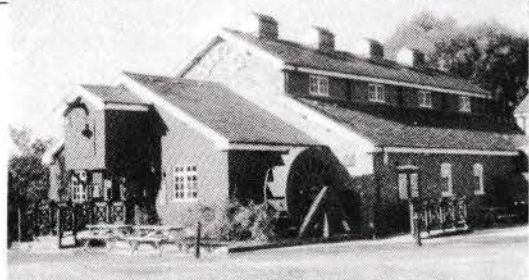
Saturday 15th - Frank Wood's 40th birthday bash. Details from Frank on 01457 865426

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 event:

Monday 24th - Monthly branch meeting at the Parkgate, Over Peover. Starts 8.00pm.

To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner

18



Now Under New Management with your hosts
Jon and Judi Laidlaw

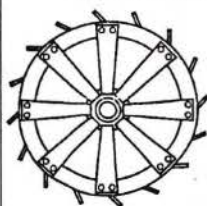
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Food available 12 - 9 every day

Quiz Nights Tuesday and Thursday



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Claire and Howard welcome all their
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MANCHESTER'S
1st FESTIVAL ALE HOUSE

9 HANDPUMPS - 6 GUEST ALES

FOOD 11.30-2.30 & 5-7 Mon-Fri

and 11.30 - 2.30 Saturday

CONSTANTLY CHANGING RANGE OF
HIGHEST QUALITY GUEST ALES

MANCHESTER MATTERS



by Rhys Jones

The Town Hall Tavern in the City Centre is to close for conversion to some style or other of cafe bar. Bass have already given us a Bar Coast (and they can keep it), so what "concept" awaits the Town Hall Tavern? At least their All Bar One and Goose & Granite chains, neither yet represented in Manchester, do generally sell real ale. Bass also plan to refurbish the Crown on Fountain Street, but this is likely to be a less far-reaching job.

Still in this part of town, the Bank is now closed for conversion to a Firkin (most probably without a brewery). Favoured name is the Financier & Firkin, though you'd have thought they'd have used that one up already. I suppose there's little hope for my fancied name the Philobiblist & Firkin - but it's suitably obscure, has a pleasing echo of "bibulous", and, meaning "book-lover", is most appropriate for the former Portico Library. By the time you read this, Manchester's original Firkin, the Flea at All Saints, should be open again. Renamed the Footage & Firkin (as in cinema footage - it'll make sense when you get used to it), this one will have a brewery. Indeed, the brewing facilities may be more extensive than before, in keeping with the new policy whereby most new Firkins (of which some 170 are planned this year) will not brew on the premises but will be supplied from a network of "genuine" brew-pubs scattered through the estate. In many parts of the country, this extension and dilution of the Firkin concept has led to major changes of character (and name) in many well-loved pubs, which has been resisted - quite often successfully - by CAMRA and the wider community. In the Manchester region, this has not so far been a major problem, largely because, until you get as far west as Bolton and Wigan, pubs belonging to the Firkin chain's owners Allied-Domecq are fairly rare, and those suitable for conversion to a Firkin even rarer. Nevertheless, we must be vigilant.

Paddy's Goose in the City Centre has dropped Draught Bass but gained Greene King IPA and Abbot on handpump - expect to see these beers in more Magic pubs as the Suffolk brewery gets to grips with its acquisition of this pub company. At Wetherspoons on Piccadilly Gardens, Westons First Quality cider has been discontinued in favour of the same company's

earthier, dryer Bounds Brand, still served on handpump - but there's still no real cider at the Deansgate branch. In Levenshulme the Wheatsheaf no longer sells Boddingtons Bitter, while in Rusholme the Welcome seems to have dropped Greenalls Festival Bitter.

In Gorton, the Gorton Arms has gained handpumped Banks's Mild - full marks to licensee Cazz for building back trade in a pub many of us had written off. The Royal Oak has gained Chesters Mild and the Pomona Tetley Bitter, both on handpump. The Friendship has lost its £1-a-pint "house beer" Friendship Bitter (as indeed have all the Marstons pubs which took this beer under a house name - it's no longer brewed). The Vulcan is dropping Boddingtons Bitter on the grounds of poor sales; it seems that the Boddies handpump is to be replaced by a fount for John Smiths "smooth" keg bitter. I suppose this makes a kind of sense in that the keg will take an age to go off if there's nobody drinking it, and indeed discerning drinkers will surely wish to stay with the well-kept cask Wilsons beers here, now at permanent bargain prices of £1.05 for mild and £1.15 for bitter. With lunches once again available, the Vulcan is well worth a visit.

In Withington, the handpumped range at the Withington Ale House is now Theakstons Bitter and XB, Moorhouses Pendle Witch, and a couple of guests, mainly from reputable regional brewers - when I called late last month the guests were Fargo from Charles Wells and Mansfield's seasonal beer White Rabbit. Gone are the dreadful (not to say deceitful) false barrels with their taps serving suspiciously gassy-tasting beer, and the place is now at last making some attempt to justify its name. The decor consists largely of photographs and ephemera of genuine local interest, including a programme for the Didsbury Agricultural Show of 1946 - a glimpse of a vanished Manchester. The place isn't cheap, though; standard guest beer price seems to be £1.89, which I thought a hefty price to pay for (thankfully quite well-kept) White Rabbit at 4.4%ABV.

Finally, hearty congratulations to the Old Wellington in the City Centre, which re-opened successfully on February 21st following severe damage caused by last June's bomb. I have a soft spot for the Old Wellington, as I'm pretty sure it's the first Manchester pub I had a drink in; more on its re-opened state next time, although early reports of keg Cidermaster cider on a fake handpump do not augur well. Of course, when the 'new' city centre gets underway in a year or two, both the Wellington and Sinclairs next door are due to be rotated and moved to the other side of Shambles square, to a 'more fitting heritage position' - and in no way to allow for a bigger Marks & Spencers, of course!

APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(OT155)

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

STUDENT MEMBERSHIP ONLY £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.





The Beer House

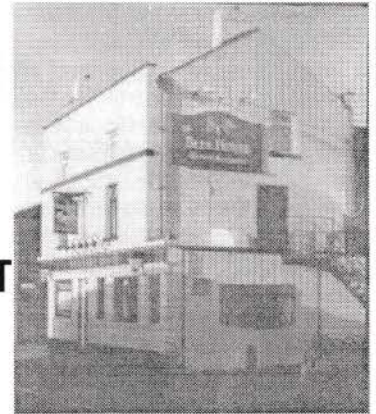
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12 REAL ALES ON OFFER including

**BURTONWOOD BITTER, THEAKSTONS XB and
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+ 8 EVER CHANGING GUEST BEERS**
including an EVER CHANGING GUEST MILD

**PLUS A RANGE OF TRADITIONAL CIDERS, DRAUGHT
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WEST COUNTRY BEER FESTIVAL May 1-5

50 plus BEERS

Many **NEW** Spring & Summer Ales,
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PLUS 6 Foreign Beers on Draught!

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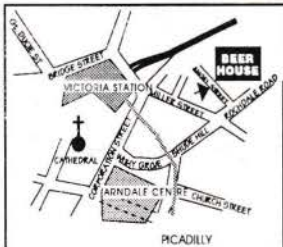
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★ EVENING MEALS 5 - 7 FRIDAY ★

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