



OPENING TIMES



Distributed throughout Stockport; Central, East & South Manchester; Tameside; N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield

Volume 17 Issue 4

APRIL 2001 No:204

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FREE

OFF THE RAILS?

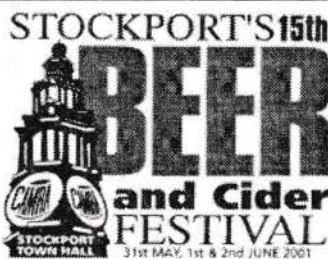
Holt's opened their latest outlet, the Railway, Lapwing Lane, West Didsbury, on 20 March and the event marked a significant departure from the usual Joseph Holt way of doing things. Most of what has been done here is commendable; some is exceptionally good – but there are other aspects which threaten to undermine and even destroy Holt's reputation as the most traditional of our local brewers.

First the good news. The (very small) pub has been extended into the not much bigger shop next door and this really is an object lesson to others as to how it should be done. Rather than make just one room, the extension has been used to create a series of compartments divided by wood and glass partitions in a style which successfully combines traditional and modern styles. In addition the old front snug (originally an off-sales area) had been reinstated (albeit on a slightly larger scale) and this too had been partitioned off from the rest of the pub, again successfully combining the old and the new. Indeed everything about this pub design shouts quality, from the off-white and pale green décor, stylish light fittings and old-new furniture.

An interesting menu is promised and the licensees, Karen Daniels and Peter Gregory, clearly know how a good pub should be run. They are highly visible and have an impressive attention to detail, just what every pub needs, in fact. So, what's the downside? Holt's traditionalists will balk at the beer prices - £1.35 for bitter and £1.27 for mild, but this is still very cheap for the area – compare and contrast with the Metropolitan across the road, for example. There's a guest beer, too. Good in principle but even by local standards is £2 a pint for Moorhouses Pendle Witch a little on the high side?

But these are minor quibbles that can be easily dismissed. Where Holt's have gone wrong, very wrong, is with the other products on sale. Apart from the three beers mentioned, the Railway also sells 'smooth cask' lager, mild and bitter. On handpump. All three are indeed cask conditioned but on the way to the bar have mixed gasses injected into them, which makes them anything but 'real ale'. Robinson's do something similar but sensibly sell these beers from typical keg pumps. Holt's however have gone down a route that deliberately blurs the distinction between smooth and real ale – it is a shoddy and shameful practice and until it stops the Railway cannot be recommended for anything at all. Avoid this pub until common sense prevails.

See also Editorial, page 2



Making Music

Details of the entertainment on offer at this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, once again sponsored by the Stockport Express, have now been released and we are able to bring you this exclusive preview.

Along with some well-established Festival favourites, this year we are bringing you some bands new to the event, all well-established professional musicians and sure to make the event go with a swing. On Thursday evening we kick off this year's festival with a band that proved such a hit last year – **The Deltones**. Having re-formed a couple of years ago, they are really on top form with their mixture of 60s, 70s and 80s rock and pop music. On Friday lunchtime you will once again be able to see, hear and experience the magnificent **Mighty Wurlitzer**. This really impressed at last year's festival, so much so that we hope to make it something of a fixture for our Friday lunchtime session. Once again the organist will be Michael Holmes.

For Friday evening, anyone that likes zydeco and cajun music will be pleased to know that we have a superb band from Wales called **Joe le Taxi**, a well-known band that appears at most of the cajun music festivals around the country. Friday is always our busiest night so arrive early to hear this band.

...continued on page 7

IN APRIL'S OPENING TIMES

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2



THE CROWN INN

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. Just what are dear old Joey Holt's up to? They carry out a terrific job at the Railway in West Didsbury and then at a stroke risk ruining their ultra-traditional reputation. Let's be clear, whether it's cock up or conspiracy, "smooth cask" on handpump is way beyond the pale.

It's not funny and it's not clever. To be honest, it's not very good either - the 'smooth cask lager', a bog standard 3.8 per cent brew which is less gassy and rather warmer than lager drinkers might expect, seems designed to appeal to precisely no-one. As for the 'smooth cask' mild and bitter, are people really daft enough to pay a premium to have what amounts to fresh air injected into their beer? Particularly when it's even dispensed in the same way as the cheaper, 'real' equivalent. Are Holt's aware - and have they been made aware - of what they might be bringing upon themselves by this nonsense? The Railway will be ineligible for any CAMRA award or guide while this goes on. They run the risk of their beers being banned from every CAMRA-run beer festival in the country. And for what? Holt's have apparently introduced at the Railway "an extended product range...to ensure its success" Fair enough, but by including in that range products served in a way which deliberately blurs the distinction between smooth beers and genuine real ales, the price of that success, if indeed it is achieved, could be very high indeed. A reputation lies shattered - let us hope that it can be pieced together again before too long.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

On a happier note, this is Mild Challenge time again. This year we have a record number of pubs taking part and I hope that all OT readers will at least have an attempt at the Challenge and give these pubs the support they deserve.

John Clarke

The VERY observant readers of OT may notice a few subtle changes in its appearance this month. OT has been forced to take note that we are in the 21st century, as our very 20th Century machine turned up its toes as we were going to press. This does mean that Opening Times on-line will finally become a reality. From next month, the whole of OT will be available on the web as we go to press (though I'm not giving out the web address until next issue) as Acrobat pdf format files, and from August a whole interactive magazine will appear, with extra features.

P.B. Hutchings

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 204

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. Editors: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ (0161) 477 1973; Paul Hutchings, 8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport Cheshire, SK4 2NP. ☎ & Fax (0161) 432 8384. News, articles and letters welcome. All editorial items may be submitted in **most** popular WP formats or preferably ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!) or via e-mail to johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com Adverts or photos should be "hard copy" or in CorelDraw 3,5 or 7 (*.cdr) format or TIFF or EPS files (submit printed proofs for checking and ensure that any "include all fonts" options are on). All editorial items © CAMRA: may be reproduced if source acknowledged. All Advertising images are copyright the respective design sources (Largely CPPR, but all other copyrights and trademarks acknowledged).

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Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs - Join CAMRA now - see page 24!

STOCKPORT'S 15th



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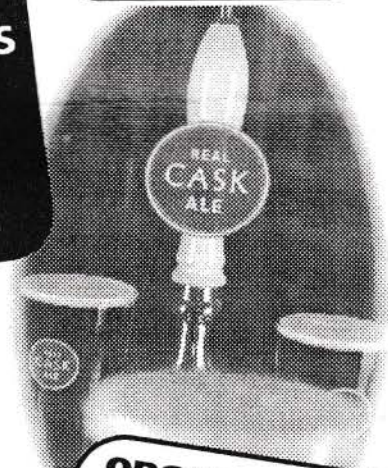
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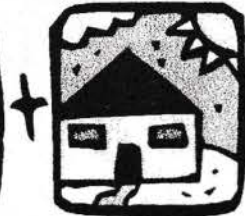
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5 till 6
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A choice of 3 curries & rice



PUB OF THE MONTH APRIL 2001

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					



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for April 2001 is the Lass O'Gowrie on Charles Street, Manchester.

The 'world famous' Lass O'Gowrie is Manchester's, indeed the region's, longest surviving brew-pub, having started production of its malt-extract beers back in 1983, a feat made all the more remarkable when you realise that it's a Whitbread pub.

It's long been extremely popular, appealing to students, media folk (the BBC is nearby) and city types alike. Despite its popularity and undoubtedly being well run, the pub for long failed to really capture the imagination of many of the city's beer drinkers – probably due to the slightly dull house beers being accompanied by a fairly staid Whitbread range.

That started to change when the pub came under the Hogshead banner but things really took off when Jamie Bell took over in late 1999. The pub came out of the Hogshead chain, a move that substantially increased the range of beers available to it, and there have been moves to revamp the range of house beers, which are to become more individual and distinctive. The current beer policy is one (or more) Lass O'Gowrie beers, a couple from the Whitbread stable and a range of guests. Quality is invariably top notch, and the pub has justifiably earned a place in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide. In addition there's real cider on handpump and a small range of Belgian bottled beers.

Jamie himself has beer in his blood – his parents run the taps in Lytham, another Whitbread-owned multi-beer free house that has won a clutch of CAMRA awards. This, however, will be the first such award for the Lass and it is a tribute to Jamie's hard work and dedication that this City Centre institution is now well and truly on the cask ale map. The award will be presented on the evening of Thursday, 26th April (*Note change from usual date*) when a memorable evening is in prospect. JC.

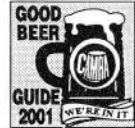
The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 204:

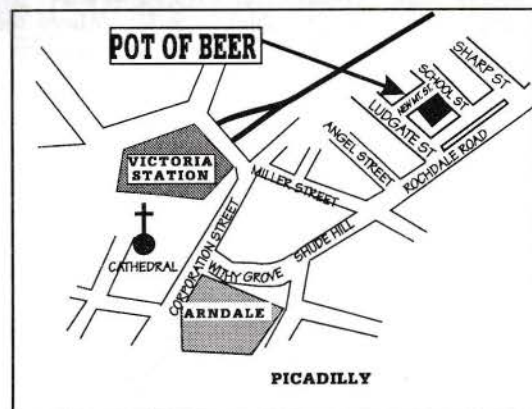
John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Jim Flynn, Stuart Ballantyne, Mark McConachie, Rhys Jones, Phil Levison, Tom Lord, Tim Jones, Paul Stanyer, Steve Bray

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STAGGER

with Jim Flynn

Reddish & Heaton Chapel

It was a comparatively pleasant winter's evening when we met up at the Fir Tree in North Reddish.

The Fir Tree is now the only pub in the area that serves real ale but the cynic might express the view that this is one of its few redeeming features. We sat in the lounge which was populated by a young clientele, so much so that one of our number suggested that he was going to apply for a bus pass the following day. The attraction seemed to be the televisions with the pop videos and the electronic games - it can't have been the quality of the Tetley Bitter. Perhaps we should have gone in the vault where the customers weren't quite so young and the TVs weren't quite so loud.

Ignoring the dubious temptation to walk down to the Reddish Vale with its keg beers from Bass, we sauntered down into the centre of Reddish, pass Whitbread's Houldsworth (no real ale) to the Thatched Tavern. The Thatched is a great little pub which has had cask Tetley Bitter, but no tonight. We were told that there had been delivery problems. So our next stop was the Union where we were warmly welcomed by the very affable licensee. The pub itself was subject to a very unsympathetic refurbishment by Robinson's some years ago; this saw the removal of many internal features leaving just one largely open-plan room. The current licensee is however making the best of the cards he has been dealt. The quality of the one cask beer, Robinson's Best Bitter, was good, so much so that most of us had another one as a result.

Next door is the Grey Horse, much larger than the Union but with similar brick and stone external features. At one time there must have been a variety of rooms here but now it's just an extensive lounge and vault. The bank of handpumps dispense just the one cask ale, Boddingtons Bitter. Sounding like the old codgers the customers in the Fir Tree probably took us for, we lamented, over the intrusive background music, that this beer is not what it was. Having said that, the beer in the Grey Horse wasn't bad at all.

Leaving Reddish, we took the half-mile walk down to Heaton Chapel and the George & Dragon, a large, popular community pub. The pub has been refurbished to a high standard and opened out in the process. Given the popularity of the pub, there is only one real ale on sale, Boddingtons Bitter. Sitting in the non-smoking area it was clear that the pub's focus had turned towards food, especially at lunchtimes. Having said that, the beer was at least up to the standards of the Grey Horse.



Off down Manchester Road and just over the border into Heaton Norris is the Ash, with its elaborate brick and terracotta exterior. The pub was completely refurbished last year, after some years of neglect and decline. Like the George & Dragon, there is no longer a separate vault, but similarly there is a vault area complete with pool table. The old dated cocktail bar is now a dining area and the concert room holds cabaret evenings (a Robbie Williams tribute artist was advertised around the pub). It certainly seems to be working, with the karaoke particularly popular on the night we visited. There were two cask beers on sale (sod's law being what it is, the pub's new guest beer policy started the very next night), Boddingtons Bitter and Greene King's Old Speckled Hen. Having already had our fill of Boddingtons, we went for the Greene King beer which after the cask was changed (at the intervention of the licensee) we found to be very enjoyable. Chris, an avid Opening Times reader, asked us to remember him to all the other readers (that's enough dedications - ed(1)). Back over the railway to the Hinds Head, perhaps the most upmarket pub on the Stagger. Externally it is a country-style pub with its own garden. Inside, there is basically a single room broken up by different levels and partitions with a conservatory restaurant area to the side. There were six cask beers on sale; Cain's Bitter (as a guest), John Smiths Bitter, Thwaites Bitter, Fullers London Pride, Marston's Pedigree and Taylor's Landlord. None of the beers were from pub owners Whitbread (licensee Alan Preston has the pub on




an extended lease so is under no threat from the impending sale of the Whitbread pub estate). We tried all bar the Cain's and the John Smiths, and they were all found to be very good, with the Landlord the pick of the crop. It was easy to see how this pub did so well in the recent 2001 Pub of the Year vote

So ended an interesting and varied Stagger. Reddish remains badly served for real ale but of those that do serve the real thing, all are worth a visit in their own right. Of course, this article can only reflect what we found on one particular night and shouldn't be taken as a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers.






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The much loved Opening Times Competition is taking a break but should be back next month!

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Puzzled, Cheadle:

Congratulations to CAMRA on your 30th birthday, may I also wish you well with your 'Ask for Cask' campaign, supporting local brewers of Real Ale.

However, I find it strange that in your March 'Opening Times' almost 50% of the pages have advertising or reference to foreign and often bottled beers, including at least one full page advert. Have your basic principles now given way to advertising profit? Furthermore how can you claim to support local pubs whilst at the same time inferring that customers are being ripped off by your continuing feature 'How to Complain'.

(The support of distinctive beers, be they foreign or bottled, has long been part of CAMRA's remit. Very few local pubs rip off their customers but readers should be made aware of how to deal with those that do. As to 'advertising profit' - if only! - Ed(1). CAMRA is a founder member of the European Beer Consumers Union, and as such promotes craft/quality brewed European beers brewed in their country of origin - as opposed to the British brewed Euro-fizz available in so many pubs. As to the list of Trading Standards Offices in the 'How to complain' section, the inclusion of such in local CAMRA newsletters is mandated by CAMRA national policy. We at OT support GOOD, and well-run local pubs - some few of which establishments feel able to advertise in this publication. There are many such, good pubs in our circulation area, many more than can be included in the Good Beer Guide - a great number of which we feature from time to time, There are also, alas, a very few establishments that are, frankly, poor. It is for those occasions that the unwitting drinker has visited one of these, that we include the list. Ed(2).)

From Roy Muckleston, Shrewsbury:

With reference to the article "A Day in Paradise" in Opening Times 202, on a recent visit to the brewery I found that the £1 per pint offer on the first Friday of the month is only between 5 and 11pm. Just a small alteration, but one you might like to be aware of. On my visit they still had Valentines Ale (4.1%) on sale, served direct from the barrel!

Letters to Opening Times are welcome by post to:

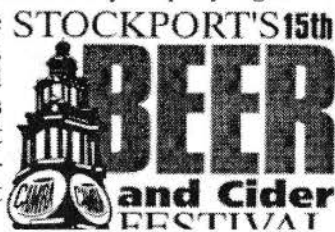
The Editor, Opening Times, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport. SK3 9HD or via the internet to johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com

Making Music ...continued from page 1

Saturday lunchtime is our quiet drinkers session which has proved so popular in recent years. Festival-goers should also note that from 9.00pm every night the Family Room will be come a quiet room for those who want a drink away from the hustle and bustle of the main hall. The Saturday afternoon highlight will be the announcement of the winners in CAMRA's National Cider & Perry Championships, together with the chance to try the winners.

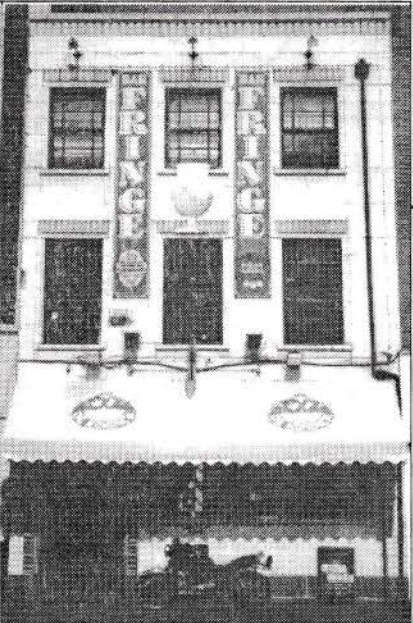
On Saturday evening we have for our last night a very popular local band called A Few Good Men. Many of you will have heard of them and seen the polished performances of this rock band. Followers of the band should come along and enjoy the night. With good music and interesting beers and ciders, why not make this your party night?

Next month we preview some of the highlights from the beer, cider and perry on offer - and there are certainly some treats in store there! Don't forget those important diary dates - May 31st, June 1st and 2nd at Stockport Town Hall.



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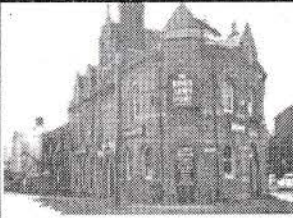
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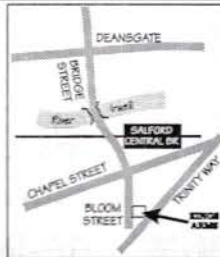
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The never-ending takeover saga of Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries (who trade locally as Banks's and Marston's) might be drawing to a close this month. An attempted buy-out led by current Wolves boss David Thompson looks to have failed with the withdrawal of a crucial financial backer. That leaves the way open for bookies favourite Robert Breare to buy the company. He is acting in tandem with both Enterprise Inns and Greene King who have been eyeing up large parts of the W&D estate. Chances are most of the local outlets, and certainly those in south Manchester, will not change hands but as to who will be brewing their beer...

Customers at the Marble Arch (Rochdale Road), and home of Marble Brewery, have contributed nearly £300 to charity for Comic Relief and Stonham Housing Association. Activities have included, amongst other things a sponsored silence, bar staff in pyjamas and transvestite brewing (size 16 skirt, flouncey blouse and wellington boots).

On a 'hoppier' note, the brewery has acquired a larger range of hops including New Zealand Pacific Gem, German Hersbrucker and Spalt Select, and Belgian Goldings (East of Kent). These will be in use as soon as the Soil Association has given the OK. Berry fruit and citrus notes along with the traditional Golding aroma should complement the existing range nicely.

Brewery tours are also available, with pre-booking, including beer and food at a reasonable price. A 'dry' tour is available for free, as long as the brewer is in the building, with a contribution to Stonham being appreciated. The Marble Beerhouse (Chorltoncum-Hardy) will be hosting a mini fest of Scottish beer at the end of April, including a rarely seen couple from Sulwath Brewery, Castle Douglas - Dave the managers' old stomping ground.

Pressure of time prevented our usual ring-round local brewers (so by way of compensation, we will have mega micro news next time). However, we do know that Pictish's April seasonal will be a stormer. The 5 per cent Maelstrom is said to be exceptionally hoppy and bitter, even by Pictish standards! No prisoners taken there, then. Phoenix, meanwhile, also have a new one out this month. St George's Flag is a 4.3 per cent bitter, described as a light amber coloured beer with a traditional English hop flavour. Again, one to look out for.



...is indisposed, and probably feeling more curmudgeonly than usual

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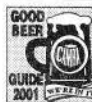


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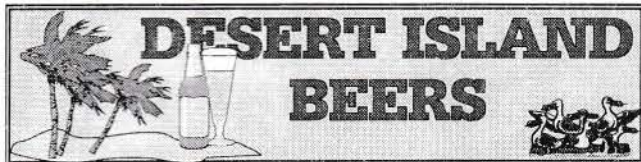


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This month's Desert Island Choice comes from Mike, licensee of the Kings Arms, Bloom Street, Salford. Already armed with the current Good Beer Guide, the Champion Beer of Britain, Moorhouses Black Cat, and the Champion Winter Beer, Orkney Skullsplitter, these are his other choices:

"As a spotty youth I approached the crowded bar, and, with all the confidence my fifteen years could muster, asked for 'a pint of beer, please'. Panic washed over me as the harassed barmaid said impatiently, 'what kind of beer, love?' Surely, beer was beer. My embarrassment was only saved by hearing someone along the bar request a pint of mild. 'Mild', I repeated gratefully, and retreated into my nearly blown cover.

"This was my first faltering step into the mysterious world of the pub and why the memory of the now defunct Walkers Mild will always stay with me.

"Time does not necessarily lead to discernment and it took the dubious pleasure of late adolescent parties with the attendant tins of Watney Party Seven (with the usual garnish of cigarette ash), to send me rushing headlong into the arms of the real ale fraternity. Whilst never wishing to repeat this experience, a desert island would be the ideal situation to contemplate past folly.

"Ale is a matter of taste, and personally being drawn to pale, hoppy beers, Archers Golden (pre Burns Leisure) must rank as my all time favourite ale. Having recently returned to said pint, it is gratifying to note, that unlike many other micros that have suffered as a result of outward investment, the taste and quality have not appreciably changed.

"The golden moments of discovery have always been the driving force of the 'professional' beer drinker, and in recent years, none have enlightened my taste buds more than the Durham White Series, all of which have distinct flavour, and are brewed with the skill and care of the enthusiast.

"A session beer with flavour and body has always been a personal Holy Grail, one that seems to be shared by brewer Richard Bazen. His Bridgewater Navigator and, more lately, Phoenix Navy have been welcome companions of many a convivial afternoon.

"These beers, excellent as they may be, however, could only provide solace on a desert island with the added ingredient that is impossible to bottle! The atmosphere of the traditional pub."

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Robinson's

A Tradition of Progression

The Stockport-based brewery Frederic Robinson Limited has a proud reputation for the value it places on tradition. This is only part of the Robinson's story, however. For an important reason why the brewery and its estate of pubs has survived since the nineteenth century has been its willingness to adapt to the changing nature of the industry.

The story began in 1838 when William Robinson bought the Unicorn Inn in Lower Hillgate, Stockport, having been its landlord for the previous 12 years.

William moved away in 1849 and his son George took over as landlord. It was George who brewed the first Robinson's beer, albeit on a small scale on the pub's premises.

George's younger brother, Frederic, took over as landlord in 1859. Frederic expanded the brewing operation by buying a nearby warehouse and also sold some of the ale to local inns.

Expansion

It was Frederic who started the estate of Robinson's houses. His first acquisition was the Railway Inn in Marple in 1876 with a number of others following soon afterwards. As well as ensuring that Robinson's ale was served in prime condition, the purchases gave Robinson's a guaranteed demand for its sales and acted as a showcase for its products. By the 1890s, Frederic's son William was at the helm. William did not over invest in property. This policy reaped dividends at the start of the 20th century when demand for beer began to fall. As many public companies were forced to restructure to satisfy the demands of their shareholders, Robinson's was able to continue its policy of steady expansion.

As its estate grew, the company became Frederic Robinson Limited in 1920. There were more pub purchases in the early 1920s but, with rival attractions such as the cinema now around, Robinson's also saw the need to provide better quality pubs to attract customers.

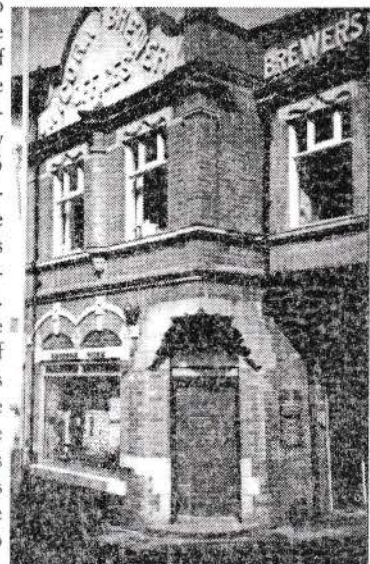
In the 1930s, William's son, John, was also quick to recognise the changing nature of the market and began to expand its estate into the countryside to attract a family clientele. One sad point in this decade, however, was the closure of the Unicorn Inn in Stockport to allow for further expansion of the brewery.

Prosperity

A significant milestone came in 1949 with the acquisition of Bell and Co Limited of Hemphaw Lane, Stockport, to confirm Robinson's as North Cheshire's leading brewer.

By the 1960s, the brewing industry was changing with production being concentrated more and more into the hands of a few large producers.

Robinson's was still able to flourish, however, as the prosperity of the town of Stockport together with the brewery's wide-ranging estate provided it with a steady demand for its beers. In 1975 it opened its high-tech bottling plant at Bredbury while in 1982, it bought Hartley's in the Lake District to further consolidate its position. The company is now in the care of the fifth generation of Robinson's - Peter, Dennis and David. Although the names may change down the generations, the brewery's recipe for success remains constant - a respect for the past and a willingness to embrace the future.



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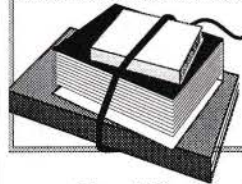


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BOOK REVIEW



City Life Food & Drink Guide to Greater

Manchester 2001; Diverse Media, 146pp, £3.50

The publication of this guide is now an annual event and this is the seventh edition of what remains a useful publication for those with even a passing interest in the city's food and drink scene...

But... There's always a 'but' isn't there? This edition, whilst as glossy and well put together as its predecessors, seems to have an element of going through the motions about it. Much Like City Life magazine itself, where the food and drink coverage is now at times quite patchy, the sure touch of Mike Hill and Paul Mason is notable by its absence.

There are six main sections covering Restaurants, Bars, Coffee Bars & Cafes, Delicatessens, Pubs and Country Pubs. Additionally there are good features covering subjects as diverse as Elizabeth Raffald, an 18th Century pioneer of food and drink, to a collection of City Centre pub crawls. All of this is topped off with a good City Centre map and a helpful index of all the establishments listed.

On the downside, there is some sloppy editing. The introductions for Chinatown and the Northern Quarter duplicate that used for the section on country pubs, for example. The places covered in all of the sections can best be described as the usual suspects - it's more a listing of the tried and tested rather than a pointer to anything new and cutting edge. In addition, while the City Centre is well covered, some of the satellite towns are quite poorly served. Having said that, all are illustrated with coloured photographs and include details of opening hours, facilities, phone numbers and, for the restaurants, an indication of what you could expect to pay.

Most readers of Opening Times will be interested in the sections on pubs (although it's also good to see bars like Fab Café and Kro Bar getting due recognition), which remains something of a curate's egg, good in parts. The guide is keen to emphasise that it's not a guide to the best real ale pubs but "to what we think are the most convivial in the sum of their parts". This is of course always subjective but where are the Swan With Two Necks and Ye Olde Vic; or the Old House At Home in Withington or Gorton's Vale Cottage? Interestingly, the Metropolitan in Didsbury is also absent (a former City Life Pub of the Year) which perhaps confirms the impressions gained in this month's Stagger.

It is of course easy to quibble. No guide to anything will contain everyone's favourite outlets and it's a truism that all guides are out of date the minute they hit the streets, and so the City Life Food & Drink Guide remains an essential buy for anyone who eats or drinks in the City Centre on a regular basis. A major rethink is needed for edition 8, though. **JC.**

10



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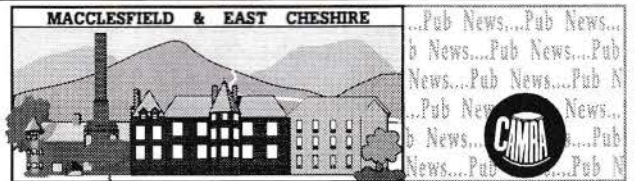
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Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch's Pub Of The Year 2000 is the Hanging Gate at Higher Sutton - the award was presented on 5th March and a good night was had by all.

Maxwells, King Edward Street, Macclesfield is now selling Cains Bitter and Theakstons XB. Also in Macclesfield, the Oxford has recently changed hands.

In Bollington the Waggon & Horses has changed hands, but is still only selling Boddingtons Bitter. Also, the Cotton Tree has a new Tenant and is selling Teteleys & Boddingtons bitter.

In Congleton, The Wharf has introduced a guest ales programme. This is alongside Greenall's Bitter, Greenall's Mild and Timothy Taylor Landlord. The Castle has introduced a second guest ale, both continue to change regularly. The Queens continues its programme of sourcing its beers from local brewers - Slaters are providing the current beer.

Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs - Join CAMRA now - see page 23!



BOOK REVIEW

Manchester: Real Ale in the revitalised city; North Manchester CAMRA, 64pp, £4.95

The publication of this guide coincided with the recent National Winter Ales Festival in Castlefield, so having got that over with I looked at this appealing little booklet and what it covers.

As well as the ubiquitous listing of pubs and bars, of which more anon, there are eight specific pub crawls (with tiny but clear maps), a neat but not terribly helpful overall city-centre map, and articles on local breweries and food.

Attractively laid out in a slightly sub-A5 format, printed black and white throughout, it is profusely illustrated with pub photos on virtually every page.

The pubs and bars are listed alphabetically, with a brief description (on average slightly longer than those in the current Good Beer Guide). Beers sold, opening hours and symbols representing pub facilities - again along the lines of those in the Good Beer Guide are shown.

Generally I feel the descriptions are reasonably fair, though there are a few exaggerations and inaccuracies, but nothing crucial. The guide was researched at the very back end of 2000, so it is as up to date as it can be, but the really surprising thing is just how many changes have occurred in the last six months.

Probably my only real quibble is with the price, which I think is a pound or so too high, but for those wishing to explore the nether regions of the 'city centre' or for the real-ale enthusiast simply visiting Manchester, it is a must. It seems to be the case that this tome is revised on two-yearly intervals, which is probably about right.

PBH

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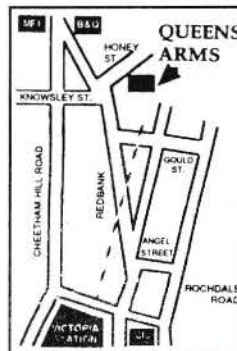
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Was it Good For You?

I refer of course, to Gordon Brown's budget. Certainly I was unsurprised but displeased after the speech in the commons. The only dim flicker was holding duty on beer steady - nothing to shout about, and singularly unlikely to make the slightest difference to the smugglers and booze-cruisers. More massive losses to the exchequer through crime, but at least no excuse for the brewers to unload another massive increase. Robinsons obviously saw which way the wind was blowing, and goit their 5p rise in beforehand...

In fact, there was a major piece of good news, but this was only covered in the 'Red Book' that accompanies the speech, and contains the real details.. In all of the rest of Europe (Ireland may be an exception) duty on beer is levied on what is called a sliding scale. The details vary from country to country, but the overall effect is the same - the small micro brewer pays less tax on a barrel of 4.5% beer than would do one of the factory based majors. This is intended to offset the advantages enjoyed by the big boys in economies of scale, which can be used too allow heavy discounting, and thereby distort the market by keeping the pub-owners loyalty via discount. The micro has no spare profit to redistributer in this way, and is thofore squeezed out. Unfortunately, although the chancellor is persuaded of the mereits of sliding-scale, he needs a year to listen to interested parties (ie make concessions to the big boy's whinging) and it will only be introduced at the end of 2002. Too late then for Ventonwyn, Kitchen and Ash Vine, who are (apparently) no more. RIP



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A Call To Arms

In his address to the troops before CAMRA's national AGM in Newcastle this month, chairman Dave Goodwin makes a very pertinent point. He laments that CAMRA members in general romanticise the importance of the liaison work with brewers, but neglect the vital contacts with pub groups (often owned by Japanese Banks, American Pension Funds or Uncle Toim Cobbley, but not, indeed by Breweries). There is no point in concentrating on brewing if there is nowhere to drink the stuff. It is a point well made, but methinks he doth protest too much.

In certain parts of the country, Stockport being a prime example, a large proportion of the pubs is still owned by the local brewery, and in the case of Robinsons, most of its houses are traditional tenancies. But there indeed whole swathes of land where identikit pubs owned by different companies serve the same, bland, branded product range - "de-emphasising" real ale, where any is sold at all, and where it is sold, featuring only national (TV advertised) brands (John Smiths, Worthington, Theakston etc.)

More should probably be done to engage the pub groups. But how? They give the impression of being uninterested in any customer over 30. They think real ale is for fat, bearded farties (presumably they have me in mind) and that it is therefore not for them. I have written reams of (mainly constructive) criticisms of pub refurbishments, management practices, buying policies, and only very occasionally do I get the benefit of a "We have recieved your interesting letter" (shorthand for "load of tosh which we binned at once...") reply. The fact that I am generally proved mostly right - they either eventually make some changes along similar lines to my suggestions or do something equally stupid but different - is little consolation. It is also very difficult to find out who the guilty parties are, and their correct addresses. So I for one will stick to supporting the micros and regionals, and support by view that any group of more than five pubs is a BAD THING. Even Wetherspoons. It must be said in wetherspoons defence though (a) that in many towns they provide almost the only half-way civilised places to

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drink and (b) they hold regular beer festivals that are starting to get quite interesting. Their next shindig is at the end of this month and among the 'guest beers' are five foreign beers. Ye gods and little fishes! Will wonders never cease? An Alkt from Dortmund, a Kolsch from Cologne, two Czech lagers and an Irish micro-beer. Hooray for Tim Martin who is obviously paying attention to grown-ups. Talking of festivals, Beer House (Ian) has one 19-22 April. Idy and Sal (Crescent) have one 3-7 May, Oldham is 6-7 April.

Cask Ale of the Month

Dwan Paddy's Oats (4.3% abv)

Offering the (Irish micro-brewery) Dwan beers at the National Winter Ales festival seemed a rare treat, but they are close to becoming ubiquitous - two more on at the Beer House Spring Beer Week (where this was sampled) and no less than seven (Black Pearl, Paddys Oats, An Dubhain (stouts), Honey Gold, Rich Ruby, (beers) Tigers Eye (wheat beer) and Cool Amber (Cask Lager)) on offer at the Oldham Beer Festival (6-7 April) - along with three from the Carlow micro. Paddys Oats is an 'oatmeal' stout, which gives a flattened dryness, not so bitter/sour as some stouts. It is a tradition that many English and even more Scottish micros have honoured over the years. This example - like apparently all of the Dwan beers, is well-balanced, with little aroma, little sweetness, but a refreshing dry maltness with just a slightly bitter finish. A classic of the type.

Foreign Beer of the Month

Gbdr. Michael Mahrs Pils (4.8% abv)

For what seems like the longest time, I have been convinced that the finest Pils style beers in Germany are brewed in Franconia, and more specifically in Bamberg. Although Jever is far and away the best seller, and is notably hoppy, I have always found it to be raspingly sharp, and slightly metallic-tasting, and much prefer the softer flavours of Bavaria's north-western outpost. My long-term favourite is Keesman Herren Pils, a delightful session pils, dry and refined with a long hoppy finish. The Keesman brew-pub can be found on Wunderburg, and directly opposite is the Mahrs brew pub, repleat with cobbled forecourt and chestnut-shaded beer garden. I really think I have under-rated their pils, it is delightful - soft and fairly dry, but warming, with an excellent floral hop nose and finish. I sampled several at the London Drinker beer festival in March. Some might end up nearer here, eventually.



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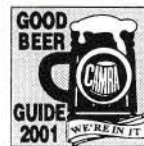
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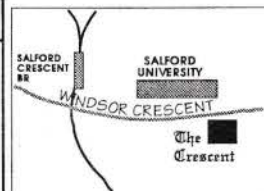
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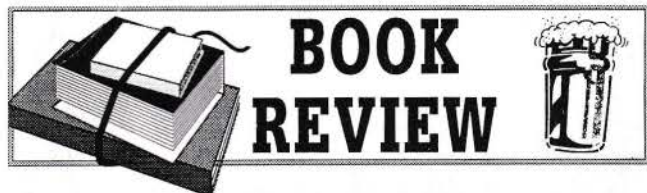
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BOOK REVIEW

2001: The Road to Wigan Beer, David & Susan White, CAMRA Wigan Branch, 32pp, £1.50

Way back before nitrokeg was invented, "1984: The Road to Wigan Beer" was on eof the great pub guide titles. Apart from a frankly under-researched interim edition in the 90s, there's been no CAMRA guide to Wigan's pubs since then, so this slim volume fills a real need.

The front cover gives a good first impression, with what must surely be the first use by any local guide of CAMRA's brand new "Ask if it's Cask" promotional material. Inside, after a couple of scene-setting pages, it's straight into the pub listings. For this edition all pubs are listed, whether cask or keg, making it easy to follow the fortunes - or even the continued existence - of pubs from that earlier guide. The table of renamings is also useful here - every guide should have one.

Naturally, only the pubs selling cask beer merit a full description, and theses manage to pack all the essential information into a small compass without the use of symbols or codes. The authors clearly have a strong sympathy for the virtues of the traditional pun - I liked the sound of the place described as "small, cramped and noisy, but rather endearing" - and there are several swipes at the excessive prevalence of TV sets. And you can't fail to like a guide that manages to get the words 'miasma' and 'assegai' into the same pub description.

For me, this passed with flying colours the only test that really matters for a pub guide - it made me want to revisit the pubs. Cheap and cheerful it may be, but it's the fruit of detailed research by people who care. And for around the price of a pint, you can't really go wrong.

Just one thing to note: the guide does not cover the whole of the Borough of Wigan, so for Leigh and Atherton that old guide from 1984 - if you can find one - is still the latest available (come on, S-E Lancs CAMRA!). As a bonus, though, the guide does venture outside the Wigan Borough boundaries to such places as Skelmersdale ("an unrewarding place for a night out") and Parbold (which is altogether pleasanter). **RPJ.**

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

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5 Years Ago

APRIL '96

by Phil Levison

A short front page headline, but very much to the point - 'Bass Chase Tetley' - this was another brewing monolith on the horizon, with Bass seeking to purchase the brewing interests of Allied Domecq. This name was unfamiliar to many Opening Times readers, being the latest incarnation of the old Allied Breweries, which included such names as Tetley, Ind Coope and Ansells. If the deal had gone ahead, the new company would have controlled in excess of 40 per cent of the UK brewing industry. It would also have achieved Bass's long un-disguised aim of reclaiming its number one spot in the brewing industry.

Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA had chosen the Davenport Arms at Woodford as their Pub of the Year, and the presentation was a double celebration, as the date chosen, March 16, also happened to be CAMRA's 25th birthday. Licensee Yvonne Hallworth sprang a surprise on local CAMRA members - after receiving her certificate, the tables were turned as Yvonne presented branch officials Rhys Jones and Peter Edwardson with a CAMRA birthday cake.

What might be called 'The Imperial Affair' had been front page news for two months running - now it had moved to the letters page, where a Mr William Shippon agreed with Dave Sheldon's comments that it was a bit late to start campaigning for the Imperial. He thought that the sudden flurry of research and campaigning activity in response to the planning application to demolish should have been planned well in advance.

The Ox noble on Liverpool Road had re-opened - arguably it had never properly recovered after its 1970's gutting that structurally weakened the building - amply demonstrated when the bar fell into the cellar. The pub had always had a claim to fame - it was unique in being the only pub in the country named after a potato. (But now, in 2001, it has been renamed the Ox - perhaps they're trying to emulate the Q in Stalybridge - an even shorter pub name which has been officially recognised by its appearance in the Guinness Book of Records).

There were two other reopenings in the Castlefield area - these were Greenall's Pack Horse, and the former Head of Steam: the Pack Horse was situated in that part of Deansgate which went round the back of the station, which was something of a backwater. The pub's new look was summed up as a not very flattering "cheap and nasty", but there was a reasonably wide range of beer - Mild, Bitter and Original from Greenalls, and Bitter from Boddington and Tetley. The Head of Steam had failed as a freehouse for railway buffs, but it had been replaced by something far worse, namely the Rocket Bar. All the railway memorabilia had gone, also the old furniture, even the carpets had gone, leaving a bare concrete floor painted grey - in fact, nearly everything had been painted grey. There was no mention of the beer, but it was 'real ale'.



Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.co.uk

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Old Stockport Bitter, Best Bitter,
Hatters Mild, Dark Mild, Frederics,
Old Tom and Hartleys and
introducing....

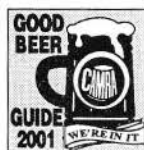
Stockport's

Arches (4% abv)

WARM WELCOME AND FINE
BEERS IN A CLASSIC PUB



The Nursery Inn



GREEN LANE,
HEATON NORRIS,
STOCKPORT

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- ★ Lunches every day including Sundays for families in our Dining Room.
- ★ Beer Garden with Eating Area
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- ★ Egon Ronay Guide, AA Best of British Gd
- ★ CAMRA Good Pub Food Guide
- ★ CAMRA Branch Pub of the Year 2001

Hydes
Ales

Brewers of
Traditional
Cask
Beers

Always in
good taste

Graham
welcomes
you to ...

THE RAILWAY VIEW

Byrons Lane,
Macclesfield

GOOD FOOD
Now Being Served on

PLATFORM ONE

8 GUEST BEERS ☆

☆ QUIZZES ☆

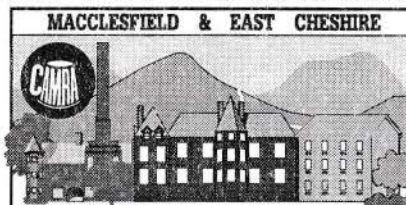
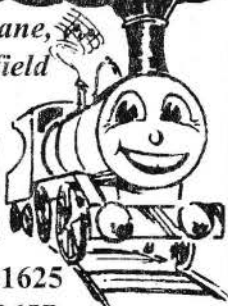
☆ BAR GAMES ☆

REAL ALE £1.30 MON NIGHT



☎ 01625

423657



**PUB OF
THE
YEAR**

The award for the Macclesfield & East Cheshire CAMRA Pub of the Year was made on Monday the 5th March. The winner was the Hanging Gate at Higher Sutton.

The award is made to honour the landlord and staff of the pub which in the views of the members of the public and CAMRA members has put a substantial effort into not only the keeping of fine beer but into the feeling of the pub itself. The winner is chosen out of the four previous year's Pub of the Season award winners and last year's winner, all very worthy contenders.

The McGrath family- Paul, Peter, Pat and Becky- all throw themselves into the running of the pub with unbounded enthusiasm. This creates a very caring and welcoming atmosphere, with personal attention to detail.

The beers are from Manchester's Hydes' brewery and include their Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the excellent new seasonal range. Superb food at reasonable prices and real fires complete a great little pub for those dark winter evenings, but then in the summer the food and drinks can be enjoyed in the garden and bottom bar, while admiring the views across the Cheshire Hills and Plain.

The pub was packed on the evening with a good turnout from Hydes, CAMRA, regulars and all the pub staff, who are very much part of the team.

By coincidence this was followed, just over a week later, with a branch outing to Hydes' brewery itself- an entertaining trip round the brewery followed by an equally interesting session in the brewery bar, sampling the various brews.

The next major event is the Macclesfield Beer Festival, now in its seventh year, to be held over the weekend of 12th/13th May. Look out for further details soon.

The Waters Green Tavern



96 Waters Green,
Macclesfield,
Cheshire SK11 6LH
Tel: 01625 422653

Real Cider
Now Sold

opposite the Railway Station
Ever Changing Guest Beers
including: Durham, Beartown, Whim,
Roosters, Kelham Island, Enville and
Phoenix.

Your Hosts Brian and Tracey

Bar Meals Served Mon to Sat Lunch

This is not a free house



**HELP HOLD BACK THE NITROKEG TIDE!
JOIN CAMRA - DRINK REAL ALE**



The Caledonia Hotel

Robinson's
Chef of the Year
1999 - 2000

Come and try our Award Winning dish
that earned us Second Place and
Highly Commended certificates in the
Robinsons Chef of the Year competition.

Opposite the General Post Office,
13 Warrington Street, Ashton Under Lyne.
Tel: 0161 339 7177 Fax: 0161 292 9313

**Watch out for Robinson's new
seasonal draught beers.
We will be stocking every guest
beer as soon as it is brewed!**

Alan and Louise welcome you to Ashton's most traditionally refurbished pub with luxurious comfortable surroundings. A warm fire for the winter and a patio garden for the summer.
Luxury en-suite accommodation is now available.

The first and only pub in Ashton to sell Frederic's premium 5.0% since it was brewed.
Robinson's Best Bitter and Hatters Mild all on hand pump.

In the heart of
Ashton Town Centre
'come shopping and
pay us a visit

Excellent home cooked food served:
Monday - Saturday 11.30 - 2.30 lunchtimes
Tues, Weds, Thurs 5.00 - 7.00 evenings
Friday & Saturday 5.00 - 8.00 evenings

Parties catered for -
hot and cold buffets
and theme nights

12.00 - 3.00 Sunday. 3 course special plus full menu



STOCKPORT & MANCHESTER MILD CHALLENGE - 8 APRIL TO 14 MAY

STOCKPORT & MANCHESTER
Mild
CHALLENGE
2001

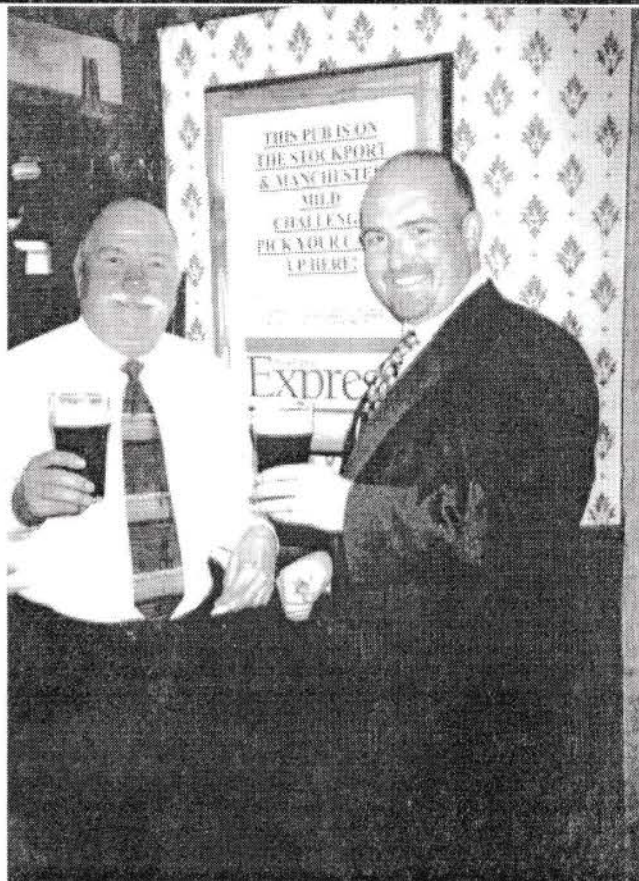
Following the success of last year's competition, we have once again teamed up with the Stockport Express to bring you another Mild Challenge, and again we have stretched our wings to include parts of Manchester and Salford along with two or three other pubs further afield. The previous Challenges have been a great success and if you haven't taken part before, try and have a go this time. It's fun and it's easy. It's also a chance to visit some new pubs, try new beers and, of course, to win some great prizes.

The Challenge runs from Sunday 8 April to Monday 14 May and offers everyone taking part the chance to win something. All completed entries will receive either a free entry ticket for the 2001 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival or, if you're a member of CAMRA, a voucher for two free pints of mild at the Festival.

We are also again featuring the **Mild Challenge Extra** - visit a participating pub in 12 different areas, using the headings shown on the card, and you will win a special Mild Challenge T-shirt; visit all participating pubs and you will win a specially engraved pewter tankard.

This year we are also especially grateful to Hydes' for enabling us to offer an extra-special prize: every completed entry will go into a draw and the first 10 pulled out will win a visit to the brewery to see how Hydes' Mild is made. Too good to miss out on? Definitely! So, what do you have to do? It's easy...

(1) First, get a card. All participating pubs have a stock or you can use the version printed in this issue of Opening Times. Additionally you can get one from the Mild Challenge address: 30 Lonsdale Road, Levenshulme, Manchester, M19 3FL



Pints being enjoyed at the Launch of the 2001 Mild Challenge at the Nursery.

(2) When you buy a pint or a half of cask mild in one of the pubs taking part, ask the bar staff to stamp your card. Remember, though, you can only get one stamp from each when you've filled the card (you'll need 12 different stamps from 12 different pubs) send it to the Mild Challenge address on the card and, after our closing date, we will send off your prizes.

Simple isn't it? Happy Drinking!

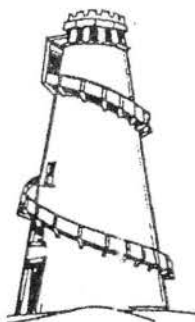
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PRESENT

**THE NINTH FRODSHAM
BEER FESTIVAL**

A great selection of
"New Brews"
and Old Favourites
plus Farmhouse
Ciders



Food available
at all sessions
Entertainment
Friday & Saturday
Evenings

25th & 26th MAY 2001

Friday Night 6 - 11 pm

Saturday OPEN ALL DAY 12 noon to 11 pm
AT THE COMMUNITY CENTRE FLUIN LANE

TICKETS £4.00 FOR ALL SESSIONS (£1 REFUND ON DOOR FOR CAMRA MEMBERS)
AVAILABLE ON THE DOOR (subject to fire limit) or IN ADVANCE FROM
THE HELTER SKELTER BAR (formerly Rowlands) TEL 01928 733381
THE QUEEN'S HEAD, FRODSHAM TEL 01928 733289
OR DAVE BROWN, JOINERS COTTAGE, OFF HIGH STREET, FRODSHAM WA6 7AN
Please make cheques payable to "Rowlands Care"

**2001 STOCKPORT
BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL
SPONSORSHIP
OPPORTUNITIES**

Stockport Beer & Cider Festival is probably one of the biggest annual events in the area attracting around 4,000 people each year. In 2001 the Festival will offer even more sponsorship opportunities to local companies and organisations:

★ **Festival Ale**

A great opportunity for any pub which wishes to promote its guest beers. The specially brewed festival ale will be named after the sponsor.

★ **Entertainment**

An opportunity for any pub which wishes to promote its entertainment. The sponsorship will be highlighted in the programme and (if desired) on the stage.

If you are interested, please contact Jim Flynn,
66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport,
Cheshire. SK4 5EG (Telephone: 0161 432 1816)

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CAMRA
CAMPAIGN
FOR
REAL ALE

MILD - THE FACTS

What it is, and why you should drink it

This beer is without doubt a "red list" species in danger of extinction. Yet if it were to disappear from our pubs it would be a great shame. Even though it may be seen as a beer without 'street cred', and the one you may have been warned off early in your drinking career because of what unscrupulous publicans might be putting into it. Not least because it was usually dark coloured and would therefore conceal the evidence from view!

Today breweries tend to brew a wide range of bitters and, tacked on at the end, a solitary mild. It wasn't always like that. Before the Second World War, many breweries would have a 'family' of milds, of various strengths and styles, which ran in tandem with a similar range of bitters. Indeed mild was the biggest selling draught beer style for many years: in 1959 it accounted for over 40 per cent of beer brewed. Twenty years later it was down to ten per cent, and today it is just a fraction of that.

Initially this steep decline was largely the result of selective advertising on bitter beers, but until the late 1970s most brewers produced at least one mild. Its last strongholds are now the Midlands and here in the North West, although even in parts of Greater Manchester you will have to look long and hard to find it. Its popularity here was perhaps typified by Chesters' "Fighting Mild", as it was endearingly known. Once a delicious dark mild, so dark that the first time you walked into a pub selling it, you would be convinced everyone was drinking draught Guinness. Its reputation lingers on but as it once typified mild's popularity, it also mirrors its decline - the beer was discontinued in cask form last year.

Unlike in many parts of the country, all our local brewers still produce cask mild today, and this includes a good number of our micros, too. Robinson's still produce two, and Hydes' three! Else-

STOCKPORT & MANCHESTER Mild CHALLENGE 2001

where, many breweries today produce only very small amounts of cask mild, some just as a seasonal beer, or none at all where its popularity has diminished through a vicious circle of no promotion, restricted availability and hence declining demand.

Mild beers in good condition are deliciously tasty and come in a host of varieties. Many are dark in colour but some, like Robinson's Hatters Mild are as lightly coloured as a bitter beer. Some are light and hoppy and others rich and high in gravity - it's a mistake to think of mild as being a weak beer and although many of today's examples are low in alcohol, in times gone by milds of five or six per cent alcohol were commonplace. In fact there are still over 100 milds brewed nationwide.

Mild beers are normally characterised by being brewed with less hops than bitter beers and often use darker malts, or sometimes more sugar or caramel, to give their typical dark colour. They are generally light and easy to drink, and usually being lower in alcohol, make an ideal lunchtime pint. They are also some of the best value beers around. So next time you pop out for a pint - make yours mild. You won't be disappointed.

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MILD - WHO BREWS WHAT

While the national brewers seem to have virtually turned their backs on good cask mild, our local companies still produce the real thing. Robinson's in fact still produce two, and Hydes' three! Here we give a run-down on most of the milds available in the Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge area with the alcohol by volume given in brackets. Those marked* are available on the Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge:

Robinson's: Hatters Mild* (ABV 3.3%) - a light mild with a refreshing dry, malty flavour.

Dark Best Mild*: Hatters Mild with added caramel. Fruity, malty and a rare find - although three Challenge pubs (Swan With Two Necks, Stockport; Pot of Beer and Castle, City Centre) sell it.

Hydes': Mild* (ABV 3.5%) - dark and dry, an all malt brew.

'Welsh' Mild - an even darker version of standard mild. Very rare outside Hydes' Welsh estate.

Light* (ABV 3.7%) - lightly hopped session beer. Refreshing and fruity with a dry finish.

Holt's: Mild* (ABV 3.2%) - very dark with a complex taste. Very bitter for a mild with a long and satisfying aftertaste.

Porter: Dark Mild* (ABV 3.3%) - rich and full-bodied with a roasty aftertaste. Available at the Railway, Portwood.

Whim: Magic Mushroom Mild* (ABV 3.8%) - well balanced with a complex mix of flavours and a sweet finish.

Cains: Dark Mild* (ABV 3.2%) - smooth, dry and roasty. A superb drink when on form.

Banks's: Mild* (ABV 3.5%) - often sold as plain "Banks's" or "Banks's Original". Amber coloured and well-balanced.

Moorhouses: Black Cat* (ABV 3.4%) - dark and fruit with a bitter, roast character that lingers in the aftertaste. Current *Champion Beer of Britain*. Available in the Kings Arms, Salford.

Marble: Uncut Amber* (ABV 4.7%) - Strong and roasty with a biscuity malt character. The only organic mild on the Challenge. Available at the Marble Arch, Rochdale Road.

Hardys & Hansons: Kimberley Best Mild* (3.1% ABV) - a deep ruby mild dominated by chocolate malt. Well balance with a faintly hoppy finish. Available at the Governor's House, Cheadle Hulme.

Greene King: XX Dark Mild* (ABV 3%) - smooth and sweetish with a bitter aftertaste. A rare visitor from Suffolk, available in the Smithfield, City Centre.

Thwaites: Best Mild (ABV 3.3%) - rich and dark with a smooth malty flavour and a pleasant, slightly bitter finish.

Lees: GB Mild (ABV 3.5%) - malty and fruity with a dry, malty aftertaste.

Timothy Taylors: Golden Best (ABV 3.5%) - clean tasting and refreshing with a hoppy, bitter finish. A frequent free trade guest beer.

Coach House: Gunpowder Strong Mild (ABV 3.8%) - full bodied and roasty with a malty aroma and full finish. Another free trade regular.

Carlsberg Tetley: Tetley Dark Mild (ABV 3.2%) - fruity and dark. Less distinctive than it was.

Tetley Mild (ABV 3.3%) - well-balanced taste of malt and caramel with good bitterness.

Greenalls Mild* (ABV 3.3%) - hugely improved; rich, slightly sweet and fairly full-bodied

Scottish Courage: Theakstons Mild Ale (ABV 3.5%) - rich and smooth with a creamy body.

Websters Green Label (ABV 3.2%) - thin and bland. Often sold as a 'budget' bitter.

In addition several pubs on the Mild Challenge will be offering a variety of guest milds during the Challenge.

MILD CHALLENGE RULES

- 1) When you buy a pint (or a half pint) of cask conditioned mild in a pub supporting the challenge, get this card stamped by a member of the bar staff. NB Ask for cask!
- 2) Only one stamp from each participating pub.
- 3) When this card has stamps from 12 pubs complete the section below and send it to 'Mild Challenge' c/o 30 Lonsdale Rd Levenshulme, Manchester, M19 3FL, by 18th May 2001 and it will be included in the grand draw (to be drawn at Stockport Beer & Cider Festival). There are numerous great prizes including 10 trips around Hydes Brewery to see Hydes Mild and Light being brewed!
- 4) You will be entitled to a free ticket to the 2001 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival 31st. May - 2nd June. (Camra members, 2 free pints of mild instead) NB if you want a free ticket (or 2 free pints) enclose a **stamped addressed envelope**. Tickets will be posted by 22nd May, 2001.
- 5) To join the **Mild Challenge Extra** get stamps from 12 different pubs in 12 different areas and you will receive a free 'Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge T-shirt'.
- 6) If you are brave enough (or daft enough) to send in six cards with stamps from all participating pubs you will also receive a free engraved tankard. Otherwise only one card per person.
- 7) The Mild Challenge runs from 8th April to 14th May 2001 inclusive. All prizes distributed at Stockport Beer & Cider Festival or as soon as possible thereafter.
- 8) The Organizers decision will be final and no correspondence will be entered in to.

This year you can win 4 pints of mild at the Festival by coming up with a slogan of no more than 8 words on why you drink mild (NB. Entry into the mild challenge does not require you to complete this). The winning slogan will appear on next year's Mild Challenge T-Shirt. The winning slogan will be announced at the Festival.

I drink mild because... _____

Complete for the Grand Draw

Name

Address

..... Post Code

Signature Tel. No. (H) (W)

Camra Membership No (if applicable)..... Signature

- I wish to enter the 'Mild Challenge Extra' and claim my free T-shirt
- I enclose a SAE for my Stockport Beer & Cider Festival ticket (or two free pints)
- I am interested in joining the Campaign for Real Ale

SEND TO: 'MILD CHALLENGE' 30 LONSDALE ROAD, LEVENSHULME, MANCHESTER M19 3FL



**CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE
STOCKPORT &
MANCHESTER
MILD CHALLENGE**

(NB Only one stamp per pub- see overleaf for rules)

Fill this card with stamps from 12 different pubs and you will receive a free ticket to the 2001 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival and entry into a grand draw- First Prizes - visits to Hydes Brewery to see Hydes Mild and Light brewed!

FREE T-SHIRT WHEN YOU ENTER THE MILD CHALLENGE EXTRA (see overleaf)

Sponsored by **Express**

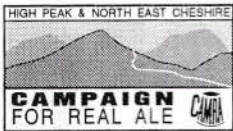


MILD CHALLENGE PUBS

Stockport
Express

PUB	LOCATION	BEER	PUB	LOCATION	BEER
Cross Keys	ADSWOOD Adswood Road	Hydes' Mild	Sir Edwin Chadwick	LONGSIGHT Stockport Road	Guest Mild
Pineapple	BELLE VUE Garratt Way (off Hyde Rd)	Hydes' Mild	Castle,	MANCHESTER CITY CENTRE - CENTRAL/SOUTH Oldham Street	Robinsons Dark Mild and Hatters Mild Holt's Mild Guest Mild
Arden Arms	BREDBURY Ashton Road	Robinson's Hatters Mild	Crown & Anchor	Cateaton Street	
Horsefield Arms	Ashton Road	Robinson's Hatters Mild	Lass O'Gowrie	Charles Street	
Albion	BURNAGE Burnage Lane	Hydes' Light		MANCHESTER CITY CENTRE - NORTH	
Adswood Hotel	CALE GREEN Adswood Lane West	Robinson's Hatters Mild	Pot of Beer, Marble Arch Beer House, Smithfield	New Mount Street, Rochdale Road Angel Street, Swan Street	Robinson's Dark Mild Marble Amber Kitchen Guest Milds Greene King Mild
Crown, Ye Olde Star,	CHEADLE High Street, High Street	Hydes' Mild. Hydes' Mild	Navigation Ring O' Bells	MARPLE - EAST Stockport Road Church Lane	Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild
Church, Governor's House	CHEADLE HULME Ravenoak Road, Ravenoak Road	Robinson's Hatters Mild. Kimberley Mild	Hatters Arms Pineapple	MARPLE - WEST Church Lane Market Street	Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild
Andrew Arms	COMPSTALL George Street	Robinson's Hatters Mild	Railway,	MARPLE-ROSE HILL Stockport Road	Robinsons Hatters Mild
Dane Bank	DANE BANK Windmill Lane	Robinson's Hatters Mild	Northumberland	MARPLE BRIDGE Compstall Road	Robinson's Hatters Mild
Masons Arms	DENTON Stockport Road	Robinson's Hatters Mild	Royal Oak	MELLOR Longhurst Lane	Robinson's Hatters Mild
Royal Oak, Fletcher Moss,	DIDSBURY Wilmslow Road, William Street,	Banks's Mild Hydes Light	Masons Arms,	NEW MILLS High Street, OFFERTON Hempshaw Lane	Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild
Gateway	EAST DIDSBURY Kingsway	Hydes' Mild	Fingerpost	PORTWOOD Avenue Street, ROMILEY School Brow, RUSHOLME Victory Street	Porters' Dark Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild.
Grapes, Greyhound Ye Olde Vic	EDGELEY Castle Street, Bowden Street, Chatham Street	Robinsons Hatters Mild Greenalls Mild Guest Mild	Railway,	SALFORD The Crescent Bloom Street	Hydes' Mild Guest Mild Moorhouse's Black Cat
Gothic Bar Prince of Wales Horse & Farrier,	GATLEY Church Road Gatley Green, Gatley Road,	Cains Mild Hydes Mild Hydes Light.	Cow & Calf ,	STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE Heaton Lane Heaton Lane Princes Street Tiviot Dale, STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE - LOWER HILLGATE/MARKET PLACE Millgate Lower Hillgate, Underbank	Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild Hoits Mild. Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild
High Grove	GATLEY SOUTH Silverdale Road	Hydes' Mild	Osborne House	STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE - HIGHER & MIDDLE HILLGATE Middle Hillgate Higher Hillgate Higher Hillgate WITHINGTON Wilmslow Road, WOODFORD Chester Road, WYTHENSHAW Ringway Road	Hydes' Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild Robinson's Hatters Mild
Plough	GORTON Hyde Road,	Robinsons Hatters Mild.	Crescent Kings Arms		
Three Bears	HAZEL GROVE Jacksons Lane,	Robinson's Hatters Mild.	Crown Pineapple Swan With Two Necks Tiviot,		
Moss Rose, Nursery,	HEATON NORRIS Didsbury Road, Green Lane,	Hydes Light Hydes Mild.	Arden Arms Spread Eagle, Winters		
Griffin,	HEALD GREEN Finney Lane	Holts Mild	Red Bull Royal Mortar Star & Garter		
Blossoms,	HEAVILEY Buxton Road,	Robinsons Hatters Mild.	Victoria,		
Horseshoe,	HIGH LANE Buxton Road,	Robinsons Hatters Mild.	Davenport Arms,		
Sportsman,	HYDE Mottram Road,	Whim Magic Mushroom Mild + guest mild	Airport Hotel		

Protect your Pint and Pub. Join CAMRA



**APRIL
FEATURED PUB
The Pack Horse, Mellor
Road, New Mills**

For this month's High Peak Branch featured pub we stay in the hills of Derbyshire but move a little further north towards the Manchester border on the road from New Mills to Marple Bridge, over through Mellor.

The pub is the Pack Horse, a converted farmhouse dating from the 1600's, standing on a bend in the road as it climbs out of New Mills. In recent years the Pack Horse has been a regular entry in CAMRA's national Good Beer Guide, and deservedly so.

It is an attractive building; stone-built and so in entire keeping with its surroundings. There are fine views over to Hayfield, across Ollersett Moor and down to Chinley. There is ample parking and a pleasant outdoor drinking area.

The single room layout is comfortable and the pub has a welcoming atmosphere, enhanced by the real fire. The regular real ale is Tetley Bitter, supplemented by up to three changing guest beers, all on handpump. The anticipation as to what the guest beers will be makes each visit interesting.

For the hungry, good quality food is served each lunchtime and evening, often with good value specials. There is also overnight accommodation available.

All in all, the Pack Horse makes a positive addition to the pubs of the area and is a good relaxing place for a pint and maybe a meal.

Opening Hours: 12-3, 5-11 Mon-Fri; 12-11 Sat; 12-10.30 Sun. Telephone 01663 742365



At the *Friendship*, Glossop, Mike Howard is not only completing the recent refurbishment (at the soft furnishing stage) but he has recently been elected to the British Institute of Innkeeping as an Associate Member. He is planning to start work on the beer garden next and is planning a "Robinson's Beer Festival" in the summer. This will feature eight different Robinson's beers.

In Bredbury, the rebranded *Travellers Call* (Lees) is to undergo a major refurbishment/extension which will include a restaurant. Work is due to start in May and if the job is anything like other projects Lees have recently undertaken it should be a massive boost to a pub which has motorway extension works hanging over it like the sword of Damocles for years.

Next, by way of a warning - the *Whitley Nab* in Glossop - recently shut for a short period is now open. There is an ambiguous sign advertising CAMRA recommended beers. The pub isn't a recommended pub and whilst the sign does not suggest this we would not like people to be under a misapprehension. The "recommended" beers by the way are Tetley and Boddington and I suppose are recommended when they are well served. But not *our* recommendation.

Finally, at the *Caledonia* in Ashton-under-Lyne, something that is recommended - the award winning Steak and Ale Hot Pot. Louise Heal has recently gained joint second place in the national Steak Pie of the Year competition sponsored by British Meat. Louise entered the Hot Pot from her regular bar food menu and was up against a field of 18, including professional chefs and acquitted herself very well. The hot pot is a rich combination of steak, black pudding and bacon and I'm sure secret ingredients! (*Pub Grub* will be visiting the *Caledonia* for May's OT - ed (1)).

THE WHITE HART

91 Market St. Mottram

Now Acquired by the owners of
The Sportsman, Hyde

Now Serving: Plassey Bitter, Taylors Landlord, Phoenix Bantam, Pictish Brewers Gold, Whim Magic Mushroom Mild, bottled Belgian Fruit Beers, imported Dortmund, Faxe and Hopf Weisse

alongside Traditional Pub Games -
Table Football, Pool

Open ALL Permitted Hours

THE SPORTSMAN

57 MOTTRAM ROAD, HYDE

Geoff and Carmel Welcome You To

CAMRA REGIONAL

PUB OF THE YEAR 1998 & 1999



**A GENUINE
FREE HOUSE
WITH EVER CHANGING
REAL ALES AND
TRADITIONAL CIDER**

Regular Beers include
Hartington Bitter, Plassey Bitter,
Taylors Landlord and
Magic Mushroom Mild and
ever-changing guest beers
Bottled Belgian Fruit Beers

**Special Vegetarian Wholefood
Menu Now Available**

now boasting a full-sized Snooker Table
Booking in Advance is Recommended


Easy Public Transport Connections

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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries
Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak and Macclesfield

<p>APRIL 2001</p> <p>Thursday 12th - Branch Meeting and AGM: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 8.00pm. NB Membership Cards required to vote.</p> <p>Saturday 21st - Sunday 22nd - CAMRA National Conference and AGM, Newcastle.</p> <p>Thursday 26th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Lass O'Gowrie, Charles Street, Manchester City Centre. From 8.00pm. NB change of date.</p> <p>Friday 27th - Burnage & Heaton Mersey Stagger: 7.30pm Milestone, 8.30 Albion. Both Burnage Lane.</p> <p>Monday 30th - Two-way Social: 9.00pm Wheatsheaf, Higher Hillgate; 10.00pm Blossoms, Buxton Rd.</p> <p>Thursday 10th May - Monthly Branch Meeting: Royal Oak, High Street, Cheadle. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p><i>The High Peak & North East Cheshire Branch covers Bredbury, Romiley, Woodley, Marple and all points north. They have advised us of the following events:</i></p>	<p>APRIL 2001</p> <p>Monday 9th - Branch Meeting: Ramsays Bar, Buxton. Starts 8.30pm.</p> <p>Monday 30th - Committee Meeting: Royal Oak, Strines. Starts 8.30pm.</p> <p><i>Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following events:</i></p> <p>Monday 9th - Branch Meeting: Queens Head, Congleton. Starts 8.00pm.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Beer Festival Friday - Saturday 6 - 7 th April - Oldham Beer Festival, Civic Centre, Fri 12 - 3 & 6 - 11; Sat 11 - 3 & 6 - 11. 100 Beers.</p> </div>
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Gothic

61-61A CHURCH RD
GATLEY, SK8 4NB

BAR & GRILL

TELEPHONE:
0161 491 1966

FOOD SERVED 12.00-2.30 MONDAY-FRIDAY

LUNCH TIME SPECIAL

ALL LITE BITES ONLY £1.99

**GOTHIC SUPER SIZZLERS
MAIN COURSES ONLY £2.99**

8oz Rump Steak • Butterfly Chicken • 8oz Gammon Steak
All served with chips & vegetables

QUIZ NIGHT EVERY WEDNESDAY

ENTRY ONLY £1.00

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OPENING TIMES 204 (APRIL 2001) Design and Origination by CPPR, a division of Connaught Technologies.

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Printed by The Redvers Press, Failsworth.

MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

After something of a fallow period, there's suddenly a huge amount of news, so fasten your seat belts and here we go...

City Centre

Well, if you're going to be wrong, you may as well do the job properly. My comments last month about the **Crown** on Deansgate have turned out to be very wide of the mark - it turns out to be an excellent, traditional pub (see separate article - ed (1)). Apologies to all concerned.

That's enough grovelling. Elsewhere in the Centre there's less good news. This concerns the **Salisbury** off Oxford Road. Under manager Andy Massey this has become something of a real ale oasis but I hear that this could be about to change. Owners Scottish & Newcastle are to turn the pub over to tenancy after a six-week refurbishment. This means Andy's departure, sadly, and the possible end of the current guest beer regime. Hopefully it won't, as the consequences could be financial suicide for any incoming tenant, but then again stranger things have happened. Andy certainly departs with my best wishes and I hope it's not too long before we see him at the helm of another pub. It has also been confirmed that the excellent folk behind **Mr Thomas's Chop House** are indeed to also run the reopened **Sam's Chop House**. Good news indeed - let's hope that cask beer features here, too.

Two other recent City Centre openings both offer cask ales, I'm pleased to say. Wetherspoon's opened their third city centre outlet on 21 March. This is styled as **Lloyds No.1 Café Bar** and is in the Printworks development. **Lloyds** is a 'brand' that Wetherspoon's bought of **Wolverhampton & Dudley** and basically follows the usual Wetherspoon format with the addition of music. This one is an attractive two-room affair that even includes a water feature. Shortly after opening the beers on offer comprised Theakstons Best Bitter, Boddingtons Bitter, Bombardier, Landlord, Brains SA and Cotleigh Osprey - all at a bargain £1.29 a pint when it opened, but now settled at a more 'Wetherspoonsy' balance of generally fairly high prices with a couple of 'bargain' beers..

More intimate is **Cord**, on Dorsey Street (just opposite Bar Centro on Tib Street) which opened on March 23. Built into the ground floor of a large Victorian block, Cord is small and intimate, making good use of a few remaining original features. It's also very brown as a result of the cord velvet covering all of the seating and some of the walls - some might think this gloom but I found it cosy and welcoming. The rear bar has Leffe and Hoegaarden on draught along with a solitary handpump. This was not in use when I called but I am assured it will be used to dispense an array of guest beers. A welcome addition to the Northern Quarter scene.

On the down side, the former **Goose on Piccadilly**, now the **Piccadilly Tavern** (or some such) has lost its cask beer and is now keg only. It is, of course, a rebadged Bass house.

Out and About in the East

There's good news and bad news from the suburbs this month. I made an all-too-rare visit to Openshaw recently, and while one or two real ale oases really stood out (notably the excellent **Oddfellows** on Abbey Hey Lane with Boddingtons

Bitter just the way it should be, and the exemplary **Railway** on Manshaw Road with superb Holt's Bitter *and* Mild, the latter a rarity in any form in this part of the City), it was a generally depressing experience.

The **Smithfield** (ex-**Locomotive**) on Ashton Old Road was closed and boarded, the **Prince of Wales** was in the throes of conversion to non-pub use, while the **Lord Raglan** was closed and for sale. As if that wasn't bad enough, both the **Crown** and **Grove** have lost their cask beer (along with a large part of their clientele if my mid-Friday night visit was anything to go by). The Grove is a particularly sad loss - on my last visit, some years ago it has to be said, this was a lively, bustling pub with two or three cask beers. It's not helped by the sign outside advertising 'Traditional Handpulled Ales'. Talk about adding insult to injury.

Staying in Openshaw, I hear that the **Oddfellows** has been bought by expanding pub company **Dorbiere** and will be having a redecoration shortly. Nearby, the cask beer range in the **Albion** is now Boddingtons Bitter, Tetley Bitter and Holt's Bitter. Travelling back from Openshaw, I passed the **Friendship**, on Hyde Road in Gorton. To my dismay, this, too, looked to be closed and boarded. This has been a classic pub in its time, and while it was decidedly quiet on my last visit, I didn't realise that things were as bad as that.

Southside News

There's quite a lot happening in Didsbury and environs. In the centre, the new **Parisa Café Bar** can easily be disposed of, having as much relevance to the cask beer lover as did **Via Vita** it replaced. Nearby, the **Hogshead** has reopened after a cosmetic refurbishment completed in double-quick time. Some of the bare brickwork has been plastered and painted and you can no longer view the cellar, but the principal change is the removal of the interior pillars to create one large open-plan drinking space. It might maximise throughput but it does nothing for the atmosphere, it has to be said.

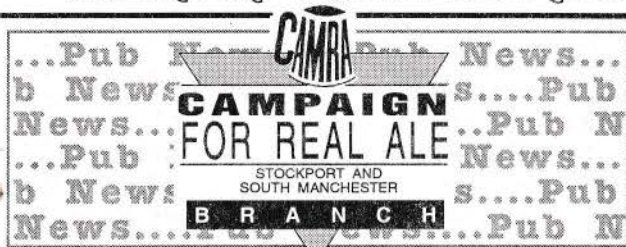
Also undergoing refurbishment are the **Parrswood**, where the kitchen is being extended, and the **Olde Cock**, which seems to be undergoing a more thorough gutting. What remains of the cask ale range when it reopens we shall see, but I'm not holding my breath.

Further north, the **Red Lion** in Withington has reopened following a refurbishment by **Wolves & Dudley**, and very nice it looks too. The pub has been expensively redecorated, reupholstered and generally upgraded but luckily structural changes have been avoided. **Marston's Bitter**, **Pedigree** and **Banks's Bitter** are on handpump. Oh, and contrary to some rumours I heard, the bowling green remains untouched.

I passed the **Red Lion** on my way to the **Railway** in West Disbury, pausing en route at the **Old House at Home** on Burton Road. It was a year ago I reported the major improvements brought about here by manager **Dave Ogden**, and it's good to report that he's still going strong. Apart from **Boddies Bitter**, three **Dent Brewery** beers were guesting when I called and the two sampled, **Aviator** and 'Ewe Wants to be a Millionaire' (I know, I know) were on terrific form. As to the **Railway**, I suspect this will be reported at length elsewhere. As far as I'm concerned, it's a superb job of work fatally compromised by a normally sensible brewery playing silly buggers with dispense systems.

In Ardwick, there's still no movement at the **Kings Head** on Chancellor Lane, which remains firmly closed and boarded. There is however activity at the long-closed **George & Dragon** which is now undergoing conversion to some other use.





The sale of the Whitbread pub estate was completed last month with the pubs going to a new player in the industry - Morgan Grenfell Private Equity. The city firm has no track record in running pubs and, in a move which will bring a welcome degree of continuity, has opted to let the current management team carry on as before. Less good news is the plan to 'securitise' the leasehold side of the estate, that's the 1,710 pubs under the Whitbread Pub Partnerships banner. As one industry source explained "They have paid an awful lot of money, and these assets are really going to have to work hard to earn sufficient income. That means putting licensees and area managers under increasing pressure to deliver." The 1,300 managed pubs are expected to be ultimately hived off.

In Edgeley, reports of the reopening of the **Gardners Arms**, Northgate Road, seem somewhat premature. The pub remained firmly closed as we went to press, although there are definite signs of building work taking place.

At the **Grove** in Hazel Grove we welcome new tenants Steve and Judy Knowles, who have found life rather hectic since taking over the pub. Both the public area and the living quarters are undergoing extensive refurbishment. Prior to taking over at The Grove, Steve was an engineer while Judy still works as a carer for the elderly in Hazel Grove. Both of them, however, have also had considerable experience of the pub industry. We wish them well in a pub which must have considerable unrealised potential.

Another new face is at the well-regarded **Coach & Horses** in West Gorton where Annmarie Wilson has taken the tenancy. Before taking over, Annmarie worked teaching literacy to young children. When she fancied a change, running her own pub was the obvious option as she has plenty of experience of working in the industry, having helped her sister who has been in the trade for many years. In Stockport, the **Nelson**, Wellington Road North, is up for franchise by Scottish & Newcastle. This former managed house once had a good record on the cask beer front, until a new manager took over and turned the pub entirely over to keg. Let's hope that more sensible hands can restore at least some of the past glories.

The saga of **Carpe Diem** in Cheadle rumbles on. As expected, Punch Taverns appealed against the decision to not allow them an entertainment licence and this will be heard by the magistrates sometime between April and June. Punch have also been refused

planning permission to alter the building's exterior, although they seem to be charging ahead with the conversion of the interior to the American pool bar theme. Objections are flooding in from locals, which includes opposition to renaming the pub "Mr Q's". This has resulted in local press advertisements requesting suggested new names from the public - one local has suggested "Inn Bad Taste". Somehow we don't think that will find favour with Punch.

Last month we reported that the **Crown** in Bredbury might be for sale. Not so, it seems and apologies to all concerned. Which leaves the intriguing question, just where is the Enterprise Inns-owned Crown which is on the market?

CROWNING GLORY

If you're going to be wrong, you might as well do the job properly. Last month we reported that Hale Leisure were planning to turn the Crown on Deansgate into a dance venue. This produced a speedy call from licensee Dave Nicholls, anxious to point out that nothing could be further from the truth; and indeed, rather than being just another late night music bar, the Crown looks set to become a real asset to the City Centre's drinking scene.

The Crown reopened late last month and is run by Hale Leisure (of Jabez Clegg et al fame) on a lease from Enterprise Inns. Dave himself, comes with some considerable experience in the trade, latterly having been assistant manager at the Salisbury, a pub which has made something of a name for itself with cask beers. Unsurprisingly then, cask beer features strongly at the Crown. There are four on handpump - when OT called these were Taylor's Landlord, Marstons Pedigree, Boddingtons Bitter and Wells Bombardier. The Pedigree and Bombardier are effectively guest beers and Dave hopes to have one or two changing guest beers throughout the week. Interestingly, he's not restricted to suppliers, either. Provided the price is right, he'll take beer from anyone who can supply it. There's no smooth sold and already bitter (i.e. cask) sales are overtaking lager.

The pub itself has not been drastically changed internally. Essentially it's just been redecorated, in relaxing shades of lemon, cream and green, and had new carpets and upholstery fitted. There's some new furniture too, including a settee, which again adds to the laid back, feel of the pub.

And that's what it's all about really. As Dave put it, "I just want it to be a pub where anyone can come in and enjoy a drink", in other words a genuine local in the City Centre. This is reflected in the low-key music policy which aims to add to the atmosphere and not dominate it. Dave was also at pains to stress that should the late license application be successful, the aim will be to create more of a 'super club' atmosphere where people can come for a late night drink and chat with jazzy/blues type music drifting in the background.

The Crown is open all permitted hours and serves food from 11-9 Monday to Friday, 11-3 on Saturdays and all day Sundays. Highly recommended. JC.



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