



# OPENING TIMES



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Volume 17 Issue 10

OCTOBER 2001 No:210

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## BIGGEST & BEST GOOD BEER GUIDE

The 29<sup>th</sup> Good Beer Guide is launched by CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, on 10 October. Edited by long-standing CAMRA stalwart and beer expert Roger Protz, the 2002 edition promises to be one of the best ever and in beer-drinking circles is the publishing event of the year.

The 2002 edition of the CAMRA Good Beer Guide offers a whole new reading and drinking experience for lovers of real ale. It's also the biggest-ever edition of CAMRA's market-leading pub guide which has now sold over one million copies since it first appeared in 1974.


The new guide has been overhauled and redesigned from start to finish. There are still 5,000 of the best pubs in Britain that offer cask beer in tip-top condition, but 4,000 of the entries now have longer descriptions. Readers will learn more about these pubs before they visit them, and will have all the information they need about the food, the history, the architecture, the facilities for families and children as well as the beer. As always, the Good Beer Guide features its unique breweries section that lists all the breweries - from micros, to regionals to global producers that make cask and bottle-conditioned beers. Editor Roger Protz gives a no-punches-pulled analysis of the state of the brewing industry, and other major features include:

- ★ Susy Smith on how Country Living, magazine joined forces with CAMRA to save rural pubs.
- ★ Simon Loftus of Adnams and Nick Stafford of SIBA on the struggle for survival of regional and small craft breweries.
- ★ Cask Marque's drive to improve cask beer quality in the nation's pubs.
- ★ Jeff Evans on the small but rising tide of bottle-conditioned beers
- ★ Susan Nowak on the Campaign for Real Food's drive to improve pub platters

Don't go to the pub without it! The Good Beer Guide 2002 costs £12.99 from bookshops or direct from CAMRA head office. Alternatively you can order your copy locally from Jim Flynn, 66 Downham Road, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, SK4 5EG. Look out next month for our special discounted rate for CAMRA members (details from Jim Flynn: - on 0161 432 1816).


**FALSE SIGNS UPDATE - PAGE 20**

**5000 BEST PUBS**




**Good Beer Guide 2002**

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EDITED BY ROGER PROTZ



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## IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Twelve months ago I opened this column with the question - is a real ale revival under way?. Well one year on and last year's 'first flickerings' of an upturn are now burning a little brighter. Admittedly the headline figure is still one of decline but it is now clearer than ever that this is purely done to the decline of the major national brands in 'real' form. Figures recently released show cask ale down by about eight per cent over the previous 12 months, headed by a huge 12 per cent drop in cask Tetley Bitter. The same goes for all of the national 'brand leaders' but look down the list and you soon come to Greene King IPA posting a double-digit increase.

Drinkers, it seems, are no longer looking to the national brewers for their cask ales. Instead, alongside the steep demand for the likes of cask Tetley, John Smiths et al there is an increasing demand for the products of dedicated cask ale brewers, be they the likes of giants Greene King or tiddlers like, say, Pictish and Bank Top, both of whom are struggling to keep up with demand. The giant pub companies are catching on to this. More and more of them are setting up dedicated cask ale schemes to give their licensees access to a much wider range of cask beers from regional and local producers. Enterprise Inns and Punch Taverns are among the latest to do this. The latter have even reopened that famous old brew-pub, the Old Swan at Netherton in the Black Country.

At some stage the decline in the nationals' products will be overtaken by the growth of the smaller brewers beers, and I suspect that could well happen sooner rather than later. At which point of course, all those sloppy, lazy journalists who never look or the facts behind the headline of a press release will have a very large amount of egg on their faces.

*John Clarke*

Has anyone else noticed the veritable blizzard of "Pub to Let" signs that are proliferating throughout the Opening Times area? As the traditional brewery estates have been handed over to a plethora of "Pub-Owning" companies, there has been a dramatic tendency to change the old big-brewery managed houses (here a "new concept", there a "retail experience", everywhere a "theme Pub") into leased pubs. On the surface this might seem like a return to the traditional tenanted estates of breweries like Robinsons, but the harsh reality is very different. In the wake of the "intrepreneur" group, these new "pubcos" are merely finance houses, who use the projected rental from their leased pubs to raise more money from other finance houses. Who suffers? Well the poor saps who sign these leases with their redundancy money as "incoming" costs, and their customers (the drinkers) who are bled dry to pay the Pubco's interest payments. Most of these leased pubs no longer offer a realistic living at all, and it will all end in tears within the next 12 months with the loss, for ever, of a very large amount of our pub stock. Remember, you read it here first. (ps: if you have shares in a pubco with lots of leases - SELL!)

*P.B. Hutchings*

## OPENING TIMES ISSUE 210

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](mailto: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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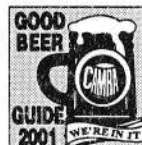
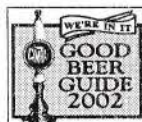


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## PUB OF THE MONTH OCTOBER 2001

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	31			



**T**he Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for October is the Union on Broadstone Road, Reddish.

It is not so long ago that for a brief period every pub in Reddish served cask ale but now over half no longer bother. The area suffers because just one pub is owned by one of our local independent breweries, the Union.

In the 1980s the Union was a thriving local until Robinson's decided to let their architects loose on the place (thankfully those days are now behind us) and for a decade or more the pub struggled from what proved to be a body blow. Almost five years ago to this very month Dermot McDermott arrived at the Union and the congenial Irishman has slowly but surely breathed life back into the pub. Once again it is a thriving, lively community local with a licensee who obviously cares about the place at the helm. The pub itself is a well-decorated and homely single room broken up into separate drinking areas with a pleasant outdoor drinking area at the rear.

There is only one cask beer, Robinson's Best Bitter, on handpump and Dermot keeps this in fine form. In the time that he has been at the pub, the Best Bitter has in fact doubled in sales - which gives a lie to all those other pubs in the area that have discontinued real ale either because they were either unable to keep it properly or, more likely, couldn't be bothered to make the effort. Dermot is testimony to the fact that a good licensee will always be able to keep good beer in a good pub even in circumstances where others have failed.

Join us when we celebrate the pub's success at the Pub of the Month presentation on Thursday 25 October. **JF**

The 42A bus from Gorton and South Manchester, and the 373 from Stockport drop almost outside the pub. It is only a 2-3 minute walk from the centre of Reddish where the frequent 203 drops off. The pub is also no more than a 10-minute walk from the A6 with its frequent bus services.

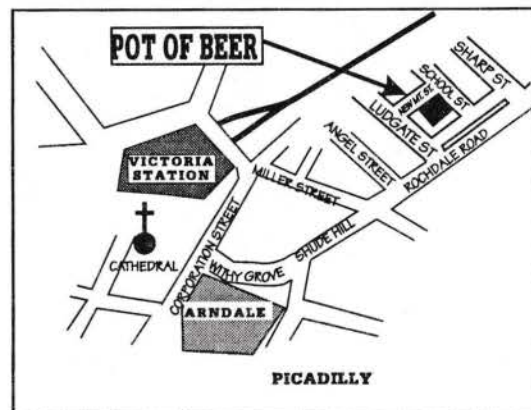
*The local branch of CAMRA decide on a Pub of the Month by a democratic vote at the monthly branch meeting.*

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# The Beer House

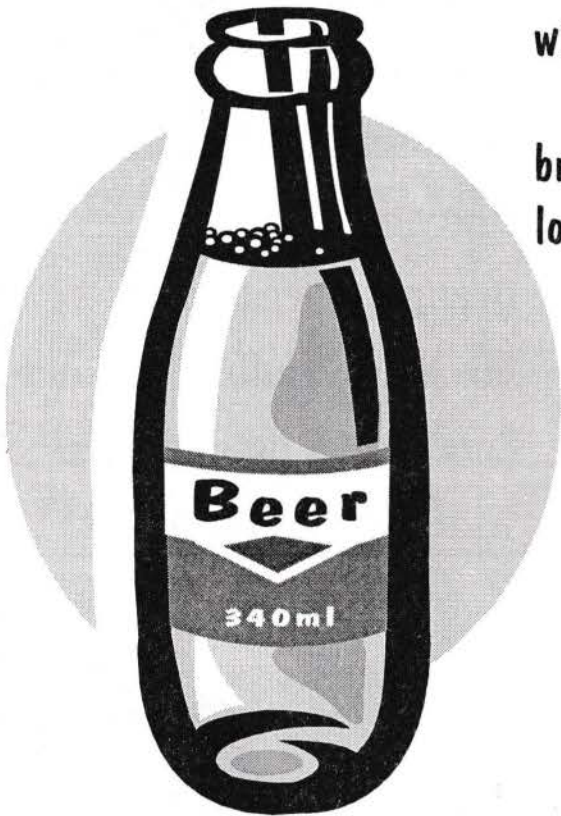
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Anne & Graham Rawlinson, Ian & all the staff would like to thank all of our customers both regular and less so for their support over the last ten years at the pub, and thanks also to Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA for their support and assistance at some of our many beer festivals with staff and a great knowledge! Other branches have been locally so to them no in assisting a great deal of CAMRA less helpful thanks at all!



In the last 2 years we have had beers from England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Belgium, Czech Republic, Germany, U.S.A. & even as far as Manchester! Including breweries such as Dwan, Brasserie de la Soif, Goldthorne, Evesham, Caythorpe, North Cotswold, St Georges, Tirril & Leadmill to name but a few With approximately 20 beers each week that's over 2000 different beers plus 30000 pints of Thwaites bitter, 25000 pints of Hoegaarden, 3.5 tonnes of Chilli, 2500 Chicken burgers & 1500 free chip butties in just 2 years!

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# STAGGER

with Dave Hanson

## Clayton & Beswick

This evening's saunter started out in Clayton on Crabtree Lane at the *Strawberry Duck*. Situated adjacent to the Ashton Canal, it has the feel of a country pub in the heart of this industrial area. Inside the pub has been refurbished, with an extension being added at the rear, and is decorated with lots of light woodwork. Outside drinking is also catered for in the garden, which around the corner on the banks of the canal. On the beer front, there was only Holt's bitter on offer, which was rated as good. Due to a late start, time was pressing, so we could not linger longer.

A long walk followed, up Crabtree Lane to Ashton New Road, then left towards the *Grove*, a distance of about half a mile. The Grove is a traditional two-roomed Holt's pub, with the public bar on the left and the lounge to the right as you enter. When entering take note of the tiled floor in the lobby area, a feature that is becoming rare as pubs are redecorated and 'old fashioned' decor is ripped out. We entered the lounge, which still has a lot of original carved dark woodwork around the bar. Being a Holt's tied pub, both mild and bitter were on offer at their famously low prices. Both beers were tried and rated as very good, with the mild being judged just the better of the two. We would have liked to stay longer, but having a packed agenda we quickly pressed on to our next port of call. *What a mistake this was!* Read on.

Turning left at the front door, we soon covered the few yards along Ashton New Road to come to the *Sir Humphry Chetham*. Externally the pub is a feast, with lots of tiling enhancing the inviting decor. This is complemented with a prominent notice proclaiming "Selection of Fine Cask Ales", beckoning us to enter. Inside was a disaster, NO REAL ALE, just cream flow/nitrokeg being offered. An expertly choreographed about turn was executed and we all exited smartly! Never mind, across the road toward our next pub.

Local knowledge reassured us that the *Derby Arms* had real ale. Another large sign declaring "Selection of Fine Cask Ales" in the middle of the smartly presented exterior confirmed this. Inside we spotted a hand pump - Good. There was no pump clip - Worrying. When real ale was requested we were told none was available - Very bad! Things were looking glum - Every one out!

Latest score: Real Ale 2 - Keg 2.

Back across the road and along Clipstone Street towards the *Victoria*. This was keg only on our last visit, so we did not hold out much hope. A hardy soul was dispatched to confirm that this was still the case. Continuing along Clipstone Street to the corner of Clayton Lane we came to the *Church*. This was also keg only. At least neither of these two had any scurrilous misleading signing outside.

Turning south along Clayton Lane until we crossed the canal we came to the *Bridge*. This well decorated pub, complete with excellent window boxes/hanging baskets, also declared itself as having "Cask Ale". Some of our group were getting very twitchy, as they hadn't had a pint since the Grove (remember we left this in haste to sample all these real ale establishments!). ALAS! We hadn't got through the door before the vanguard were heading out muttering "Bl\*ty misleading signs!". Yes, you guessed, no real ale. Half time score: Real Ale 2 - Keg 5.

We continued south along Clayton Lane until we came to the *Fox*. Externally it held out little promise of cask ale, in fact some of our party had dismissed it and walked on past. Someone entered and was heard to exclaim "BEER AT LAST". The Fox is split in two by the central bar, with the lounge to the left and a games/public room to the right. There was only one hand pump dispensing, of all things, Cains Mild. We were so desperate for a drink that we emptied the barrel (well it sounds good, but I suspect it was near the end anyway!). The landlord swapped the barrel promptly, and satisfied all our needs. A couple of the pints (the barrel ends) were not up to scratch, but were instantly changed, without quibble, by the bar staff. A karaoke session was being set up in the lounge, so we all retired to the games room. After a very leisurely pint (we were well ahead of schedule) we had to once again brave the beer desert of Clayton.

Cutting through a few back streets we came to the *Bradford* alongside Alan Turrin Way. I have drunk cask ale in here, but this was not to be the case tonight. Yet again it was a keg only pub. Oh hum! Score update: Real Ale 3 - Keg 6.

We made our way along Grey Mare Lane passing, after confirming that no real ale was available firstly the *Victoria*, secondly *Mary D's Beamish Bar* (what a surprise this sells no real ale!) and finally the *Crossroads*.

Crossing Ashton New Road for the last time we headed for Rowsley Street, which is around behind the new commonwealth stadium. This led us to the *Britannia*, our final destination. This idiosyncratic pub is owned by Lees and was acquired at a time when the area was economically depressed, Manchester Steel and the gas works being big employers. A period of despondency followed with the wholesale clearance of the area, but the pub hung on through this desolation. Now it is booming, with as much trade being done in breakfasts for the men working on the stadium.

As you enter, turn right to the bar. If a shower of darts greets you, don't turn tail and flee, the locals are friendly, but the board is just by the door. Having negotiated any stray arrows, the bar has both mild and bitter on offer. We tried both, which were both rated excellent (though in truth we have had little to compare it with this evening!). If you turn left on entering however there are other drinking areas. By any standards the *Britannia* is an excellent example of the classic English pub. What a wonderful advert this will be for real ale when the Commonwealth games takes place. Which will form a better impression, Chrome Bar 6 (if it exists) or the *Britannia*?

Full time score: Real Ale 4 - Keg 9.

How can I sum up this evening's stagger? Plenty of pubs, so there is no lack of customers, but real ale on sale in less than half. This is bad enough, but not one, but **three** pubs dishonestly displaying "Real Ale" here signs and offering none at all. These have been reported to the Trading Standards Department, who is currently investigating them. Is it any coincidence that pub chains own all these offenders, and real ale is only available in local brewery tied pubs? I think a misquote from the Ancient Mariner, "Beer, beer everywhere, and not a drop to drink!"



## THE HINDS HEAD

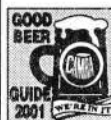
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# O P E N I N G T I M E S

**From Mr G Peters, Warrington:**

*Could you help campaign for the disabled?*

*My local is the Old Monkey on Princess Street (Holts) where we don't have a ramp for wheelchairs and the toilets are in the basement. Anyone in a wheelchair has to be taken to Yates Wine Lodge to use their toilet.*

*How do breweries get a license when we have disabled people wanting a cheap drink and when we have a situation like the Old Monkey? There have been two muggings and one regular died on the stairs coming back from the toilet 12 months ago. Anyone disabled wanting a meal forget the Old Monkey because you have to go upstairs to the lounge.*

*Hope something can be sorted.*

**From Peter Black, via e-mail:**

*Having taken the advice to visit the Knott Fringe Bar next to Deansgate Station, I can confirm that both it (especially the first floor balcony) and the beer are very pleasant. The bar deserves our support*

*In particular, being a native of Cambridge it was a delight to enjoy an excellent pint of Greene King IPA.*

*Which brings me to the second point. The Farmers Arms in Cheadle is part of the Hungry Horse chain owned by Greene King. As a recent arrival in Cheadle I notice there is a GK IPA handpump on the bar, and I was looking forward to a pint or several hundred. However IPA has been unavailable on three recent visits. Has anyone succeeded, and if so, what does it taste like?*

**From Peter Cash, Secretary North Manchester CAMRA:**

*It is rarely that I feel moved to write to your organ, but the implication by "Beer Monster" in the September issue, that support for the Beer House by the "local branch" (not named, but obviously North Manchester) disappeared at the same time that Idy & Sal left for the Crescent, is simply not borne out by an examination of the facts.*

*In the last two years of Idy & Sal's term at the Beer House, the branch held just three meetings there, in March, August and September 1999.*

*When Ian took over the Beer House (around October 1999) our Branch took a deliberate decision to hold meetings there regularly; we plan our events about three months ahead. Meetings were held there in January, May, July, September and November 2000 and in January 2001: twice as many during Ian's first 15 months than in Idy & Sal's final 24!*

*This May, the Beer House featured prominently in the branch Mild Marathon, and Ian was awarded a framed certificate as 'Mild Champion' for featuring seven draught milds. Our annual*

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](mailto:johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com)

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July Independent's Day Treasure Hunt this year was centred on the Beer House as usual and attracted a record number of people. Both events were extensively reported in What's Doing. As recently as 5 September, the branch held a Social there which was enjoyed 99% of the evening, until the last few members remaining (before closing time) were thrown out. The quality of the beer under Ian's stewardship has been just as excellent as during Idy & Sal's tenure, which is underlined by its continues selection by the branch for the Good Beer Guide (including 2002). I recently telephoned the pub, and WestRose Leisure, the owning company, four times to see whether they wanted any Guides at a discount, but my calls went unanswered. I am not aware of any adverse criticism of the pub, the beer or the licensee in any North Manchester publication. We wish Ian well in the future and will continue to watch developments at the Beer House with interest.

**From Sue Ridings, Heaton Norris:**

Many thanks to Hydes' Brewery for their generous hospitality, and to Paul Jefferies in particular for his very informative tour during our recent visit there. I was fortunate enough to have been a lucky prize-winner in the draw for ten places amongst Mild Challenge winners and tool along my partner as a guest. We were both overwhelmed when unexpectedly the Branch Chairman presented us with a Mild Challenge 2001 "Mild Champions" certificate in recognition of visiting all 66 pubs on foot. Many thanks to Stockport & South Manchester Branch for their award which we will always treasure, and we greatly appreciated the encouragement given to us by members of the branch during the Challenge.

**From Frank Wood, Glossop:**

Elsewhere in this edition of OT, it is reported that two Glossop area pubs have been closed by Pubmaster and are re-opening as Italian restaurants. One of the pubs, The Whiteley Nab, was a Good Beer Guide listed pub as recently as the 1994 and 1996 editions, when it was a well thought of Vaux house, selling up to four beers from their range and selling fine food in the process. What went wrong you might ask? Following the demise of Vaux, it was acquired by Pubmaster, who had every opportunity to do their homework and carry on selling fine beers and food. Instead, they put on an often lone beer (Boddingtons bitter) with Tetteys on occasions and stopped selling food. A succession of managers came and went, none having the local interest that the previous licensees had. Its demise was rapid, on some visits I had there in prime times, there were two and three customers when before there were twenty or thirty.

The moral is that the winning formula was not carried on and that stinks of bad management by Pubmaster.

May I end by wishing the partners opening the restaurant every success. It is no use blaming them for the fiasco! Reflecting back to other Glossop area pubs that have shut in the past two years, the Plough, Roebuck, Woolley Bridge Inn and two years previous to this, the Rose & Crown. Having thought about them, they all were thriving community pubs whose managers had to do what the pub group concerned told them to do i.e. sell keg/smooth/big brand (tasteless) beers. Their customers voted with their feet and simply went somewhere else to drink. Will they ever learn from this scenario happening over and over again?

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# Robinson's

## STILL RAISING THE STANDARD

The tension is mounting as the fourth annual Robinson's Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition enters its final stages. Over the last few months, Robinson's district managers have been dropping in unannounced at all the houses in the estate to grade them on aspects of the business ranging from the cleanliness of their bars and cellars to the quality of the cask conditioned ales they serve.

After careful deliberations, the pubs were whittled down to a shortlist of twelve which have each recently received a surprise visit by the competition's two judges - marketing manager Oliver Robinson, a member of the sixth generation of the Robinson family to be involved in running the company, and head brewer Chris Hellin. The two will shortly be announcing the winners of what has been a very close contest.

Oliver is in no doubt that the competition has, over the years, achieved its prime objective of promoting quality across the estate. "Standards have risen beyond recognition since we started the competition," he said. "It is important that there is uniformity for our customers so that a pint of Best Bitter will taste just as good whether it is served in Stockport or North Wales."

As quality continues to improve, Oliver admits that the task of choosing the winner is getting harder.

"The houses that were short-listed all scored very highly," he said. "If two pubs are awarded equal marks, then we look closely at the licensees' overall work in raising quality and adding to their customers' enjoyment."

To further improve standards, Robinson's is this year running the competition in association with Guinness, which is currently developing its own national quality initiative, to ensure that the legendary Irish stout is also served in prime condition across the estate.

Following the announcement of the judges' final verdict, the overall winner will have the honour of hosting a presentation night where the top licensee will receive the coveted Unicorn Shield that was won last year by Syd and Jenny Hampson, of the Masons Arms, Denton. Additional prizes to the successful house include a certificate, 36 gallons of beer and, courtesy of co-sponsors Chemisphere UK, a cheque for £120 and a trophy. Prizes will also be awarded to the second and third pubs, and to the most improved cellar.

In addition, Guinness is offering prizes, including the chance to watch Manchester United play a Premiership game from the Guinness box at Old Trafford, for the top pubs in its section of the competition.

Robinson's has long been renowned for its commitment to quality throughout the brewing of its cask conditioned ales. The Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition, together with the comprehensive training that the company provides for its licensees, shows how this insistence on the highest standards extends to all areas of its operations.



This space is sponsored by Frederic Robinson Ltd.



## The National Scene

The big news of course is the great Bass sell-off, with Interbrew now preparing to sell half its UK business after Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt's final ruling on its takeover of Bass Brewers.

Something called the 'Carling Brewing Company' is to be floated off by the end of February next year and the purchaser has to be approved by the government. The news had many trade figures scratching their heads as to just what comprised 'Carling Brewing' which turns out to be everything in Bass apart from brands beginning with the words Bass or Tennents plus two breweries in Belfast and Glasgow. Everything else will be flogged off including four English breweries - Alton, Hants; Cape Hill, Birmingham; Tadcaster, Yorkshire and the giant Bass brewery in Burton itself. Along with these go major beer brands like Stones Bitter and Worthington.

One bizarre result of this will be that Interbrew will on one hand keep the Belfast Brewery but not the rights to its major product, Caffreys, while on the other will lose the Burton plant but retain the rights to its major product, Draught Bass. Interbrew are apparently quite relaxed about having their flagship beer brewed under licence as this is not an uncommon situation for European brewers.

## Closer To Home

Meanwhile, our four local family brewers can take some satisfaction from the first ever Cask Ale Week. While there may have been lessons to learn about pre-publicity and the need to make it more of an 'event' for both drinker and publicans alike, this was a valuable first step and hopefully will lead to bigger and better things next year.

All four have new or seasonal beers out at the moment. Robinson's are reprising Coopers Bell from last year and it seems to be proving as popular as ever. Lees and Hydes both brought out new seasonals last month. Lees have Red Dragon, a 'Welsh honey ale' which has managed to avoid the cloying sweetness of some honey beers while Hydes have One To Unwind which has some of the characteristics of a strong mild and is an excellent full-flavoured beer for autumn. Holts new beer should also be out about now and is planned to be paler, less bitter but stronger (about 4.5 per cent ABV) than the standard bitter. Initially it will be unnamed but if it goes well it and becomes a permanent addition to the Holts range then head brewer Keith Sheard tells us that he does have a name in mind.

As the winter months approach, so does the strong ale season. Lees Moonraker is out, of course, and Robinson's Old Tom is back for the winter season. Hydes' XXXX is also likely to appear following what appears to have been a successful, if limited, relaunch last winter.

## LAB Latest

The LAB beers continue to flow out of the hand-pumps at the Lowes Arms in Denton. The first brew of Frog Bog (3.9%) lasted just over a week. Sales have been so good the brewery have not been able to keep up with demand. As a result of the success production is going to have to be increased from one to two brews per week. The brewery is also looking to purchase another fermenting vessel and more casks! An attempt is going to be made to finally brew "Wild Wood" at some point during October.

The first firkin finally left The LAB at the end of September and went to the Halkin Beer Festival in North Wales. Initial reports were that the beer, Broomstairs Bitter, had been very well received. Hopefully, with the increase in production, beers from "The LAB" will start to be seen around the area over the next couple of months.

On Saturday 29th September The LAB held the launch party for which the Lowes Arms in Denton was full to brimming. High Peak Branch made the evening a social event and Stockport Branch made a special stop on the way home from their trip to the Keighley Beer Festival to help the celebrations, and were joined by other members who travelled from Stockport and Manchester for the event. The evening's excellent entertainment was provided by the "New Orleans Jazz Trio" and Peter Wood's special sausages made with The LAB's Broomstairs Bitter. A beer quiz was also held and the winner was High Peak chairman Tom Lord (it wasn't a fix-honest!). Lowes Arms landlord Peter Wood told Opening Times "the evening was extremely successful, the beers from The LAB proved very popular indeed". Customers on this fateful evening



managed to consume an astonishing 12 firkins of beer. If success is measured by the amount of beer consumed then the evening was a roaring success and thoroughly enjoyable. Peter and Anthony asked Opening Times to thank all who went along.

### Micro Magic

Of course, our other micro brewers continue to produce the goods, and how. Apologies to all those not contacted this month; look for a more comprehensive round-up next time.

Pictish Brewery has two new beers out this month. The monthly special is Spellbound, 4.8 per cent with root liquorice and what is by now the trademark lingering bitter finish. The second is a limited (just one brew) extra (partially as a result of nagging by your very own Ed.1) and this is Samhain, a 5 per cent bitter stout with lots of roasted barley in the recipe. If previous Pictish brews are anything to go by this could be an instant classic in the making. Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA also had a trip to Pictish to present Richard Sutton with his Beer of the Festival award, won



by Summer Solstice. Our picture shows him receiving the framed certificate from Festival Organiser Jim Flynn.

Another brewery with a classic stout in its portfolio is Porters and in an embarrassment of riches, that, too, should be available this month. At 5.5 per cent it's a potent, bone-dry brew and is also arguably the best beer that Porters produces (which, given the quality of the rest of the beers, is saying something).

Boggart Hole Clough also has another beer out. This is Bog Standard a 4 per cent bitter that is anything but - full-bodied yet easy drinking and with a good smack of hops, it's one of Mark Dade's best beers to date. Look out for it in the local free trade (OT has already been fortunate enough to try it in the ever-excellent Kings Arms in Salford).

Marble Brewery also has a new beer out this month. This is to mark the first anniversary of going organic and is a special edition of Old Lag. It will still be 5 per cent but should be paler and hoppier than the standard version, which it may replace if it's sufficiently well received. Brewer James Campbell also tells us that in the coming months we can look forward to the return of both Amber and Chocolate Heavy. There have been rumours that Sarah's Hop House had ceased brewing. There was apparently a short break while Sarah and her boyfriend went to France as they intend to relocate (and brew!) there. However the good news is that they're back and the Golborne brewery is back in production.

Unfortunately the same can't be said for the well-regarded Pasageway Brewery in Liverpool which has been mothballed. The loss of these distinctive beers is a major blow to the real ale scene in the north west and it would be a tragedy if they are gone forever. As you might expect, Phoenix has a whole raft of beers out this month. There's Last Leaf (4.5%, amber and well-balanced); Fire Cracker (4.7%, light brown with a good hop finish); RipRap (4.1%, very pale and very hoppy - it was superb last time); Spooky Brew (4.5%, reddish brown and hoppy) and Uncle Fester (4.5%, light brown with a bitter finish). There's also a chance that something called Black Bee will appear. Not yet brewed as we went to press, this is intended to be a 4.5% honey porter.

Bank Top has a new beer out for the Bolton Beer Festival at the Howcroft pub. This is Outback Bitter, a 4.2 per cent beer brewed using Australian Pride of Ringwood hops. Bank Top's John Feeney also tells us that building work is about to start on his new premises, with a move scheduled for February or March next year. Demand at Bank Top is such that three new fermenters have been bought, bringing the total to seven. "Not bad considering we started with one", say John. You can say that again!



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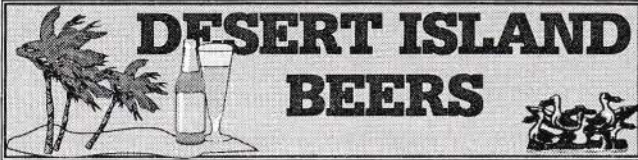
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This month's Desert Island Beers are from Anthony Firmin, brewer at the new LAB brewer, based at the Lowes Arms in Denton. Already armed with the Good Beer Guide together with the current Champion and Winter Champion Beers, Oakham JHB and Orkney Skullsplitter respectively, here are his five choices...

"A month or so ago John Clarke asked me to write about my five favourite beers and I agreed. I then sat down and thought about it, what were my five fave beers - this was neither going to be an easy or simple task. After much deliberation I have made my decisions and here, as a celebration of the hop, they duly are (in no specific order)...

**"Osset - Quicksilver:** Not so obvious but it is a pale and hoppy beer. The first time I tasted this was at the Huddersfield Beer Festival and the reaction was WHOOSH!!!! Absolutely marvellous. My taste buds never recovered for the rest of the day. Ossett beers are not often seen around Manchester but even so this remains a firm favourite. If you ever see it, try it - it's a tremendous brew and you won't be disappointed.

**"Pictish - Brewers Gold:** Awesome. What can I say about this excellent beer that hasn't already been written. Richard Sutton brews fabulous beers but if this is on a bar somewhere it's the one I always go for first. Always consistent, always outstanding. Nice and light with lots of hoppy flavours floating around the mouth.

**"Porter - Sunshine:** The competition. I went to college with Dave Porter 20 years ago and we spent most, if not all, lunchtimes in the student bar supping a real ale or 4. Happy days indeed. This again is a fabulous hoppy beer which I would certainly take with me to the desert island.

**"Roosters - Yankee:** Bit of an obvious one really if you're getting the drift of all my choices. In fact it could have said Roosters Anything! Mr. Franklin brews exceptionally good beers, all of which have that WOW factor. Pale, hoppy, absolutely wonderful. I have never had a disappointing Roosters beer and would always recommend them to people who are looking for something to excite the taste buds.

**"Orval:** I am certainly no expert on European beers but during a visit to Europe this year a good friend and myself were trying some beers in a hotel bar and we decided to try this. Oh dear!! The fruity flavours flooded around the mouth - bananas, berries, all sorts of things!!! It was so good I had to track it down once I returned home and there is now always at least one bottle in the fridge!!! Tim Webb in his European Good Beer Guide describes it as his favourite European Beer and I can understand why. Fabulous stuff! No fridge should be without a bottle!

"The 'Try Also' section that didn't quite make the final selection... Milk Street - ZIG ZAG, Barnsley IPA, Abbeydale Matins, and Whim Hartington Bitter. Oakham JHB, too, but I'm already allowed that!

"I hope you have enjoyed reading my diatribe about my favourite beers. If you haven't tried any of these I would recommend all of them for a wonderful hoppy experience. Cheers!"



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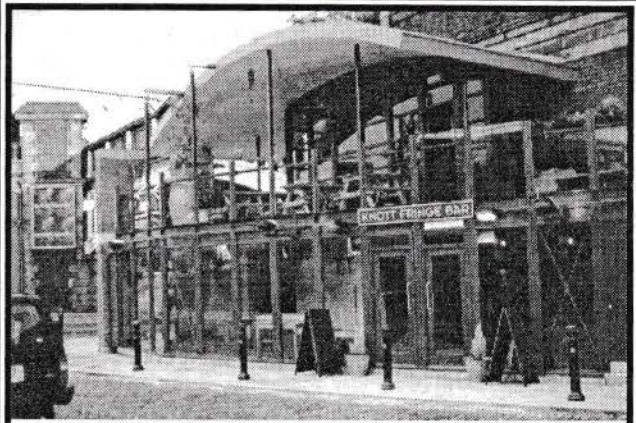
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# Stockie on The Che

By John Taylor



In the Stockport Licensed Houses team knock-out final, The Royal Mortar from Hillgate completed the league and cup double, beating Reddish WMC 6-1 in a one-sided match. Lancashire star Kevin Weir took the first game in 15 and 18 darts, which included a 113 outshot. This was followed up with wins by Darryl Fitton 15 and 20, including a tremendous outshot of 157; next was Tony Daniels who won in 21 and 14, with John Hollins winning the match with two legs of 20 darts. The formalities were completed with wins for Pete Connolly and Roly Mellor. George Pike was the sole winner for the Reddish team, the Champions only dropping four legs in the whole match.

Another team in great form is Stockport, in the Cheshire Super League, having won their first match 8-1 against Warrington they went one better against Sandbach, completing a 9-0 whitewash. They now face three away matches before returning for their next home fixture which is planned for Sunday, 4 November. If you like to watch darts as they should be thrown, come down to the Ash Hotel in Heaton Norris on that evening and watch the tungsten fireworks go off.

The end of season Licensed Houses darts pairs and individual finals were a great success and I would like to thank all the players who took part, which made all the preparation worthwhile. The pairs final was won by the

Ash Hotel pairing of Barry Riley and John McArdle who defeated John Hollins and Glynn Griffiths from the Royal Mortar. It was a very close run thing, with John Mc hitting the winning double in a nail-biting last leg. It was nice to see Barry back, having just returned to the fold after a year out of darts.

In the individuals, the competition was over-subscribed with the venue being just about full - not bad for a Tuesday night. Those who were in attendance and stayed for the final saw an excellent display of darting by Daz Fitton who overcame Roly Mellor in a closer than expected final. There was even enough food put on to keep Pete (crusher) Gerrard happy, although it was a good job Phil Kerr didn't turn up as well. I hate to see grown men fight over the last butty.

The new season in Stockport has just started again. The Stockport & District League which has dwindled in numbers in recent years will probably have to merge with another league in the very near future or face the possibility of going out of existence, which would be sad to see. The Stockport Licensed Houses League, though, appears to have benefited from their demise and now boasts 27 teams which make up the Super and Premier Divisions. Darts leagues, like anything else, need to be run and organised properly. Administration is a very important factor; teams and secretaries need to be updated on a regular basis with regards to recent results and stats. It is important to get darts as much coverage as possible, hence this column. So, as I mentioned last month, if anybody has anything worthwhile they wish me to include in future articles please let me know. Once again, thanks for taking time out to read this and hopefully it will lead to better things to come.

John Taylor can be contacted on 0161 432 2707.

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Having been given my just desserts (spacewise) last month I am on a strict ration for a couple of issues. Just space for a final recommendation from Ian Casson's Beer House and an advisement: If you like Blackcurrants, and BEER, you would be well advised to go to Bar Fringe when OT comes out, because something VERY INTERESTING is going to appear...

### Cask Ale of the Month

Hanby Black Magic Plus (3.9% abv)

I am not normally a fan of milds, but this was sublime. Clearly based on Jack Hanby's famous Black Magic, there was a hop bitterness from nose to finish, complimenting massive chocolaty dry malt. A super beer, bags of flavour for its gravity. Tried (alas) at the Beer House.



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**Are You Dining, Sir?**

Thirty years ago, serving food in pubs was widely regarded as a regrettable trend that distracted pubgoers from the serious business of drinking. It was often said dismissively of a particular pub that "it's gone over to food." Nowadays, for a variety of reasons, the situation has changed completely, and apart from neighbourhood locals most pubs have to sell meals to survive.

But often today the trend has gone too far in the opposite direction, with a growing number of pubs giving a clear impression that anyone who only wants a drink isn't welcome. I recently called into a pub that had been converted into one of Bass's "Vintage Inns" and was snootily asked by the landlady "Will you be dining with us today, Sir?"

In a Peak District pub I bought my pint and wandered into the lounge, which had been laid out with place-settings, prompting the landlord to suggest I might be better off in the public bar. As it happened, I did order a meal, but in the time I was there nobody else came into the lounge, indicating that maybe the pub didn't have its priorities quite right.

Even if pubs do most of their business with diners, surely they should still set aside a little space, and a little courtesy, for customers who just want a drink. If pubs go too far down the road of becoming purely restaurants they risk losing what it was that attracted people to them in the first place. Diners are likely to feel that a place has more character and atmosphere with a few regulars chatting at the bar.

And if you know where to look it's still possible to find a few country pubs defying contemporary political correctness and serving nothing more substantial than a packet of crisps.

**Fashion Discrimination**

A perennial subject of complaint in "Opening Times" is pubs applying ludicrous door policies that exclude responsible citizens while giving admission to yobbos and troublemakers. On the face of it, these policies seem to be completely counter-productive. But the people who run pubs are not totally stupid, and surely the point is that these restrictions have a hidden agenda, to enhance the image of these drinking establishments by admitting the sharply-dressed young, but keeping out the tubby middle-aged in their out-of-fashion casuals.

"Door control" may appear to be an insurance against trouble, but in practice it is often a sign that trouble is likely. And, if a pub or bar does apply daft dress restrictions, then it's a clear indication that it doesn't deserve your custom anyway. There's scarcely any area around here where there isn't a choice of decent, welcoming pubs that don't have these obnoxious policies, and where the chances of being attacked or robbed are much less.

It would also be interesting to know whether pubs are still maintaining bans on jeans when they have become such a popular fashion item, particularly for the female sex, in the past year.

**Curmudgeon Online: [www.curmudgeon.co.uk](http://www.curmudgeon.co.uk)**

**5 Years Ago**

by Phil Levison

**OCTOBER '96**

**E**ach year CAMRA stages a Day of Action in September, and in 1996 the theme was quality, driving home the message that what was needed was not necessarily more real ale, but better real ale.

The whole of the front page was taken up by the special Quality Award to Hydes' which had been made by the three CAMRA branches covering the City of Manchester. The citation was for "dedication to quality in traditional draught beer", and recognised Hydes' efforts over a wide area, from the introduction of seasonal beers to cellar training for licensees.

"Porter's Railway Builds Up Steam" was the headline - the former Byrons, on Great Portwood Street, had been converted into a comfortable, traditional one-room local with no pool table, juke box or fruit machines. The emphasis was on good ale to be enjoyed in good company. There were five handpumps dispensing Porters standard wide range of ales, from the Dark Mild to Porter's Sunshine with a sixth pump reserved for "one offs".

Local brewers Frederic Robinson had launched an initiative to mark CAMRA's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary that year. In a move described as "both welcome and generous" by CAMRA representatives, a recruitment campaign for the organisation had been launched throughout the company's tied estate. Specially printed membership forms had been made available to every pub, and those joining could get a voucher for a pint of Robbies at 1971 prices - that was about £1 off. New members would also get a copy of Robinson's guide to their pubs.

Another item on Robinson's - they had just won their first major export contract with an order to supply bottled Frederics to Boston Beer Brands of Boston, Massachusetts. The five per cent ABV beer, known as Frederics Premium Beer in the UK, was to be branded "Frederic Robinson Premium Ale" for the American market. Frederics is of course named after the founder of the Unicorn Brewery, and had originally been introduced as a cask-conditioned beer and despite only limited availability in the tied estate it had gone well in the free trade.

Finally, a couple of pub news items from Manchester Matters; the Pot of Beer was up and running; the John Willie Lees in the Arndale Centre had re-opened after the June bomb (and was it still bizarrely prohibiting hats in the lounge?).



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**Making the most of Mobberley**

Last time out I covered the area around Alderley Edge. Now it's the turn of the adjoining community of Mobberley, one stop before Knutsford on the railway line south of Altrincham. The quiet rural lanes of this quaint and expansive Cheshire village can be spoilt by the thunderous roar of air traffic passing frequently overhead. The area does boast several real ale hosterries to whet my imbibing experiences and I began with the two most northerly ones.

Firstly, conveniently situated for the train service is the **Railway**, and on turning right out of the station down Station Road I immediately encountered the pub sign on the side of a disused old barn type building, giving the impression that it was closed, but not so! Just to the left I espied the white façade of the pub itself, done out in Greenalls livery. The interior appears to have been opened out somewhat, with an extension, to provide three drinking and eating areas, but still retaining its public bar room. An outdoor beer garden sports a children's play area and a bowling green. Real ales are Boddingtons Bitter, Greenalls Bitter (both £1.78) and Marston's Pedigree at £2.

Moving from here, a right turn at the end of Station Road brought me on to Smith Lane. Following this to the T-junction and a further right turn led me on to Broadoak Lane, which in turn becomes Pepper Street. Hardly a street this, as it's more like a country road. Here I found the **Chapel House Inn**, a small two-roomed Boddingtons badged house which seems to have more seating outdoors than inside. However, it does retain a certain amount of cosiness with compact lounge and vault rooms. Boddingtons Bitter is available at £1.75 as the cask offering in the former Good Beer Guide entry. It appears to be closed on Monday lunchtimes, otherwise food is available.

On the south side from the station, it is some distance going via Station Road, following it across into Hobcroft Lane and right into Church Lane, before I encounter the **Church Inn**, a brick built pub opposite the Norman church. Externally it is prettily decorated with flower beds and hanging baskets, the rear having a flagged patio-style beer garden. Opened out internally, there is a compact bar with a real ale range consisting of Boddingtons Bitter, Marston's Pedigree and Tetley Bitter.

Intimate areas afford its patrons drinking and dining space, with much wood panelling in evidence.

On leaving, I continued down Church Lane, turning right onto Town Lane (B5085), then left onto Mill Lane for my next two hosterries serving the village proper. Amid much redevelopment of new housing taking place, first of all it's into the countrified **Bulls Head**, a whitewashed building with Tetley signage and a cobbled front for outdoor drinking. Inside the pub there is a lounge bar with space catering for those wishing to dine, and a vault room with pool table. There is an interesting range of real ales with Boddingtons Bitter, Tetley Bitter, Timothy Taylor's Landlord and a guest beer on my visit, the refreshing and palatable summer style Dabbers Delight at 4.8% ABV from Paradise Brewery.

Virtually opposite is the **Roebuck**, a lime and navy decorative exterior, extending to adjoining barn buildings. Reminiscent of the modern café bar styling, the interior of the pub is fitted out with low ceilings, two bars (one appearing to be temporarily unavailable), much pine furniture, a mix of floor coverings and tables lit with candles, attracting the dining fraternity. The beer range is handpulled Greene King Abbot Ale, Tetley Bitter and Timothy Taylor's Landlord, and what I took to be a guest beer in Adnam's Broadside at £2.10 a pint.

I retraced my steps, this time going down Town Lane, across into Hall Lane, eventually to reach Knolls Green and Knutsford Road, where two further pubs are close by, on the far extremity of the village, almost midway towards Alderley Edge.

One of the prettiest houses is Samuel Smith's **Bird In Hand** on the B5085, situated by a sharp twist in the road. It has a compact bar with four handpumps for their Old Brewery Bitter. This can be consumed in the myriad of rooms the pub has to offer, all having had a tasteful refurbishment since a recent change of licensee. A raised area has been created at the rear as a non-smoking room, other rooms offering quiet solitude with an abundance of wood panelling, archways, low beamed ceilings and other rich furnishings. Some outside seating is provided, now with what seems to be the obligatory heaters. There are good main meals, bar snacks and specials every day of the week.

From Knutsford Road via Moss Lane and onto Paddockhill Lane, an exhilarating walk down these pleasant country lanes, punctured only by the sounds of nature interspersed with the occasional traction engine from the nearby farms brought me to the **Plough & Flail**, which just happens to be another one of those low whitewashed establishments, possibly an old farm building at one time, but now with conservatory set out in a country kitchen style no doubt set on attracting the family dining fraternity. The pub has a rectangular bar counter, with three handpumps of which only two were in operation dispensing Boddingtons Bitter and Draught Bass. The space in which to drink them is opened out, the accent being on dining. Externally there are extensive grounds, which incorporate beer garden and childrens playground.

This about sums up and completes the scenario of Mobberley's public houses. Cheap day return tickets are available at £3.40 from Manchester Piccadilly via Stockport and Mobberley is a request stop station. GMPTE's Wayfarer ticket covers most bus and train services in the area.



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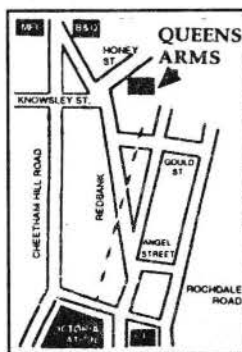
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The **Autumn Pub of the Season Award for Autumn 2001** has been won by that most traditional of pubs, the **British Flag on Coare Street, Macclesfield**.

This classic back-street Robinson's local has been run for the past eight and a half years by Lloyd and Viv Robertson who have made the pub a thriving local firmly anchored in its community. The four comfortable rooms are enjoyed by a wide cross-section of locals and the pub's popularity is evidenced by the large number of teams it can boast with pool, darts, crib and skittles teams all well established at the pub. Indeed sport of all types features strongly at the British Flag and it is particularly popular for football on the big screen. Being very much a local pub it doesn't open until five-thirty in the week but is more or less open all permitted hours at the weekend.

Apart from crisps and nuts you won't get any food here, but then it's not that sort of pub. What you will get is a great atmosphere and terrific beer with Robinson's Hatters Mild and Best Bitter now joined by the seasonals when these are available.

Years ago there were thousands of pubs like this but nowadays they are something of a rarity, especially when they are so well-run as the British Flag. This very well-deserved award was due to be presented on Monday 8 October with locals and CAMRA members alike set to celebrate Lloyd and Viv's success at this excellent pub.

...Pub Ne  
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...Pub Ne  
b News...  
News...P



In Hyde, the licensees, Ian and Carol at the Bush on Market Street left after over 6 years in charge. It would appear that the licensee has not been bought and a brewery manager will be taking over in the mean time. Down the road, Raymond and Christine Conley have taken over at the Crown. This will be their first pub so we wish them luck in their new venture. (They have had a bit of experience doing two weeks relief at the Cow and Calf in Romiley). Opposite at the Shepherds Call, Greenalls Festival is no longer available, but Hatters Mild is now available at the Bankfield Arms, Mottram Road alongside the Best Bitter.

Over in Marple the Railway, Rose Hill is starting to take the Robinson seasonal beers. An upgrade of the beer range to complement the recent refurbishment.

Now some losses: in the Glossop area the Lamb, Brookbottom, Hadfield has been closed for a number of weeks (we'll keep you posted) and the Roebuck in Whitfield is now keg only. The same fate has befallen the Feathers in Stalybridge which also lost its real cider. Finally the licensee at the Ardern Arms, Bredbury is due to leave shortly so another licence is on the market.

J W Lees are in the process of carrying out a major redevelopment of the Traveller's Call in Bredbury (which almost fell down during the building work!). While this is likely greatly to increase the emphasis on food, I confidently expect a strong emphasis on real ale as Lees will see it as something of a flagship pub.

The SEMMMS study has recommended the construction of the A6(M) Hazel Grove bypass in a watered-down form, but I'm not sure how this will impact on the Traveller's Call site (the original plans would have flattened the pub). Obviously Lees believe the pub will be there for long enough to justify a major investment.

Bad news about the Bowling Green, Marple. The closed pub was broken into by some kids who set it on fire. It was badly damaged and the roof has been demolished as a safety measure. It is to be knocked down and the rumour is that houses will be built on the site.

What was the Squirrels (formerly the Princes Hotel) in Chinley is now the Chinley Lodge, altered internally and with what appears to be now only one cask-conditioned beer - Wadworth 6X.

Stalybridge Labour Club, on High Street, now has non-member lunchtime entrance and also sells a range of changing guest beers.

Two of Glossop's oldest pubs are being turned into Italian restaurants! The Whiteley Nab on Charlestown Road has been transformed into O-Sole-Mio and the Lamp in Blackbottom is also to become an Italian eaterie after a £120,000 face-lift. The partners in the venture apparently promise (should that be threaten?) that more local pubs will become high-class Italian restaurants with the plan being to open a block of five. Until the demise of Vaux, the Whitely Nab was a Good Beer Guide entry for three years with a selection of four beers from the Vaux range. The Lamp was formerly a very highly thought of Boddingtons pub until recent years when it went over to Boddingtons smooth and down the pan with it.

PS (and I don't think this is actually pub news however) On a recent brewery trip I had to help remove an over enthusiastic imbiber (male-name withheld to protect the innocent) from the ladies toilet and pour him back on to the coach. This is probably of little significance but it did take me back to my student days!

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## THE MILD WALKING CHALLENGE (II)

*Steve Robinson and Sue Ridings conclude their coverage of the 2001 Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge on foot...*

**B**y Wednesday 18 April we were rested and had just over a couple of hours to spare that evening. We decided therefore to 'sprint' round Leg 6 by re-visiting Cheadle (one pub shut previously), then on through East Didsbury and in to Heaton Norris. All three pubs were Hydes and another five miles covered. The following day by chance we were in Stockport town centre for 'late night shopping' (what an excuse!) and therefore sampled three more beers - Robinson's Hatters and Dark plus Porters. Mileage negligible.

Not having unduly exercised ourselves since the previous weekend, we decided more 'punishment' was in order, and so a route was planned for Saturday 21 April taking in Belle Vue, Gorton, Dane Bank, Hyde, then back through Denton and Bredbury. All went well until we found the Masons Arms in Denton shut (afternoon) but we rang the doorbell, explained we were challengers and were cordially invited in! The Hatters was found to be superb as well. All in all just seven well-scattered inns covering 14 miles and three different milds.

The following day was spent mostly travelling to Whitby and back (with excellent beer in the Tap & Spile there, as usual), arriving back in Stockport by mid-evening and managing three more pubs, all selling Hatters Mild. Again, the Greyhound was visited but we were told that we had just missed the end of the barrel and none would be ready until the following day. (bad luck twice?).

Our next free evening was Thursday 26 April and we walked a modest three miles or so, visiting the remaining local/Stockport/Edgeley puns including the Greyhound again (success at last - the guest bitter from Marlow was also excellent). Just five pubs but five different milds.

This left us with just 12 more to do (all Robinson's) within the next two weeks or so remaining. But within that time we had already committed ourselves to a full day's trip around the entire Cain's estate in Merseyside (seven pubs), as well as an afternoon out at the Southport Beer Festival.

We still had to walk to Romiley, Compstall, Marple, Mellor, Rose Hill, New Mills, High Lane and Hazel Grove. It wasn't going to be easy and we were pondering how to complete our mission as the thought of walking to New Mills without adequate stops (i.e. beer breaks) was daunting. Additionally, we had never previously visited most of these pubs and were uncertain of some exact locations, maybe walking further than necessary. An A-Z plus two Ordnance Survey maps were therefore consulted.

A plan had emerged and as we were both free the following evening we decided to tackle what was already going to be a difficult trip. It proved to be just that. Our 11<sup>th</sup> outing therefore visited just five pubs - Hazel Grove (nearly in Bramhall), High Lane, two of the four Marple pubs, and finally Romiley. 12 miles in mainly pouring rain and arriving home around midnight having gone straight from work. In many ways this was the hardest session that we had undertaken.

The 12<sup>th</sup> and hopefully final trip we planned for the following weekend, on Saturday 5 May, leaving one further week or so just in case there were any further problems. Thankfully there were none, but we had to walk some 18 miles or so to cover the remaining seven pubs, two in Compstall, Mellor, Marple, out to New Mills (four miles), back to Marple (four miles again!) and finally Rose Hill.

Reflecting on the mainly enjoyable past month we realised we had both walked some 120-plus miles and had sampled 21 different milds (one organic) from 18 different breweries.

Many thanks to the organisers and other volunteers for canvassing the pubs involved, delivering stamps, cards, posters etc. We experienced few problems. Well done! We would also like to record our appreciation to the following pubs for their exceptional hospitality and encouragement - Victoria (Withington), Crescent (Salford), Masons Arms (Denton), Northumberland (Compstall) and Masons Arms (New Mills).

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## MORE ON THE MILD CHALLENGE...

On Friday 14 September, ten lucky Mild Challenge winners, along with partners, friends and a sprinkling of local CAMRA members, enjoyed a visit to Hydes' Brewery to see how Hydes' Mild was made.

We were greeted in the refurbished hospitality room by Production Director Paul Jefferies who had arranged for no less than three milds to be available on the bar - Light, Mild and the rare extra-dark mild produced mainly for Hydes' Welsh pubs - along with Hydes Bitter and the new seasonal, One To Unwind, which itself has some of the characteristics of a strong mild.

After some initial sampling, we were all treated to a detailed and informative tour round the brewery which is an interesting amalgam of the old and new - it's always reassuring to see continued investment by small family companies like Hydes'. After that it was back to the hospitality room for more beer and a buffet. Branch Chairman John Clarke also presented Sue Ridings and Steve Robinson with a framed certificate marking their extraordinary achievement in completing the entire Challenge on foot.

Many thanks to Paul Jefferies and all at Hydes' for such an excellent night and their continued support of the Mild Challenge.

STOCKPORT & MANCHESTER

# Mild CHALLENGE

2002

Stop Press - the Mild Challenge will run again next year. Look for preliminary details in next month's Opening Times.

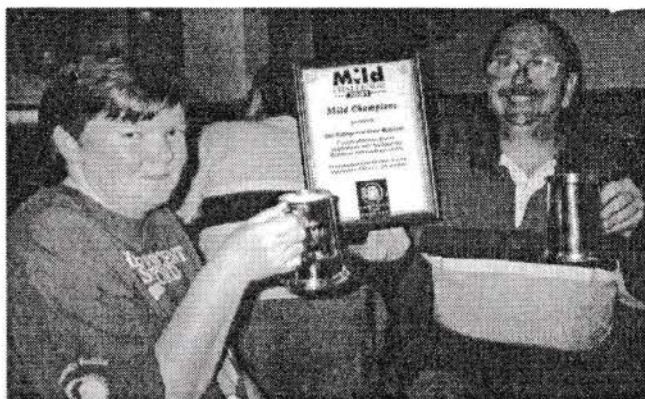
## NEW N/4 BEER FEST - THE A-Z TOUR

This year's Northern Quarter event is scheduled for 15-18 November. All the regular pubs will be participating with the exception of the Smithfield and the Beer House. One newcomer is the Hat & Feathers on Mason Street but unfortunately reports of a second in the form of Cord, off Tib Street, have proved misplaced as that newcomer to the N/4 scene has dropped out.

As in previous years, a variety of food and entertainment will be provided for those who trek round, sampling different ales and foreign beers. A free bus will be laid on for the Saturday. If all goes to plan, Boggart Hole Clough will be producing a special bottled beer for the event and special commemorative T-shirts will be available.

One highlight of the event will be on the afternoon of November 15, when the Marble Arch will be hosting an organic beer competition run by SIBA (a national association of micro-brewers) and sponsored by Safeway. Apparently both bottled and draught beers will feature, and in conjunction with this the pub will be running an organic beer festival featuring organic brews from around the country.

There will be further details of this not to be missed festival in the next Opening Times, with some news of food and entertainment.



Sue Ridings and Steve Robinson with their tankards and commemorative certificate to celebrate their coverage of the 2001 Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge on foot...

### OPENING TIMES ADVERTISING

ADVERTISING RATES: 1/8 page (60mm x 85mm): £30; 1/4 page (120mm x 85mm): £50; 1/2 page (horiz: 174mm x 120mm; vert: 250mm x 85mm): £85; Full page (175mm x 240mm) £140. Surcharges apply for back page. Discounts available on adverts of 1/4 page or above for runs of insertions. Advert design & origination usually free of charge unless large costs involved. Ring 0161 477 1973 for details. Artwork should be submitted as hard copy (positive bromide) or PC COMPATIBLE (NOT MAC) \*.eps, \*.tiff or \*.cdr (Corel Draw versions 3, 5 or 7 - please state which AND you MUST include hard copy back-up).

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**CAMRA CALLING!** Here are the monthly branch event diaries, starting with Stockport and South Manchester, followed by High Peak and Macclesfield

**Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries**

Diary

**OCTOBER 2001**

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup>** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 8.00pm.

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup>** - Two-way social: Moss Rose, Didsbury Rd, Heaton Norris 9.00pm; Wooplack, Brinksway 10.00pm.

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup>** - Minibus trip round selected East Manchester pubs. Departs Crown, Heaton Lane 7.00pm. First stop Waggon & Horses, Hyde Rd, Gorton 7.30pm. Book with Paul Formby on 0161 612 0759 (after 6.00pm).

**Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>** - Pub of the Month presentation to The Union, Reddish.

**Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> November** - Trip to Bank Top Brewery, Bolton. Cost is £6 per head for tour which includes food and free beer for two hours (plus minibus fare, £4-5 per head). Minibus leaves Crown, Heaton Lane 7.00pm. Book with Paul Formby on 0161 612 0759 (after 6.00pm).

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

**Monday 15<sup>th</sup>** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Bankfield Arms, 175 Mottram Rd, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup>** - Branch Walk: meet New Mills bus station at 9.45am. Details from Frank Wood on 01457 865426.

**OCTOBER 2001**

**Monday 5<sup>th</sup> November** - Committee Meeting: Hare & Hounds, Otterspool, Marple. Starts 8.30pm.

**Saturday 10<sup>th</sup>** - Social to Dewsbury and Ossett by train (details from Frank Wood)

*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:*

**Saturday 13<sup>th</sup>** - Severn Valley Railway Pubs Trip walk, ride and try lovely West Midland Brews. Coach from Macclesfield, Congleton and Crewe. Details from George Symes on 01565 653096.

**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup>** - Campaigning Meeting at Congleton Leisure Centre. Starts 8.00pm.

**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> November** - Meal and two Pub Social: Roebuck Moberley preceded or followed by Bulls Head.

**REGIONAL EVENT**

**Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> October** - 3rd Planning Meeting for National Winter Ales Festival (Castlefield 24-26 Jan 2002). Crescent Salford 12.30pm



To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner

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# MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

## On The Southside

Oh, this is sooo embarrassing! I read last month's report about the 'Hogshead' on Oxford Road and hot-footed it down there straight away. And its all true! A great pub run but a real beer fan, and it's been that way for months. Like many other people I'd written it off following reports of imminent changes and had missed a terrific pub right under my nose. Arguably it's now the best of the local pubs with the Hogshead name although this one isn't actually part of the Hogshead 'brand'.

I ventured down to the Hogshead after one of my visits to the Kro Bar Beer Festival which proved to be a thoroughly enjoyable event. Kro's Martin Judge tells me that one or two lessons were learned (not least the sheer unpredictability of what beers will sell and which won't) and there are plans for a follow-up event next January. One spin-off has been a change in Kro's guest beer policy. While Taylor's Landlord, Boddingtons and Theakston Cool Cask remain permanent, the other two handpumps are now given over to ever-changing guest beers. On my last visit these were Beartown Ambeardextrous and Oakhill Triple XXX Mature - and very good they were, too.

Venturing further out, there are one or two changes afoot in Didsbury. In particular Andy is leaving the Olde Cock for another, unnamed pub, which won't apparently be selling guest beers. No news yet of who takes over in his place. Elsewhere, I hear that Ian Yearsley at the Parrswood would like to sell additional cask beers in addition to his staple Boddingtons Bitter. Apparently, and can this be right, he isn't allowed to do this because the policy for John Barras branded pubs (of which the Parrswood is one) is to allow one cask beer only. If true then someone at Scottish & Newcastle needs both a kick up the backside and an initiative transplant!

## What's Doing In The City Centre

The Beer House remained in a state of flux as these words were typed (indeed as we went to press, there was still no news as to the new tenants that Innspired are putting in - indeed the latest rumour was that there may be a period of closure - heaven forbid - Ed(2)) but there are of course also new(-ish) faces at the Pot of Beer. These are David Wroe and Tam Plowman who took over on 11 July and who are now well settled in the pub. They are in fact no strangers to the Pot, having done relief work there in the past but immediately before taking the helm at the pub they were running a Thwaites pub in Bradford - so it's welcome back to the right side of the Pennines I suppose. (*Oh God, the letters, the letters - Ed. 1*).

No major changes are planned for what is already a winning formula at the pub. Beer quality will be paramount, of course, and the menu will be extended although the Polish food will remain.



The latter is in fact now attracting a good number of customers from the city's Polish community. You can eat at the Pot from 12 noon until 4.00pm, although these times can be extended on request. David and Tam also have an internet business (Globewide Internet Services) and they are considering a local real ale web site for the Northern Quarter. I must say I found my chat to them very reassuring in terms of the pub's future and stability - which is something it needs after the roller coaster ride of the past year or so. Elsewhere in the Centre there's not been too much happening. The Hogshead on Deansgate has had (yet another) refurbishment but doesn't seem all that different. Further down, the Crown is also in the throes of another makeover to make it more 'pubby', or so I am told. Hopefully it will be open in time for next month's column. The Old Garratt has reopened as The Garratt and now seems to be decked out as some sort of café bar. There's cask beer, though, albeit of the Old Speckled Hen, Theakstons etc type. Not really worth making a detour for, I'm afraid. The other Scottish & Newcastle pub under refurbishment is the Salisbury but due to a fire (accidental, for a change) it's still shut.



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Taking over at The Queens in Great Portwood Street, Stockport, has given Sue Igbon and Pat Kirby a whole new outlook on life. Although it is the first time that the pair, both aged 50, have run a pub, they are thoroughly enjoying their new venture at the Robinson's pub. "Every day is a new challenge with something different to learn about," says Sue. "So far, its been a very rewarding experience for both of us."

Sue who hails from Whalley Range, was formerly an office manager at a utilities company although like Pat, who comes from Northernmoor, she had done bar work in the past. Embarking on a full-time career in the licensed trade was very much a joint decision, as Sue explained. "We were both looking for a change and also liked the thought of working for ourselves. Pat actually had her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday on the day we started here and, for both of us, it really does feel as though a new part of our lives has started.

**The Blue Bell, King Street West, Stockport, reopened on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> September and it has to be said that the refurbishment is top-notch. No expense appears to have been spared in restoring what remains of the pub's Victorian features with a newly varnished mosaic floor being particularly impressive. The pool room remains as does the old 'concert room', while the former vault is now a lounge complete with new 'etched' windows; all have been finished to a very high standard. The one cask beer is Holt's Bitter, which was on fine form on opening night. A welcome addition to the local pub scene with the only drawback being the exceptionally loud music - hopefully this was just down to the opening festivities and will not be a permanent feature at such an ear-splitting level.**

The Lamp Hotel on Hillgate has stopped selling real ale again after a brief spell with handpumped Jennings Bitter following the reopening.

**The Navigation at the top of Lancashire Hill is up for lease, free of tie (though what exactly that means these days, we don't know!) for just £20,000 which may indicate there are not too many years available. Don't all rush at once, but it may be one of the better offers on the current market.**

In South Reddish, the Carousel has reopened following a refurbishment. The place now looks like a dumbed down IKEA and still sells no real ale.

## FALSE SIGNS - UPDATE

Our lead article in August, highlighting local pubs falsely claiming to sell real ale, sparked a huge amount of interest. Media coverage included GMR, the Manchester Evening News, Metro News and South Manchester Reporter. More to the point, prompt and effective action by local trading standards officers should soon see the problem eliminated.

In Stockport, Trading Standards visited both offending pubs, The sign at the Elizabethan, Heaton Moor, had been taken down by the time they arrived while at the Crown, Hillgate, both signs had been painted out by the end of September.

Manchester Trading Standards has visited all eight offending pubs and discussed the matter with their licensees. In addition, their owners have been spoken and written to with the warning that unless there is an intention to install real ale in the **immediate future** there is a problem and the signs should be removed. We are monitoring the situation here and certainly if there has been no movement either way by the end of this month then further complaints will be registered with the Trading Standards.

Luckily some pubs have already seen the error of their ways with signs removed or painted out at Hardys Well, Rusholme; Derby Arms and Sir Humphrey Chetham, Clayton; Church, Levenshulme and the Hamlet and Abbey Hey in Gorton (although at the Hamlet while one sign has gone, the other remains). On the other hand the Brewers in Ladybarn was still calling itself a 'cask ale house' as we went to press (and no, it hasn't seen the error of its ways and put cask ale in).

However, it seems that what the press dubbed our 'top ten' should in fact have been the 'dirty dozen' as Opening Times has been told of two other pubs with these misleading signs. These are the **Bridge Inn** in Clayton and the **Horse & Jockey** in Hazel Grove. Trading Standards have been alerted to these two and we await further action.

## THE HINDS HEAD

**It is the end of an era at the Hinds Head in Heaton Chapel. Alan and Jane Preston, having sold the lease, left the pub and retired from the trade on Monday 1 October.**

Alan has been licensee of the pub almost from the day when it was first built (we draw a veil over the first incumbents...) and no-one could accuse him of sitting back on his laurels. From the beginning it was clear he did not want the Hinds Head to be just another Whitbread eaterie.

His beer policy did not include any of their mediocre beers (Castle Eden Ale being the only Whitbread beer sold as a regular) and the food sold in the restaurant has always been of the highest quality. The quality of the six cask beers is such that the Hinds Head has been in CAMRA's Good Beer Guide from 1997. The food has been similarly, and justifiably, honoured with entries in several editions of the Pub Food Guide.

The Hinds Head has been Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month no less than three times and on two occasions was runner-up or close to being Pub of the Year. Not bad for a Whitbread pub, as Alan says.

All this success brought problems for Alan and June in the mid-nineties. Whitbread tried to take the tenancy off them and install a manager. With a little help from CAMRA they tenaciously fought off the corporate might of the PLC and claimed an all too infrequent victory for the small operator.

Alan was a great licensee who supported CAMRA throughout his time at the Hinds Head and he will be missed by all his regulars and friends in the Campaign.

Taking over at the pub are Terry Murphy and Bob Hanks, who are pub regulars, and their colleague John Redfern. The current pub manager Steve Craddock will remain and has been joined by Jay Boyd as joint manager. Terry, Bob and John have confirmed that they want to build on the success of the Hinds Head and have no intention of reducing the beer range or of changing the emphasis on cask beers. We wish them well in their new venture and look forward to many enjoyable nights still to come in this excellent local.

## CASK ALE WEEK

**Peter Cash reports on a new initiative...**

**Cask Ale Week is a new initiative organised by the Independent Family Brewers of Britain to promote cask conditioned ale with special brews, tutored tastings, 'try before you buy' schemes and beer-related competitions and quizzes.**

In an unprecedented show of unity, the top management and head brewers of Greater Manchester's four major independent breweries came together at Rain Bar on Great Bridgewater Street on September 17 to host a special beer tasting event. Colour and spectacle were provided by Robinson's horse-drawn dray, which left Rain Bar to make symbolic visits to the Old Monkey (Holts), Grey Horse (Hydes) and Castle (Robinson's).

The Rain Bar event was opened by William Lees-Jones and each of the head brewers introduced the beer he had selected for the occasion. Giles Dennis for Lees presented Red Dragon, a pale bitter brewed with Welsh honey. To offset the sweetness of the honey, Giles had opted for Styrian hops, which he said had a 'light and peppery character, but not too hoppy'. The supply of Welsh honey from Anglesey had been used up and fresh supplies were being sought.

Chris Hellin from Robinson's, after thanking CAMRA for its support, introduced Cooper's Bell, an all-malt bitter which included 10 per cent wheat malt and 20 per cent copper hops. Holts' Keith Sheard presented Holts Bitter, which uses pale ale malt together with some black malt. None of Holts beers used caramel and 'never will'. Keith also pointed out that Tetleys Bitter, which was supposed to be renowned for its bitterness, was 33% less bitter than Holts. We had expected to taste a special brew from Holts, but trials were still going on.

Finally, Paul Jefferies from Hydes offered Jekyll's Gold, which was made from Maris Otter pale malt with no colouring. Hops came in three stages: Fuggles, then Styrian Goldings and finally dry-hopping with more Styrian Goldings. The resulting beer was 'very light and refreshing'.

Considering the number of family brewers which have succumbed to takeover and closure in recent years, the sight of the four Greater Manchester breweries' pump-clips side by side on the bar made us realise how fortunate we are to have so many long-established brewers supplying this area with their excellent beers. PC.