



OPENING TIMES



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6,700 CIRCULATED EVERY MONTH

FREE

BEARTOWN HITS STOCKPORT



In a move which will delight all local beer enthusiasts, Congleton's Beartown Brewery has acquired its third tied house - the Navigation, Lancashire Hill, Stockport.

Once a thriving local, the Navigation seems to have lost its way in recent years and latterly has offered nothing in the way of cask beer at all. All that is set to change with the arrival of Beartown Brewery who were scheduled to take possession of the pub by the end of November. If all goes according to plan, there will be four different Beartown beers on handpump at The Navigation by the time you read this.

The brewery's initial aim is simply to get established in the pub and turn it round from its current all-keg status. Given the fact that many of its nearest competitors offer little or nothing in the way of cask beer, that shouldn't be too difficult, especially when you consider the breadth and quality of the Beartown range. All being well this will be followed by a refurbishment as the ultimate aim is for a similar operation to that at the Beartown Tap pub in Congleton, which is an impressive pub by any standards.

Opening Times asked Beartown's Ian Burns, why the Navigation? Ian told us that the other partner in Beartown, John Gregory, lives not too far from the pub and they thought it would be a nice idea for him to have a Beartown pub on his doorstep - Ian already has the Beartown Tap on his! On a more serious note, Ian also explained that Stockport is in the brewery's trading area and Beartown has always received a great deal of support from the local CAMRA branch. Older readers may recall that Opening Times visited Beartown on almost the day it was launched and we have covered their progress ever since.

The licensee will be Angela Lindsay who currently works at Burnage Cricket Club a dedicated cask ale outlet (albeit for Lees beers, although Beartown coincidentally has a regular outlet at Burnage Rugby Club) and we wish both her and Beartown Brewery well in this very welcome new venture.

* Beartown Brewery have two new beers out - one is an experimental ginger beer at 4% ABV and is currently the subject of a naming competition at the Tap while the other is the winter special Santa Claws, a dark, ruby 4.5% bitter which is making a welcome return.

BRAKSPEARS REPEAT ORGANIC SUCCESS

Massive interest in Second UK Organic Brewing Competition

The Henley on Thames firm of WH Brakspear & Sons beat off stiff opposition from 37 beers to retain the title Champion Organic Beer of Britain with its 4.6% Live Organic bottled ale; last year's winner.

The competition was held on November 15th at the fully organic Marble Brewery, based at the Marble Arch pub on Rochdale Road in Manchester, where a panel of 13 judges drawn from the ranks of beer writers, trade press, the

Continued on page 4...



Brakspears Jeff Drew with the overall award

IN DECEMBER'S OPENING TIMES

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WHICH TRADITIONAL BREWERY TENANCY - WITHOUT GUEST BEERS - OFFERS 6 BITTERS, 2 MILDS AND A WINTER WARMER? - ANSWER P 13



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MORE CHOICE BETTER BEER



1998 International Brewing Awards
Wobbly Bob awarded Silver Medal

IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Beartown Brewery are to be congratulated on bringing local drinkers an early Christmas present in the form of their third tied house at the Navigation, Stockport.

This is a pub with an enormous amount of potential and while several neighbouring pubs offer little if anything in the way of cask beer there must surely be enough good local people who appreciate decent pubs and good beer to make the Navigation thrive again. And that's without the many local beer enthusiasts who will undoubtedly be beating a path to the door.

On the wider scene, Beartown's investment is a sign of confidence in the local Stockport pub scene, which is particularly strong at the moment. While it has become fashionable in certain CAMRA quarters to claim such and such a place is the country's 'real ale capital', these claims are usually based on just a crude head count of the number of cask ales available. Opening Times makes no such claim for Stockport - but what we do say is that with its unbeatable combination of traditional locals, heritage pubs, notable free houses and quality cask ales from a variety of independent brewers (to which Beartown must now be added), the town must now offer one of the best, no, let's make that the best pub crawl in the country. Challengers have a hard act to beat.

On that upbeat note, let me now just wish the merriest Christmas and the happiest New Year to all of our readers, writers, distributors and, of course, our advertisers, whose continued support enables us to bring OT to you every month. Happy Christmas, everyone.

John Clarke and Paul Hutchings

OOPS... in last months small advert about the forthcoming Stockport & Manchester Mild Trail we missed off the last digit of contact Mark McConachie's phone number - for the record its 0161 429 9356. Full details are on page 4.

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 212

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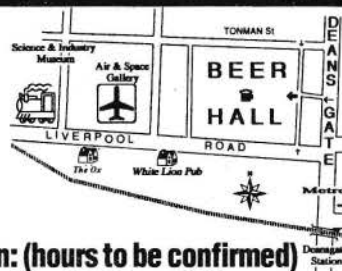
Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs - Join CAMRA now - see page 13!



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CAMRA 2002 NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL

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Friday 25 January: 12 - 4 (£2) & 5.30 - 10.30pm (£3),
Saturday 26 January: 12 - 4 (£2) & 5.30 - 10.30pm (£2).
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ORGANIC BREWERS COMPETITION

...continued from Page One

organic sector and others had to consume some 42 beer samples in a hard-working three and a quarter hours in order to produce winners in each of the main categories as well as an overall champion. Local representatives on the judging panel included Idy Phillips, popular licensee of the Crescent in Salford and the Rev. Robert Bracegirdle, Rector of Ordsall and cask ale enthusiast who declared the event to be 'immensely enjoyable' at the close of the marathon judging session.

Last year's competition saw 22 beers entered. This year the entries literally came from all corners of Britain; from Black Isle in the north of Scotland to the Organic Brewery in Cornwall. From fairly new Ceredigion Brewery in Wales to ancient Shepherd Neame in Kent. The judges were unanimous that the quality of beers in the competition had risen since last year and the overall standard was a credit to all the breweries brave enough to enter this demanding competition. However, in getting so many of its beers into the final placings Brakspears have consolidated their reputation as one of the country's most respected brewers. The plethora of awards was collected for Brakspears by second brewer Jeff Drew who told Opening Times that he was "overwhelmed by the success" which he described as a "testament to continued brewing quality at Brakspears". Jeff also explained that the brewery researches different materials for different organic beers each year and will continue to do so.

The competition was organised by SIBA - the Society of Independent Brewers - and was sponsored by Safeway, who are expanding their range of organic beers in response to increased consumer demand for organic goods generally.

Competition organiser and SIBA general secretary Peter Haydon said, "we are delighted that this competition has been such a success. We enjoy challenging brewers to show us what they can do, and we hope they enjoy rising to meet that challenge. Sadly we cannot give prizes to all entries, and I know that brewers are so proud of their beers that not winning causes great disappointment. I also hope it spurs them to greater resolve to victory next time. I



Main Picture: Good Beer Guide Editor and competition judge Roger Protz enjoys a much needed pint (after sampling 37 beers!) with local CAMRA stalwart Tony Molyneux. Inset: Jan Whitehead of Marble Beers receiving an 'organic' plaque from SIBA's Peter Haydon

am certainly looking forward to seeing an even larger number of entries for the SIBA Organic Brewing Competition 2002." As a sign of SIBA's "total appreciation" of their efforts and support, Peter also presented Marble Brewery's Jan Whitehead and Vance De Becheval with a new SIBA plaque to display on the pub.

The Results were as Follows

- Champion Organic Beer of Britain 2001 - Brakspear - Live Organic 4.6%
- Champion Organic Ale - Brakspear - Live Organic 4.6%
- Runner-up - Brakspear - Vintage Roots 4.6%
- Champion Organic Lager - Brakspear - Naturale Lager 4.6%
- Runner-up - Broughton - Angel 5.0%
- Champion Speciality Beer - Pitfield - Stout 4.0%
- Joint Runner-up - Black Isle - Porter 4.2%
- Joint Runner-up - Brakspear - Stone Bottled 5%

Entering Breweries were:- Arkell's, Bateman's, Black Isle, Brakspear, Broughton, Caledonian, Ceredigion, Freedom, Fullers, Greene King, JW Lees, Marble, Meantime, Organic, O'Hanlons, Pitfield, St Peters, Wychwood.



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STOCKPORT & MANCHESTER

Mild CHALLENGE

2002

CALLING ALL LICENSEES!

The 2002 Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge is coming. This increasingly popular annual event will run from early April to mid-May next year but the organising starts now!

Last time over 100 people completed the Challenge with two dozen visiting every pub. Each year more and more people take part and once again we are pleased to have sponsorship from the Stockport Express which will be ensuring the Challenge gets maximum coverage.

The entry fee is just £10 per pub so if you sell traditional cask conditioned mild and would like to make a provisional booking to get your pub on the 2002 Mild Challenge then call Mild Challenge Organiser Mark McConachie on 0161 429 9356

PUB OF THE MONTH DECEMBER 2001

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Month for December is the Griffin, Stockport Road, Heaton Mersey.

It is just over five years since the Griffin last gained this honour and then, as now, it is in the capable hands of Bev and John Bonyng. Last time the award was made in recognition of Bev and John's efforts in restoring the fortunes of something of a local institution on the Stockport pub scene. Five years on and this time we are recognising the much-needed stability they have brought to the pub and their continued hard work at running what must once again be one of the busiest pubs in the area.

This is a pub which just sums up the word 'tradition', from the ornate Edwardian bar with its mahogany and cut glass, to the excellent Holt's Mild and Bitter and the fine pub food.

In many ways the Griffin embodies everything that makes the great British pub what it is and while there are pubs like this around, and run with such enthusiasm as shown by Bev and John, they will be with us for many years to come - despite the prophets of doom who would have you believe that the community local has had its day. The well-deserved award will be presented to John, Bev and their hard working staff on Tuesday 18th December. It's always a busy night in the Griffin but this one promises to be more hectic than most so get there early. The pub is well served by public transport from both Stockport and Manchester with buses 23, 42 and 370 dropping you almost at the door.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PRESENTATION IS EARLIER IN THE MONTH & ON A TUESDAY.

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

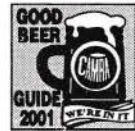
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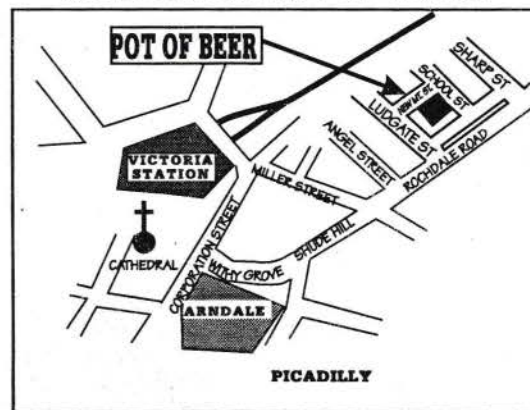
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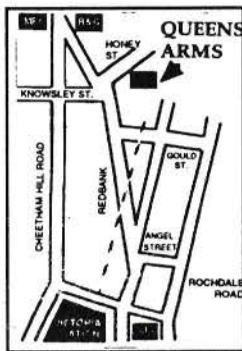
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The Marble Arch

While Manchester's Northern Quarter pubs are known for the range and quality of the beers on offer, many deserve an equally high reputation for the food they sell. Bar Centro, Bar Fringe and the estimable Pot of Beer with its Polish specialities all stand out. Right up there with them is the Marble Arch, where the combination of top-notch home cooking and value for money must make it one of the best pub food outlets in the City Centre.

The menu runs the whole gamut from snacks and toasties to main meals with at least 90% produced in-house. Soup is all home-made at just £1.95 and other snacks include chips in a bread wedge (£1.30), toasties (£1.95), chili bowl (£2.75) and a variety of burgers (including veggie and fish) with chips, salad, peas or beans for £3.20.

Of particular note are the 'Deli Sandwiches' at £2.60. There are 12 varieties in all, eight hot and four cold, and each offers something very much out of the ordinary. For example amongst the hot varieties are Beef with orange and ginger (beef marinated in orange, ginger and garlic, pan-fried and wrapped in a tortilla with lemon and coconut, with side salad and soy sauces); Curried Chickpea (in a toasted pitta pocket with lemon and mint dressing plus side salad) and Pan-fried Halloumi (pan-fried in olive oil, on toasted ciabatta with wild rocket and side salad and olive/tomato dressing). Tempting these may be, it was the specials board which caught my eye and from which our meals were ordered. There is usually a choice of six or so, and when I called these comprised Broccoli & Cauliflower Bake (£3.75), Aubergine & Chickpea Stew (£3.95), Cannelloni Verdi (the only 'bought-in' main course - £3.95), Mushroom & Roasted Pepper Tagliatelle (£4.50), Moroccan Beef (£4.75) and Cajun Spiced Fish (£4.75). The menu helpfully also includes a detailed description of each dish.

My companion and I chose the latter two. The beef was diced and with onion, tomatoes, apricots and prunes, was simmered with cinnamon, cumin, ginger and garlic, seasoned with fresh coriander and served on a bed of cous-cous. To say it lived up to expectations is something of an understatement, the superbly tender beef blended perfectly with the other ingredients to deliver a satisfying, gently spiced dish.

The fish was equally impressive. A tail fillet of cod was coated with cayenne, paprika and coarse black pepper and then grilled. The result packed a pleasing kick without being overpowering and was well complemented by its bed of pan-fried bell peppers and on the side mashed sweet potato and grilled tomatoes. Portions in both cases were very generous, indeed this seems to be a hallmark of the food here, with several of the main courses, including mine, arriving in large bowls.

All in all, superb food, which really is and looks home-cooked, and keen prices. This in fact is very much the philosophy of Christine Baldwin who runs the kitchen who told me later that her motto was "keep it simple, present it well and offer value for money". She also takes particular pride in the fact that during her stay at the Marble she has managed to change her customers eating habits, away from a 'chip butty' style menu to something more sophisticated, Christine also tries to cater for all tastes with her menus which, for example, will always feature a vegan meal.

The Marble Arch is already well-known for the organic beers produced in the Marble Brewery at the back of the pub, and indeed our meal was washed down with fine pints of N/4 and Cloudy Marble bitters, but it deserves an equally high profile for the first class food on sale. Highly recommended. **JC.**

The Marble Arch is at 73 Rochdale Road, Manchester. Phone 0161 832 5914. Food is available 11.30-3 and 5-8 Monday-Thursday; 11.30-6 Fridays, and 12-2 on Saturdays (when the menu is restricted to a £2.75 soup and sandwich special deal). Some of the more complex meals are only available in the evening.



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STAGGER

with Dave Meynell

East Manchester Highlights

Tonight's Stagger was to prove a complete contrast to the previous visit to the real ale desert of Clayton and Beswick, when more time was spent walking than drinking.

On this evening, a full minibus left the Crown, Heaton Lane, for our first port of call, the **Waggon & Horses** on Hyde Road in Gorton. I had never visited this pub and found it empty and tonight was no exception. Even at 7.30 both the large lounge and the separate vault were busy with a central bar serving both areas. The vault, with its pool table, maintains a separate atmosphere and the general feel is of a well-supported community local where both the Holt's Mild and Bitter were above average.

Next on the agenda was the **Hare & Hounds** on Abbey Hey Lane which unfortunately had no real ale. However we did discover that the new tenants had only been there two days and the landlord advised us that he intends to reintroduce real ale in the near future (further reports please).

It was a short trip here to the **Oddfellows Arms**, a longstanding Boddingtons local, which despite some alteration still has distinctly separate vault and lounge areas on either side of the central bar, together with an excellent little snug off to one side. There is a cosy feel to the whole pub and trade was steady at the time of our visit. An impressive shield dominates the vault wall, which featured both a standard darts board and the Manchester 'log end'. The Boddingtons Bitter was considered no worse than average and many found it very good indeed.

Another short journey to another classic Holt's pub - the **Railway** on Manshaw Road, just off Ashton Old Road. You have to cross a cobbled frontage to enter this impressive building, dominated outside by the huge lamp, once a common sight on many pubs but rarely seen today. Inside the pub is large and spacious with a lounge and bar area and two distinctive separate rooms either side of the entrance. Not as busy as I would have expected but it was only 9.00pm. There has been a recent sympathetic and tasteful redecoration and I recommend a visit to this classic pub. The bitter was good but the mild was better still.

It seemed as if this was to be a Holts night as the next pub, the **Strawberry Duck** on Crabtree Lane, although not part of the brewery estate, had Holt's Bitter as the only cask ale available. It was in good form but too cold for my liking. Situated next to the canal with a pleasant beer garden, a great atmosphere existed throughout what was the busiest pub so far, with music for varied tastes, including country.

Further down Ashton New Road we arrived at the **Grove**, yet another Holt's pub. This is what I call a "proper pub"; very busy and obviously a community local with an older clientele and a great atmosphere. Very ornate (and new) timber bars dominated both rooms and a log end dartboard was in use in the vault. The 60's music from the jukebox just added to the feel of what was the best pub of the night for me. The Holt's Bitter was also in top form but the mild is keg (despite the presence of a handpump complete with pumpclip on the bar).

We travelled back to Hyde Road for our last visit of the night - to the **Travellers Call**. On our last visit to this Hydes' pub, a new landlady had only just taken over and told us of her plans to improve the pub and attract custom. She has obviously done everything right as the place was packed with a complete mix of ages enjoying the excellent atmosphere and the Hydes' Bitter, which was considered by most to be one of the best beers of the night. Apart from the carpeted walls, the main point of interest is the superb collection of photos of old local pubs which have disappeared from the area over the years. Well worth a visit to see how a run-down pub can be resurrected.

The opinions expressed here are those of a group of beer enthusiasts on one particular night and I must admit it was very difficult to choose a best pub or best beer as unusually there were no bad ones. All are worth a visit so why not give them a try.



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STAY SAFE!

Don't drink and drive This Christmas

As a reader of "OpeningTimes" you will know that alcohol is very much part of the world we live in. Have a few drinks too many, and the only things that normally suffer are your head and stomach. But combine driving with your drinking and you have a lethal cocktail which could have a lasting effect - on your own and other people's lives.

Each year in Britain, some five hundred people die in road accidents involving drivers and motorcycle riders over the legal blood alcohol limit. Fifteen per cent of all drivers and riders killed are over the limit and around 50 per cent at night between the hours of 10pm and 4am.

The more you drink, the greater the problem. Some people's driving performance may be affected even below the legal limit. Twice the limit, and you are at least twenty times more likely to have an accident.

Contrary to popular opinion, alcohol is a depressant. It slows down the activity of the brain and makes you less alert, while at the same time giving you a strong but false sense of confidence. The more you drink, the more your brain is affected, and the greater your chances of having an accident.

★ Alcohol slows down your reactions

★ Alcohol affects your judgement

Those who believe that sticking to weaker drinks will stop them going over the limit are sadly mistaken. It's not the type of alcohol that's important, it's the total amount of alcohol the drink contains. Alcohol takes effect quickly and wears off slowly. Once you've had a drink, there is nothing you can do to reduce the level of alcohol in your blood.

★ Exercise doesn't work

★ Nor does black coffee

★ Nor medicines of any kind

★ Nor vitamins

The only thing that will reduce the level of alcohol in your blood is time - and a long time at that. The body gets rid of alcohol at a very slow rate - equivalent to about half a pint of beer in every hour. If you have been on a long or late drinking session, you might still be over the limit the morning after, or even at lunchtime.

How To Avoid The Problem

Plan in advance. Take a minibus or taxi. Use the bus, train or tram. If you can't arrange transport home, then fix up somewhere to stay. If you are in a group, decide amongst yourselves that whoever will be driving will not drink for the evening. Drink soft drinks.

Don't be a statistic this Christmas. Don't drink and drive. For once the cliché is right. Drinking and driving really wrecks lives.



So begins the famous Monty Python "Dead Parrot" sketch, perhaps one of the most quoted of all

time. John Cleese certainly had a point; often we have cause to complain. The Campaign for Real Ale was formed to complain, and went on to become the most successful consumer organisation in Europe. We certainly saved traditional beer, but the fight is far from over. Bad beer, adulterated beer and short measure still trouble us on occasion.

You, the customer, are in the front line and we all know it can be all too easy to do nothing; "I don't like to make a fuss"; "No-one else is complaining"; "Perhaps it's supposed to taste like this"; "I might get barred" - the excuses for inaction are endless. Remember the point though: if you've paid good money for something which is substandard, then you've been swindled - so complain!

Once you've decided to do something, the question remains, how? Opening Times offers a few words of advice and technical points:

- ★ **Be Polite** - create a conflict & you lose - the licensee has home advantage!
- ★ **Be Discreet** - no licensee wants to draw attention to a problem
- ★ **Be Reasonable** - if the beer has reached the end of the barrel, you can tell at once. The landlord may not be drinking and be unaware of this.
- ★ **Be Diplomatic** - "I think this might have gone" is less of an insult to the cellarman's craft than "this tastes foul!"
- ★ **Be Sensible** - a tiny shortfall in volume isn't worth the fuss, but perhaps nearly an inch is worth a polite request to "squeeze a drop more in".
- ★ **Be Decisive** - bad beer should be returned promptly. Struggling valiantly through 3/4 of a pint will undermine your case.
- ★ **Don't** - complain to an outside body (see below) without first trying to gain satisfaction in the pub.
- ★ **Don't** - accept the guff that "real ale is supposed to look like oxtail soup and taste like vinegar" or that old standby "no-one else has complained". Stand your ground.

If you don't get satisfaction from the licensee, contact:

Trading Standards Officer (for consistent short measure or missing price list)

Environmental Health Officer (for sour beer or unhygienic practices)

Brewery/Pub Owner - (for poor beer in a tied house or poor customer service)

The local branch of CAMRA (who will certainly check up on any horror stories) Luckily none of the above is relevant in most of the pubs in the Opening Times area. Normally we find a full measure of good beer served by polite staff in pleasant surroundings, and that any minor niggles are dealt with in a quick and friendly manner. Local Trading Standards Contacts are:

Stockport - 0161 474 4248, Manchester - 0161 234 5600

Tameside - 0161 342 3477, Derbyshire - 01629 585858

Cheshire - 01244 602500, Trafford - 0161 912 2274



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NEW NELSON

After a fallow period languishing under uninspired management, the Nelson (Wellington Road South, Stockport) now looks to be firmly on track to regain its old form.

The transformation in both the pub and its fortunes has been brought about by the return of long-time licensee Nigel Pitman who, along with business partner Dave Fortune, has now taken the lease of the pub from Scottish & Newcastle.

Nigel and Dave took over on 12 June, approximately 18 months after Nigel left the pub, having acted as manager there for some 12 years. During his spell at the Nelson, the pub has been a regular outlet for cask ale and latterly had even ran some successful in-house beer festivals. Eventually he tired of Scottish & Newcastle's corporate approach and left the pub, to be replaced by a manager evidently more attuned to the passing whims of every new area manager - cask ale was an immediate casualty, subsequently to be followed by the pub's atmosphere and a large chunk of the trade. Nigel always had a hankering to run the Nelson though, and when the chance came to buy the business he jumped at it, and immediately set about restoring the pub's fortunes. There has been a thorough redecoration, inside and out, but maintaining the traditional feel. New furniture is on its way, too, including old school benches and church pews.

While the pub retains its strong links with the neighbouring college and its students, Nigel and Dave aim to cater for as many people as possible, "a pub for all sorts" says Nigel. During the day it will be more of a food-led operation, aiming to capitalise on trade not only from the college but also the new office and residential developments on the old infirmary site. Food is in fact available from 11.30am to 8.30 in the evenings, to maximise this side of the business.

Strong links are being maintained with the college, though. In particular the interior walls are plain white to be used as an exhibition space for students at the art college, with the result that a constantly changing array of artworks will be displayed in the pub. Also constantly changing is the guest beer. There's just one at the moment, alongside the regular Theakstons Best Bitter although the aim is to gradually build up to sell 2-3 standard beers plus the guest. The guests so far have included Freeminer Trafalgar, Youngs Special (in very good form when OT called) and a one-off re-brew of Youngers No.3. Trade is already up and while there's still a way to go before past glories are fully recaptured the Nelson is now back in the hands of people who know both the pub and its customers very well indeed. Success seems assured. JC.

HAPPY NEW YEAR FOR PUBS

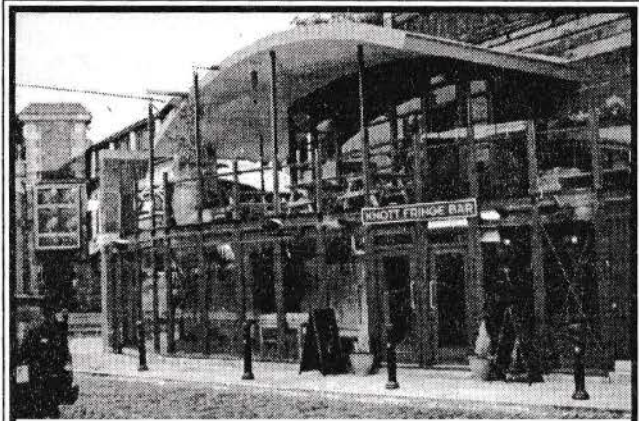
It should be a Happy Hogmanay for licensees and their customers across Britain after the government finally succeeded in putting the machinery in place to allow all-night pub opening on New Year's Eve.

However some experts are sounding a note of caution, as the order permitting the extra hours has still to be passed by Committees in both Houses of Parliament. As we went to press it was hoped that the order would be in place by December 6.

There were also fears that the last-minute rush to get the order through has left licensees - mainly those in residential areas - whose hours are restricted by police or local authorities on public order grounds no time to appeal.

While we may now have all-day opening over the New Year period, reports that pubs will be allowed to open at 6am on match days during the football World Cup next year have been exaggerated. No steps have been taken at government level to permit pubs to open while matches are being played in Japan and South Korea, but licensees will be free, as normal, to apply for special occasion extensions from local licensing justices.

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Robinson's

A WINTER WARMER FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

As the nights get ever colder, the thoughts of many will be turning to a glass of Old Tom Strong Ale to help give them an inner glow. The winter warmer's origins may lie firmly in the 19th century, but Old Tom shows no sign of losing its popularity.

Despite the increasingly fierce nature of the brewing industry, Old Tom was named Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain 2000, after having been runner-up in the previous two competitions, and remains a favourite around the Robinson's estate and in the free trade.

All of this seems a far cry from Old Tom's origins that date back to Victorian England. The first record of Robinson's Old Tom comes from 1899 with an entry in the head brewer's notebook referring to the ale, together with a drawing of a cat's face.

INGREDIENTS

Old Tom is still brewed using traditional methods and with the same meticulous care and finest quality ingredients that have always been the case. The all malt grist consists of Halcyon Pale Ale and Crystal and Chocolate malts. The finest East Kent Golding Hops are used in the Copper and for dry hopping in cask to produce the smooth, mellow 8.5% ABV ale with its dark winy colour.

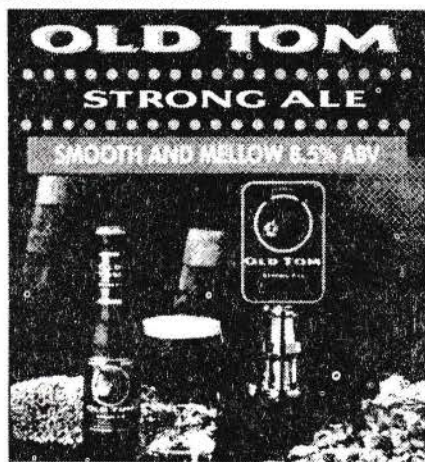
One man who should know more than most about the secret of Old Tom's enduring appeal is Robinson's head brewer Chris Hellin.

"First of all the quality of the product is right," said Chris. "Secondly it's unusual to have a beer of that strength in cask and I think that this has helped to give it longevity."

On a personal level, Chris is also well aware that, when brewing Old Tom, he is following in the distinguished footsteps of many earlier Robinson's brewers.

"The heritage of the brewery lies with the product," he said. "People relate Old Tom to Robinson's and it is nice to have such a close connection with the people who have gone before."

The success of Old Tom has indeed mirrored that of Robinson's itself. For while, in bygone days, a number of breweries produced an Old Tom ale, it is the Robinson's product, like the Company itself, that has stood the test of time.



This space is sponsored by Frederic Robinson Ltd.



Lees Latest

Both Lees' and Hydes' runs of seasonal beers come to an end this month and both breweries have been turning their thoughts to 2002. As usual Lees are combining the welcome return of a few old favourites with the launch of some new products, kicking off in January with Moonlight Oak, a 3.8% dark mild first brewed in May this year. For March and April there's Brooklyn Best a 5% full-bodied American-style bitter flavoured with US hops. Garrett Oliver from the Brooklyn Brewery in New York has had a hand in the formulation of this beer so expect something pretty exceptional. May/June sees the return of Scorcher, Lees popular 4.2% summer ale and in July/August there's another new brew in the shape of Sprinter. This is will tie in with the Commonwealth Games and will be a 4.3% brew using New Zealand hops to produce a "thirst quenching ale with exotic fruity flavours". The September/October offering is yet another new beer, Ruby Glow, a 4.5% rich, ruby coloured beer with a hint of liquorice while for November/December there is the welcome return of the acclaimed Plum Pudding, the popular 4.8% winter brew from 2000 described as "a feast for the discerning drinker" and more appropriate for this time of year than the current, and rather disappointing, White Bear.



Hoppy Hydes

HYDES Hydes have also announced their craft ale programme for 2002. It will major on the raw materials of beer making and in particular the hop plant. Each bi-monthly craft beer will be brewed from a single hop variety with the name indicative of which variety of hop has been used. The beers will be: January/February - Bramling Cross (4.8%), March/April - Styrian Spring (4.2%), May/June - Red Admiral (4.4%), July/August - Summer Challenger (4%), September/October - Autumn Goldings (4.5%), and November /December - Winter Fuggles (5%). The point of sale material will be similar in design and shape to this years craft ale programme. On the down side, however, the potent XXXX won't be appearing this year.


Look out, too, for the last of the 2001 range. Dutch Courage (5%) is the creation of Hydes student brewer (who just happens to be Dutch) and includes three malts, roasted barley and three hop varieties in the brew. The end result is a dark, rich, smooth beer with a hint of liquorice, and it has been getting rave reviews so far.

Robbies Round-up

Robinson's are continuing their repeat of last year's seasonal run which means that January will see the excellent Robin Bitter replaced by Samuel Oldknow, perhaps the most disappointing of the range but which is nevertheless back for a two-month run. More interestingly is Robinson's decision to drop the 'mild' tag from Hatters Mild, which will henceforth be simply known as 'Hatters'. New-look beer mats have already been spotted whereon the beer is now described as a light 'ale' rather than mild. While some may see this as another stage in the general decline of mild, it is important to remember that the beer itself remains entirely unchanged and if this move helps to stem its decline then so much the better.



Holts Happenings

 Holts have recently brewed another batch of Sixex, the 6% beer that is sent away for bottling. This year an extra quantity has been produced for racking off into casks (primarily 9-gallon firkins). While most of these are destined for the free trade, some will be going into Holt's own pubs. Only about 10% of the Holt's estate will be selling the handpumped Sixex over the Christmas period, the Railway, West Didsbury, being one of them.

The results of the brewery's trial of the 4.5% special beers are being evaluated. Reactions have been mixed; many pubs sold out within a few days, while others are not doing as well. It is too early to say whether another batch will be produced, but if it is, it will be next year at the earliest.



Micro Matters



The beers from The LAB are continuing to prove popular. December's special is Houghton Hangover (ABV 5.5%), a Christmas Porter which will be available from the beginning of the month. The January special will be the long awaited Denton Dynamite - a 5% IPA.

One thing that has come to light over the past couple of months is that the brewery is actually located in a World War 2 air raid shelter, which was built into part of the cellar. Some of the locals remember as children going down into this part of the cellar when the air-raid warning sounded.

Ever the perfectionists, over the past few months The LAB has been tweaking the recipes and the beers now are quite different to the way they were four months ago, hop rates have been increased quite considerably leading to a much improved hoppy taste.

The Marble Brewery took the opportunity of hosting the SIBA/Safeway organic beer contest to re-launch Chocolate Heavy. This 5.5% rich dark ale is seriously (or perhaps the word should be dangerously) drinkable and is now back for the winter season.



On November 11 Marble Beers presented a cheque for £2,000 to Stonham Housing. Part of this money was raised from the sale of Stonham Lager, which was produced by Marble Brewery. Other monies were raised through many events involving customers and staff of Marble Beers Limited during 2001. Marble Brewery send thanks to all people involved in activities ranging from sponsored haircuts and football matches to a mini fete held at The Bar, Chorlton. The enterprising Boggart Hole Clough Brewery is now offering a series of brewery workshops whereby a group of friends can sign up and spend the day brewing a beer to their own specifications. Over the following few days, Boggart Hole supervise fermentation and then transfer the beer into conditioning tanks prior to racking into 9-gallon casks or an alternative choice of packaging. The beer is then delivered free to your home for 'the ultimate test'. The Standard Workshop normally needs eight people divided into two teams of four with each team producing a full brew of up to 5% ABV, each brew consisting of one brewer's barrel, equating to four nine-gallon containers. The cost is £85+VAT per person. More details can be had from the brewery on 0161 277 9666 or brewer Mark Dade directly on 07946 508731. Incidentally the brewery now has its own web site at www.boggart-brewery.co.uk. Look out too, for Boggart Hole Clough's new Christmas beer, a 5% Irish Red due out at the beginning of this month.



Once in a while a brewery produces a definitive, landmark beer. Pictish Brewery did this last month with the appearance of the truly sensational Blue Moon, a 6% IPA. Bursting with hops and exceptionally bitter, this stunning beer combines dangerous drinkability with an increasing complexity. Only one brew has been produced to date but some should still be available as you read this - try it if you can. Look out, too for the Pictish December special is Winter Solstice a 4.7% beer making a welcome return. This should be a pale amber beer brewed using chocolate malt, which is balanced with a light bitterness and floral hops.

Phoenix brewery have a wide range of specials out this month. Black Beer honey porter (4.5%) is still available, and is joined by Flash Flood (4.1%), Snowbound (4.3%), Christmas Kiss (4.5%), Golden Glow (6.5% - and very well received at the National Winter Ales Festival last January), Porter (5%) and the powerful Humbug at 7%. Phew! Phoenix also tell us that they have been receiving numerous compliments about their beer from drinkers around the country via CAMRA-produced quality report cards.



Bank Top Brewery's move to new premises draws ever closer, owner John Feeney tells us. In the meantime he is gearing up to produce his Christmas brew, Santa's Claws (5%) and is also planning two new beers for next year. Bolton will be hosting Badminton and cycling events in the Commonwealth Games and Bolton Council have approached Bank Top to produce

two beers to mark this. The council will be designing all the artwork and the Bolton Evening News is currently running a competition to name them. All being well the beers will be available from March to August next year.

News From Paradise

As we reported last month, Paradise Brewery, sited next to Wrenbury Station in deepest Cheshire will once again be holding its winter beer festival from Thursday 27 to Saturday 29 December inclusive. There will be 30-plus beers, real cider and hot and cold food.



More to the point, the Crewe & Shrewsbury Passenger Association has now received confirmation from Wales & Borders Trains that the 11.33 Manchester-Cardiff will stop specially at Wrenbury on both Friday 28 and Saturday 29 December. This service should call at both Stockport and Wilmslow although Stockport travellers should check their travel arrangements on the Saturday. A return service will call at Wrenbury at 17.05.


Congratulations are also do to Paradise Brewery for winning the South Cheshire Start Up Business of the Year Award. They have also been invited to exhibit their beers at an All-party Parliamentary Beer Group event. To be held in Brussels on 5 December, this will be attended by 87 MEPs and 250 guests.



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NATIONAL NEWS

Three out of Four Voters Want Full Pint Law

Joan Walley MP last month revealed poll results showing overwhelming public support for new laws to end the scandal of short measures of beer in the nation's pubs and clubs. An incredible 77% of voters back new laws to ensure drinkers receive a full pint of beer every time, only 4% of voters disagreed.

Joan Walley said: "These results show overwhelming support for the Government's proposals to introduce new laws to protect beer drinkers from short measures. Today I have tabled a motion in the Commons in support of the Government's proposals and look forward to these proposals being introduced as soon as possible." Surveys conducted by Trading Standards Officers indicate that eight out of ten pints sold in the UK are short measure and one in four contain less than the industry's own guideline of 95%. Midland brewer Wolverhampton and Dudley however, guarantees full pints in over 1000 pubs, yet is still able to charge lower prices than its competitors.

Joan Walley continued: "Many pubs already serve full measures at no extra cost to the consumer. The Government's proposals will ensure all pubs achieve this level of best practice and that pub goers will be guaranteed a fair deal in pubs and clubs across the country."

Time To Move on Beer Duty

The Campaign for Real Ale is urging Gordon Brown to support Britain's 400 small brewers by introducing a progressive beer duty system (PBD) in next March's Budget. CAMRA's call for action follows last month's pre-Budget speech, which did not refer to PBD despite assurances in last March's Budget that the Government was considering such a system.

Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns and Communications said, "We urge the Chancellor to introduce a progressive system of excise duty which will mean that very small brewing companies will pay a lower rate of beer tax. Such a system will cost the Treasury very little, but could be the difference between life and death for many small brewers who are struggling to survive in an increasingly competitive market."

Britain's 400 small breweries have less than 2% of the beer market, but they produce some 2,000 real ales to match local tastes. The three biggest companies have around 85% of the market.

A progressive system of beer tax will increase investment in small breweries which are often based in rural or economically marginal areas, improve cash flow - one of the biggest threats to small businesses and create local jobs.

Mike Benner added, "Last March's announcement that the Government was to consider progressive beer duty was very welcome, but now is the time to translate the idea into action before it's too late to save many breweries from closure."



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To All Our Friends & Customers From Bob & Anne

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Guest Beers Changed Weekly
Good Beer Guide 2002



Stockport & South Manchester Branch of CAMRA have a long-standing tradition of voting, in a reasonably democratic fashion for a pub of the month, and annually, a pub of the year, selected from the twelve winners. It is an excellent tradition, and long may it continue. (The 2002 award will be decided in January. Ed(2)) The BeerMonster, however, has decided, totally autocratically (well, with a nod to the views of the editors of Opening Times - and our erstwhile magazine treasurer) to create a totally separate occasional award, in conjunction with OT, to celebrate pubs that are doing something very out of the ordinary, and are within our distribution area (which includes pubs in London & Oxford! - so I'd better be careful).

It is therefore with great pleasure that I announce the inaugural BeerMonster™ Pub of the Year - The Castle, in Oldham St., Manchester. Kath & Ian have held the pub for the last six years, but have been associated with it for eight more. The pub, despite its location is a thriving community local, with darts and pool teams. Its eclectic mix of customers vary from the people who still ask for "a bitter" (despite their being 6), to CAMRA members visiting the only Robinson's pub to feature all 9 cask beers (the brewery literature talks about 7!) including the seasonal choice and the rare dark mild. Beer quality remains astonishingly good, and it's a rare occasion for a beer to run out for more than a day. Its a no-food, basic pub with a fifties feel that makes you think the photo should be sepia-tinted. The only changes are that live music is now left for the bigger venues, and there are 9 - count them - cracking beers. The award will be presented on Friday 21 December at about 8.00pm. If you're coming, why not also pop into the Beer House, where Lynne & Alan Whitehead are doing a very creditable job, keeping a much wider range of beers than the doomsayers predicted, in fine fettle. Food is now on and more beer festivals are planned. Watch this space. A full review of the new operation next month.



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Beer of the Month

Draught Paulaner Original Helles (5.5% abv)

In Germany, this is the first taste of Munich for people who prefer some dryness in their beer. Whilst Muncheners have their individual preferences, it is generally reckoned that Augustiner (Munich's oldest city centre



brewery) produce the finest beer in the city. Paulaner, though, is nearly everyone's second favourite, and it is a very, very, good drink. Best enjoyed out in the open, on a beechwood bench in a courtyard or beer garden. Now whereas most of us would rather have it served from a wooden barrel on gravity (vom Holzfass), beggars cannot be choosers, and in Albert Square its a near miracle. Yes, Albert Square, Manchester - where an enterprising stand in the north east corner of the "international market" (next to the christmas trees), complete with a tented courtyard with beechwood tables and benches is dispensing the stuff. Plastic glasses (sadly, the law) and 0.4l measures, but not bad value all the same, and a change from the ubiquitous gluhwein. Treat yourself.

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The Brewery Tenancy with Nine Real Ales - The Castle, Oldham St.



All hands to the pumps - all 9 of them. Kath & Ian behind the bar. Runner up as City Life Pub of the Year, it now gets a First!

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THE CASTLE
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Robin Bitter (4.5% abv)
 A MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL OUR CUSTOMERS

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Wayfarer in Wilmslow (1)

The pub and bar scene in this Cheshire town has changed somewhat over the last few years. Here I attempt to give a comprehensive view of what has taken place and what is now available. As there are quite a number of entries this is a two-part article with a north-south divide of the town.

Wilmslow North

Commencing with one of the most recent additions, I began at the **Grape & Grain**, fronting Swan Street and Manchester Road (B5166). A Wetherspoon's outlet, but unlike any of their other creations as it was originally built as a Thwaites house. Cleverly converted, the exterior impression is that it is three separate buildings, each with a different design and colour. There are numerous entrances and outside seating including a flagged courtyard with terrace heaters. Inside a number of bars cater for the customer and there are secluded drinking areas, some with subdued lighting, on multi-levels, lots of wood, bare floorboards and brickwork. The beer range consists of the usual Wetherspoon standards and up to two guest ales.

Next door is the **Swan**, branded as an "Ale House", a former Boddingtons pub still retaining a couple of brewery windows. A 17th Century building which has lost a lot of its character, radically altered, inside, opened out with an area for pool and darkened wood in abundance. Like a magnet it mainly attracts the town's younger clientele, with a substantial amount of noise. One plus point may be the real ales available. When I called there was a handpulled selection of Boddingtons Bitter, Timothy Taylor Landlord and two guests - Butcombe Gold and Titanic Iceberg.

Another pub which leans heavily towards the young at heart is the **Hogshead**, on the main Manchester Road. Again, a plethora of noise emanates from within this ultra-modern open-plan affair, with predominant bright pastel colours and light wood including the bare flooring. A long bar to the left dispenses Boddingtons Bitter, Hook Norton Old Hookey and Fullers London Pride and guest ales. There is an upper level, which is not always open, and a gathering of aluminium chairs and tables outside on the sheltered patio.

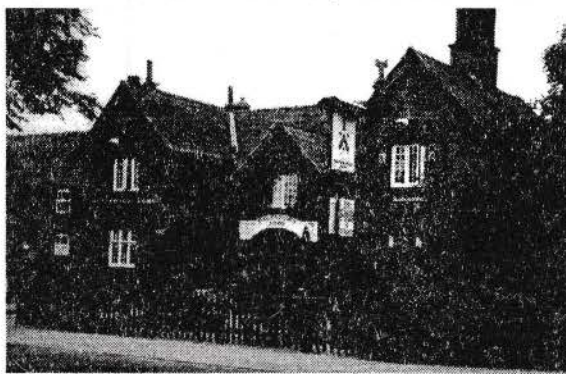
On Green Lane is a Banks's pub, the **Victoria**, housed in the old County Constabulary buildings and which enjoyed a spell as the **Blue Lamp** when first converted. The place is large and roomy inside giving an airy feel, with piped music, light wood and pleasing décor, split levels and a no-smoking section. Value specials and 'mega meals' are available daily until 9.00pm and handpulled Banks's Bitter and Marston's Pedigree are the ales. There is an outside beer garden fronting the proceedings.

On the very outskirts of the town at Lindow Common is the former **Boddington Arms** at the junction of Altrincham Road (A538) and Racecourse Road, now converted into the **Range**, an "eating and drinking" concept with a Premier Lodge alongside. More modernisation has taken place here with cream and mushroom décor, split levels and a mixture of floor patterns. Mostly geared up for those wanting substantial sustenance which can be washed down with real ales in the form of Boddingtons Bitter and Theakston Cool Cask ale. There is a big screen in evidence and I did feel a little out of place whilst only having a drink.

By the roundabout at the northern end of the town is a pleasant Robinson's house on the corner of Mill Street and Manchester Road, the **King William**, where also some modernisation has taken place, evidenced by new window frames. The interior is a very comfortable affair, divided up into small areas with split level, lounge and settle type seating, low beams and ceilings. A compact and busy bar dispenses Best Bitter and Hatters Mild via handpump, with certificates of competence to prove the licensee is more than capable of supplying a decent well-kept pint. Some outside seating is provided.

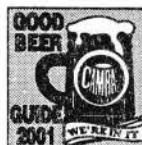
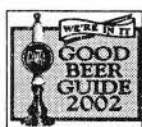


DAVENPORT ARMS (THIEF'S NECK), Woodford

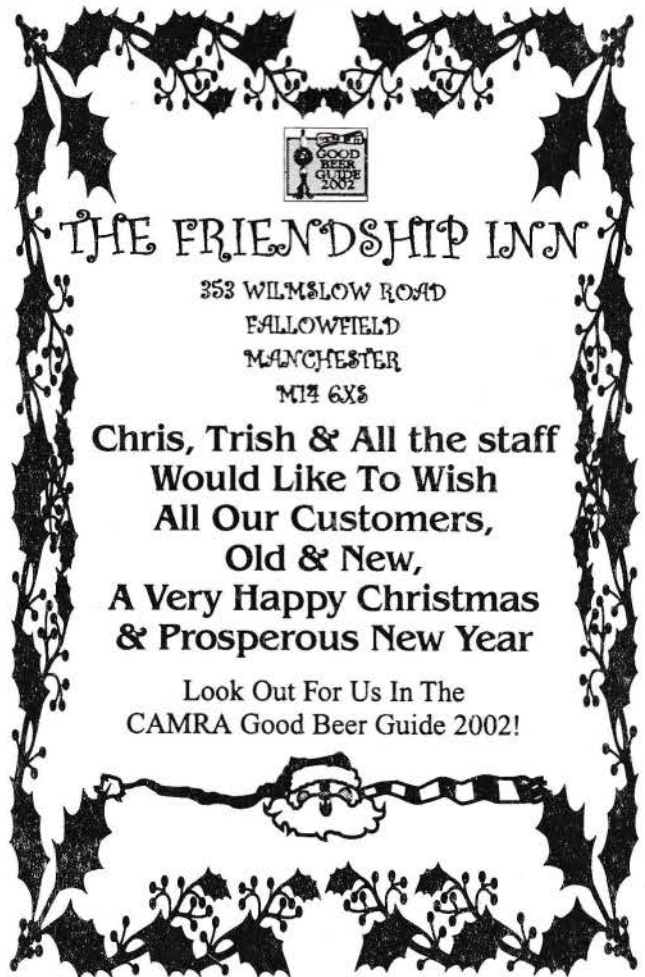



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There are some new café bar/restaurant-type establishments such as **Ask** and **Parisa** on Water Lane, **Suede** on Grove Street, **Bank** on the corner of Swan Street and **Dinks** on Wareham Street, but there's no need to venture in; you've probably guessed already that there isn't a drop of real ale to be found anywhere inside them. The same goes for the modernist **Rectory** on Station Road, set back with bouncers on the door and loud music bouncing off the walls.

A final point on the town's northern scene is that despite not selling any real ale a few years ago, the once proud rambling Bass house, the **George & Dragon** on Church Street and closed and boarded up in a state of disrepair.

Next month - Wilmslow South.



BOOK REVIEW

City Life Food & Drink Guide to Greater Manchester 2002, 146pp, £3.50

City Life magazine's annual guide to eating and drinking in and around Manchester is now a well-established publication which has settled down into a tried and tested format which works very well, and for a visitor to the city is pretty much indispensable. But is it any use if you're a local?

Well, yes and no is the answer. On many levels it is a useful and very well-presented book, on others it's just extremely frustrating.

You can't fault the appearance, glossy throughout and with a full colour photograph of every bar, restaurant, pub and coffee-bar featured. Scattered throughout are side panels (or even full-page features) on items as diverse as the Peter Street 'fun zone' to the history of coffee consumption.

Comments on all the features establishments are well-judged and to the point and full details of all opening hours are provided. Of particular use are the food-quality, décor and service ratings in the restaurant section. In fact it is this part of the book, occupying just over one-third of the total space, which is its great strength and, to partially answer the question posed in the introduction to this review, makes it a pretty essential buy if you eat out in and around the City Centre to any great extent.

The section devoted to coffee-bars, tea shops and chippies is eclectic to the point of eccentricity although any guide which includes the wonderful Fitzpatrick's Herbal Health in Rawtenstall, the very last of the old-style temperance bars, deserves nothing but praise.

Then we come to the sections covering bars (20 pages) and pubs (35 pages). The Bar section, as usual, seems pretty indiscriminate and appears to cover almost every one in the City Centre, including those familiar to OT readers - Bar Fringe, Bar Centro, Kro Bar, Atlas, The Bar (Chorlton), Cord and Fab Café. At the foot of each description are notes describing each bar's cocktails and 'house special'. Thus we learn that the 'house special' at Bar Fringe is 'Cantillon beer', at Kro Bar it's St Louis Kriek and at Sand Bar, Draught Erdinger. Well, perhaps not.

'Pubs' covers most of the usual City Centre suspects and includes a useful rundown of local breweries. There's also an excellent hand drawn City Centre pub-crawl. When the guide ventures further afield however (presumably to justify that 'Greater Manchester' tag) it all goes pretty pear-shaped. Manchester is covered by a scattering of entries along and around Wilmslow Road together with the Farmers Arms in Northenden. However venture to the other side of Upper Brook Street and you're in 'there be dragons' territory with not a single entry for anywhere else in the city. Strange, but true.

Stockport fares little better with just six entries - Andrew Arms, Compstall; Crown, Heaton Mersey; Nursery, Heaton Norris; Oddfellows, Mellor and, in the town centre, the Arden Arms and Queens Head. All fine pubs but I'm sure anyone reading the column could add at least half a dozen more (and not the same half-dozen at that).

So, worth buying? As usual, the answer is on balance yes. If you are a great diner-out then that's an emphatic yes. I can't help feeling though that this would be a far more authoritative book if it dropped that 'Greater Manchester' tag and instead just covered the City Centre (in its widest possible interpretation). JC.

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Stockie on The Che

By John Taylor



Superstar dartsman Darryl Fitton got an early Christmas present recently when he won a knock-out at the Greenwood Tree pub in Wythenshawe.

This was the first of many to be held at this establishment, running over eight weeks with four going through each week and the final taking place in the ninth week. With prize money of £1,000 for the winner, £400 for the beaten finalist and £100 for the beaten semi-finalists, there are not many competitions like this around any more. So get yourself down there on a Thursday evening – even if you get beaten, you will see a feast of good darts.

Darryl won his prize the hard way, by taking out his namesake Les Fitton in the semis and then Steve Coote in the final with legs of 16, 14, 13, and 14. Nice one Daz.

Stockport Still Tops

In the Cheshire Super League, Stockport are still unbeaten, but they only just got the better of Warrington recently. The score was tied at 4-4, after wins for Stockport players Darryl Fitton, Dave Cullen, Andy Wright and Les Fitton, so it was handy to have England international Tony O'Shea going on last. The final result was never in doubt, well done 'T.O.'. The next home match is against Altrincham at the Ash Hotel in Heaton Norris on the evening of 16 December. If you like watching top class darts that's the place to be, get there early.

Tony will be taking part in this year's World Masters soon – he is seeded for this competition and it will be screened live on national TV. He has also qualified for the Embassy World Final at the beginning of the New Year. "World Champion Tony O'Shea" – who knows, it might even get some coverage in the local press. Don't bet against him pulling off a few surprises.

Royal Mortar Undefeated

Champions Royal Mortar are now the only undefeated side in the Stockport Licensed Houses Super League, after taking out the joint second place team The Magnet, 7-0. The win included top darts from Kevin Weir and Darryl Fitton who both won in legs of 21 and 14.

The Ash Hotel crashed to their second defeat of the season, this time to the Bobby Peel 4-3. Bren Shields for the Bobby won the crucial game, beating Andy Wright two legs to one. The Sidings are rooted to the bottom having lost their first seven matches, including a 6-1 defeat at the hands of The Jack & Jill, which is the only win for the Brinnington team.

After seven matches the top of the table is:

Team	Played	Won	Points
Royal Mortar	7	7	14
Bobby Peel	7	6	12
Ash Hotel	7	5	10
Magnet	7	5	10
Reddish WMC	7	5	10

In the Stockport Licensed Houses Ladies 'A' Division, Reddish Workingmens Ladies are presently top, if that makes sense. It's early days in that league – the top score so far is 154 by Miss J Wheeler from the Albion, and least darts is 25 by Miss L Forster from the Ladybridge at Cheadle Hulme. It's nice to see so many ladies turning out; in fact about five years ago I was on the committee which allowed an all ladies team into the men's Premier Division, which is still the case today. Well done girls, keep it up. Well, that's it for another month. As usual, if you want any darts matters mentioning, ring me on 0161 432 2707 and I will see what I can do. Many thanks for your time. I would finally like to wish you and yours a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

16

CAMPAIGN FOR REAL ALE

The Caledonia Hotel

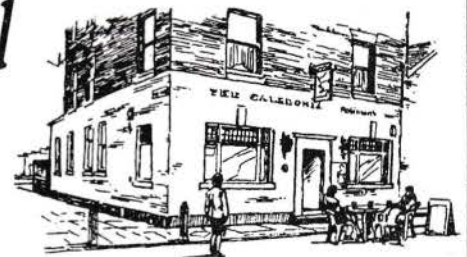
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Walking With Pubcos

It was reported recently that Pubmaster were contemplating a bid for the Laurel Pub Company, who run the former Whitbread pub estate, a move that would create a giant pub company with over 7,000 outlets. Where once mega-brewers dominated the pub scene, it is now huge pub companies. It's rather like the giant mammals superseding the dinosaurs in "Walking with Beasts". But it's highly doubtful whether pub companies represent a form of business organisation that is sustainable in the long-term.

There's no other example of firms owning a huge chain of retail outlets, but refusing to put their name above the door. If drinkers choose to visit Wetherspoons, they have a clear idea of what to expect. If you go in a Robinson's or Hydes pub, you know that you will find their distinctive, high-quality beers there. But why on earth should anyone choose to visit a Pubmaster outlet in preference to one owned by Punch Taverns or Enterprise Inns? Many pub company outlets are excellent, well-run places. But belonging to the pub company contributes nothing to their success.

Pub companies as currently constituted are basically driven by property management, not retailing. It won't be too long before they find that they are losing business to operations, whether branded managed pubs, enterprising free houses, or independent brewery tied houses, that offer the pubgoer a clearly-defined unique selling proposition. And, all-conquering as they may now seem, I wouldn't be surprised if in ten years' time the giant pub companies in their current form have vanished from the face of the earth just as surely as the dinosaurs.

No Hiding Place

Last month, salesman Mark Hodges was dismissed from his new job when his boss found out that he smoked ten cigarettes a day at home - even though he never smoked in the office or in his company car. Given that more and more companies are instituting strict no-alcohol policies, this sets a disturbing precedent for moderate drinkers, particularly as many business leaders are proud to proclaim that they are teetotallers.

But surely, so long as it's legal and doesn't affect your performance at work, what you do in your own time should be your own business. Taken to its logical conclusion it isn't difficult to imagine companies preventing their employees from playing rugby, riding motorcycles or climbing mountains, as it may lead to them having too much time off sick. But staffing your company with dull, prissy people may not be the best guarantee of success.

Pub Therapy

You often hear people say that they could do with a visit to the pub to relax and unwind - and this is now supported by academic research. A recent survey of 900 men by Dr Colin Gill of Leeds University found that they used the pub to bond, to recharge their batteries and as an emotional outlet. What a surprise!

Rather more questionable is the claim that almost half said they would still go to the pub even if there was no alcohol. Maybe in these politically correct times they felt they had to say that, but in reality beer and pubs are inextricably linked and without one the other would disappear. Obviously they would find somewhere else that served a similar purpose - and no doubt the menfolk of Kabul chew the fat in coffee shops or whatever - but it wouldn't be anything like a pub.

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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

DECEMBER '96

The front page headline was "Nitro-threat to Cask Ale", and the warning came from a conference sponsored by CAMRA on beer quality and flavour.

The bearer of the bad tidings was Chris Whitworth, director of logistics at Bass, who was described as an expert on sales figures, trends and market share. According to his figures, sales of premium cask ale were falling by 10 per cent a year, with standard cask declining by 12 per cent - this latter figure seemed to be permanent. His prediction was that drinkers would continue to switch from standard ales to premium, and premium's fall would only halt in 1999, when sales of nitrokeg reached a peak.

There was news of two seasonal beers. Hydes' had announced that its 4X Anvil Strong was to re-appear early that December. Many older drinkers remembered it as a powerful 8-9 per cent brew, but it had now reverted to the original 6.8% ABV (or og1068 as it was).

At Porter's Railway, Sleighed at 6.5 per cent was due to make its annual appearance, slightly earlier that year - it was to be available by mid-December. In previous years it had arrived on the bar on Christmas Day!

Sand Bar on Grosvenor Street, All Saints, had been open since April, but it could probably lay claim to being the best "undiscovered" beer bar on the south side of the City Centre. A pub selling three ever-changing guest beers from regional and micro-brewers, with around 50 quality bottled beers from around Europe, together with German wheat beers and other speciality products on draught, ought to be high on any beer enthusiast's list of places to visit on a regular basis.

Ye Olde Vic in Edgeley had re-opened after a very short period of closure, during which time it had been redecorated and painted. This long-standing Stockport free house was now owned by Glen Geldard who, together with manager Val Morris (with a great deal of experience looking after cask beers), was aiming to re-establish trade at this once very busy pub. The range of beers on offer, and indeed those planned for the future, had probably been something of a disappointment to long-time aficionados of the Vic, compared to the exotica which the pub had previously specialised in.

Two new breweries had been announced - "Mash & Air" on Chorlton Street and the Marble Brewery in the Marble Arch pub on Rochdale Road. "Mash & Air" was already in production, but brewer Alistair Hook had warned that we should be prepared for a different beer philosophy, using words like aromatic malts, fruits and spices, lemon, lime, orange and a host of natural flavours. In any case, the beers could not be classified as "real ale", as they were dispensed by a mixed gas system from their cellar storage tanks. The Marble Brewery was only in the very early stages - it was to be housed in the pub's back room, extending into the cellar, and it was likely to be some time before actual construction started. The last sentence of 'Five Years Ago' December 1991 read "The 1991 Hillgate Crawl was to be held in reverse for the first time. It was to start at the Turners Vaults, going uphill to finish at the Blossoms. Merry Christmas!"



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PUB OF THE SEASON

The Macclesfield and East Cheshire branch of CAMRA has voted the The Poacher's Inn on Ingersley Road in Bollington as its Pub of the Season for Winter 2001.

The Poachers is right on the edge of Bollington, overlooked by the Peak District National Park and often overlooked by visitors too - but those who stop can enjoy the pleasures of a convivial pub selling exceptional real ale. The pub is also known by some regulars as "the best kept secret in Cheshire" and this has now been recognised by the pub's recent inclusion in the "Hidden Inns of Lancashire and Cheshire".

The Poachers is now the only independent pub in Bollington, being family-owned and run by Rob and Helen Ellwood. The Poachers has sold real ale for many years, but previous landlord Bill Carden re-introduced a regular guest beer in 1999 and a marked improvement in the quality and consistency of the beer soon saw it enter the national Good Beer Guide. It is once again the only representative for Bollington in the 2002 edition.

Bill's niece Helen and husband Rob took over the pub about 20 months ago. The Poachers is their first pub and Bill stayed on for about 3 months to pass on his considerable cellar expertise and knowledge to Rob. Rob was clearly an exceptional pupil with no discernible change in beer quality as Rob gradually did more and more of the cellar work before taking over completely.

At first nothing much changed with a single guest beer supplementing the Timothy Taylor's Landlord and the Boddingtons Bitter, which is still the best selling real ale. Before long Rob introduced a second guest real ale, much to the delight of the locals. Now there is always an interesting choice of real ales from Somerset to Cumbria and all counties in between, although they do always try to have a local brewery as one of the guests.

Landlord is not a bad third choice for the rare occasion when neither of the two guest beers tickles your fancy, and serving only firkins keeps the beer fresh and the range interesting. A couple of years ago Rob drank lager, but now he is a keen real ale drinker with an interest in breweries and beers that goes beyond the merely professional. Most of the guest beers come from small breweries and Rob researches each one, often using the internet. The result is a folder in a corner of the pub containing as much information on each beer as Rob can gather. And for those people who want to know a little more about the beer Rob is always happy to chat.

The Poachers is not just a real ale pub. It enjoys a growing reputation for food, (so much so that booking is recommended should you wish to eat on a Friday or Saturday) nearly all of which is produced from fresh ingredients, delivered daily. The interesting menu includes ostrich, sea bass and a serious Steak and Ale pie whilst the 3-course Sunday lunch is always very popular. During weekday lunch-times The Poachers offers a home cooked lunch including soup and main course for only £4. This helps to attract local business people, retired folk and walkers looking for good

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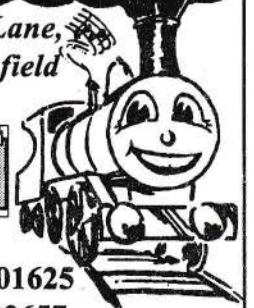
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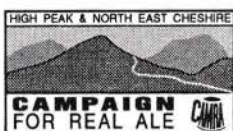
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food in pleasant surroundings. The monthly food theme evenings always sell out fast and over the past year have seen Vietnamese, Mexican and Greek delicacies on offer. It all shows what can be done when a young, energetic and enterprising couple decides to run a pub. It benefits the local community as well as the local real ale drinkers.

The Poachers represents a good balance between those who just fancy a pint and those who want to enjoy a pleasant meal washed down with good beer. There is a choice of eating areas with a non-smoking A La Carte restaurant and an area within the main pub set aside for smokers. The pub does also carry a comprehensive wine list.

The Poachers is a much-improved pub, not just for real ale but also for food. It may not have the barrel turnover to rival some town pubs who offer a wider range of real ales, but its ever-changing selection of high quality ales mean that even the locals can go in with a sense of pleasant anticipation, wondering what is in store. The credit for keeping locals and visitors happy goes to Rob and Helen who run an excellent pub with obliging staff, thoroughly deserving to be Pub of the Season. The presentation will be made on Monday January 7th at 8pm.



FEATURED PUB
The Bakers Arms,
Buxton

This month we return to one of the outlying areas of the branch, Buxton, where Mark and Gillian have run the Bakers Arms on West Road since 1989. The ivy-covered exterior, recently cut back to fully reveal the pub name, which was in danger of disappearing altogether, hides a small friendly local pub.

You enter through a small porch into two small rooms. To the right in the larger of the two rooms is the main bar with bench seating down one side with several small tables and a darts board squeezed in at the back. The walls are covered with a large collection of trophies and old photos from the many local sporting clubs that are associated the pub. To the left through an open doorway is another smaller bar again with bench seating and small tables. Outside there is a small patio area to the front and a separate car park located of the main road.

The beers available are Tetley Bitter and Greene King Abbot Ale, along with at least two ever-changing guest ales, usually including one from Kelham Island. These can even be purchased in a four-pint jug. Also available is a newly introduced range of foreign and unusual bottled beers. You can e-mail Mark at markatbakers@aol.com for a list of the currently available beers before you visit.

Recently there have been two small beer festivals held, which proved very popular with the regulars. Also on a Sunday evening there is usually an Irish duo playing.

The Bakers Arms has been in the Good Beer Guide since 1982 and currently remains Buxton's only pub with a full guide entry, and therefore should not to be missed on a trip to the town, but remember that the pub is closed on Saturday afternoons. AJ.

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HIGH PEAK & NORTH EAST CHESHIRE
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The Eagle on the Market Place in Buxton (Hydes) is now has a guest beer alongside the Hydes beers and over in New Mills The Pack Horse also has expanded its range with guests. There are three hand pumps devoted to the guest beers and on a recent visit these were Ventnor Gold, Cottage Wessex and Hardy Hansons Guzzling Goose.

Also in New Mills the Swan in New Town has new licensees. Sylvia and Neil have moved across from the Vine.

In Glossop the Partington Club associated with the Partington Theatre has also introduced a guest beer policy and a good value one at that. The beer rotates on a monthly basis and in October it was Batemans XXXB at £1.30 a pint. In November it was Shepherd Neames Autumn Red also at £1.30 a pint. The draw back is that you have to join first (only £6.00 though) and may be asked if you have any thespian leanings ('ooh no madam'). Break a leg!

The Oakwood (Robinson) in Glossop has a new licensee, Steve Barrow who is also a director of Glossop FC incidentally.

New licensees have also arrived at the Ardern Arms in Bredbury but our correspondent was obviously too interested in the Robbies to get a name! More information when available. We also understand that the Sportsman in Bredbury will also be changing hands, and indeed may already have done so.

Finally news of a couple of Jennings pubs which have been sold on. The Globe in Glossop and the Park in Dukinfield. More information as to the new owners when available. Jennings have in fact put another tranche of former managed houses on the market, this time including the Bowling Green in Ashton-u-Lyne and the Romper at Marple Ridge. They're not cheap either, being priced at £475,000 and £575,000 respectively.

Ye Olde Admiral Rodney

Prestbury

Robinsons Hatters

Mild and Best

Bitter

on handpump



Lunchtime Bar Snacks

12-2.30 Mon-Sat

Peter and Gail

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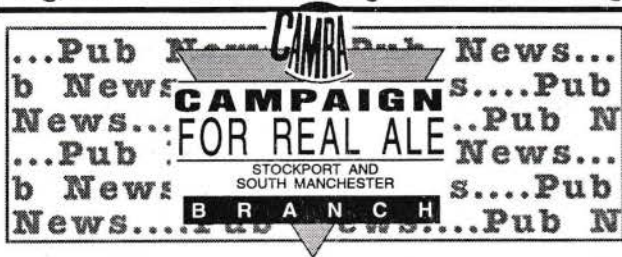
Your Hosts Brian and Tracey

Bar Meals Served Mon to Sat Lunch

This is not a free house

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CAMRA
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REAL ALE



In Edgeley, Windsors on Castle Street is currently closed with the tenancy advertised as to let. This is a pub that has had more than its share of problems over the years and has never really recovered since it was butchered and turned into a 'Sports' many years ago. Unless it has a major change of direction it is difficult to see how this pub can really be successful again.

A handpump has sprouted on the bar of Dillon's Whistlin' Jig (Wellington Road North, Stockport) although it has so far failed to dispense any cask beer. When Opening Times called in mid-November we were told real ale was on its way - more next month.

Another pub to regain real ale is the Kings Head on Tiviot Dale where both Draught Bass and Worthington Best Bitter are now available on handpump, the former at a bargain £1.30 a pint. The Kings has always had the potential to be an excellent little pub and this is certainly a major step in the right direction.

On the downside, however, the Lonsdale in Heaton Norris is now keg-only, although in truth this was never a major cask ale outlet.

Another local pub closed and awaiting a tenant in late November was the White House in Offerton. This has been a very good pub in its time and it's difficult to imagine it being closed for long. The reasons for its current (and hopefully temporary) demise are unknown.

Staying in Offerton, Scottish & Newcastle have applied for listed building consent for alterations at the Strawberry Gardens. Last time they attempted to alter this pub, their radical plans, which involved knocking through the snug at the front, were rejected by a planning inspector. Presumably they have learned their lesson and the latest proposals are more restrained and pay due recognition to the building's status.

The boarding had come down at the Kings Hall (Wetherspoons) in Cheadle Hulme as this was typed and there was a banner up stating that they re-open on 3rd December. Peering through the window one can see that the bar has been extended and visible are two banks of five handpumps.

There's a new face at the Nicholsons Arms (Lancashire Hill, Stockport) where Amanda Parsons took over on 7 September. This is her first tenancy and she tells us that to date she has experienced no problems at what some would regard as a difficult to run pub. Business has so far been good and the quality of the Robinson's beers when OT called was certainly a vast improvement over our previous visits.

It now seems certain that Wetherspoon's will be going ahead with their second development in Stockport town centre, on the site next to the Natwest Bank on Underbank. A new licensing application has gone in and it seems from this that this second outlet will be part of Wetherspoon's 'Lloyds No.1' chain - basically a Wetherspoon's with music and fewer beers.

Sam Smiths are spending money on both their Stockport outlets. Substantial work is planned for the Boars Head (Market Place) which will see new toilets and the creation of an outside drinking area, while work was already underway on the Queens Head as OT went to press. Reports are that the bar is to be extended backwards in some way. The Queens is of course a listed building so anything major would require listed building consent - which we presume was obtained here...

In East Manchester the bad news is that a 'for sale' sign has gone up on the Britannia in Beswick. Its survival so far has probably been down to ownership by Lees rather than one of the pub companies and it is ironic to think that just as large amounts of money are being poured into the area there is now a question mark over the pub's future.

On a brighter note, the Kings Arms on Chancellor Lane has now reopened and is selling cask Tetley Bitter. The bad news is that it's in direct competition with the smooth version (that's the one that gets all the promotion and advertising spend) so your guess is as good as ours is as to its future prospects. Good to see the pub back, though.

Enterprise Inns have taken over the Grey Horse in Reddish. New tenants are local brothers David and Nigel Johnson along with friend John Stringer. Previously run as a Scottish & Newcastle managed house, the Grey Horse had been in decline for a number of years, however David, Nigel and John are determined to realise the pub's potential and already they seem to be making a noticeable difference.

Dermot and Ellen McDermott of the Union in Reddish, fresh from their recent Pub of the Month triumph, have announced their retirement for April 2002. Dermot (or Gerry as he is known in the pub) is returning to Ireland after 40 years in the UK.

Also moving on is Ian Bailey of the Armoury, Stockport, who is leaving the trade to live on his canal boat. His successor is local Edgeley man Peter Kaut who, Ian assures us, knows the pub 'inside out'. No major changes are expected at this excellent traditional local.

On the national scene, Japanese investment bank Nomura has put its Inn Partnership pub estate up for sale for a cool £500 million. This is one of the three pub companies in the Nomura fold and has particular prominence locally since it primarily consists of the old Greenalls (and Boddingtons) leased and tenanted estate. It is thought that numerous other pub owning companies such as Enterprise Inns, Pubmaster and Punch will be interested in snapping up the Inn Partnership chain.





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ROBINSONS FREDERICS BEST BITTER HATTERS MILD SEASONAL ALES

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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

Diary

DECEMBER 2001

Thursday 13th - Monthly Branch Meeting including Christmas Quiz: Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm. **NB Change of venue**

Tuesday 18th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Griffin, Didsbury Rd, Heaton Mersey from 8.00pm.

Friday 21st - Famous Annual Hillgate Stagger. Let's have a **really** good turnout this year, folks! Meet Queens Head (Turners Vaults) Underbank, 7.00pm; 8.30pm Red Bull, Hillgate. Finish in the Blossoms with Old Tom nightcap!

Thursday 10th January - Monthly Branch Meeting: Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. *Pub of the Year 2002 will be chosen at this meeting.* Starts 8.00pm.

Saturday 12th - Annual Branch Meal at the Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 7.30pm. Details of guest speaker to be announced. Cost approx £6-7 per head. Book with Paul Formby on 612 0759 (after 6.00pm)



A Merry Christmas to all local CAMRA members from Opening Times

DECEMBER 2001

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 10th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Crown, Victoria St, Glossop. Starts 8.30pm.

Monday 7th January - Committee Meeting: Bee Hive, NewMills. Starts 8.30pm

Monday 14th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Royal Hotel, Hayfield. Starts 8.30pm.

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:

Monday 10th - Campaigning Meeting: Drum & Monkey (Moss Rose), off Heyes Lane, Alderley Edge. Starts 8.0pm.

Monday 7th January - Winter Pub of the Season Award: Poachers, Ingerseley Rd, Bollington. Starts 8.00pm



To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 33 Planner



Gothic

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BAR & GRILL

TELEPHONE:
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FOOD SERVED

12.00-2.30 MONDAY-FRIDAY • 12.00-2.30 SUNDAY

EXCITING NEW MENU
LAUNCHED MONDAY 21st MAY
'Taste the Difference'

SUNDAY LUNCH SPECIAL
3 COURSE MEAL ONLY £3.50

QUIZ NIGHT EVERY WEDNESDAY

ENTRY ONLY £1.00

Price includes hot supper • Everyone welcome

Serving a full range of Cains Traditional Ales and Imported Danish Lagers.

Hopf Weisse, a German Award Winning Wheat Beer is also available.

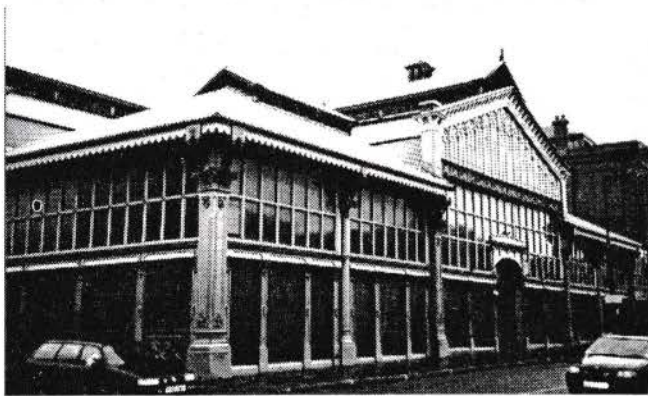
CAINS

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT LORRAINE ON 0161 491 1966

National Winter Ale Spectacular



The world will come to Manchester next month when the city hosts CAMRA's sixth national Winter Ales Festival and Champion Winter Beer of Britain Competition.

The festival moved to Manchester three years ago, from its original home in Glasgow, and has been a runaway success with beer selling out by 7.00pm on the Saturday night the first year. Larger supplies will ensure this does not happen this year! This will be a truly national festival with well over 100 real ales on offer.

It won't all be super-strong winter warmers, either. These powerful beers will be out in force but there will be plenty more sessionable milds, a huge range of bitters, and stouts and porters from independent brewers all over Britain. Specially featured this year is the LADS (Light & Dark Supporters) campaign, highlighting a selection of thirst-quenching and lipsmacking milds - ideal if you want to drink more because of their (generally) lower gravity. In addition, the local microbrewers' products will be promoted on one bar, giving licensees and general drinkers the chance to directly compare their offerings. As last year there will be an international flavour to the event too with the



NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL CASTLEFIELD, 24 - 26 JANUARY 2002



**NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL
MANCHESTER 2002**
24 to 26 January
Upper Campfield Market, Liverpool Road
PLEASE USE ONE FORM PER PERSON



Name _____
 Address _____

 Post Code _____
 Phone _____ CAMRA Member No _____
 CAMRA Branch (if known) _____

Please tick the sessions you are able and willing to work, along with the nights you would like accommodation. This is basic and largely limited to sleeping space within the hall. Please contact the staffing officer directly for details.

Please note - accommodation cannot be guaranteed.

	MON 21	TUE 22	WED 23		THU 24	FRI 25	SAT 26		SUN 27	MON 28
0900				0900				0900		
1300				1600				1300		
1300				1600				1300		
1800				2300				1800		
Accommodation										
	Setting-up				Festival Open				Take Down	

Note - On Saturday evening volunteers will be expected to help in taking-down for 45 to 60 minutes after the Festival has closed before partying

Have you worked at a CAMRA Beer Festival Before?
 Please list any special skills you could offer the festival _____

Do you have any first aid qualifications? _____
 (if yes give details on reverse) _____

Please use the back of this form for any other information you feel could be of use to the Staffing Officer in allocating jobs at the festival.

Send your completed form to:

NWAF STAFFING, Janet Prescott

6 Holly Bush Square, Lowton, Warrington, Cheshire, WA3 2JX

Telephone: 01942 719037 E-mail: steven.prescott@virgin.net

return of the spectacular foreign beer bar with an unrivalled range of 24 draught German beers, as well as bottles and a bigger range of Belgian beers, including seasonal specialities, and a return of six or more real ales from the Irish Republic. An excellent range of ciders and perries will also be available, this time from an individual bar. Good (value and quality) hot and cold food will be available every session provided by Idy from the GBG lister Crescent in Salford.

The three day event runs from 24-26 January and is again being held in the historic Upper Campfield Market, a Victorian market hall in Castlefield, just off Deansgate in the City Centre and only 4 minutes walk from Deansgate BR, and G-Mex Metrolink stations. An event that no beer lover can afford to miss. Get those dates in your diaries now - 24-26 JANUARY.

CAMRA Volunteers Needed

An event of this scale requires a great deal of volunteer help to run, so we are appealing to any current CAMRA members who are readers of Opening Times to devote some time, no matter how little, to give us a hand. Please complete the adjacent form and send it in!

We must emphasise that legal and insurance requirements mean that only fully paid up members of CAMRA are permitted to work.

The Beer House

Telephone 0161 839 7091

6 Angel Street Manchester (off Rochdale Road)

Open 11.30am till 11pm



Wishing all our customers a
Very Merry Christmas!!

Look out for some very special seasonal brews over the
next month - Guaranteed to impart festive cheer and
warm even Scrooges cockles!

Thanks to all involved in the very successful A-Z tour in November -
We look forward to welcoming you over the festive season, and
onward into the New Year.

Your Hosts

Lynne and Alan Whitehead

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