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Volume 18 Issue 1

JANUARY 2002 No:213

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FREE

NURSERY IS NATIONAL CHAMP!

Stockport Local Scoops CAMRA's 2001 National Pub of the Year Award



There was a surprise but richly deserved New Year's Honour for the Nursery in Heaton Norris when the news emerged on January 1st that it had been named the Campaign for Real Ale's National Pub of the Year for 2001. The Hydes pub beat off strong challenges from contenders in County Durham, Kent and Berkshire to take the prestigious annual award. It had already won the Stockport & South Manchester and Greater Manchester Pub of the Year titles before going on to the final round of the competition.

It is the first time the award has been won by a brewery-owned managed pub, and also marks a relatively rare victory for a pub in an urban location, the majority of winners having historically been rural free houses.

Licensees George and Susan Lindsay were not surprisingly lost for words, but managed to say "This is absolutely amazing. We knew we were in the last four but we never really imagined we were going to win!"

George and Susan are among the country's most experienced licensees, having been in charge at the Nursery since 1981, after an earlier spell at the late lamented Bridge on Georges Road. Many years ago George showed an early enthusiasm for the licensed trade by getting himself a job at the famous Horseshoe Bar in his native Glasgow when only seventeen and officially too young for duty. It is no exaggeration to say that the hard work, dedication and attention to detail of George and Susan over a long period of time have been the crucial factor in making the Nursery such an exceptional pub.

The key to the Nursery's success is that it is a pub that does so many things extremely well, as this is an award that considers not only beer quality but also atmosphere, quality of service and welcome, mix of clientele, sympathy with CAMRA's aims and value for money.

Originally built in 1939, the pub retains a classic multi-roomed interior including a superb wood-panelled lounge and that increasingly rare feature, a proper vault. It caters for a wide cross-section of customers from a lively vault trade to lunchtime diners. At the back is an immaculate and well-used bowling green and the spacious upstairs room is popular for meetings and functions. It is strongly supported by local people and is a real hub of the community.

...continued on page 4

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WINTER ALES FEST 2002

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

This will be a truly national festival with well over 100 real ales, Traditional Ciders & Perries and 100 Foreign beers 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. 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 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. 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. CASTLEFIELD

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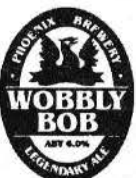
IN JANUARY'S OPENING TIMES

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IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

Well, what can you say? The Nursery's victory in the national Pub of the Year competition is a marvellous New Year present. It really is a feather in the cap for all concerned and in particular for George and Sue Lindsay who have run such a fine pub over these past years. They will no doubt be showered with congratulations but just let me add those from all of us involved with Opening Times.

Last month I commented on the strength of the current Stockport pub scene and suggested that we offered the best pub crawl in the country. This latest award is certainly vindication of those comments.

The question for those of us in the local CAMRA branch is just how do we follow that? By the time you read this we will have selected our local Pub of the Year for 2002, starting all over again the process that has led to the Nursery claiming the national honours. Who will be our standard bearer in the 2002 contest? Well, you'll just have to read next month's Opening Times to find out.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

It's not all good news, though. The shock news about the sale of Liverpool's Robert Cain brewery is a major blow, not just for Liverpool, which again is faced with the prospect of losing its last large scale commercial brewery, but for all beer lovers in the north west who have come to appreciate the distinctive Cains beers. CAMRA will be campaigning hard to retain some form of local brewing in the Cain's name - more news about this, hopefully next month.

John Clarke

As well as taking the opportunity on our joint behalf(s) to wish everyone a happy new year, I wonder what the year will bring the real beer drinker (apart from a few more dead brain cells). A footnote to the pre-budget statement once more promised sliding scale beer-duty - which would help the micro-breweries become more competitive. Little else in the financial world promises to be good - more closures, amalgamations, pub group mergers, and without doubt more Wetherspoons...

Paul Hutchings

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 213

OPENING TIMES is published by Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the campaign either locally or nationally. Editors: John Clarke, 45 Bulkeley Street, Edgeley, Stockport SK3 9HD. ☎ (0161) 477 1973; Paul Hutchings, 8 The Green, Heaton Norris, Stockport Cheshire, SK4 2NP. ☎ & Fax (0161) 432 8384. News, articles and letters welcome. All editorial items may be submitted in most popular WP formats or preferably ASCII on IBM-PC format 3.5" disks (which will eventually be returned!) or via e-mail to johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com Adverts or photos should be "hard copy" or in CorelDraw 3.5 or 7 (*.cdr) format or TIFF or EPS files (submit printed proofs for checking and ensure that any "include all fonts" options are on). All editorial items © CAMRA; may be reproduced if source acknowledged. All Advertising images are copyright the respective design sources (Largely CPPR, but all other copyrights and trademarks acknowledged).

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Fight for Consumer Choice in Pubs - Join CAMRA now - see page 19!



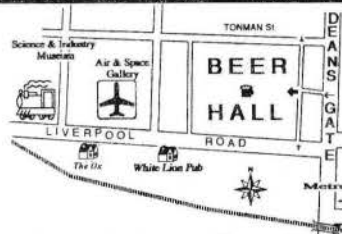
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CAMRA 2002 NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL



Festival Opening & Admission: (hours to be confirmed)
Thursday 24 January: 5.30 - 10.30pm (£2),
Friday 25 January: 12 - 4 (£2) & 5.30 - 10.30pm (£3),
Saturday 26 January: 12 - 4 (£2) & 5.30 - 10.30pm (£2).
Card-carrying CAMRA members: FREE on Fri Lunch & Sat Eve,
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Tony Dunn has now left the Unity on Wellington Road South, Stockport, to take over the Queens in Cheadle. No major changes are planned at the moment although a refurbishment could be on the cards for next year.

There has also been a change of licensee at the Greyound in Edgeley and the Royal Oak in Cheadle, although we had no details of the new incumbents as we went to press.

The refurbishment of the Queens Head, Underbank, has simply taken the form of a general spruce-up and redecoration, and very nice the pub looks, too. Rumours of more substantial alterations were evidently unfounded. The Sam Smiths Old Brewery Bitter remains on both good form and good value.

In a surprise move, Lorraine Jevons will be leaving the Gothic Bar in Gatley at the beginning of February. During her stay at Gothic, Lorraine has run an excellent pub and gained a well-deserved place in the national Good Beer Guide. We wish her well for the future.

The Crown, Heaton Lane, continues to cement its reputation as one of Stockport's top cask ale pubs. Two handpumps are already reserved for a mild and a Bank Top beer respectively, and these are now to be joined by dedicated handpumps for Pictish and Phoenix breweries. This should guarantee regulars the chance to sample all of the new beers produced by what are two of Greater Manchester's leading micro-brewers.

NURSERY IS NATIONAL PUB OF THE YEAR

...continued from front page

Despite its tucked-away location it also draws customers from many miles around, particularly for the excellent food, the Sunday lunches being especially well-regarded.

Most importantly, the beer quality is consistently good, resulting in the pub having been in the Good Beer Guide without a break, by some way the longest record of continuous entries in the Stockport & South Manchester area. As well as the Dark Mild and Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the Hydes seasonal beers are also available, plus XXXX strong ale when it has been brewed (regrettably not this year).

Much credit is also due to Hydes both for respecting the fabric of the pub when a major refurbishment was carried out during 2000, and for the marked improvement in the quality and range of their beers in recent years, which has given pubs such as the Nursery a much greater appeal to the beer drinker. Hydes Production Director Paul Jefferies said, when told of the award "This is wonderful news. Everyone at the brewery is delighted. Warmest congratulations to George and Susan for a superb effort!" The award also represents a major fillip for the independent family brewers in proving that their tied pubs can successfully compete at the very highest level.

Details of the presentation ceremony are still to be arranged, but a memorable event is certainly in prospect and "Opening Times" will make sure its readers are kept informed.

If you want to pop in in the meantime to see what all the fuss is about, you should be warned that it's not the easiest pub in the world to find. By road, it can be reached by turning off the A6 (Wellington Road North) along Heaton Road by the Dunham Jaguar garage, following the road straight along when it becomes Alexandra Road and bends to the left, then continuing straight on where it becomes a narrow cobbled street, the pub being a little further on the right. Alternatively, but on foot only, get the 192 bus to Belmont Way in the A6 and then walk along Bowerfold Lane in a westerly direction across the railway bridge for about a third of mile until you reach the pub on your right. But once you've found it you're sure to want to go back and try it again.

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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 JANUARY 2002

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		



This month's Pub of the Month is being presented to The Travellers Call, Hyde Road, Gorton on Thursday 31 January.

Unfortunately the phrase PUB of the Month implies we are giving the award to bricks and mortar, nothing could be further from the truth! Janice and Alan are the recipients because of their excellent work changing the Travellers Call from an average pub into a thriving locals' pub. When Janice and Alan took over some 18 months ago the pub was only ticking over, now the place is busy at all times, with cask ale sales doubling in that time.

The Travellers Call was one of Hydes earliest acquisitions, and has been in their hands for 100 years. In that time there have been changes, but many of the original features are still discernible.



Recent improvements have been welcomed but the locals, but did not let it get in the way of their drinking. On one occasion demanding to be let in, even though there was no floor in the front bar, on another wrapping up snugly while the windows were replaced! Apart from an excellent pint of Hydes Bitter (sorry no cask mild at the moment) what else has the Travellers Call to offer? There is a thriving darts and crib team and impromptu card games at other times. Karaoke evenings are other frequent occurrences along with parties for people of all ages (imagine my surprise at being offered a bowl of jelly and ice cream on a recent visit!). At other times there are spontaneous outbreaks of silliness, such as when a pogo stick was brought in, the whole pub ended up bouncing around the bar! To say that the pub is friendly is an understatement. Whenever you visit, there is always a welcome and somebody will engage you in conversation. If you are still unsure of the character of the pub, just imagine the Rovers Return on Coronation Street, except the stories here are a little more believable!

To sum up, the Travellers Call is a traditional locals pub, full of character and characters, so come along on January 31st and support Janice and Alan in this real life Rovers Return. **DH.**

The Travellers Call is located on Hyde Road just yards from its junction with Pottery Lane (the new inner ring road) just next to the Mecca Bingo hall. Getting there could not be easier, as the 203 bus from Stockport drops you outside the door. From Manchester buses 201, 203, 204 and 205 all pass the door. The A6, with its frequent 192 buses, is only 5 minutes walk away via Kirkmanshulme Lane/Pottery Lane.

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

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 213:

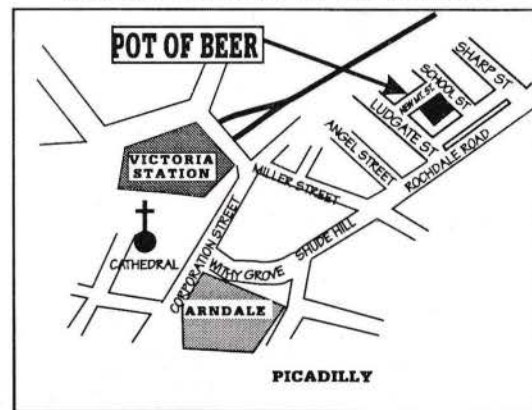
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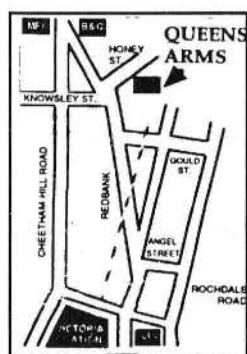
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STAGGER

with Stuart Ballantyne

It is some time since Opening Times last did a stagger of Heaton Norris and we had been told that several of the pubs had changed fortunes but we were not sure which and to what degree. There was only one way to find out...

Our first port of call was the **Swan With Two Necks**, a Robinson's pub that has improved beyond all recognition under the stewardship of Paul and Bev Stanyer. When they moved in the pub received a thorough and tasteful redecoration, the old beer engines were thrown out and replaced with brand new items and the previously unused back room was brought into life as part of the pub. Bev started to excel in the newly appointed kitchen serving a range of home cooked specials and Paul slowly but steadily increased the range of cask conditioned Robinson's ales to the extent now that the pub probably stocks the biggest range of Robinson's ales of any pub in Stockport. On sale tonight were Robinson's Hatters Mild, Best Bitter, Frederic's, Old Tom and the new permanent addition to the Robbies range, Cumbria Way. With a long night ahead of us we chose to go for the weaker beers, electing to try the mild and the Cumbria Way. Bad luck meant that we hit the end of the barrel with the Cumbria Way but it was promptly changed and the new beer received a good rating. The mild scored even better with a very good rating. There is rarely a problem with the beer in this pub, and if there is it is changed without question and with good grace. It richly deserves its place in the 2002 national Good Beer Guide. Moving on now to Wellington Road North and **Dillons Whistlin' Jig**, an Irish theme type pub. However we stopped only long enough to put our heads around the door as no real ale was on sale, although we were told that a hand pump was being installed and that real ale would be available in the pub 'soon'. Don't all hold your breath but watch this space...

Next stop was the **Magnet**, a pub signed as a Wilson's pub and selling Holts bitter and Webster's Green Label. Only it doesn't sell Webster's Green Label as this 'has not been on for ages' but it would seem to be too much trouble for staff to remove the pump clip. And yes, those of us that did order Green Label did feel stupid when we were told that it as not available. However the Holts bitter at 72p a half was on and which we all tried, and decided it was distinctly average. Over the years the pub has been knocked through and it is now a rabbit warren of small rooms on different levels, all seemingly over brightly lit and with few interesting features. As the disco was in the process of being set up it was time to make a sharp exit.

Further up Wellington Road North brought us to Greenalls **Railway**. Despite the large sign outside saying Traditional Cask Ales, we were disappointed to learn that there were no cask ales on tonight. One of our group enquired why and was told that the reason was because the cooler was not working. A later visit happily revealed that cask ale was now back on sale, the cooler problem having been fixed.

Bypassing the **Hope**, a pub with a great exterior but for as long as I can remember it has not sold real ale and shows little signs of ever doing so (in fact it could be described as hope-less on that front), we moved on to Robinson's **Silver Jubilee**. This is a modern but friendly two-roomed estate pub complete with a large fish tank and the evening's karaoke being set up as we entered. Robinson's Hatters Mild, Old Stockport and Best Bitter were on sale with both the mild and Old Stockport being considered good but for some unknown reason nobody tried the Best Bitter. With the karaoke kicking in and the first singer being truly dreadful, it was time to move on from this otherwise excellent local.

Next bypassing what looked to be yet another keg only pub, the **Lonsdale** (on a return visit I spotted a Websters Green Label handpump although whether it's in use or not I don't know), the next stop was the **Three Crowns** which was also a handpump free zone. The **Navigation** was in its last days as keg only (see the article on page 9) so we turned into Old Road and the **Grey Horse**. Tonight the pub was busy with a band 'Kickers Trio' playing their own style of country & western music. A notice on the wall indicated that live music featured in the pub every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night. Greenalls bitter at £1-65 a pint was on sale and was judged between average and good. Although country and western is not my cup of tea, the regulars here obviously appreciated it and it was heart warming to at last find a busy community pub.

Walking further down Old Road brought us to the **Grapes**, a former Boddingtons pub now also selling Robinson's Best Bitter as a guest. Once again there was music on (they like their music in Heaton Norris,

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don't they?), but this time in the form of a DJ with a disco and a karaoke. This is basically an open plan pub with a central island bar, which means that it can be difficult to get away from the music if you don't like it. Whilst the locals may have been boisterous, they were good-natured and everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves. Boddingtons bitter and Robinson's Best Bitter were on sale, both beers received an above average rating by the group. A novel feature and something I have not seen in many years, was the hot pie counter on the bar from which more than one of us sought sustenance. Suitably replenished, it was time for us to press on.

The **Nicholsons Arms** on Penny Lane just off Lancashire hill is a modern estate pub offering panoramic views over the Portwood basin. Outwardly it is not Robinson's most inviting pub and on previous staggers the pub has been described as intimidating, but tonight it seemed OK and everyone in the pub seemed oblivious to the disco which was blaring out. Cask beers in the form of Robinson's Best Bitter and Hatters Mild were available and were judged to be above average and good respectively. The disco was too loud to attempt to hold any form of conversation and so we gesticulated to one another and decided that it was time to move on.

Our penultimate pub of the evening was the renovated and much improved **Kings Head** on Tiviot Dale. Formerly a Boddingtons pub it is now a rare outlet for Bass beers selling Draught Bass and Worthington and because the Bass was not on tonight, we were left with the scintillating choice of Worthington or nothing. I have to admit that I have never been a fan of this beer and I found it to be uninspiring to the point of being insipid. My fellow staggers appeared to be equally unimpressed with the beer scoring it below average or poor. It's a shame really as the pub has the potential of becoming a good local. It was a case of a nice pub, shame about the beer. Time to move on for better beer.

The final pub on the crawl tonight is one of my favourite Stockport centre pubs, the **Tiviot**. This is a pub that has not been ruined by over investment by the brewery over the years. The pub has a big lunch time trade and it is quiet in the evening (or at least it was until we got there). The pub may have yellowing paint work and plain décor, but add to that a hard working licensee and some of the best Robinson's beers in Stockport and you have a great pub. The beers on sale tonight were Robinson's Hatters Mild, Best Bitter, and Old Tom and all three were judged to be very good.

In common with all staggers, the information given in this article is purely the impression gained by our group of Staggerers on one

particular night and certainly can't be taken as a once and for all judgement of either the pubs or their beers. Why not try the pubs for yourself and see how much you agree or disagree with the author?

FALSE SIGNS UPDATE

Pubs Ignore Trading Standards

In the August issue of Opening Times we exposed a whole list of pubs displaying signs falsely claiming that cask ale was sold when this was not in fact the case. Opening Times featured a further 'naming and shaming' in October.

We followed this up by contacting Trading Standards officers who took prompt and effective action resulting in most of these signs either being removed or painted over. Some pubs, though, just seem to have no shame at all and continue to deceive. Those yet to see the error of their ways are:

◆ **The Hamlet**, Abbey Hey Lane, where one sign has been painted out but a second remains (in fact we think this is cock-up rather than conspiracy)

◆ **The Bridge**, Clayton Lane, Clayton, which has passed the buck on to the pub's owners, Avebury Taverns who are now being contacted by *their* local Trading Standards. Meanwhile the deception continues.

◆ **The Brewers Arms**, Ladybarn, possibly the worst offender of the lot as it has the gall to promote itself as a 'cask ale house'. Allegedly the pub is to be repainted, a job evidently scheduled for the day hell freezes over, or so the lack of progress would indicate.

◆ **The Horse & Jockey**, London Road, Hazel Grove, a long-time offender this one. Just what will it take to shame this place into displaying honest and accurate signing?

Trading Standards are being contacted again to ask that even firmer action be taken, and of course Opening Times will be updated on progress, or lack of it.

Meanwhile our attention is turning to a more widespread and insidious use of misleading and false signs, usually by pub companies and relating to a very well known national brand of bitter.

Watch this space.



ABV - 4.8%
No.1 in the series Jan - Feb

HYDES

Pick of the Hops

Craft Ales for 2002

Hydes of Manchester, famed for producing fine cask ales, introduce their new Craft Ale selection of seasonal beers for 2002. In keeping with our tradition of only using the choicest ingredients, our 2002 range feature the most important one - the Hop. Each of our 'Pick of the Hops' beers exude quality and each has been brewed to a special recipe which allows for the style and character of the hop to shine through. This in turn has enabled us to produce a range of beers of true distinction. They are very much individual and whether you've enjoyed our fine beers before or not, we're confident you'll want to try our 2002 portfolio.



ABV - 4.2%
No.2 Mar - Apr



ABV - 4.4%
No.3 May - June



ABV - 4.0%
No.4 July - Aug



ABV - 4.5%
No.5 Sept - Oct



ABV - 5.0%
No.6 Nov - Dec

For more details of Hydes Craft Ale range for 2002

Tel: 0161 226 1317

Available nationally from The Beer Seller and other leading Wholesalers



Robinson's

EXPERT ADVICE ON TAP AT THE BREWERY

While Robinson's have a well deserved reputation for the quality of their cask conditioned ales, this is only part of the reason for the Company's record of success over the years. The brewery also has a long-standing commitment to ensuring that its portfolio of beers are enjoyed in prime condition by customers and that all of the houses in the Robinson's and Hartleys estates are run in a professional and efficient manner. Since 1996 this philosophy has been symbolised by the Robinson's five-day Licensee Training Courses that are held each month at the Unicorn Brewery.

The courses are open to all, not just potential Robinson's and Hartleys licensees. They are accredited by the BIIAB and, as well as providing expert guidance on all aspects of the trade, the courses also incorporate three industry Certificates - the Qualifying Examination Certificate, the National Licensee's Certificate and the Basic Food and Hygiene Certificate. Training and development manager Veronica Robinson, a member of the sixth generation of the Robinson's family to be involved in the running the Company, is in charge of the courses. Much of the expert tuition is provided by Bob Lloyd Jones who, after being the licensee of The Dusty Miller near Nantwich for 15 years until 1997, now runs his own training consultancy business.

PROCEDURES

Robinson's, of course, insists upon the highest standards during the brewing process. It is also of great importance, however, that their cask-conditioned ales are handled and stored in the correct manner once they reach the pubs.

The training course addresses these issues by means of a comprehensive hands-on section on the art of cellar management. Delegates learn the correct procedures for keeping the beers in peak condition and also receive expert advice on how to maintain and clean lines and equipment.

For most drinkers, the efficiency and courtesy with which they are actually served their drinks at the bar will play a large part in determining their opinion of the pub. This is another area that the course deals with in detail to ensure that Robinson's and Hartleys licensees are able to show themselves in the best possible light to their customers.

No matter how good a pub and its beer may be, however, a detailed knowledge of marketing is crucial for today's competitive licensed trade. Delegates on the course, therefore, are given expert advice on how to build up business through advertising and other forms of promotion.

If a pub is to prosper, the licensee must also pay attention to important behind the scenes issues such as bookkeeping, health and safety requirements and licensing legislation. The licensee training course provides advice on all these topics to ensure that the pub is run in a professional manner.

People who successfully complete the course may be offered a Robinson's or Hartleys pub of their own. Anyone who is interested in becoming a licensee should contact Wayne Roach at the brewery.



This space is sponsored by Frederic Robinson Ltd.



Cains Shocker

North West beer lovers have been rocked by the news that respected Liverpool brewer Robert **CAINS** Cain has been put up for sale by its Danish owners due to a poor financial performance.

The sale is expected to fetch more than £20 million but worryingly, a piecemeal sale of the various constituent parts cannot be ruled out. The problem seems to be a combination of struggling cask ales sales, high-volume but low-margin canned beers and the cost of running a large and listed brewery.

Sadly, early consensus seems to be that the brewery is doomed although there are hopes that a smaller Cain's brewing presence could be retained in Liverpool supplying most of the local Cain's tied estate and free trade. Just where that leaves Gothic Bar in Gatley is a moot point - given its distance from the rest of the Cain's operations, a sale to a third party must surely be on the cards. It is still early days of course and a white knight cannot be totally ruled out. More news as and when we have it.

Family Focus

A whole raft of new seasonal beers hit the bar tops this month.

Robinson's are reprising last year's Samuel Oldknow, a light, hoppy 3.5 per cent beer. It was a bit of a flop last time round with a consensus being that it a good enough beer but brought out at the wrong time of year.

It will be interesting to see how it fares this time round. On the other hand the excellent Cumbria Way continues to be a roaring success, wholly justifying the brewery's decision to make it a permanent beer.

As we reported last month, Hydes' 2002 bi-monthly **HYDES** craft ales are to feature different hop varieties and will be marketed under a 'Pick of the Hop' banner. First up is Bramling Cross, described by the brewery as "a deep copper-coloured, flavoursome premium ale with a 4.8% ABV, which provides a hint of fruit and spice for the winter". Sounds just the job for January and February.

Lees meanwhile, are also reprising an old favourite. This is Moonlight Oak, a 3.8% ABV dark mild, described as having a "burst of mouth-wateringly full flavour". The hyperbole is right too, this really was a top-notch beer last time round. Indeed, there was some pressure on the brewery to make it a permanent beer.

John Willie Lees' limited edition Harvest Ale also went on sale last month. This special brew is produced in October and November each year from the first crops of the finest of the season's barley, malt and hops. The character of the beer varies from year to year according to growing and harvesting conditions, and each vintage will mature differently over the years. This 11.5% beer was first produced in 1986 and has gained an international reputation; it sells in specialist outlets in New York for up to \$55 a bottle. In Manchester, the beer is available for a more modest £2.20 per 275ml bottle. It can be bought by the bottle or the case from Willoughby's in Manchester (0161 834 6850) or by contacting JW Lees direct (0161 643 2487).

Lees have also gone down the organic beer route, producing Heathcotes Organic Lager for the restaurant chain of the same name. The 5% brew is a crisp, refreshing beer brewed using organic malt from Scotland and hops from New Zealand. Finally, there's a whisper that Holt's may start brewing small batches of beer to different recipes during this year. An interesting development if executed properly.

Micro Magic

Marble brewer James Campbell has been tweaking his Uncut Amber recipe, producing a beer with greater depth of flavour and a slightly hoppier edge. There's also a new Marble beer due out this month, too. Manchester Bitter will be a very pale and bitter 4.2 per cent brew



and is due to be launched at Knott Bar Fringe during the National Winter Ales Festival. This should be an exciting year for Marble Brewery as more varieties of organic ingredients become available. Pictish Brewery's January special is North-ern Dawn, a 4.3% amber coloured ale with a long malty but bitter finish. If you're lucky you might also be able to catch the last of brewer Richard Sutton's Rudolph's Rocket Fuel, the 7.3 per cent Christmas seasonal, a flavoursome and dangerously quaffable beer.



Phoenix Brewery have only one new beer out this month, Jovian (4.2%) will be making a welcome reappearance on 29 January. Meanwhile the excellent Porter and Snowbound are still out and we understand that the excellent honey porter, Black Bee, may become semi-permanent such has been the demand for it. Phoenix are also celebrating the fact that they now have three beers permanently available at the Wishing Well in Heywood, the brewery's home town.

Finally this month to Whim, who have complemented their regular winter seasonal, the powerful and luscious Black Christmas (6.5%) with a new chocolate stout, the 4.4% 'El Culo'. The name is taken from a Spanish phrase referring to something being "as black as a bee's *rse" and 'culo' is Spanish for, well you can guess, can't you?. The good news is that this new beer has gone so well, it may be retained as a second winter seasonal for future years.



NAVY NEWS

The Beartown Brewery takeover of the Navigation, Lancashire Hill, Stockport, has proved to be a roaring success with the instant popularity of the pub leaving both the brewery and the licensee stunned.

The licensee, as we reported last month, is Angella Lindsay who has brought a wealth of trade experience to the pub, not least some two years spent as assistant steward at Burnage Cricket Club. Angella expected the pub to be quiet at first and instead has been rushed off her feet!

What has been surprising is how cask ales sales have taken off in a pub which offered nothing but keg beers for years, which just goes to show that if a pub is well run and sells quality products,



there will always be a demand for real ale - despite what the doom-mongers of the licensed trade would have you believe.

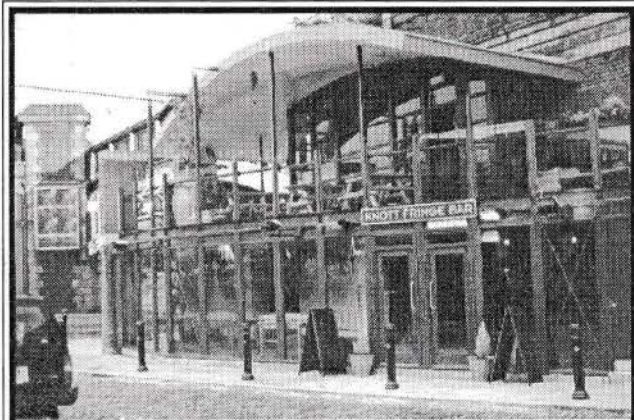
About half of the pubs former regulars have remained (the other have either been barred or have taken their trade elsewhere in search of keg beers, cheap lagers and the likes of WKD), and these have been joined by many new customers, all appreciating the range of six Beartown cask ales, draught Krombacher lager and a small but well chosen range of Belgian and German beers, including such classics as Chimay, Duvel, Timmermans and Liefmans. The entire Beartown range of beers has been tried with Bearskinful and Kodiak Gold proving the best sellers and these, along with Polar Eclipse stout, will probably be available permanently with the rest of the range rotating round the other three handpumps. Prices are keen too - all bears less than 4.5 per cent are £1.50 a pint, those above are all £1.60. Angella herself has never been a beer drinker but has found that she likes all the Beartown range, although her favourite tittle remains Timmermans Kriek!

Future developments include a redecoration of the public areas of the pub (energies have so far been devoted to getting the living quarters in decent shape) and additions to the range of drinks on offer, not least the introduction of real cider.

The Navigation has all the makings of a classic pub and our best wishes go to Angella and her family. If you've not been yet get there soon.



Letters to Opening Times are welcome: The Editor, Opening Times, 45 Bulkeley St, Edgeley, Stockport. SK3 9HD or johnclarke@stocam.u-net.com



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The real 'Real Ale' market

I have long pondered the contradiction that anecdotal evidence, annual production figures from regional breweries, and the apparent (narrow)viability of the bulk of the several hundred micro-breweries within these shores make nonsense of the 'official figures' from the British Beer and Pub Association which this year show real ale at just 9 per cent of Britain's beer market with a sub 3 million barrels production. I am, apparently, not alone, as Martin Information, a consultancy run by two veteran business journalists, shows, in a new report, that thanks to archaic and inept statistical method, the BBPA has under-reported real ale sales by 66%. No account of the massive changes in pub ownership, production and supply seems to have been taken.

So Real ale sales, in fact exceed five million barrels - giving cask beer a 16 per cent market share, and almost all the 4% year on year decline can be attributed to customers rejection of bland, mass-produced taste-free brands so 'loved' by the nationals. Interestingly sales of the much hyped smooth beers (think Caffreys and keg Smiths & Tetleys) are declining by 11% annually. The new report - The Business Guide to the Cask Ale Market draws on a survey of more than 66,000 pubs and bars conducted by independent market researchers CGA.

If the Chancellor honours his promise to introduce European-style sliding scale beer duty (giving a small advantage to craft breweries over national beer factories) - and it appears that he will, things might improve so much that the huge pub-owning companies actually start thinking straight, consider product differentiation, and buy tasty local brews from the micros and smaller regionals, and give the customer something worth drinking. Pigs, of course, might also learn to fly.

**NWAF 2002 - The Winter Ales Festival
24 - 26 Jan, Upper Campfield Market
Castlefield, Manchester**

Talking of tasty brews, the rest of this column is devoted this month to two places to try them - The 6th National Winter Ales Festival, and



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Manchester's Northern Quarter. The Festival is in the same venue as last year, the Upper Campfield Market on the corner of Deansgate and Liverpool Road (Cervantes Spanish Centre and Dimitri's restaurant are at the front, it starts just behind them off a passage, and is the big steel and glass Victorian building just before the aerospace part of the Science & Technology museum). **There is absolutely no acceptable excuse for not going.** But go early or you risk having to queue. This year the 'British' section, in addition to the bar featuring the beers entered for the 'Champion Winter Beer' Competition (Stouts, Porters, Old Ales, Winter Ales and suchlike, selected by a surprisingly democratic and fair procedure) will feature most of the local micro-breweries on one bar, and a 'trail' of interesting milds, leading to prizes, organised by LADS (the Light And Dark Supporters group). Now if only we can come up with the words to fit the acronym "LASSES"! Three other bars with a vast range of bitters and winterish beers will tempt you, as well as games, stalls, food - the very well stocked cider and perry bar, and of course the 4th Bier Internacional - otherwise known as the foreign beer bar. So far we are promised over 100 different foreign beers. Irish Cask Ales (with the return of the massively successful stouts of 2001, and a few new offerings) will complement 25 draught German Beers with Kolsch and Alt styles from the north alongside the predominantly Bavarian range. At least three of the Oktoberfest Beers from Munich will join the 'house favourites' from Tegernsee in the Alps, and a number of beers are expected from Bavaria's heritage brewing capital, Bamberg - also home to a nascent CAMRA-like German Beer Drinkers group, based around the Brewery Museum! The largest range of Belgian bottled beers yet seen at a Festival, with glasses and presentation sets also available might yet be complemented by a few choice draught belgian beers, though there will definitely be some draught Belgian Winter Beers available at Bar Fringe in the Northern Quarter. Which brings me to...

The Northern Quarter

I had hoped to produce a 'Stagger' of the Northern Quarter this month, but space being at a premium, I will hold back for four weeks, and instead mention some of the edited highlights which might suggest a few things to do during the periods when the festival is closed...Every Robinsons Beer in production, and in good form in ultra-traditional surroundings at the Castle, Oldham Street. Four local micro brews plus an unrivalled range of Belgian draught beers, in comfortable, if slightly noisy surroundings at the ever excellent Bar Fringe, Swan St (which is having a Belgian & British Winter Ales fest to coincide with NWAF - in conjunction with sister bar Knott Fringe on Deansgate). Six regional beers (though they tend to run out quickly at the weekend) and more televisions showing the football than you can shake a stick at - the Burton Arms - also on Swan Street, as is the Smithfield Hotel. Almost always beers from a brewery I've not yet discovered, sourced by Terry from all over, especially Scotland. Very frequent and excellent Beer Festivals (the one when I did my 'Stagger' was outstanding) and sure to be some extra new arrivals on during the national festival - probably more really new beers that NWAF itself! Off Rochdale Rd, the Beer House, now featuring beers primarily from Local-ish micros, and all excellently kept in a sparklingly clean environment, with Mon-Sat food specials, free chip butties twice a week and a festival of beers from the excellent Durham Brewery (one of Ed(1)'s favourites) on during the NWAF weekend. Interesting Cask beers also feature at Centro Cafe Bar (Tib St) which may feature some Winter Brews during the festival. Other N4Q emporia worth the visit - Pot of Beer, on New Mount St, below and to the east of the Beer House, small, cosy with good and rare guest beers; The Marble Arch Brew Pub - where "Organic James" Campbell will be launching the new Marble Manchester Bitter - but DO try the Ginger beer - world's best, imho. Finally, the Queens Arms, t'other side of the valley, on Red Bank. Interesting beer range, good views and a great pub. Full staggering details after the NWAF festival.

Beer of the Month

Vierzehnheiligen Silberbock (7.5% abv)

Sadly I think this may have been the last 30ltr tub of the stuff, though I gather an attempt has been made to secure some for NWAF. After an afternoon sampling a range of new beers at the Pigs Ear Festival (Stratford, East London) in early December, many of which were excellent without being scintillating, all of which were in good condition, word reached me that the 'Bock had been put on at the Foreign beer stall. I toddled (not staggered, at least not yet) over and was presented with a pale brown beer with a slightly reddish hue - a bit of a surprise since the name implied a pale beer hopefully similar to the delightful Keesman Bock (but I digress). What a wonder it turned out to be - slightly fruity, with masses of dry, complex malt, and hints of hop in the nose and increasingly in the dry not-quite-bitter finish. Perfectly balanced it had the mouthfeel of a 5% IPA - and the alcoholic kick of a mule. I had five and then I staggered home.



**Keith Farman Checks Out
The Poachers in Bollington**

We had something to celebrate. Nothing special but we wanted a good meal in pleasant surroundings with some good ale.

We had been to the Church House in Bollington a few times but thought a change would be nice. A friend suggested we try The Poacher's Inn on Ingersley Road. We had not been there before but we found we could enjoy a good long ramble in the Peak District National Park and finish at this pub, which stands right on the edge of open countryside.

From the outside the pub is a pleasant but not exceptionally beautiful sight, (except in the summer months when I understand the hanging baskets and window boxes are award winning). Made from local stone you would guess the building dates from Victorian times, although apparently the pub has been converted from the terraced mill cottages so typical of Bollington and is thought to be approaching its centenary. Do pause to admire the stained glass door, which we discovered was specially commissioned and made by a local artist.

In winter the first thing you notice on opening the door is the roaring coal fire and nearby a couple of comfortable armchairs. The pub is warm and we were able to order our beer and thaw ourselves by the fire after our long walk. I chose Timothy Taylor Landlord, a classic beer and an old favourite of mine. It was excellent - perfect temperature, perfect condition.

The Poachers is quite long and thin with a single, central bar and several bays, each containing a couple of tables. This enables it to accommodate large groups whilst also providing a pleasant atmosphere for couples or individuals. At the far end is a non-smoking restaurant that can seat 22 people, and I understand can be booked for private parties. Diners who like to smoke are accommodated in a separate part of the main bar.

After a while we moved through to the restaurant, I took with me a pint of Windgather, brewed down the road in Macclesfield by Storm Brewing and one of the two guest ales on offer. The pub landlord, Rob, told me he regularly takes a firkin from Macc's only brewery.

The menu is wide and varied - starters range from the old favourites like soup of the day, pate and prawn cocktail to stuffed mushrooms, mussels ala Portugese and spiced creole prawns. For main course I passed over ostrich and salmon asparagus in favour of char-grilled fillet of sea bass, whilst my wife opted for a simple gammon steak despite being tempted by herb-crusted lamb and chicken camembert. The wine list looked interesting but I was enjoying the beer too much to change.

Having both thoroughly enjoyed our meal we returned to the bar so that I could sample the other guest beer, Fisherman from Adnams, a brewery I did not know. Rob, who it seems, knows a thing or two about the beers he sells, told me a bit about the history of Adnams he picked up from their website.

Apparently he tries to find out about each of the beers he sells. And then it was time to leave. An excellent meal in pleasant surroundings with attentive staff and exceptional real ale. What more could you want? We shall be back to The Poachers next time we have a little something to celebrate or just have a relaxing night out. **KF.**

THE CASTLE

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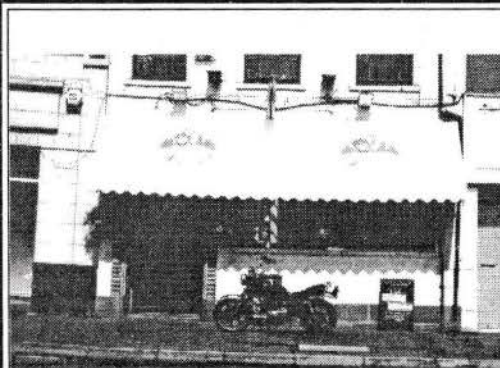
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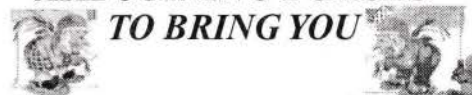


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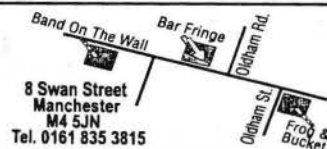
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Stockie on The Che

By John Taylor



First and foremost, a happy New Year to everybody. Like most other things, darts leagues have just had a couple of weeks off due to the festive season, but prior to that an unusual event occurred in the Stockport Licensed Houses Super League.

Champions Royal Mortar lost a league match, for the first time in nearly two years. Having won their previous 40 fixtures, they were defeated 4-3 at home by the Ash Hotel. The first game on was a clash of the titans, Darryl Fitton-v-Tony O'Shea. You could have heard a pin drop in the pub as Tony took the first leg in 14 darts, Darryl the next in 16 and Tony the last leg in a magnificent 11 darts. When the dust had settled Tony had hit two 180s and Darryl one, and they had hit over 13 tons between them. One up for the Ash, that tie set the tone for the evening.

John Hollins (17 and 14) and Tony Daniels (20 and 17) then hit back for the Mortar but the Ash refused to lie down and took the next three games with Gary Townley two legs of 21, including a 107 outshot. John McArdle (27 and 30) and Brian Adshead (18 and 19) and an outshot of 116, against Kevin Weir who took a leg in 15 darts and who also had an outshot of 105; Roly Mellor won the final game for the Mortar in 19 and 24. The match produced a total of 74 tons or over from 18 legs played. This equalled the record set seven years ago in this league by Cale Green Social Club and the Nicholsons Arms, although in that match the total resulted from 19 legs.

That defeat means that after 11 matches only two points separate the top four teams in the table. The dark horses in this league would appear to be Reddish WMC; two seasons ago they were almost relegated to the Premier Division but the team have never looked back since then and have only suffered two defeats all season and they were unlucky to lose them. One of their more recent scalps was the Magnet who they beat 5-2 away, their best of

the night coming from captain Jeff Pearson who won in legs of 17 and 22. Earlier Derek Higgins for the Magnet had gone out in 18 and 20 and had hit two 180s.

The Magnet were also on the receiving end of a shock result in the second round of the team knock-out, when they were beaten at home 4-3 by bottom of the table Royal Oak. Steve Maurice (18 and 21) and John Taylor (no, not me) (19 and 21) were top shots for the Oak. The only other surprise was Premier League side the Old King beating their Super League opponents North Reddish WMC 4-0. John Sainsbury completed the rout winning in 18 and 21. The only other Premier team to make it through to the last eight was the Copperfields. The quarter-final draw is as follows: Royal Oak-v-Royal Morter; Bobby Peel-v-Copperfields; Reddish WMC-v-Printers Arms and Old King-v-Ash Hotel.

The current top of the table is:

Team	Played	Won	Points
Royal Mortar	11	10	20
Bobby Peel	11	9	18
Ash Hotel	11	9	18
Reddish WMC	11	9	18
Magnet	11	8	16
Printers Arms	11	7	14

Local star Tony O'Shea plays Colin Monk in the first round of the Embassy World Darts Championship to be held in early January. If he gets through that one he just has the small matter of the World Champion John ('Boy') Walton or Andy Fordham in the next round. Best of luck with that one. Tony went out in the group stages of the World Masters to Wayne Jones and just missed the double 18 for a nine dart leg which would have earned him £2,000. He is presently ranked 13 in the BDO rankings and he has also been selected to represent his country again in the six-man team to play Northern Ireland, Holland, Scotland and Wales alongside Walton, Fordham, Mervyn King, captain Martin Adams and Wayne Marvel. All this is great news, not only for Tony but for local darts in general. Well, it's that time again. Thanks for taking time out to read this article. See you soon.

John Taylor.

12

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NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL - CASTLEFIELD, MANCHESTER, JAN 24 - 26 2002



Going Large

Imagine the uproar if pub operators decided that, for presentational reasons, they would only serve beer in pints, claiming that people mincing around with halves in their hands gave beer a poor image. Yet exactly the same is happening with wine, where licensees are being urged to chuck out the standard 125 ml glasses in favour of larger and supposedly better-looking 175 ml glasses.

With a price hike in proportion, this is obviously likely to improve pubs' profitability, particularly given that many customers only drink a single glass anyway. But it could easily lead to people consuming far more alcohol than they intended, as not only are they getting a bigger measure, but the strength of modern wines - on average around 13% ABV - is widely underestimated. How many people realise that a 175 ml glass of Chardonnay contains more alcohol than a typical pint of bitter, and two such glasses could easily put a smallish woman over the drink-drive limit? Now I've nothing against people guzzling large quantities of wine if that's what takes their fancy. But it does nothing to encourage responsible drinking to deny them the choice of big or small measures that they get with beer.

Wooden Wombs

A local pub on a prominent corner site has recently been given a thoroughgoing refurbishment. In general, they've done a good job, but one more questionable change is replacing the previous frosted glass windows with clear ones, so if you sit at the front it feels as though you're in the middle of a traffic island, with 38-tonners coming at you from all directions.

Traditionally, pubs have often been seen as places where you can go to escape the cares and stresses of the outside world, if only for a short time. They have been described as wooden wombs for adults. But the contemporary trends in pub design that have swept away small rooms, bench seats, real fires and etched glass have made this ever harder to achieve. In a modern open-plan drinking barn, with its plate-glass windows and sparse, uncomfortable seating, you're more likely to feel that all the social problems of today are being forced down your throat. Fortunately, if you know where to look, it's still possible to find old-fashioned cosy retreats in pubs, often tucked away at the back away from the street. There's a prime local example in the marvellous wood-panelled snug at the Swan with Two Necks in Stockport, but other particularly memorable ones I've come across include the Berkeley Arms in Tewkesbury, the Dolphin in Derby and the Blue Bell and Royal Oak in York. Spend some time in one of these rooms, with a blazing fire in the grate and a pint or two of robust English ale in front of you, and the world suddenly doesn't seem quite so bad.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.co.uk

5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

JANUARY '97

1997 saw the 30th anniversary of Star Trek and the 20th anniversary of Star Wars, so it was perhaps appropriate that Opening Times found itself covering the opening of a brewpub which could have easily passed for a discarded set from either production.

Mash & Air, Oliver Peyton's £2 million conversion of an old cotton warehouse at 40 Chorlton Street in the City Centre, had finally opened its doors to the public on 19 December, after several delays and false starts. Mash, the bar-cum-bistro covered the first and second floors, but the centrepiece of both floors was the in-house micro-brewery looking very high-tech with its steel, orange-clad vessels. Air was described as a restaurant pure and simple, and occupied the other floors.

The house beers were the only draught products available, but they did not pretend to be real ales, being stored and served by a mixed gas system. Varying in strength from 4.75% to 5.3%, they all retailed at the not inconsiderable price of £2.40 a pint. Perhaps a fair assessment was that this was an exciting concept for the serious beer lover but spoilt by its execution.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The annual CAMRA price survey of Manchester City Centre had taken place in mid-November, and the results produced both good news and bad. The good news was that there was a greater choice of real ale than ever before, and it was still available at a reasonable price. The cheapest was Younger's Scotch Bitter for 95p a pint at Wetherspoon's, and there were several other pubs offering a £1 pint. There was also a surprising amount of mild still available. The bad news was that the £2 pint had arrived at Duke's 92 (Castlefield) with its Taylor's Landlord and guest beers - and of course there was Mash & Air at £2.40 a pint. There was another favourable comment - short measure didn't seem to be a problem, and only one pub served less than a full pint, which was topped up as soon as requested.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The progress or lack of it, on saving the Imperial on London Road had been reported from time to time. Sadly, the pub which the saw the birth of both Manchester United and the Professional Footballer's Association seemed finally to be doomed - just before Christmas scaffolding had gone up around it and the adjoining Joshua Hoyle building, destined to become the Malmaison Hotel. Would there be a plaque on the new building that would remind everybody of its illustrious predecessor? No.

Finally, two City Centre changes - the long-closed Old White Bear on Swan Street confounded many expectations by reopening as Bar Fringe, described as an agreeable place in bare boards style. A new branch of Yates's had appeared on Portland Street, with Boddingtons and John Smiths on handpump - by 2002, of course, to be keg-only.



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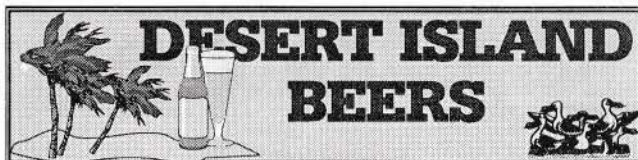


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This month's Desert Island Beers have been selected by James Campbell, head brewer from the Marble Brewery, Rochdale Road, Manchester. Though young for his position, James has an impressive pedigree, with experience in two Irish breweries (namely Dwan and Messrs Maguire) prior to which he was running several Firkin brewpub breweries. Already armed with the Champion Beer of Britain (Oakham JHB) and the Champion Winter Beer (Orkney Skullsplitter), these are his additional choices...

"I believe that anyone in my position becomes intimately involved in the beers that they produce. My palate has therefore become drawn to the beers I produce, or have been involved in the production of. 'Brewing in the only organic vegan brewery in the North of England has changed my perspective on beer production. While 'organic' and 'vegan' are grand words to attain, this recognition means to brew in the most traditional sense. There are no Indian Ocean fish bladders involved in the brewing of Marble beers, a fact that makes me a little snobbish in my drink preferences.

"While I have tasted many beers which I believe to be benchmarks of their style, and others which are so unique as to stand up on their own, my judgement is often coloured by the situation in which I am drinking and the company being kept. After much thought and the odd glass or two, I have chosen five of the many that I like, but were I to take all these to my desert island it would surely sink under the weight.

"My first and favourite beer must be **Ginger Marble**. This is not just because I brew it, although I am damn proud to be able to say I do, but also because it is a unique product in its class. As with most ginger beers, it tends to be a 'love it' or 'hate it' product, this is inevitable of any drink of such distinctive character. An intensely ginger and complex taste/aroma is underpinned by subtle not overbearing spice notes. A moderate bitterness and slight residual sweetness provide an ideal backdrop to a balanced and exceptionally quaffable pint.

"The Celtic words for 'Dark One' are in Dwan Brewery's name for its **An Dubhain Extra Stout**. While an excellent name for such a beer, I always thought it a little odd, as Bill Dwan himself is an affable man, not given over (even slightly) to satanic notions. On my first drinking I found it exceptionally fulsome and complex, despite it being so poorly treated as to be in nitro-keg. A little tweaking by the brewer in order to make it bitterer and slightly less lactic and this stout was later casked and sent to Manchester. Just one word leaps to my mind, perfect.

"Moving aside from real ale for my third choice and **Pilsner Urquel** (served Prague style) wins the day. Slamming it down on the table in front of me, a stone-faced waiter brought a splendid appearance to it as the gas escaped. I am not sure if this serving style was the result of my attempts to order it, a bad day for the barman or just the way it's done. Either way it was memorable. A beautifully refreshing drink, this beer has a distinct and refined bitterness. It has a relatively low alcohol content for the style, but with a fulsome and complex palate it is exactly the right drink for a hot day.

"Far be it for me to agree with another of this noble profession, however I would concur with Richard Bazen from Phoenix Brewery by taking a tub of the now sadly lapsed **Holts Entire**. The first cask ale I ever tried (sniff), at least I can still remember it. A biology trip to Holt Plant & Deakin really did prove to be a defining point in my life. A beautiful floral nose and smoothness of palate gave quaffability and body in the same mouthful.

"My final choice is the ever-popular **Timothy Taylor's Landlord**. While invariably a good pint, on the occasion that springs to mind it was absolutely great. Whilst avoiding the tedious aspects of shopping at Leeds Market (the buying thing), I popped into the Duck & Drake. This beer was so perfectly kept that, with its massive floral aroma, and exceptionally clean and balanced flavour, the memory has always remained with me. The purchases of that day did not need a bag to carry them home in, but unfortunately I have never had a pint of this product quite the same again. Could I have carried more that day I ask?"

COORS FOR CONCERN?

US giants snap up Carling



In a surprise move, US brewers Coors have snapped up 'Carling Brewing' in a £1.1 billion deal cementing their first major overseas acquisition.

'Carling Brewing' comprises most of the former Bass Brewers operation whose disposal was forced on Interbrew following its purchase of both the former Bass and Whitbread brewing operations. Included in the deal are breweries in Tadcaster, Burton and Birmingham and the ownership of such famous brands as Bass, Stones and Worthington amongst others. While many of these beers, and others that emanate from the various breweries, may not exactly set the taste buds racing, they remain widely available cask ale brands and any move which could either threaten or compromise these beers must be bad for the consumer. Of perhaps greater concern is the inclusion of the Bass Museum Brewery in the deal. This small operation is a respected brewer of many small-run cask ales (such as the powerful PS stout, recently on sale at the Crown, Heaton Lane) as well being the producer of bottled Worthington White Shield. It is of course early days yet and it remains to be seen what the newest incomers to the

COORS - THE LOWDOWN

- ☆ Coors is based in the Rocky Mountains at Golden, Colorado and makes great play of the fact that its beers are produced from 'Rocky Mountain spring water'.
- ☆ Their brewery there is the world's single largest plant, capable of producing 20 million barrels a year.
- ☆ The interior has been described as "the world's most beautiful example of a large, modern brewery" with tiled brewing halls lined with rows of traditional copper vessels.
- ☆ Coors malts its own barley and grows its own hops
- ☆ The conservatism of the Coors family, who still control the company, has brought them into conflict with trades unions and various minority groups.
- ☆ This conservatism is reflected in the brewery by a dislike of pasteurisation. Instead the beer is sterile-filtered, a process said to remove some taste from the beer.
- ☆ Mainstream Coors beers are defined by a 'remarkable cleanness' leading beer writer Michael Jackson to comment that "only a hint of malty dryness reminds the drinker that this is not just Rocky Mountain spring water".
- ☆ Coors have however branched out with a range of much more flavoursome specialities.

UK brewery scene will do with the hot-potch of beers and breweries that they have acquired. Known for their extreme conservatism, Coors may proceed slowly, and some of the beers which will effectively be brewed under contract for Interbrew (such as

Draught Bass) presumably have something resembling a secure future. Things are almost bound to change, though. The first warning sign will be the announcement of a full scale review of the business - more news as and when we have it. JC

TOP OF THE CLASS

The Railway at Rose Hill, Stockport, has beaten off competition from more than 300 other pubs to win Robinson's fourth annual Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition. In recent months, managers from the Stockport brewer have been paying surprise visits to all the pubs in its estate, which ranges from North Lancashire to South Cheshire and from Derbyshire to North Wales, to find the top house. A total of 12 pubs made it through to the final stages after being graded on a variety of areas including the cleanliness and tidiness of their bars and cellars and, of course, the quality of their Robinson's cask conditioned ales.

The Railway was named the winner following a stringent final judging session carried out by Robinson's head brewer Chris Hellin and marketing manager Oliver Robinson, a member of the sixth generation of the family to be involved in running the company. Oliver is certain that the competition has achieved its aim over the years 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 Robinson's will taste just as good whether it is served in Stockport or North Wales."

During a presentation night held at The Railway, Steve and Jan received the Unicorn Shield, named in honour of Robinson's Unicorn Brewery, which they will keep for the next 12 months. They were also presented with a certificate, 36 gallons of beer and, courtesy cleaning materials suppliers Chemisphere UK, who co-sponsor the competition, a cheque for £120 and a trophy. Sponsorship also came courtesy of Guinness UDV for the first time this year.

Last year's winners, Syd and Jenny Hampson, of the Masons Arms, Denton, were second in this year's contest. Billy and Denise Parkin, of the King William, Wilmslow, who are also previous winners, finished in third place. Marjorie and Murray Johns, of the Ring 'O' Bells, Marple, and Mark Mitchell of the Pineapple, Stalybridge, collected special awards in recognition of the improvements that they have made at the houses.



The Railway wins Robinson's Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition

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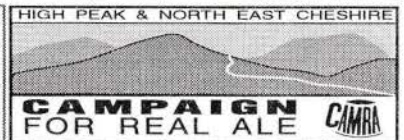
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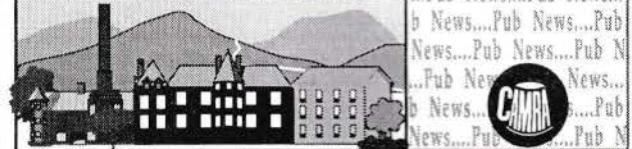
The Rose & Crown, at Tunstead Milton (which was recently relieved by High Peak Council when planning permission to convert the pub into a private house was refused) has finally lost its battle. The decision by the local council planning committee was reversed on appeal where the owners successfully argued that the pub was not the hub of the community, that there are other pubs and a golf club in the vicinity, that the business wasn't financially viable and that it had been up for sale for two years with no buyers. It is a shame that the Rose & Crown will no longer function as a pub but goes to show that a pub has to be particularly special and have a unique place in the community to satisfy current planning legislation.

In Denton, the prominent Pinnacle (formerly the Kings Head and Crown Point) has had a bit of a makeover. It is now resplendent in green fluorescent light - no report on beer and to be honest I'm not expecting any. Last known: keg.

Up in Mottram, the Pack Horse is shut with rumours that the pub company has gone bust. Geoff Oliver at the White Hart has been enjoying an increase in trade and hopefully converting some new regulars to the joys of independent brewers' real products!

The Lamp, on Banksbottom in Hadfield, recently reported as shut, is being refurbished or converted - and this is the conundrum...is it going to remain a pub or be converted to a house? Watch this space.

MACCLESFIELD & EAST CHESHIRE



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In Wilmslow, the Grape & Grain (Wetherspoons) is to close in January for a complete refurbishment, which is expected to be completed by April. We have seen the plans, and they look pretty impressive. Gone will be the confusing layout with its multiple bars. Over a million pounds are to be spent on creating a much simpler layout, with a single long bar at the rear under a new conservatory-style roof. The bar will sport no fewer than 10 handpumps giving it the widest range of cask beers for many a mile.

Just down the road the recently refurbished Coach & Four (previously the New Inn) now sells up to 5 real ales from Hydes - Mild, Light, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and sometimes the seasonal ale. Actually the refurbishment is rather good and in my opinion a big improvement on the old pub (it's not often I can say that.)

The Harrington Arms at Bosley has been taken over by Ian Biggar, son of the landlord of the George & Dragon in Macclesfield. Ian is an experience chef, so once Robinson's have finished refurbishing the kitchen, you can expect good quality food to be available.

In Macclesfield the Storm Brewery has now completed the move to larger premises, just below the Silk Road close to the Sun Inn. With the addition of another fermenting vessel it is hoped that production can be increased.

Also in Macclesfield, speculation still surrounds the site of the closed Three Pigeons and the still operating Olde Kings Head - sources suggest that planning permission is to be sought by the owners of the site for office buildings.

In Hurdsfield the Britannia has had a complete refurbishment and now sells Burtonwood Bitter and Top Hat.

In Handforth the former Wilmslow Flyer has been refurbished and is now called the Summerwood.

The Wild Boar in Wincle now has 2 en-suite bedrooms available - something to please the hill walkers I would imagine.





This month Wayfarer concludes his look at the pubs of Wilmslow with those on the south side of the town...

Beginning at the southern extremity of the town provided me with the biggest concentration of the best hostleries. The **Horse & Jockey** is located off the Knutsford Road (B5086) on Gravel Lane, and is a Victorian brick-built pub with a good mix of friendly locals. There is a comfortable lounge room and a public bar area incorporating a pool table, all tastefully furnished. Boddingtons Bitter and Greenalls Bitter are the handpulled offerings here.

A short cut via Newlands Drive leads onto New Street where at the top, on the corner of Moor Lane, is the **Riflemans Arms** which was having the standard Boddingtons lettering removed earlier in the day and appeared to be closed. However, by the evening it was trading, with the same beers on offer as the previous pub. Some refurbishment has also taken place inside the spacious lounge with its prevalent piped music. There is also a vault room and beer garden.

Moor Lane leads onto Chapel Lane where a further two pubs can be encountered. The first of these is the **Farmers Arms** with its steps leading up to an unspoilt community local with a warren of tiny rooms. Boddingtons Bitter may be the only cask ale offering at the moment, but the place is a wonderfully atmospheric one in which to consume it. There is an outside beer garden and a children's play area to the rear. For me it is still one of the best pubs Wilmslow has to offer.

The second pub is the **Carters Arms**, a former Wilsons house on a corner location at Hawthorn Street, now part of the SJP chain (whoever they are). Selling Thwaites Bitter, the pub has an open-plan with tasteful décor. Adorning the walls are Mickey Mouse cartoon prints and a Rolls Royce mirror proclaiming it is "the best car in the world". Outside there are a few picnic tables at the front.

At Fulshaw Cross, the roundabout at the southern end of the town boasts another Robinson's pub, the **Kings Arms**, sitting prettily at the confluence of the B5086 Knutsford Road and the roundabout with Alderley Road, near to the ancient cross. Incorporating a Thai restaurant, bed and breakfast, and also flats to let, the pub generates a mature feeling and a country atmosphere proven by its clientele. The bar has Best Bitter on offer, still using electric metered dispense. A flamenco theme is apparent, with collections of hats (ponchos, fedoras etc), guitars and the like. Comfortable rooms with some nice wood panelling in evidence.

On the main Alderley Road (B5086), the Hydes pub formerly called the New Inn is now the **Coach & Four** and has had a complete makeover. There is now a bright interior with pastel shaded walls, various floor coverings and light wood. Many intimate areas have been created with certain spaces reserved for diners only. It is a showpiece of a place, this one, with a full complement of the brewery's ales on offer; there's Bitter, Jekyll's Gold, Light, Mild (deliciously dark and drinkable) and the seasonal beer.

Also along this thoroughfare, and named after a social reformer against drunkenness, is the **Samuel Finney** (aka Sam's Bar), sandwiched between the car park and the town's designer shops. I can only imagine that the poor fellow must be turning in his grave with the level of noise this place can produce and the amounts of alcohol consumed. There are some intimate drinking spaces spread around with a ground floor bar and stairways to an upper saloon, which has a galleried rear. Boddingtons Bitter and Courage Directors are the real ales.

Wilmslow can be reached from Manchester and Stockport by direct trains and buses. Other local bus services do penetrate to the outer public houses although these are mostly confined to daytime operation.

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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

JANUARY 2002

Thursday 10th - 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. Guest speaker - Peter Lakin, North West assessor for Cask Marque.

Monday 14th - Two-way Social: 9.00pm Wheatsheaf, Higher Hillgate; 10.00pm Blossoms, Buxton Road.

Friday 18th - Minibus trip round Bramhall and Woodford. Departs Crown, Heaton Lane 7.30pm. First stop Shady Oak, Bramhall 7.45pm. Book with Paul Formby on 0161 612 0759 (after 6.00pm).

Thursday 24th - Saturday 26th - National Winter Ales Festival, Upper Campfield Market, Castlefield, Manchester. Will all members please try and help, even if it's just for a couple of hours. If you can't work, then come and have a drink!

Thursday 31st - Pub of the Month presentation to Traveller Call, Gorton. 8.00pm onwards.



**A New Year
to all local CAMRA
members from
Opening Times**

JANUARY 2002

Tuesday 5th February - Committee Meeting: Armoury, Shaw Heath, Stockport. Starts 8.15pm. **Please note Good Beer Guide 2003 pre-selections will be made at this meeting - all welcome to attend.**

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

Monday 4th February - Committee Meeting: Lowes Arms, Manchester Rd, Denton. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 8th - Sunday 10th - Annual winter weekend away, this year a trip to Lincoln. Details from Tom Lord on 0161 427 7099.

Monday 11th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Mottram Rd, Hyde. 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 21st - Branch AGM - upstairs room at Beartown Brewery Tap, Congleton. All members please try and attend. Starts 8.00pm.

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MANCHESTER MATTERS by Citym

Not a great deal to report this time, and that's despite my 'rest' last month, too! Of course, this year may be less eventful than the last pub-wise, as most if not all of the new developments in the City Centre are now on stream, and a pretty poor bunch they've been for real ale, too.

Pick of the crop must be the **Paramount**, the new Wetherspoons on Oxford Street which, for me at any rate, is by far and way the best of their City Centre outlets. Top notch beer on my visits, too. Another City Centre star of 2001 must be the reborn **Sam's Chop House** on Back Pool Fold, with an unbeatable combination of tip-top beers and traditional British food sold in a convincing mock-Victorian setting. Proving the theory that good things also come in threes, 2001 also saw Bar Fringe take over and transform the former Nowhere Bar at Knott Mill into **Knott Bar Fringe** and so bring more choice and quality to the Castlefield area.

On the down side, last year saw the closure of the **Temple of Convenience** (apparently for good), the **Crown** on Deansgate (supposedly for yet another refurbishment) and the, hopefully temporary, loss of real ale at **Fab Café**.

That's not to say that there aren't some interesting developments in line for 2002. At the Printworks, we are likely to see the opening of **Waxy O'Connors**, which is likely to be a kitsch extravaganza along the lines of **Via Fossa** (which looks to have lost its real ale, by the way). I'm not holding my breath for real ale. Work is however underway on yet another Wetherspoon's - this is the **Waterhouse** on Princess Street and occupies the buildings that back on to the City Arms and Vine. This should be an interesting development perhaps on a more human scale than is usual for Wetherspoons. Time will of course tell. Something else to look out for are the opening of **Kro Bar** operations in the museum and at the National Computing Centre on Oxford Road, both of which promise to add further choice and quality to what some now dub the 'Southern Quarter' (and that, I promise, is the last time you will see that phrase, the product of some fevered journalistic imagination, in this column).

South Side

I'm told that Dave Ogden has now left the **Old House At Home** in Withington. If true this is a surprise, shock move. I've not had chance to get down there for a couple of months so I don't know what's going on and what, if any, effect this will have on the pub's excellent guest beer policy. There have also been changes for the worse at the **Hogshead** on Oxford Road. Readers may recall our report last year, which featured the seven real ciders sold at the pub - they've now all gone, to be replaced by a display of canned beers and spirit mixers. In short, it looks as though a change of licensee has resulted in the pub reverting from something special to plain bog standard.

On the plus side, the **Milestone** on Burnage Lane has now metamorphosed into the **Rising Sun** and is a huge improvement. Out goes the dull interior and the electric pumps proclaiming cask

but dispensing keg. In, at a cost of £480,000, comes a well-lit, spacious and more upmarket pub with handpump dispensed real ale. The vault has gone and the pub is now a one-room lounge with an emphasis on affordable food and the real ales are Banks's Original, Marston's Bitter and Pedigree. I tried the Original (aka Mild) and found this to be on good form. All this has been much appreciated by the locals as many former regulars, alienated by the previous regime at the pub, are now returning.

All this is good news for the new licensee Paul Saxton, a Burnage man who has returned to the trade and whose previous pubs include the Kingsway in Levenshulme.

East Side

It's just all doom and gloom here at the moment. OK, there are a few bright spots - a trip down Hyde Road saw the **Coach & Horses** at Belle Vue open again and of course the excellent **Travellers Call** continues to thrive. But what about the rest?

Well, both the **Bulls Head** and the **Wellington** are both derelict, the **City Gates** and the **Junction** are rubble-strewn crofts, the **Dolphin** was closed and boarded, as was the **Midland**. The **Lord Nelson**, never my favourite pub on Hyde Road, is still trading but up for sale.

Nearby the **Gorton Arms** is now at the end of the road following an unfortunate collision with a HGV. The pub is now dangerous and due for demolition. This used to be a great pub in its Banks's days and for some time was something of a showpiece for the Midlands company. Prior to that it was the Gorton Brook, keg Wilson's with a purple interior and whose ex-wrestler licensee's lady wrestler daughters would fight bouts in the pub. Happy days. In Beswick the **Britannia** on Rowsley Street has apparently been sold but to whom I just don't know. Elsewhere the **Pomona** on Reddish Lane, Gorton, is partially boarded up and has all the signs of closure. I'm also disappointed to learn that the **Hare & Hounds** in Abbey Hey is still keg, despite an indication from the new licensees that real ale would return. The handpumps are still there, they still have their pumpclips promising cask Boddies Bitter but not a drop of the real thing is available. They could at least do the decent thing and take those pumpclips off.

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The Beer House

Telephone 0161 839 7019
6 Angel Street Manchester(off Rochdale Road)
Open 11.30am till 11pm

Wishing a happy New Year to one and all !!

This month not only heralds the start of the sales, Burns Night, the onset of colds and flu, the first credit card statement of the year, and er... the Euro

But *also* the



BEERHOUSE DURHAM ALES FESTIVAL

Thursday 24th - Sunday 27th
January

Which we will be offering alongside our usual selection of beers, wines and spirits Look out for our free chip butties every Wednesday and Friday and a new improved selection on the juke box (we asked you selected!!)
Friday happy hour promotions
and daily food specials.