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**Volume 18 Issue 3**

**MARCH 2002 No:215**

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# ALL OUT WAR!

**CAMRA challenges Blair to end rip-off Britain's short pint scandal**

**CAMRA**, the Campaign for Real Ale, has declared all out war on the brewing industry's latest backstairs bid to stifle full pint legislation.

A new law to put an end to the country's biggest consumer rip-off was promised by Labour before the 1997 General Election. The Labour party's web site still states: "We will tighten legislation to ensure consumers are protected from short measures and get a full pint." Secondary legislation, which doesn't have to go before Parliament, has been drafted and the necessary regulatory impact assessment has been completed. All that is needed to consign Britain's longest-running consumer scandal to history is Trade Secretary Patricia Hewitt's signature.

But fears are growing that industry lobbyists have put the boot in by persuading the DTI's Small Business Unit that full pint legislation is not a consumer protection measure but another bit of red tape being imposed on an already overburdened industry.

CAMRA's campaign to bury the industry's black propaganda and hold the Government to its publicly made pledge was launched at the National Winter Ales Festival in Manchester in January.

It is backed by new research showing that the short-pint scandal is getting worse. The research, drawn from surveys conducted by trading standards officers in 21 local authority areas, shows that nine out of 10 pints served in British pubs are less than 100 per cent liquid – an increase of over 10 per cent since the last survey in 1997.

The research shows that:

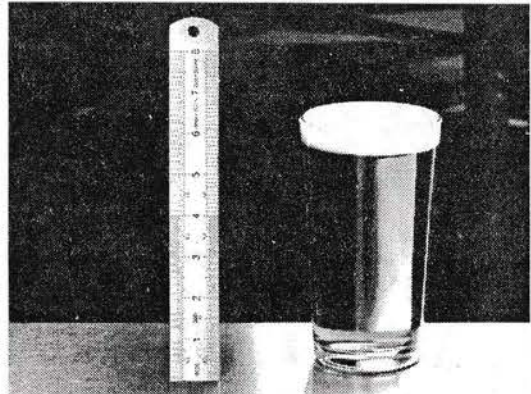
- 89.4 per cent of pints are less than 100 per cent liquid.
- 27.7 per cent fall short of the industry's 95 per cent guideline.
- Pubs which already serve 100 per cent liquid pints charge 14p a pint less on average than pubs which do not.

CAMRA Head of campaigns Mike Benner said: "It is Labour policy to tighten the law to protect Britain's 15 million beer drinkers from short measures, but despite proposals from the DTI, the Government seems to have swept reform under the carpet.

"Our research shows clearly that short measure is on the increase and there is a need for Government action to stop drinkers being ripped off. "Industry bodies have persistently claimed that legislation would lead to higher prices for consumers. The truth is that pubs set their prices based on a number of different factors, which is why the same beer is priced differently in different pubs.

"Our research stamps out the myth that full pints mean higher prices. Drinkers are charged per pint and they should get exactly that: 100 per cent liquid"

*This article by Ted Bruning originally appeared in What's Brewing, the monthly newspaper of the Campaign for Real Ale*



## HOW DOES YOUR PINT MEASURE UP?

- Short beer measures cost drinkers £1 million a day
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Stockport Town Hall

30th May to 1st June 2002

Stockport Beer & Cider Festival is well and truly up and running. Once again sponsored by the Stockport Express, arrangements are now well in hand.

Our beer managers have been getting together to plan one of the best beer ranges ever, with some old favourites being joined by newcomers from all over the country. Hopefully we will be able to bring you more details next month although OT can confirm that the festival special beer will be coming from Rochdale's highly regarded Pictish Brewery. Given this company's formidable reputation, hop lovers should be in for a treat!

Cider lovers shouldn't feel neglected, though – while we will not be hosting CAMRA's National Cider & Perry Championship this year, this does give our cider manager much more freedom with the order. This means there should be plenty of treats in store. So don't forget those important dates – Thursday 30 May – Saturday 1 June. Get them in your diaries now!

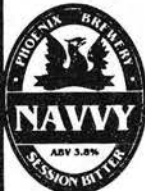
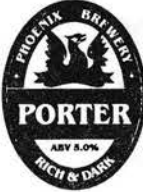
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## IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

CAMRA's long battle for a full pint could well be drawing to a close. Either we succeed in getting Tony Blair's government to fulfil one of the promises on which it was elected, or the industry's spin doctors succeed in getting the issue quietly buried. If CAMRA wins, it wins once and for all. If the industry wins, the struggle is over for the foreseeable future.

What drives our full-pint campaign is a mystery to some observers. They see it as a non-issue: most people aren't too worried about it, they say, and if you do get a short pint, just ask for a top-up. That may be true. But it doesn't go the whole way.

What infuriates so many consumers so much is not merely the feeling that they have to ask, and often embarrass themselves in the process, for what is theirs by right; it's the outright lies the industry resorts to to defend its pinchpenny practices.

The biggest lie of all is the British Beer & Pub Association's bald assertion that "no-one complains". It's true that no-one complains to the DTI, which is what the BBPA actually means - but then who would? On the other hand people do complain to their local trading standards departments; and anyway every request for a top-up is, in effect, a complaint.

Another lie is that this is just one more bit of red tape being imposed on an already overburdened trade. It isn't. It's a simple consumer measure. Every other trade delivers the quantity it promises as a matter of course: your pint of milk, your litre of unleaded, your 330ml can of Coke are just what they say they are. Only the pub trade stands out as one where a pint doesn't necessarily have to be a pint. The list goes on. It would mean higher prices. It would cost a fortune in new glassware. It would mean the replacement of handpumps by metered electric pumps. And so on and so on. Every one of these lies crumbles under examination: but by repeating them often enough the BBPA thinks it can make people believe them.

This is why CAMRA has planned its campaign on as many front as possible to publicise the worsening problem of full pints. We also need your support. Write to your MP (at House of Commons, London SW1A 1AA) and Patricia Hewitt at the DTI. Register your support by voting "yes" on our on-line poll at [www.camra.org.uk](http://www.camra.org.uk). The fight is on. The battle must be won.

*John Clarke*

## OPENING TIMES ISSUE 215

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

## PUB OF THE MONTH MARCH 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
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31						



**T**he Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for March 2002 is Little Jack Horners on Wellington Street, Stockport.

The pub has had several owners over recent years, originally Wilsons, then Vaux and now, following the demise of Vaux, it is owned by Pubmaster. Luckily, despite the changes of ownership, there has been a welcome degree of continuity in the form of Paul and Christine Roberts who have been running the pub, their first, since December 1993.

Deceptively small from the outside, Little Jack Horners is a surprisingly large, rambling pub although, being built over several levels gives the interior the warm and cosy feel of a suburban community local. The difference here, of course, being that the pub is right in the town centre with the roar of the A6 in one direction and numerous office blocks in the other. Not surprisingly, then, the pub tends to be busiest at lunchtimes, when food is available Monday to Friday.

That's not to say the pub is dead at night. It boasts darts and crib teams and has a good solid crowd of regulars, who also enjoy the four cask ales on offer - Marstons Pedigree, Tetley Bitter, Worthington Best Bitter and Camerons Strongarm

While many of the local ex-Vaux pubs have conspicuously failed to thrive, Little Jack Horners really does stand out as a success story. It is no coincidence that it is the only one to have been repainted and re-signed by Pubmaster. For commitment and continuity, this is a well deserved award and will be presented on the night of Thursday 28 March.

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

### OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

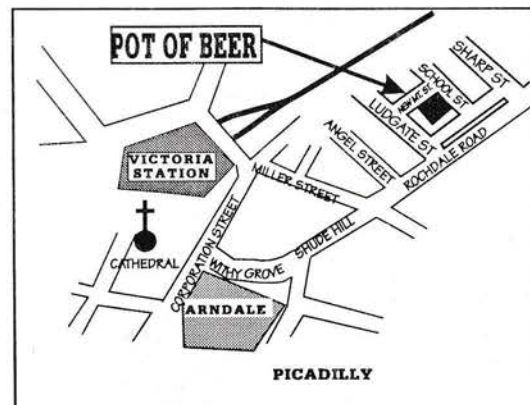
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# STAGGER

with Peter Butler

## Adswood, Cheadle and Cheadle Heath

**T**his Stagger took place on a pretty blustery autumn night and was something of a strange animal, being sort of bolted together from left-over bits of other Staggers. Having said that we encountered an interesting selection of pubs and beers.

The meeting point was the excellent **Cross Keys** on Adswood Road. The latest refurbishment by Hydes has been a startling success and those of us who hadn't been there for some time found it difficult to recollect the former layout. There's essentially just one rambling room although it feels like three different ones and there's a proper vault. Beers available included Hydes Mild, Bitter and Jekyll's Gold. Unusually, no-one tried the Bitter but the other two beers were perfectly acceptable, with the Jekyll's just having the edge.

From there it was just a short walk to the **Greyhound** on the corner of Councillor Lane and Ladybridge Road. This pub has undergone several transformations over the years, including a spell as the ghastly Gamebird. It now has a vaguely sporting theme and is split up into several distinct areas. The good news is that a keen licensee has seen the introduction of cask beers in the form of Greenalls Bitter and John Smiths Bitter. It was good to see a big poster advertising the cask version of John Smiths, too. Sadly this is a beer that even at its best is usually pretty uninspiring and so it proved tonight. The Greenalls Bitter was rather more appreciated, though.

Continuing down Councillor Lane brought us to the **Micker Brook**. This is a new (ish) Whitbread (as was) 'Brewsters' formerly a 'Brewers Fayre'. Not that the re-branding seems to have made much difference as it is still basically a family dining pub, although unlike some there's no real problem if you just want to stay for a drink. That's if you think it's worth the effort. Three cask beers were available - Boddingtons Bitter, Flowers Original and Marston's Pedigree, and while none of us tried the Boddingtons, the other two weren't up to much at all, and certainly not worth the wait some of us encountered before being served. The Flowers had an oddly cloying taste while the Pedigree attracted rave reviews along the lines of "stale" and "past it".

To digress slightly, whenever I've tasted Pedigree in the last few months it's been disappointing, lacking flavour even when in good condition - a pint at the Lass O' Gowrie last year was sulphurous (as expected) but tasted of little else! Are W&D running it down? I've had a couple of reasonable pints of Pedigree but it does seem to have less flavour than it used to. On a recent trip to Bramhall someone said the same thing was happening to other regional brewers' beers with national distribution, naming Wadworth's 6X - I haven't tasted 6X lately, it would be a great shame for it to lose its distinctive quality.

After the Micker Brook there was an exceptionally long walk, punctuated by a brief halt outside the shabby and keg-only **Malt Shovels**. This really does seem to be a lost opportunity (and apart from which it would have made a useful stopping of point in what seemed like an endless trek to the next pub, which turned out to be the **Red Lion**, on Stockport Road in Cheadle. This is a Robinson's pub currently leased (following a labyrinthine series of takeovers) by Scottish & Newcastle. The music was loud and the pub was very busy indeed, so clearly it's doing something right. Despite the S&N involvement, the Robinson's connection ensures that cask beers are sold, in the form of Frederics and Best Bitter. The former was unavailable but the Best was one of the best beers we'd had so far.

Nearby is the **Royal Oak**, a 'proper' Robinson's pub with a traditional exterior and multi-roomed inside, with a quiet lounge and traditional vault as well as a larger central main room. A loud and occasionally awful karaoke was in session but everyone seemed to be having a good time, so who am I to criticise? It was Best Bitter only, and again this was pretty good, certainly on a par with the Red Lion.

More Robinson's next at the **Queens**. An excellent traditional local, still retaining a multi-room layout despite some opening up. When we called the current long-standing licensee was about to retire, and has now been replaced by Tony Dunn, who has plenty of experience in serving good cask beers so the pub will be in safe hands. There were three beers on when we called, Old Stockport, Hatters and Best Bitter. None of us tried the Best, but the other two were perfectly all right, with the Old Stockport having the edge. Across the road is the **Printers**, a pub much changed over the years but still having more than one room plus a pleasant conservatory at the back. Bright (too bright, personally) and very busy, Hatters and Best Bitter were the order of the day. Both were OK without being exceptional. This part of Cheadle, you will have gathered, is perhaps too dominated by Robinson's - a Hydes or Holts pub would make a welcome addition.

Cheadle Heath next and the **Farmers Arms** on the corner of Edgeley Road. Now a Greene King-owned 'Hungry Horse' we were surprised to find no cask ale at all, not even Greene King IPA. Not what you expect in a Greene King pub. Luckily a bus turned up and whisked us into Stockport so we could get last orders at the **Crown**, on Heaton Lane. The usual range of excellent beers regaled us, on this night Slaters Top Totty being on particular form. A high point finish to what had been a very mixed evening indeed.

Given its tortuous nature, this is probably a crawl that hasn't been undertaken before. Of course, we can only report what we found on that particular night (and there may have been some changes since then) rather than give a once and for all judgement on either the pubs or their beers, but while there were some definite highlights, there were also some notable missed opportunities. The Malt Shovel seems to be crying out for investment and cask ale, while the absence of cask beer at the Farmers Arms is just inexplicable.

4



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# OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Andy Rigg, Hazel Grove:

Regarding Dave Nunn. He's at it again! Just what gives with this guy? Firstly he has the gall to call us all "pondlife", OT a few months ago, and now has the effrontery to doubt the quality of the wine at Brown's, Hazel Grove.

May I suggest that he sample the said wine before he proffers an opinion and perhaps be more aware of the people in his "pond". On second thoughts, is there anyone out there who really takes this man seriously? That is of course - disregarding the contents of his fish tank.

From John England, Disley:

I am a regular reader of Opening Times and obtained your address from the February edition. I am a solicitor based in Disley having up until Feb. 2001 practised in Stockport for some 19 years. In September 2001 I set up my website [www.flytheflag.net](http://www.flytheflag.net) in an (admittedly ambitious!) attempt to try and rekindle a sense of identity and pride in England. The site is developing nicely and I have now set up a section called "The English Pub Guide". If you access the site (and I would be grateful if you did) you will see what I am trying to do. I hope to create a national guide and am trying to get a brewery to associate itself with the guide if at all possible.

I wonder if the guide is of any interest to CAMRA or to "Opening Times". If you are able to provide me with a list of local pubs on the net then obviously this would be helpful. Entry on the guide is free of charge and so I cannot see how any pub could fail to be attracted. I would like to stress the English element of the guide and if at least some of the participating pubs could fly the national flag outside their premises then the exercise would, in my opinion be worthwhile.

(CAMRA is a UK-wide, strictly non-political organisation so this isn't something we can actively promote - Ed(1))

From: Simon Eyles, Marketing Manager, Burtonwood Brewery:

Regarding Opening Times (February), page 17 carries a question relating to the Britannia, Hurdfield Road, Macclesfield. The pub was extensively refurbished in November of 2001. The refurb would have involved removing external fascias and considerable internal works to allow for extensive alteration. The pub reopened on 30th November 2001 and regularly stocks Burtonwood cask Bitter in addition to either Top Hat or the Burtonwood Cask Collection beer of that month. Should you require any further information about any Burtonwood pubs please feel free to contact me.

From Tony Pearson and Helen Macneill:

Being new members to Camra we were somewhat disappointed to read the brief! article in the Jan issue of Opening Times, number 213 concerning the Kings Head in centre of Stockport. We would like to suggest to Mr Ballantyne, the person whose name appears at the top of the said rubbish, for him to give a clear picture of the pub and state the facts more clearly next time.

For example, on the night in question the pub had just run out

of Bass, so it was available (No, it had been. Ed(2)), the people who arrived at that late hour had missed out on a fine beer. This should have been stated within the article and the fact that the people who run the Kings Head have only been there just over 12 weeks and are trying to encourage and promote good beer. One might have thought that Mr Ballantyne had got his facts correct by doing a little research before entering the pub. As far as the beer being, and I quote "average or poor" We can think of many so called "real ale pubs" in Stockport that claim to serve good beer, but do far from that. In fact most of them are revolting and many are Robinson's, of course this is only our opinion. So give the Kings Head another try, it is a good pub and it does serve good ale, and now has along with Bass, IPA and Top Hat on.

(We do of course make clear that comments in a Stagger are simply a reflection of what we found on one particular night and are not a once and for all judgement of the pubs or their beers. It's also fair to say that Worthington Best Bitter, even when very well kept - as I fully accept it is at the Kings - is not a beer to set the taste buds alight. Happily, we've now been back - see this month's 'Pub News' - Ed(1). Ed(2) adds: "most of them (Real Ale Pubs in Stockport) are revolting"...who are these people trying to kid and what planet are they from? Presumably "new" to CAMRA also means new to decently served beers that are no stranger to the hop and/or a bit of taste. At a guess their all-time favourite beer is badge-brewed Stones - a classic taste free zone! Robinsons may not be every drinkers favourite (though I am known to be fairly partial) but compared to the majority of Bass products it is the nectar of the Gods.)

From Hazel Grove Prune Life (aka Dave Nunn):

In respect for the late Spike Milligan, many (nah most) regulars of the Grapes, Hazel Grove now wish to be known as the "Prunes off the round table". Prune Life will never be the same without Spike. (Well, that's enough of that - Ed(1))

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



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This month's Desert Island Beers are supplied by Tony Molyneux, a long time CAMRA stalwart, doughty campaigner and socialist. Now living in Bury he has long been identified with CAMRA on Merseyside and is to be found at most local beer festivals.

"As I approach the tasting of my 10,000<sup>th</sup> British beer I reckon I can allow myself to indulge in a little nostalgia. I'm choosing eight beers which sadly are no longer available due to a combination of brewery takeovers and closures, and sheer short-sightedness of some brewers.

"**Higsons Bitter** - I'll never forget or forgive Whitbread for denying me the pleasure of this wonderful beer. The combination of a sulphurous nose, an astringent bitterness with a lot of tasty hop, and a long lasting finish made this beer a true classic. The desperately feeble attempts to replicate it at Sheffield, Castle Eden and Burtonwood served only to insult us all, and when the name finally died it was neither loss nor surprise.

"**Higsons Mild** - Much as I love Cains Mild (my second favourite beer out of the 10,000) I still have fond memories of this Higsons brew. A lesser known but only marginally less-appreciated stablemate of the Higsons Bitter. A gorgeous ruby red colour. Lots of bitterness for a mild, but with some malt also coming through, made this beer a classic too. It died without having to endure the same indignity as the bitter.

"**Burtonwood Light Mild** - As the name would suggest, very light in colour, and in alcohol, but bursting with taste, and a respectable amount of hoppiness. Burtonwood do seem to have lost their way of late in terms of their cask ales. A strange brewery to deal with! The CAMRA campaign to save this beer met with little interest at the brewery and the beer had to suffer a lingering death; at the very end the late lamented "Snigs Foot" in Ormskirk accounted for 50% of total production.

"**Carlisle State Bitter** - The Carlisle State Management Scheme produced some very tasty beers, sold at a cheaper price than the private enterprise beers in the area, and many of the pubs contributed greatly to the architectural glory of the Border City's pubs. It was a deliciously delicate beer but with enough bitterness to trigger the palate into a "more please" reaction. Though now regarded as a harmless old moderate, it was Edward Heath who sold this brewery off to the Tory funds contributing national brewers, thus initiating the whole chain of often disastrous privatisations which have followed. A recent recreation of this beer by the Derwent micro-brewery was actually quite a good replica of the original.

"**Yates & Jackson Bitter** - A palate-blastingly hoppy pale bitter from the Lancaster independent, taken over and closed by fellow Lancashire independent Thwaites in spite of CAMRA protests. I learned two things as a result of this closure. Never take part in a CAMRA last day protest unless as a futile last gasp gesture - much better to get behind the local brewers while they're still in good health. Never trust any brewer! The independents can be just as bad as the big boys!

"**Hartleys Bitter** - As above, another independent beer lost due to the actions of a fellow family brewery. The Robinson's takeover and closure of Hartleys resulted in the discontinuation of the Ulverston brewed Mild and Bitter with only XB moving to Stockport, with consequent dumbing down and loss of its strawberry taste. The Bitter was beautifully balanced in the best sense of that phrase (too often used nowadays to describe something without *any* taste). This beer was a tasty combination of hop and grain, both there but neither dominating.

"**Boddingtons Bitter (up to about 1980)** - The straw coloured, full tasting, tartly hoppy (with just a hint of sweetness) bitter from Strangeways was a true classic. I would regularly undertake a bus/rail round trip from Aintree to St Helens just to savour this beer (fond memories of the Vine in Thatto Heath). First Boddingtons own accountants, and then the Whitbread ones, decided this beer could be dumbed down, and that without its distinctive taste more people would flock to drink it. Well they didn't! And in spite of elaborate and costly adverts it just failed to take off as a national brand. It's a beer I wouldn't cross the street for now!

"**Greenalls (St Helens) Bitter** - I could never understand in my pre-CAMRA days, why the Greenalls in St Helens area was so different and superior to the Warrington version. This beer had all the hoppiness and flavour (a little bit Roosterish!) that its Warrington cousin lacked. Now even the Warrington brewery has gone - along with many others in the Greenall empire. Although I certainly loathe Whitbread I actually despise Greenalls even more. For one brewery company to have eliminated Wem Pale Ale, Simpkins Bitter, Shipstones Bitter and Davenport's Bitter as well as the above is absolutely unforgivable. Nasty people indeed!

"I am aware that all these beers I've chosen are from North West England, but that's natural since this is the area where my beer education started, developed, and continues, and where I'm happy to consume some of the glorious beers still around. (maybe the Editor will permit me to submit a current list of favourites in a later article?) (*oh, go on then - Ed(1)*). Being an optimist by nature I hope the best are yet to come, but I'll cherish the memory of all the beers I've talked about. Cheers!"



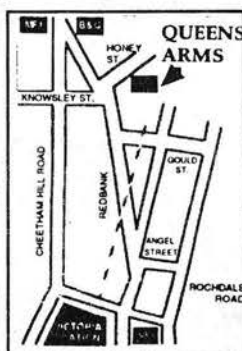
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# MANCHESTER MATTERS by Citym

Following last month's brief round-up, there's something of a bumper offering this time...

The hoardings are up around the new Wetherspoons on Princess Street. The Waterhouse, as it will be known, is due to open in April. The hoardings are also up next to **Churchills** on Chorlton Street as the pub is expanded into the building next door.

## New At The Circus

Not a million miles away from Churchills, there has been a change of licensee at the famous **Circus Tavern** on Portland Street where George Archondogeorge took over from Steve Campbell on 28 January. As promised last time, I've now been able to call in and have a word. Changes are underway in that the entire interior has been re-decorated to the same colour scheme as original - so the grained, matchboard walls and seating, and the bar remain as they are. The exterior is also being repainted. Tetley bitter will remain on handpull and will be joined by Carlsberg lager on draught (the first time the pub has ever sold a draught lager). George says there is a demand for a weak lager, especially from the ladies who find Stella too strong. Opening hours are extended to include all-day opening Saturday and Sunday.

George is not new to the trade, but it is some 20 years since he ran the Douglas Arms (Wilsons) on Corporation Street for eight years followed by a spell at the nearby Moonraker. George is a previous customer of the pub and knew Terry and Kath Corless very well; during his tenure at the Douglas he was dubbed 'Mad George' or George 'The Barmy Greek' by journalists from the nearby Maxwell House, Daily Mirror newspaper offices. As a nod to his roots, you can now get Ouzo in the Circus.

## Other City Centre Changes

Elsewhere, I was surprised to learn that Jamie Bell was leaving the **Lass O'Gowrie** on Charles Street. Not only leaving the pub, but the licensed trade as well. Until a permanent replacement is found, the pub is being run by the Lass's brewer, Roy Constantine who produced a special beer to mark Jamie's departure. This was planned to be a strong, (4.9%), dark and bitter beer. Sadly, I didn't make it down to the Lass to try any! There has been some restriction of the beer range at the pub, too. Until recently they were getting through about 1000 different beer a year but under new arrangements introduced by Laurel PubCo, this is now down to 20 a month. Still well worth a visit, though.

In January I reported last year's closure of the **Temple of Convenience** (Oxford Street), apparently for good, it seemed at the time. I delighted to report that in fact it's reopened (12-11, seven days) with the slightly shorter name of **The Temple**. There's still no draught real ale but it's there in the form of Chimay, Duvel and Kwak in the cold cabinet, together with Erdinger Weisse and other interesting bottles, all with their own glasses. They also have Taylor's Landlord and Black Sheep in bottle (but not bottle conditioned).

## Didsbury Doings

The **Royal Oak** (Wilmslow Road) has now reopened following redecoration. The main change is the removal of the cocktail bar in the front lounge as it was not used and this has been replaced by upholstered seating. The whole pub has been tastefully redecorated, new carpets, new curtains, and new wooden chairs. The TV has been removed from the front lounge as it was never watched, and most of the picture rail ornaments (jugs/tankards etc) have been consigned to the bin. The beer range is as it was before the redecoration, Banks's Mild, Marston's Bitter and Pedigree plus a guest beer from one of W & D breweries. However no sooner is this all finished than we say farewell to licensee June Bunton who retires on 12 March. June has worked hard to maintain the traditions at the pub and I'm sure we all wish her well.

Also refurbished is the **Station** which now looks a treat. The pub has new carpets, new curtains and a new colour scheme. There are also new tables and seating together with larger pictures of local interest. Apparently the refurbishment is attracting more women to the pub which must be a good thing.

I was sorry to learn that Ken Mallion from the **Fletcher Moss** has been quite ill with septicaemia i.e. blood poisoning. This has been caused by an old leg injury gained in his rugby playing days, which flared up. Ken has spent three weeks in intensive care in hospital but is now out and hobbling around on crutches. Get well soon, Ken. Nearby, the **Wok Wok** café bar restaurant is currently closed for a major refurbishment. This is described as 'an exciting new concept' so I dread to think what this actually means. It is scheduled to reopen in spring 2002.

At the **Hogshead**, the Laurel pub company have now reduced the length of the guest beer list available ditching a lot of the micro breweries in favour of regional breweries such as Wadworths and Hook Norton. Surely in pub's such as this (and the Lass O'Gowrie), which have proved themselves more than capable of selling a very wide range of beer this is a seriously retrograde step. Is there no room for any initiative and flair at Laurel?

On a brighter note, it's welcome to Andy and Karen Carter who took over at the **Olde Cock** earlier in the year. The beer range is now fixed selling Boddingtons bitter, Hook Norton Old Hooky, Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Deuchars IPA. At the moment Andy is awaiting his entertainment licence and he hopes to be able to put on live music.

Finally in Didsbury, the **Nelson** has now dropped Websters Yorkshire bitter and sells Boddingtons bitter and Holts bitter, and more recently the excellent John Smith's Magnet at £1.30 a pint. A snip!

## Ladybarn Latest

The **Brewery Arms** has had some bad press in OT but things are looking up. Last October the pub was taken over by Tracie Maun and David Proctor who have put in a great deal of effort in cleaning the pub up, in every sense of the word. The result has seen the return of a good crowd of regulars and a doubling of turnover and now they hope to reintroduce cask beer.

There has been a small glitch, though. The couple originally took over as managers for Clarinbridge Pub Co who held the tenancy from Enterprise Inns. Clarinbridge have now pulled out but Tracie and David remain and are negotiating to take on the tenancy themselves. This will see the pub repainted outside (its first lick of paint for about eight years or so) and real ale installed within. Tracie is a real cask ale fan; her favourite pub being the famous Blue Anchor in Helston, and the strong 'Spingo' brewed there ranks as one of her favourite beers. However, something less potent is planned for the pub, Tracie favouring Jennings Bitter while David fancies Adnams. The overall aim is to run a "good old fashioned pub", as Tracie told me when I called in recently. I'll certainly drink to that - and hopefully in a pint of cask ale at the Brewers. Tracie has promised to keep me posted on developments and I will of course pass this on straight away.

Whilst in Ladybarn, I also popped in to the nearby **Peninsula**, formerly the Talbot, and have to say I was pleasantly surprised. It's been done out in a modern café bar style, with blocks of colour, mood lighting and comfortable seating, including leather sofas. More to the point, it stocks real ale in the shape of Wadworth 6X and Black Sheep Bitter. The latter was in good nick and cheap at £1.60 a pint.

## East Side Story

There's some news about the **Britannia**, Rowsley Street, Beswick. This excellent former Lees pub has been bought by none other than Mike Summerbee of Manchester City fame. Of course, City are to make the nearby stadium their new home from the 2003 season so Mike is clearly thinking ahead to the commercial possibilities that will bring. As this is the only pub near the stadium he should rake it in. I just hope that both cask beer and at least some elements of the pub's character survive all of this.

Elsewhere there are a handful of pubs up for sale. These include the **Bridge Inn**, Clayton Lane and on Hyde Road both the **Wellington** and the **Midland**. Don't all rush at once.

## CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 215:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, John Taylor, Tony Molyneaux, John Cresswell, Ted Bruning, Mark McConachie, Peter Butler, Stuart Ballantyne, Tim Jones, Tom Lord, Chris Walkden, Anthony Firmin, Steve Bray, Keith Farman, Steve Smith





# Robinson's

## A QUESTION OF ROBINSON'S

Over the past year, this column has been giving readers an insight into the operations of Robinson's, past and present. We hope that you have enjoyed hearing about the Stockport brewer's rich heritage and the ways in which it continues to achieve the highest standards in all areas of its operations. We're pleased to tell you that the Company will be continuing its support of both the Stockport and South Manchester Branch of CAMRA and Opening Times. One of the brewer's highest profile connections with CAMRA will come at this year's Stockport Beer and Cider Festival. The popular event will be taking place at Stockport Town Hall between 30th May and 1st June. The Company will once again be sponsoring both the official T-shirts and the beer glasses.

As a bonus for this year, Robinson's will also be running a quiz in the festival programme with an attractive prize on offer to the winners.

To get you in the mood, the brewer will, from the next issue, be running a monthly competition in Opening Times. The focus will naturally be on cask conditioned ales with each month's questions set to test your knowledge of one of the beers in the Company's portfolio. While the majority will be familiar to you, there may be just the odd surprise along the way as head brewer Chris Hellin and his team are currently developing some new brands.

There will be some high quality Robinson's products on offer as prizes over the coming months including fleece jackets and award-winning real ales.

April's competition will certainly get the series off to a great start with a superb hardback book entitled *The History of Robinson's Brewery* as the prize. Its author is Dr Lynn Pearson, a writer and historian with a special interest in the history of brewing and public houses.

The full-colour volume charts the development of the brewer from its origins in the early nineteenth century up until modern times.

Contained within the book are fascinating case studies of the successive generations of the family and the way in which they contributed to the Company.

The book charts key events such as William Robinson's purchase of the Unicorn Inn in 1838, the development of the estate, the acquisition of other breweries and the building of the Unicorn Packaging Centre in Bredbury in the 1970s.

In addition, the volume also provides a deep insight into the social and business history of Stockport over nearly two centuries as, unlike many towns in the region, it continued to prosper despite the decline of the cotton industry.

The book is a wonderful read and will get our year-long run of competitions off to a great start. So get your thinking caps on and good luck!



This space is sponsored by Frederic Robinson Ltd.



## The National Scene

**Wolverhampton & Dudley Breweries** is sending out 25,000 text messages to customers, in what is seen as a cheap and effective way to boost consumption of its product. Those who signed up for the service will be sent a mobile voucher that can then be used to obtain a free pint of Fosters at one of W&DB's outlets in Manchester or Birmingham. Why don't they extend this to their cask products? Or are they just desperate to flog Fosters?



In Hertford, **McMullens** has been put up for sale by the family for £200 million. The company had a turn-over last year of £47.3 million but as much of the property is freehold, including the Nags Head in Covent Garden worth about £10m alone, the asking price may not be too unrealistic. Favourites to buy the business include Greene King and Pubmaster, although the consensus seems to be that whoever buys the company will close the brewery.

**Coors Brewers** is developing a new premium cask ale to market in place of Draught Bass as the latter brand remains in Interbrew's ownership (albeit brewed for them by Coors). It is probable that the new beer will use the Worthington name, although it is to be hoped that the new beer will be more than just a stronger version of the terminally dull Worthington Best Bitter.



The finalists in this year's **Brewing Industry International Awards** were announced late last month – and now face a two-month wait until the winners are announced in late April. North west beers among the finalists include Cains Best Bitter, Robinson's Old Tom, and Phoenix Navy and Wobbly Bob.

## Family Brewers Update



To cope with expected demand for its new range of seasonal beers, **Joseph Holt** is installing a brand new microbrewery at its Empire Street site. The new plant has the flexibility for 10-barrel test brews as well as bigger production runs. Head Brewer Keith Sheard said: "These are very exciting times. We plan to commission the new brewery by the end of March and will hopefully be doing test brews by Easter."

Our other three local family brewers have new seasonal beers out this month. **Robinson's** will be reprising Stockport Arches while Hydes and Lees will be bringing out brand new beers. **Lees** entry is Brooklyn Bitter, a bitter 5% beer in the American style, while **Hydes** have Styrian Spring, a 4.2% beer continuing this year's craft ale theme featuring different hop varieties.



## Micro Magic



As the **Lowes Arms**, Hyde Road, Denton will be participating in this year's Mild Challenge, Peter Wood at the LAB will be brewing a 3.6% ABV mild for the occasion. It will be dubbed 'Jet Amber' as it will utilise amber malt and will have a deep red colour together with a biscuity malt taste and a slight bitterness and hop character. The name also follows the brewery's tradition of using local names and landmarks to name its beers, so this beer's name derives from the fields across the main road from the pub called Jet Amber Fields. Surely, another good reason for readers to participate in this year's Mild Challenge.

Expansion and progress at "The LAB" is continuing at a steady pace. Two 2.5BB fermenters have been purchased from Blackpool Brewery which will increase capacity to 10 Barrels per week. The additional capacity will also help increase the range of beers brewed.

Down in Congleton, **Beartown Brewery** is cock-a-hoop at the continuing success of the Navigation in Stockport. The pub has recently been redecorated and now looks a treat with new seating





and curtains adding the finishing touches. A beer to look out for this month is Blarney Bear, Beartown's superb dry Irish-style stout, which will be out in time for St Patrick's night.



Heywood's **Phoenix Brewery** has a whole raft of new beers to tickle your tastebuds. Double Stout (4.5%) and Jovan (4.7%) were already available by the end of February and this month will see March Hare (4.4%) and Shamrock (4.3%). From 2 April, the brewery will also have Resurrection (4.7%) and St George's (4.3%).

**Pictish Brewery** is reprising Dolmen from last year. This 4% bitter is an amber coloured beer with a long bitter finish in the popular Pictish style. Pictish will also be brewing the Festival Special for Stockport Beer Festival this year - the aim is to have a quaffable bitter session beer at about 3.6%.



In Moston the **Boggart Hole Clough Brewery** is producing Humphrey Boggart, a 4.3% light Spring ale and is aiming to bring out a mild for April, although the final specification for the beer had not been decided as we went to press.

There are two new beers from **Bank Top** in the pipeline, too. These have been commissioned by Bolton council to mark the town hosting cycling and badminton events during the Commonwealth games. Boneshaker and Spitting Feathers will both be 4.2% pale bitter beers. Bank Top also intends to start bottling in the near future, although the beers will not be bottle conditioned. Work has now finally started on the new brewery site so expect a move later this year.



Up in Nangreaves, the **Leyden Brewery** continues to go great guns. The next new beer is Cool Shamrock, a 3.9% hoppy, easy drinking bitter and this is to be followed by a lager-style beer brewed using lager and wheat malt together with Hallertau and Hersbrucker hops. The beers, due to be launched at the Hare & Hounds (Holcombe Brook) Beer Festival is to be named "Leyden Hosen"! Leyden are also producing a house beer for the pub in the form of Hare & Hounds Bitter (3.8%). The brewery's latest dark beer, Frombury (from Bury, geddit?) a 4.2% dark beer halfway between a mild and a stout has proved so popular that a further three brews have had to be produced.

Finally, mention has to be made of the superb new beer from **Marble Brewery**, launched on the weekend of the National Winter Ales Festival. Manchester Bitter is a 4.2% pale gold beer with a slightly spicy taste and a long, moreish bitter finish. It's just fabulous - and has proved to be an instant hit with Marble Brewer James Campbell brewing flat out to keep up with demand.



## EASTER IN PARADISE

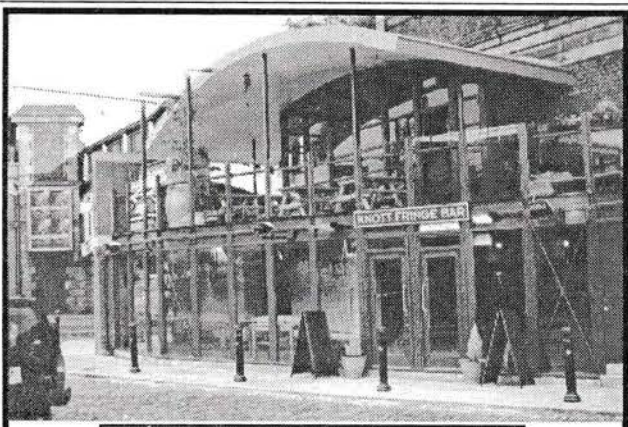
Following the success of the Christmas Beer Festival at Paradise Brewery at Wrenbury, an Easter Beer Festival will be held from Friday 29 March to Monday 1 April.

The redoubtable Crewe & Shrewsbury Passenger Association has again made arrangements for trains to stop at the adjacent Wrenbury Station. The 11.33 Manchester-Cardiff express will stop specially at Wrenbury on Friday 29 and Saturday 30 March. A return service will stop to pick up at 17.05. On Friday these services will serve Stockport and Wilmslow. On Saturday, Stockport passengers will need to check local arrangements as there may be engineering work taking place. Remember, Wrenbury is a request stop - tell the conductor you wish to get off there and hand signal to board the train when coming back.



With 30 beers available, mostly from small brewers, this promises to be an excellent festival. And of course, the weather should be a lot warmer than it was at Christmas!

The Passenger Association tells us that with 560 arrivals by train for the July festivals (Paradise and Bhurtpore) and 336 for the Christmas festival, they will soon be dubbing Wrenbury the 'Beer Festival Capital of Britain'.



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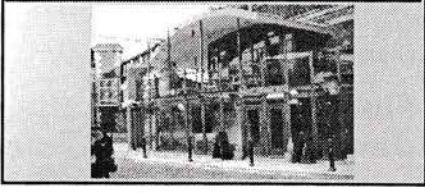
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STOCKPORT & MANCHESTER  
**Mild**  
 CHALLENGE  
**2002**

**F**ollowing the success of last year's competition, we have once again teamed up with the Stockport Express to bring you another Mild Challenge, and again we have stretched our wings to include parts of Manchester and Salford along with a few other pubs further afield. In fact it's looking as though we may have a record number of pubs taking part. The previous Challenges have been a great success and if you haven't taken part before, try and have a go this time. It's fun and it's easy. It's also a chance to visit some new pubs, try new beers and, of course, to win some great prizes.

The Challenge runs from Saturday 6 April to Sunday 12 May and offers everyone taking part the chance to win something. All completed entries will receive either a free entry ticket for the 2001 Stockport Beer & Cider Festival or, if you're a member of CAMRA, a voucher for two free pints of mild at the Festival.

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

Full details including a list of all participating pubs and an entry card will appear in next month's Opening Times.



**An Australian By the Tail**

"FOSTERS - don't ya just luv it?" The quintessential 'pale amber nectar', crystal clear, - and in the UK - full of chemical additives and virtually taste free. The beer that gives Australia (the land of everything that swims, creeps and crawls and is especially venomous) the name for bland crap.

Well knock me down with a didgeridoo, sport, but sales of beer by Fosters Brewing have now been surpassed by sales of wine from their vinyards! Its enough to make yer prawn fall off the barbie! It is also a victory for commonsense, as Fosters Brewing have some quite excellent vinyards in both Oz and the US of A. Reality though, beckons. The wombats who are running the show are now boasting that they are looking to "outsource" their wine production to concentrate on their core areas of expertise - Marketing and distribution. So expect massive numbers of tinnies of revolting sweet wine with a plastic kangaroo glued on top in a bar near you soon (and no, I didn't make this up, well except for the bit about the plastic kangaroos!).

**God & Mammon**

*Last month I promised some sort of considered opinion on the Winter Ales Festival and the start of the "Beer Festival Season". In the best tradition of half-truths peddled in this column, here goes...*

As you may have read elsewhere, the National Winter Ales Festival was a great success. Manchester saw a tremendous range of great beers, and the queue for the Gents was a lot smaller than last year (either the european idea of unisex ladies' or the drinking men of Manchester developing bigger bladders was clearly responsible). Beer condition on the main British bar was first class, which on the Thursday night was a relief to us on the European Bar, because most of our draught beer was still on the wrong side of the channel. First, our friends in Customs & Excise are delighted to be playing silly buggers over occasaional import licences - apparantly it is too difficult to discriminate between 'White Van Man' doing a booze and fag run (- no, honest, guv, its all for me own use (cough) (barf)) and the legitimate small trader with all the paperwork duly filled in. Result, they stop the legitimate trader. When you've jumped through the thousand new hoops that C&E put in your way, then God closes the channel with a storm! Anyway we unloaded the van on Friday lunchtime at least 90 seconds before the customers entered the building. Of the beers, the Goss pale bock and Kneitingen DunkelBock were exceptional. We had four Oktoberfest beers on draught, the Hacker Marzen and Paulaner being sublime. The Tegernsee beers were their magnificent selves. On the Irish front, one judge and a good few others who had tasted the competition beers said that the Carlow O'Haras Stout, or the Dwan An Dubhain stout would have won the Winter Ale competition had they been eligible. The Carlow Curim Gold Wheat Beer was the best I have ever had it - as the stewards (who drank virtually all of it) concur! But it seems we were not the only festival accured... The huge Rotherham festival I missed through illness, and Bradford was hit severely by the Arriva train strike (a prior bout of which affected Winter Ales as well!) Still as we go to press there's Wigan (at

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

Cumbrian Way  
 re-introducing....  
**Samuel Oldknow**  
 (3.5% abv)



A WARM WELCOME IN A TRADITIONAL PUB

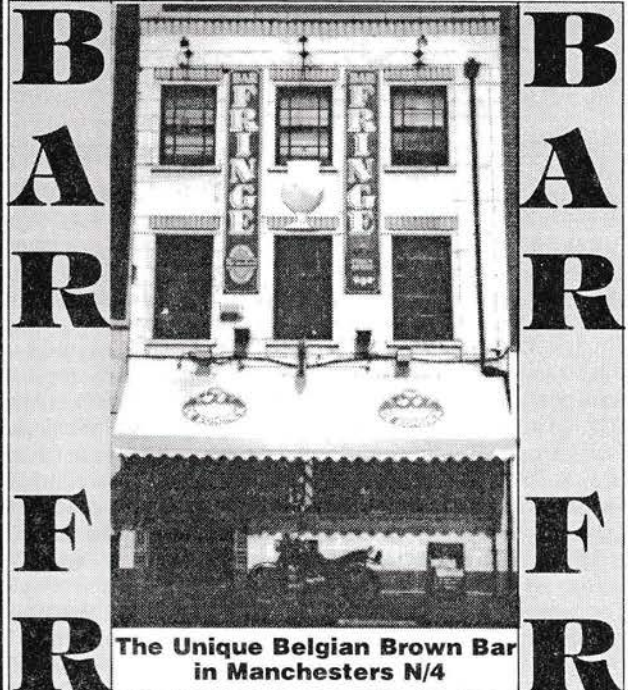
# NORTHERN QUARTER STAGGER<sup>(1)</sup>

the Mill on the Pier, Thurs eve to Sat pm 7-9 March) and two weeks later Oldham at the civic centre on Friday & Saturday (22-23 March)...and so we return to the Stagger of the Northern Quarter...

## Best Laid Plans

...I left myself, in last month's OT, emerging into a sharp December night from the Smithfield Hotel on Swan Street, (having been fuelled-up by way of the Castle, Centro Cafe-Bar, Bar Fringe, and the Burton Arms en route). I was on my way to the Beer House when I was rudely interrupted by a change of management! Just as we went to press, Allan & Lynne left the Beer House and former bar-staff regular Yvonne took over, so I thought it only right that I re-do the latter half of the stagger, to bring it up to date, so, starting somewhat earlier in the day, we resume by leaving the Smithfield and going all the way down Rochdale Road to the **Marble Arch** (about 600 yards). James (Organic) Campbell is the brewer responsible for most of the beers at this classic (and organic and vegan) brew-pub, but Phil, the manager (who used to be Ian Casson's oppo at the Beer House) has added a few guests to make this a 'must-do' pub on every visit to the area. For many years the best pub-building in the area, with its vaulted and tiled ceiling, its beers are now up to its architectural standards. Beers on offer were the Marble range of Ginger Marble (the BEST Ginger beer in the world, imho) N/4 Bitter, Cloudy Marble, Old Lag and Uncut Amber and the first-rate newly-launched Manchester Bitter, plus guests from Msrs McGuire in Dublin - Rotes Weiss and Dark Rider (a stout sort of fella) complemented by Titanic Set s'ale and Hebridean Brewing Co Clansman. Frankly a list that would keep any sane drinker in the pub all day.. but being brave, I tried the Ginger (exquisite), the Manchester Bitter (excellent) the Dark Rider which was a black and uncompromisingly dry stout with a dominant chocolate and malt feel with some slight bittersweet notes interrupting the finish, and the unusual Rotes Weiss, which was a truly fruity crystal wheat beer with a taste that was a mixture of banana and raspberry. I was very taken with it.

Dragging myself away towards the Beer House, the mid-way point is marked on New Mount Street (a little below Rochdale Road - but visible) by the **Pot o' Beer**. This wonderfully refurbished local offers an interesting mix of Polish and British food in a pleasant (nearly) two-roomed format, served from a bar to the left of the entrance. Here there were four beers on offer - regulars Boddingtons and the rare Robinsons Dark Mild, complimented by Ossett Mellow Yellow and Nethergate Red Rooster. This latter proved to be a dark brown full-bodied bitter with a malty dryness with bitter hints. Very pleasant. The Mellow Yellow was surprisingly sweet and not quite to my taste, but was presented in excellent condition. And so, the **Beer House**. The pub itself is unaltered, but since she took over a couple of weeks ago, Yvonne has managed to restore the juke-box to its former glory, hire a new chef, and bring about a new menu with most of the old favourites restored. On the beer front on this official visit, there were two beers from Greene King (IPA and Abbott), because some concessions to the ultimate owners (Innspired Inns) are required, but also Pictish Dolman, Derwent Pale, Milk Street Beer, John Joule Swan and three from Milton - Pegasus, Electra and Jupiter. Complemented by Hoegaarden Wheat (still on offer in Four-pint Jugs) Becks and two trad ciders, Thatchers and Prinknash Abbey Red. I tried the Milton Electra, a hoppy pale brown beer with a malty finish and slightly citrus edge. Yvonne is one of my favourite people, hugely popular with the regular customer base, and I am certain she will do very well. The staff, from Simon to the part-timers, remain the same, making the Beer House the excellent all-round pub it is. The last port of call of this (truncated) N/4 Stagger is the other side of the valley, on Honey St, off Red Bank - The **Queens Arms**. Wonderful views from the garden area, inexpensive food ranging from pub curry to a special Cullen Skink (smoked haddock soup) all for under £3.50, Belgian draught in the shape of Vlaams Wit and St Louis Kriek, Boggart Angel Hill and the (inexpensive!) 9% Steaming, Phoenix Bantam & Black Bee, Salamander Axolotl, Swale Cocklewarmer and Timothy Taylor Landlord. Again, enough to detain you for an entire session. The pub is a credit to owners Dave & Sue Price. So the N/4 is alive and well. Next month I'll look at the edges....



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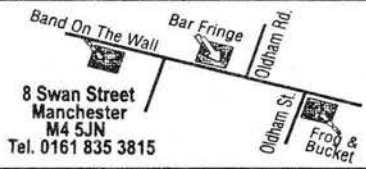
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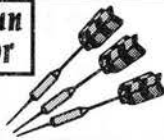
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# Stockie The che

By John Taylor



**I**n the Stockport Licensed Houses Super League, things are hotting up with just four points separating the top five teams and, as mentioned earlier in the season, the surprise side are Reddish WMC and that point has been made apparent in the last couple of months by the fact that they have beaten their two biggest rivals.

Firstly it was the Ash Hotel who were put to the sword in a 4-3 away win; that was followed by another 4-3 win, this time at home to the present champions, Royal Mortar. The winning quartet were Pete Day Jnr who beat master dartsman Darryl Fitton and won legs in 21 & 18 darts including a 117 outshot. Darryl took a leg in 19 darts and also hit a 180. The other winners were Pete Day Snr (30 & 21), Vic Clegg (23 & 21), and captain Jeff Pearson winning the match (23 & 28). In reply for the champs they had Roly Mellor (27 & 16) and a 180, John Hollins (20 & 17) and a 180, and Tony Daniels (17 & 16).

That win puts the club joint top with the Mortar. The Ash are back in third place and they bounced back from their defeat with a 7-0 win against the Sidings. Their best came from Paul Yates (18 & 25), Ray Matthews with two legs of 19, Gary Townley (23 & 18), John McArdle (20 & 23), Dave Adshead (15 & 20) which included a big 135 outshot, and Andy Wright (14 & 22).

The real ale must be having a good effect of the players from the Nursery Inn because, having found themselves bottom of the table, they have just won three on the trot. The latest win was a 5-2 victory against the Royal Oak, and I don't think it's a coincidence that all these wins have come about because Pete Webb has rejoined their ranks and won all his matches.

The Royal Oak now find themselves four points adrift at the bottom of the table and appear to be heading for the Premier Division next season, although they presently top the crib league. The Magnet are in joint fourth place with the Bobby Peel and have Geoff Millward top of the 180 list for the season on six with five other players back on five maximums, as the tables show below.

Super League	Played	Won	Pts	180 List
1. Royal Mortar	17	15	30	Geoff Millward
6 Magnet				
2. Reddish WMC	17	15	30	Derek Higgins
5 Magnet				
3. Ash Hotel	17	14	28	Tony O'Shea 5
Ash Hotel				
4. Magnet	17	13	26	John Hollins 5
Royal Mortar				
5. Bobby Peel	17	13	26	Darryl Fitton 5
Royal Mortar				
6. Printers Arms	17	9	18	Kevin Weir 5
Royal Mortar				

In the draw for the semi-finals of the team knock-out the top four play each other, with the matches being played on Tuesday 19 March, the same night as Stockport County play Man City, so where would you rather be? I knew as much. The darts venues are the Royal Mortar, where the Ash play the Bobby, and at the Ash, where the Mortar take on Reddish WMC.

In the Cheshire Super League, Stockport are going from strength to strength, their recent wins include a 6-3 win against Altrincham, with win for Brian Derbyshire, Andy Wright, Mick Haynes and Kevin Weir. That was followed up with a 7-2 win against Winsford, with the above winners being joined by Tony O'Shea, Darryl Fitton, who were missing from the first win, and Tony Daniels. Well, that's it for another month. See you soon. **John Taylor.**



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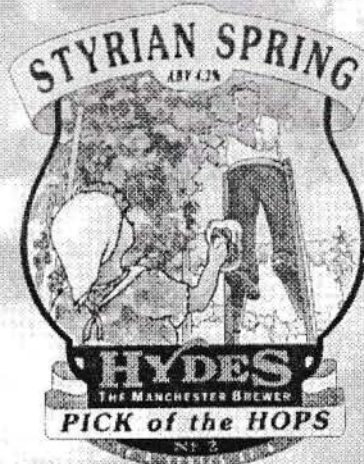
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### In Praise of Lager

One of the most distinctive features of the National Winter Ales Festival was the extensive foreign beer bar, which, according to the Beer Monster, offered, amongst other delights, probably the widest selection of authentic German lagers anywhere in the world. Sampling a few of these underlined just how good examples of this style can be, the Tegernsee Spezial proving particularly memorable.

The knowledge that the best pale lagers from Germany and the Czech Republic are genuine world classics makes it all the more disappointing how so much taste-free rubbish is produced vaguely in the same style, which has become a lowest common denominator for bog-standard, mass-market beers around the world. Particularly regrettable is how no version of a foreign beer brewed under licence in the UK comes remotely near matching the character of the original, most having a flavour that owes more to cardboard than to hops.

So, if during the summer months you should want to quench your thirst with a cool beer from the fridge, make sure you choose the genuine article rather than a poor imitation.

### No Excuses

If people want to advertise their lack of taste and manners by swilling beer from the bottle, that's up to them, but I wish they wouldn't try to come up with pathetic excuses in an attempt to justify it. I'm informed by a relative from the younger generation that drinking from the bottle rather than a glass makes it much more difficult for strangers to introduce date-rape drugs into your drink. For young women in city-centre nightclubs late at night this could contain some truth, although even there surely it's easier both to spot and taste foreign matter in a glass. But when you have a group of strapping young men drinking in a pub at lunchtime, the risk of someone dosing them with Rohypnol and dragging them off to a dark corner must be absolutely zero. Nobody's going to convince me there's any valid reason for this boorish practice.

### Doing the Splits

On the subject of bottles, a slightly more civilised habit that has vanished from pubs is drinking splits. In the 1950s, in an attempt to perk up the often dodgy draught beer of the day, light and bitter became virtually the staple drink in the south of England. Even in the mid-seventies it was commonplace to see people around here ordering brown mixed and brown over bitter. Yet it now seems to have totally disappeared, and sales of bottled brown and pale ales in pubs must have fallen off a cliff, with the result that most brewers have stopped producing them. Maybe this is due to pubgoers becoming more discerning and not wishing to blur the flavours of their drinks, but when you can sit in a pub and watch six middle-aged blokes in succession go to the bar and order a pint of Carling Black Label it looks more like another distinctive tradition that has fallen victim to blandness and standardisation.

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

## 5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison **MARCH '97**

**F**ury Over Short Pint Scam' was the headline, and publicans and brewers had reacted with predictable fury to the renewed media exposure of the short pint scam. The scandal had come back into public view in January, when CAMRA's national newspaper *What's Brewing* revealed a Shropshire County Council survey which found 23 out of 25 publicans cheating their customers.

Surveys in different parts of the country produced mixed results, but there were many short pints reported, and only very few full pints. It was estimated that publicans were benefiting to the tune of £250 million a year, but a Brewers Association spokesman said they were fed up with the repeated allegations. Many local pubs avoided the problem by using metered dispense from electric pumps (particularly Hydes and Robinson's) but only one brewery in Britain was totally committed to an honest pint - Banks's of Wolverhampton, who also owned Camerons. CAMRA's policy was to continue to lobby for oversized glasses to be used throughout the industry.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Old Wellington in the City Centre had re-opened following the severe damage it suffered from the previous June's bomb. Oddly, its neighbour Sinclairs managed to reopen in just a few weeks. Of course, both pubs were due to undergo a "rotation and removal" across to the other side of Shambles Square when the "new" city centre got going in the next couple of years.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Whitbread's Hogshead chain continued to impress with enterprising brews on offer - the latest batch had been produced specially for the Five Nations Rugby Championship, and named after the national anthems used in the tournament. Sweet Chariot from Youngs of Wandsworth; Flower of Scotland (Caledonian of Edinburgh); Bread of Heaven (Brains of Cardiff); Molly Malone (Hilden of County Antrim), and the real surprise, Marseillaise, a cask conditioned beer from the Brasserie des Deux Rivières in Normandy.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The final two items concern Robinson's. They had launched a new training course designed to prepare new managers and tenants for the modern-day demands of running a pub. The five-day programme aimed at raising standards and satisfying licensing magistrates' requirements for proof of professional competence. It also prepared candidates for the British Institute of Innkeeping National Licensees' Certificate exam which they sat on the final day. The Brewery News column reported that Old Tom had been given a new look, and branded as a "strong ale" rather than a barley wine, although nothing about the beer itself had changed. Old Tom was the last of the Robinson's beers to get a new image in what had been a generally successful rebranding operation. Certainly, sales of the former "ordinary bitter" had improved markedly since its redesignation as Old Stockport Bitter. Someone had spotted a nitro-keg font in Robinson's hospitality room - could this have been the forerunner of things to come?

13



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## MAN WITH A MISSION

**T**hat's Garrett Oliver, head brewer of New York's Brooklyn Brewery, who last month "returned to his roots" to brew Brooklyn Best, the American-style bitter which will be John Willie Lees' seasonal beer for March and April. Garrett gave a talk at Lees Brewery on 18 February to mark the occasion.

As American as apple pie, Garrett gained his love of beer and brewing during a prolonged stay in the UK in the early 1980's, particularly in London where he came to appreciate the ethos and feeling of the British pub.

Returning to the USA, Garrett found he had 'nothing to drink'. There were just some 40 breweries in the whole of the United States, most of them producing the beer equivalent of "sliced white bread". Turning to home brewing, this slowly took over his life and in 1989 he went to work for one Mark Whitty to start up a brewpub in New York which used the open fermenters and ale yeasts familiar to most UK brewers. So, while Garrett is now head of production at a much larger operation, producing a whole range of beers using different yeasts and production methods, he immediately felt at home in Lees' rather more traditional brewery.

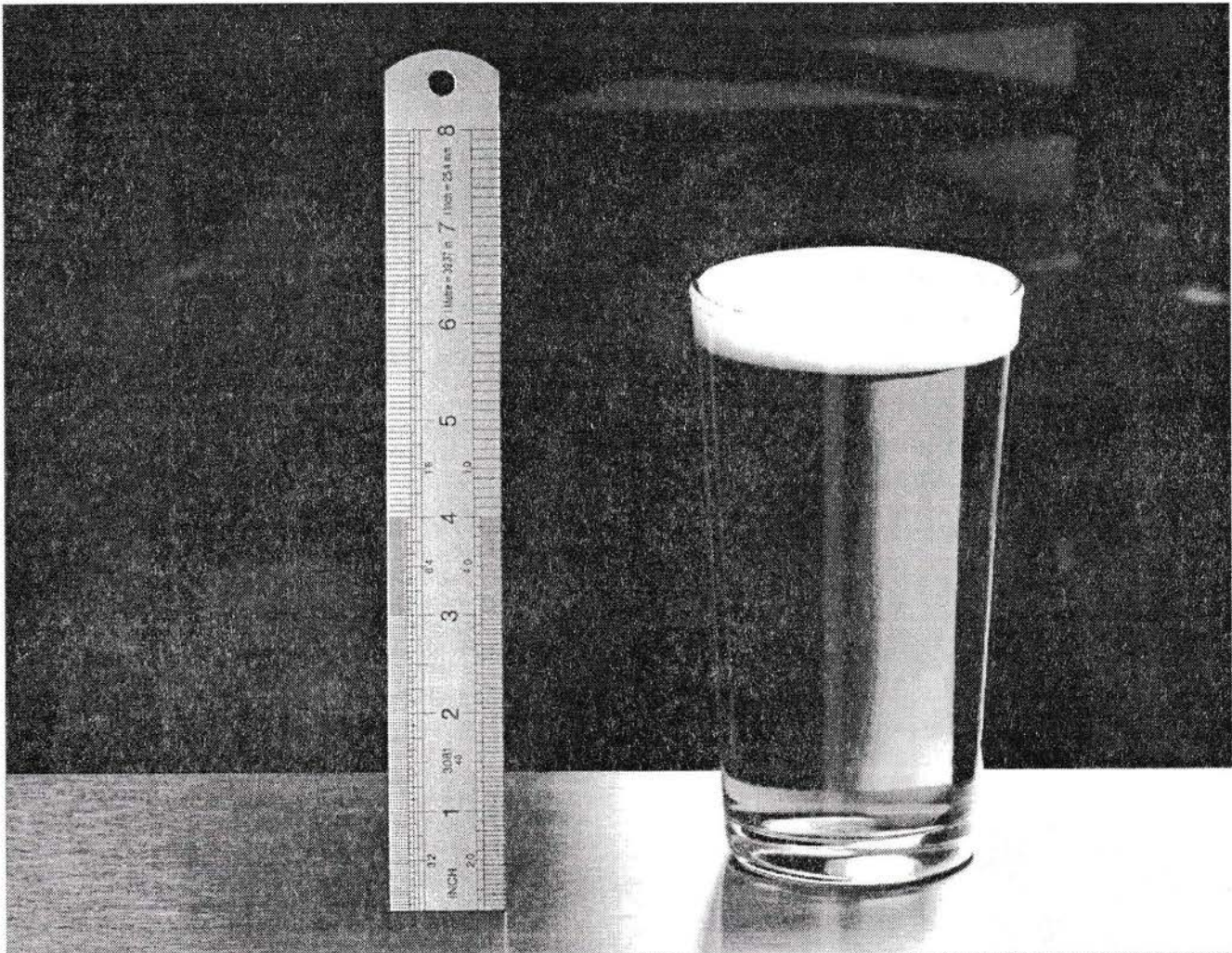
The Lees connection with New York, stems from their 11% Vintage Harvest Ale, which has become something of a cult beer over there. Apart from the bottled version, Lees also export a cask version, in specially made wooden 9-gallon casks commissioned by their American importer. These are also soaked in a variety of spirits to add an additional dimension to what is already a very complex beer!

Brooklyn Best has however been brewed at a more manageable 5% and is described by Garrett as "loud, like an American". It certainly promises to be unlike anything that has emerged from Lees before. Generously hopped with American Chinook and Cascade hops to give a long, deep bitterness with the grapefruit and citric character that epitomises many American bitters (and an increasing number of British beers let it be said). To quote Garrett Oliver, it will be "dry with a clean, clipped finish...with lots of backbone to support the hop character".

Lees are producing a 100-barrel brew of Brooklyn Best and this will be available in their pubs by early March. Those in the Opening Times area taking the beer include Rain Bar, Manchester; Golden Pheasant, Plumley and, hopefully, the Travellers Call in Bredbury. This isn't quite the end of the story, though. As a quid pro quo, Lees' head brewer Giles Dennis is travelling to New York this month and will be producing a beer for the Brooklyn Brewery. This will be based on a recently rediscovered 1884 recipe for a J W Lees beer called 'Star'. The recipe was recorded in November that year so it may well have been a Christmas Ale. Will we see this beer in the UK? Well, it will be bottled so anything is possible.



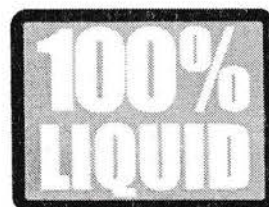
Garrett Oliver of Brooklyn Brewing with Giles Dennis of Lees



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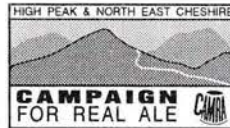
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## FEATURED PUB The Shepherds Arms, Whaley Bridge

For this month's featured pub we take to the hills again, to Whaley Bridge, between Stockport & Buxton.

The pub is the Shepherds Arms, a Marston's pub on Old Road, right in the centre of Whaley Bridge just off the A6, and just a few minutes walk from the railway station and bus stops.

Just approaching the pub, its external appearance, whitewashed and solid looking, gives you a sense of 'here is a real gem', and you will not be disappointed.

The pub was formerly a farmhouse and one of the oldest buildings in Whaley Bridge, and when converted into a pub it was owned by Smiths Brewery of Macclesfield. There is car parking and an excellent beer garden at the side of the pub.

The interior, thank goodness, has resisted the trend to open-plan pubs. There is a small entrance hall (perhaps a 'jug and bottle' in the past?) plus lounge and tap room, both with real fires.

The lounge is comfortable and cosy; the tap room is magnificent with a flagged floor and scrubbed wood-topped tables. It is a great example of a traditional vault, once common-place but now getting rarer all the time.

The beers are Banks's Original, Marston's Bitter, Pedigree and the monthly seasonal brewers beers, all on handpump. Bar snacks and sandwiches are available.

The licensees Graham and Monica have been in the pub for two years and have established a good local trade and a variety of social activities. It is the HQ of Whaley Bridge Cricket Club, and hosts PTA meetings and Boating Club get-togethers. The pub has teams in the local quiz league and supports darts and dominoes teams. Graham also helps to organise trips to the theatre and narrow-boat canal trip on the nearby Peak Forest Canal.

This is a great pub with all the traditional qualities that you would expect of a genuine local. From where you are Whaley Bridge may be a long trip but the Shepherds will make it worth the effort. TL.

Opening hours: 11-11 Monday-Saturday; 12-10.30 Sunday.  
Tel 01663 732384. Trains Manchester-Buxton; Buses 199 Manchester Airport-Buxton (Trent). While in Whaley Bridge also make a point of visiting Goyt Wines off-licence opposite the railway station. A small off-licence with a good range of British and foreign bottle beers, well deserving of support.

## JIM BOWDEN AWARD

Each year the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch nominate one of their pubs for a special award in memory of their late Chairman, founder member and long-standing branch activist, Jim Bowden. For 2002, the Jim Bowden Pub Award is to be presented to the Bulls Head in Kerridge.

The Bulls Head is a lovely traditional local in the Robinson's tradition, serving Robinson's Best Bitter and Hatters Mild. It provides real ale in a quiet atmosphere, where good conversation is valued above the noise of a juke box. Pub games are encouraged with several teams competing in local competitions.

A homely, friendly atmosphere that welcomes all types of people and encourages them to mingle and exchange ideas. It is the sort of unsung, welcoming local pub that may not win any prestigious national awards, but is a home-from-home for many local people, and a few from further afield. The sort of pub very much appreciated and enjoyed by Jim Bowden.

The landlady of the Bull is Dorothy Dickens and she has been landlady since 1966, having worked behind the bar since 1953. It is undoubtedly this long degree of continuity that has preserved the superb atmosphere at this excellent village local.

Vistors should be careful when leaving since the steps are steep and more than one local CAMRA member has experienced an unpleasantly quick and painful descent! The date for the presentation of this prestigious award had not been finalised as we went to press - look for details in forthcoming issues..





### Hiking Along High Lane

Between Hazel Grove and the Cheshire boundary town of Disley, there is a stretch of road, the very busy Buxton Road (A6) in fact, more commonly known as the High Lane area. There are a number of public houses on either side of the road, mostly surrounded by open fields, and both the Macclesfield Canal and the Middlewood Way cut across it.

**H**eading uphill out from Hazel Grove the first pub encountered is the **Robin Hood**, and the first of three Robinson's houses. This one is perhaps the most basic of them all, decoratively, and not strictly in High Lane, but included here for completeness. It has some outside seating and is conveniently placed for the buses, which stop directly outside or across the road. The interior sports three rooms; recreation facility with pool room, bar room lounge with restrained rustic décor and a further room mainly used for functions, or perhaps at weekends, when flashing lights and rock music predominate. The beers, on electric dispense, are Best Bitter and Hatters Mild.

It's quite a distance between here and the next pub, a 2002 Good Beer Guide entry, the **Royal Oak**, a Burtonwood hostelry offering this brewery's Bitter and usually an independent guest beer. There is a cobbled front laid out with picnic tables and internally its rooms have been opened out. a compact bar overseas an area for pool with pleasant lounge seating.

On the corner of Windlehurst Road is the second Robinson's pub, the **Horseshoe Inn**, definitely a horse of a different colour, this one (pardon the pun). Not surprisingly the pub sports an equine theme, with ceramic shire horses, brasses and such like. A former games room has been converted into a non-smoking dining area to accompany the well tended lounge. Handpulled Best Biter and Hatters Mild are the ales.

Changing onto the opposite side of the road, the **Bulls Head** is a true canal side tavern with the main bar room opened out, neatly furnished with two further rooms, one for darts, one for pool. There is a jukebox evident, but not too overpowering and all in all, this is a good community local. The Boddingtons Bitter is served in oversize glasses.

Next comes the **Dog & Partridge**, where more Boddingtons Bitter can be sampled in the Brewers Fayre establishment. Pleasing enough, with split levels, low ceilings, scrubbed wood, rag rolled and brick walls in a faux-bucolic setting. Undoubtedly it attracts families and diners, as this pub chain is wont to do.

The third Robinson's pub, and the final pub on this crawl, is their large residential roadside **Red Lion**, easily recognisable with a prominent exterior, brightly illuminated at night. The interior is reminiscent of a "big chain" eaterie, and indeed there are split levels with several areas for eating and drinking, over half the pub encompassing a restaurant facility. Best Bitter is electrically dispensed, as is the Hatters Mild, though this comes through a brass "T" fount type contraption. A reference to past times is presented by old advertisement signs for commodities long since passed away.

This completes a brief foray of this area, which is easily reached by public transport.

Buses 199 (the most frequent, half hourly from Stockport), 304, 360, 361 and 394 and TP (this latter the Trans-Peak service from Manchester and Stockport - but the first dropping off point is the Royal Oak) all pass through, or why not try an exhilarating walk from Middlewood station (limited train service).

## NEED TO COMPLAIN?

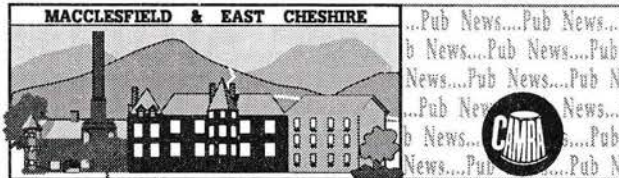
If you experience problems in a pub, please first try to sort it out tactfully with the licensee, but if you need to take it further:-

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



The Bulls Head in Congleton has just been sold to Hydes, which can only be an improvement.

Robinson's Hartley's Cumbria Ale has arrived in the area - it can be sampled at the Dolphin, Windmill St., Macclesfield and the Harrington Arms, Bosley.

In Macclesfield, as we have previously speculated in Opening Times, the Old Kings Head on Chestergate is closed and boarded up. The block where the pub resides also contains the closed Three Pigeons and, if local gossip is to be believed, the whole site is to be redeveloped into offices.

Another pub casualty in Macclesfield is the Fox and Grapes, a former Wilsons house that doesn't look like reopening.

The Plough on Station St, is open again with temporary management after a few weeks closure however reports reveal that business is extremely poor. Also in Macclesfield, Bar 108 is to revert to its original name of the Bull and Gate - a much more sensible name.

Last month we inadvertently printed some old news to the effect that the Meridian in Bollington no longer sold cask ale. Happily that sorry state of affairs has long since been put right and since last June(!) the pubs has sold Black Sheep Bitter which has gone down a treat with the regulars.

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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

## MARCH 2002

**Thursday 14<sup>th</sup>** - Monthly Branch Meeting: Gateway, Kingsway, East Didsbury. Starts 8.00pm.

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup>** - Mild Stagger to publicise forthcoming Mild Challenge. Meet Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris 7.30pm; 8.30 Crown, Heaton Lane.

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup>** - Social: Navigation, Lancashire Hill, Stockport. 9.00pm onwards.

**Friday 22<sup>nd</sup>** - Offerton Stagger: start Wrights Arms, Marple Rd 7.30pm; Gardeners Arms, Little St, 9.00pm.

**Thursday 28<sup>th</sup>** - Pub of the Month presentation to Little Jack Horners, Wellington St, Stockport. From 8.00pm. **Note change of venue.**

**Friday 5<sup>th</sup>-Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> April** - CAMRA National AGM & Conference Scarborough.

**Thursday 11<sup>th</sup>** - **Branch Meeting and AGM**, Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. Starts 8.00pm. **Will all members please attend this important meeting.**

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

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup>** - Coach trip to Saddleworth (afternoon/evening); contact Frank Wood for details

**Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April** - Committee meeting : - Travellers Call, Bredbury. Starts 8.30pm

## MARCH 2002

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup>** - Branch meeting : Station, Warrington Street, Ashton-U-Lyne. 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 11<sup>th</sup>** - Knutsford Pub Crawl: Legh Arms. 7.30, Builders 8.00, Cross Keys 8.45, and then by agreement.

**Monday 25<sup>th</sup>** - Campaigning Meeting: Harrington Arms, Gawsworth. Starts 8.00pm.

**Monday 8<sup>th</sup> April** - Spring Pub of the Season presentation to Beartown Brewery Tap, Congleton. 8.00pm onwards.

### Regional Event

**Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> April** - Regional AGM and Social: Stalybridge Station Buffet. Starts 8.0pm. All local CAMRA branches to send representatives, please



To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner

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# Gothic

## BAR & GRILL

61-61A CHURCH RD  
GATLEY, SK8 4NB

TELEPHONE:  
0161 491 1966

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**QUIZ NIGHT EVERY WEDNESDAY**

**ENTRY ONLY £1.00**

Price includes hot supper • Everyone welcome

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AWARD WINNING ALES  
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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT LORRAINE ON 0161 491 1966



We hear that the 'Arches', formerly the 'Ups and Downs', and originally the Wellington on Wellington Road South is due to reopen shortly. One of the problems with this pub over the years is that the various people who have taken it on seem to have had lots of ideas but not enough money to put them into practice properly, when what the pubs needs (and you'll not read this very often in OT) is a complete gutting and refit. It will be interesting to see what happens this time around. The District Licensed Traders' Bowling Club (incorporating Stockport & Macclesfield) needs new members for the 2002 season for the matches to be played on Thursdays 3-00pm to 6-00pm every week. The first match is on 11th April at "The Victoria Bowling Club", Webb Lane, Offerton. Just turn up and make yourself known or contact the Secretary, M Johns, at the Ring O'Bells, Marple (0161 427 2300).

We bid a belated welcome to new licensees Tony and Helen Dunn took over the *Queens* in Cheadle on Thursday 29th November, moving from the Unity in Stockport. Prior to this they also had a spell at the Travellers Call on Hyde road in Gorton. There are no immediate plans for change but in due course they hope to have central heating installed and for the pub to under go a much needed refurbishment. As the brewery also owns Roseby's shoes next door long-term plans could see a redevelopment of these premises.

Regular trips to Italy may seem ideal for some but, for Stephen Robins, the new manager of the *Cock* in Hazel Grove, Stockport wins hands down. "For the past 29 years I've been driving trucks and making deliveries to Italy and Sicily," he says. "It has been a good job but now I'm really looking forward to spending more time in the place I like best." Stephen has now moved from his house in Marple to take up residence at the Robbies pub, which he will be managing for the licensee Elizabeth Nimoy. "I've known Elizabeth for years and have occasionally worked for her at pubs she has kept in the past," he said. "The timing couldn't have been better because just as she needed a manager for the *Cock* I was looking for a new job. It was a perfect opportunity so I jumped at the chance". (Our picture shows Steve receiving his training certificate from brewery director David Robinson).



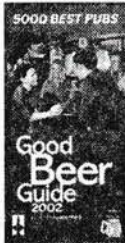
The *Kings Head* on Tiviot Dale is a pub that's on the up and up. Offering no real ale for years, things changed for the better at the Pyramid Pub Co outlet last October with the arrival of licensee Debbie Marshall and her partner Tony Catling. Debbie, who does all the cellar work herself, asked for handpumps to be reinstated and the pub now offers three cask ales. The two regulars are Worthington Best Bitter and Draught Bass at £1.65 and £1.75 a pint respectively, and when OT called the Bass was on fine form. These two have been joined by Burtonwood Top Hat which it is planned to rotate with Courage Directors, both of which retail at £1.65. Call between 4 and 7pm Tuesday to Thursday and you'll get all the beers for 20p less.

While this is Debbie's first pub in her own right, she has plenty of experience under her belt having worked as a bar cellarperson at several local pubs including the Old King on Portwood. She was in fact offered several pubs but wanted one in Stockport and the *Kings* appealed, as it's a good old-fashioned pub. "A beer drinkers' pub" as Debbie describes it.

Her initiative is paying off as sales are now picking up and the next step is to introduce pub food at the end of this month or early in April. Open all permitted hours, the *Kings Head* is well worth a visit.

The refurbishment of the *Navigation*, Lancashire Hill, is now complete. The pub has been redecorated throughout and now looks better than it has done for years. The bright green paint in the vault has died a deserved death and the room is now bright without wanting to make you ill. The lounge side has been decorated in the subdued autumn shades that always work well in pubs, with new wallpaper, carpet, curtains and seating.

There are also some fascinating photos showing the pub at various stages in its history. A special mention should go to landlady Angella Lindsay who spent several hours removing years of grime from the brass foot rail around the bar. Give her a medal!



**GOOD BEER GUIDE 2002 - ONLY £12.99 (including p&p)**  
 As You plan this year's trips out & holidays - Why not buy this year's New Look Good Beer Guide! Packed full of the descriptions of the best pubs in Britain, and all real ale breweries - together with articles on subjects as varied as rural pubs, and Britain's contribution to the world of beer. The Good Beer Guide 2002 is the perfect gift for any pub-goer or real-ale drinker.

Send a cheque made payable to: CAMRA, Stockport & South Manchester to: CAMRA (GBG), 66 Downham Rd., Heaton Chapel, Stockport. Cheshire SK4 5EG



## APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP

(Opening Times 215)

I / We wish to join the Campaign for Real Ale Limited, and agree to abide by its rules.

NAME (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms) . . . . . Date of Birth . . . . .

PARTNER (Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms) . . . . . Date of Birth . . . . .

ADDRESS . . . . .

POSTCODE . . . . .

TELEPHONE . . . . . SIGNATURE . . . . .

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO CAMRA

SINGLE £ 16  JOINT £19  UNDER 26 / OAP: SINGLE £ 9  JOINT (both must qualify) £13

**Send To: Paul Moss, 60 Adelaide Road, Bramhall, Stockport SK7 1LU**

**(Marple & High Peak Area to: Tom Lord, 5 Vernon Drive, Marple SK6 6JH)**



# The Beer House

Telephone 0161 839 7019

6 Angel Street Manchester (off Rochdale Road)

Open 11.30am till 11pm

Okay so you didn't hear it hear first...  
Please welcome Yvonne Heywood as the new Landlady of the  
Beerhouse!!

( Best wishes and get well soon to Lynne & Allan)

Yvonne ( don't call her Vonnie) has already revamped the jukebox, got a  
new chef, and delivered her first beer festival to exacting  
standards...so what next??



In addition to the extensive range of cask ales available we will be  
running the

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**WIN A FIRKIN OF THE MYSTERY BEER IF YOU CORRECTLY  
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\*In the case of 2 or more correct answers the judges will decide the winner on the  
tiebreak question..

Go on have a Craic it's the season of the Mad March Hare  
afterall.