



OPENING TIMES



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FREE

TIME RUNNING OUT FOR LICENSING REFORM?

The clock is ticking on licensing reform...and unless Tony Blair's Government can be held to its promise to act soon, time could run out for longer pub opening hours in England and Wales.

Culture Secretary Kim Howells has unveiled a full set of proposals, including concessions for licensees who feared the new dual licensing system would suffocate them in red tape, which he aims to see introduced by July 2004.

But now there are fears that despite Government promises to act on licensing reform early in this Parliament, his Bill might not be included in the Queen's Speech due on 13th of this month. And if that happens, the whole package of reform, including the abolition of permitted hours, is in real danger of being swept away by the next General Election.

Now CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, is urging its members to put overwhelming weight behind a move by Lib Dem MP Lembit Opik to make sure that licensing reform doesn't fall off the Government's agenda. He is tabling an Early Day Motion expressing support for the reform proposals.

CAMRA Public Affairs Manager Jonathan Mail explained: "If licensing reform is in the Queen's Speech it should become law by next summer, and there will be a transition period of at least a year while it is brought into force. "If it is postponed for a year, there's a very real risk that the transition period will be overtaken by the next General Election and the work necessary to implement it simply won't be done. Local and community pubs are at a significant disadvantage to town-centre venues with late licenses. To give them a chance to compete more fairly we need this measure as soon as possible."

New Year Setback

Campaigners for more flexible hours suffered another blow last month when it emerged that once again the Government has left too late legislation guaranteeing the now traditional New Year 36-hour opening. For the third year running, pubs will not know until the very last minute whether they are able for the extended period over the celebrations because the plans are still to be debated in the House of Commons.

It now seems unlikely that the government will be unable to say for sure whether extended hours have been granted until the first week of December, which will leave pubs with very little time to arrange entertainment and parties for the New Year period. A spokesman for the Department of Culture, Media & Sport said that while the government was unable to confirm when the legislation would be passed, it was still on track to go through before New Year.

"It's been delayed but the two Houses are looking at it. The House of Lords has reported back, and its report is favourable," she said.

Meanwhile solicitors and magistrates are advising licensees to apply for special orders of exemption, namely an extension of hours until 12.20am on January 1, in case the extension is not approved in time.

BODDIES SAVED FOR MANCHESTER

As Opening Times went to press, news broke of a last minute deal to keep all brewing of Boddingtons Bitter at Manchester's Strangeways brewery.

Last month we reported that Interbrew, owner of the Boddingtons Brewery and the beer brand, planned to run down production of beer at the Manchester brewery, and from April 2004, retain only the cask (real-ale) version in Manchester, brewing the keg and 'smooth' versions at their plant in Magor, South Wales.

Apart from the job losses, this would have meant the Manchester brewery running at only an uneconomic 20% capacity, and this led to fears over the brewery's long-term future.

The result of Interbrew's change of heart is that although the brewery in Manchester will see some job losses, these should involve "natural wastage" and some transfers to the Salmesbury (Preston) brewery, with (hopefully) no compulsory redundancies. The positive result was announced after five hours of talks between the company and the union (TGWU) and vociferous local protest, led by (among others) Manchester City Council, CAMRA and the Manchester Evening News who raised thousands of signatures for petitions which were sent to Interbrew's Belgian headquarters.

T & G union officer Franny Joyce said: "We campaigned to keep production of Boddies in Manchester and that is what we have done."



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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

This month we should finally find out if the government is serious about licensing reform. The signs are good but then again we have been here before only to see everything fall at the last fence.

There have been some concerns in the trade that the reforms may lead to extra costs for pubs and this would certainly be unwelcome to say the least. On top of that there is a right old battle being fought over plans to move licensing in general from the magistrates to local councils and the jury must be out as to whether or not this is a good thing. Local authorities have had control in Scotland for several years and that doesn't appear to have been a disaster so there's no reason why problems should be encountered here.

The main bonus for local drinkers will be the extended hours available. We won't be seeing the round-the-clock binge drinking prophesied by the temperance lobby, instead most pubs will opt for sensible and modest extensions to midnight or 1am at weekends. This is a welcome and long overdue reform.

We report in this issue on the changes planned to the Hogshead - or should that now be Hog's Head - chain. There is very little mention of cask ale in these plans although we understand that a commitment has been given that real ale will remain although it seems certain that the number of beers will be restricted. Earlier reports suggested that a minimum sale of two containers a week of any particular beer would be needed before it was stocked. Of equal concern are the other proposed changes and the gushing terms in which they are expressed. Those readers with long memories may feel that the spirit of Pennine Hosts is with us here.

John Clarke

Just as the final brews of Brakspear were quaffed, before the ersatz Warrington stuff made its appearance, came news that Boddingtons was to become the "Cream of Magor". Within CAMRA there were mixed feelings about this. Boddingtons is NOT the beer it once was, indeed its now a sad apology for the hoppy session brew of yesteryear, it has been run down by the original company, Whitbread who bought it, and now Interbrew who bought it from them. 80% of production is now keg, nitrokeg or can. What a travesty. But it will at least continue (for the present) to be brewed in Manchester, for which I suppose we can raise one and a half cheers. Perhaps having kept it here, we can now hope to start a similar campaign to put the taste back into the beer?

P.B. Hutchings

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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 CD-R, 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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Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for November is the Plough Hotel on Hyde Road, Gorton.

This Grade 2 listed building has been a pub for at least 200 years (brewery records show it changing hands in 1802!) and for most of the past 50 years it was threatened by proposals to widen Hyde Road. Campaigning efforts by CAMRA and other interested bodies helped save the day and prevent the demolition of this historic gem.

The lack of investment during the long period of threat helped preserve the many historic features of the pub. From the outside the pub may look quite plain, but within there is a wealth of etched and cut glass, ornate tiling and other Victorian features, largely unchanged since the pub was refitted in 1893. There's a fine lobby with three rooms off (the pool room having been converted from a former kitchen) but the heart and sole of the pub is the large vault with parquet floor, bench seating and carved mahogany bar. There are now plans to gently refurbish the pub, bringing the toilets inside and restoring many of the features.

None of this means that the pub is some cold museum piece. Far from it - this is a thriving community local with lots of charity work for the local area and hosting darts, crib and dominoes teams. Of course, behind every successful pub you need good licensees and the Plough is lucky to have Tony and Linda Lindsey at the helm. They have been there about 3½ years and during that time real ale sales have about tripled as the pub's fortunes have revived. Robinson's Hatters and Best Bitter are on handpump and these have recently been joined by a cask of Old Tom on the bar. Beer quality is invariably top notch - it was so good on a recent Stagger that the end of the itinerary most of us went back to the Plough for more. This award will be presented on Thursday 28 November from 8.00pm when a busy and entertaining night is promised. DP.

The Plough is well served by public transport. From Stockport buses 203 and 42A (Heatons/Reddish) will take you there and from Manchester all of the Hyde Road buses (201, 203, 204, 205) stop nearby. In addition services 166, 168 and 168 will drop you near Gorton Market from where it's only a short walk down Wellington Street to the pub. For rail travellers, Belle Vue Station is only a short walk down Hyde Road.

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

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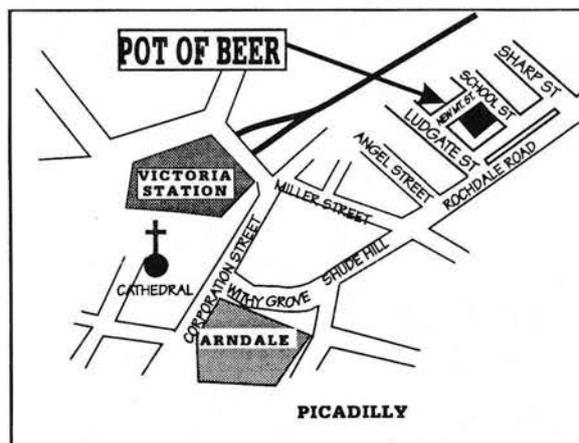
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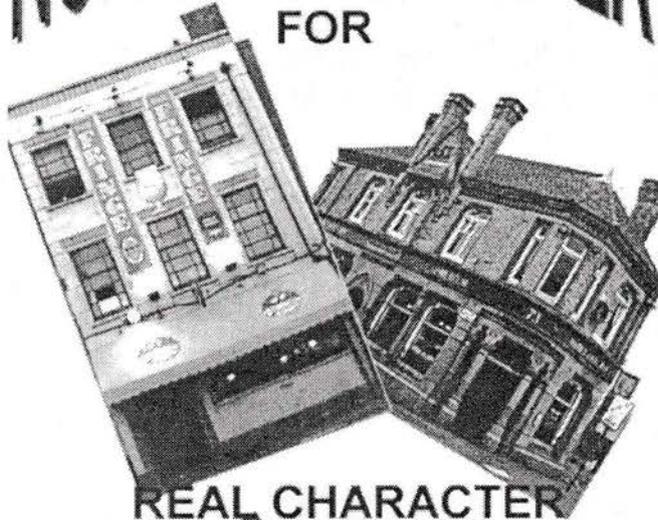
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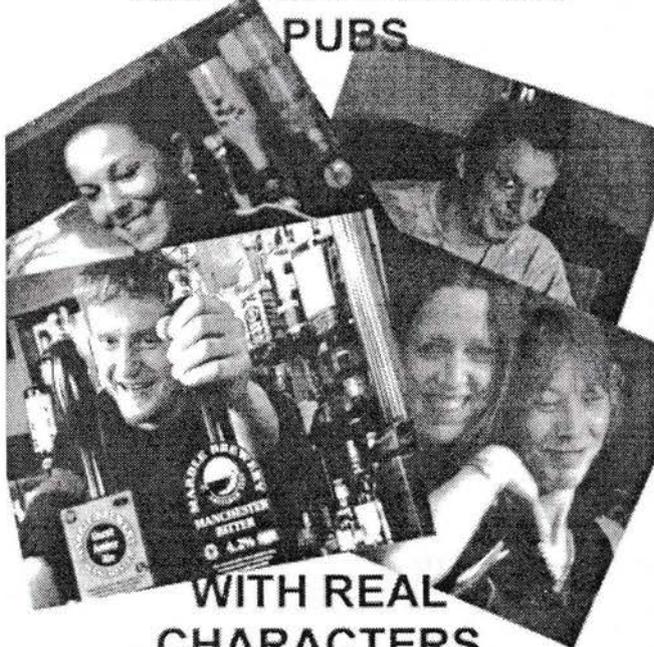


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with Jim Flynn

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If you are going on a pub crawl around the University area, and also want to get served quickly in most of the pubs, then August is the month to pick.

Given that it was the holiday season, it was a surprisingly large group of us who met up at the **Whitworth** on Moss Lane East. The pub has been opened up over the years but not to the extent that it has lost its multi-roomed character. There's a beer garden at the back, too, although we chose to sit inside. Possible a mistake as at times conversation was difficult over the unnecessarily loud music – after all we were almost the only customers so just who were they hoping to entertain? There were three cask beers – Marston's Bitter and Pedigree plus a guest beer, Brakspear's Special. We all went for the latter and found it in good condition. The evening had started well.

Further down Moss Lane is Hydes' **Denmark**, our next stop. This open-plan pub had a robust but not unpleasant atmosphere despite the Alsatian pup padding around the lounge where we sat (can't you tell I'm not really a dog lover?). The feature of the lounge (other than the dog) is the sloping, varnished wood ceiling, giving the pub a slightly incongruous country feel. The only cask beer as Hydes Bitter, which was reasonable enough.

Retracing our steps, we cut through Whitworth Park to Oxford Road and to the **Hogshead** in the heart of the University area. The pub is typical of the chain with a predominance of bare brick and wood over two floors. One interesting feature is that the toilets are in the basement and on your way to pay a visit you can see the pub cellar through a large window in the corridor. Four cask beers were available – Hook Norton Old Hooky, Caledonian Deuchars IPA, Boddingtons Commonwealth Ale and Boddies Bitter. Between us we tried all but the Boddingtons Bitter and found the Old Hooky to be the pick of the bunch. Particularly commendable was the keenness of the staff to top up the beer and ensure full measure. Moving out of the immediate area of the University, we walked up Grafton Street to the **Grafton**. Unfortunately for us, the new licensees were refurbishing the lounge and we had arrived a week early for its reopening. We crowded into the pretty typical Holt's vault and drank the bitter, which attracted a variety of opinions. Some of us had initially tried the mild but found it close to undrinkable, although to be fair it was changed without any problem. Having had not dissimilar problems here over the years you do have to wonder whether it's really a pub for cask mild at all. Further up Grafton Street is the **Bowling Green**, a 'Porter Ale House', although sadly nothing to do with the excellent Porter Brewing Co. No, this was a 'brand' of Greenalls when they still ran pubs, and what a disappointment this place was tonight. Almost deserted and only indifferent Flowers Original on sale. Perhaps it has more atmosphere when the students are around but for now the less said about this pub the better.

Our next port of call, the **Mawson**, across Upper Brook Street on Kincardine Road, was a complete contrast. No sign of student life here (although some probably use it), this brilliant community local oozes character and atmosphere. Certainly my favourite pub of the Stagger, the multiroomed in-



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terior is largely unspoilt with many original features, and is also one of the few pubs on this side of Upper Brook Street still serving cask beer. Tetley Bitter, Mild (yes, mild!) and Coach House Dick Turpin were all on handpump and between us we tried them all. They were as good as the pub itself. As we left the landlady chased after us, shouting for us to go back and have more beer! If there hadn't been more pubs to cover, we would all have found it almost impossible to resist her request.

Tearing ourselves away we returned to the University area and a refurbished **Jabez Clegg**, and yet another contrast. This former church hall with its long bar and bench seating is packed in term time, but it August getting a seat was relatively easy. Two cask beers were on sale and not the 'usual suspects' but instead Moorhouses Premier Bitter and Taylor's Landlord, both of which were well up to the standard you would expect from these beers. Moving back to Oxford Road, **Kro Bar** was next, a modern conversion of the old Manchester Temperance Society with plenty of chrome and pale colours. I have to declare this is just not my cup of tea (or glass of beer) but some of our party rave about the place (*including me - Ed(1)*). We resisted the temptation to drink inside, either in the more traditional upstairs room or the bar areas downstairs, but chose instead to sit outside on what was a very warm evening. Unusually, the only cask beer was John Smith's Cask which, as ever, was pretty average. Later, when most of our party had already departed, Theakstons Cool Cask and Gales Summer Hog came on. I quickly tried the Gales and found it much better than the John Smiths (no surprise there, then).

As some of the Staggerers went for last buses, most went to the last pub of the evening, **Sand Bar** on Grosvenor Street. This conversion of two old town houses has often featured in these pages. Notable for a bohemian atmosphere (there is usually an art exhibition on the walls), good cask beers and a large selection of continental beers, both on draught and it bottle, the place was heaving, although we were able to get seats outside. Most of us finished the night on a variety of refreshing wheat beers in bottle although those trying the cask offerings, Cropton Two Pints, Jennings Cock-a-Hoop and Phoenix White Monk, weren't disappointed either.

Thus ended a varied Stagger, with a wide variety of pubs and beers. Most of them didn't disappoint and would repay a return visit, after all this article can only be a snapshot of what we found on one particular night and can't be taken as a once and for all judgement on either the pubs or their beers. Why not visit them yourselves and see how much you (dis)agree.



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NATIONAL NEWS

Hogshead Revolution

It looks like the end of the road for the Hogshead chain as multi-beer freehouse style operations. Owners Laurel Pub Company have unveiled their new look for the chain which is to be rolled out across the chain's entire 111 outlets in the next year.

The pubs are to be renamed Hog's Heads and the old Hogshead barrel will be disappearing from pub frontages to be replaced by Harry Hog "a figure which symbolises the new emphasis on personality-led service". This will be supplied by "Hoggers", front of bar staff on duty from 9pm Thursday, Friday and Saturday offering table service and who will earn commission by selling "shooters and platters". The Hoggers will also be encouraged to interact with "guests" (that's customers) by, for example, playing table football and Connect Four.

Other design changes include the introduction of more sofas and chairs plus "additional vertical drinking stations". Walls will become a "backdrop for the offer" - photographs will feature "fun or stupid images such as clowns" to reinforce the feelgood atmosphere. Plasma screens will show videos selected by a focus group composed of target audience members. Harry the Hog, shown moonwalking and flipping - will be projected from the front of the pub. "He provides a bit of personality and provides us with a language" says Karen Forrester, the architect of the new-look pubs. You couldn't make it up.

Binge Drinking

According to Ross Cranston, MP for Dudley North, who is a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on alcohol misuse, the demise of the traditional pub has led to the growth in binge-drinking among teenagers.

The move away from community locals towards trendy high street bars was at the root of the modern binge-drinking culture. If youngsters drank in a community pub where there are often organised social activities, they would be drinking less, he argues. Mr Cranston said there was evidence that factors such as happy hours and loud music in modern bars were also encouraging binge-drinking. His views followed the release of research by Alcohol Concern called 100 per cent Proof. The research revealed that unsafe drinking among 16-24 year old women had more than doubled, with young men's drinking up by over a third.

Pressure on Customs

The Government is coming under growing pressure to end the "stop and search" policy used by Customs to control duty-paid alcohol imports.

In an action brought by a ferry company, the High Court ruled that Customs had no right to search travellers at random, and said the "indicative limit" above which duty-paid imports are assumed to be for illegal resale was itself illegal. Customs is ignoring the ruling pending its appeal, and continues to seize vehicles belonging to anyone it suspects of smuggling.

Now the European Commission has said the policy is too harsh and says it may take Britain to the European Court of Justice. And in a House of Lords debate, Labour peer Lord Dubs said he thought the present system was "grotesquely unfair". Lib Dem peer Lord Newby said: "The only options are to accept that nothing can be done or to look at a strategy which might lead to lesser differentials on duties between this country and the rest of the EU."

Brakspears Shuts

Brewing has now ceased at Brakspear's historic Henley-on-Thames brewery. The Brakspear beers are now brewed in the north west at the Thomas Hardy Burtonwood brewery near Warrington. For several weeks prior to closure the Brakspear beers were apparently a blend of Burtonwood and Henley beers. No reports yet as to how the Burtonwood versions compare with the classic Brakspears of old.

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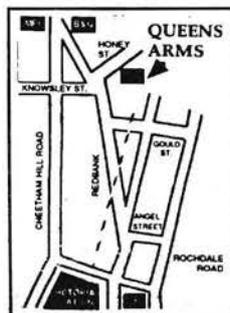
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Stockie on The che

By John
Taylor



Champions of the Stockport Licensed Houses Super League, Reddish WMC, are presently leading the table by four points. After week 15 of the fixtures they are still the only unbeaten team in the league, but in week 12 they came very close to losing that record when they entertained fourth placed Magnet.

The visitors took the first three games of the match through Geoff Millward with legs of 18 & 23, and a 180; Alan Riley (16 & 21) and Martin James (24 & 17). The league leaders showed why they are currently the best team in Stockport as they won the final four pairings. Vic Clegg led the way (19 & 15), including two maximum scores. He was well supported by son Brad (17 & 25), Neil Hunter with two legs of 23 darts, and Dave Becket who came from a leg down to win the last two of the evening in 19 & 21 darts. There were 51 tons or over scored in the match. Great entertainment and two more points for the champs.

Also in week 12, England International Tony O'Shea went out in legs of 11 & 16 for the Union Inn and a match average of 37.11 per dart. It was the second week on the trot that Tony had hit an 11 darter.

In week 13, the half-way stage in the season, bottom placed Jack & Jill were at home to the Royal Mortar. The result was never in doubt, but the way the Mortar won was nothing short of ruthless. They dropped only one leg in the entire match, with the magnificent seven winning as follows: Phil Butler (20 & 19), Pete Woodin (23 & 19), John Hollins (18 & 19), Darryl Fitton (17 & 15), Tony Daniels (19 & 18), Chris North (20 & 19) and Mark Turner (21 & 20). Those wins included outshots of 146 by Daniels, 131 by North and 110 by Hollins. Fitton hit his tenth 180 of the season and we are only half-way.

Week 13 also saw CAMRA Pub of the Year, the Nursery Inn, pull off a much needed win against the high flying Bobby Peel. The scoreline was 4-3 and saw wins for Frank Devlin, Alan Howarth, Pete Webb (24 & 23) and Andy Proctor (20 & 21) plus a 180. In reply Bren Shields (22 & 21) and a 180, landlord Paul Cretney (24 & 26) and Eric Stubbs all won for the Edgeley team.

The following week saw the Jack & Jill lose again, this time 5-2 to the Bobby Peel. Captain Dennis Kidd did all he could to encourage his side by winning in legs of 17 & 16, hitting a 180 and having a 136 outshot. It was alone battle, though, and is one which is seeing this team slowly slide back into the Premier Division. Best for the Bobby Peel were Steve Lyons (25 & 21) and Mick Clooney (24 & 20). The Royal Mortar beat Club Leisure 7-0 without dropping a leg - they're getting boring now. Best of the match was Chris North (21 & 16). It was also the battle of the clubs as Reddish beat North Reddish 6-1 with Dave Beckett having an outshot of 141, and the Union Inn defeated the Nursery 6-1 (the real ale must have been off) as captain John McArdle won in 17 & 19 for the Union.

Week 15 saw the Printers Arms return to losing ways after recording two wins on the trot against Greg Street and Club Leisure. But they couldn't beat the Copperfields 'A' who had Gary Edgerton and Rob Hollinshead both winning in 24 & 22, and Cliff Cartwright with two legs of 24 darts. Best for the Printers was mister reliable himself, Derek Elliott (24 & 19) and veteran Pete Cave (29 & 27). The champions again deprive the Nursery of 'real sustenance' and beat them 6-1. Never mind, they are playing at home again next week. Neil Hunter hit a 149 for the club, but the big surprise of the week was the 5-2 home defeat of the Magnet by the resurgent Royal Oak. This team recently suffered the death of one of their players, Steve Gamble, at the early age of 33, but this tragic loss appears to have rallied the team and this latest win lifts them to the dizzy heights of ninth in the league. Well done to them. Winners on the night were Paddy Hackett and a 180, Alan Perkin, Darren Borthwick, Terry Clarke and my namesake John Taylor. Best darts of the match came from Derek Higgins for the Magnet, who won in legs of 21 & 16.

Well, it's that time again. Thanks for taking time out to read this article. See you soon - John Taylor.

Steve, Johanne, Molly &
sometimes Jess welcome you to

Ye Olde Vic

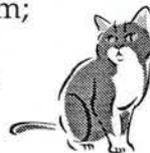
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7

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New Seasonals

It's time for a new clutch of seasonal beers from our local family brewers who also of course historically produced some excellent winter warmers.

Robinson's new beer for November and December is a reprise of Robin Bitter, back for the third time and one of the more successful beers from Robbies. It is darker than the usual Best Bitter, a little stronger with a full body and malty dryness which makes for a satisfying yet easily quaffable beer. Of course this is also the real start of the Old Tom season – and this powerful strong ale seems to appear in more pubs every year. Try it in the brewery tap, the Spread Eagle on Hillgate where you'll get it in a 1967 vintage nip glass if you're lucky.

Lees are also reprising one of their most popular seasonal ales. Plum Pudding is a 4.8% rich dark beer "brewed with a hint of fruit especially for the festive season". Yes, there are plums in it but they just add a subtle fruitiness rather than being overpowering. One of the most successful British fruit beers and worth seeking out – Rain Bar in the City Centre will certainly have it. Don't forget Lees regular strong ale, Moonraker (7.5%), which really comes into its own at this time of year, and of course there's the bottled Vintage Harvest Ale made from the new season's hops and malted barley. If you're very lucky you'll find it on draught but bottles are usually the norm – and be warned, it is a huge 11.5% alcohol.

The new one from Hydes is Winter Fuggle at 5%. Their November/December special is usually darker and stronger than those for the rest of the year, so expect something special. Last year's Dutch Courage was particularly memorable. There's also a chance that Hydes may rebrew their famous XXXX Anvil Strong Ale this year.



Holt's are sticking with the new Thunderbolt for the time being. This dark, rich 4.5% beer certainly seems to be dividing opinion. Some confirmed Holts drinkers can't stand the stuff but on the other hand OT knows of at least one confirmed Holts hater who thought it was great – "At last, a Holts beer I like!". So, you pays your money and takes your choice.



Micro Magic

As ever, our local micros have plenty of new beers to tickle your tastebuds. **Phoenix** – firm favourites Snowbound (4.3%) and Porter (5%) are due out soon but will be a little delayed this year as Phoenix are still involved with a Wetherspoon's promotion for the award winning Navy and will ale feature with the Beer Seller for November, too. Towards the end of this month look out for the seasonal beers Golden Glow (6.5%) and the mighty Humbug (7%). A new, as yet unnamed, festive beer at 5% will also be produced.

Phoenix are also celebrating Beer of the Festival wins for White Monk which picked up the honours at both Northwich and, further afield, the 13th Yapton Beerex in Sussex.

Boggart Hole Clough – As usual there are a clutch of new beers in the pipeline. Coming soon is Bogwater a 5.2% winter stout and, at the end of November, two beers for the Christmas season, Bogsleigh a 6% 'Irish' red' style beer plus a still-to-be-named 4.5% seasonal.

Bank Top – now settled in their new premises, there are no new beers scheduled for the immediate future although Santa's Claws (5%) will be back for Christmas. Bank Top is also helping the Old Laxey Brewing Co from the Isle of Man. They contacted John explaining there had been a disaster and the brewery was under three feet of water! As a result, John has brewed Old Laxey's Bosuns Bitter and when OT called was facing shipping out 15 18-gallon barrel from Heysham at 2.15am! For those who care about such things, this will presumably be a new 'tick' but since all the beer is set to be sold on the Isle of Man, a fair amount of travelling will be needed to get it.



Bazens' Brewery – seems to be going great guns. Navigator has been renamed Pacific Bitter but is otherwise unchanged. Both the Freshers beer and Best Bitter (4.5%) are selling very successfully and new beers are in the pipeline. Black Pig Mild will be out early this month and may be available at the Smithfield in Manchester. Orders are also in for the porter which will also be available soon. The name is to be Nowles Porter, named after the family which used to own the Agecroft mine.

Pictish – last month's special, Alchemists Ale, proved very popular and it has to be said it was a great beer. The Crown, Heaton Lane, shifted nine gallons in just 1 3/4 hours. There was also an 'extra' last month in the shape of Samhain Stout, bone dry and highly quaffable. This month there's another brand new beer, Z-Rod, 4.8%, pale with full malt flavours and the trademark Pictish hoppy finish. Richard Sutton tells us that business is booming to such an extent that he is having to turn away customers!



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The Pot of Beer

The Pot Of Beer (New Mount St, City Centre) has been a long-time favourite of this column, primarily down to the unusual Polish food menu which gained the pub something of a national profile. All that changed some six months ago and it was high time for a return visit to see how the replacement menu was bedding down.

The changes took place with the arrival as managers of Sue and Paul Higginson, who faced the task of rebuilding the pub's reputation after something of a roller coaster ride during the previous year. At the same time Wanda Ward, of owners Ward Taverns, felt unable to continue with her Polish food due to other business commitments. The additional loss of this unique selling point could have been another, perhaps fatal, blow to the pub's fortunes.

That the Pot is not only still with us, but is once again beginning to thrive, is a tribute to the steady dedication and hard work put in by Sue and Paul. Beer sales are clearly up and quality is as good as ever. The only regular cask beer is now Robinson's Dark Mild and this can be joined by up to four guests. The list of guest bottled beers is also worth a mention. Small, but perfectly formed perhaps sums this up, with the likes of Fraoch and Kelpie from Heather Ales side by side with more exotic offerings from overseas and traditional English ales like White Shield. Brooklyn Lager from the USA looks to be a recent addition as are the two new bottled beers, Northern Glory and Double Hop, from Robinson's.

But what of the food, you may ask. The plan six months ago was to feature simple, high quality meals using all fresh ingredients, hopefully making use of connections Sue and Paul had with North West Fine Foods, an organisation representing small and often specialist farmers.

And that is precisely what they have done with an interesting menu featuring a range of traditional dishes. These range from the exotic - Wild Boar and Pheasant Pie (£5.25), Venison in Red Wine (£5.50) to the more mainstream, for example Gammon and Egg (£3.50) of Galloway Steak & Kidney Pie (£4.25). I was seriously considering the Arbroath Smokie (£5.95) but the filthy weather outside pointed to something more comforting - so Wild Boar & Pheasant Pie it had to be. This was ordered with mash (from a choice of potatoes) and veg.

Side by side with the main menu is the sausage menu. Priced at £3.95 you get two sausages on a pile of mash with onion gravy and veg. Again the choice runs from the more mainstream to the likes of Duck and Orange, Pork and Black Pudding and, for veggies, Stilton Walnut and the oddly named 'Hot Lips', which is in fact Beetroot with chilli. My companion of this occasion chose the Duck & Orange.

There then followed quite a wait. Commendably, the Pot serves food until 9.30pm, Monday to Friday, but most of the trade is at lunchtimes so in the evenings most of your meal will be prepared to order, hence the delay. This did however give us time to enjoy the beers on offer and it must be said that the food was most definitely worth the wait.

The pie was a proper slice of pie, full of tender succulent game in a rich gravy. Excellent. The sausages were meaty and full flavoured and done to a turn. Both meals came with a pile of mash, flavour-some gravy and a huge pile of ribboned carrots. All first class, but the start turn was the mash. Creamy, sensuous but not at all heavy, this was mash to die for. The secret? "Oh, just lots of butter, double cream and some nutmeg", explained Paul. In fact he thought there might be less fat in his chips than the mash!

After this, I unusually had no room for pudding. This was a real wrench as the three on offer - Chocolate Sponge with Rum and Honey, Black Cherry and Amaretto Crepe, Minto Choc Chip Ice Cream, all £2 - £2.25, sounded rather special.

I've promised to go back and do the menu rather more justice (OK, for that read pig out on a pud) but I'm please to see this fine little pub once again firing on all cylinders. All it need now is lots more customers - with a quality operation like this, I'm sure they won't be long in arriving.

The Pot of Beer is on New Mount Street which is off Ludgate St which in turn is off Rochdale Road, between the Beer House and the Marble Arch pubs. Phone on 0161 834 8579.

Robinson's COMPETITION

Old Tom Strong Ale is the award-winning winter warmer brewed using traditional methods and only the finest ingredients to produce a smooth, mellow ale with a dark winey colour.



As the long, cold nights set in, we're offering you the chance to give yourself an inner glow by winning a tray of Old Tom in our latest competition. Meanwhile, Ceri Dudley of Heaton Chapel receives a tray of Double Hop after winning our September competition.

To enter this month's competition, all you have to do is answer the following three questions.

1. To what abv is Old Tom brewed?
2. Which other ale in the Company's portfolio features a cat on its pump clip?
3. In which year did Old Tom last win the title:

Supreme Champion Winter Beer of Britain?

Send your answers by the end of the month to: Robinson's Competition, BHA, 94 Churchgate, Stockport, Cheshire, SK1 1YJ

Or by fax to 0161 477-0809
or e-mail info@barryhook.com
Normal competition rules apply

**HELP HOLD BACK THE NITROKEG TIDE!
JOIN CAMRA (PAGE 19) & DRINK REAL ALE**

9





CIDER & PERRY AWARDS

Mid-October saw a small group of branch members travel to the West country to present the awards for Cider and Perry of the Festival from this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival.



First stop was Hecks of Street, Somerset who won Perry of the Festival with their excellent Hendre Huffcap.



The next day was the turn of Denis Gwatkin at Abbeydore in deepest Herefordshire to get his Cider award for Yarlinton Mill. Out photographs show the winners with their well-deserved framed certificates.

A HEARTFELT APOLOGY

The Beer Monster™ and the staff of the Foreign Beer Bar at The CAMRA National Winter Ales Festival, held for the last four years at the Upper Campfield Market, Castlefield in January of each year would like to apologise for their non-appearance in 2003. Manchester City Council have seen fit to lease the hall to the local Aerospace Museum for use as a storage space, and have failed in their vague promises to offer us alternative sites. The 2003 National Winter Ales Festival has therefore moved, and will be held at Burton on Trent on roughly the same dates, sadly without our presence.

ADVERTISING IN THE 2003 STOCKPORT PUB GUIDE

This will be the third edition of Camra's Guide to Stockport Pubs, 'Viaducts and Vaults' - The first two each won awards and sold out and we are very confident that our new edition will be equally as successful. This edition will be published in early June 2003 with a print run of 2000 copies.

Advertising in the Guide will enable businesses in and around Stockport to promote their company within their local core market at highly competitive rates. Each reader will use the book time and time again bringing the companies who advertise and their products to mind each time. In order to maintain the integrity of the Guide no advertisements can be accepted from pubs.

If you are interested please ring Jim Flynn on: 0161 432 1816 (evenings) or write to him at: 66 Downham Rd, Heaton Chapel, Stockport, Cheshire, SM 5EG.

Closing date for advertising copy is the end of November 2002.

LOCAL PUBS GAIN TOP AWARDS

Two local pubs in the OT area have recently received prestigious awards. In the annual City Life Food & Drink Awards, the top honour was taken by the Queens Arms, Redbank, Cheetham. This is a particularly noteworthy win as their was strong competition from two other OT area pubs, the Marble Arch on Rochdale Road and the Royal Oak in Didsbury. Sue Price from the Queens described the occasion to OT:

"Last night I attended Manchester's Town Hall for a Tattling champagne reception. This was the Manchester Food and Drink City Life awards. I do not think you would have recognised me as I wore a very posh dress and you know me, happy in jeans.

Following several glasses of champagne I sat down to a delicious 5-course meal. After this Tony Wilson hosted the awards ceremony. I was sat at a table that included our weekday cook Carol, John Henley and Phil from Marble Beer Co. The three nominees being the Marble Arch Rochdale Road, the Queens Arms Redbank (ourselves) and the Royal Oak at Didsbury. Our category was about four from the end and you can imagine the tension when this came up.

Sue and Dave Price at The Queens with the City Life Pub of the Year Award (and son)



John and I cheered very loudly as the presenter complimented the independent pubs. He read out the nominees and almost immediately opened the envelope. "The Queens Arms" he read. Well, I stood up and squealed with delight, then hugged everybody. I grabbed Carol's hand and dragged her on to the stage with me where the presenter got down on one knee to present the award (I presume it's the royalty aspect).

The frightening bit was the speech, which I kept very short, as I had not prepared anything, because I had no idea we had won this. I cannot actually remember the speech but the gist was to thank the hard work of the staff" Dave and Sue were still pretty gobsmacked when OT caught up with them but it has to be said it's great that City Life, a magazine which often seems more concerned with the latest café bars opening in Chorlton rather than the very strong city pub scene, has recognised the qualities of not only the Queens but also the Marble Arch and the Royal Oak, too. Well done to all concerned. Our photograph shows Dave and Sue with their award.

It was shortly after this award that news came of another tribute to the strong city pub scene. This time courtesy of the Good Pub Guide, which named the Britons Protection on Great Bridgewater Street as its Town Pub of the Year. The pub was lavished with praise by Guide readers who commented on the friendly, accommodating service and the sociable welcoming atmosphere. Again our congratulations go to licensee Peter Barnett and all at the pub.

CAMRA REGIONAL PUB OF THE YEAR

As reported in September's Opening Times, once again the Regional Pub of the Year is in our circulation area, this time being the Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year, the Porter Brewing Co. Railway in Portwood Stockport. Licensee Alex Lord is shown with his well-deserved trophy, presented on the 5th October last month.



HOP FEAST IN DURHAM

Durham drinkers know it. Yorkshire drinkers know it. And after the CAMRA Stockport Beer Festival, Stockport drinkers know it too.

Know what? The fact that Durham Brewery makes the most wonderful tasting beers you can imagine. Hardly any surprise therefore that Durham's White Amarillo (4.1%), their delicate and fragrant light session beer, was voted Beer of the Festival even though it sold out on the first day !!

As is traditional, the branch arranged a trip to the Brewery to present the owners, Steve and Christine Gibbs, with a certificate to mark their success and see how these excellent beers are made. The brewery is located in an industrial estate in Bowburn, five miles south of Durham and started out life in 1994 in one small unit. It now occupies three- the original area now being used for cask washing whilst the two larger units are used for the brewery and a cold store. Brewing is now conducted on a ten barrel plant and there are three brews each week utilising four fermenters where the beer remains for four to six days. Steve oversees the whole operation and produces the recipes whilst Christine concentrates on the sales side with a brewer and delivery man completing the team.

It is a far cry from those formative years when the brewery was started whilst Steve and Christine were both still music teachers. Education cuts were in the air and Steve decided that opening a brewery seemed a sensible thing to do as he had been an enthusiastic home brewer for some years.

Whilst the brewery provided a fallback, doing both jobs was nothing short of exhausting. Eventually, the inevitable happened on the teaching side, but unlike some of their colleagues, they both had something productive to do straight away. Education's loss and our gain- what a shame!

A look at the excellent website (address below) reveals a breathtaking array of beers. Steve takes a different line to many other micros who limit their products to a small number of beers. He likes to experiment with different flavours and when he finds a new type of hop will have no hesitation in producing a commercial batch of beer. The Festival winner, White Amarillo is one such case in point- Steve wanted to see what he could do with the Amarillo hop although a few Goldings are also added to give some spice.

Another of the White series, White Crystal (4.3%), was available for sampling. This is made with the aromatic American hop, Crystal, and results in a clean, spicy and refreshing beer with a magnificently hoppy finish. Little wonder that the sample pin ran out before we left!! The idea for the White series came after a pre-Christmas marketing slump- just the time when you would expect the orders to be rolling in. They were immediately successful and there are now nine of them with the prefix "White" plus some others such as their biggest seller Magus (3.8%) which was voted CAMRA Beer of the North East this year. This session beer contains a complex blend of English, American, Slovenian and Czech hops and is highly quaffable.

Unlike other brewers, Steve usually uses a low boil with a 2-3% evaporation rate (instead of around 10%) as this retains the hop flavours. And he is not averse to adding hops up to four times during the brewing process to give these beers their distinctive flavours. What a contrast to some of the nationally distributed beers which seem to taste as if hops don't figure in the recipe anymore.

Gold and Dark ranges are now being introduced and Evensong (5.0%) from the latter range was also available for sampling. This is a re-creation of a beer called Old Tom which was brewed by

Whitakers of Halifax in 1937 and whilst some of the ingredients cannot now be sourced, some first hand tasting information is still available. Using Goldings hops and dark malt, this is a dark ruby coloured beer which is sweet, but has a wonderful balancing hop bitterness. Yum, Yum



In short, Steve has now got to the stage where he can make the sort of beers he wants to make. All that experience means that he can tickle his recipes with some certainty to produce the flavours he wants - the days of trial and error are largely over. The good news is that in doing so he produces beers that are bursting with flavour and more importantly are appreciated by discerning beer drinkers. The bad news is that Durham Beers are rarely seen on this side of the Pennines although they sometimes appear at the Stalybridge Station Buffet. Steve prefers to do most of his own distribution which helps quality control and improves feedback and he concentrates on the North East, West Yorkshire and Sheffield. In Durham, the GBG listed Half Moon, Shakespeare and Woodman are regular outlets. Steve believes that the biggest threat to micros are pubs which are sold to big chains which then limit the landlord's choice. "CAMRA needs to shout this from the rooftops and the Beer Orders need a good sorting out."

Steve is very conscious of the need to maintain quality right through the process and has therefore invested in a cool store at the brewery to ensure that the beer is properly conditioned before it goes out. In these cut-throat times, some publicans want to put the beer on as soon as possible after delivery and this has led to some complaints because the beer is still "green". Now however, the beer is stored at the brewery for up to two weeks before it is released, so ensuring a much better quality even if the cask is tapped soon after arrival at the pub.

The brewery has now moved in to tap the growing bottle market having acquired the manual bottling plant from the Butterknowle brewery recently closed by Customs. A limited number of the dark beers are currently available, all bottle-conditioned, and several of our group were to be seen staggering away from the brewery with cases of the stuff. There is an on-line shop on the website or you can ring them to discuss an order, which will be dispatched very quickly. Steve and Christine also produce their own pumpclips and labels, so you could always personalise those labels for a present for that special occasion.

Steve and Christine provided us with an excellent, informative and entertaining visit. Their enthusiasm for the brewery shines through and this is reflected in their products. I am sure that Durham beers will feature again at next year's festival but you don't have to wait until then. Seek them out in your local freehouse, suggest them to your local landlord or order some bottles from the brewery. Happy hunting.

The Durham Brewery Ltd, Unit 5A, Bowburn N Industrial Estate, Bowburn, Co Durham, DH6 5PF. ☎ 0191 377 1991/Fax 0191 377 0768. e-mail gibbs@durham-brewery.co.uk. web www.durham-brewery.co.uk



CAMRA PUB OF THE MONTH PRESENTATIONS

The two most recent Pub of the Month presentations by Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA were to Tony and Helen Dunn of the Queens, Cheadle (left) and to the licensees of the Rising Sun in Burnage, right.



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

NOVEMBER 2002

Thursday 14th – Branch Meeting: Adswold Hotel, Adswold Lane West, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm.

Monday 18th – Social: Hinds Head, Manchester Rd, Heaton Norris. Starts 9.00pm.

Friday 22nd – Gatley & Cheadle Stagger: 7.30pm Prince of Wales, Gatley Green; 9.00pm Crown, High St, Cheadle.

Thursday 28th – Pub of the Month presentation to the Plough, Hyde Rd, Gorton. From 8.0pm.

Thursday 12th December – Branch Meeting and Xmas Quiz: Gateway, Kingsway, East Didsbury. Start 8.00pm. Lots of great prizes so let's have a good turnout please.

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 11th – Branch Meeting: Friendship, Stockport Rd, Romiley. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 16th – Sponsored Walk Presentation Night: Sportsman, Mottram Rd, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 23rd – Train Trip to York. Details from Tom Lord 0161 427 7099.

NOVEMBER 2002

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 event:

Monday 18th – Macclesfield Crawl: Meet 7.30pm at Storm Brewing for look round then pub crawl. Contact George Symes 01565 653096.

Trafford & Hulme Branch covers Trafford Borough, Manchester west of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the city centre. They have notified us of the following event:

Thursday 21st – Branch City Social: 8.00pm White Lion, Liverpool Rd; 9.00pm Knott Fringe, Deansgate.



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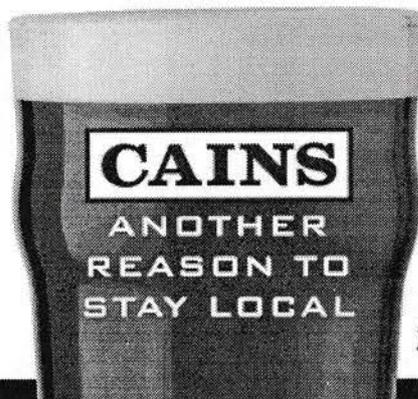
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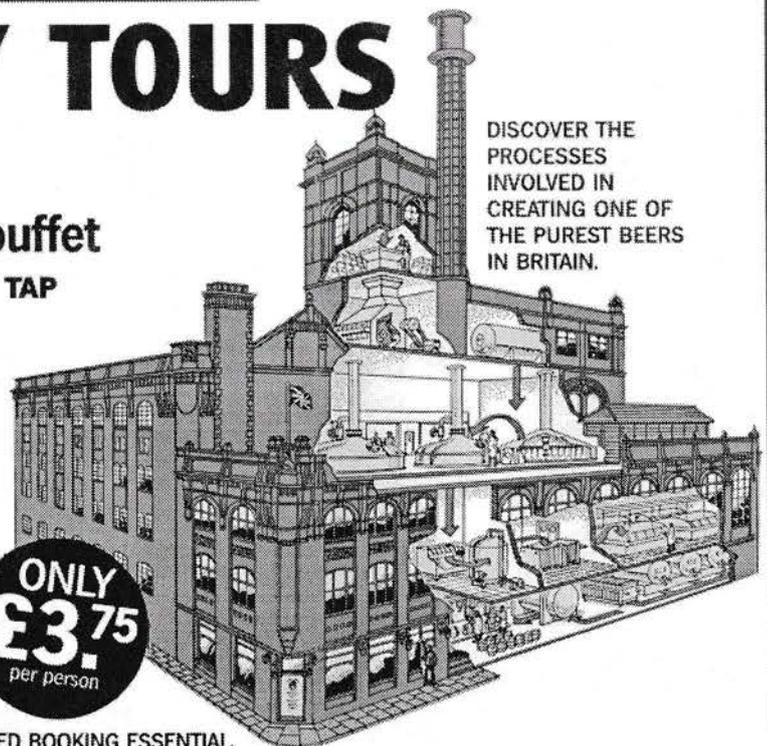
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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

NOVEMBER '97

Short Pint Scandal" was the main front page headline, and it was actually an article that originally appeared in "What's Brewing", with additional material added.

The case for a full pint was overwhelming, wrote Ted Bruning. Customers believed they were paying for a full pint, and they had a right to receive a full pint - without extra charge. There were various figures quoted, following surveys from different parts of the country, but the worst result came from Liverpool, where trading standards officers tested 10 pubs and found 40% of them serving less than the Brewers & Licensed Retailers Association recommended 19 fluid ounces. Only three actually served a pint. The article ended with good news, however. The JD Wetherspoon chain, who then operated nearly 200 pubs nationwide, had decided to introduce oversize lined glasses in all their pubs, and had experienced no problems. (But barely a year later, they had withdrawn their oversized glasses citing an increase in complaints since their introduction).

There were also two shorter items on the front page. Firstly, it was congratulations to the Forgery & Firkin on Mosley Street which had organised a beer festival with other Firkin brewpubs providing a wide range of beers - something for all tastes in fact. Secondly, Bass had formally announced their intention of buying the former Allied Breweries' huge Burton Brewery (next to Bass's own). This was likely to lead to all Bass brewing activities concentrated on the enlarged site, which in turn would result in the closure of Bass's Cardiff and Sheffield plants.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

After a two-year break, Opening Times had once again teamed up with the Stockport Express to produce a Stockport Mild Challenge. Previous Challenges had been a great success, and the invitation was for people who hadn't had a go before, to give it a try now. The Challenge was to run from Saturday 8 November (which was CAMRA's National Mild Day) to Sunday 7 December. Over 50 pubs were taking part, and there were many prizes to be won, including the now renowned pewter tankard for visiting all participating pubs. There followed a brief history of mild, and sadly, there had been a decline in mild consumption over the previous 40 years for a variety of reasons. The North West still remained a stronghold of mild drinking (and still does).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

David Porter was selling the third of his experimental beers at the Railway, Great Portwood Street - it was in fact Sunshine with three times as many hops as normal, and also dry hopped. Dave was very disappointed that the beer was still not bitter enough to be undrinkable. Finally, there was news of a rare beer launch at the prestigious Market Restaurant on High Street, Manchester City Centre, where a bottled "Market Porter" winter beer was due to make its first appearance. Brewed specially for the occasion by Dave Shelton, Lecturer in Food Technology, specialist in the art of brewing, at Manchester Metropolitan University, it was to be a bottle conditioned dark-ish beer, from the small plant at the "Toast Rack" in Fallowfield. Does anyone remember another beer, brewed on a previous occasion for the Market Restaurant, when it was on a nearby site?



Turn it Off

One of the biggest success stories for pubs in recent years has supposedly been the crowds attracted by major televised sporting events. But major regional brewer Greene King have recently terminated the Sky TV subscriptions for 100 of their 373 managed houses, after the company discovered broadcasting live football matches was not lifting sales enough to justify the cost of having the package.

While live football may appear to attract customers, it must be remembered that even key European matches gain less than half the audience of Coronation Street or East Enders, and the prospect of Middlesbrough vs. Southampton on a wet Monday night in November is hardly likely to tempt people off the street. Although Wetherspoons have no TV in any of their pubs, their trade was scarcely affected during the recent World Cup.

Football has its place (preferably in the vault), but beyond major finals is never going to generate mass appeal. It only takes a handful of enthusiastic supporters shouting and chanting to deter a large number of quieter customers, a problem that is made worse where the interior has been knocked through into one room, leaving nowhere to escape. In the long run, pubs that think they can prosper by encouraging loud, boorish behaviour are on a loser. Most pubs should do no more than show whatever sport is on offer on terrestrial TV with the sound turned down.

A Real Surprise

"Opening Times" recently reported with surprise that two new, "trendy" bars that had opened in Manchester both sold real ale. However, while cask beer may be on offer, all too often it's the same diet of minimalist décor, bare wooden floors, vast open spaces and about three seats per acre - and those rather high and hard. What really would be a surprise is a new licensed establishment opening with carpeted floors, small rooms, upholstered bench seating, a wealth of dark wood, and an eccentric collection of china ornaments. Does nobody believe any more that pubs should be cosy? So it made a refreshing change to see Sam Smith's, in their excellent refurbishment of the Boar's Head in Stockport, actually reinstating some walls rather than ripping them out. Currently this is so rare as to be newsworthy, but may be a foretaste of things to come. Apparently within a few years the average person in the UK will be over forty. Pub operators will have to come to terms with a more mature and discerning population, and the approach of packing young drinkers into echoing stand-up drinking barns that seems to have been so successful in recent times may not be the best formula for the long-term. Wide-screen football may have to go, and walls and seats make a welcome return.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.co.uk

JOIN CAMRA (PAGE 19) & DRINK REAL ALE



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The Branch Social in October could only be in one place. A group of us gathered in the Royal Hotel in Hayfield on 12th October, during the annual beer festival. We were not disappointed. A very varying selection of beers was on offer, not to mention the Irish band on the night we were there. For anyone who has not attended the festival, it is one of the best pub festivals on the local circuit and accommodation and camping are plentiful in Hayfield. I went back on the Sunday lunch, walking over from Glossop with three of our Branch members, via Lantern Pike (the hill) and it looked very much as if the weekend had been a huge success.

Whilst in Hayfield, due to the Glossop bus on the Saturday night being early (6.30pm) and our party not meeting until 8pm, I spent a very pleasant few pints in the Kinder Lodge, where I re-acquainted myself with the landlord Graham Clark (Glossop School many years ago). Always a good place to watch a football match (they have a large screen), England were playing that night and the place was packed with some of the overspill from the beer festival as well as a good local trade. The beer choice was Adnams Bitter, Taylors Landlord, Banks Bitter and Storm Brewery Ale Force, this pub being a regular outlet for that particular brewery's beers. Open all day, every day, the place has a great atmosphere, as it did again the following day when three more pints were tried. At the moment, with the Royal and the Kinder Lodge both in the hands of such enthusiastic licensees, the village is well worth spending time in.

At the other end of the Branch area, the Britannia at Mossley, as we reported last Spring, has now had its major refurbishment and Phil & Alison tell me that the Pyramid Pub Co. have a decent guest ale list from which they can choose from. In late October, the Marstons beers they sell as regulars, were accompanied by Archers Gold and Morrells Varsity Ale. They have had major kitchen changes too, food being available 7 days a week from 12-7 (5 on Sun). Sunday lunches are a give-away at £3.95.

Over in Buxton, the George has installed two more handpumps. Shaws bitter is currently on very regularly (2 firkins a week we are told) as is Kelham Island Pale Rider and Whim beers are quite prominent too. Our Buxton Branch members report it is gaining in popularity and in the quality of the beers all the time.

Just out of the Branch area, the Setter Dog at Walker Barn, on the Macclesfield to Buxton road, a former GBG entry, is closed. Nothing further is known but it looks a possibility for yet another pub that may have closed its doors for the last time. I remember it with affection as the lunchtime stopping point some years ago on a charity walk I was taking part in. Lets hope this is not the case. If anyone knows more please get in contact with Opening Times (see also Macclesfield Pub News - Ed(1))

Finally, the two Buxton members who missed the bus they needed to get them back from Leek after a session at Stoke Beer Festival the other week, had a lonely walk in the fading light, over the tops. However, on reaching Buxton, they were not beaten and went straight to Wetherspoons to finish the night off.

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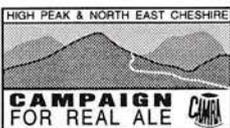
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NOVEMBER FEATURED PUB The Queens, Old Glossop

The reopened Queens in Old Glossop is worthy of High Peak's Featured Pub this month, writes *Frank Wood*. You will have read over the last couple of issues about the recent closure due to flash floods at the end of August. The Queens is now very much open for business again and seems busier and more popular than it was before the floods - and worthy of its first entry into the Good Beer Guide (2003).

Located in the old part of Glossop, a pleasant walk through the town's Manor Park brings you to a cluster of three pubs, the Queens standing further down the hill to the Bulls Head and the Wheatsheaf. Alan and Carol Osbourne offer a selection of five real ales. Youngs Bitter, Marstons Pedigree, Worthington Cask, Jennings Cumberland Ale and Black Sheep Best Bitter is the usual line up, with an odd change now and again "to give the locals a bit of interest".

The Queens Arms (as was) was built in 1825 as a beer house, by William Robinson, a cotton manufacturer, possibly as it was convenient for the local Old Glossop market that was on the old cross just to the rear. In 1837, he successfully applied for an alehouse licence, the same year Queen Victoria ascended to the throne (possibly hence the name) In 1890, it was sold to Gartside Brewery and remained in their hands for many years. As with other Gartside houses, it eventually became a Bass House. It was sold when Bass were selling their tied estate and became simply the Queens.

The pub has had a very pleasant refurbishment, keeping its partially flagged floors but the new bar is a little smaller, giving a wider access to the tap room and back snug. Re-upholstered seating throughout, new outside signage and painting have given a smart, clean look. Also the wooden cladding around the pub has added to the homely surroundings. A nice feature in the tap room is a display of miniature bottles round the top shelves.

The food operation has increased to include a charcoal grill, with a £24,000 kitchen refurbishment. Food is served 12.00-8.45pm every day at present, with dinners all day on Sundays. Currently there is accommodation available on the middle floor but the plans for early next year are to change this to a function room, with a separate restaurant and a games room.

On my five visits there in October, the beers were in excellent form, the pub particularly busy on the Sunday afternoons I have been in, with families dining, mixing with locals and the walkers who use the pub after their descents down Bleaklow and Doctors Gate. A popular event is the Sunday meat draw, which is the biggest I have seen around, with literally tables of fresh meat on offer. Hopefully their run of bad luck is now over, with floods and two cars within weeks, crashing through the front window in the past 12 months. Recommended for a warm and friendly welcome, it is a local outlet for Opening Times.

To get to the Queens, from Glossop station, turn left up Norfolk Street, right onto Hall Meadow Road and nip through Old Glossop church yard on your right. Alternatively, turn right from the station, to the traffic lights, turning left up High Street East, then cut through Manor Park to the left or continue to Manor Park Road and turn left.

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OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From "Applejack Dundee", Warrington:
 Whilst perusing the pages of the October OT I could not help but notice the full page advert placed by the Porter Brewing Co regarding their Railway public house at Portwood. As I see it the reason for the advert is two-fold. Firstly to offer commendation to the pub and its landlord and secondly to inform the good people of Stockport (and beyond) who have yet to visit the place. However, as a devout cider drinker, I am perplexed and was for a while annoyed, as to why the words "traditional cider" do not appear. For the record, the Railway is one of the foremost traditional cider outlets in Stockport, the quality and diversity of which are renowned. Wassail! Hopefully the omission was an oversight and that this letter helps level the playing field.

From Andy Whyman, Chorlton:
 What sensitive souls Ron Young and his friend must be. Not enough for them that the Beech has been refurbished and the range of beers, in Mr Young's own words, remains impressive, it seems a swear box on the bar and the staff to go to grovelling school is required before they are satisfied. Perhaps in the ten months that he has been living in Stockport Mr Young has become accustomed to a more genteel sort of clientele in the pubs around those parts or could it be that in that short time drinkers at the Beech have started swearing more? There has always been good banter in the Beech and as in any pub this will involve some swearing. I find it hard to believe that regulars of any pub will abandon it on that ground alone. More importantly his assertion that the service was poor and unfriendly and the bar staff inattentive is verging on libellous. John and Joanne Reid have been running the pub for four years now and have always had a friendly and efficient staff who know most of the regulars by name. Strangely none of the staff nor any of the regulars I have spoken to have ever heard of Ron Young so if the sensitive Mr Young is, "sad to say that (he) won't be going back," I have to say that he really won't be missed.

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

CONGLETON - REAL ALE PARADISE?

I moved to Congleton four years ago after ten years away. My first CAMRA activity in the area was contributing to the "Out Inn Cheshire" pub guide - published in 1998. In those days, Congleton could hardly be called a Real Ale Paradise. Only two pubs served guest beers and the town was dominated by the national breweries. Serious drinkers travelled to Macclesfield on the train or bus. Today the serious drinkers are travelling the other way. The picture in Congleton has changed almost beyond recognition!

First there are the new pubs. The most famous is Beartown Brewery's **Beartown Tap**, but also there is Wetherspoon's **Counting House** and the **Woodlands** pub/restaurant. All serve quality real ale and guest beers. Second there is the real ale gain of the **Bull's Head** - a keg only pub now bought by Hydes - although reports so far are not very encouraging. Third and most encouraging is the existing pubs that have dramatically improved their beer ranges. Four spring to mind: The **Queens Head Hotel**, listed in 1998 with just two hand-pumps offering Tetley Bitter and Ansell's Mild now has an array of seven hand-pumps, including two guests and regularly featuring local beers. The **Castle Inn** still has its Greenall's Bitter and has lost the Greenall's Original (no longer brewed) but has replaced it with Timothy Taylor's Landlord and two guest beers. The **Wharf** has also lost the Original but replaced it with a guest beer and also swapped the now defunct Greenall's Mild for the much more exciting Cain's Mild. Finally, the **Robin Hood** may have lost the glorious Bateman's Dark Mild (no longer sold through the Marston's Estate), but regularly has two guest beers to make up for it. All these pubs serve excellent quality ales, two of them are Good Beer Guide listed.

When you also take into account the other pubs listed above and the excellent **Leisure Centre Bar**, still flying the flag for a variety of unusual and exciting beers in an unexpected venue - has Congleton become a Real Ale Paradise? Perhaps it has. JN.

Woodlands is now under new management, and the emphasis at certain times of the day is very much on food. However, real ale is still available. One correspondent had a pint of Boddingtons with his lunch there (which was OK as Boddies goes), but there was also a pump clip for Caledonian Deuchars IPA, although the barrel had only just been tapped when he was there, and it wasn't yet ready to serve. We are unaware of anywhere else in Congleton that sells it. We hear that the Deuchars IPA was on good form when sampled later

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The Cotton Tree in Bollington has improved considerably since it changed hands a few months back - it's clean, brightly lit, all of the idiots have gone, the beer is good and a guest ale policy has been introduced. Along side the Tetley's & Boddingtons recent guest ales have been Waggedance, Archer's Best Bitter and Black Sheep.

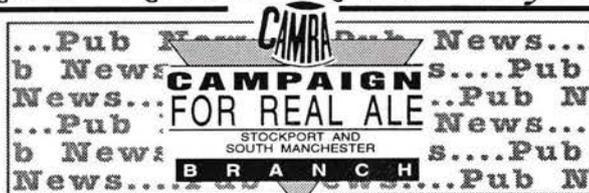
Also in Bollington, the Meridian has a guest ale policy. Alongside his regular Black Sheep is a guest, which was Bateman's XB on my visit. Staying in Bollington, the landlord of the Spinners has announced his retirement.

Further to my last report about the re-opening of the Vale I can now add that it has no juke box, pool table, television or electronic games of any kind. The opening hours are 17.30-23.00 Monday, 11.30-15.00 & 17.30-23.00 Tuesday-Thursday and all day Friday, Saturday & Sunday. They are trying all of the Storm beers and once they find the one that sells best it will become permanent. Also, once the kitchen is ready, food will be available lunch and evenings - considering the proximity of the canal and Middlewood way this could be a good stopping place for rambblers.

In Macclesfield the licensees of the White Swan have left and a relief manager is currently running things. Also the Cat & Fiddle has new tenants.

In Walker Barn the Setter Dog, which has been closed for some time, is now up for sale again (£410,000). This has happened because the person who bought the pub has failed in his attempt to convert it to houses due to the objections of local CAMRA members - well done to all those who wrote to the council.

The Oxford in Macclesfield is up for sale for a cool £450,000. At that price only the big pub chains are likely to be able to afford it and so Macclesfield will lose another true free house.



Finding myself in Hale Barns recently, write Mark McConachie, I decided to see what was on offer at the two pubs in the village. On the main Hale Road we have Hydes' offering, Corbans. This is a re-working of the former Unicorn, a fifties roadhouse affair; it has been opened-out somewhat to give a drinking-cum-sports area to the left, whilst the right (and an upper storey area) provides room for diners of the fare from kitchen. The food is good but may prove a tad pricey for some pockets - £8.50 for liver and onions, for example. But, hey, this is Hale Barns. The sole beer offering is Hydes Bitter. Across the road on Wicker Lane one finds Robinson's Bulls Head. This has a far more traditional outlook to its decor - the No Smoking rooms are particularly noteworthy for their taste and elegance - and would seem to attract a slightly more mature clientele. Food is available here too in the form of a hot buffet servery in one of the rooms. A decent looking bowling green occupies the rear next door to what is probably Robbies only hotel lodge-type accommodation. The drinker is well catered for in the form of Robbies Hatters, Best, XB and Cumbria Way. The Bulls Head is run by Kalton Inns (they must have taken on the mantle from Playmaster Leisure who used to run this and the likes of the Red Lion and Fletchers Arms) on behalf of Robinson's. Public transport to Hale Barns is via bus 19A from Altrincham or 19 from Wythenshawe (both hourly in the evening). As these buses go via the Airport and Cargo Centre, you could get off and explore the Romper at Ringway.

Hydes have acquired the Conway on Etchells Road, Cheadle Hulme. It now retails cask Hydes bitter and the seasonal ale - Autumn Goldings on OT's visit; both being kept in very reasonable form too. The Conway dates from the late sixties, at a guess, and comprises a long open space with raised lounge to the left, bar counter and more seating to centre, with pool and sports to the right (two dart boards are accommodated here). A pleasant enough pub that is deserving of a visit to try beers that have hitherto been unavailable in the town. Cheadle Hulme now has 100 percent of its pub stock serving a cask ale.

Up the road in Heald Green, Holt's Griffin is still doing the business with some great mild and bitter on really terrific form. These will be joined by the new seasonal 4.5 percent Thunderholt; if this is kept in as good condition as the other beers, regulars should be in for a treat. The Griffin is really serving up some of the best Holts in Stockport metro. Both pubs can be reached via bus 368/9.

The White House in Offerton has reopened after a lengthy period of closure. The layout is unchanged (OT thinks, it's a while since we were there) but there has been a comprehensive redecoration and the pub appears comfortable and welcoming. There's real ale, too, in the shape of Boddingtons Bitter on handpump.

In Hazel Grove, the George & Dragon has finally discontinued real ale. While it's always sad to see this happen, it must be said that the quality of the cask beer there on OT's most recent visits certainly did the cause no favours at all. Nearby, the Woodman has discontinued cask mild.

The Dog & Partridge (Boddingtons) on Didsbury Road, Heaton Mersey is down to just Boddies on a recent visit. The pub seemed fairly quiet too.

A tour around the Heaviley / Stockport Cemetery area found that the Bamford had Boddies, Tetley and Pedigree on; quality was fair to poor though, so don't all rush. No such problems at the Duke of York, where both Robbies Best and the seasonal (Snowdon on OT's visit) proved to be excellent. The licensee's eagle-eye is so well attuned to the beers that he will take away and replace beer that 'he knows is about to go off!' How's that for nurturing both beer and customers? News reaches us that Clarinbridge have surrendered the leases on the last four Robbies pubs they were running on behalf of Jennings back to Robbies (yes, it's a complicated tale which began some years ago with a deal between Robbies and Playmaster Leisure of Cheadle....). The pubs in question are the Flowerpot, Macclesfield; Fletchers Arms, Denton; Red Lion, Cheadle and Puss in Boots, Offerton; thus, a visit to the Puss (147 Nangreave Road) was therefore in order. Licensee of eleven years, Linda Ashworth, is still at the helm, but now as a tenant; she told OT that she is relishing the opportunity to improve the pub and make some changes. At present the sole cask Robinson's beer is Best Bitter, she plans to re-introduce Hatters and one or two of the seasonal ales are promised; Old Tom may even make an appearance. The pub currently does hot food noon till 2pm daily, including a carvery on a Sunday; the introduction of evening meals is a possibility too. A gradual redecoration will take place beginning with the Games Room-cum-Function Room which is proving to be a popular venue for funeral parties. The exterior, too, will see a spruce-up to improve the pub's visibility and appearance. Whilst, over in Davenport, the Jolly Sailor has a new licensee in the person of Jeanette Crossley. This popular S&N pub has re-introduced the full food menu again, every day from noon till 9pm. A Monday quiz is promised, as is a special (late licence) event for the Children in Need appeal night. The beers are Boddies, Cool Cask, Bombadier and Directors; the latter two can be varied for other guests, and, yes, the pub does have the throughput to maintain four beers being on. The Jolly Sailor can be found at 218 Bramhall Lane (buses 374 and 378).

Also newly arrived is Dee Gregory at the Wheatsheaf at the top end of Higher Hillgate. Dee and partner took the reins of this Pubmaster house on October 1st. It appears the pub had become somewhat run down and lost trade prior to her arrival, but change is now in hand with the introduction of hot lunchtime meals (noon - 2), pool teams, ladies darts and a Saturday Karaoke and curry evening. Beers are Tetley, Adnams bitter and Pedigree; the latter being a favourite with the Thursday motorcycle club members apparently. On another visit, the Adnams had been replaced temporarily by Holts Thunderholt of all things.

Brinnington never seems to get much news. Well, a tour round on a 325 bus revealed the following. The Cheshire Cat (Robinson's) by the station, is down to just Best Bitter now, having dropped the mild. The Farmers Arms (ex Boddington?) has ditched cask beer altogether; whilst at the other Robinson's house, the Jack & Jill, both Best and Hatters are on electric meters. The latter pub seemed quiet, but perhaps that can be explained by its location being away from Brinnington centre and the timing of OT's visit.

The refurbished Horse & Farrier in Gatley was due to reopen on November 12. This will be the second of Hydes' Heritage Inns and it will be interesting to see how they have modified what was already an old, traditional pub. A full report next time.

17



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MANCHESTER MATTERS by Cityman

A quiet month in the City Centre – perhaps it's the pre-Christmas lull. One development of note, though – Gordon and Don are giving up the **Crown & Anchor** on Hilton Street. In their short time there they've really turned the pub round with superb quality beer. Luckily, though, their replacement is Wayne from the Waldorf (who will be running both pubs). The Waldorf is already well-known for its quality beers so it looks as though the C&A will remain in safe hands. I also decided to pay a visit to the **Millstone** on Thomas Street, having heard that it has been revitalised. It does seem smarter than before but I fear for the survival of cask beer. The sold offering was Coach House Flintlock, which was well past its best. It didn't seem that much was being sold, I'm sorry to say.

Wandering in Wythenshawe

Something got inside of me a few weekends ago, and I thought "I just have to visit Wythenshawe to see what the cask ale scene is like since my previous, all too few, visits". Getting an 11 bus from Stockport armed with a crude map and the knowledge that probably 80 percent of the pubs would serve no real ale, I reckoned on it being a short afternoon. To clarify matters, I only looked at the pubs to the east of the M56 / Princess Road; the route I decided to take was a circular one as the pubs are spread quite evenly over the many estates that comprise Wythenshawe.

My trawl began at the **Happy Man** (Bass), one of four pubs on Portway in Woodhouse Park, this was keg; so too was Enterprise's Mountain Ash, whilst Burtonwood's Talisman was closed 'Awaiting new management'. On Selstead Rd. the **Woodpecker** (Bass) looked pleasant enough but had none of the cask stuff. Then came the **Portway Hotel** (jct. of Ruddpark Rd), styling itself a Whitbread Free House, it was advertising Holts and Boddies outside. Although the Boddies was of the smooth variety, the Joeys was definitely real and at 135p a pint represents good value. The pub was quite dark inside, but a good lively crowd inside lightened up the atmosphere. Continue round to Cornishway and you find Banks's **Cornishman** on the corner - a large L-shaped house this, that offers not one cask ale, but two: Banks's mild and bitter on electric meters. The pub seemed pretty much unchanged from ten years ago when I used to have an occasional lunch in here when I worked at Ferranti's (remember them anyone?). This and the Portway are both on route 369 from Stockport.

Further along Cornishway is another keg Bass house, the **Red Beret**. Over to Peel Hall next and the **Tudor Tavern**, which I found to be keg too. Further along Peel Hall Road the site of the former Peel Hall (Tetley) is now a housing development; so it was off toward the Civic Centre I trod and the **Silver Birch** (S&N) in Poundswick - another keg offering. The final two were now in sight, both on Greenwood Rd. The first was shut and I know not why - the **Greenwood Tree** (Burtonwood); whilst the second, the **Anvil** seemed to be selling two Hydes beers and Jennings Cumberland! Alas, this ex Hydes pub was only selling cask Hydes mild of all things, the Hydes bitter was smooth. The pub seemed somewhat shabby and could do with a spruce-up, likewise the disappointing mild.

So that was that, three out of eleven pubs selling cask - a better result than I had expected after my four and a half mile saunter. I do not mention Robinson's two pubs in the area, the **Tatton** at Moss Nook and the **Airport** as most of you should know these sell Hatters and Best, whilst the latter does XB too (both pubs worthy of a visit folks). In the name of completeness, I did the northern part of Wythenshawe the following day - Northenden. First off was the

Tatton Arms down by the river, a pleasant enough boozier but no real ale. My research of the area told me that when the pub first opened its doors some hundred years ago it was then called the Boathouse Inn - a reference to the then adjoining ferry service. Anyway, it was up Boat Lane to the **Crown** on the corner; this is a two-roomer selling just Boddies. Small, boisterous and busy. Around the corner are two pubs on Royle Green Road, both were Greenalls/Boddingtons owned, both now offer no cask ale; they are the **Spread Eagle** and **Jolly Carter**.

Coming back to the centre again the corner **Church** (ex Bass) was inexplicably closed and looked as though it may have been for some days. The final pub, the **Farmers Arms** on Longley Lane (about a third of a mile from the main cluster of Northenden's other pubs). Again, this is a Greenalls house but this one seemingly caters for a slightly more well-to-do clientele as there is a full menu on offer, three cask beers and a bowling green. The beers were Greenalls and Boddies bitters together with a guest, which that day was Taylor Landlord (at 204p!) - not bad either. The pub was tidy and busy, the bowling green at the back was showing a good deal of wear, presumably from a good season's use.

Returning to the city via Princess Road, I noticed that the **Princess** (jct. of Mauldeth Rd) was closed and boarded. I decided that a long overdue return visit was necessary to a couple of pubs on Claremont Road, Moss Side, so thus it was that I alighted at the bus garage and walked in to the **Claremont** (Holts). Still a pub of great presence that retains quite a lot of its original features (some doors, etched glass, most of the room layouts and such). It looked clean and was fairly lively at the time; two beers were on - Holt mild and bitter. The Claremont is always worth a look in. Just along the road is Hydes' **Beehive**. Previously this has been very shabby and the beer disappointing, this time though the place has been re-decorated with clean, plum walls. Mild and bitter were both on sale.

Didsbury & Withington

A later trip to the re-opened **Golden Lion** in Withington proved futile, as although the place looks a very smart dining pub, it now no longer sells cask beers. If you can recall the Golden Lion from a couple of years ago, then this scheme has utterly removed any trace of that previous pub - everything is different.

A quick visit to Didsbury was called for to check out various little-visited cask establishments. The **Nelson** still has Holts bitter and John Smith's Magnet; Greenalls (Famous) **Crown** had four beers - Greenalls bitter, Boddies, Bombadier and Woodhams Old Chopper. The **Didsbury** had had a revamp so in I went. Cottagey, foody, quite cosy really; bedecked with hop bines. A good balance of drink mixed with food - although you need not eat despite its restaurant appearance. It is a world away from the old Didsbury - no louts now, just quiet music, conviviality, very middle class. Three cask beers are offered - Theakston BB, Pedigree and Directors (the Pedigree was 208p! by the way). Last call was to the **Bell Tower** at Parris Wood, I must have taken the wrong door in as I ended up in the ghastly Wacky Warehouse. Getting through to the pub part I did spot two handpulls for Boddies and Tetley, but both clips were reversed. No bad thing perhaps, as I do not think I would have enjoyed the 'experience' that much. I will try another visit in future however.

I was then prompted to return to Didsbury by an extract from the Business page 14 of the Manchester Evening News on Friday 4 October which read as follows:

"Four Manchester pubs are amongst 100 being offered to potential licensees by Sheffield based licensed property agents Brownill Vickers on behalf of the Union Pub Company. The pubs are: **Station**, Wilmslow Road, Didsbury; **Dean Brook Hotel**, St. Mary's Road, Moston; **Wendover**, Wendover Road, Wythenshawe; **The Bank at Sale**, School Road, Sale"

Speaking to Joyce Hill, licensee of the Station in Didsbury, she explained that up to 140 pubs were up for lease, with the Station being offered with a 21 year lease. Not only are these leases very expensive, but Joyce is hoping to retire well before twenty one years time and so in effect feels she is being squeezed out of her job. It may be that the Union Pub Company may offer her another pub, but what is the chance that the pub she will be offered will be suitable for her? While in Didsbury I popped into the **Royal Oak** and found it had Marstons Wicked Witch (4.6%) as a guest and which is reportedly selling well at £2.16 a pint. Down the road the **Dog & Partridge** is continuing to do well in providing guest beers with turnover up at around £11k per week. On a recent visit the beers on offer included Brakspear Old Ale, Youngs Special, Marlow Rebellion Smuggler, Timothy Taylors Landlord and Theakstons Bitter. Well worth a visit, I think.

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PRAGUE – OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Last month's article looked at the bars in the so-called 'Lesser Town' or Mala Strana and around Prague Castle (Hradcany). This month we conclude by looking at the bars on the other side of the river writes John Clarke.

This side of central Prague is broadly divided into two – the Old Town or Stare Mesto and the New Town or Nove Mesto, although it's worth remembering that even the so-called New Town was founded in 1348! Both have interesting places for the beer tourist to call.

Stare Mesto

Crossing the Vltava via the famous Charles Bridge will bring you to the heart of the Old Town with its wealth of historic sights with a focal point in the Old Town Square (*Staromestske namesti*). A birds eye view can be gained by climbing the Town Hall tower. To the north is the old Jewish quarter (Josefov) which will also repay a visit. Another must-see is the spectacular art-nouveau Obecni Dum (*namesti Republiky*) now resplendent after a multi-million pound restoration. Beer or coffee is the basement American Bar is quite an experience.

U Zlateho Tygra (The Golden Tiger), Husova 11, Prague 1

Walking from Charles Bridge to the Old Town Square, Husova joins from the left and the Golden Tiger is a short way down on the right hand side. A legendary bar, allegedly President Vaclav Havel's favourite and on the wall you will also find the almost obligatory photo of Bill Clinton downing a beer. It doesn't open until 3.00pm and it's best to get there at about 2.55 and join the short queue. The reason for this is that most of the tables are 'reserved' for the locals – the 'tourist table' seems to be immediately to your right as you enter – and after about 20 minutes it can easily be full. The beer is Pilsner Urquell 12. Service is efficient rather than friendly.

U Medvidku (The Little Bears), Na Perstyně 5, Prague 1

Follow Husova southwards and it will eventually lead on to Na Perstyně and U Medvidku. One of the historic bars of Prague and while it is nowadays pitched fully at the tourist trade it still retains enough local custom to give it integrity. It's essentially a large, brightly-lit beer hall that also does a good line in food (English version of the menu available). For many years this was almost the only Prague outlet for Budvar beer and it still majors in that today (the entrance seems to double as a Budvar souvenir shop). There's also a dark beer available – Cerna Hora Granat, a 3.5% sweet, malty beer but not at all unpleasant.

Pivni Bar, next door to U Medvidku

Not only next door, it seems to be part of the same operation and which seems to open after its more venerable neighbour closes for the night. Very new, the bar appears to be constructed out of brewery pipework and indeed this does seem to be something of a Budvar theme bar. Budvar is the main brew with two dark offerings – Cerna Hora Granat 12 and Kern 10 (the latter didn't exactly get rave reviews, sadly). It's a pleasant place for a late night drink and stays open until 3am.

Nove Mesto

Running south and west of Wenceslas Square (*Vaclavske namesti*) to the river, this is the city's main commercial and business district and is perhaps the most architecturally varied part of Prague. There are also a good number of interesting bars, so much so that space permits only a brief review of some. One rule though – don't drink anywhere on St Wenceslas Square, with the possible exception of the Europa, an art nouveau masterpiece (Pilsner Urquell 12, expensive by Prague standards) *Novometsky Pivovar (New Town Brewery), Vodickova 20, Prague 1* Vodickova runs south-west off Wenceslas Square, almost opposite the Europa and you will find the New Town Brewery on the left-hand side as you walk down. It's an odd, affair, at then and of what appears to be a

shopping arcade, but once there you will find an almost labyrinthine collection of rooms, including a very pleasant roof terrace, which make up one of the city's newer brew-pubs. There's a good menu (English version available) and the food is recommended – don't however be tempted by what appear to be 'free' snacks on the tables – there's a charge for them! There are two unfiltered house beers available, light and dark. The light (approx 4.5%) was dry, hazy and very quaffable. The coffeeish, chocolatey dark (about 5%) was even better. *The Branicky Sklipek at Vodickova 26 is also worth a visit, by the way.*

Pivovarsky dum, corner Jecna and Lipova, Prague 1

Another of the new brew pubs to open in recent years, this occupies a prominent corner site with three eating/drinking areas and the bar dominated by the shiny copper brewing vessels. There's a good mix of locals and tourists and once again the food is recommended (English version of menu available). Much brewing memorabilia decorates the walls including maps showing the location of the Czech breweries over the years; books and t-shirts are available to purchase. There is an interesting range of beers – apart from the standard light and dark (the dark is particularly recommended), there are wheat, coffee, banana, cherry varieties, some more successful than others. The wheat and coffee are probably the best. You can also try a 'champagne beer' which didn't really seem to work

U Fleku, Kremencova 11, Prague 1

While the other brew pubs in the city are very recent developments, U Fleku has been brewing its own beer since 1499 and so claims to be the oldest brew pub in the world. If you've not been before, it's a must, if only to try the unique house beer Flekovsky Dark 13 (5.5% and reminiscent of Sarah Hughes Dark Ruby Mild) which is available nowhere else. Having said that, this must be a highly qualified recommendation as these days U Fleku is essentially an operation to relieve tourists of their money. There have been reports of an entrance charge but we didn't encounter this mid-afternoon, which is about the best time to visit. The waiters will try and sell you a (very expensive) schnapps with your beer, which should be firmly refused. Musical accompaniments can range from an accordion player ('Tulips from Amsterdam' is part of his repertoire) to an oompah band. Eat elsewhere, like for example....

U Bubenicku, Myslikova 8, Prague 1

Really just around the corner from U Fleku, this is a cheerful, multi-roomed pub with lots of dark wood and a good local feel. There's an extensive menu and Pilsner Urquell is on draught. No gimmicks, this place just aims to do the simple things well.

U Havrana (The Crow), Halkova 8

Out of the way, on a back street south of Wenceslas Square, this is a real find. It's open 24 hours a day, Monday-Friday (6pm-6am Saturday and Sunday), with food available at all times. Unpretentious and unseedy, it attracts mainly a young crowd and the only noise is one of friendly, animated conversation. The décor is spartan but clean and comfortable. The food is also good although there's no English version of the menu (by the way there's a daytime menu and a different all-night one). The beer is Kozel dark and light and a bargain 13kcs for 0.5 litre during the day, rising to just 18kc after 10pm. Well worth seeking out.



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