



OPENING TIMES



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NAVIGATION IS LOCAL PUB OF THE YEAR

Top Award for Stockport Pub

It's usually a close run thing in the voting for Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA's Pub of the Year. This year, though, it was a different story as the Navigation, the Beartown Brewery tied house on Lancashire Hill, stormed to victory with an overwhelming majority of the votes cast.

This long-time keg only ex-Wilsons pub was acquired by Congleton's Beartown Brewery in December 2001 and almost overnight transformed itself into one of the foremost cask ale outlets in the town.

Everything about the pub was improved and the Navigation became a relaxing, comfortable place in which to drink – probably for the first time in years.

This transformation would be impressive in itself, but it is in the range of beers on offer that the pub really scores. In less than a week, the standard keg range (including beers, lagers and stouts) and the usual boring bottles were all ditched. In came six cask ales from Beartown Brewery. Bearskinful and Kodiak Gold are permanent bitter and the superb stout, Polar Eclipse, is the third permanent beer. The rest of the Beartown range rotates among the other handpumps – and such is the demand that a seventh pump had to be installed. Prices are keen too, with the beer either £1.50 or £1.60 a pint depending on strength. The only other draught beers are two imported German lagers and these are supplemented by a bottled range of Belgian and German beers. Real cider has also been successfully introduced – between three and five are always available, and many cider aficionados now consider the Navigation to be the top cider pub in the north of England.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the right people behind the bar and in Angella Lindsay, Beartown have been very lucky indeed. Angella has run the pub with impressive efficiency – firmly dealing with any troublesome customers but offering a warm welcome to the many new faces the pub has seen. Mention also needs to be made of daughter Chantal who is a regular face behind the bar, and whose efficiency and charm have won over many of the regulars old and new.

Angella was overjoyed when told the news of her win. "I was absolutely over the moon," she told Opening Times. "I'd just like to thank everyone involved with the pub, this award really does make all the hard work worthwhile."

It was a double win for Beartown as another pub, the Beartown Tap in Congleton has also won the local Pub of the Year from Macclesfield Branch. Beartown's Ian Burns was clearly a very happy man when OT spoke to him. "To have achieved Pub of the Year in a little over 12 months of opening at the Navigation comes as a real bonus and we are particularly delighted as it also coincides with the Beartown Tap receiving Pub of the Year from Macclesfield & East Cheshire," he told us. "We see this as recognition for the hard work put in by everyone at Beartown and in particular Angella and Chantal at the Navigation, and Steve King at the Beartown Tap. We would like to thank all our regulars for their continued support in all our outlets, and also thanks to Opening Times for the positive feedback and help over the period."

This very well deserved award will be presented at the end of National Pubs Week, on Saturday 1 March when a full house is expected. Get there early if you want a seat.

The Navigation is well served by public transport. In particular bus 203 will drop you very close.



Beartown's Navigation - Lancashire Hill

...AND KRO BAR IS RUNNER-UP

While the Navigation is a very traditional pub, Kro Bar on Oxford Road is a very different kettle of fish.

Uncompromisingly modern in its interior design and catering mainly (but not exclusively) for the student market, Kro Bar is perhaps not the typical 'CAMRA pub', at least not in the eyes of those who believe the clichés. In point of fact, Kro Bar proves the point that good pubs come in all shapes and sizes, and make no mistake, Kro Bar is a very good pub.


Converted from the former premises of the Manchester Temperance Society, the stylish interior and rear conservatory extension were designed by Manchester architects Stephenson Bell who have successfully incorporated a very modern bar into a listed Georgian building. Upstairs other public rooms have a more traditional feel and are decorated with old Temperance memorabilia found during the restoration of the building.

The owner of Kro Bar, Mark Ruby, is Danish and a Kro is a Danish country pub. As it says on the Kro website (www.kro.co.uk) the aim is for the bar to have the qualities of a Kro – good food, good beer and a warm welcome. Mark, ably assisted by bar manager Martin Judge, has certainly achieved these aims. The bar is lively and friendly, as you would expect from its location, and the quality of the food is legendary with a wide variety of freshly prepared dishes, often with a Scandinavian accent, available.






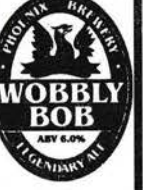
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**MORE CHOICE
BETTER BEER**

 **2002 International Brewing Awards**
Gold Medals for Navy and Wobbly Bob

IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

This month we report on an important initiative from Interbrew. This giant company intend having the quality of Draught Bass and Boddingtons Bitter assessed for quality by the Cask Marque organisation. In total some 8,000 pubs will be visited with the aim of getting 2,000 of them full Cask Marque accreditation.

Thus far so good – and all credit to Interbrew for their obvious commitment to and investment in cask ale quality. But – there's always a 'but' – what about those pubs which are checked and fail? Cask Marque's Paul Nunny reckons that about 20% of pubs fail their assessment and that's based on a history of checking pubs where there is at least some degree of commitment to real ale. The 8,000 pub company outlet now brought within the scheme are likely to be rather more of a mixed bag so a rather higher failure rate can be expected. The problem is that even if very poor Boddington's or Bass is uncovered, Interbrew can do bugger all about it. Their contract is to supply the companies that own the pubs and are thus largely powerless to dictate where their beers are sold. It also remains to be seen if this initiative will address the main problem with Bass and Boddingtons in many outlets – their degree of maturation. The problem with these beers is that they 'drop bright' very quickly. In some cases, certainly with Boddingtons, they go on sale the day they arrive in the pub. OK they are fresh, sparkling beers but to even approach their quality of old they need 7 days or more in the pub cellar before going on sale. 10-14 days is preferable. Now two weeks stock is a lot of beer with a lot of cash tied up in it, and few pub company outlets can or (in the case of managed pubs) are allowed to afford that investment.

Until this major problem is addressed it doesn't matter how many boxes the Cask Marque inspectors tick, Bass and Boddies will remain disappointing in too many pubs. So – a real commitment to quality cask beer or half a million pounds worth of window dressing? The proof of the pudding will be in the drinking.

Congratulations and commiserations this month. Hearty congratulations to Beartown Brewery's Navigation in Stockport and Brewery Tap in Congleton, both winners of their respective CAMRA Branch's Pub of the Year awards. A remarkable double for this small brewer. Both will now go forward to Regional and, hopefully, National competitions for CAMRA's next Pub of the Year award.

This brings us to CAMRA's current Pub of the Year contest. The award is due to be announced during National Pubs Week, which starts on 22 February. We are sworn to secrecy regarding the winner, which, sadly, isn't Stockport's Railway. However, to reach the final four is an achievement in itself and licensee Alex Lord and owners Porter Brewing Co can take a great deal of pride in that.

John Clarke

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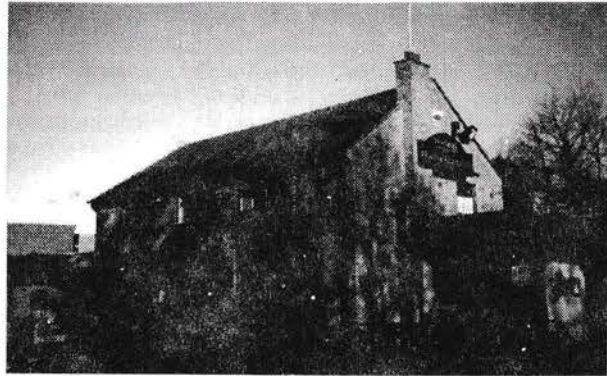
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The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA pub of the month award for February 2003 has been won by the High Grove on Silverdale Road in Gatley.

Tucked away in the centre of a large housing estate, it is Gatley's best kept secret; a pub that could accurately be described as 'difficult to find but well worth the effort'. About three years ago, Hydes extensively refurbished the pub, opening out the interior by adding a purpose built restaurant at one end with a lounge area at the front and public bar area behind. Much has been made of the pub's mahogany bar and traditional styling, creating a pleasant urban pub with a distinctive country feel. Inside there are many interesting local pictures and historical photographs of Hyde's brewery.

Then enter husband and wife team Brendan and Jan Adderley, an experienced couple with over sixteen years in the trade, mainly with local Greenalls and Scottish & Newcastle brewery pubs. Difficulties in working with these large corporate breweries have been well documented in OT, and so when Hyde's brewery offered Brendan and Jan the High Grove in Gatley, this was an opportunity not to be missed. Changes in the cellar followed, the pub became much cleaner and with a more enterprising and varied menu, trade was soon up. Brendan addressed beer quality issues, introducing Hydes bi-monthly craft ales and this, together with ensuring that the rest of Hydes beer portfolio was in the very best of condition, (Hydes dark (Welsh) mild, bitter, and Jekyll's Gold), increased sales even further.

The pub is now the focal point of the local community. You can be assured of good beer, food and a warm welcome when you visit. The High Grove is everything a good community local pub should be and so it richly deserves the pub of the month award. So why not join the local CAMRA branch to celebrate this award, which will be presented to Brendan and Jan during National Pubs Week on Thursday 27 February when, no doubt, a great night will be enjoyed by all. **SB.**

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

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

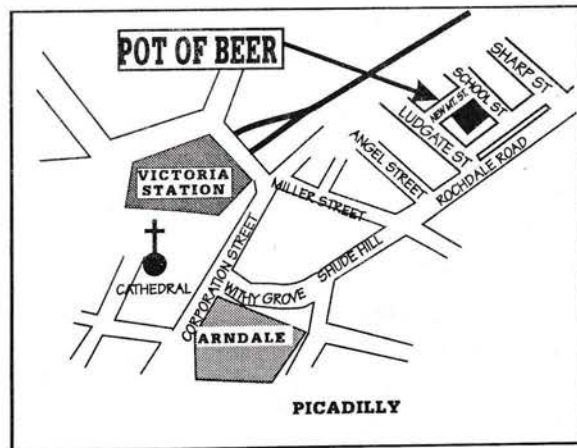
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...KRO BAR - RUNNER UP

...Continued from page 1

However, it is on the beer front that Kro really makes an impact. Given the type of bar this is, you could be forgiven for having very low expectations on the beer front. You would however be very wrong. A wide range of foreign bottled beers (both Belgian and German) are complemented by both interesting foreign beers on draught and, pride of place in the centre of the bar, five cask beers on handpump. These always include two or three guests, usually from micro-brewers. There's a real commitment to quality too, a policy which has resulted in very healthy cask ale sales in an environment where the bigger operators would have you believe it would be a non-starter.



ON THE EDGE

A recent "Five Years Ago" in Opening Times November 2002 referred to a rare beer launch at the Market Restaurant on High Street in Manchester City Centre. A bottled "Market Porter" had been specially brewed for the occasion by Dave Shelton, lecturer in Food Technology at Manchester Metropolitan University. The beer had been produced on the small brewing plant at the 'Toast Rack' in Fallowfield. A question was posed regarding another beer, brewed on a previous occasion, for the Market Restaurant. This was a celebration brew produced back in 1983, another "Market Porter", in a limited edition of 96. It commemorated the "the re-opening of the restaurant under the auspices of Lin, Anne and Peter". The beer was "brewed at home in Fenton, Staffordshire, by P E Rushton". At that time, the restaurant was at 30 Edge Street, not far from the present situation on High Street. Removal from Edge Street became imperative when everything was apparently in danger of slipping into a large hole, which had started to appear in the floor.

INTERBREW SEE THE LIGHT?

Interbrew, the Belgian brewing giant that owns Boddingtons Brewery in Strangeways, have engaged Cask Marque to assess all of the 8,000 pubs selling cask conditioned Boddingtons Bitter and Draught Bass, even though they don't actually own any of the outlets themselves, reports Jim Flynn. Over the next two years 2,000 cask ale licensees will be sponsored for Cask Marque, the licensed trade's independent real ale quality accreditation scheme, with Interbrew paying half their fee - the maximum allowed under the rules of the scheme. The will double the number of pubs with Cask Marque accreditation.

These pubs will have all their cask beers quality assessed, whether or not they are supplied by Interbrew. In the remaining 6,000 outlets, only the quality of the cask Boddingtons and Draught Bass will be assessed and these pubs will not receive formal accreditation.

The cost of all this to Interbrew is estimated at £500,000, perhaps one of the biggest investments in cask ale quality ever made by one producer. It also amounts to a remarkable recognition that in a concerning number of outlets the quality of the beers leaves something to be desired. As a result, the reputations of what a decade or two ago very highly regarded brands have suffered considerably in the market place. Interbrew's research shows that if consumers are concerned about the quality of their beer, 34% will transfer custom to another pub and 49% would order a different drink next time.

This initiative, together with the increasing advertising of cask Boddington's Bitter must give real ale drinkers hope for the future. This is after all the first time a brewery company has sponsored such assessments outside their own tied estate.

There are however a number of barriers which Interbrew still have to surmount in their quest for improvement in quality. It has to be remembered that they control none of the pubs, and while they will supply licensees with support and encouragement, they will not withdraw products from pubs that don't come up to scratch.

The biggest question however is whether Interbrew are really converts to the cause of real ale. Over recent years they and their predecessors have continually treated cask Boddingtons Bitter and the 'smooth' nitrokeg version as a single undifferentiated product. This has resulted in confusion in the mind of the general public and a loss of numerous cask outlets across the Opening Times area. Will this damaging marketing strategy and attitude of mind cease? Given that in those pubs where nitrokeg Boddingtons is also no sale, Cask Marque have also been asked to assess this product, too, there must be grave doubts. Time will tell.

EARLY HOURS FOR STOCKPORT PUBS?

An innocuous item under 'Public & Legal Notices' in the Stockport Express of 15 January could herald earlier opening for Stockport pubs.

The notice was by the Clerk to the Licensing Justices and announced that on 10 February, the bench would consider a proposal to modify general licensing hours within limits set down by the 1964 Licensing Act. If granted, it will mean that pubs in the area will be able to open at 10.00am rather than 11 as at present.

So, what's brought all this about? The instigators of this move are none other than the JD Wetherspoon organisation, operators of pubs like Calverts Court in the town centre and the Kings Hall in Cheadle Hulme. They have selected certain licensing districts to try and obtain this extension in permitted hours and Stockport is one of those chosen.

It might not be all plain sailing, though. Legal experts in the trade press have cast doubts on their chances of success and it will be necessary to demonstrate a 'need' for the change. Having said that, given that general liberalisation of licensing hours is in the air, it may well be that the local bench will decide that no harm can come from this. Some traditional town centre pubs busy during the day but very quiet at night, might welcome the move as it would enable them to open when they have a greater chance of attracting custom. By the time you read this, though, the die will be cast - one way or the other.



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STAGGER

with Dave Williams

Cheadle & Gatley

Our Friday night Stagger kicked off on a dark autumn night with just three of us putting our heads round the door of the **Red Lion** in Gatley which, as expected, sold no real ale. Not the best of starts. With our curiosity satisfied, we went across to the opposite end of Gatley's village green to the advertised meeting place, the **Prince of Wales**. This Hydes' pub, a listed building, was originally two cottages and recently had a visit by Rod Stewart. Inside, there is a lounge on one side and a fine vault with pew seating on the other. Cask beers were Hydes Mild and Bitter, both were tried and found to be pleasant enough without being anything special.

A few yards down Church Road was our next pub, the **Gothic**. Once a Methodist church, it then became Gatley Wine Bar and the Gothic, the only pub outside Merseyside owned by Liverpool's Cains brewery. We entered an open-plan, one-roomed pub, still with many original church fittings, which was already quite busy. Most of us found seats on the balcony (the pub was so busy, some had to stand) and tried the Cains Mild (very good), Bitter and FA (both good). Also on offer was the guest beer - Shepherd Neame Bishops Finger. Alas, there was little time to enjoy the pub as we had to race on to the next one to give us time to get the bus to Cheadle.

That pub was the **Horse & Farrier**, a recently refurbished pub, now a Hydes' 'Heritage Inn'. We all managed to pass the bouncers at the entrance and the door was opened for us by a uniformed member of the pub staff. The pub was very, very packed. The last time I visited the Horse & Farrier I thought it looked a little shabby and run-down but now it's much more plush. There has been an increase in the drinking area with even an old bottle store now turned into a drinking vault. We all found seats in the "Smoke Room", which was filled with Hydes' memorabilia. On the beer front we were advised by the bar staff that the Jekyll's Gold was 'going off' but fortunately Hydes Light, Bitter and the seasonal Winter Fuggle were all still flowing. One grumble here - the uniformed bar staff all seemed to be serving the beer with big heads, rather less than full pints, although top-ups were freely given when requested. The Light and Bitter were fine while the Winter Fuggle was rated a very good winter ale in excellent condition.

Leaving the pub we spotted our bus about to depart but a quick dash saw us all aboard and bound for Cheadle where we got off at Gatley Road. Opposite was **Weavers**, now an all-keg "Q-Bar" but our destination was the **White Hart**, a landmark former Boddingtons pub, remembered by one of our party as selling the best 'original' Boddies "I've ever had". Boddies Bitter is still sold at this rambling, open-plan, wood-panelled pub, catering mainly for a young, upmarket crowd. Of course, present day Boddies rarely, if ever, matches its past glories, and what we had here was perfectly summed up by one of our party as "a fine example of a mediocre beer".

Next up was walked down High Street to the **Crown**. This Hydes pub has a large, glass shop-window style frontage and inside is a large L-shaped room furnished in traditional style. Three beers were available on handpump - Hydes' Mild, Bitter and Winter Fuggle. The Mild was judged to be generally adequate while the Bitter and Winter Fuggle were both in very good nick.

Our next destination was down High Street, passing the **Vine** (once a fine pub and due for a major refit) - a few of us briefly checked this out but, you've guessed it - keg only! I'm told cask ale is promised for the future, though. Thankfully, nearby is another Hydes' pub, the **Olde Star Inn**. This pub has a fine frontage, and inside is a large, roomy, traditional local. We all sat in the basic front lounge area sampling Hydes Light and Bitter, both considered to be perfectly OK.

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 226:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Peter Edwardson, John Taylor, Frank Wood, Tom Lord, Brian Taylor, Dave Williams, Stuart Ballantyne, Jim Flynn, Stewart Revell.

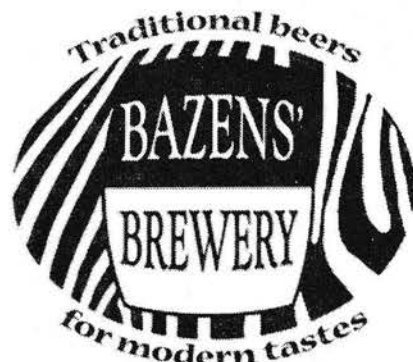
We drank up and moved down to the **George & Dragon** where two bouncers greeted us as we entered. The G&D is a spacious pub with wood-panelled walls, plus a very tiny hidden snug (complete with many Manchester City pictures on the wall). On this particular night loud dance music was playing and the pub was extremely busy. The beer fayre was Boddies, which was considered poor, and Greenalls Bitter (now an over-cloying and sweet beer) which was at best average.

Next up was a long and challenging walk down Manchester Road to the **Cheshire Lines**. Located next to the M60, this ex-railway station is now a Banks's "drive-in" pub. The interior is spacious and open-plan, with an island bar in the middle of the pub. Naturally, there is a lot of good railway memorabilia adorning the walls. The beer line up was Banks's Bitter, Marston's Pedigree and a guest, Hall & Woodhouse Tanglefoot. The Banks's and the Pedigree were both in extremely good nick, but alas the Tanglefoot was not quite so good.

At about 10.30 we made a bee line back up Manchester Road and raced into the **Ashlea**, a "Chef & Brewer" pub (ie Scottish & Newcastle restaurant-style pub), with a large amount of bric-a-brac spread around the interior. We swiftly drank either Courage Directors or Theakstons Best Bitter. The Directors was in poor condition, wit the Theakstons little better. We were all alarmed at having to pay over a pound, just for halves.

With just minutes to go for closing time, a few of us dashed up to the **Royal Oak** on Stockport Road, our first Robinson's pub. A karaoke was in full swing, but disappointingly the pub's back snug was locked out to one and all! Worse still, we found the Robinson's Best Bitter in a very poor condition ("the worst Robbies beer I have ever tasted in my life" commented one staggere), whilst the Old Tom strong ale (no other beer, including mild, was available) was also extremely poor. The Royal Oak has normally always been a great pub with a reputation for top quality beer; it seems like we caught it on a rare off night, A disappointing end to the stagger.

In the whole this was a very stimulating stagger taking in a wide and assorted range of pubs, and a variable selection of ales sampled. Of course, this Stagger is based around one Friday night, and the beer ranges, quality and the vibes of the pubs themselves could be different at another time. Why not give these pubs a go yourself - it will be well worth it.



Sea God 4.3% (Feb/March)

Pacific Bitter 3.8%

Flatbac 4.2%

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NATIONAL PUBS WEEK

STARTS SATURDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 2003

The aim of National Pubs Week is to encourage more people to visit pubs more often. New research compiled by CAMRA shows an astonishing 20 pubs close every month and over a quarter of adults (27%) never visit a pub. If this trend continues then Britain's unique pubs will disappear very quickly!

Mike Benner, CAMRA's Head of Campaigns said "The aim of National Pubs Week is simple - to encourage people to visit pubs more regularly. Its slogan is 'There's a pub for everyone' and we seek to highlight the enormous variety of pubs in the UK. We are not only supporting the quaint country pubs but also community and town centre pubs as we want all of the pub industry to benefit from this initiative."

CAMRA, and a number of industry partners, are currently encouraging as many pubs throughout Britain to take part in National Pubs Week and organise a variety of events throughout the week to encourage more people to attend pubs more regularly.

To support the launch of National Pubs Week, CAMRA will be issuing a number of interesting pub press releases. These will include:

- ★ Announcement of the 'National Pub of the Year' winner - the 'Best Pub in Britain'
- ★ New research findings into people's pub going habits - what age groups, sexes and regions are visiting pubs the most / least, what pub promotions will attract more pub custom and the main reasons why people choose a particular pub.
- ★ The Pub is the Hub - A year on since the launch of this exciting initiative by the Countryside Agency and the British Beer and Pub Association, CAMRA takes a look at how the pubs market has changed.
- ★ Announcement of Britain's top ten Pub names - Has the 'Rat and Parrot' taken over from the 'Red Lion'? CAMRA looks at pub names through time and how they have changed.

Locally, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch are holding events most days, while Stockport & South Manchester will be presenting both Pub of the Month and Pub of the Year Awards in this week.. See the CAMRA Branch Diaries for details. In addition, here are some of the area's heritage pubs - why take time out during National Pubs Week to visit some of these historic gems?

HERITAGE PUBS NEAR YOU Your Handy Guide for National Pubs Week

The Opening Times area is well blessed with historic locals of all shapes and sizes. Here we present a selection of some of the best. All sell real ale and all will repay a visit - National Pubs Week is the ideal opportunity to take time out and visit these rare examples of our historic public house heritage.



The Plough, Hyde Road, Gorton

This is a late C19 pub incorporating parts of an earlier building. The layout is virtually unaltered and comprises tap room, bar parlour, smoke room, pool room, all off a central hall, and an upstairs meeting room. The interior was remodelled in 1893 and most of the fittings installed at that time are still intact. The bar parlour, to the left as you enter, has been in continuous use since at least 1802.

Real Ale - Robinson's Hatters and Best Bitter

The Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris

The Nursery was built in 1939, replacing a mid-nineteenth-century pub. The pub is virtually as it was built. There is generous use of light oak including full-height panelling in the lounge and the leaded glass windows are decorated with an occasional coloured glass panel depicting horticultural nursery motifs - a spade, a watering can or a flower. In addition to the large lounge there is a bar lobby area, a smoke room/dining room, a vault with a separate entrance and a function room/dining room upstairs.

Real Ale - Hydes Mild, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and Seasonal beer

The Circus Tavern, Portland St, Manchester



An utterly unspoilt pub which is a tremendous survival in bustling central Manchester. Just one bay, this early nineteenth-century stuccoed building, has a corridor on the left leading to two simply-fitted public rooms, one behind the other, on the right. The servery is placed under the stairs and is only large enough for one person to perform the noble act of serving the beer. *Real Ale - Tetley Bitter*

Mr Thomas's Chop House, Cross St, Manchester

A tall, narrow building dated 1901 in the gable. It's a typical example of exuberant end-of-the-nineteenth-century architecture. The interior consists of three spaces, one behind the other, the rear two defined by a wide, green-tiled arch. These two rear areas are characterised by an impressive display of tilework, with a green dado running round the walls. Black and white tiled flooring throughout. The bar counter and back is modern. *Real Ales - Boddingtons Bitter, Taylor's Landlord, Guest Beers*

Pevevil of the Peak, Great Bridgewater St, Manchester

This pub is an amazing sight. There are a number of pubs (especially in Birmingham) where interior walls are covered in tiles, but here the display is outside. This simple, two-storey mid-Victorian building was remodelled about 1900 and given a ceramic facing. One the ground floor it is yellow-green, and above the orange name band it



is cream. The interior has three rooms and a dog-leg corridor which also serves as a drinking lobby. The woodwork dates from the time of the great remodelling. *Real Ale - Websters Bitter, Guest Beer*

Alexandra, Northgate Rd, Edgeley

Built in 1911, the Alexandra is beautifully intact. Only the back bar and the outdoor department have been altered. The entrance hall has glazed tiles with multi-coloured Art Nouveau motifs. A room leads off each corner of the hall and each glazed door is etched with 'Tap Room', 'Smoke Room', 'Bar Parlour' etc.. The decoration continues up the stairs with an impressive coloured glass window on the half landing. A short corridor leads to an attached billiard room with exposed roof timbers and a painted glass skylight and a bay window with billiards etched in the glass. *Real Ales - Robinson's Bitter, Seasonal Beers*

Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport

The Arden Arms has a beautifully preserved interior dating from the nineteenth century, with simple wooden panelling, bench seating and quarry tile floors. Three rooms open up off the lobby area around the bar and a fourth room can be accessed by passing

CAMRA's NATIONAL INVENTORY

What they say: "We have preserved its character"

What they mean: "We've knocked out all the walls and filled it full of junk"

Of the 60,000 or so public houses in the whole of the UK, it is estimated that less than four per cent have been able to escape drastic alteration in recent times. The number whose interiors might be considered of outstanding heritage interest has dwindled to around 200 or so. The National Inventory is CAMRA's pioneering initiative for bringing greater recognition and protection to the country's most priceless historic pubs.

What then is the 'National Inventory' and what is its importance?

The list of pub interiors is the culmination of 11 years work, having started life as an 'emergency initiative' to take account of the turmoil facing the brewing industry following the 1989 Beer Orders and the large-scale pub disposals by national brewers that came in their wake. The idea, then and now, has been to identify and seek safeguarding for the very best of Britain's architectural heritage of pub interiors.

Hundreds of pubs have been looked at by a team of volunteer surveyors and while many worthwhile pubs were flagged up, far fewer met the, admittedly demanding, criteria. Time and again we encountered pubs which had been seriously compromised with walls and interior fittings ripped out, sometimes replaced with reproduction 'historic' interiors, but in many cases simply victims of the refurbishments of the Sixties and Seventies when little regard was had to our architectural heritage. Often we encountered surviving fragments, perhaps even an entire room, sitting incongruously amid the neon and plastic of a later age.

The range of pubs which have made it to the list reflects the very diversity which is the backbone of the British public house tradition. Apart from the classic 'gin palaces' we have also sought out plainer but still unspoilt urban and rural beerhouses. In Victorian towns and cities as much care was lavished on smaller domestic pub as on the great gin palaces, and since these pubs have perhaps had more need to adapt and change with the times, truly unspoilt

examples have proved elusive. Of particular rarity are truly unspoilt pubs from between the wars. Not only do fewer pubs date from this period but the larger 'roadhouse' style pubs have invariably been gutted over the past 20-30 years. It is in the smaller, domestic examples that the 1920s and 1930's pub survives, with such local pubs as the Nursery and the Swan With Two Necks being prime examples of this vanishing breed.

Apart from identifying the best of what is left, the National Inventory is also being used as a tool for these pubs' preservation. We have found that no more than half of the pubs identified had any form of statutory protection. Even where a pub was listed as being of historic importance, the listing description tended to concentrate on the interior features and generally overlook what was inside, what made the building work as a pub. In some cases this led to the false belief that only part of a pub was protected. Exteriors were lovingly preserved while all hell broke loose inside. This now is beginning to change, with more pubs getting listed status as the descriptions of those already protected 'beefed up' to lay greater emphasis on interior details. At the same time many pub owners have shown a greater appreciation and understanding of the remaining heritage qualities in their pubs.

The Opening Times area includes a large number of heritage pubs, many of which are on the National Inventory. Why not make National Pubs Week (February 22-March 1) the chance to visit some of these superb locals - just see our handy guide for one near you.

through the bar. There have been some structural alterations in recent years (new openings, a new room formed from former living quarters and some bench seating removed) but the quality that remains is very evident. *Real Ales - Robinson's Hatters, Best Bitter, Old Tom, Seasonal Beer*

Swan With Two Necks, Princes St, Stockport



Rebuilt or remodelled about 1930, this pub has not really changed since. The interior is simply organised with a corridor running the length of the building on the right-hand side, and leading (from front to back) a public bar, the servery (with a drinking lobby in front) and a lounge behind. Extensive use is made of wall panelling as was so often the case in inter-war pubs. The lounge, particularly, with its Tudor-style fireplace, succeeds in creating a warm, comfortable atmosphere. *Real Ales - Robinson's Hatters, Best Bitter, Frederics, Old Tom, Seasonal Beers*

**Queens Head (Turners Vaults),
Little Underbank, Stockport**

A three-storey building in the town centre and part of a late eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century block. Like the Circus Tavern in Manchester it is extremely

narrow and shows how many small urban pubs must have looked a hundred years ago. The furnishings are probably late Victorian. Behind the main bar are a couple of smaller ones. Make a point of having a look at a very rare survival behind the counter - taps which formerly dispensed wines and spirits. *Real Ale - Sam Smith's Old Brewery Bitter*

Stalybridge Station Buffet, Platform 1, Stalybridge Station

This is a marvellous institution - probably the last-remaining, truly traditional railway buffet in the country. It was part of the 1885 rebuilding at the station and consists of a conservatory and the main part of the buffet within the brick-built station buildings. In the latter there's a long, straight, marble-topped counter with shelving on the back wall. Stone fireplace and lots of railway memorabilia. To the right these areas have been brought into public use as part of the buffet; the extreme right-hand part was originally the first-class ladies' waiting room. *Real Ale - ever-changing range of guest beers*

Harrington Arms, Church Lane, Gawsworth

The Harrington Arms is actually part of a working farm and thus is a rare example of a once common way of making a livelihood - combining public house keeping with other activities. The main part of the pub is a three-storey red brick building of the late C17 or early C18, which has been added to in the C19. The public areas lead off a through corridor and are located in both the original and added parts. The servery is right of the entrance in a narrow room, which leads on to two further public areas. The tap room has simple seating and a quarry tile floor. *Real Ales - Robinson's Hatters, Best Bitter*

The Castle, Churchwallgate, Macclesfield

This whitened brick public house probably started life originally as late C18 dwellings which were remodelled later as a pub in the C19. The central entrance leads to public rooms left and right, the bar counter being in the small right-hand one; this has fixed seating and panelling. On the left is a smoke room which has fixed seating, bell-pushes, and painted slate fire surround. There is a serving hatch in the corridor. Towards the rear is a parlour with glazed partition to the corridor. *Real Ale - Theakston's Best Bitter*

Other Heritage Pubs

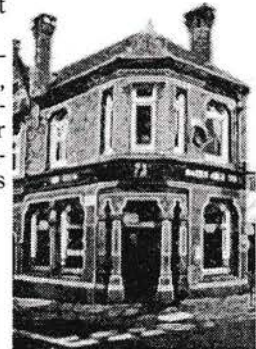
Pressures of space prevent us giving details of all the heritage pubs in the area. Apart from those mentioned above, these additional pubs are also well worth visiting:

Stockport - Blossoms, Buxton Rd, Heaviley: Multi-roomed Victorian pub; rear smoke room is unspoilt gem. Robinson's beers.

Manchester - Hare & Hounds, Shudehill: Unspoilt inter-war interior; National Inventory listed. Tetley and Holts beers.

Manchester - Marble Arch, Rochdale Rd: Stunning tiled interior and mosaic floor. Marble and guest beers.

Stalybridge - Grosvenor, Grosvenor St: unspoilt inter-war multi-room interior. Robinson's beers.



Marble Arch



MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

The post-Christmas lull seems to have gripped the City Centre with very little news to report and, from what I can gather, not that much in the pipeline, either. The introduction of a bar billiards table at the *Knott* (opposite Deansgate station) though, is a welcome site at this excellent bar, which just seems to get better and better.

Openshaw Revisited

I therefore decided to pay a return visit to Openshaw, this time to check out what remains of the pub scene on and around Ashton Old Road heading back to the City Centre. It's certainly the case that the pub scene here is very much a game of two halves. In Higher Openshaw, out from the crossroads there have been very few pub losses and quite a few of the pubs serve cask ale. Head in the other direction, though and it's a very different picture.

The first port of call was the *Railway* on Chapman Street. No real ale and looking pretty run down with dirty windows and broken glass in the door. Nearby are the closed and boarded remains of the *Napoleon* (or the *Jive Inn* as it was called in its dying days) – a very depressing site, I must say.

Round the corner on Ogden Lane both the *High Bank* and the *Royal Oak* survive but neither offer any cask beer. On the main road, though, it's mainly a depressing collection of defunct pubs. The *Pack Horse* (ex-Holts) is closed, boarded and for sale; the *Smithfield* (ex-*Locomotive*) is closed, boarded and up for auction. The *Staff of Life* and the *Malcolm* are now private residences and the *George* has been converted into shops. The *Drovers* is also closed and boarded and has been painted a lurid green into the bargain. Add to that numerous demolitions (*Wrexham*, *Grey Mare*, *Travellers Call* etc) and it's all pretty dreary. In fact apart from the improving *Seven Stars* in Ardwick, only two pubs still function. One, the *Queen Anne*, is a keg-only free house. The other is an oasis.

This is the *Leigh Arms*, opposite Openshaw College. A former Whitbread house, it's obviously well-run and still sells cask beer in

the form of Marston's Pedigree and, wait for it, Cains Mild. When I called the Pedigree had just run out and the new cask wasn't ready yet. The mild, though, was terrific and obviously selling well. It's a pub I shall certainly be visiting again.

Out & About

Before setting off for Openshaw, I finally managed to get my head round the door of the *Friendship* in Gorton. No real ale.

I also visited a few pubs in the Bradford and Beswick area. The *Big Bradford* remains keg as do the other pubs on and around Grey Mare Lane. The former *Britannia* has also re-opened as *Summerbees*, aiming to cash in on the football trade from the nearby stadium. The *Britannia* was an excellent traditional Lees pub, with lounge and vault, cask beer but very few customers. *Summerbees* is open plan, café-bar style, keg beer...and very few customers. Perhaps it'll take off (and will certainly be busy on match days) but I have to say I'm not convinced. It will be interesting to go back in, say, 12 months time to see how it's faring. Heading back into town, I called at the *Mitchell Arms* on Every Street, a Banks's house with just cask bitter (and, oddly, keg Boddies as well). Another well-run pub, I can't help but wonder if the introduction of the keg Boddies has hit cask ale sales as my bitter was certainly past its best. Hopefully, I was just unlucky because I've had good beer here in the past.

Whilst in the *Mitchell*, I was told that the nearby *Bank of England* had reopened. It looked ramshackle and closed, but open it was and peering through the windows, it doesn't look like it sells real ale.

Back in Didsbury, Paul and Irene Saxton are now settling in at the *Station* and are already making their mark. They are to introduce the W & D guest beer, axe Marstons Pedigree because of poor sales and replace it with Banks's (mild). Other changes planned for the pub include introducing Sky sports, joining the darts and quiz leagues, and next season to set up a pub football team and enter the team into the North Cheshire League.

Meanwhile, there's no news of their successor at the *Rising Sun*, Burnage. I'm told that several people have come and gone but as this was typed there was no permanent successor. Perhaps there will be more news next time.

And that's your lot!



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Stockport CAMRA Pub of the Month Oct 2000
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The Ring 'O Bells, Marple

The Ring O'Bells is this year's winner in Robinson's Best Kept Bar & Cellar competition. Presentation night at the pub was accompanied by a very impressive array of pub food so a return visit to sample the menu was clearly on the cards.

The pub is a four square stone-build building of no little age, sited on the towpath of the Macclesfield Canal. There's something about pubs on canals - they always seem to be a cut above the rest and the Ring O'Bells is no exception. There's an attractive outside drinking area overlooking the canal, and this is doubtless a major attraction in the summer months. On a damp day in February, though, the appeal of the pub was inside and what a welcome refuge it proved to be.

While there has been some opening out over the years, there is still essentially a multi-room format with a bar and snug at the front, another room opposite the bar and a fourth room, often used primarily for dining at the back. The whole place is decorated and furnished in proper country pub style - that's warm and welcoming rather than twee and kitsch.

Late on a Thursday lunchtime the pub was still busy with diners although it should be stressed that this remains very much a pub with food rather than being an eatery that just happens to sell beer. An excellent pint of Hatters provided an ideal accompaniment to browsing the menu, which is wide ranging to say the least, running the whole gamut from snacks and starters to three-course roast dinners. The printed menu is supplemented by a daily specials menu and I ended up choosing from this. There was a choice of four starters priced from £3.25 to £3.95 and a number of mains ranging from £6.95 to £11.25. I went for the top of the range in each case with salmon, dill & lime pate for starters followed by fillets of steak with a black bean, mushroom and onion sauce.

The starter swiftly arrived and the round of pate surprised me with a mousse-like texture, but none the worse for that. The salmon and the dill blended perfectly, as they are wont to do, with a hint of citrus underpinning the whole confection. Accompaniments were a soft roll and a small salad garnish.

The main, served with rice and chips, although I could have had just either, was terrific. Large slices of tender steak, whole button mushrooms and tender onions complemented each other well with the savoury black bean sauce in the background. It was a generous portion and I just about finished. I also noticed a generous bowl of hotpot delivered to a neighbouring table, which also looked to be filling well-prepared dish. Its recipient certainly demolished it with obvious enjoyment.

There's a temptingly described range of puds available, too but, unusually for me, I couldn't manage one. I didn't even have room for another beer, although both Best Bitter and Double Hop were also available and, if anything like the Hatters, would have been something to savour.

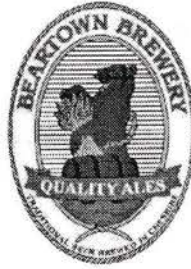
I'd been meaning to eat at the Ring O'Bells for some time and now I've been I'm just sorry that I didn't go sooner as this really is top of the range stuff. Highly recommended.

The Ring O'Bells is at 130 Church Lane, Marple. Telephone 0161 427 2300. Food is served 11.30-2 and 5.30-8.30 Tuesday to Saturday and from 12-7 Sunday. No food is available on Mondays and the catering operation will be out of action for the first two weeks in March. Phone ahead for details.



PUB OF THE SEASON

Macclesfield and East Cheshire's Pub of the season for Winter 2002/3 is the Dolphin in Windmill Street, Macclesfield, enthusiastically run by landlord John Lythaby. A Robinson's house, it is a traditional pub serving the local community (there are 7 pub teams!) and also making visitors feel welcome. Since arriving at the pub just over 2 years ago, John (a CAMRA member) has extended the beer range and has recently had extra pumps installed, so that he can serve not only his regular Best Bitter and Hatter's, but also Snowdon and occasional seasonals - including a welcome barrel of Old Tom on the bar in the Winter months. The Dolphin epitomises a good Winter pub - as well as the aforementioned Old Tom, there is a real fire, cosy rooms with gleaming brass and copper and it is within easy walking distance of the town centre. The presentation was made Monday 13 January.



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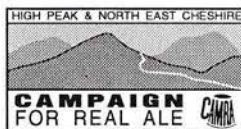
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FEATURED PUB
 The Royal Oak,
 Mellor

This month's featured pub is the Royal Oak on Longhurst Lane in Mellor between Marple Bridge and New Mills. Situated in the centre of a brick built row of attractive cottages the Royal Oak is recorded as having been a pub as early as 1828. Throughout the 1800,s Mellor was a hive of industrial activity with mills, forges, and quarries as well as numerous farms. During all this period the pub will have played its part in providing hospitality for the local workers and passing travellers alike who passed its door Gradually as the industry declined the area became more residential but the Royal Oak continued to provide refreshment as it does today to both locals and passers-by. The beers are Robinson's Hatters Mild, Best Bitter and also Robinson's seasonal beers all served through hand pumps and currently the opening hours are 5.30 to 11.00 Monday to Friday, 12.00 to 11.00 Saturday, and 12.00 to 10.30 Sunday. Externally the pub is in keeping with the area having been there before much of the surrounding property was built. Inside the pub is cosy and friendly with an extremely good beer garden at the rear with very good views over the river Goyt valley to Strines and Marple. The pub admirably fulfils a role of community focal point particularly acting as a base for several sports teams including lacrosse and cricket. There is also a quiz team in the Stockport and District quiz league against whom the author has had many close contests when playing for another league team, the Ring O Bells in Marple!! On the catering front part of the pub has been developed as an Indian restaurant with excellent food served each evening from 6.00 onwards. So here you can have the best of both worlds, good beer and a good curry, and on warm nights the delights of an excellent beer garden as well. Mike and Tracy the licensees are happy to provide sandwiches and snacks at weekend lunchtimes but they need to be ordered in advance. Mike also has plans for Friday coffee mornings. All in all this is an excellent pub, doing well the job it is intended to do and long may that continue. The pub has many attributes not the least its warm and welcoming atmosphere and is richly deserving of continued support and visits.



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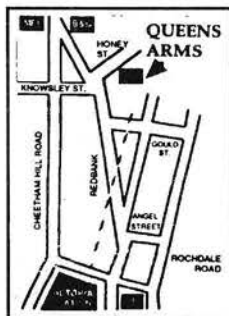
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 Boddingtons Bitter
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Emmon, Mal and Staff
 welcome you

Leyden - another brewer with a festive special in the pipeline. This will be Christmas Cracker, a 4.3% bitter with a seasonal feel. If you're lucky you might also catch the last of Lanky Lass, a 3.8% beer brewed for the Smithfield (Swan St, Manchester) beer festival. This pale, dry-hopped bitter has almost sold out.

Boggart Hole Clough - in common with many local micros, Boggart Hole Clough is currently brewing flat out. Luckily, they've still found time to introduce two new beers this month. Bogsleigh is a 6% Irish Red-style beer while Boggart's Balls is a 4.5% "roast smoked flavour Christmas beer with a hint of chocolate". Phew - sounds like that one's got something in it for everyone!

Khean Brewing Co - the new Congleton micro has been going great guns since we first reported on it. To maintain the cricketing theme, the initial Premium Bitter has been renamed Legspinner. This has been joined by a session beer, the 3.9% All Rounder, and a very well-received dry stout, the 4.2% Caught Behind. Just brewed as OT went to press was Seamer, a 4.5% 'conker coloured' beer, brewed to be less bitter than Legspinner and All Rounder with a good malt-/hop balance. Brewer Ken Newsome is also looking to produce a Christmas special with a 'Christmas cake flavour' with some added spice. The name is as yet undecided - to keep up the cricket theme, though, a distinct possibility is Jingle Bales!



It might be quite difficult getting around over Christmas, with endless numbers of intermittent train strikes, works undertaken by the organisation formerly known as RailTrack, and now apparently a bus strike as well, but it might well be worth it. Up until the weekend before Christmas there are the Christmas Markets, and as far as I can ascertain there are no less than five different German beers available. The big tent has a Berliner pale and a black lager (sadly a bit underflavoured) but an interesting curiosity. One of the stalls in the middle is selling a quite effective Saxon Pilsner (dry with a hoppy bite) and at the Princess St end there is both the Paulaner stand (also selling bratwurst this year) and another selling... an unidentified (as yet) pale beer. Average is about £1.50 for 0.4l (about £2.05/pint equiv). Bar Fringe has a succession of interesting beers coming on, both British and foreign draft and some bottles. The Christmas menu at the Pot of Beer is both unusual and excellent - its certainly where I'll be eating my pre-Christmas, Christmas lunch. Interesting British beers are destined for the Smithfield and Pot (and of course the Marble) and as the food operation at the BeerHouse gradually comes on stream, so the range of interesting non-standard beers continues to increase. Its usually quite diverting to go in once again (especially on the 21st when they hope to have a barbecue, the fancy dress on Christmas eve and the "piss-up" scheduled for New Year's eve!). My discourse on Bamberg is postponed until the New Year as OT has had far too many "what we did on our hols" articles recently, in my humble opinion.

Bottled Beer of the Month....NOT!

Holsten Fusion (5%). Ohmigod! A German-brewed bottled beer mixed with fruit extract! No!, No! and thrice No! The present for somebody you hate. The Citrus version is foul, the "Kurrant" (I kid you not) version is execrable, and the Apple just about drinkable (but why would you want to). The beer itself must have been over 6% 'cos the blend is still 5%. Ugh!

Robinson's COMPETITION



Robin Bitter is a unique seasonal ale brewed specially for the dark months of November and December. It is a rich, dark full bodied bitter with a distinctive roasted malt character complemented by the vague hint of liquorice.

Keep yourself warm over the festive period by winning a stylish Robinson's fleece in this month's competition. Margaret Corlett of Newton Heath, meanwhile, was the winner of our October competition and receives a tray of Frederics and a Frederics T-shirt.



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

1. In which year was Robin Bitter launched?
2. To what aby is Robin Bitter brewed?
3. Which ale with a Welsh theme was launched this year?

Robinson's

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



LICENSEES

We're looking for pubs to join in next year's event. £10 gets your pub into this successful campaign.

Due to demand, a limit of 86 pubs has been set this time.

The prizes have been changed, too.

- Challenge Extra (T-shirt) for 12 pubs, in 12 areas
- Challenge Super (Sweatshirt) for 36 pubs, in 12 areas
- Challenge Ultra (Pewter Tankard) for all of the pubs

Contact Mark McConachie 0161 429 9356 for details.

CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

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

Diary

DECEMBER 2002

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

Tuesday 17th - Pub of the Month presentation to the Waldorf, Gore St, Manchester City Centre. From 8.00pm.

Friday 20th - Annual Hillgate Stagger: 7.00pm Queens Head (Turners Vaults), Little Underbank; 8.30pm Red Bull, Hillgate. **This is the longest running event in any CAMRA branch! Let's have a really good turnout this year and get the festive season off with a swing.**

Saturday 11th January - Annual Branch Meal: Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris. 7.30 onwards. Giant prize raffle and (hopefully!) guest speaker. Book with John Clarke (0161 477 1973) or Paul Formby (0161 612 0759 after 6.00pm).

Thursday 16th - Branch Meeting: Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport. Starts 8.00pm. **NB the 2003 Branch Pub of the Year will be decided at this meeting - 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 9th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Mottram Rd, Hyde. Starts 8.30pm.

Saturday 28th - Branch Trip to Paradise Brewery Beer Festival - contact Frank Wood on 01457851674

DECEMBER 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 events:

Thursday 12th - Xmas Meal: Poachers, Bollington. £15.95 per head - booking essential. Phone for details asap - contact Keith Farman 01625 0572460

Monday 13th January (tbc) - Winter Pub of the Season Presentation to the Dolphin, Macclesfield

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 events:

Thursday 5th - Monthly Branch Meeting: Old Market Tavern, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm.

Thursday 12th - Xmas Curry in Broadheath. Phone Joan Taylor (0161 962 2396) for details.

Wednesday 8th January - Regional Meeting hosted by T&H: Vine, Kennedy St, City Centre. Starts 8.00pm.



To Do Address Noteepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner

12



CAINS

BREWERY TOURS

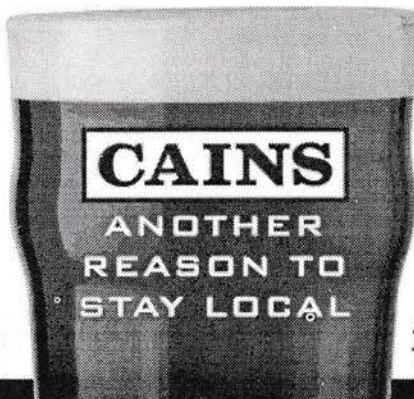
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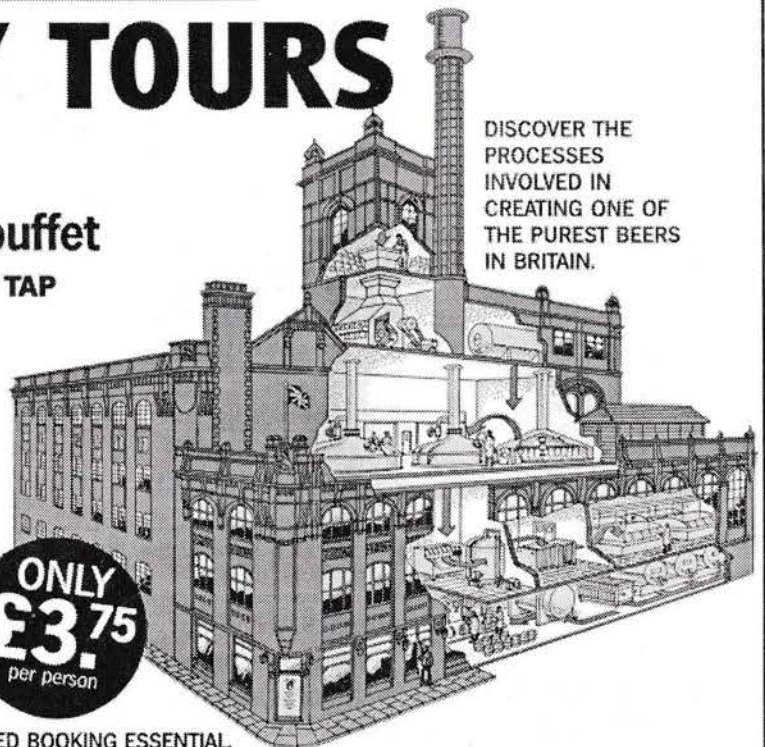
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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison **DECEMBER '97**

There was one front page story – the opening of the Marble Brewery, based at the Marble Arch free house on Rochdale Road, Manchester.

Looking after a huge variety of cask ales from micro-breweries all over the UK had given licensee Mark Dade the idea of brewing himself, and it had taken a year to bring the dream to fruition. The brewery had been designed by Brendan Dobbin, who had also helped install the five-barrel plant. It would distribute its products to The Bar, and the Marble Beer House in Chorlton, in addition to the Marble Arch itself. The brewery now produces beers made with organic ingredients and GM-free yeast, accredited by the Soil Association and the Vegetarian Society.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Editorial comment was focussed on the state of the Real Ale market – “Sales down by 14%, Real Ale in crisis.” Bass blamed the closure of two breweries on the steep decline in sales of cask conditioned beer. But many of the local breweries (including micros) were selling more cask beer than ever before – so what was going on? Bass and other national giants accounted for around 86% of all beer brewed in Britain, and it was their rush to invest in and promote nitroreg (or “smooth”) that had produced this apparent crisis of falling real ale production. Whitbread were preparing to sell their breweries and become solely a retailing company. This was where the Campaign for Real Ale arrived in the early 1970’s. Once again, they would support small regional brewers who had remained true to cask ale, whilst the big brewers the big brewers were attempting to consign draught beer to the dustbin.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CAMRA’s Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition had been held at the Glasgow Beer Festival the previous month, and some of Manchester’s local brews were among the winners. In the Stouts & Porters class, McGuinness Tommy Todd’s Porter gained the bronze award, but it was in the Barley Wine class that local brewers had excelled. Lees Moonraker won the top awards, with Robinson’s Old Tom as runner-up. The National Winter Ales Festival subsequently moved to Manchester and the Upper Campfield Market off Deansgate but, sadly, that venue had been lost and for 2003 the festival is moving again, to Burton-on-Trent.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Finally, two items of pub news with up-to-date comments on the ever-changing face of the local pubs...

The Navigation, Lancashire Hill, was selling Websters Bitter and Green Label, as well as the most recent addition to the range, Tetley Bitter, all at £1 a pint. Twelve months ago the pub, which by then was keg-only, was acquired by Congleton’s Beartown Brewery and now sells an impressive range of Beartown beers on handpump. Hydes had made a great job of re-furbishing the Horse & Farrier in Gatley – recarpeted and refurbished throughout – even the vault had a new polished wooden floor. They have just repeated the exercise with another impressive job converting the pub into one of Hydes’ “Heritage Inns”.



Seasoned but Rare

Most of our local independent brewers have now introduced programmes of seasonal beers, typically changing every couple of months. Virtually all of these have been well worth drinking, and some - Robinson’s current offering Robin Bitter particularly springs to mind - have been exceptional. Yet these beers can be found in very few of these brewers’ tied houses, and in those where they do appear, low turnover can lead to inconsistent quality. Drinkers have been known to avoid the seasonal unless they see someone else drinking it, and it has even been suggested that in one or two high-profile pubs the seasonal beers are kept on to promote the image of the brewery, but a gallon or two at the end of each cask goes to waste.

At the same time, these seasonal beers often do very well in the free trade, so why should there be this disparity? Many of the independent brewers’ tied houses tend to be community locals used by conservative-minded drinkers who stick to what they know and are unwilling to pay a premium for an unfamiliar beer. You can’t blame them for that, and such drinkers sustain a healthy regular turnover of mild and bitter in plenty of good pubs. The more adventurous drinkers tend to congregate in the pubs that specialise in a changing range of beers, leaving the seasonals falling between two stools. But it’s disappointing that some very good beers get stuck in a vicious circle of low sales and variable quality, and perhaps the brewers could think of some more imaginative ways of promoting in their own estates what after all should be seen as their flagship products.

The Cost of Calories

In an effort to restrain the nation’s spreading waistlines, the Food Standards Agency has proposed that all menus in pubs, restaurants and takeaways should have to state the calorie content alongside each dish. You can see the point of this, as people have little idea how fattening meals eaten outside the house are likely to be, and a large proportion of such meals are, to be honest, far more than a normal person needs. But there’s a big risk that this policy may damage the business of independently-run pubs, and end up doing the opposite of promoting healthy eating.

Many smaller pubs may be deterred from providing any food at all if they have to work out the calorie content even if they’re just knocking up a few sandwiches. Others will be reluctant to serve daily specials, instead falling back on standardised dishes, and all will be required to apply a strict policy of portion control to make sure they meet the requirement. Chain dining pubs that obtain their dishes from a central point and heat them up in a microwave will have no trouble in complying. On the other hand, independent outlets that want to offer varied menus using fresh local produce may find the requirement very onerous, and end up deciding it’s not worth the bother. The end result will be to encourage the trend towards processed factory food that has done so much to spoil our diet in the first place.

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Two of our branch area Robinson's pubs are in the top three of the Robinson's Cellar of the Year award 2002. Last years winner the Railway at Rose Hill, Marple has been pipped this year by the Ring O'Bells, also in Marple. For Mr & Mrs Johns it is the second award they have scooped this year, they also won Northern Area Robinson's pub of the year back in June. In third place was the Admiral Rodney at Prestbury.

One of our members reports that the Rock Tavern (Matteos) on the Marple Bridge to Charlesworth road is selling Holts Thunderholts, a rare beer for the area but at £2.00 per pint, a touch overpriced maybe? On the same road, a little nearer Marple at Lane Ends, he reports that the Lane Ends has Adnams Bitter alongside the Tetleys bitter. I have visited the pub three times myself since May and Adnams was on each time so presumably it is regular as it is also at the Oddfellows in Mellor some two miles away.

It is sad to see another former Good Beer Guide pub (where we used to have branch meetings and even a Christmas 'do' one year) now selling all keg. What was the Squirrels in Chinley (now the Chinley Hotel), well run by an enterprising landlord (Drew was his name) taking micro brews from far & wide is now, from my peek in the door last week, more of a hotel bar. I settled for sitting outside on the porch to shelter with my walking colleagues and finishing my coffee, before walking the old tram line down into Chapel-en-le-Frith.

In Chapel, a quick look round the market place found the Kings Head, advertised outside as a Porters Ale House (unfortunately not that Porter!) with only Tetleys bitter on handpump but with the clip turned round — the barmaid told us it was not available that lunchtime. Across the road the Dog Inn, though smartened up considerably since my last visit, only sold keg beers.

Next door at the Royal Oak, Burtonwood Bitter was the single beer on cask. However the recent new landlord of only two weeks, Gareth Jones a local lad, told me two more handpumps were being installed next week with Burtonwood Top Hat and another beer being introduced. He is a real ale man himself, being the assistant cellar man at the Royal in Hayfield for the recent beer festival. The Royal Oak is a very clean and pleasant pub in which to drink, with stone exposure on the walls, flag floors around the bar and good quality framed paintings and prints around the walls. A fairly spacious L-shaped pub, one end has tables and has been changed into an open plan eating area (Gareth's father previously owned a restaurant in Manchester and has been installed as the Chef), whilst the other end has a pool table and games room. A further visit certainly will be made once Gareth has put his plans into action and I will report back to OT.

From here we crossed the road to the Roebuck, a former Good Beer Guide pub. These days there is no sign of the guest beer that it had under previous licensees but the Tetleys Bitter and Dark Mild were on handpump, the Mild in particular being drunk by most of us and was on very good form too.

Three branch pubs which Shaws beers have been popular from the outset, are the George in Buxton and the Star and Old Gloveworks in Glossop. From mid-November all these three outlets have been selling the new Shaws IPA (5%).

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14
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The Cheshire Ring in Hyde is boarded up. Nofurther details known. The Hare & Hounds at Simmondley near Glossop reopened on 22nd November after a full refurbishment. On a brief visit on Sunday 24th, the pub was much better laid out, mainly open plan but much cleaner, with a flag floor as you enter, wooden floor round the bar area and better access from the kitchen, which has been improved. The beers were Tetley Bitter, Old Speckled Hen and Taylors Landlord, the latter two at £2 per pint each.

In something of a departure, you will now find an 'outside' guest beer on sale at Hydes 'Q' in Stalybridge. One at a time is being taken off the Beer Seller monthly list and Wychwood Dog's Bollocks has been a success so far. Since Ray and Sheena run both this and the nearby White House as a family operation, it wouldn't surprise us if occasionally, a guest found its way up the road, either. Speaking of the White House, it is now the policy there to always have a mild available.

The Lamp, in Hadfield, closed over a year ago now, has had a lot of activity by workmen for two weeks now and sources close to the pub say it is being developed by Pubmaster as a pub & restaurant. High Peak Branch members raised £1467.00 from their latest Charity Walk earlier this year. At an informal presentation at the Sportsman in Hyde in November, the cheque was divided equally between Tameside & Glossop M.I.N.D and Stockport & district M.I.N.D. A great effort again, this year even more so when only 14 walkers registered for the day. Once again, it was a great opportunity for branch members to visit off the beaten track branch pubs, that we do not get the chance to visit too much during the course of a year. Next year's walk is likely to take in the Chapel, Chinley, Buxworth and Whaley Bridge areas and will be routed out early in the new year by the regular organisers.

Though Opening Times is not known as a tickers magazine, this month one of the North of England's best known Beer Tickers has reached his ultimate goal of 10,000 beers and it is worth a mention in these columns. Roly (Roland Holroyd), who has been well known in local drinking circles in the free houses of Greater Manchester for many years drank his penultimate beer in the Crescent on Thursday 28th November at the pub's in-house beer festival. In the few days leading up to the event, Shaws Brewery had a special T-Shirt made for him which was presented on the night by Phil Windsor and Neil Hay from the brewery and Shaws new brew, Tame Valley Ale was on the bar, the Crescent being the first pub selling it. Roly fittingly drank this as his 10,000th, a High Peak Branch member drinking a new brew from a High Peak Branch brewery. Good publicity for all concerned and the Reporter Group of newspapers are running a feature on Roly for this week's edition (5th December) following up on a feature on him earlier in the year.

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PUB OF THE SEASON

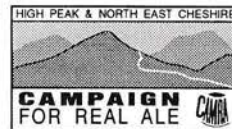
The Highwayman, Rainow.

The Highwayman, Whalley Bridge Road, must have one of Cheshire's most appealing pub interiors. A very attractive, remote and windswept moorland inn, with breathtaking views from the front door. It was known as the Blacksmith's Arms until 1949 and locally as "The Patch". Within, there is a maze of connecting rooms with a small tap room at the far corner. Very low ceilings and genuine old beams are complemented by scrubbed wooden tables and numerous settles. A room to the right of the hall is reached through a latched barn-style door and has a separate bar hewn from a single timber. The front snug is named after a local historical rogue, Tom King.

However, no matter how impressive the fabric or location of a pub, an essential ingredient of a successful formula is good licensees. Since taking over in March this year Susan and Rob have swiftly had a positive impact taking an already good pub on to even better things. They have, for example, opened up a separate room as a restaurant serving an interesting selection of good quality food. Without making any alterations to the pub they have increased trade enabling them to add another real ale. An excellent pint of Lancaster Bomber now supplements the enjoyable Thwaites Bitter. Both are of consistently good quality and of course, this is one of the few Cheshire pubs serving these excellent beers.

The Highwayman provides a timely reminder that rural pubs can still be successful if run by enterprising businessmen who want to run a successful pub, instead of people who want to run the pub down, turn it into a private home and make a fast buck. They have also illustrated that there is no need to make sweeping changes to the fabric of our lovely country pubs. They can be successful just as they are, selling good quality real ale and fine food in a traditional pub environment. Susan and Rob are to be congratulated for their efforts here - celebrate with us when our Autumn Pub of the Season is presented on Monday 9 December, from 8.00pm.

• The Highwayman is on the B5470 on the outskirts of the village towards Kettlethulme.



FEATURED PUB

The Four Lane Ends,
Lane Ends,
Charlesworth Road, Marple.

I found myself unable to walk recently for a couple of Sundays due to injury, writes Frank Wood, so a bicycle ride here seemed a good idea, though my route all uphill for 1½ miles from Marple Bridge was a bit of a slog. As I rounded the last corner however, I was met by the smell of fresh cooking wafting from the pub (it has a growing reputation both locally and further afield for its freshly cooked food). It was the beer I was after though and a couple of pints of Hanby Wem Special (4.4%) went down very well after my exertions a warm day. Gary Wood the licensee has had the pub now for 6 years, being formerly a local at the pub as well as part time barman, living nearby for many years, and relief when the previous people went away a couple of times a year. When it came up, he did not hesitate in taking over.

The pub was formerly a Tetleys pub but is now owned by Enterprise Inns, who invested rather a lot of money in it last year. The pub was completely renovated and replanned with a rear extension, elevated drinking and eating areas, a new car park with children's play area and outside benches. Inside, the pub used to be several small rooms with very thick walls. These are all gone, the pub is now open plan, airy, cheerful and spacious.

On my visit the Hanby beer was accompanied by Adnams Broadside and Tetley Bitter, though Gary says the Tetley is the only regular beer (though Adnams does seem popular at the pub, one of their brews being on the bar on each of my last three visits). A nice feature in the front two drinking areas of the pub are the old photos of local views, enlarged and framed nicely.

Food is served Tuesday-Thursday (5-8pm) Friday-Sunday (12-7pm) and is all freshly prepared to order including a large blackboard of specials. On my visit, the generous looking Sunday lunches looked very nice and a friend of mine who regularly dines there on Sundays speaks highly of the quality. Custom has widened considerably since the building work. Whilst trade was mainly local before, now people come from deep into Cheshire, Derbyshire and Greater Manchester and with the views down into the Cheshire Plains, the pubs ambience and friendliness, I am pretty impressed myself.

To get there, take the 394 bus that runs between Hazel Grove and Glossop every hour by Speedwell buses (not Sunday). Speedwell are an independent company who took over only a few weeks ago after Stagecoach dumped the route. Take care however, as the buses only run until early evenings.



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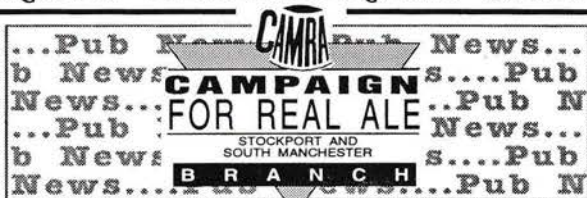
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O OPENING TIMES LETTERS

Two major developments from Hydes to report this month. First, *Horse & Farrier* in Gatley has reopened its doors after a 8½ week refurbishment and it has to be said that this is a first class job by Hydes. While a great deal of work has been carried out but it has been done with such sympathy to the pub's fabric and traditions that the casual visitor could be under the impression that very little has been done. There's a new bar counter, the whole pub has been refurbished and redecorated, and a former bottle store has been converted into a snug, OT would like to have brought you more details but every time we've called the pub has been so busy it's been difficult to get a proper look at it! There will be slightly more emphasis on food (including a Sunday carvery) with the aim of bringing the food up to about 20% of turnover. It remains very much a beer pub, though, with the full Hydes' range on handpump. The new licensees are Alan and Jenny Hazlehurst who have our best wishes (although given the instant success of the new-look pub, they hardly need them!)

The *Horse & Farrier* is one of Hydes new 'Heritage Inns'. There will soon be another one nearby as the Manchester brewers have purchased **Millington Hall** on Station Road in Cheadle Hulme. Both a full license and planning permission have been applied for and given the scale of the work planned it will probably be well into 2003 before this welcome new development opens its doors for business. Further acquisitions may well be in the pipeline as Hydes have announced that some £6 million has been set aside to expand the estate from its current 80 pubs.

Two Hall Street pubs in Offerton that seem on the up are the *Victoria* and the *Emigration*. At the former the cask ale range now comprises Cain's mild, Greenalls and John Smiths bitters plus a changing guest. On OT's visit this was Cain's FA. The beers tried were in very good order; this coupled with very pleasant surroundings makes it worth a look-in. Also worth a visit is Robbies' *Emigration*. Sporting what looks like a recent re-decor inside, manager of a year's standing, Iain McKinley offers Hatters, Best and the Robbies seasonal for you to delight in. Iain told OT his favourite of the seasonals has to be Robin Bitter and, although primarily a pub attracting local custom, visitors are assured both good beer and good cheer. *A poser re the Emigration pub name - is it the only pub so-named in the UK? Does the name derive from a racehorse or some other source? OT would be interested in your theories.*

A warm welcome to Jenny and Duncan Laing, new licensees at the **Stockport Arms** on St Petersgate. They started in late August and, although new to the trade, have seen through some improvements. The place has been redecorated; a new lunchtime (noon till 2pm) menu is in place; a 'No Swearing' policy is in force; and Fri/Sat evenings sees a female DJ host a disco. The beers are Greenalls and Tetley bitters, so things are looking up.

The *Travellers Call* on Great Moor usually gets a mention because of its vast collection of bells and nauticalia (*is this a new word? - Ed(1)*). Don't forget the fine Robinson's Hatters and Best, together with all-year round Old Tom on gravity. Worthy of note must surely go to the pub's fundraising capabilities - this year's annual ten mile walk raised a whopping £5,000 for Francis House; pretty good going for a small pub with a capacity of, say, 100 maximum! Each year a different local charity is chosen as the recipient; this year's event was the sixteenth such walk and the tally of funds raised so far is a mammoth £58,000. OT congratulates all concerned and the editorial team will have a drink to that.

A major renovation and refurbishment is set to take place at the **Queens Arms** in Cheadle. The pub is to be completely refurbished both inside and outside with major work taking place in the cellar and the siting of the bar. The front two rooms are to be retained but the existing bar is to be replaced by a larger L shaped bar, which will also serve the rear smoke room. The outside toilets will be demolished and a new internal toilet block is to be built on to the side of the pub that currently serves as an additional car parking area. The ornamental glass ceiling that is presently above the bar will be removed and reused as a decorative feature somewhere else in the refurbished pub. By moving the toilets to the side

From Rhys Jones, Aberystwyth:

While your scorn for the Hogsheads chain's latest piece of marketing drivel is entirely merited, I fail to see why you object to the reported policy of requiring a minimum sale of two containers a week in order to stock any particular beer. In the case of cask beer, this implies that a cask will be on service for three or four days - surely about the optimum to retain top quality. If this policy means better beer quality in Hogsheads, I'm all for it. (Whether I will actually wish to visit the new-style Hog's Heads to be interacted with by Hoggers is, of course, another matter entirely).

From Geoff Johnson, Stalybridge:

Disappointed to report that a trip to the Derby Brewery Arms on Wednesday discovered no cask mild - "the lines were being cleaned"(!) we were offered smooth. The Thunderholt seasonal was cloudy and the bitter lacked condition. I hope the pub is not following the practice that is evident in other Holts pubs of allegedly stocking cask mild but it never being available. In any event it amazes me that a pub round the corner from the brewery can't keep decent quality beer!

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

of the pub the corridor to the toilets will be brought into the pub increasing the size of the rear smoke room. Modest changes to the kitchen and the upstairs living quarters are also planned.

All this amounts to huge changes for the pub. Robinson's plan to assess the pubs requirements in more detail early in the new year with a view to starting work around April 2003. The pub will remain open throughout the changes but so extensive will the changes be that it is not expected that the work will be completed before the end of 2003. Licensees Helen and Tony Dunn told OT that "its early days yet in the planning process but if you have any sensible suggestions about how best to improve the pub then we would be pleased to hear from you".

In Hazel Grove, Bill and Hilda have now retired from the *Royal Oak* on Commercial Road. Their replacements are already familiar with the Hazel Grove pub scene as Steve and Judy Knowles from the nearby Grove have taken over. We wish them the very best in their new pub. The *Cock Inn* was also awaiting a new licensee as we went to press; the current licensee is also the landlord of the Sportsman in Strines. More Offerton news - we welcome new faces at the **Harvester**, Turnstone Road. These are Cath Donaghue and Carol Hulme who have been there over three months now. The Harvester remains a cask beer outlet with both Marstons Pedigree and Greenalls Bitter permanently on handpump.

Late Manchester news - in a welcome move, the *Royal Oak* on Cross Lane, Gorton, is now selling a guest beer. So far both Caledonian Deuchars IPA and Jennings Cumberland Ale have been enjoyed there by our reporter.

The Thatched Tavern in Reddish now has added Boddingtons Bitter to go alongside Tetley Bitter and Dark Mild. Not bad when most pub sin the area can't even sell one cask beer.

Finally, Stockport doesn't lose that many pubs but another one bit the dust last month. The *Blue Bell*, Shaw Heath, closed its doors, probably for good. This large ex-Wilsons pub has had lots of money spent on it in recent years, most recently via a large investment by Holts. Despite this investment, the *Blue Bell* struggled to attract custom to what is a very large pub, which must have substantial overheads. Planning permission to convert the building into six flats has been applied for and is likely to be granted.



NATIONAL BEER NOTES

Last month Shepherd Neame's Spitfire Ale made its TV debut with a series of animated spots created by RPM3. The ads continue the German-bashing creative theme and adopt the strapline: "Spitfire - the bottle for Britain."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Organic beer production has boomed on the back of drinkers' demands for food and drink made without the use of agricultural chemicals. Such has been the growth in organic brews that there are believed to be 59 British beers that meet the accreditation requirements of the Soil Association, which checks that only truly organic ingredients are used. Britain is also the world's major producer of organic beer with a clear lead over the likes of France, which has 32 brews, Germany (14), US (11), and Belgium (3).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Yet another branded high street chain appears to be on the skids. Following the collapse of the Old Monk pub company, it's now the turn of SFI Group. Formerly known as Surrey Free Inns, the company has grown from a handful of pubs in the Home Counties to a national operator with well known brands like Slug & Lettuce, Bar Med and Litten Tree (there are examples of all three in the Opening Times area). They've now unearthed a £20 million 'black hole' in the balance sheet and the company's shares have been suspended. This latest piece of bad news follows a cash crisis, a profits warning and the cancellation of the dividend.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

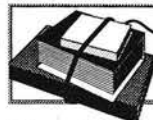
By contrast, yet another dedicated cask ale brewer and traditional pub operator has produced a healthy set of results. This time it's Gales, based in Horndean, Hampshire which has reported a 10.5% increase in brewing volumes in the last half-year. Wet sales and profits through the company's pubs are also both up by 6%.

★ ★ ★

The Office of Fair Trading has asked the country's biggest pub companies to supply details of the structures of beer tie agreements held with tenants. The follows complaints lodged by the Federation of Small Businesses and could lead to another full-scale investigation into the beer tie.

★ ★

In the week before we went to press PubCo and Brewery stocks suffered sharp falls because of a profits warning from Wetherspoons. Usually upbeat boss Tim Martin reported that like-for-like sales growth was stuttering in the last four weeks - down to 3% from 5%+ because of customer belt-tightening before Christmas. Apparently this reduces their planned opening schedule to a mere 50-60 outlets in each of the next two years. The "gits-with-braces" were so panicked by this that Wetherspoons and others had between 7% and 11% wiped off their value in a day.



BOOK REVIEW



The Good Beer Guide to Belgium & Holland edited by Tim Webb (CAMRA Books, 352 pp, £11.99)

What have Audrey Hepburn, the bloke who played harmonica on the theme to *Midnight Cowboy*, Emperor Charles V of the Hapsburgs, Plastic Bertrand, the electric train, the pistol and Saint Christina the Astonishing (who could juggle hot coals and levitate to the tops of churches) got in common?

They all came from Belgium and feature in long-overdue and very welcome third edition of the *Good Beer Guide to Belgium & Holland*, which was published in three countries last month. The Guide has a comprehensive introduction to the 117 breweries and over 1,000 regular beers from the greatest ale-producing nation of all. Plus details of 640 top rate specialist beer cafés from brewpubs on the edge of Amsterdam's Red Light District to 17th century mills in the deserted and beautiful valleys of the Ardennes.

That most British of institutions, the Campaign for Real Ale, has gone all European because, in the words of editor Tim Webb: "the world is losing most of its finest beers to the accounting fashions of bottom-line bandits and brand-obsessed execs, who drink wine with their friends and bottled water at lunch. These are not people to leave in charge of your laundry, let alone the future of one of the world's great drinks."

Belgian beer gets the edge on the other great brewing nations because of its extremes of variety. Cherry beers, strong dark ales from Trappist monasteries and sweet cloudy "white" beers are seen increasingly in the UK. Back home, the range of styles is massive, from specially cask-aged brown ales that may take two years to ripen, via subtle blond ales laced with coriander and dried peel, to sumptuous amber brews that match fine wines in strength and depth.

After 1945 the Dutch replaced their brewing skills with prowess in advertising. Recently things are changing. Webb cites some impressive Dutch brewpubs as examples of where Dutch brewers are beginning to beat the Belgians at their own game. The book aims as diverse as Tim Webb explained: "We try to keep it full of useful tips on places to visit, stuff to eat, open-door breweries, festivals and the like. Plus some pretty bossy advice about what we think is over-rated. We probably have the only comprehensive listing of how to get across the North Sea in the travel book business." While the listings are invaluable, the real strength of the book is the gloriously opinionated Webb himself - some of our favourite bits include:

On failing to find beer cafés in Luxembourg: "In Esch we found a gorgeous looking bar with a fin de siècle frontage that has been taken over by the friends of Lisbon Athletico and was gradually swapping its ancient fittings for new Coke adverts. In Wiltz we thought we spotted a café with a great view of the valley only to find that its reason for existence was to inebriate the workers at the local abattoir, after which it had been named."

On finding a beer café in Luxembourg: "This pleasant café and dining room is still almost as famous for its unfiltered Pilsener and typical Luxembourg cuisine as it is for its moody service and refusal to allow drinkers to sit at tables reserved for clearly mythical diners."

On a hotel in Arlon: "If you have ever wondered what Fawley Towers would have been like without a trace of humour, try the truly astonishing Ecu de Bourgogne"

On the use of hop extract: "Whoever suggested to Chimay, and a dozen other less honest specialist brewers that the science of hop ester extraction had reached a point whereby you could substitute hop oil or powder for whole hops, needs to be put up against a wall and, well, prayed for"

On what makes a good beer: "After hearing a paean of praise from our favourite professional taster, we asked: 'But is it a nice beer?'. With extreme reluctance and after four paragraphs of provisos, because this guy avoids value judgements like cats avoid motorcycles, he opined: 'No, it's an extremely dull beer but it is beautifully made'."

Highly recommended and an ideal Christmas stocking filler.

JC



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MANCHESTER MATTERS by Cityman

After last month's bumper crop of news there's less to report this time round, particularly in the City Centre. I was however browsing in Selfridges's food hall (oh yes, this column gets to all the best places) and came across a small but well chosen range of bottled beers including Boon Gueuze, Freeminer Deep Shaft Stout and Shakemantle Ginger Ale, plus Wickwar Station Porter. The prices didn't seem too bad either.

There is however one bright piece of news from the City Centre - we've had a real ale gain! That long-time bastion of keg fizz, the Crown, off Fountain St near to the Town Hall, has new faces behind the bar and a new attitude to the products it sells. It's still a Bass (or Six Continents) pub but is now doing cask ale in the form of Bass and three other handpulled beers. When I popped in 'early doors' there were a fair few in and the Bass was terrifically good - the first 'Burton snatch' I've experienced in a long time (*no smut - Ed (1)*). All the beers come from the Supply Line portfolio, so I'm told there's a fair few to go at. As they wish trade to build steadily and, crucially, they have the financial backing to achieve this, the pub will be allowed to grow organically, so to speak, and will thus only open Mondays to Fridays until its feet are firmly set. Promises to be a very decent addition to the Albert Square drinking scene

Sounds of the Suburbs

What I was able to do was get out and about a bit round some of the suburban pubs I've been meaning to visit for some time.

In West Didsbury the **Barleycorn** (Barlow Moor Road) was all keg and due for a refurbishment last time I called. Well, it's now been done up (in a sort of lounge-cum-café bar style) but, you guessed, it's still all keg. Across the road, though, the **Woodstock** still offers four cask beers (Fuller's London Pride, Greene King IPA and Old Speckled Hen, Draught Bass) in pretty good nick. This was in fact the first time I'd been to the pub in daylight hours - it really is in a very impressive setting and a credit to the area.

Holt's **Railway** on Lapwing Lane is also performing well, with Mild, Bitter and Thunderbolt on handpump. The food's good too, but... I was disappointed to see that the gassed up cask lager is still being served on handpump. Why on earth Holt's can't sell this stuff another way, and so make the pub eligible for the CAMRA awards and guide entries it would surely get, I just don't know. Presumably they don't care.

I was also made my first visit in along time to the **Old House At Home** on Burton Road. I'd not been in since licensee Dave Ogden left unexpectedly. Carolyn Kelly is licensee now and I was pleased to see that three guest beers still feature alongside the Boddies. When I called these were Wyre Piddle Piddle in the Hole, Wychwod Dogs Bollocks and Skinner's Spriggan Ale - I tried the Piddle in the Hole and it was OK without being anything special.

I'd heard some upbeat reports about the **Cotton Tree** on Cotton Lane, Withington but I must say my visit was slightly disappointing. At 1.15pm on a Saturday I was the only customer and so drank my (rather good) pint of John Smith's Cask in splendid isolation. It's a well-appointed pub but must surely be under-performing. There were display cards for cask Tetley Bitter and in the other

room I saw reversed pump clips for Greenalls Bitter and the long-defunct Mild but the John Smiths was the only offering. Later I saw an advertisement in the trade press for the pub's lease (yours for £49,950) so perhaps it's in a transitional stage.

A visit to Ladybarn brought mixed results. On the down side I was disappointed to see that the handpumps in the **Peninsula** now appear to be disused but on the upside, cask ale is back and seemingly doing well in the **Brewers Arms**. Tracy Maun is still in charge and the pub has finally been repainted - it's still badged as a cask ale house and this time there's Tetley Bitter on handpump to back up the claim.

I also popped into the **Rampant Lion** on Anson Road. It had been a long time since I last called and it was good to see cask ale on sale with Tetley and Boddingtons Bitter on handpump. On my way back to town, I passed though Rusholme where I observed 'To Let' signs on both the **Clarence** and **Hardy's Well**. Neither have sold cask ale for some time - would it be too much to hope that whoever takes them over puts real ale back in? Yes, I suspect it probably would.

Ducie Doings

A chance mention in the Old Monkey of changes at the **Ducie**, had me scuttling down to the Burtonwood pub at the back of the university. There, I was welcomed by new man at the helm, Paul Wright. Paul also has an interest in the city Burtonwood pub, the **Bulls Head** on London Road in which he retains a hand. Those who remember the **Ducie** as a quaint, rather care-worn, Irish pub run for many years by the friendly face of Marion, are in for a surprise. Re-opened on November 14th, the original plan layout is much altered - the two front rooms remain much as they were, but smartly spruced-up; you still go up two steps to the back to the bar which now occupies the back wall of the two former rooms. These back rooms are now combined into one comfortable bar / lounge. The whole being done-out in that modern-take on Victoriana - the lightly scumbled walls, dark wood, photos of local scenes and such. The old bar by the side of the stairs in the right room has gone, but the gabled roof-light remains as a reminder of the old pub.

The Irishness may have gone, but the Burtonwood bitter remains, and is now joined by that brewer's Top Hat and a guest - this being Jennings Cocker Hoop on my visit. As a new kitchen has been built, a full food menu will be on offer noon to 2.30, and 5 to 8 (Monday - Friday) along with sandwiches and bar snacks. For the sporting, a dartboard is being fitted in one of the front rooms. Before leaving, an impromptu cellar visit was given - very tidy it was too. All in all, a splendid effort that should see a wider cross-section of people using the pub. The **Ducie** is on Devas St, off Upper Lloyd St.

Stop Press - there's a very impressive food operation newly launched at **The Knott**, Deansgate (opposite Atlas). An initial sampling produced large amounts of excellent food, all washed down with Marble beers. I'm told a full review will appear in 'Pub Grub' next month. Recommended.

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

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(Opening Times 224)

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