



OPENING TIMES



Distributed throughout Stockport; Central, East & South Manchester; Tameside; N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield

Volume 19 Issue 5

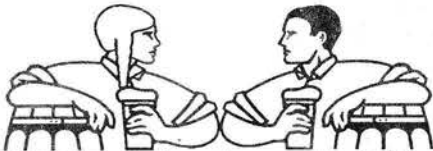
MAY 2003 No:229

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FESTIVAL FEVER

Countdown Underway to Stockport's Main Event



Stockport's 17th Beer & CIDER FESTIVAL

STOCKPORT TOWN HALL
29TH-31ST MAY 2003

Ware now well and truly in the run-up to this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, once again kindly sponsored by the Stockport Express. The entertainment is booked, the glasses and T-shirts ordered, the license obtained (many thanks to Steve Brannan of Ye Olde Vic for being our licensee) and, most importantly, the beer and cider order has been worked out.

As usual Opening Times is taking this opportunity to bring you just a small taster of the many beers on offer. There really will be something for every taste, whether you like mild, bitter, stout or strong ales. While there will be beers from all around the UK, there are perhaps two themes this year – West Yorkshire and the Celtic fringe.

West Yorkshire will be represented by beers from Eastwood & Sanders, Ossett, Anglo-Dutch, Salamander, Golcar and Upper Aggbrig. The Celtic nations are represented by beers from Wales, Scotland, Cornwall, the Isle of Man, Orkney and the Irish Republic.

There will be up to eight milds available from the classic Bank Top Dark Mild, the superb Bullmastiff Ebony Dark, Wentworth's Gun Park Dark and the rare Hydes Welsh Dark.

Lovers of bitter will be well catered for with no less than 58 standard and premium bitters available during the course of the Festival. Beartown Brewery will be brewing a Festival Special for us and this will have to compete with heavyweight contenders such as Roosters, Marble, Abbeydale, and Phoenix. Among many highlights for lovers of the hop will be Durham White Amarillo, the excellent Wentworth WPA and four beers each from Ossett and Eastwood & Sanders.. This will be one of 8 stouts and porters which include Dwan Carden's Sweet Stout, Moor Peat Porter, Hebridean Celtic Black Ale and, a stunning beer this, Wentworth Oatmeal Stout.

There will also be 10 special beers including a ginger beer from Abbeydale, wheat beers from Dwan and Okells, Nethergate's classic Umbel Magna coriander beer, O'Hanlon's Port Stout and at least one cask lager – the excellent Kellerbier from Upper Aggbrig.

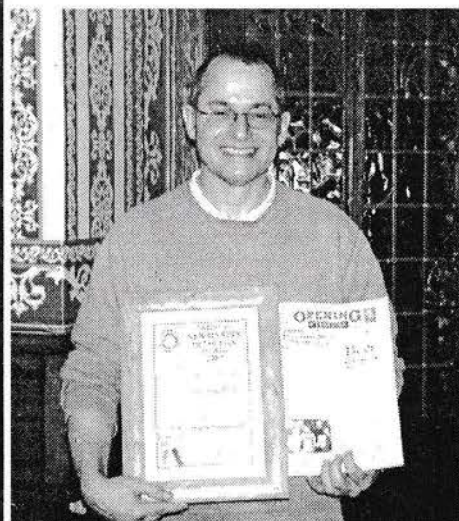
Bringing up the rear we also have 9 strong ales and this year there are some real treats here. Robinson's Old Tom is a firm favourite of course but others to try include Anglo-Dutch Tabatha The Knackered at 6 per cent, Moor Old Freddy Walker at a powerful 7.3 per cent and this year's two brain cell killers, the 11 per cent Thomas Sykes Ale from Burton Bridge and the 10 per cent Mogadog from Bullmastiff. The 8 per cent Liquid Lobotomy from Garton isn't to be sniffed at either.

So, something for everyone. Do remember, though, that not all beers will be on at the same time and one or two may not even arrive (although we usually have an acceptable alternative if that happens). You can also visit the Festival Website at: www.stockportfestival.fsnet.co.uk

AWARD FOR OPENING TIMES


We always knew Opening Times was one of the best – and now it's official! At the recent CAMRA AGM in Exeter, we were stunned to be presented with a special award for the magazine.

It was almost 10 years ago that Opening Times won the first ever CAMRA Newsletter of the Year Award and this latest award was in recognition of what we have achieved since then. The citation read out by National Executive member Sarah Durham reads, "One newsletter which deserves a particular mention is Opening Times from Stockport & South Manchester. This was the first ever winner of these awards and has been published continuously since, keeping to its high standards both in production and content with a particular strength in hard effective campaigning, which has achieved many successes. It is for this that the judges have awarded this fine newsletter a special Highly Commended Award".





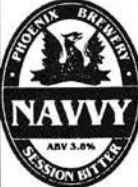


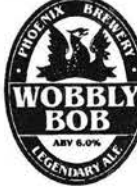


A gobsmacked Ed1 (seen here grinning inanely) was presented with the award and for once was totally lost for words!

INSIDE MAY'S OPENING TIMES	Editors View	2	Brewery News	8	Mild Challenge	11	Curmudgeon	15
	Pub Grub	4	Salford Syndicate	9	Letters	12	Peak Pub News	16
	Pub of the Month	5	Hoppy Day in Osset .	10	CAMRA Calling	14	Manchester Matters	18
	Stagger	6	Bootleg Budget	11	Five Years Ago	15	Pub News	18



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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

Space it at a bit of a premium in this issue so, I'll keep this one brief. Firstly, I have to mention the award presented to Opening Times at the recent CAMRA AGM. Achieving recognition such as this from your peers is always pleasing and goes a long way to making all the hard work that is put into OT worthwhile. My co-editor, Paul Hutchings, couldn't make it to Exeter so I would like to take this opportunity of thanking him for all the effort he puts into OT each month, it really is very much appreciated, and without Paul's efforts, Opening Times would look half as good as it does. Thanks are also due to the legion of people who contribute to OT, those who distribute it and of course to those pubs which stock it and all our advertisers, without whose support we just couldn't put together such a large publication. We aren't resting on our laurels, though, and later this year we are looking to make some major improvements to Opening Times. More on that in due course.

★ ★ ★

Last month the research organisation, A C Neilson, released some figures on the state of the cask ale market. Not only were they grossly misleading, in our view, but they also appear to have been presented in a way guaranteed to do the cask ale market the most damage. We are carrying out our own research and a very different picture is emerging. More on this next time.

It was also announced by Scottish & Newcastle - the last of the old 'Big Six' National brewing combines still to have a managed pub estate (1400 pubs), that it was bowing to city pressure and putting its estate up for auction. The money will allow S&N to buy troubled cider maker HP Bulmer (hopefully its well-regarded real-ale wholesale operation will be subject to a rumoured management buy-out) and to look at acquiring other foreign breweries,

★ ★ ★

Finally, it's Stockport Beer Festival time - make sure you all get down there and have a few pints. I'm sure myself and Ed2 will be there extensively toasting OT's success!

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 229

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

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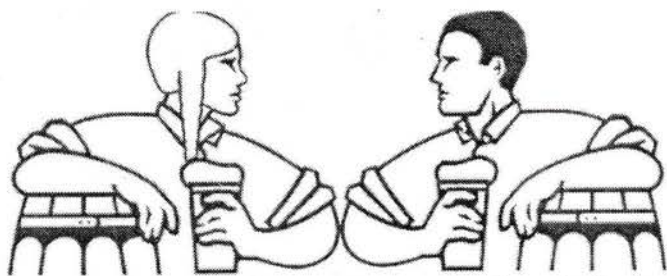
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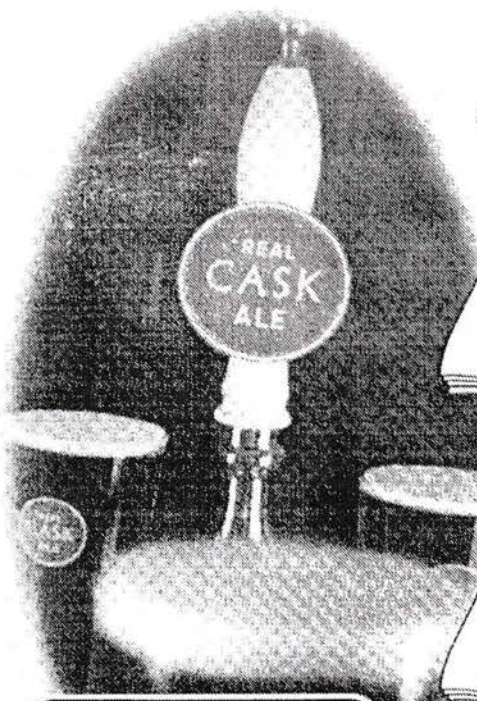
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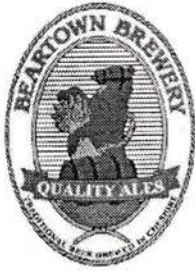
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The Caledonia, Ashton-under-Lyne

Like in many post-industrial northern towns, Ashton town centre is not a thing of great beauty, a situation not helped by the lack of any imposing civic buildings (as in Bolton town hall) or other imposing features (as in Stockport's viaduct). The town's pub scene is equally uninspiring. Many of the remaining central pubs have been turned into night-time circuit bars and plenty of the rest offer nothing in the way of real ale. There are a few honourable exceptions, though. One of the best is the Caledonia on Warrington Street. This welcoming Robinson's pub has been run by Alan and Louise for several years now and has become a firm local favourite for both its range of beer and also the extensive range of food available. Obviously there's a tie to Robinson's beers but the best use is made of what is now quite an extensive range of beers available. Apart from the usual Hatters and Best Bitter, the Cally has been one of the few pubs selling Frederics since the day this underrated premium beer was introduced. Cumbria Way or Snowdon are also regularly sold and of course the current seasonal is usually available, too (although Sod's Law dictated that wasn't the case when this article was prepared).

The pub has been impressively refurbished (a move which also saw the introduction of letting bedrooms) and now basically comprises on large L-shaped area, albeit nicely broken up into different areas and levels, including a no-smoking area.

The Saturday lunchtime I called saw the pub busy with a mixture of football-viewing regulars and passing shoppers, many of whom were tucking into lunch of one form or another. The menu is wide-ranging covering sandwiches, salads, burgers, jacket potatoes right up to more substantial main meals. These are generally priced in the £4.25-4.50 range and include staples such as gammon steak, fish and chips, sausages and mash etc alongside one or two more unusual offerings. The steak and mushroom in ginger wine pie won 2nd prize in last year's British Meat Pie of the Year contest (I only noticed this on the menu after I had ordered, otherwise this would have been a 'must try'). A previous prize-winner was the pub's steak and ale hotpot. This is a fabulous creation comprising steak, carrots and onions braised in ale, all topped off the black pudding, bacon, sliced potatoes and melted cheese. There is also a range of 'spicy delights' covering chillies, pasta and curry dishes. I decided to go for a chicken, ham and leek pie while my dining companion couldn't resist the steak and ale hotpot. Both dishes didn't disappoint and each made for a filling meal.

The chicken etc pie comprised a very well filled small pie dish, with generous amounts of chicken, ham and leek all bound together with a rich cheesy sauce and topped with a short crust pastry lid. Crispy fries were a welcome accompaniment although the rather watery carrots and peas added little to the enjoyment of what was otherwise a fine dish. No complaints at all about any aspect of the hotpot. The menu description was spot on and a rich, filling bowl of food was accompanied by a whole barmcake (very useful for mopping up the tasty gravy) and a small bowl of red cabbage. Both of our meals were washed down with some very well-kept Hatters, which provided an ideal accompaniment to the quite rich food we had ordered.

All in all very well-judged and presented pub food which was difficult to fault in any major way. It is easy to see why the Caledonia is so popular and while food is obviously a major part of the operation here, it remains first and foremost a pub with food, rather than a quasi-restaurant that just happens to sell beer as well.

The lunchtime menu is available 11-2.30 Monday to Saturday and 12-3 on Sundays. There is also a special evening menu that provides for more substantial meals with starters and puddings, too. The main meals here are rather more adventurous and range in price from £7.50 up to £9.95 for a 10oz fillet steak. This menu is available between 5 and 7pm Tuesday to Thursday and 5-8 Saturday and Sunday. The Caledonia is a pub working well on many levels and the food is just one aspect of what is obviously a very professional operation. Highly recommended.

The Caledonia is at 13 Warrington Street, Ashton. Telephone 0161 339 7177.



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				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



Good local pubs, with good beer and an atmosphere to match are becoming hard to find these days, especially in an area like Heald Green, where pubs of any kind are few and far between. However, situated prominently on the junction of the A34 (Wilmslow Road) and Finney Lane is the Griffin, Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA's Pub of the Month for May.

The Griffin is an excellent community local in the truest sense – friendly atmosphere, good service, good beer and wholesome, no-frills food. Factors clearly appreciated by the pub's regulars, and evident by the steady trade throughout the day, seven days a week. A dart board, pool table and television are available in a separate vault (another rarity these days), leaving the spacious lounge and large snug free for friendly conversation or just a quiet drink.

Being a Holt's pub, the beer is very nicely priced and of excellent quality. On a recent minibus tour of suburban pubs, the Holt's beers, and particularly the mild, were of outstanding quality and this reflects the high standards set by Diane Davenport, the licensee. Diane came to the Griffin over five years ago from the Angel in Knutsford. This followed successful periods at the Old Monkey in the City Centre, the Griffin, Heaton Mersey; and the Grafton, Chorlton-on-Medlock. A few months ago there were rumours that Diane would be leaving – happily these were unfounded and she remains firmly in charge of the pub.

The hard work over the years by Diane and her staff makes the Griffin well worth a visit (and not just on the night of 22 May when this well-earned award will be presented) and shows why this will in fact be the second Pub of the Month Award the Griffin has earned under Diane's expert stewardship. **JC/PB**

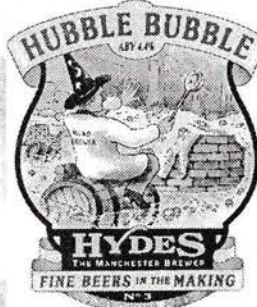
The Griffin is served by several bus services – from Stockport numbers 368,369 and 312 will drop you nearby; from Manchester the 45 will do the same.

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

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 229:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Butler, Mark McConachie, Peter Edwardson, Phil Levison, Frank Wood, Tom Lord, Brian Taylor, Jim Flynn, Chris Walkden, Anthony Firmin, John Tune, Dave Hallows.

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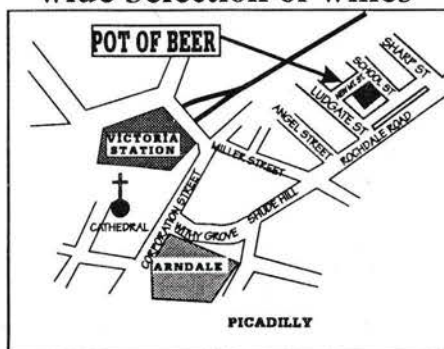
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5



STAGGER

with Mark McConachie

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Our crawl was to begin tonight at **The Grove**, just north of Commercial Road. Tastefully decorated, a large lounge separated from the lobby by three Spanish-style rustic arches: "viaduct to vault" opined the curly-haired blonde in our party. She was also taken by the giant pink rabbit on the bar back. Local scenes of old Stockport and black and white tiling decorate the bar area. Geometric, comfortable snug with Manchester City memorabilia. A Bell's Brewery mosaic is still visible in the vestibule tiles. The beers on sale were Robbies Hatters and Best as the Bell's beers went long ago along with the brewery. We found them to be in good condition. Taking our lives in our hands, we hared across the busy London Road to the **Anchor**. A large house offering three fair-sized rooms in Robbies cream decor and red dralon upholstery. A muted nautical theme is used throughout with photos, a ship's wheel, boat lamps, even a figurehead of a Turk. The pub offers a Wednesday themed curry night as well as an extensive menu available weekday lunchtimes and on Sundays. On the ale front, once again it was Robbies Hatters and Best (this time on electric freeflow dispense) and in much the same good condition as the Grove. The interestingly named **Brewers Green** divides this pub from our next, the **Woodman**. This street is also part of one of the borough's walking routes - The Fred Perry Way. Originally a single cottage, but now extended both sides to incorporate adjoining properties. This gives a spartan vault / pool room and a dining area flanking the popular bar. Quite a number of people in tonight as it is popular with the young crowd. There are a number of idiosyncratic African artefacts on display, presumably reflecting the taste of the new licensee (or more likely his mum, who had the tenancy previously). On the night the Robbies Best was average, and not up to the standard of the last two pubs. The **George & Dragon** by Stepping Hill Hospital was passed by as it is now selling only keg



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beers. This is a sorry tale, as I recall the pub being somewhat of an 'alehouse' some years ago; it provided a welcome change in the Robinson's diet on a pub crawl. Ah, well...



Northwards in to Great Moor now and to the **Crown**. An imposing, three-gabled house set back slightly from the road. Two large, well-furnished rooms (one with large TV for football) at the front, are divided from the curved bar by a fine, carved staircase. Some period features remain, such as etched Crown windows, panelling and tiling; the latter tiles, featuring a crown atop an escutcheon, enhance the modern bar counter. The modern archways are a touch incongruous, but the room layouts remain. The wooden screen that hides the entrance to the Gents is an unusual relic. For the sporting, a good bowling green can be found at the back whilst, back inside and through a Gothic arch, lurks a vividly-coloured pool room. This was the busiest pub so far and the Robinson's beers the best we had had so far with Best just edging it over a good Hatters.

During our time inside the Crown a fog had descended outside as we made our way to the **Travellers Call**, was it to get thicker? The Travellers is a small and, seemingly, always busy three roomer. The Robbies here ranked as some of the best beer of the night, with Hatters scoring it over the Best (in oversize pots, too), whilst the Old Tom went untried. A most striking feature of the decor is a vast collection of brass nauticalia and bells. As well as the ships' bells and hand bells, there are port-holes, propellers, lanterns and telescopes. The TV and Darts room remains free of this style, whilst the front snug has a well stocked fish tank set amid-ships the chimney breast. Outside, one finds a small beer garden, bizarrely furnished with a red telephone box, traffic lights and a well, surmounted by a giant red bell - all highly entertaining. The pub is also notable for its fundraising, £58,000 has been collected in 16 years by means of a ten-mile annual walk. Note the old Stockport boundary marker outside on the Cherry Tree corner.

The fog had cleared as we walked to the **Dog & Partridge** (the final Great Moor house). This is a smallish pub sympathetically extended on both sides many years ago. With its varied decor of tartan and wood panels in many rooms it has quite the country club feel to it. A large beer garden/play area to the rear means it often attracts a varied custom - tonight it was very busy with a mixed crowd, two of whom, Sharon and her mother, latched onto a number of our party. Regaling us with tales of her 40th birthday, the Robbies Hatters and Best slipped down easily; the Old Tom was sampled by a couple of hardy souls who thought it only average.

The final part of our tri-area crawl was at hand now as we wandered into Heaviley and the **Duke of York** (well, your author didn't wander, but decked-on to one of the frequent 192 buses to cut down the half-mile so that it is). Robinson's again, this time though Best and Snowdon were the offerings and both in very reasonable nick. Bustling with a mixed crowd tonight, the Duke is far larger than it looks with three plush rooms at the front and a two-level vault at the rear. A large beer garden with play area at the rear is also a well used facility. A rather unusual feature, and slightly disconcerting, were the Acropops (extendable pieces of scaffolding) that were holding up parts of the ceiling - a temporary feature, no doubt.

Just across Nangreave Road lies the **Bamford Arms**. This is a Travel Inn with upstairs restaurant attached, does this work as a pub or a hotel bar? Make your own minds up. The Whitbread rustic, library look is in vogue. Usually there are three beers on, tonight we had Boddies (which went untried), Tetley bitter and Pedigree both were average to good in quality. Across the ever busy Buxton Road lies the borough's largest church by far, St.

Georges - I must pay a visit one day to see the interior. Beside the church is another magnificent erection in the form of Robinson's Blossoms. Built as a coaching house in the 18th century, this three-roomed pub with lobby bar is reported to be the exit place for an escape tunnel from Bramhall Hall, and was used for the planning meetings when designing St. Georges Church. Nowadays it supports two separate Lodges of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes. Neville and his staff provide a warm, friendly atmosphere and excellent service - this pub is well worth a visit. It is also one of the few Stockport pubs to offer a pinball game. Three beers are offered - Hatters, Best and the powerful Old Tom, all three were sampled, with none found to be wanting. Easily some of the best beers of a very pleasant, if somewhat Robinson's-skewed, stagger. All of the pubs outlined herein are accessible by buses 191, 192 and 199, all of them from central Stockport. Nine different pubs, all splendid in their own way; and not a bad pint in any of them. Beer choice was somewhat limited, so if you do not like Robbies, you're really stuffed! For a change, you may wish to pop into the Wheatsheaf at the top of Higher Hillgate as they do Tetley, Pedigree and a guest beer.

FESTIVAL SPONSORS KEEP PRICES DOWN



Stockport's 17th Beer & CIDER FESTIVAL

STOCKPORT TOWN HALL
29TH-31ST MAY 2003

After the accolades Festival-goers gave the pricing policy at last year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival, the organisers have announced that once again the Festival's sponsors have helped keep prices really keen. The Festival has also continues with beer priced at only £1 a pint before 8.00pm, which must be amongst the most competitively priced beer at any festival in the UK.

Festival Organiser Jim Flynn told Opening Times "Without the help and loyalty of our sponsors prices would be at least 10p a pint dearer. The fact that these companies and businesses want to be part of the Festival just shows how much it has become a key annual social event in the area. Our grateful thanks go to them all" At the time of going to press, the following festival sponsors had been announced:

- The Stockport Express - sponsors of the Festival itself, the Family Room and the Quiet Room.
- Frderic Robinson Ltd - sponsors of the Festival glasses and t-shirts.
- Hydes Brewery Ltd - sponsors of the Festival programme and the Festival Stewarding Team.
- Ye Olde Vic, Chatham Street, Edgeley - sponsor of the Festival Special Beer from Beartown Brewery of Congleton

There are still a few sponsorship opportunities remaining for local firms. If you are interested, contact Jim Flynn on 0161 432 1816.

CAMRA REGIONAL EVENTS

U-26 Socials

Thursday 22 May 8pm: Marble Brewery Tap visit. £2 on night including 1½ pints of Marble beers. Contact Ian Kenny on 0161 728 3642 to book.

Saturday 7 June: Microbrewery Tap Minibus Crawl. £4 for bus. To book contact Rick Yates on 0161 282 7447 or 07762427552. Visiting 5 Brew pubs.

Annual CAMRA Independents Day Treasure Hunt

Saturday 5th July: Starting from the Marble Arch, Rochdale Road, Manchester from 12 noon. Food provided on return in the evening. Teams of around four members are invited to turn up on the day. More details will be provided in the June Edition.

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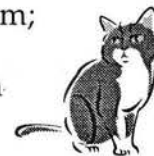
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Family Brewers Update

May sees new beers from all four of the local family brewers...

Robinson's have their latest seasonal out this month and this is the welcome return of Young Tom, a weaker version of the legendary Old Tom and a beer which has been one of the top selling seasonals for Robbies. Also at long last the brewery have produced a dedicated pump-clip for the rare dark mild. Now christened 'Dark Hatters', the new clip can be seen in the Pot of Beer and Circus Tavern, Manchester. That's not to say that the beer is now freely available - pubs wanting the beer still have to make a strong case before they will be allowed to sell it.



Hydes bring out the latest in their 'Fine Beers in the Making' series of craft ales this month. The May/June beer is Hubble Bubble, a 4.4% pale gold beer described as full bodied with a clean, dry flavour and a rounded finish. In a surprise move, Hydes also produced a small quantity of 'By George' a special for St George's Day which, we understand, was a version of Jekyll's Gold produced for those pubs wishing to celebrate the saint's day.

The latest beer from **Lees** should be rather special, brewed as it is to mark to company's 175th anniversary. The 4.6% '1828 Anniversary Ale' is described as "a malty brew to salute the millions who have enjoyed a pint of John Willies over the years". Lees new beers are always worth seeking out - Manchester's Rain Bar will be a guaranteed outlet. Lees are also looking to up the expansion of their tied estate with the appointment of a new executive to actively pursue this - let's hope they don't overlook us down here in Stockport and South Manchester as they formulate their expansion plans.



Holt's moved forward the launch of their next seasonal beer, "Edward's" so it should be out by the time you read this. It has been made with honey in the fermentation process and comes in at 4.1%ABV but despite this will still retail at the same price as the slightly weaker bitter, £1.29 a pint. Also, soon to be available, is a bottled version of ThunderHolt but at 5% ABV, for the 'Take Home Trade'



Micro Magic

We don't know whether there's something in the water up there, but the Oldham brewing scene just keeps on growing. Two new micros are in the pipeline here. First there's the **Millstone Brewery** which, if all goes according to plan, will occupy the same building as the Greenfield Brewery, and, also in common with Greenfield, have its plant installed by Dave Porter of Porter Brewing. Now we hear of a second project - this is to be the **Owl Brewing Company**, which will occupy part of the currently-closed Hope Hotel, Greenacres Road, Oldham. The rest of the pub (closed since May 2001) will reopen as The Owl's Nest and operate as a brewery tap for the new venture. The man behind this venture is one Gordon Potts who is hoping the Oldham Council will give the green light to the project, which will cost an estimated £100,00. Meanwhile the established brewers are continuing to produce the goods, with a constant stream of new beers.

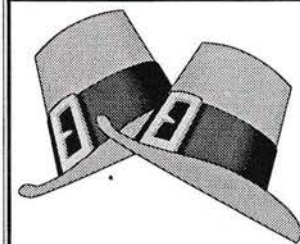
Boggart Hole Clough officially have just one new beer out this month, the 5% Half Cut, described as a red ale. We say 'officially' as brewer Mark Dade does have the habit of slipping out a few extra new beers unannounced. Boggart Hole are also now in the beer distribution business as a proper wholesaler (as opposed to just swapping beers with other micros) covering the whole of the UK.

Bank Top at Bolton have no new beers out this month - not only is brewer John Feeney off on a well-deserved holiday, but the brewery is still running to stand still with sales often exceeding production and a consequent reduction of beer on hand. The superb Dark Mild has been picking up a clutch of awards, coming first in its class and third overall in the Society of Independent Brewers' north of England championship. John tells us that Celebration, the 5% special commissioned by Bolton Council sold out straight away and may reappear, under a new name and in bottle.

Phoenix at Heywood have a number of new beers in the pipeline this month - look out for Mayfly, 4.4%; Midsummer Madness, 4.5%; Tennis Elbow, 4.5% and Sticky Wicket, 4.7%. These are all bitters but also check out a new mild - Black Shadow at 4%. This will feature at Stockport Beer Festival.

The new **Greenfield Brewery** is going great guns. The regular beers, Bill's O'Jacks (4.1%), Dobcross Bitter (4.2%) and the mild, Greenfield Ale (4%) have been joined by two new beers recently. Friesland Ale is a 4.4% dark bitter which, while dark in colour is light in body with a good bitter character coming from First Gold hops. The second newcomer is Delph Donkey a very pale and very bitter beer using Pioneer hops, which, we think, are an American variety. It is good to report that business is booming at this newcomer to the local scene. Closer to home in Dukinfield, the **Shaws Brewery** has been going for 12 months now and had settled in well. Due to the size of the plant, only two beers are produced at any one time. One of these is the Best Bitter (4%) and the other is one of IPA (4.8%), Tame Valley Ale (4.3%) and the new Beltane Ale. This latter is a 4.5% pale ale with quite a bitter taste - the first brew used Cascade hops from the USA but the second will use a different variety, Willamette. To ensure that control can be kept over the casks, deliveries are currently restricted to Tameside, West Yorkshire, north Derbyshire and Cheshire.

Congelton's **Khean Brewing Co** will also be producing a new beer this month although brewer Ken Newsome hadn't formulated this when we contacted him. He did tell us that the Village Green has been so popular that it is still in production and will be entered into the Champion Beer



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of Cheshire competition, to be held at this month's Macclesfield Beer Festival. The beer is perhaps unique in being brewed using a blend of American and Pott Shrigley hops!
Peter Wood at **THE LAB** informs us of a few changes and tweaks to beers. A new formulation of Haughton Weave has seen hoppiness reduced in line with customer comments; it remains at 4.5% ABV. To make Broomstairs bitter 'smoother', the chocolate malt has now been removed, with the colour and taste coming from roasted barley. Frog Bog has reduced aroma hops to make it more 'sessionable'. A new IPA beer should be production, most likely to be called Audenshaw IPA (3.8%). It will be light in colour and using purely bittering

THE LAB

hops, no aroma hops to give a refreshing, clean on the palate beer.
Pictish Brewery of Rochdale has two new beers out this month. One is a former 'Beer of the Festival at Stockport, the 4.7% Summer Solstice, described as "A crisp refreshing blonde ale. Rounded pale malt flavours in the mouth are balanced by a subtle bitterness which leads to a dry finish with a delicate floral hop aroma". Also available is the 3.5% Black Diamond, a full bodied, rich, dark Mild with roast barley flavours dominating the palate. Both will of course be available at the Crown, Heaton Lane, Stockport which has a pump reserved for Pictish products.



THE SALFORD BREWERY SYNDICATE

The well-established Bazen's micro and the brand new Facer's have come together under one roof in a venture currently unique in British brewing. Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA paid the first ever CAMRA visit to the new operation - and came away very impressed with what they saw, heard - and tasted!

Bazen's Brewery, based at Agecroft Industrial Estate, will be familiar to many OT readers. Richard Bazen has quite a brewing pedigree, having made his mark locally at Bridgewater Ales before going on to brew at Tony Allen's Phoenix Brewery. After leaving Phoenix he set up Bazen's with wife Jude, with the new outfit's beers becoming an instant hit on the local scene. Pacific Bitter (3.8%) and Flatbac (4.2%) are the mainstays, supplemented by Knoll's Porter, Black Pig Mild, Bazen's Best and a range of seasonals based on an astrological theme. Demand was such that the original premises were rapidly outgrown. Meanwhile, Boddington's head brewer David Facer was facing redundancy and aimed to set upon his own. David has had a long career in the brewing industry, starting at Wilsons in Newton Heath, moving on to Tetleys at Leeds, Chesters in Salford and finally Boddingtons, where he was head brewer for the last four years. Craft brewing was, however, new to him. 'Facer's First Draught' was literally the first beer he had brewed on a micro scale - hence the name!



David and Anne Facer

The first brew was brewed and fermented at Bazen's Brewery in Agecroft. However, the two concerns have now co-located to new premises at Knoll Street Industrial Park at The Cliff, Salford. In a unique arrangement, both breweries will share premises and equipment but still run as separate concerns. The semi-derelict unit was transformed in a matter of weeks and when Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA visited on 14 March, brewing hadn't yet started, with the first brew due on Tuesday 18. Everything was very new and indeed more new eight-barrel fermenters were still under construction at Boggart Hole Clough. In fact, the brewing equipment will be split, rather than individual vessels being shared. Each concern has its own ingredients, offices and telephone numbers - all under the one roof. The current capacity is five barrels but this will shortly increase to give each brewer a 15-barrel capacity.

The Beers

The Bazens' range is fairly well-known and on our visit a cask of the excellent Flatbac was available for sampling. Richard and Jude also told us about the new seasonal range loosely based on an astrological theme, each using a single hop variety. The February/March beer was Sea God (4.3%) using Pacific Hallertau hops and made with crystal rye and crystal malt to create a medium amber beer. The March/April (Aries) beer is Golding Fleece, a 4.4% golden beer brewed using Golding hops and market under the slogan 'rammed full of Goldings', while the latest based on the theme of Taurus, is 'Bullocks', a 4.3% beer brewed using American Mount Hood hops. Also available to try were two Facer's beers. First Draught is brewed using Optic Pale Ale and Crystal Rye malts with a hedgerow hop called 'Jenny' for bittering and a generous late addition of Bramling Cross for aroma. The 4.1 per cent beer has a gentle introduction but becomes increasingly bitter and quenching as you drink leaving that all-important "I'll have another" aftertaste. The second beer was a 'special' - an extra-dry-hopped version of First Draught. At first David thought he'd overdone the dry-hopping but this had matured out to give a dry, refreshing beer. Something similar to this will be marketed as Rhapsody with a third beer being the 4.7-4.8 per cent Landslide, which will be a stronger and again dry-hopped version of First Draught which will be aimed to not drink its strength. Future special may include a mild, a porter and a wheat beer, the first of which, Facer's Dark Mild, should appear this month. This will use Halcyon malt, and crystal and roast rye malts. The name hadn't been picked as we went to press but one idea is Rye Smile.



Jude and Richard Bazen

One 'syndicate' beer is likely to be a cask lager. This should be a 5 per cent beer, which will be conditioned for a month before release into the trade. Only three brews are likely over the summer months. The visit also included excellent chicken and veggie curries to soak up the copious samples on offer and it was an excellent evening spent discussing beer and brewing with Richard and Jude Bazen, and David and Anne Facer. With the wealth of brewing experience and dedication to quality which have come together in this new operation, success should be guaranteed. Out thanks go to all involved for a superb evening.

Bazens' Brewery can be contacted on 0161 708 0247. Facer's Brewery can be contacted on 0161 792 7755.

HOPPY DAY IN OSSETT

The latest CAMRA Stockport & South Manchester visit involved a foreign trip- across t'border and into Yorkshire. Our highly under-powered minibus obviously didn't want to be climbing hills and going to foreign parts, but nevertheless it got us to our first target, the Brewers Pride in Ossett, West Yorkshire on schedule.

The Brewers Pride is located at the edge of town and is just adjacent to the Healy Mills Railway Yards. More importantly, it is also next to the Ossett Brewery, here a tour had been organised. We had left plenty of time to sample some of the beers on offer in the pub as well as a bite to eat before our tour and we were not to be disappointed. Although the pub and brewery are not connected, three Ossett beers are usually available and today these were the 3.8% Pale Gold, 4.3% Silver King and the 5.2% Excelsior. Between us, all were tried and they were in excellent form. The well balanced and orangey Pale Gold was described by one of our number as "unassuming but nevertheless forceful" whilst another likened it to "a maiden aunt on speed"! This pretentiousness was suitably mocked.

Notwithstanding this wonderful lineup, also on the bar was one of my recent favourites, Whim Cascade. Not surprisingly and like Silver King, it is made with Cascade Hops and can be sometimes sampled in the Crown on Heaton Lane, although it never lasts long! Others available were Taylors' Landlord (above average), Cottage Breast Bitter which had a blackcurrant tang, Hambleton Nightmare, (a porter) and the 7% Church End Rest In Peace which was malty with a marzipan taste. Addlestons Cider completed the range.

The pub has two front rooms, one with the bar, and a collection of breweriana including a mirror from the long departed Bentley Brewery. The tap room at the back has a TV and Pool table. This is obviously a good community pub as it got quite crowded for a Saturday lunchtime and that was before the Bradford Branch arrived on a motorised pub crawl.

Fortified with some excellent value for money food from a varied menu, we set off through the pub's beer garden for our tour of the Ossett Brewery. Our host was Paul Spencer who had tapped a barrel of HSB (Healy Special Bitter 4.2%) for our visit. This was a

typical Ossett beer, light coloured, rounded and well balanced. The beer is made from Cluster hops and Fawcetts lager malt whilst the Ossett yeast came from Wards via Kelham Island.

The brewery was founded in 1998 by Bob Lawson and a colleague who eventually left to set up a rival operation at the Red Lion, also in Ossett. Bob has over 30 years of brewery experience starting locally at Beverleys Eagle in Wakefield. When they were taken over and closed by Watneys - surprise, surprise- he moved to Matthew Brown in Blackburn before going to Joshua Tetley in Leeds for the next 25 years. Subsequently he commissioned breweries for the Firkin chain (remember them?) before operating the Kelham Island micro in Sheffield.

Brewing started in June 1998 and in September that year the brewery won its first award at The Huddersfield Beer Festival. During early 1999 Silver King was named Beer of the Festival at both Bradford and Leeds Festivals in the face of stiff opposition from over 100 other beers. More importantly perhaps, Bob's peers voted Excelsior Champion Beer of the SIBA Festival in September 1999. The brewery was certainly living up to its motto "Science and Art Combined" which along with its coat of arms is displayed on the distinctive pump clips. Soon the beers were proving so popular and winning more awards that an extension to the brewery was developed raising capacity from 10 barrels so that now, with 3 or 4 brews per week, they are producing 35 barrels per week- and selling it all. Ossett will be opening their first pub, The Bull in Liversedge in the summer. This will provide a steady outlet for the beer and aid one of the difficulties of marketing the beer in West Yorkshire which is awash with many excellent microbreweries. The brewery also delivers to a wide area stretching from Peterborough to Darlington on the East Coast and around Cheshire, Derbyshire, Sheffield, Liverpool and Manchester. Local outlets with an Ossett beer on are likely to be the Crown on Heaton Lane, the Olde Vic in Edgeley or the Glove Works in Glossop. Flying Firkin also distributes the beers nationally.

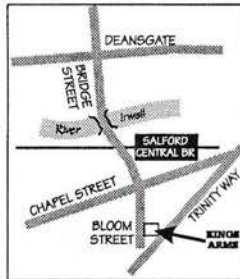
Ossett now have five members of staff in their team to operate the brewery and its collection of brewing equipment some of which is reclaimed from the milk industry. The plant consists of a 5 barrel mash tun, 3 fermenting vessels, (2 of which are 10 barrel capacity) and 8 tanks. Five staple beers are produced -the three in the pub plus Silver Shadow (3.9%) and Fine Fettle (4.8%) - the former uses eco -friendly English hedgerow hops whilst the latter is a refreshing pale ale. The brewing schedule is made up about a month in advance, so if you want to find out what is coming up you can visit their website at www.ossett-brewery.co.uk or give them a ring on 01924 261333

After a comprehensive tour of the brewery and an empty barrel of the excellent HSB, we thanked Paul for his time and hospitality and set off for home. Time had been allowed for a few stops on the way and first call was at the Red Lion to meet up again with the Bradford Branch. This stone clad brewpub was set up by Bob Lawson's erstwhile partner and is food orientated with one room occupied by a popular restaurant. However it was too early to eat, so we just had to concentrate on the beer. White Lion Bitter at 4.5% was light and hoppy as were the Golden Oldie (4.0%) and the Silver Bullet (4.6%) perhaps betraying their origins down the road. Also available was Roosters Yankee whilst next to come on were Phoenix Thirsty Moon and an Outlaw beer. I guess people in Ossett just like hops in their beer! None of our gang sampled the John Smiths Cask which was also on ...

One more stop before we headed back over the border and this was at the Good Beer Guide listed West Riding Refreshment Rooms at Dewsbury Railway Station. This is the main outlet for yet another local micro, the Anglo Dutch Brewing Company whose offering was Piston Proud (4.8%) which had a wonderful earthy taste. Also available were beers from Outlaw, Kelham Island and Springhead as well as Timothy Taylor staples Dark Mild and Landlord and Black Sheep Best and Riggwelter.

An excellent and hoppy day out in Yorkshire was rounded off on the right side of the Pennines at The Trackside in Bury. (We had to drop someone off there so it seemed churlish just to drive on straight away) Even though we were again in Red Rose territory, I have to say that if nothing else, these Yorkshire chappies certainly know how to brew beer that really grab the tastebuds like well, er, nothing else.

Your Ossett and two Anglo-Dutch beers should be on sale at this month's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival which is held at Stockport Town Hall from 29 - 31 May.



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BOOTLEGGERS' BOOST

Gordon's penny-a-pint slap in the face

Chancellor Gordon Brown's penny-a-pint Budget hike in beer duty is bad news for brewers, bad news for licensees and pubgoers... and great news for bootleggers. That was the industry's unanimous verdict on Mr Brown's "war Budget", which also saw 4p slapped on a bottle of table wine. And, according to CAMRA Head of Campaigns Mike Benner, the increases won't even help Treasury revenues.

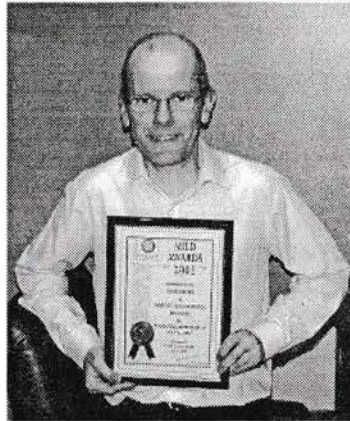
"Increasing beer duty is a flawed strategy," he said. "People only have so much cash to spend in pubs. Increasing duty reduces average consumption, which in turn reduces revenues from duty." But one of CAMRA's biggest fears, shared throughout the industry, is that the duty increases will see price differentials on beer and wine between Britain and France open yet wider, leading to a resurgence in bootlegging.

Beer duty in Britain at 34p a pint is nearly eight times higher than France's 4.5p, and Mr Benner said: "High duty is the cause of smuggling and the social problems which result from the unregulated and illegal sale of alcohol. "It also affects pubs and local jobs. Someone with a garage full of cheap low-tax French fizz is unlikely to use their local. The only long-term solution is to reduce beer duty to a level which knocks the profit out of smuggling. The increase is a slap in the face for Britain's 15 million beer drinkers."

Titanic Brewery's Keith Bott, who has just been elected president of the Society of Independent Brewers, echoed CAMRA's fears. "Many pubs will increase the price of a pint by 2p and some will round up to 5p," he warned. "The only good news is that the rise in fuel duty might encourage pubs to buy locally to keep costs down."

Jonathan Neame, managing director of Kent family brewer Shepherd Neame, said: "This is a tragedy. It will make little if any difference to revenues, it will reduce the Chancellor's other revenues such as employment taxes, which will fall as more pubs lay off staff or close. It will leave less money for schools and hospitals, not more. Higher duty hits taxpayers, pubs, pub customers, pub staff, and the local communities pubs serve. The only winners will be the smugglers and the French Treasury, which collects the duty and VAT on the million pints brought in from Calais every day."

MILD CHALLENGE LATEST

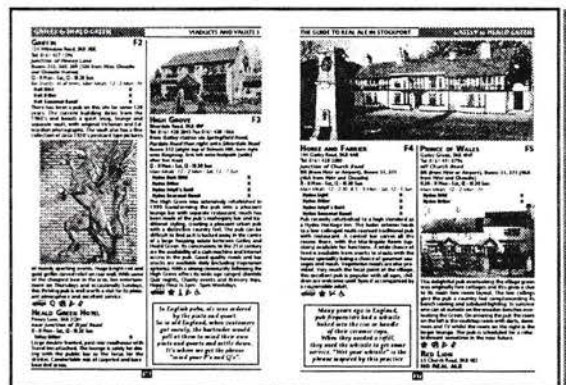


For those on the Mild Challenge, LAB's Aromatic Amber may well have been styled as 'Owd Stan's Amber Ale' for the first two weeks of the event - do not worry, it's the same beer. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the Moss Rose in Heaton Norris closed for a five or six week refurbishment on April 13th. This will only affect people who wish to attempt the Mild Challenge Ultra (ie. all 81 pubs); if you had not got your stamp from the Moss Rose by that time then cards with all 80 of the other pubs' stamps will suffice. Excuses for not completing Extra or Super levels because of this will NOT be considered.

The Stockport & Manchester Mild Challenge also won an award at the recent CAMRA AGM. Two awards were made for those CAMRA Branches running 'high quality' mild promotions and both our Challenge and the 'Mild Trail' run by Nottingham Branch were singled out for praise. Our photograph shows Mild Challenge Organiser Mark McConachie with the award. Congratulations all round.



COMING SOON!

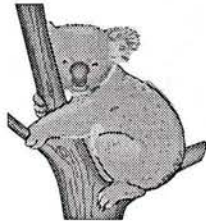


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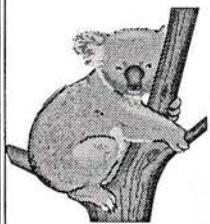
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LETTERS OPENING TIMES

From Peter Edwardson, Heaton Norris:

In your recent "Stagger" visiting the Airport Hotel your correspondent fails to mention that this pub has recently introduced pay and display parking. The minimum charge is £3, of which only £2 can be reclaimed against bar or food purchases.

I appreciate that there was a problem with both planespotters and airport workers using the car park. But this policy must damage trade and, in particular, deter the kind of casual visits that may lead to a more lasting acquaintance with the pub. Surely a tariff could be devised that does not penalise short stays by genuine customers so harshly.

From Alan Gent (via e-mail)

Your recent comment re Stalybridge struck a chord, particularly, the quote "probably the last remaining truly traditional railway buffet in the country"

Can I add Dewsbury to that list? The Dewsbury refreshment room is truly magnificent with both food and beer of the highest standard. Funnily enough, I am organising a trip out from my drinking cohorts at the end of March (entitled A Grand Day Out) which will include a stop off at Dewsbury. We shall also be taking in Huddersfield Station, York and Marsden Brewery. If you are interested, I can send you a report on what is a truly great "Stagger".

(The West Riding Licensed Refreshment Rooms at Dewsbury station are indeed highly recommended. We'll bring you Alan's report in due course, but a short report can also be found this month on page 12. - Ed(1))

From Alan Wilson, Macclesfield:

In an inexplicable lapse I've defected to cider as I type this, so perhaps I can be forgiven for sounding 'off'.

I have before me, taken at random from my pile of previous editions of Opening Times, a copy of Nov 2002, No 223. It contains, out of the 20, approx 13 pages of readable material. In contrast, this month's edition, April 2003, No 228, has seen a marked decline to only 7. Even if you count the 4 pages devoted to the very worthy Mild Challenge, it's still 2 pages adrift.

Thus, at first sight, you may be thinking I would support your search for a new darts reporter. On the contrary, I have two objections to appointing a successor to John Taylor. Firstly, although I am sure many a pub owes its survival to the darts team's thirst for beer, no doubt some of it cask, what about the other pub games that support a league? What is it that is so special about darts?

My second reservation concerns a simple observation; the darts column is a lightweight in comparison to the fascinating world of real ale we read about in your magazine. It's almost as if it is trying to reconcile Stockport's working class heritage with a predominantly middle class readership.

I would urge you to restrict the pages of Opening Times to articles featuring beer and pubs. I'm sure there must be plenty to choose from, and if not, appeal to the readership. One of my favourite features is the 'Pub Grub' column, but its appearance is erratic. Is this because contributors are hard to come by? Or are some of us sending in reports that are gathering dust?

(Cost usually dictates that Opening Times is restricted to 20 pages, so some months certain items have to be held over, usually, however, the cupboard is bare. Given that promoting the Mild Challenge is one of the central features of Stockport & South Manchester's campaigning year, we feel it is necessary to devote 4 pages of April's edition to it. This does mean that this particular issue is often a bit unbalanced, and last month's issue was a bit 'light' on new reading. Hopefully next year we can manage 24 pages in April so the problem will be avoided. Alan will be pleased to note that Pub Grub returns this issue. If Alan or anyone else wishes to write regularly, or even occasionally, about anything beer and pub related, we will be only too happy to hear from them. - Eds(1 & 2))

From Dave Hannan, via e-mail:

After reading opening times April 2003 and talking with the Chair of Peak District Mountain Rescue Organisation I want to let you all know that there are seven teams that cover the Peak from Derby up to Oldham and not just the teams that Frank talks about, we work anywhere that the police call us to and primary call is normally to the local team. The fifth High Peak Branch Walk starts in the Buxton team area and ends in the Kinder team area

(Dave tells me he has been with the Peak District Mountain Rescue Organisation for 25 years - Ed(1))



Exit the 'Big Six'

With S&N's auction of its 1400 strong managed pub estate, the integrated mega-businesses that CAMRA was established to fight have gone, whilst our membership passes the 60,000 mark. Oh if it were only so simple. Market research company AC Nielsen once again claims that Cask Ale (and beer in general) is in terminal decline, and that we will all be drinking Reef, Black Ice and such. I think not. The reason ale is declining in share is simple. The big pub owning companies are steadily pulling it out of accounts because with Keg it is (a) easier to get away with serving short measure so you get more out of a keg, (b) a 'dead' product with a long shelf-life, so it doesn't go off and so you get more out of a keg and (c) it requires no skill to keep so you can recruit supermarket shelf stackers (who come cheap) to run your pubs. Oh and (4) the accountants are in charge of the asylum. I suppose it could be worse...it could be lawyers in charge.

Places to Drink

I might as well join everyone else in Opening Times and highlight the forthcoming Stockport Beer & Cider Festival (29 - 31 May at Stockport Town Hall), the beer list looks pretty good so far, but more importantly, it is far and away the best place to drink an excellent range of cider and perry in the North of England, so if you are thirsty after the giant success that was Reading this year (or in case you missed it) this is the place to be. I did also say that I was going to remind everyone that the summer European Market is supposed to be held in Exchange Square (next to Selfridges) in Manchester between 20 - 30 May, if its not cancelled in the name of the Sars pan-panic, and that Eberhard was due to bring over four German beers on draught. If it happens (pray God), I'll be there.

Bermonster's Pub of the Season

You wait months for an award - then two come along at once I am not referring here to local CAMRA with Mark McConachie's Mild Challenge gong and the long-service award for OT (worthy though they undoubtedly are), but my somewhat erratic Pub of the Season Awards, for there is one this month for Spring and yet another (Summer) will be made in June.

The Spring Award goes to **Bar Fringe** on Swan Street in Manchester. Now with a succession of entries in CAMRA's flagship Good Beer Guide to its name, The Fringe has over the years gradually increased its traditional cask sales to the point that four handpumps dispense micro-brewery real ales, with more often than not a beer from Bank Top and Boggart alongside the (parent) Marble Brewery's Manchester Bitter and a guest from further afield. This has been made possible by a steady increase in the cask sales (are you listening AC Nielsen) and is now complimented by a traditional cider. All this alongside one of the best foreign draught ranges in Britain (Kriek, Framboise, Peche and Cassis feature frequently - and often all at the same time!), decent good value food from the tiny cabin kitchen, a wide range of bottled beers, and the delightfully eccentric (not to say slightly mad, very noisy and incredibly slim) management team of Charlie and Martina - pictured in reverse order with three of the handpumps).

With its recent redecoration and a few tweaks, The Fringe is an oasis of quality in an ocean of mediocrity, popular with customers from 20 to sixty, and from bikers to suits. The award will be presented at around three o'clock on the afternoon on May 17. As to next month's award watch this space.



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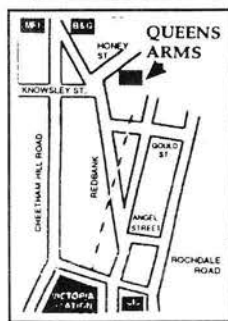
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Guest Beers



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

MAY 2003

Friday 16th - Ardwick & City Centre Stagger: meet Kings Head, Chancellor Lane 7.30pm; Bulls Head, London Road 8.30pm

Saturday 17th - Social Day in Burton-on-Trent as guests of local branch - includes pub tour & visit to Tower Brewery. Minibus leaves Crown, Heaton Lane 10.00am. Book with Paul Formby on 0161 612 0759 (after 6.00pm)

Thursday 22nd - Pub of the Month Award to the Griffin, Wilmslow Rd, Heald Green. A minibus will run to this event departing from the Crown, Heaton Lane at 8.00pm. Book with Paul Formby.

Tuesday 27th - Sunday 1st June - Set up, run and take down the 17th Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. All members are urged to support our flagship event - staff required so please try and lend a hand, even if it's just for a couple of hours.

Tuesday 10th June - Social and Social Secretary's Birthday Drink at the Navigation, Lancashire Hill, Stockport. From 8.00pm - all welcome

Thursday 12th - Branch Meeting: Gateway, Kingsway, East Didsbury. Start 8.00pm.

REGIONAL UNDER 26 EVENTS

Thursday 22 May 8pm: Marble Brewery Tap visit. £2 on night including 1½ pints of Marble beers. Ian Kenny on 0161 728 3642 to book.

Saturday 7 June Microbrewery Tap Minibus Crawl. £4 for bus. To book contact Rick Yates on 0161 282 7447 or 07762427552. Visiting 5 Brew pubs.

MAY 2003

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 12th - Branch Meeting: Kinder Lodge, Hayfield. Starts 8.15pm

Saturday 24th - Rail trip to Sheffield - details from Tom Lord on 0161 427 7099

Monday 2nd June - Committee Meeting: Newboro Inn, Astley Street, Dukinfield. 8.15pm

Saturday 7th - Annual Sponsored Charity Walk This year in aid of the Glossop and Hope Valley Mountain Rescue Teams. Route 14 miles / 7 pubs approx / Buxton to Hayfield.

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 22nd - Macclesfield Mild Meander: details to be advised. Contact George Symes on 01565 653096.

The Trafford & Hulme Branch covers the Borough of Trafford, Manchester west of the M56/Princess Parkway and a large part of the City Centre. They have notified us of the following events:

Saturday 10th - Join with North Manchester Branch for National Mild Day City Crawl. Meet noon at Queen's Arms, Honey St, Cheetham; 1.30pm Smithfield, Swan St.

Thursday 15th - Sale Social: meet Kings Ransom 8.00pm.

Saturday 24th - Urmston & Flixton afternoon crawl: meet Railway, Irlam Rd, Flixton between 1 and 2pm. Contact Dave Ward on 0161 980 1170

To Do Address Notepad Anniversary CAMRA 93 Planner

14



CAINS

BREWERY TOURS

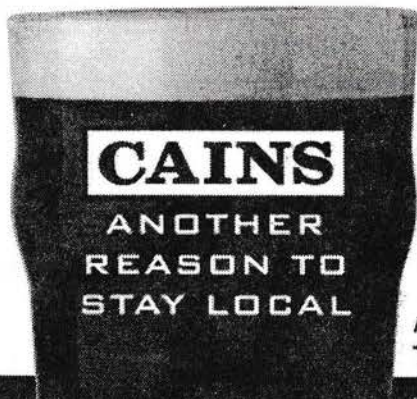
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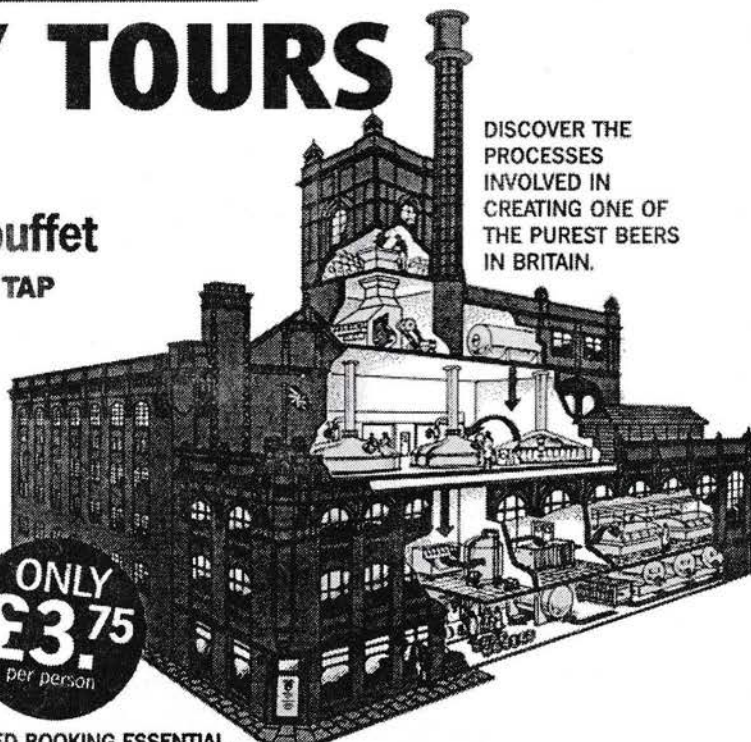
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5 Years Ago

by Phil Levison

MAY '98

CURMUDGEON



Ten Years On

This month marks the tenth anniversary of the very first "Curmudgeon" column in May 1993, which reflected on the sacking of railway guard Jeffrey Sullivan after drinking three pints of beer before his turn of duty, and wondered where this country would be if the same standards had been applied to Winston Churchill during the second world war. While there may have been some justification in this particular case, it remains a very relevant point as employers take an ever more restrictive and intrusive attitude towards even very modest drinking by their employees.

Many may think that this column has simply spent ten years moaning about things getting worse both on the beer and pub scene in particular, and in terms of broader social attitudes to pubs and alcohol, and there's more than a grain of truth in that. But a lot of positive developments have been celebrated too, and there have also been plenty of constructive suggestions as to how to improve things. The one constant factor has been that little stays the same for very long. Change is an unavoidable feature of life, and it often seems that the pace of change gets ever faster. It's also part of human nature that as you grow older, you will recall with regret the things that have been lost, while viewing with suspicion any new-fangled innovations. Thus people become, well, a touch curmudgeonly. People's view of the world tends to be formed in the period when they entered the world as young adults, and they view any deviation from that state of affairs in a negative light. Many older folk still look back nostalgically at the 1950s, although most of us today would find them insufferably conformist and full of prejudice. As I came of age in the 1970s, the era of the Winter of Discontent and the Austin Allegro, when nothing ever seemed to work properly, perhaps I don't recall the days of my youth in such rosy terms.

People have been claiming for hundreds of years that the world is going to hell in a handcart, but it hasn't happened. Some things get worse, others get better, but on balance, people continue to become more prosperous and live longer, and the passage of time usually proves the doom-mongers on any subject to have been at best guilty of greatly overstating their case, and at worst completely wrong.

Of course there's plenty to have a good grumble about, and I'm still annoyed by tables slopping with beer where pubs refuse to provide beer mats, baffled by the reasoning behind ripping out comfortable bench seating, and disgusted by otherwise respectable people guzzling beer straight from the bottle. But the story of the last ten years has been far from one of unrelieved decline.

While you're less likely now to find a good pint simply by going in pubs at random, the best pubs now are better than ever before. There are plenty of superb drinking establishments about, both old favourites and ones that have sprung up in the past few years. And the choice and quality of beers available, if you're prepared to make a little effort to seek them out, is enormously better than it once was. The pace of change is unlikely to relent, and undoubtedly there will be many changes that give cause for regret. But I'll raise a glass to the confident expectation that we'll continue to enjoy good beer and good pubs for many years to come.

Curmudgeon Online: www.curmudgeon.co.uk

There were three stories sharing the front page - most prominent was "Black Friday" with a black border, announcing three brewery closures. Two were described as yet another phase of Whitbread's "Tour of Destruction", involving the Castle Eden Brewery, situated in the Sedgefield constituency of Prime Minister Tony Blair, and the Flowers Brewery in Cheltenham. Completing the trio came the famous Ruddles Brewery, which had been bought by Morlands less than a year previously. The second front page story related how Dennis Turner's "Honest Pint" Bill had come up for its third reading, only to be stopped in its tracks by Tory Eric Forth shouting "Object". The third item announced that the Crown on Heaton Lane, Stockport, was in the process of being sold to little-known outfit, the Old King Cole Pub Co.

★ ★ ★ ★

Amongst the brewery news was an announcement about the experimental appearance of a smooth version of Robinson's Best Bitter. The beer was, and is, actually cask conditioned, and can originate from the same barrel that dispenses "real" bitter at the same time. On its way to the bar, the "smooth" passes through a "nitrogenator" which injects gas into the beer. There is also a price differential - at the time possibly an extra 10-15p a pint, intended to cover the cost of the equipment and the gas cylinders. Vaux were also playing around with their "smooth" beers. Samson had been reduced in strength to 4% ABV, and also launched in "smooth" form. But confusingly, the cask version was also labelled "smooth", but as if this wasn't enough, the existing smooth beer, Lambtons, was being introduced in cask form. Vaux of course, went on to asset-strip itself and both the company and its beers have now vanished.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

As part of its prodigious all-month beer festival, the Beer House in Manchester had brewed its own beer, in the Shugborough Museum Brewery (with assistance from Titanic Brewery) and there was a picture of Sal working at the wood-fired kettle.

There was more news of the conversion of Winter's Wine Bar, Stockport. Holt's brewery Director Tom Dempsey told the Stockport Express - "Not only is Winters a listed building, its name is also listed, and we're going to keep it the same when it becomes a pub." It was expected that the premises would finally open early the following August, with bars on two floors.

★ ★ ★

The long-closed Coach & Horses on London Road, just across from Piccadilly Station, looked to be in the final stages of decay, and the original frontage had been removed, presumably because it was in a dangerous state, and replaced by what looked like temporary boarding. It was a miracle that the old pub was still standing - a state of affairs which looked unlikely to continue for much longer. But now, in 2003, it is still with us, the building having recently been extensively renovated. Paradoxically, though, this may now be the end of the line for we hear that the block may be the subject of a CPO to make way for an office development.

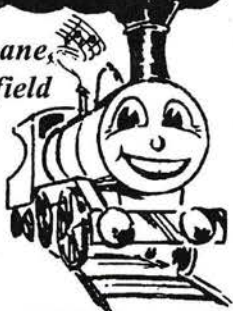


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- ★ CAMRA Good Pub Food Guide
- ★ CAMRA Regional Pub of the Year 2001
- ★ CAMRA NATIONAL Pub of the Year

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Checking out the Shepherds Arms in Whaley Bridge during the Mild Challenge, Banks's (the name Mild was dropped) was in good form alongside the Marstons Bitter, Pedigree and Wells Bombardier. Whilst in the village, I got a stamp at the Goyt Inn with an excellent pint of Tetley Dark Mild. I had forgotten what a pleasant old pub this is, it is often bypassed in favour of the Good Beer Guide-listed Shepherds. Also, I put my head in the Jodrell Arms which has been closed for nearly two years. Tetley bitter is the beer on handpump but the landlord tells me that from late April, a further pump is to be used for a varying cask beer.

At the Hatters in Marple, the Cumbria Way seemed to be selling well but the Hatters was worth the stamp!!

In New Mills the Masons Arms surprisingly, for such a small pub with almost all local trade, has Robinson's Best Bitter, Hatters and the seasonal beer all on pump, on my visit it was Cumbria Way. However, I determinedly stuck with the Hatters, with a stamp and the prospect of a sweat shirt at the back of my mind. Also I checked out the Crescent and the Peaks as they have both been shut since the turn of the year. Well, the Peaks is still shut down but the Crescent has re-opened, but alas Tetley Smooth is the only beer on offer.

In Hyde, the Cheshire Ring, boarded up for some time, has been put up for sale by Enterprise Inns. They have several other Tameside pubs up for sale at the moment as reported in Opening Times last month.

At the Lane Ends, high above Marple on the road over to Charlesworth, reports are that the regular Tetleys Bitter has been taken off in favour of Caledonian Deuchers IPA. Guest Beers are also available here, often from Hanby and Adnams.

By the time you receive this month's edition, Shaws May Special, Beltane Ale, named after a Pagan Festival, a 4.4% straw coloured ale made with a generous amount of Cascade hops, will be in various pubs in the area. My reports from brewer Neil Hay are that the Smithfield in Manchester's Northern Quarter and the George in Buxton had ordered it well in advance. Ron at the Globe in Glossop also was starting to deal with Shaws and had asked for it.

Talking of the Globe, a further two handpumps have been installed during April to extend their range of cask beers to five, such is the current demand for the beers from Kelham Island, Abbeydale, Pictish and Lees (and now Shaws). On the gig scene, it goes from strength to strength, with recent performances from Sinner Boy (a Rory Gallagher tribute band) Andy Irvine and Stone Sole River. Kyla Brox is a big pull whenever she is on - surely she is a star of the future. Her next appearance is downstairs on Sunday 11th May (3pm) and the following Friday 16 May, she is performing upstairs with her dad Victor Brox. This was an absolutely great gig the last time they played together, get there early as it will surely be a sell out!

The New Inn on Mossley Road, Ashton has been closed periodically of late. However, it has recently reopened - with a handpumped beer on sale. Interestingly it has been Saddleworth More, from the Church Inn Brew Pub in Uppermill.

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NEW BEER BOOK

To celebrate St Patrick's Day on 17th March, CAMRA, The Campaign for Real Ale launched a new book detailing the history of stout and porter as part of its campaign to encourage the drinking of the real cask-conditioned variety, rather than the better known brands. Written by historian and home brew enthusiast Clive La Pensée, and the author of CAMRA's best-selling Good Beer Guide Roger Protz, 'Homebrew Classics - Stout & Porter' explores the streets of Dublin where stout was born and travels to London to establish the beginnings of porter.

"I hope it is a historical contribution as I have tried to put stout and porter into their historical context," says Clive La Pensée. "How can we understand the beer if we ignore the people and their reason for doing it?"

Historical observations are supported with extracts from stout drinkers James Joyce and Flann O'Brien, exploring how brewing styles have developed as part of the country's tradition and culture. Roger Protz adds, "The importance of the new CAMRA Homebrew Classics title is that it not only tells the fascinating story of porter and stout but enables both homebrewers and craft brewers to fashion versions of the beers using Clive La Pensée's recipes."

'Homebrew Classics - Stout & Porter' contains:

- * Fascinating stories from the early days of brewing Stout and Porter.
- * Authentic recipes from contemporary brewers.
- * Full instructions for brewing your own Stouts and Porters with modern ingredients.
- * Detailed analysis of what constitutes Stout and Porter Beer Styles.

Published by CAMRA books priced at £8.99, the text supports the belief in drinking REAL Stouts and Porters rather than the cold and bland mass-produced variety.

It is the latest addition in the 'Homebrew Classics' series which includes titles for India Pale Ale, Lager, Mild, Bitter and other famous beer styles. To order a copy please call 01727 867201.

Look out for a review of *Viaducts & Vaults 3 - A Celebration of Real Ale In Stockport's Pubs* (to be launched at the Stockport Beer & Cider Festival 29 - 31 May) in June's Opening Times

HIGH PEAK BRANCH WALK 2003

The fifth Annual Branch Walk takes place on Saturday June 7th, as usual a new route within the Branch area, with a new Charity as beneficiaries of the event.

This year, Members and friends (that could be you!!) are assembling at Ramseys Bar, in the Buckingham Hotel, Buxton (Good Beer Guide 2003) for an 11am start. The route ascends through the Cavendish Golf Course, down through the Goyt Valley, up to Pym's Chair, across to Windgather Rocks, before descending to Kettlethulme where the Bulls Head and the Swan are the lunchtime stops.

After lunch, with the walk half completed, the route is more gentle, taking in parts of the High Peak Canal, River Goyt and Sett Valley Trail (and a few more selected pubs), finishing in Hayfield at the Kinder Lodge pub.

The Charities this year are the Glossop Mountain Rescue and the Edale Mountain Rescue crews, who between them cover most of the Dark Peak area, including the Kinder, Bleaklow and Black Hill areas. The teams are all volunteers who turn out on rescues, often in appalling weather conditions, all year round. With many Branch members being active walkers, it is likely to be a popular charity. Anyone wishing to take part, please contact Frank Wood on 01457 865426 or 07960074996 (evenings).

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Good Beer Guide listed.

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Frederic's Premium
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Hartleys Cumbria Way.
Seasonal Guest Beers
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PLUS Snowdon Bitter
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Award Winning Food.



**Robinson's Chef of the Year 1999/2000
- second place and highly commended.**

British Meat Steak Pie of the Year 2001 - second place.

British Meat Steak Pie of the Year 2002 - runner up.

Shopping in Ashton? Why not pop in for lunch and a pint at The Cally. We're just near the market!



Congratulations are due to the Railway, Lapwing Lane, West Didsbury, for winning the 'Joe Goodwin Award' in this year's CAMRA-English Heritage Pub Design Awards. The Joe Goodwin Award is solely in the gift of the competitions CAMRA judges and is made for good design in the context of the traditional local. More on this in a later issue, but Holt's are to be commended for the first class job they carried out here - as we have reported in the past, the Railway really is an object lesson on how to extend a small characterful pub into a neighbouring building and, if anything, enhance its character.

The Moss Rose, Didsbury Road, Heaton Norris is currently closed for an extensive refurbishment. The intention is that it should reopen on Bank Holiday Monday 26th May and the current licensees will stay in charge after the refurbishment.

The outside appearance is going to be transformed, with a new porch, bigger windows, new fencing, an enlarged beer garden, a balustrade at first-floor level and cream painted walls. Inside the basic layout will stay the same, but the bar counter will be extended, the strange protruding feature in the lounge removed, and a stage area created in the far corner of the lounge. Regrettably some fixed seating will be lost but the overall impression should be much brighter and more welcoming. If Hydes follow their recent standards everything should be well done, tasteful and appropriate. An extended food menu will be offered and it is hoped to attract many more local people who currently do not use the pub. No decision has been made yet whether to change the name - "Moss Rose" is a traditional, distinctive pub name that was taken from the original pub further down towards Stockport, but unfortunately because of a particular incident has attracted something of a stigma recently.

The former Vine, and latterly Muse Bar, on High St, Cheadle has now re-invented itself as Barsh, or should that be Bar Sh...? Whatever, it is now a stripped-out, pared-down, blond-wood, chilled-out cafe bar. Far smaller than before because of the rear space being utilised for a kitchen and toilet improvements. Given all that, it is pleasing to see cask beer in such an establishment. Yes, we have Boddies plus a guest beer - the guest was Spitfire and at £2.20 a pint when OT called one Sunday afternoon. It has definitely set its stall out to be different from other pubs in the locale and this could be the format that may bring success. It's a Punch Taverns venture and it opens all permitted hours and also from nine daily (11 Sun) for coffee and such.

The Bowling Green, Charles Street (off Higher Hillgate), Stockport, is going back to real ale. When OT called new licensee Barry Richardson was just seeing off the last of the keg and was planning to introduce cask Boddingtons Bitter. The Bowling Green has had a chequered history in recent years, including an extensive period of closure. This was followed by an impressive refurbishment and the appearance of cask ale now completes the picture.

It has taken six years of practice and patient waiting before local man Craig Heslop could achieve his ambition to become licensee of the Woodman, Hazel Grove. For before he could take over at this Robbie pub, he has had to wait for his mother Lynn, who was the previous tenant to step aside and let him take on the role.

"Mum had been here since 1997 and during that time she really built up the business, but she decided that it was now time for a change and has moved to take on the Silver Jubilee in Heaton Norris," explained Craig. He is no stranger to the business, having helped out at the Woodman for the past five years, and also provided relief management at times to support his mother. In addition, he has worked overseas in the licensed trade to build his experience and having worked as assistant manager at the Three Bears, also in Hazel Grove, for the past six months he is now well known in the area.

MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

Due to Easter and the CAMRA AGM in Exeter, I've not been out and about so much this month. I did however pop into the Town Hall Tavern in the City Centre and was delighted to see Caledonian Deuchars IPA on the bar - I hear it's pretty regular there, too. This is one of the most improved pubs in the City Centre over recent years and it was good to see it packed when I called. Staying in the centre, I also see that the Retro Bar (which some of us fondly remember as the Swinging Sporrán) has rebranded itself again and is now advertising 'traditional' beers. This can of course mean anything and it remains to be seen whether or not they are cask conditioned.

Apart from that it's mainly snippets. I hear that the Mauldeth in Burnage is now back to keg only after what seemed to be just a flirtation with cask ale. Meanwhile over in Didsbury, the Nelson has put on an unusual mild for the Challenge - none other than M&B Mild from the West Midlands. A very rare sighting in these parts. Nearby, Carringtons is closed and this may be for good, at least as a beer and wine shop. This will be a sad loss for the area if this turns out to be the case.

Luckily, the Chorlton branch is still going strong. In fact Chorlton is something of a beer lovers mecca these days. As these words were penned, Lees were reopening the Lloyds - a very smart affair apparently. I intend to make a comprehensive visit to Chorlton for next month's column so more on this next time. I must mention the Unicorn Grocery, though - this excellent organic store has just produced an organic beer guide. I'm hoping to persuade Ed1 to give it a review next month, so that'll be something else to look forward to.

Down The A6

I did manage to pay one of my periodic visits to Longsight last month. On my way down there I spotted lights on outside at the Cleveland on Wilson Street. I'd written this pub of and it will be amazing if it's reopened. It will be miraculous if it sells real ale.

In Longsight, the Gold Cup and the Ducie still remain keg but I was pleased to see that real ale remains in the New Victoria. The 'Barnsley Bitter brewed at Oakwell' was in very good form when I called. It looks as though the pub no longer sells the Oakwell-brewed Old Tom mild, but that is really no surprise as this has never really been much of a mild outlet. The pub itself continues to impress and looks to be a very well-run operation.

I'm pleased to see the Springbank Tavern has reopened, although the loss of real ale in this long-time cask ale outlet is a blow. The Bay Horse across the road is still keg, of course. I keep hearing good things about the beer quality and range at the Sir Edwin Chadwick but on this occasion I didn't have time to call. Time also prevented a planned visit to Levenshulme and this will have to be on next month's itinerary, although I have to say it's looking as the Railway, on the corner of Albert Road, has closed for good. I will be very surprised if anyone takes this one on again.

Well, that's it for this month. I'm off to the Knott, where a new seasonal menu has been introduced, for a well-deserved rest...

STOCKPORT BEER & CIDER FESTIVAL 2003

SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Would you like to promote your company to thousands of people who will attend the Stockport Beer & Cider Festival - and/or log on to our website each year? for details contact Jim Flynn on 0161 432 1816

18

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FREE! DID YOU KNOW?

that you can get free entry to the Stockport Beer & Cider Festival by becoming a member of CAMRA, and if that isn't enough, you can also gain free or reduced price entry to every other CAMRA beer festival throughout the UK - currently over 150! Details of these festivals and other social events, along with the latest brewery news are supplied in CAMRA's monthly newspaper 'What's Brewing' - delivered free to your door.

All members are invited to participate in our packed line-up of socials - at least two events per week: brewery visits (with plenty of sampling time!), curry crawls, minibus trips inside and outside the area; awaydays by train; Staggers and Pubs of the Month are all forthcoming events. So why not become a member of the most successful consumer pressure group in Europe. There has never been a better time to join.

YOU KNOW IT MAKES SENSE!

RECENT LOCAL CAMRA AWARDS



Pictured are the delighted winners of Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA's three most recent Pub of the Month Awards (left) Jan and Brendan Adderley, of the High Grove, Gatley with the award presented on Thursday 27 February, (centre) local Branch Treasurer Jim Flynn with Eamon of the Thatched Tavern in Reddish, award presented on March 27, and finally (right) Neville and Margaret Owen of the Blossoms, Heaviley with the April award, presented on April 24. A good time was had by one and all - why not join us this month for the presentation to the Griffin at Heald Green on May 22. (details on page 5)



APPLICATION FOR CAMRA MEMBERSHIP (Opening Times 229)

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

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

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

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

TELEPHONE SIGNATURE

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO CAMRA

SINGLE £16 JOINT £19 UNDER 26 / OAP: SINGLE £9 JOINT (both must qualify) £12

Send To: Karen & Chris Wainwright, 173 Shearwater Road, Offerton, Stockport SK2 5XA
(Marple & High Peak Area to: Tom Lord, 5 Vernon Drive, Marple SK6 6JH)



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BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND! Happy hours.

Monday all day cask £1.50
Tuesday House wine at £5 a bottle
Wednesday Guinness £1.60 pint
Thursday Budweiser £1.60 pint
Friday- Budvar £1.60 pint
Saturday-Lowenbrau £1.60 pint

Sunday (from 9/2/03) 2 pint Hoegaarden at £4!!

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