

The FREE CAMRA Regional Magazine covering Central, East & South Manchester; Stockport;Tameside; Trafford; N.E. Cheshire & Macclesfield

THE MAIN EVENT WINTER ALE FEST MARKS COUNTY'S

PLACE AS NATIONAL CASK ALE CENTRE

Cask ale fans from far and wide will be descending on Manchester City Centre at the end of this month when CAMRA's National Winter Ale Festival returns to the city after a two-year absence.

The new venue is the New Century Hall on the corner of Corporation Street and Miller Street and the festival promises to be bigger and better than the previous events at Upper Campfield Market. There will be a bigger range of beers than before, with all of the local brewers represented, traditional cider and perry, a huge foreign beer bar with, in particular, wide ranges of Belgian and German beers, and a bottled beer stall featuring bottle conditioned beers ('real ale in a bottle') from many northern micro brewers. And although this is a winter ales festival, there will be plenty of session beers alongside the stronger and darker ales on sale.



Among the highlights of the festival will be CAMRA's Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition, the winter equivalent of the Champion Beer of Britain contest staged at the Great British Beer Festival in August. This time it's the chance for stronger and darker beers to take centre stage with stouts, porters, strong milds, old ales and barley wines all in contention for the top spot. And unlike previous years, the winners of the competition this time will also be eligible for entry into the Champion Beer of Britain contest, too.

CASK ALE CENTRE

All this activity puts the seal on Greater Manchester's status as the UK's top centre for cask ale brewing. Although brewing is commonly associated with towns such as Tadcaster and Burton-on-Trent, much of the beer from there is processed and comprises a handful of brands. By contrast, Greater Manchester can claim a greater concentration of cask ale brewers producing a greater variety of beers than anywhere else in the country.

As this is written there are no less than 24 cask ale breweries in the county producing something like 100 different cask beers on a regular basis, not to mention a whole variety of seasonal, special and one-off brews. The brewers range from the large family concerns like Holts, Hydes', JW Lees and Robinson's, with hundreds of outlets between them, to small micros and brew-pubs. The monthly 'Brewery News' column in *Opening Times* gives just a small flavour of what is on offer.

Not only that but the region is also supplied by quality brewers from just across the boundary – the tied estates of brewers such as Porters and Beartown have often brought irrigation to local cask ale deserts. Add in a fantastic selection of traditional pubs – Greater Manchester is second only to Greater London in the number of unspoilt pubs on CAMRA's National Inventory of Historic Pub Interiors – and you have a true national centre of excellence for traditional pubs and quality cask ales.

The National Winter Ales Festival will be held at The New Century Hall from 26-29 January. See the full page advert on the back page of this issue for full details.



Pub of the Season
Trafford & Hulme
CAMRA

THE CITY ARMS, KENNEDY STREET

One of the most popular city centre pubs, the City Arms on Kennedy Street, is the Trafford and Hulme branch's Winter Pub of the Season. Originally a Walker's pub, the City Arms was a Tetley's house for many years, until it was passed by parent conglomerate Allied to Punch Taverns, and then onto the Spirit group. But throughout these changes the one constant has been the high quality of the beers, justifying a Good Beer Guide entry almost every year. The pub's appearance in the 2005 Guide is its ninth in a row. The current range features Tetley Bitter and Tetley Dark Mild, along with five changing guest ales from a list of up to thirty supplied by the Beer Seller, mainly from regionals. The standard of the Tetley's, particularly the mild, gives the lie to the notion that big brewers can't brew decent cask beer - some are quite capable when they make the effort.

Manager Sean Piatt took over in August 2003 and decided to open on Sundays for the first time. For a pub often unfairly labelled as one just patronised by 'suits' at lunchtime and after work, the new hours have worked well - trade has really picked up. Sean says the limiting factor is the size of the place - sometimes it is so busy everyone who wants

to get in can't. Naturally, lunchtime meals are a big attraction, served between 12 noon and 3.00pm every day, while Curry Night between 5pm and 9pm on Wednesdays have been successful.

Sean is originally from Stockport and came back up north with partner Niki and baby daughter Sophie after a spell with the Firkin chain in London. His previous spell on home ground was at the Lass O'Gowrie, where as assistant manager he brewed the last batch of beer to be produced in the pub's brewery. "That must have been an interesting experience," I asked him. Sean laughed: "It was if you tried drinking it!"

The recent demolition of derelict buildings on Kennedy Street caused some disruption when the pub and its neighbour the Vine had to close briefly but things are back to normal. The Pub of the Season Award will be presented to Sean on Wednesday 19th January at around 9.00pm. To coincide with the National Winter Ales Festival the following week, Sean has plans for some surprise guest beers. More will be known by presentation night, when all are welcome. SF





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In JANUARY's OPENING TIMES ...

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PUB OF THE MONTH JANUARY 2005

Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	Sa
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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					



As you approach the Railway on Manshaw Road in Openshaw you know you will be entering a venerable Holt's establishment. The pub stands well back from the road, which itself is off Ashton Old Road right on the Tameside border (in fact, were it across the road it would be outside the Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA area). This outside area is used as a, dare I say patio, or is that too pretentious? Either way tables allow outside drinking in the better weather. Pass under the large lamp (formerly gas lit?) and enter the front door. The first thing you will notice as you enter is the extensive etched glass which is still extant in the Railway. You are greeted by two front rooms.

To the left the News Room is announced as by the name etched in the door. This currently functions as the tap or games room. Football is shown on the telly in the corner and cards are played. Of special interest is the Manchester log end darts board. This is not just a novelty or ornament, but a serious game in these parts. The Railway's team is currently top of their league. Unfortunately it is an away game on the evening of 25th January, but we may be treated to an exhibition match.

The room to the right is the No Smoke Room (now that would make an interesting etched window!). This comfortably furnished room feels like you are sitting in the best parlour, so customers are politely asked to resist the urge to smoke. This experiment has been introduced by the landlord Paul, and is proving popular. Could it be a blueprint for the solving the current smoking debate?

Travel a little further into the Railway, and you come to the recently refurbished bar on the left. This is the heart of the pub, from where pints of excellent Holts Mild and Bitter are served. Paul has tried introducing some of the seasonal ales, but as he says, "This is what folks come in here for" as he holds up a pint of Joey's finest. Finally to the rear there is a large room beyond the bar. This is used for a variety of events, and is especially popular when the big screen TV is pulled down for selected sporting events.

The Railway is the archetypal community pub with a non-youth clientele (I was warned not to call them mature, even though I meant it in the 'established' sense). It attracts a cross section of locals, who come in to enjoy the friendly banter, karaoke, quizzes, etcetera and especially the beer. I hope you can come along and give you support to Paul on Tuesday 25th January when this well-deserved award will be presented. To get there on public transport, the 219 bus runs every half hour, at 25 and 55 minutes past the hour from the Piccadilly station corner of Piccadilly Gardens. The pub is also only a short walk from Fairfield station. **DH.**

Cask Marque Award

Albion, Burnage Lane, Burnage
All Bar One, 73 King Street, Manchester
Angel Inn, 197 King Street, Dukinfield
Bamford Arms, Buxton Road, Stockport
Bank at Sale, 70 School Road, Sale
Barsh, 65 High Street, Cheadle
Barton Arms, 2 Stableford, Worsley
Bishop Blaze, 708 Chester Road, Stretford
Boathouse, Ferry Road, Itam
Bollin Fee, 6 Swan Street, Wilmslow
Bulls Head, 155-157 Broken Cross, Macclesfield
Bulls Head Hotel, 28 Buxton Road, High Lane
Calvert's Court, St. Petersgate, Stockport
Church House Inn, Church Street, Bollington
Coach and Four, 69-71 Alderley Road, Wilmslow
Cotton Bale, 21 Market Street, Hyde
Cross Keys, Adswold Road, Cheadle Hulme
Crown, 81 High Street, Cheadle
Dog & Partridge, 665-7 Wilmslow Road, Didsbury
Duke of York, Stockport Road, Romiley
Eccles Cross, 13 Regent Road, Eccles
Farmers Arms, 209 Stockport Road, Stockport
Farmers Arms, Manchester Road, Swinton
Fletcher Moss, 1 Williams Street, Didsbury
Football, 35 Swinton Hall Road, Swinton
Four Heaton, 63 Didsbury Road, Heaton Norris
Friendship Inn, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield
Gateway, 882 Wilmslow Road, East Didsbury
Gothic Bar, 61 Church Road, Gatley
Governor's House, 43 Ravenoak Rd, Ch'dle Hulme
Great Central, Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield
Hanging Gate, Higher Sutton, Macclesfield
Harbord Harbord, 17-21 Long Street, Middleton

Hare & Hounds, Dooley Lane, Marple
Harrys Bar, UMIST, Sackville St Manchester
High Grove, Silverdale Road, Gatley
J P Joule, Northenden Road, Sale
Jar Bar, SilkHouse, 4 Park Green, Macclesfield
John Gilbert, Worsley Brow, Worsley
Kings Hall, 13 Station Road, Cheadle Hulme
King's Ransom, Britannia Road, Sale
Lloyds No 1, The Printworks, Manchester
Lowe's Arms, 301 Hyde Road, Denton
Moon Under Water, Deansgate, Manchester
Oddfellows Arms, 73 Moor End Road, Stockport
Old Plough Hotel, 56 Green Lane, Sale
Old Wellington, 4 Cathedral Gates, Manchester
Osborne House, 32 Victory Street, Rusholme
Paramount, 33 Oxford Street, Manchester
Poachers Inn, 95 Ingersley Road, Bollington
Porters Ale House, Prince Roe Street, Macclesfield
Q Bar, 3-5 Market Street, Stalybridge
Rising Sun, 22 Queen Street, Manchester
Ryecroft, Turves Road, Cheadle Hulme
Sam's Chop House, Black Pool Fold, Manchester
Sedge Lynn, 21a Manchester Road, Chorlton
Society Rooms, Macclesfield Park La, Macclesfield
Society Rooms, Grosvenor Street, Stalybridge
Stalybridge Buffet Bar, Stalybridge Rail Station
Star Inn, 13 High Street, Cheadle
Tim Bobbin, 41 Flixton Road, Urmston
Victoria Hotel, 438 Wilmslow Road, Withington
Waterhouse, 67 Princess Street, Manchester
Wetherspoons, 47 Piccadilly, Manchester
White House, 1 Water Lane, Stalybridge
Wye Bridge Inn, Fairfield Road, Buxton

To find outlets in your area with the Cask Marque award visit our website on www.cask-marque.co.uk or ring us on 01206 752212 and we will send you a regional guide.

The Cask Marque plaque is awarded to a licensee who has passed two unannounced visits by our assessor who checks all cask ales on sale.

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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

I hope all our readers will try and pay a visit to the National Winter Ales Festival this month. Getting this highly prestigious event back to Manchester is a real feather in the cap for local CAMRA branches, many of whose members are working tirelessly to make it a success, (including Paul Hutchings, the 'Ed(2)' of Opening Times, who is promising one of the most impressive foreign beer bars seen at any British beer festival). If it's a success we think it's ours to keep, at least for a good few years, so please do try and support us in this.

As we also report this month, the Winter Ales Festival is just one facet of the traditional pub and beer scene in Greater Manchester. While the media continue to whip themselves into a frenzy over binge drinking (and while no-one is denying the trouble seen in some town and city centres, let's also bear in mind that on the government's definition, anyone drinking, say, 3½ pints of Guinness in a 24-hour period is a binge drinker - yes, really!) this is the time for the City and County of Manchester to celebrate all that's best about traditional pubs and beer. And it's time for CAMRA, local publicans and brewers to work together to promote the region's undeniable status as a national centre of excellence on both fronts.

The sensible consumption of quality cask beers in traditional well-run pubs must be the way forward and surely if the will if there we can all work together to bring this about.

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES LETTERS

From Frank Wood, Glossop:

Elsewhere in this months issue, I told of the goats in the pub incident at the Sparrows in Glossop. To start the year on a lighthearted note, it got me thinking of other 'animals in pubs' stories, or just unusual animals in pubs.

To save the embarrassment of a friend, I remember an incident many years ago in the Crown in Glossop, when he left his pony & trap parked outside and went in to sample a few of Sam Smiths Best. (No this is not the white horse joke, it is true!) The horse got a bit fed up of the time moving on and mounted the pavement and nosed open the pub door (the trap wheels prevented it getting as far as the bar!). Mr X, as I will describe him, worse for wear, thought it would be best if he made for home at this point. Underestimating his consumption and not seeing the police car draw up, the result was an arrest for being drunk in charge of a horse (I'll get some stick for this!).

At the Little Mill in Rowarth, the resident caged parrot has picked up some bad language over the years from customers sat nearby and on my last trip to the Quiet Woman in Earl Sterndale, where I bought some of landlord Ken's free range eggs, I was surprised on my trip down the corridor to the toilets, to pass a hen that had sneaked in the side entrance and was looking hopeful of getting through the next internal door into the empty taproom. Those of us in High Peak Branch who went to Ghent for a day trip last Autumn, whilst staying in Bruges will remember the mouse that was covering at the bottom of the step up into the back room of the first pub we went in. It did not scarpier all the time we were in, despite me treading on its tail a few times and causing it to move position and who knows how many customers virtually stepping within 2 inches of squashing it.

I thought it would be a light hearted bit of fun to invite readers to write in this column and name any other pubs that have had unusual animals or odd incidents involving them over the years (true ones please - and keep it clean!)

(Letters to the usual address, please - Ed(1))

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 249

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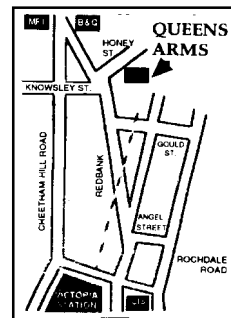
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Pacific Bitter 3.8% **Zebra Best Bitter 4.3%**

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DEVONSHIRE ARMS, MELLOR IS TOP PERFORMER

First place in Robinson's annual Best Kept Bar and Cellar Competition has been awarded to the Devonshire Arms, Mellor near Stockport. The annual competition held by the brewer is now in its seventh year and involves a comprehensive, top-to-bottom, inspection of 330 public houses throughout the North West and North Wales.

John and Liz Longworth, licensees at the Devonshire Arms, secured a near perfect score of 299 points out of a possible 300. They dropped just one point for their otherwise immaculate presentation, but picked up full points for their cellar and the quality of their beer.

The couple have been Robinson's tenants for a total of 20 years with



this being their second pub with the family brewer. Their hard work and attention to detail paid dividends this year having achieved 5th position in the 2003 challenge, and leading a close fought competition this time around, in which the top three contenders were separated by just five points.

"We are really chuffed to have won the award, because it not only recognises the very highest standards that we work hard to achieve, but in the past seven years, it has built a tremendous sense of camaraderie and light hearted rivalry between those who compete," John explained.

As a reward for John and Liz's effort they hosted a high profile celebration evening at the Devonshire Arms and were presented with The Unicorn Shield which has been inscribed with their names, and will take pride of place in the pub for the coming year. The prize from Robinson's also included a valuable barrel of Unicorn Bitter.

As ever, the competition was organised by director Oliver Robinson with the initial judging being carried out by a team of four district managers. In a shift from tradition, for the first time packaging and brewing assistant Stewart Thompson was drafted in to make the final selection through a series of surprise visits when he made his unbiased and independent decisions.

Credit should also be given to Helen and Karl Guare of the Royal Scott, Marple Bridge who came second with 295 points and Roy and Betty Williams of the Bay Horse, Newton who were just one point behind with a score of 294.

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SPONSORS Aid WINTER FESTIVAL'S RETURN

Reviving a beer festival in an area is always a daunting and financially risky task. This is certainly the case with the return of the National Winter Ales Festival to Manchester after a couple of years housed at Burton on Trent, which was always going to be a challenge for the festival organisers.

Coming to the rescue, like the cavalry in old western movie, are this year's Festival sponsors. As the Festival Organiser, Steve Prescott explained this can only be to the advantage of the thousands of beer drinkers the festival is hoping to attract in its new home in the New Century Hall. "We have been very keen to provide value for money to our customers and without the valued assistance of our sponsors we would have been faced with charging up to 30p more per pint or an additional pound on the entrance charge for all customers. The commitment of these companies just shows how much the return of a bigger and better National Winter Ales Festival to Manchester has engaged the imagination of people in the area and nationally across the brewing industry" Steve told *Opening Times*.

At the time of going to press the following sponsors have been announced by Jim Flynn, the Festival's Sponsorship Manager:-

Manchester Evening News - Sponsor of the Festival itself and the Festival Special Bitter brewed by Shaws, locally in Dukinfield. With CAMRA, the Evening News has been at the forefront of the 'Save Boddingtons' campaign and their sponsorship is further indication of their commitment to the life of the Manchester area and the North West in general.

The Co-op - Sponsor of both the Festival souvenir glasses and the Real Ale in a Bottle Bar. The Co-op is a real Manchester institution, a large local employer (they own the New Century Hall where the Festival is being held). While at the Festival try out their own bottled real ale, 'Gold Miner' which is brewed for them by the Freeminer Brewery and which can be found in many of their supermarkets and local stores.

Fuller, Smith and Turner - Sponsor of the Festival Trade Session. This London brewery is well known in the local free trade for 'London Pride' they also produce bottled real ale including the wonderful award winning '1845'. Try Fuller's beers both on draught and at the Real Ale in the Bottle Bar.

Hydes' Brewery - Sponsor of the staff T-shirts. A real Manchester institution which in recent times, after a great number of years in the shadow of its larger neighbours, has seen a huge revival with improvements in quality and the introduction of new beers such as Jekyll's Gold. Try their beers at the Festival.

Three Rivers Brewing Company - Sponsor of the entrance hall and the cloakroom. Based in Reddish in Stockport, Three Rivers is a recent arrival on the brewing scene in the area but the inspiration behind the venture, Mike Hitchen, is no stranger to the dark arts of the industry having been the leading light at the St Helens based Beecham brewery. Try their Old Disreputable and Black Moon at the Festival.

Frederic Robinson Ltd - Sponsor of the Festival souvenir T-shirts and sweatshirts. One of the largest and most successful family brewers in the country this Stockport based brewery will be well known to most readers. You can be sure that their multi award winning 'Old Tom' will once again be in contention for Champion Winter Beer of Britain at the Festival. Try their beers, including Old Tom, Unicorn and Enigma at the Festival.

Charles Wells Ltd - Sponsor of the Festival programme. The largest independent brewer in the country their premium bitter, Bombardier is well known across the free trade. This Bedford brewery has even cracked the challenge of selling real ale in vented cans! Try their beers at the Festival including Eagle IPA, Bombardier and if available, John Bull.

J D Wetherspoon - Sponsor of a Festival Beer Bar. With over 600 pubs nationally Wetherspoons are probably the only major pub chain to have to have cracked the challenge of getting a distinctive brand image. From a CAMRA's point of view the really positive plus is that they have done so by promoting cask beers and competitive prices.

J W Lees - Sponsor of a Festival Beer Bar. What an incredible year the last 12 months have been for Lees with an endorsement from the heir to the throne and their GB Mild was the winning the mild in CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain at the Great British Beer Festival in August. As well as the mild you will also be able to sample their Moonraker strong ale.

Beartown Brewery Ltd - Sponsor of the Festival Stewards. Celebrating 10 years of brewing this Cheshire brewery is going from strength to strength with pubs in Stockport and Manchester as well as closer to home. Indeed 2003 saw two of their pubs, the Navigation in Stockport and the Beartown Tap named as Regional Pubs of the Year. Try their beers at the Festival.

Daniel Thwaites Brewery -- Sponsor of the Foreign Beer bar. Well known as a real ale brewery, Thwaites have recently started to import German beers and you can try Konig Ludwig, their imported Bavarian Weiss Bier (Wheat Beer) on this bar. You can also try their cask beers, including Lancaster Bomber.

T R Theakston - Associate sponsor. The last 18 months for Theakstons have been historic with the return to family ownership after 20 years of ownership by Scottish and Newcastle. Try their famous Old Peculier at the Festival

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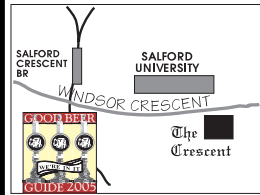
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NATIONAL WINTER ALES FESTIVAL MANCHESTER 2005



Of course this month's main event for the brewing industry has to be the National Winter Ales Festival at the New Century Hall from 26-29 January. Not only will all our local brewers be showcasing some of them will be in the running for an award. Naturally, details of the finalists in the various categories are firmly under wraps until the judging has concluded so it's 'fingers crossed' at the moment. Full details of winners next month. Meanwhile...

FAMILY FAVOURITES

Each of our local family brewers has announced details of its forthcoming seasonal beer programme for 2005.

Hydes - this year's theme is 'Made in Manchester' to celebrate Hydes' long connection with the city. The current craft ale is Perfection (4.8% ABV), marking the meeting of Rolls and Royce, described as a dark robust ale, strong in flavour and full in body. This will be followed in March/April by Satisfaction (4.2% ABV), noting 500 million pints from Hydes since its foundation in 1863, described as smooth and satisfying with great balance and a well rounded finish. The May/June beer is Elevation (4.4% ABV), marking the home of Avro aircraft, a light tawny beer with a crisp and refreshing taste. Next will be Celebration (4% ABV), marking the anniversary of the Manchester-Liverpool railway, a light golden beer brewed using Liberty hops. For September/October will be Inspiration (4.5% ABV), an autumnal ale using Maris Otter, crystal and cara malts, and finally the winter special for November/December will be Insulation (5% ABV) a dark beer with a hint of fruit and spice.

Holts - we don't have details of Holt's programme for the full year. However for January/February is Nearly Holt Upright (4% ABV), described as a full drinking bitter with cascade hops added late in the boil. The 4.5% ABV Thunder Holt reappears for March-May and for June-August

look out for Lightning Holt (4.3% ABV), a clean tasting summer ale with a pronounced floral hop aroma.

JW Lees - tend to start the programme with a clear wheat beer and this year is no exception with the January/February special being Icebreaker (4% ABV) This will be followed in March-April with Dragons Fire (4.5% ABV), a rich amber ale. The May/June beer will be Googly Pale Ale (4.3% ABV) and the year ends with three favourites - July/August sees the return of the popular Scorchler (4.2% ABV), a classic summer ale, September/October welcomes back Brooklyn Best (5% ABV) a hoppy ale first brewed for Lees by Garrett Oliver of the Brooklyn Brewery in New York, and finally for November/December there is the very welcome return of Plum Pudding (4.8% ABV), a rich dark beer with a hint of fruit, and a very successful beer in previous years.

Robinson's - for January/February it's turn of Enigma (4.7% ABV), a very : beer introduced last year. March/April brand new beer in the shape of Champion (3.9% ABV), a full-bodied, crisply hoppy beer. In May/June it's the return of Cooper's Bell (4% ABV) and for July/August Sunny Jim (3.8% ABV) comes back - this was a very successful summer quencher last year. The September/October beer hasn't been decided yet - it was going to be Kick Off (4.2% ABV) but last year this beer was not judged to be a commercial success so a replacement may well

be produced. November/December sees Robin Bitter (4.5% ABV) back again - this excellent tasty beer is now a Christmas regular for Robbies.

MICRO MAGIC

Tight deadlines and ill-health prevented a comprehensive ring-run this time. However those micros we were able to contact are brewing up a treat...

Bazens' - Wass Ale (4.5% ABV), their New Year beer, has sold well and should still be available early January at the Albert Vaults in Salford and The Trackside in Bury. The Knoll St Porter (5.2% ABV) has proved very popular again this year and this will be brewed until March when the weather gets warmer(!) Bazens' have also decided to bring out a January beer which will be available as you read this. Stonker will be 6.5%, mid-amber in colour and old ale in style. For the rest of the year, Bazens' will be brewing special seasonal beers rather than bi-monthly ones due to the increasing demand for their regular brews. They hope to produce a spring, summer and autumn special. Details will be posted later in the year.

Boggart Hole Clough - Dogsleigh (5% ABV) made a welcome Christmas return along with new monthly special Snow Dog (4% ABV), a light amber, malty ale with blackcurrant and lemon flavour and aroma.



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Facer's – the new Mild is launching with the Winter Ales Festival. It will be 3.3% ABV, dark with some residual sweetness. For inspiration for the recipe Dave Facer has looked at both Boddingtons (Manchester) and Chesters (Salford), so he is thinking of Twin Cities for the name. He had also thought of calling it 'The Mild' so that people can ask for 'a pint on the mild' but thinks Twin Cities will probably be it. Dave hasn't decided yet whether to do something a bit different such as spice it up a bit with a bit of ginger - this would be controversial with ultra-orthodox traditionalists, but it worked very well in 'Never Christmas' and would make it stand out from the crowd. Dave is also producing a one-off special cask for the Trackside in Bury to feature as their thousandth different beer. The 500th was a special by Bazens' so it's nice for the Syndicate to also be doing the 500th. It will be called 'Trackside's Thousandth' which, though not stunningly original, has the virtue of following a certain heritage, the 500th having been called 'Trackside's 500th'. Finally, and though not quite on a par with a Champion Beer of Britain award, Dave was very pleased that Landslide won the bronze medal in the Strong Bitter category at the recent 27th Norwich Beer Festival. His thanks go to the good folk of East Anglia!

Greenfield – a new beer is out this month in the shape of Clog Dancer (4.3% ABV), an amber bitter beer brewed with the Saddleworth Morris Men in mind



Leyden – Hoppy New Year is the new one here. This is a 3.6% ABV pale and hoppy brew. Brendan Leyden is currently arranging swaps with other local micros to supply the beer festival to be held at Bury FC's Gig Lane ground at the end of February. He will also be resurrecting some of last year's football specials (On My Head Son, Extra Time and Referee) for the festival.



Marble – one of the highlights of the festive season was the launch of the new Marble Port Stout (4.7% ABV), which made its first appearance at the Marble Arch on Christmas Eve. This dry stout has a bottle of organic port added to every nine-gallon cask and is a wonderfully rich, smooth and dangerously drinkable beer. Only two brews will be produced and the current plan is to keep the beer as a Christmas/New Year special. Get it while you can.

Millstone - Christmas Ruby put in a second appearance and sold well. Demand was such that a lot of customers were disappointed, as there wasn't enough to go round to everyone who would have liked it! December sales on cask

and bottles have been exceptional with all stocks of bottles selling out (although Mossley Wholefoods still has some left – they say it's selling like hot cakes!). Hopefully this month will also see the appearance of the new 5% ABV True Grit.



Phoenix – two new beers this month, both old favourites making a welcome return – look out for Jovian

(4.2% ABV) and Massacr (4.7% ABV).



Pictish – the special for January is Northern Dawn (4.3% ABV) a full bodied, deep amber beer with a malty but bitter finish. Alchemists Ale and Celtic Warrior now alternate although Alchemists will be available throughout January, given Celtic Warrior's similarity to Northern Dawn.



Three Rivers – a possible birthday special is planned for brewery telesales person Julie Black although no details had been finalised as we went to press. All beers are selling well with Pilgrims Progress (4.2% ABV) going very well. The chocolate stout, Black Moon, will have its last outing at the National Winter Ales Festival where you will also be able to sample the brewery's Old Disreputable.



OWL TAKES OFF

One of the newest breweries in the region is the Owl Brewer in Oldham, which produced its first beer last August. A visit was therefore well overdue.

The brewery is based at the Hope Inn on Greenacres Road, less than a 10-minute walk from Oldham Mumps Station. The ex-Thwaites house had been closed for three years prior to its rescue by Owl Brewery's Gordon Potts and in that time had been substantially vandalised. After a major refurbishment, the pub reopened for business on 20 September.

While the lounge and vault are pleasant and comfortable, it is the brewery then tends to the jaw-dropping. Unlike many micros and brew-pub, Gordon has opted for a brewery based on the traditional tower principle. Thus through glass

panels you can see the brewery extending the full height of the pub from the cellar to the roof. It's certainly an amazing sight.

Gordon himself. Spent over 20 years working on the fringes of the brewing industry during which time he was actually sent on a brewing technology course. He was also a keen home brewer and like many home brewers he harboured the desire to brew commercially on a larger scale. The plant from the defunct Kitchen Brewery came up for auction and after snapping up the equipment Gordon then spent 12 months looking for premises. The Hope Inn came to his attention and the rest, as they say, is history.

The beers, which have so far been largely restricted to the pub, are all full mash beers brewed with 8-10 malt varieties. Gordon tells us that his tendency is to quite complex malt grists in his beers combined with a simpler hop regime with Fuggles, Goldings, Styrian Goldings and Hallertau Hersbrucker being the only varieties used. The brew-length is a nominal five barrels although so far 2-3 barrels has been the norm. Seven beers have been produced:

Horny Owl (3.8%) – a dark bitter with quite an assertive fruity palate. A stronger 4.7% version, spiced with cinnamon, was produced for Christmas.

OB Bitter (4%) – Gordon's first attempt to recreate the famous local brew. This way well be tweaked – so far the colour is about right but the beer lacks to slight fruitiness of the original.

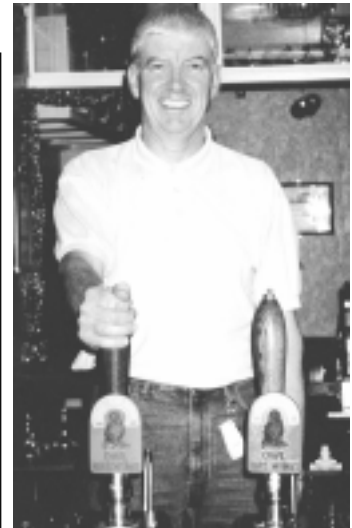
Greenacres Gold (4.2%) – a pale honey-coloured beer with a rich, slightly fruity palate.

Night Owl (4.2%) – a dark porter with dominant coffee notes on the aroma and a rich complex taste. Very moreish.

Russett Owl (4.2%) – described as a traditional 'Yorkshire Bitter' with a complex and very fruity flavour.

Yon Owl (3.8%) – a very pale beer with a long bitterness in the aftertaste. This may be adjusted to give the beer more body.

More Owl beers will appear, mainly in the 3.8 to 4.2% range and Gordon tells us that he will not



generally be brewing beers above the 4.5% region. These are of course early days and while trade at the pub has been good, based mainly on word of mouth, this year should see the beers get out more into the free trade. The Hope is well worth a visit but does have some odd opening hours – phone ahead on 01706 840 356 or check out the website at www.owlbrew.co.uk.



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I hope you all had a very merry Christmas. I certainly did, although some of my excursions last month didn't yield much in the way of cask beer.

TOWN CENTRE

First though, welcome to another new face on the local pub scene, this time at the **Railway**, Portwood. Alex Lord's permanent successor at this Porter Brewery flagship, is Martin Wood who took over on 1 November. I caught up with Martin on a very busy Friday night so was only able to snatch a few words. He comes to the Railway with 14 years experience in the trade, latterly running a club in Bradford and before that a long spell with Wolverhampton & Dudley. He told me that he was loving it at the Railway, a pub not only noted for its characterful beers but also its equally characterful locals, and no changes are planned to its successful operation. Beer quality has been bang on form so far. The Railway has also taken on a new chef from 1 December so the menu has been revamped as well – I already hear good things about the food. It's reassuring to see the pub remaining in obviously safe hands. Elsewhere, the **Three Shires**, a new convert to real ale has installed a second handpump and as this was written was selling Greene King Abbot and Exmoor Gold. Things just seem to get better and better here. The **Bridge Street Wine Bar** remains firmly closed and boarded, while up on Hillgate, the **Royal Mortar** has now been sold by Robinson's, although I have no idea who to.

REDDISH RAMBLES

8.5 8.6 personal favourite Tetley Dark Mild, the only cask mild in the area. A quick trip down Broadstone Road towards Heaton Chapel brings the **Union** and the **Grey Horse** along side each other. The Union with its loyal band of customers is the only pub owned by a local independent, Robinson's, in the area. I found the Unicorn, the one cask beer, on more than reasonable form on my visit. The Grey Horse has just re-opened, or should I say partially re-opened as the vault is still shut, and on my visit the Boddingtons Bitter was in good nick. As I went in who did I meet but Mike Hitchen from the nearby Three Rivers Brewery, delivering some of his beers as they were running short of cask beer following the opening night. It would be interesting if this was to become a permanent feature rather than a stopgap. Reddish has its own brewery and Reddish drinkers should have the opportunity to support it. I wait to see if the new owners can pull the pub up and make a real go of it. Let's hope so. Moving into South Reddish the one pub

is the **Carousel**, which briefly dabbled with cask Boddingtons. The handpump is still there, but beer is isn't. My advice is don't go in but proceed down to the **Navigation** for a decent pint.

HILLGATE SAUNTER

I managed to miss the annual CAMRA crawl up Hillgate so after Christmas I had a leisurely saunter downhill stopping off at one or two of the better pubs. I started at the **Blossoms** on Buxton Road. This remains a terrific traditional pub with Robinson's Hatters and Unicorn on handpump plus a cask of Old Tom on the bar top. It was a little early for Old Tom but both mild and bitter were on top form. A new licensee took over the **Wheatsheaf** on 30 December so it's early days yet – let's hope real ale makes a comeback as it has sold well here in the past. The **Royal Mortar** is closed and de-signed, having been sold off, so it was the **Star & Garter** next for quick halves. Hatters and Unicorn again and while perfectly OK, not up to the standard of the Blossoms.

The **Crown** (or 'Corner Cupboard') had made a welcome return to the cask ale fold with Boddingtons Cask and Bass on handpump when I popped in. The Bass wasn't ready (and was to be replaced by Old Speckled Hen) but the Boddies was on fine form. It was good to see the pub nicely busy too. The **Golden Lion** across the road is still keg but the **Sun & Castle** can be relied on for Holts cask beers. Alongside Mild (not bad) and Bitter (not tried) was the new Joeyes, not in every pub and to my taste a bit ordinary. It's certainly not a patch on the Bitter.

I understand there are plans to extend the **Red Bull** into the building next door. I'm sure Robbies will make a good job of this but I hope they don't change the rest of the pub. It really is one of the best with a rambling interior with two bars and a flagged tap room. Hatters and Unicorn are on handpump and both were on fine form.

Finally it was down the hill to the brewery tap, the **Spread Eagle**. The pub has an odd layout and the casual passer-by can't really see the interior and so won't realise what a good pub this is. Let me tell you, it's well worth the walk up Underbank – the interior is pleasant and comfortable, the pub is very well run and the beer is a treat. Landlord Noel always makes sure the Hatters, Unicorn and Old Tom are properly matured and the electric pumps guarantee you a full pint every time. All beers were on top form when I called, particularly the Old Tom, which retails at a bargain £1.30 a half.



CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 249:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Butler, Peter Edwardson, Paul Felton, Paul Moss, Jim Flynn, Tom Lord, Frank Wood, Stuart Fish, Brian Taylor, Ruth Andrew, Robin Wignall, Phil Levison, Stewart Revell, Dave Hasler, Glen Mason.

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EDGELEY

The night of Friday 19 November was perhaps too bloody cold to be traipsing around Edgeley in search of a decent pint: but when the alternative was to stay in with Wogan, Roslin and Pudsey Bear, the weather suddenly became less of a consideration.

First port of call was the **Woolpack** on Brinksway, in the shadow of the pyramid. This free house offers a vault on the left of the front door and two separate lounges on the right (the rear of which appears vastly larger than its already ample size due to the back wall being completely covered by a mirror). There is one regular beer, Theakston's bitter (recently strengthened to 3.8%) and three guests, Caledonian 80/-, Phoenix White Tornado, and Storm Bosley Cloud. The Theakston's was good, the Storm better, while the Caledonian, while pleasant enough, didn't seem to have too much of the expected brewery characteristics. (The Phoenix was not at all good, but was changed without any problem.) A good start.

This good was not continued at either the **Bow Garratt** (which appeared to be closed for refurbishment) or the **Gardener's Arms** (which did have handpumps for Boddingtons Bitter, but was not actually any cask beer despite pumpclips being on display - *I've had very good Boddies in here - Ed(1)*). So it was an early arrival at Robinson's **Alexandra**, on Northgate Road at the corner of Chatham Street. This is a superb unspoilt building, Grade II listed and on CAMRA's national inventory of pub interiors. It retains its multi-room layout, including vault, and the lobby is particularly impressive, being tiled up to the waist high dado rail. Up until late in 2003, the building itself was perhaps the only reason for visiting the Alex, as the beer was often not very good (and unusually for a Robinson's pub, served bitter only). But a change of licensee has worked wonders: one of the regulars took over, reinstated cask mild, and certainly on this evening was selling good beer, with little to choose between mild and bitter. Worth a visit.

Down Chatham Street and right onto Grenville Street took us to the **Royal Oak**, the first of the many pubs on Castle Street. This is a thriving, C-shaped ex-Wilsons house (note the green-and-white chequerboard tiling in the gents') with the many fake beams so beloved of a certain period of pub architecture. It was easily the busiest pub of the three so far, with not too much seating still left. Two beers were available, Boddingtons Bitter, which was okay, and Holts Bitter, which the Royal Oak has been serving for years and was pretty good. Again, worth a visit, but perhaps not if you object to a very smoky environment.

Then followed a litany of woe on our walk down Castle Street. **Prince Albert**: keg. **Sir Robert Peel** (a branch pub of the month in ages past): keg. **Pineapple**: keg. **Windsors** (the former Windsor Castle): pump clips for both Boddingtons Bitter and Courage Directors, but both clips turned round, so no cask beer available. Better was found at the **Jolly Crofter**, where everyone was pleasantly mugged by a group of ladies in Spanish costume collecting for Children In Need. The central entrance splits into two more or less equal sides, though the right-hand side was noticeably better patronised. The only beer available was Boddingtons Bitter, which was quite reasonable and certainly the best of the three examples of the beer that we were to try on the night.

The **Grapes** at the north-east corner of Castle Street is a Robinson's pub. It's a basic place, divided into a small vault on the left and a larger, longer lounge on the right. As seemingly ever here, it was a bit of a squeeze to get into the lounge, as the most popular place for drinkers appears to be in front of the bar right behind the door, but once through there was more room at the back. Mild and Best Bitter (sorry, Hatters and Unicorn) were available, and both were on good form. One point to note: the floor slopes *up* at the back of

the lounge as you head towards the toilets: disconcerting enough when sober, a minor peril after a drink or two.

Next was Robinson's **Church** on Moseley Street, tucked away

in the little square behind the (closed) Bluebell. Oh dear, the Church. It's a small pub which seems to be overlooked by the drinkers of Edgeley. When we arrived at around 10pm, the only people in the place were a group of twenty year old girls drinking alcopops. The only beer available was (interestingly) Cumbria Way. However, despite the lateness of the evening, it seemed possible that ours were the first pints pulled all night. It was very poor, and was returned by most of us, with an immediate refund with good grace. It pains to criticise when the licensee in question had provided many of us with numerous fine pints in the past in a previous pub, but this was not at all good, and we had to fear for the pub's future.

The **Greyhound** over the road on Bowden Street was contrastingly very busy, despite/because of (delete as applicable) a karaoke going on in one part of the lounge. There is a small separate vault, and the lounge is divided into two offset squares. Only one beer was available, Boddingtons Bitter, which was drinkable but ordinary, and the least impressive of our three encounters with the beer that evening. Curiously, part of the lounge was given over to the sort of free-standing chest high 'tables' that you might expect to find in more up-market establishments, and which seemed here only to get in the way. Our final port of call was the **Old Vic** on Chatham Street, only a small place but as busy as ever after a Sale Sharks game at Edgeley Park (though perhaps the mood was more sombre than usual as Sale had lost). The Old Vic serves an ever-changing range of four guest beers, plus real cider. Two beers were available from St. George's brewery in Worcestershire, plus a Ginger beer from Enville in Stourbridge. Most of our party went for something more local, Bazens' Blue Bullet from Salford, and this was comfortably the best beer of the night. Once the Old Vic could have been called pricey at £2 a pint, but not so now, as prices rises elsewhere appear to be fast catching up with this. Anyway, very good as ever.

With the exception of first and last, it's a long time since your writer had been in any of the pubs we visited this evening. Certainly the crawl is less exhausting than in past years, with so many pubs in the area no longer serving cask beer. As ever, it was noticeable that the best beer was to be found at free houses and in the pubs of the local independent brewery. And that's a snapshot of Edgeley's pubs on one specific cold November night: visit some of them yourselves and see what you think.



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CAMRA CALLING!

Campaign For Real Ale Branch Diaries

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

Diary

January 2005

Thursday 13th - Branch Meeting: Waldorf, Gore Street, Manchester City Centre. Starts 8.00pm. **NB - Pub of the Year 2005 will be chosen at this meeting.**

Thursday 20th - BeerMonster Pub of the season award, Cask, Liverpool Rd, Mcr - from 8pm
Friday 21st - Stagger: University Area - meet 7.30pm Whitworth, Moss Lane East; 8.30 Grafton, Grafton Street.

Tuesday 25th - Pub of the Month presentation to Railway, Manshaw Road, Openshaw. From 8.00pm. **NB change of day from Thursday.**

Wednesday 26th - Saturday 29th - National Winter Ales Festival, New Century Hall, CIS Building, Corporation St, Manchester. **Will all members support this important event.**

Tuesday 1st February - Committee Meeting: Crown, Heaton Moor Rd, Heaton Moor - note pre-selection for 2006 Good Beer Guide will take place at this meeting - all members welcome to come along and have their say. Starts 8.15pm.

Thursday 10th February - Branch Meeting: venue to be confirmed. **Good Beer Guide 2006 entries to be chosen at this meeting - all please attend.** Starts 8.00pm.

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 17th - Branch Meeting: Station, Warrington St, Ashton-under-Lyne. Starts 8.15pm.

Monday 7th February - Committee Meeting: Red Lion, Stockport Rd, Denton. Starts 8.15pm.

Monday 21st - Branch Meeting: Sportsman, Mottram Rd, Hyde. Starts 8.15pm.

Apart from Macclesfield & Bollington, the

January 2005

Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch covers a wide area from Wilmslow to Knutsford and down to Congleton. They have notified us of the following events:

Monday 10th - Wilmslow Pub Crawl: King William 8pm; Swan 8.30; Bollin Fee 9.15 Coach & Four 10.00

Monday 17th - Jim Bowden Award: British Flag, Coare St, Macclesfield. 8.00pm.

Monday 24th - **Branch AGM and Campaigning Meeting:** Beartown Brewery Tap, Congleton. Starts 8.00pm.

Monday 7th February - Conversion to Cask Award: Brewers Arms, Macclesfield. 8.00pm.

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 advised us of the following events:

Thursday 13th - Chorlton Social: Meet Beech Inn, Beech Road at 8.00pm.

Wednesday 19th - Pub of the Season presentation to the City Arms, Kennedy St, Manchester City Centre. From 8.00pm.

Thursday 3rd February - Branch Meeting: Old Market Tavern, Altrincham. Starts 8.00pm.

REGIONAL EVENTS

Saturday 15th January - Regional Meeting: Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, Manchester City Centre. Starts 12.30pm.

CAMRA under 30 social group (Est. 2002)
 Next event is Fri 4 Feb. Social at the Lass 'O Gowrie, Charles St (at side of BBC) from 8 pm. and at the Sand Bar, Grosvenor St from 9pm. Meet by the CAMRA sign. Non-members & guests welcome.

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DIVIDE AND RULE

Many licensees and pubgoers will have breathed a sigh of relief when the government announced that they did not intend to impose a total prohibition of smoking in pubs, something which, going by the Irish example, would reduce overall trade by about 20% and lead to the closure of thousands of pubs and the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. However, the proposals they have come up with – to ban smoking entirely in any pubs serving “prepared food”, but to continue to permit it away from the bar area in other pubs and private clubs – seem remarkably ill-informed and potentially likely to achieve the opposite effect to that intended. The plans give the impression of having been formulated by people who rarely if ever visit pubs and have no idea how they function in real life.

While around 80% of pubs serve food of some kind, the number where it is a major part of their business is probably only about a quarter. Many more will provide some lunchtime food for local workers, or for tourists, but gain most of their trade from regular customers in the evenings. Half of total pub takings come on Friday and Saturday nights, when relatively few customers will be eating. A lot of pubs will be faced with a stark choice of closing their kitchens in order to protect their regular trade. This would go entirely against the trend of the past thirty or so years of broadening the appeal of pubs.

Where pubs have historically been a relatively homogenous institution – everyone knows more or less what a pub is – in future they will be artificially divided into two classes of “diners” and “smokers” which broadly would represent a split between middle class and working class pubs. Over the years these two types of establishment would tend to grow apart and eventually would be unrecognisable to each other. The further spread of food in pubs would be largely halted, as it would be a huge risk and upheaval to bar your smoking customers in favour of serving meals. And in many working-class areas it would become well-nigh impossible to find any pubs serving food, or even open at all on weekday lunchtimes. The end result will be less to ban smoking in pubs than to ban food in pubs.

Realistically, preserving the status quo or anything resembling it is not an option. Some form of government restriction on smoking in pubs is inevitable. But the proposals as they stand are ill-informed, divisive and likely to be counter-productive. Therefore it would make sense for everyone interested in defending the licensed trade to unite behind an acceptance that non-smoking should become the norm in pubs, but that all pubs, whether or not they serve food, should be allowed to set aside an indoor smoking area provided it is genuinely separate from the rest of the pub, children are not admitted and no food is served there (although it would be unreasonable to prevent customers from carrying food into smoking rooms).

In this way no customers would need to enter a smoking area unless they had freely chosen to do so, and neither would any staff be expected to work there for prolonged periods. By preventing the establishment of smoking ghettos in local boozers there is a strong argument that it would also do more to deter people from smoking in the first place. As such a solution would involve substantial rearrangement and structural work in many pubs, it would be important for government to give a commitment that they would not return to the issue of a total smoking ban in pubs for many years. It was also good to see Mike Benner, CAMRA’s recently promoted Chief Executive, speaking out strongly against the proposals and pointing out the severe threat they represent to community pubs. Too often in the past CAMRA has washed its hands of the really big issues affecting the pub trade, on the grounds that they are just too difficult and politically controversial.

Curmudgeon Online: www.pubcurmudgeon.org.uk

5 Years Ago
by Phil Levison **JANUARY '00**

New faces in top pubs was the theme of the front page, under the headline “All Change!” Perhaps the most surprising change was the departure of Paul and Bev Stanyer from the Railway, Portwood. However, given the chance to work for themselves as tenants rather than be managers, they had snapped up the chance of taking over at the Swan With Two Necks on Princes Street, when licensee Sue Conley decided to leave the trade. Meanwhile the Railway was still thought to be in good hands, with the arrival of new manager Fleming Robb-Brown, a licensee of many years experience, who had been carrying out relief work for David Porter for some time. There had been one or two minor changes – Floral Dance was a new permanent addition to the pub’s range, and all day opening on Sundays had been introduced.

★★★★★

There were two new additions to the local drinking scene, Kro Bar on Oxford Road, in premises formerly belonging to the Manchester Temperance Society, and the Sedge Lynn in Chorlton, converted from a billiard hall. Both had unusual names – Kro is a Danish village pub, and the new owner just happened to be Danish. The Sedge Lynn took its name from a former house on the neighbouring site, now occupied by the Co-op funeral parlour. Both buildings were Grade II listed, and their conversion to licensed premises had resulted in two completely different watering holes. Kro Bar’s five handpumps dispensed Boddingtons Bitter, Courage Directors and Taylor’s Landlord, plus a well thought-out range of continental beers, both on draught and in bottle. The Sedge Lynn was a Wetherspoon’s outlet, with its usual wide range of cask beers.

★★★★★

The month of January saw the National Winter Ales Festival 2000 coming to Manchester for the second year. It was a runaway success the previous year, and was a virtual sell-out by 7.00pm on the Saturday. The beer order had been increased to make sure it couldn’t happen again, and it would be a truly national festival with over 100 real ales on offer. It’s a pretty certain bet that a lot of 2005 diaries will have 26-29 January allocated to this year’s event, back in Manchester at the New Century Hall.

★★★★★

More news of pub changes. The Unity, Stockport, changed hands towards the end of the year when Tony and Helen Dunn took over. No major changes were planned although Tony had installed new cellar lines to serve the beer just a little bit cooler. Tony and Helen now run another Robinson’s pun, the Queens in Cheadle.

There was another Robinson’s licensee change at the Flying Dutchman on Hillgate, where Dennis and Susan Morrall had taken over. Although this was their first pub, Susan had 30 years bar work experience behind her. Just before Christmas, a cask of Old Tom was a welcome sight on stillage behind the bar.

Finally an exchange of comments in the letters column. Rhys Jones had spotted that Holt’s had produced 220 gallon containers of Sixex. At more than four times the capacity of a hogshead, Rhys thought this must have taxed the draymen. Oops, said the editor – just testing – it should, of course, have been 22 gallon containers.



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In Mellor, news of the Oddfellows being sold has emerged. However, the free house appears to be under no threat, as a regular customer has had a hand in the purchase, it is his daughter and her French husband who have bought the pub.

Old Tom has been available through December and into the New Year at the Friendship and Bulls Head in Glossop and Old Glossop.

Hartington Brewery our Branch, have resumed brewing Magic Mushroom Mild after a two year gap.

Rumours still flying around about the recently closed Swan at Kettlethulme. The villagers seem to think it may now have been sold as a pub and could re-open in the Spring. Any advance on this?

The George in Buxton were so successful with their recent beer festival that another is already at the planning stages.

A real ale gain this month in Hadfield, where the Masons Arms on Station Road (used in filming of the League of Gentlemen) had Ruddles County, followed by Old Speckled Hen during December, not the most inspiring of choices in our opinion, but better than the choice before!

The Stamford Arms, a free house on Huddersfield Road, Micklehurst (between Stalybridge and Greenfield), where a guest beer has always been available, has been bought by Thwaites. The same long serving licensees are in charge for the moment, though we suspect they are retiring. This acquisition by Thwaites is the second in the area of late, following another free house, the Church at Mossley, a regular Shaws and Millstone outlet, being acquired in the autumn. All is not lost for Shaws fans however, their beers are now available on a regular basis in a Conservative Club just down the steep hill near the Church, the name of which I cannot remember.

The White Hart in Mottram, yet another free house up for sale, is possibly being bought by J W Lees, though we will confirm this when we have some updated information from owner Geoff Oliver.

In Ashton the Station is now running a Curry House franchise, a cue for someone in the Branch to do a pub grub write up for a future edition?

ACTING THE GOAT AT THE SPARROWS

Finally this month, a strange story from a pub in a backwater of Glossop, namely the Sparrows on Gladstone Street, where Ron & Sheila have done a steady job holding the fort for several years now. Recently one lunchtime, two goats escaped from a nearby pen and were seen by Ron in the street. As the owner was a customer, he herded them into his back yard for safety and carried on in the pub. However he forgot to shut the door into the pub and in a while the goats must have smelled the beer and into the pub they came. Herded out again into the yard, this time with the pub door shut, all seemed well until a sudden shriek from upstairs where the landlady was having a long lie in, alerted Ron to rush upstairs, where Sheila had woken to find a goat staring at her over the bed. I think a photo taken at the right moment would have easily won her the award of the Opening Times "shocked landlady of the year award"!!

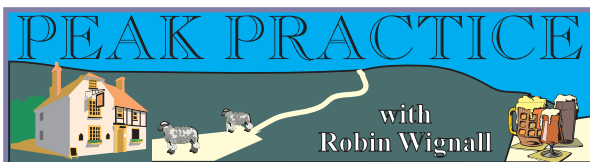
END OF AN ERA

This month sees the departure of long standing licensees Alan and Lou Heal from the Caledonia in Ashton after 20 years at the pub and on 15 January will host their leaving party, before departing for Cyprus. Alan said they leave with mixed feelings, having had many good times at the pub, but all things must come to an end and the time has arrived to move on. They will certainly be missed - during their tenure Alan and Lou have turned it into one of the best pubs in town serving award winning food and, latterly, offering top class accommodation as well. Beer quality was always paramount too. The pub always stocked the Robinson's seasonal beers and was one of the few pubs that stocked Frederics from the day it was introduced (and carried on with its successor, Double Hop). Unsurprisingly the Caledonia became a regular Good Beer Guide entry. They will be an incredibly hard act to follow and leave with our best wishes for the future.



The occasional BeerMonster Pub of the Season Award re-starts this month with a presentation to the excellent Cask on Liverpool Road, a small but perfectly formed bar offering an excellent range of Foreign beers (draught and bottled) plus two cask ales in comfortable surroundings with a tidy beer garden (when warmer!). The presentation to proprietors Rob & Richard will be made about 9ish on Thursday 20 January when beers from Three Rivers & Copper Dragon are promised, as well as a draught Black lager! One for the diaries to get you in the mood for the National Winter Ales Festival the following week.





Early in December came the news that Wolverhampton & Dudley had bought out Burtonwood. Burtonwood now operates as a pub company, having separated itself from its brewing concern, the Thomas Hardy Burtonwood Brewery, formerly Forshaw's Burtonwood Brewery, in June last year. Wolves' chief executive is quoted as saying "It fits perfectly with what we have been looking for" and that he did not see any competition issues. For a chunk of the Burtonwood estate, this latter may be true, however in some areas consumer choice will be threatened.

Back in 1986 when Burtonwood Brewery published its *Pub Lovers' Pocket Guide*, its estate in the Peak District was very limited. The George at Hayfield, the Royal Oak at High Lane on the fringe of the Peak, and further south in the foothills, the Red Lion at Leek and the Golden Lion at Rushton Spencer were the extent of the estate. However the number of Burtonwood outlets increased in the Peak District and its fringes, bringing its own range of beers and customer choice to towns and villages in the area.

George Symes' and Simon Scott's *Out Inn Cheshire* pub guide of 1998 identified the Crompton Road Tavern and Ivy House in Macclesfield as being Burtonwood outlets. To these can be added the Britannia on Hurdsfield Road. Andrew McCloy's *Pub Guide* notes the George at Alstonefield, the Royal Oak in Chapel-en-le-Frith, one of the best pubs in town, and the Scotsman's Pack in Hathersage selling Burtonwood beers. The Bakers Arms in Buxton is currently Good Beer Guide listed and shown as selling Burtonwood beers. Also in the Good Beer Guide is the Royal Oak in High Lane (see above).

Burtonwood have brought choice and quality into the Peak District. So what happens now? There may well be supply agreements which allow Burtonwood beers to continue to be sold in the former estate. These agreements would doubtless be time limited and then the choice could be withdrawn. The future of the current brewing company, Thomas Hardy Holdings could also be threatened.

Wolverhampton & Dudley is already a major player in the Peak District. All those Marston houses in towns and villages are part of the Wolves estate, and whilst some like the excellent Good Beer Guide regular Shepherd's Arms in Whaley Bridge bring choice and quality, in some area there is already a Wolves dominance. At least the Marston's brewery still produces beer.

All those Mansfield houses are part of the Wolves estate, too, and what is worse the Mansfield Brewery was closed soon after takeover in 1999. The question of badging pubs is another issue but there seem to be a lot of Mansfield houses around in some areas. Will they all become Banks's houses, the trading name for Wolverhampton & Dudley?

This takeover might suit the chief executive of Wolverhampton & Dudley but it will not suit beer drinkers since in the Peak District choice will be removed because of a big brewer's dominance in the area.

There is one consolation. Just before this takeover was announced there was rumour in the City Section columns of newspapers that Punch might be interested in Burtonwood. Better the big regional brewer than this wheeler dealing pubco. Just about.

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MANCHESTER
MATTERS by Cityman 

Holidays and illness have clipped my wings a bit this month. Of course, like all of my loyal readers (I trust), I'm now gearing up for the National Winter Ales Festival. This promises to be a real treat, whatever your beery tipples, so make sure you all get down to the New Century Hall sometime from 26 to 29 January.

WILMSLOW ROAD

I did manage to get out and about a bit between Christmas and New Year, and treated myself to a brief tour up Wilmslow Road (oh yes, I know how to live). First port of call was the Didsbury (in Didsbury, of course), where the new licensees have really made a mark on the beer front. There were six on handpump when I called - Theakstons Bitter, Wells Bombardier, Greene King Old Speckled Hen (which, I think, comprise the core range) plus Tolly Original from Riddleys, Courage Directors Winter Warmer and Robins Revenge, from an unknown brewery. I tried this and while pricey (£1.12 for a half pint of a 4% ABV beer) it was in excellent form. There's a very good food operation, too, and I must say that the Didsbury is now highly rated in my book - the range of pumpclips on display is testimony to the range of guest beers that have been sold and there's obviously real commitment here. I'm not so sure about its near neighbour, the Old Cock. This used to be a cask ale oasis but has well and truly lost its crown. When I passed the bank of handpumps sported just one forlorn pumpclip for Greene King IPA, a decent enough beer but the Old Cock has done far better than this in the past.

In the village proper, I called in at two of the top pubs. The Royal Oak just seems to get better and better and had no less than four Marston's beers on handpump when I called - Best Bitter, Pedigree and the excellent Owd Roger were joined by Marston's Christmas Ale, a light-bodied, refreshing beer belying its 5.8% strength. Needless to say, quality was spot on. Round the corner, sort of, is another fine pub, the Fletcher Moss. This is the only Hydes' outlet in Didsbury and sells Mild (often the darker 'Welsh Mild'), Bitter and Jekyll's Gold - the craft ales never seem to have taken off here. This is another pub with a fine reputation for good beer and I have to say that my sample of Mild was about as good as it gets.

After that it was on the bus to Withington. I passed the Golden Lion and, given the constant stories of this pub's imminent demise, I was slightly surprised to see it obviously open and trading. I've no idea what it sells, though. I do know what that Turnpike, White Lion and Albert sell, or rather what they don't sell - real ale. All remain firmly keg. Time was slightly pressing so I passed on a visit to the Red Lion and made my way to the Victoria, another Hydes' house and something of a flagship for beer quality. The pub has a cosy, well-used feel, and usually sells four beers on handpump - Mild, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and the seasonal, although on this occasion the fourth beer was the new 5% HPA. This is a fine beer although I was told that it hadn't taken off here - I stuck to Jekyll's Gold, which was excellent. Up in Fallowfield Bruins was closed but the Friendship was doing a roaring trade. I have reported before how expertly this pub has been refurbished and extended and having had another good look at it, I must say that Hydes' are to be congratulated for what they have done here. There's a particularly extensive beer range - Light, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold, the seasonal (Seventh Heaven on my visit) plus a guest. This was Nethergate Umble Ale which was acceptable without being particularly exciting.

CITY CENTRE

"One to watch" was my verdict on the former Old Monk in November's column. This was on the basis of spotting a Church Inn/ Saddleworth Brewery van outside and it seems I was right. Having said that, though, there was no Saddleworth beers on sale at what is now Number 14 when I called, although I gather they have been sold.

The layout seems little different from Old Monk days although there's been a thorough redecoration and new furniture comprising a mix of chunky wooden tables and chairs along with comfy leather sofas. Jazzy music was floating in the background and there were some bright



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modern artworks on the walls. There's quite an interesting beer range. Three handpumps dispensed Thwaites Lancaster Bomber and Thoroughbred, which I guess are permanent, and Coach House Dick Turpin, which I assume was a guest. Other draught beers included König Ludwig Weissbier, Liefmans Frambozen and Maredsous 6. In bottle I spotted Koppers Kolsch and Jever Pilsner from Germany, Timmermans and Chimay from Belgium plus the American Victory Hop Devil and Golden Monkey. All very enterprising I must say and the only thing that stops me giving this place a high recommendation was the pretty disgusting half of Thwaites Thoroughbred I sampled - it wasn't off but had a musty, unpleasant taste. I think Number 14 has got a great deal of promise but perhaps needs more attention to detail. I'll certainly give it another go when it's bedded in a bit more. Also new is Dr Livvy's on High Street, occupying the former premises of Yates's Wine Lodge. It's very open plan with large amounts of empty space. There's no real ale but Hoegaarden is on draught and the still good Hoegaarden Grand Cru is in bottle. There's also Belle Vue Kriek for those who like what in my opinion is these days little better than alcoholic cherryade. Finally, a word about the Beer House. In short - it's now back on the map. The beer range is up to 16 at the weekends (with many new and rare beers), there's a great bottled range plus draught cider and perry. I have been very impressed and what's happened here is a credit to all concerned. It deserves everyone's support and I for one will be visiting regularly from now on.



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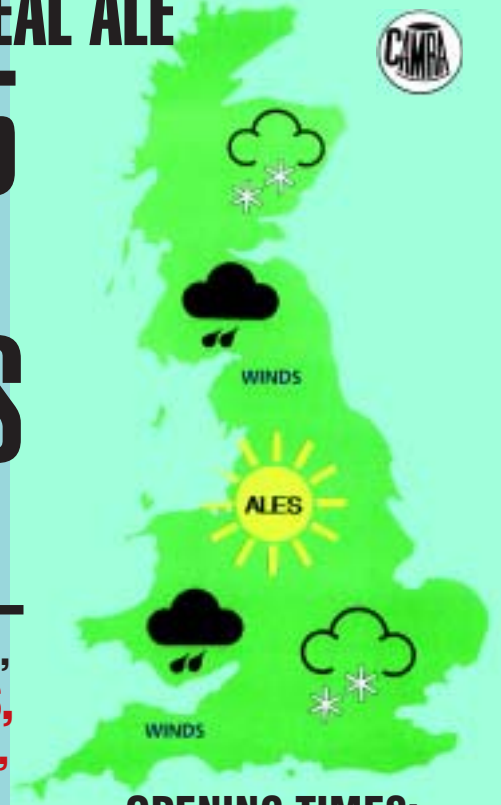
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