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## Beer Exhibition

30th 31st October  
Poynton Social Centre

This much awaited exhibition now depends upon one major item, volunteer labour. Honest hardworking sober volunteers are required to serve beer, sell beer tokens, sell food, collect and wash glasses and other such soul-destroying activities. The Committee would like to point out that volunteering to help does not give anyone the right to get disgustingly drunk (until the exhibition closes but that's a different story) and volunteers are expected to stay sober.



The entrance fee has been fixed at 50p which includes 20p worth of beer tokens and a 10p returnable deposit on a half pint glass.

Negotiations are now under way with several breweries both local and not so local and an extensive range of bitters, milds, and loony beers should be available.

Tickets will be available at the October meeting of the South Manchester CAMRA branch at the Gateway Hotel on the 14th October or from Graham Lister:

Flat 6  
40 Osborne Road  
Levenshulme  
Manchester M19 2DT

Cheques, P.O.'s made payable to CAMRA (South Manchester). No personal callers, postal applications only. Please state which session you wish to attend, i.e. Saturday Dinner, Saturday Evening or Sunday Dinner.

## Boddies on the Fylde Coast

There are a surprising amount of Boddingtons outlets springing up in and around Blackpool and Poulton le Fylde. To name two not in the Good Beer Guide: POULTON—'The Thornton Lodge' (Thwaites here also), electric pumps. BLACKPOOL—'The Clifton Real Ale Cellar.' Part of the Clifton Hotel in Talbot Square. The entrance is in Bank Hey Street opposite Boots chemist. This is quite a good place — tiled floor, benches and tables down each side, empty hogs-heads down centre of cellar to rest pints on, barrel ends on walls and six handpumps serving excellent Boddies, Bass Mild and Tetley bitter — well worth a visit. NOTE: There are handpumps in the 'Thornton Lodge' serving Thwaites bitter but they operate a switch which serves the beer by electric free flow.

A more comprehensive list of Boddies etc. in the Fylde will follow in the next issue of O.T.

## BRANCH EVENTS

(September 10/11th, Isle of Man)

Friday 17th September — Altrincham Stagger. KamraKazi members meet Cheshire Cheese 7pm. Social drinkers

meet Orange Tree, Altrincham 8pm.

Friday 24th September  
Coach trip to Ashford in the Water (Stones Best Bitter) for social with Sheffield and other branches. Extension till 12.30 applied for. Depart Mersey Square 7pm.

Saturday 2nd October  
(Provisional)  
Mini bus trip to Midlands Home Brew Pubs. Contact Martin Blamey — 477 0011 (Office hours).

## CULTURED PINT

It looks as though Lees Brewery are not going to be the suppliers of beer to the Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre after all. Without having further information on the subject, it looks as if the suppliers may be Whitbread (!) but at this point it is not known what went wrong or why things didn't turn out as was hoped for.

The Royal Exchange Theatre was intended to be based on traditional customs. A great pity and much to be regretted, if Real traditional ale cannot be obtained during the interval. We will wait and see.

Due to various people being away on holiday and to the death throws of the silly season we have been able to deal with only about half of the copy submitted to us, hence our apologies are due to those who have made the effort to contribute to the Opening Times, and we will try for a bigger issue next month.

# Features

One of the most welcome side effects of the last two long hot summers, as far as I am concerned, has been the big increase in the number of pubs providing seats and tables to sit outside. It's almost as if there has been a delayed reaction to our joining the Common Market, the way

Some are 'naturals' of course — hitherto underused gardens or flagged forecourts, but others are equally laudable, if less appealing — corners of car parks among the Datsuns and Volkswagens, or back yards among the empty crates and mops. Funnily enough, perhaps on the basis

monument) in 1972. On the last day of a long weekend half the contingent spurned further sight seeing (or any sight seeing in some cases) for a whole day sitting outside the cafe opposite, at a busy road junction, converting the last of the francs into a mixture of beer,

## Everything in the garden's lovely especially the ale

parasols have sprung up. It's no desire to imitate the continental cafe forecourt however, but sheer commercial sense which has dictated the trend. After all there must be lots of people whose drinking habits are restricted by an aversion to sitting indoors in hot weather, a preference for fresh air and sun, or the more mundane practicalities of children to look after. In marketing terms, this segment appears to have been identified and is now being catered for by more and more pubs, backed by brewery paraphernalia such as parasols and moulded plastic furniture. The point is that until say last year, certainly back in the days when summer had come and gone in the time it takes a hangover to clear, it probably wasn't worth a landlord bothering unless he needed an overspill area or particularly wanted to show off his begonias. However, now that it looks as if sun is more than just a passing phenomenon, they're all vying for the outdoor trade, and tables and chairs are springing up in the most unlikely places.

that the less you have of something the more you appreciate it, pubs in London, where space is at such a premium, have long shown the lead in utilising every square foot on the basis that if a bit of pavement belongs to you put a table on it. Up here it seems to be spreading at last, and whether the view is urban Manchester or rural Cheshire the trend is one I for one am pleased about, as it makes it easier to drink around with a five month old son, and thereby teach him to appreciate by example the finer things of life — he's already clocked up well over twenty different pub 'gardens.'

Finally, to finish with something of a digression, talking of pavements reminds me of the Printers Vault mini trip to the Arc de Triomphe (the horse race not the

Ricard and wine and settling down to watch the world go by, or 'waiting for an accident' as Gurn put it. After an afternoon of near misses, screeching brakes, gesticulations, and some terrible driving, all they had to show was one unfortunate cyclist who came off, or was knocked off, in the middle of the road. The ensuing chaos, helped by clueless French policemen, was worth waiting for. Perhaps the highlight, however, was the rush hour, and as the cafe was next to a baker's shop there was an unending procession of workers collecting the bread on the way home for dinner. Thanks mainly to the cumulative effect of the day's drinking, the sight of one smart French businessman after another emerging from the shop with a long 'baguette' sticking out of his briefcase was for some reason just too much and gradually reduced everyone to hysteria.

*David K Hall*

### The Column that Jack built

## I want to go home

On page 129 of the Good Beer Guide at a place called Flintham between Nottingham and Newark there is a pub named the Boot and Shoe. This pub has a special interest to me because I reckon I've had more hangovers from drinking in that pub than all the others I've had since.

In 1949 I had to do 18 months National Service in the RAF and after all the training and bull-tin had passed I was posted to RAF Syerston near Newark for the rest of the time.

The Boot and Shoe was the great escape from the complete and utter boredom of the day's activities at the airfield. I was an armourer on a Flying Training Command Station and the only servicing of arms that I did were in the numerous pubs around.

What I can recall most about the Boot and Shoe was that it was THE perfect village pub. Everything about it was right, the situation (in a small country village) the locals, the games of darts, played on a plasticene dart board, great sing-songs around the piano (no dreadful juke-box here) but most of all the Home Mild was nearly always on first class form. I was a Mild man then, bitter being a drink if you wanted stomach ulcers or a dried up liver (or so it was rumoured). However, not to be outdone on this, once or twice weekly I used to sup mild until I couldn't

sup anymore and I got a bad stomach with a bad head thrown in, in any case.

Most nights were spent in this pub. On Thursdays (pay night) we all used to go into Newark to sup the BIG 3 (Holes Newark Ales, Home & Shipstones) We always started at the local dance hall and ended up in a pub called the White Hart — generally known as 'The Dug Out'. This was because at the back of the pub down some steps was a room where there was always a pianist playing. This was our latter day 'Disco'. The walls and ceiling were practically running with nicotine and it was so disgustingly horrible that if you felt OK when you went in then you wouldn't by the end of the evening, when, after visiting the smelliest lavatory I've ever been in you were guaranteed to heave up.

Once, after one of these sessions in this

pub we were staggering across Newark bridge over the river Trent when one of our crowd suddenly jumped up on to the bridge parapet and drunkenly announced that he was going to finish it all (he was a parachute packer and the job was getting him down —UGH!!). I and a few others quickly grabbed him and pulled him off the parapet only to become objects of great abuse from him. Strange lad he was, he used to use his boots under his bed in the middle of the night after his very frequent sessions.

However, to get back to the Boot and Shoe. I am going to do just that on a Saturday lunchtime within the next few weeks. Will it be just like going HOME? (another UGH!!)

Jack Hopwood.

## LETTERS

Frederic Robinson Limited  
Unicorn Brewery,  
Stockport, Cheshire.  
20th August 1976.

Dear Mrs Greenhalgh,

I have just completed reading the July edition of 'Opening Times' which I always find interesting, but especially so this month in view of the article on Robinsons. However there are one or two small inaccuracies so far as we are concerned and I am sure you would wish to know of these to avoid in any way misleading your readers.

1. I am delighted to tell you that the Foresters Arms at Openshaw which as you rightly say was damaged by fire recently

has just been re-opened. It has always been a popular house and in view of this when the fire occurred it was our one aim to get the house re-opened as soon as possible.

2. The information about the gravity of our beer is I am afraid not quite correct, and as the incorrect information has just been supplied to your Head Office for inclusion in the 1977 Good Beer Guide I thought you should have the correct figures which are:-

Best Bitter	1042
Bitter	1035
Best Mild	1032
Old Tom	1079

I am not quite sure where you get a figure for Mild as we have not brewed a Mild as opposed to Best Mild for some years and it would be fascinating to know whose beeryou have apparently tested to produce a gravity of 1030 for our Mild which does not exist. I can only assume this is a mistake.

3. Under your heading 'Warrington Column' you break down the ownership of the pubs in Nantwich. We are given as owning only one house — in fact we own two. The Red Cow, Beam Street, Nantwich and The Rifleman, The Barony, Nantwich. I do not know which of the ones you have not found but they are both well worth a visit. Incidentally we are at present carrying out an alteration to the Red Cow which will in no way alter its old world character but will slightly increase the drinking area at this very popular house.

Yours truly,  
p.p. Frederic Robinson Ltd.,  
P.B. Robinson  
Director and Secretary

## BEER & CANALS

We tried our first canal holiday last year on the Grand Union and Oxford canals, and enjoyed the peace and quiet of the waterways. However, as much of the week was spent cruising through Northamptonshire, the week was spoilt by the near monopoly of Watney's alcoholic fizz in the canalside pubs.

So this year we decided to take no chances and cruised 'The Cheshire Ring' circumnavigating East Cheshire and passing through Central Manchester, with real ale all but guaranteed en route.

Armed with Nicholson's Waterways Guide, which lists all the pubs near the canals but not what beer is served, and the National Good Beer Guide, but unfortunately not the Real Ale Guide to the Waterways (not quite published). We met our fellow sailors (!) from Ruddles country on Saturday lunchtime in the Old Kings Arms, Congleton, a crowded rambling wooden beamed pub serving Marstons Mild and Burton Bitter by handpump. We then drove down to the boatyard at Kent Green, loaded luggage and babies (two of whom were still enjoying the benefits of draught milk) on to our boat, The Kinder Scout, and chugged off north-bound on the Macclesfield canal at the regulation 4mph. By opening time we had rounded Congleton and moored for the night by the A54. The evening's drinking was at the nearby Robin Hood, a rather posh one roomed Marston house with only Burton Bitter (H) on draught. As canal boats are equipped with chemical toilets of limited capacity, pubs are an attraction for their loos as well as their beer.

Sunday morning saw us climb the twelve beautifully situated Bosley locks under the shadow of the Cloud hill and headed towards Macclesfield. We reached the Fool's Nook at Oakgrove half an hour before opening time and decided to forgo our only chance of Higsons during the week (unfortunately) and pressed on to Gurnett where we scrambled down from the canal aqueduct to taste Burtonwood Mild and Bitter (H) in the Old Kings Head on the road below. The afternoon was rather frustrating as we passed through the real ale resorts of Macclesfield and Bollington and numerous good pubs beyond before opening time. Perhaps it was just as well though, as otherwise we would never have completed 'The Ring' in a week and would have been even less capable than usual in controlling the boat. The stretch of the Macclesfield canal from the Fool's Nook to Marple, as well as being very popular

*continued on back page*

## WHITE GATES INN



The White Gates Inn opened in 1854 when Charles Hinchliffe brewed his own beer in the back yard.

In 1872 there were 11 spittons in the Vault, and the pub sold canary seed to the miners on their way to the pit up the road.

The White Gates Inn was run by five generations of the Oldham family until 1975.

Today the pub is owned and run by CAMRA. It has been renovated and

extended. It is a maze of little rooms and alleyways. It sells bitter from Buddingtons, Hartleys, and Pollards, best mild from Thwaites, and good food at working people's prices.

The White Gates Inn  
Manchester Road Hyde



# STAGGER

## No.4 Stockport

In the South Manchester branch area there's no other place quite like Stockport. Even though its become surrounded by urban sprawl from Manchester, somehow its kept its individuality and character as though it was a separate town. In particular this refers to the central part of Stockport which is a curious mixture of the old and new.

It's the old which houses a fine selection of brews in many excellent pubs: Robinsons (on their home ground), Boddingtons, Pollards, Bass, Higsons, Wilsons and Youngers are all represented on this crawl, a total of 14 brews (16 in winter).

Stockport is readily accessible from all points of the compass. Frequent train services run from Manchester Piccadilly to Stockport (every 15 mins) and also from Alderley Edge (every 30mins), Crewe (hourly), Macclesfield (hourly) as well as the intermediate stations on these lines. Bus services are myriad. Most run at 20min intervals.

Now we turn to the important matter:- the pubs. No.1 is the Crown Inn (Boddingtons). A GBG listed pub and a proper little museum piece it is too. The vault is small and cosy and there's a fine mirror in the back lounge room. The beer here is always phenomenally good. It's handpumped bitter (20½p) and mild (18½p). Its also the HQ for Crown Divers Club for anyone interested in exploring the depths of fermentation vessels? Turn left out of here towards Mersey Square past the spoilt Pineapple (Robinsons)—vault ripped out,



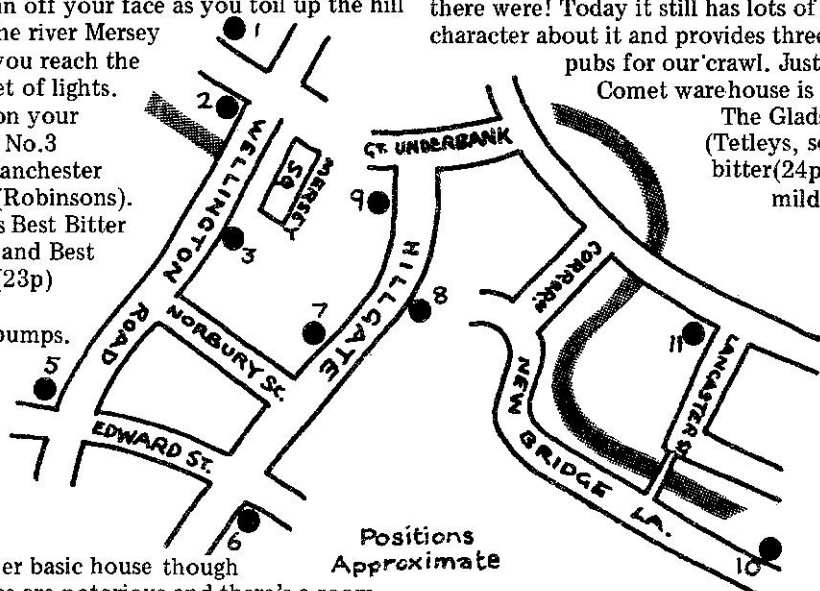
now 'rustic' beams and whitewash, — to No.2 the George Hotel at the traffic lights on the corner. Another GBG listed pub and another absolute must. It feels like being on the Queen Mary sat in the lounge. The handpumped Higsons bitter (24p), mild (22p) and draught Bass are usually of the highest quality.

If you've had a pint of each brew so far you might be feeling a bit merry, so wipe the grin off your face as you toil up the hill over the river Mersey until you reach the first set of lights. Here on your left is No.3 the Manchester Arms (Robinsons). It sells Best Bitter (25p) and Best Mild (23p) from handpumps.

A rather basic house though the pies are notorious and there's a room that's frequented by juke-box fiends. From here carry on plodding up that hill past the Unity (Robinsons) as far as Norbury Street. Turn left down here and straight ahead will be seen No.4 The Grove (Wilsons), this is an average town pub, unspectacular but with well kept vault and quiet too. Handpumped bitter (24p) and mild are available. Retrace your steps back onto Wellington Road and carry on up the hill to the traffic lights. On the right will be seen the Wilsons revamped Nelson's Ale House (No.5). Outside and in its been done up to look like a 1910 Edwardian pub even down to the Yates' style bare floorboards round the bar. Why didn't they go the whole hog and put sawdust and spittoons in? Despite the contrived atmosphere it serves very good bitter (25p) and mild (24p) from electric pillar taps. Next go straight across and up Edward Street,

at the first set of lights here on the right across Hillgate is No.6 Black Lion (Boddingtons) It sells bitter (20½p) and mild (18½p) from handpumps. A basic house. Turn right out of here and on down Hillgate past the Red Bull (Robinsons) on the left. Hillgate once constituted a very famous crawl route. Many said it was impossible to finish before the demolition men moved in. So you can imagine how many pubs there were! Today it still has lots of character about it and provides three more pubs for our crawl. Just past Comet warehouse is No.7

The Gladstone (Tetleys, selling bitter(24p) and mild(22p) from



handpumps. It's a very quiet pub and its a shame because the quality of the beer and the nature of the pub itself make it worthy of far more trade than it receives.

Carry on down Hillgate to the brewery of Frederic Robinson and call in at No.8 The Spread Eagle, i.e. The Brewery Tap, Best Bitter (25p) and Best Mild (23p) are dispensed from old wooden handled handpumps. From here keep following Hillgate along until you come to an archway spanning the street and there just on the left will be seen the very old bulging front window of Turner's Wine Vaults (No.9). Tetleys bitter (24p) and mild (22p) are sold from electric pumps. It's Stockport's



answer to Yates' this — so expect the characters. Note also the fine bank of taps on the bar once used to deliver the draught wines.

Anyway have yourselves a beer break now and have a test of your powers of navigation. Turn left out of Turners Vaults and down to the White Lion (don't go in) then turn right here and along the Great Underbank tending left until you meet a major arterial road — turn right along it before peeling off right down Corporation Street and following it round, becoming New Bridge Lane about 400 yards down on the left is No.10, The Midway. This is a recently modernised ex-Wilsons house, now a free house selling six brews, draught Bass (24p), Youngers XXPS (24p) and Wilsons bitter (24p) and mild (23p) are handpumped. Boddingtons and Pollards bitter (both 24p) are delivered by electric pumps. Thus a very fine range of beers can be had in a pub which would be more at home in Buckinghamshire than behind an iron foundry in Stockport! Go easy at this one for there's still two more to come. Retrace your steps (is this still possible!) until you can cross the river by turning right over a footbridge; then down past a mill before turning left then quick right (Boddingtons Coach and Horses here for those tired of life) into Lancaster Street and down to the end where on the left corner is the Old King (No.11), Bass (26p), XXXX mild (22p) and Worthington BB (24p) are all served by free flow electric pumps. Beware of the Toby Light as its keg. A spartan pub and only its beers merit a note. Out of here turn left and head back towards the town centre down Great Portwood Street. As this bends to the right to go round the Merseyway will be seen the terminus, No.12, Buck and Dog (Boddingtons). A very basic house selling good bitter (21p) and mild (19p) from handpumps and Boddies Strong Ale in winter direct from the cask. This seems a good enough place to stop, near enough to bus and rail stations for the survivors to find their way home.

Stockport is a town rich in real beer and the route described above not necessarily the best, so there could be many other permutations and this is left to personal likes and dislikes.

Written conceived and performed by  
Graham Cundall Photographs by Graham  
Lister.



# WILLIAM HICCUP COLUMN

## Tetley Bittermen rule OK

So now that we all know what the best bitter in Britain is, we can all pack up and go home and forget about CAMRA.

Perhaps before we do it does seem to me that some of the Sunday Mirror's findings are open to question and some anomalies seem to have crept in.

In the first place I have always understood it to be the case, at least according to what the Big Six always say, that there is no difference between brewery conditioned beer, be it tank or drum and cask conditioned beer. If this is so why does not cask conditioned Tetley's Bitter tie in equal place with their keg Drum Bitter? Can it be the case that there is a difference, that they have made their real ale to be less palatable in the hope that people will change to keg? Not even yours truly subscribes to that point of view, but either Tetleys are wrong in their assertion or else the judges are not consistent in their judging — what do you think? I subscribe to both points!

Then comes the strange fact that in the first Sunday Mirror article, Boddingtons scored 11 out of 12 marks along with Tetleys for taste, palatability etc. Try as I can, I cannot find Boddingtons being placed in the Northern Bitter Section for cask conditioned beers, in the second article where the 'judging' was done. Indeed Robinsons came second to Bass Charrington (draught Bass) with Hardy Hanson third. So perhaps the Sunday Mirror would care to explain that.

Needless to say, Mild was completely ignored as usual since presumably half of the Sunday Mirror's readers living down South will never have heard of the drink. S.P.O.M. where are you? Mind you it was pleasing to see that only Worthington E of the Big Six Premium keg Beers got a mention. Two other points of interest, Scottish & Newcastle did not get a mention (what a surprise) and Whitbreads only got a mention for two of their southern Trophy Beers. Perhaps this confirms what we have been trying to tell them for some time now; Whitbreads brew some excellent beer, just try the Weatherheads and Fremlin version, but up North their brewers seem to have lost the art of brewing.

On the whole the articles were worthwhile and help to stimulate further interest in beer and brewing.

I'll leave the subject with a quote

from the newspaper: "The supreme champion was chosen in a drink-off between winners of the best cask-conditioned and brewery conditioned bitters in Britain." — sounds like Crufts Dog Show.

## Fairer Deal For City Centre.

Although South Manchester is still a very large branch and we, the members, manage in one way or another to cover an area stretching from Stockport and Gorton on one side, to Stretford and Altrincham on the other, it always appears to me that the City Centre gets short shrift.

Now I know we do share coverage of the Centre with North Manchester Branch, and that many people do work in town, but I always get the impression that little or no campaigning ever gets done with landlords and people who frequent these pubs, at dinnertime especially.

Nobody raised a murmur at the last meeting about the removal of 'Sam's Chop House' (which incidentally has had incorrect information about it in the National Guide for over a year) because nobody has ever been in it or knew anything about it. Now I bet if it had been a Boddingtons house, the usual cry of horror would have gone up, and sheer weight of numbers from the Boddingtons clique would have kept it in, as occurred with 'The Bridge' at Dane Road. No mention was made of other excellent pubs in the City Centre for inclusion in the place of 'Sam's', such as 'The Oxford' on Oxford Street (close to Oxford Road Station) the 'Peveril of the Peak', Britons Protection, both on Chepstow Street, and Paddy's Goose, which being opposite Chorlton Street Bus Station, should have made it an ideal choice (despite its lack of hand-pumps) since the National Guide is designed primarily for outsiders coming to Manchester rather than for people living here who already know them. There are also several real ale pubs on and around the Great Ancoats Street area which I don't think we as a branch are even aware of. Cannot the branch organise some form of activity — not just pub crawls — by which landlords and the general public in Manchester will become aware that CAMRA does show its face occasionally in town.

## Carlsberg win by an innings.

*I regretfully announce that the branch does not appear to have one Lancashire Cricket Member, or if it does, that person is not interested in drinking real ale whilst watching Lancashire, since there has been a total nil response to last month's plea about the state of beer (and cricket) at Old Trafford.*

with canal enthusiasts judging by the number of weekend admirals around, must be unsurpassed on the waterways for the availability and variety of real ale within easy reach, 9 breweries being represented in 15 miles.

From Marple, where we spent Sunday evening supping Robinsons Best Bitter and Mild (E) in the multi-roomed 'Ring o' Bells', we descended the recently re-opened 16 Marple locks and then crossed the Marple Aqueduct. This impressive structure spans the River Goyt 100 feet below without any guardrail — definitely to be avoided after a skinful unless a quick trip to the next world is desired. It was just as well then, we weren't travelling the other way as our next stop was Hyde and where else but the White Gates, which if you don't know is within a couple of hundred yards of the Lower Peak Forrest Canal. The Thwaites Mild and Boddingtons and Hartleys bitters were all sampled with relish. In fact our travelling companions from the Midlands acquired the taste of Boddingtons so quickly that our intended hour stop became three and clobbered our schedules. Eventually we set off towards Dukinfield with the canal bounded by sewage works and then turned sharp right into the Ashton Canal which descends via 18 locks to the centre of Manchester. Our long stop at the White Gates, plus a coat stuck round our propellor and lock restrictions due to the drought meant we failed to reach our intended mooring at Ancoats and had to spend the night outside a chemical works at Clayton. The local canal-side pub was a Whitbread house — our first 'miss' — so I willingly offered to babysit.

On Tuesday morning we wound our way between the factories and warehouses of Eastern Manchester to Piccadilly. Here we entered the remaining mile of the privately owned Rochdale Canal which crosses central Manchester from Ducie Street to Castlefield. This canal, financed by and named after the Duke of Bridgewater (as are numerous pubs), is a motorway compared to other canals, no sharp bends, narrow bridges or locks, and therefore like a motorway, rather tedious. In no time we reached Stretford just in time for a few pints of Boddingtons in the Spartan public bar of the Robin Hood. From Sale to Timperley the canal is dead straight, even after a few, and cheek by jowl with the Altrincham railway line whose trains hurtle past at what seems the speed of light. We then veered off through the countryside to Lymm and our next overnight mooring at Groppenhall. The three buildings of note in the village are its sandstone church and its two pubs, the whitewashed Parr Arms and the sandstone Rams Head. Both have pleasant outside tables and serve Greenall Whitley Mild and Bitter by electric dispense.

From Grappenhall the Bridgewater passes through the suburbs of Warrington, of which there is a panoramic(?) view, after which there is a quiet rural stretch out to Preston Brook. Here there is a 3/4 mile tunnel leading on to the Trent and Mersey canal. After hitting the bank a couple of times we realised we were off the 'motorway' and back on a normal canal with sharp bends, where by Sod's Law we always met boats coming the other way. Beyond the Barnton tunnel is the Anderton lift, an amazing engineering structure which connects the canal with the river Weaver 50 feet below. Less amazing but also worth visiting is the Stavley Arms, a Greenall Whitley house with electrically dispensed Mild and Bitter, and a bowling green, which overlooks the Anderton lift and the enormous ICI salt works over the Weaver. From Anderton down to Middlewich the Trent and Mersey passes numerous salt workings and their resultant subsidence, including two canal-side lagoons filled with submerged old boats. Steer well clear!

At Middlewich we tried to find a real ale pub serving food but without any luck. So we ate in a house that had Ansells signs outside, but with pressure taps saying Tetley. A sure admission that Allied (unlike Watneys) are making no effort to distinguish between their local brews. Perhaps they realise that when the stuff is pressurised there is no difference in taste anyway. I slaked my thirst in the Bears Paw, no food, but Wilsons Bitter and Mild on handpump.

Thursday was a black day for real ale. We started the long but fairly leisurely lock climb towards the Potteries, and had a good, but ultimately expensive, laugh when the boat's television aerial was reduced to a mass of tangled metal after a one-sided argument with a sudden low bridge. It still gave a good picture though. The evening's pub stop was at the Romping Donkey at Hassall Green. This pleasantly situated pub had an Ansell sign outside. However, the sight of pressure taps dashed our hopes of a decent pint, this time they had Ind Coope on!

Friday, and more locks up to Kidsgrove. Along this stretch they are in pairs and in many cases both are in use. Of special interest is the pair at Thurlwood. Modern technology is represented by a steel lock with an enormous ugly superstructure, built in 1957 to combat brine subsidence. Alongside is a traditional lock with wooden gates originally built nearly 200 years ago. Ironically it is the 200 year old that works, the 19 year old steel lock is rusting, broken down and was more difficult to operate anyway. At lunchtime we reached the Red Bull at Kidsgrove which must be one of Robinsons most southerly pubs, and very welcome it was too, with electrically pumped Best Bitter and Mild.

The Macclesfield Canal curves back and crosses over the Trent and Mersey back by the Red Bull. We were now only a couple of miles from our boatyard and decided to complete the 'Ring' that evening and have a long Saturday morning in bed (we were on holiday after all). This gave us a chance to round off the week in the nearby Bird in the Hand the superb old canal-side pub which both inside and out looks more a private than a public house. The landlord brings the gravity drawn Worthington Best Bitter up from the cellar in an enamel jug.

A canal holiday is certainly a fine way to see the English countryside away from the hustle and bustle of modern life. However, make sure you plan your route using the Real Ale Guide to the Waterways plus any local beer guides to make the most of the canal-side pubs. Our problem for the first half of the week was having to pass so many good ones. Remember there is no breathalyser and that unlike cars, boats will happily crash into obstacles and other boats without damage. The only thing that could clobber a canal holiday is a prolonged drought, but that's unlikely in these rainy isles! (eh? — Ed.)

John Davies.

## Odes to Ale Competition

The rich vein of poetic talent that was discovered among 'Opening Times' readers when the Odes to Ale Whitbread competition was launched has yet to be exhausted. Here are the latest entries:

There was a bighead called Whitbread,  
Who wrote "Beers to avoid, A to Z"  
Listing Gauntlet and 'E',  
Local Trophy, DD,  
All the lagers, "Draught" Guinness and Red.

OR

There was a bighead called Whitbread,  
Who put gas on a cask, not a keg.  
The staves made a gap  
And out burst the tap  
Which sliced off the top of his head.

OR

There was a bighead called Whitbread  
Who aimed to brew beer — so he said.  
With flaked maize and fake hops  
It tasted like slops  
And was used to flush drains out instead.