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Volume 18 Issue 5

OPENING TIMES

MAY 2002 No:217

6,700 CIRCULATED
EVERY MONTH



FREE

FESTIVAL FEVER



Countdown Underway to Stockport's Main Event

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

As usual Opening Times is taking this opportunity to bring you just a small taster of the many beers on offer. There really will be something for every taste, whether you like mild, bitter, stout or strong ales.

There will be up to **nine** milds available from the classic Bank Top Dark Mild, the superb Phoenix Monkey Town Mild, Wentworth's Moore's Magic and the rare Hydes Welsh Dark.

Lovers of bitter will be well catered for with no less than **58** standard and premium bitters available during the course of the Festival. Pictish Brewery will be brewing a Festival Special for us and this will have to compete with heavyweight contenders such as Roosters, Marble, Abbeydale, Phoenix and Oakham, whose stunning White Dwarf makes a welcome return. Among many highlights for lovers of the hop will be Durham White Gold, the excellent Wentworth WPA, Pictish Brewers Gold and the ever-reliable Whim Arbor Light and Hartington Bitter.

Last year's well received Festival newcomer, Alcazar from Nottingham, will again be sending four beers including the quaintly named Nottingham Nog. This will be one of **9** stouts and porters which include Beartown Polar Eclipse, Moor Peat Porter, and, a stunning beer this, Wentworth Oatmeal Stout.

There will also be **11** special beers including the classic Ginger Marble, three excellent beers from Salopian, Black Booty, Golden Thread and Puzzle and three beers from Heather Ales - Kelpie, an organic bitter with seaweed (it tastes great - honest!), Alba, a beer with spruce tips, and Meadow Wheat which, we believe, is the first commercial beer brewed with Scottish-grown hops.

Bringing up the rear we also have **8** strong ales and this year there are some real treats here. Robinson's Old Tom is a firm favourite of course but others to try include Boggart Hole Clough Streaming Boggart at 9 per cent, Moor Old Freddy Walker at a powerful 7.3 per cent and this year's brain cell killer, the 11 per cent Thomas Sykes Ale from Burton Bridge. Look out also for the stunning Blue Moon, a strong (6%) IPA from Pictish.

So, something for everyone. Do remember, though, that not all beers will be on at the same time and one or two may not even arrive (although we usually have an acceptable alternative if that happens). *More Festival News on Page 5!*

You can also visit the Festival Website at:

www.stockportfestival.fsnet.co.uk

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DUTY CUT SPLITS BREWERS

While many micro-brewers celebrated their Budget beer tax cut, family brewers complained they had been left out in the cold, and all criticised the way in which the announcement was made by Chancellor Gordon Brown.

In a move for which the micro-brewers have been fighting for over 20 years, the Chancellor slashed duty by half for those brewers producing less than 3,000 barrels a year, a saving of about £40 a barrel. Brewers producing up to 18,000 barrels a year will get a graded discount on duty, which could save them up to £120,000 a year.

The campaign for the duty cut had been spearheaded by the Society of Independent Brewers (SIBA), whose spokesman Nick Stafford (of Yorkshire's Hambleton Ales) said: "This is excellent news. It's great - you can't say otherwise."

"We actually argued for the limit to be set higher, but the Treasury wasn't having any of it. Still, we are finally going to reap the rewards of years of campaigning, and it will make a significant difference to the chances of growth for hundreds of small breweries".

These sentiments have been echoed by local micro-brewers. Bank Top Brewery's John Feeney told Opening Times, "I think it's wonderful", a view echoed by Pictish brewer Richard Sutton who added "It's terrific news, isn't it?"

Out In The Cold?

These positive views are by no means universal, however, even among the micro-brewers. Tony Allen at Phoenix Brewery, which is too big to benefit from the full duty cut, was less than impressed. "I've never been in favour of it," he told us, saying it would simply be a boost to his competition.

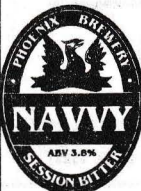
The most scathing criticism, though, came from the Independent Family Brewers of Britain (IFBB), most of whose members will not benefit from the cut. Calling the move "the worst possible scenario", the IFBB said the cut merely deflected interest from the greater problem of Britain's overall high duty rates. "We estimate that the duty cut will affect only one pint in every 100 consumed in the nation's pubs", said IFBB vice-chairman Stuart Neame.

...continued on page 5



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Gold Medals for Navy and Wobbly Bob

IN THE EDITOR'S VIEW..

There was good news and bad news in the budget. Beer duty was frozen (although a couple of pence off would have been useful) and at long last a sliding scale of duty was introduced, giving a welcome boost, and in some cases a lifeline, to the micro brewing sector.

The bad news is the spin which accompanied the announcement and the relatively low level at which the cut-off point has been set.

Don't expect 14p off a pint in village pubs in time for the World Cup. In fact, don't expect 14p off a pint at all. While some small brew pubs with little or no outside trade may well reduce their prices, most of the brewers benefiting from the tax reduction will be using the money for investment and expansion rather than slashing prices. And quite right, too. And of course most pubs selling cask beer, village or otherwise, are owned by family and regional brewers who won't get a tax reduction at all. Not surprisingly, many family brewers are pretty cheesed off by all this, particularly as research indicates that to set the cut-off point at the European level of 120,000 barrels a year annual production would only cost another £3 million. A drop in the ocean compared the annual beer duty take by the Treasury. Vigorous lobbying is taking place to try and bring this about and certainly has the full support of Opening Times.

The brewers must be careful not to overstate their case, though. The family brewers do have tied estates to fall back on (unlike most micros); and the powers that be are unlikely to be impressed by fanciful stories of the likes of Adnams being squeezed out of business!

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Don't forget to enter our monthly competitions, by the way. These are brought to you by Robinson's and every month there's a great prize to be won. All it will cost is the price of a stamp – as they say, you'd be daft not to.

John Clarke

Two breweries threatened, but one sale at least might prove to be good news for once. Wychwood, a small brewery (but too large to be really called a micro) with a growing pub estate has seen its major investor 3i pull out, and the pubs and brewery split up. The pubs (the Hobgoblins) have found a new owner in the form of one of the specialist smaller pubcos and whilst they will continue to take the Wychwood cask ales, their already large number of guests beers will improve still further, and the brewery, bought by the owners of the Ushers brands is actually going to see further investment and expansion. Brakspear on the other hand, who keep sweeping the board at the Organic beer championships have said their tied estate cannot keep on subsidising the brewery (much of whose production is sold on at massive discounts to the big pub-owning chains) so after a review it will almost certainly close (the cut off point for duty relief in the Budget being set too low for them to benefit), bringing an end to a very ancient brewing heritage in Henley-on-Thames. At the same time Enterprise Inns are being allowed to buy thousands more pubs. The trouble is, very soon there will be very little decent for them to sell, even if they had a change of heart, and wanted to!

P.B. Hutchings

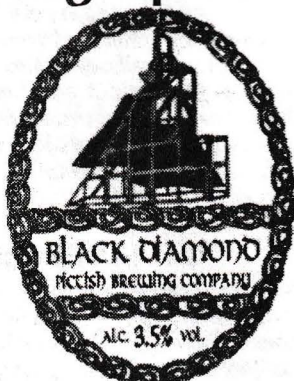
OPENING TIMES ISSUE 217

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



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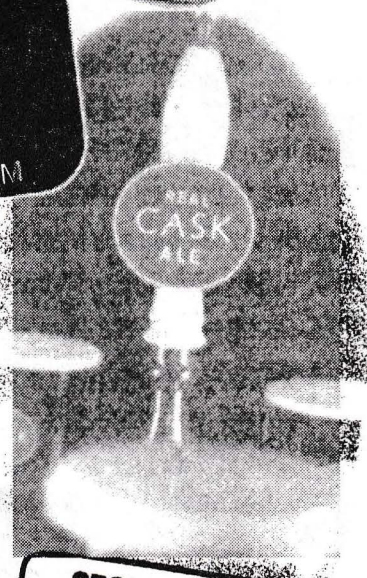
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PUB OF THE MONTH MAY 2002

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19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	



The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA Pub of the Month for May 2002 is the Royal Mortar, Hillgate, Stockport.

Vinnie Burke and Irene McEwen have now been in residence some 20 months. Both experienced hands in the club and pub trade they have turned around the fortunes of this popular Robinson's house from a one-barrel-a-week loser (yes, one barrel!!) to an eight per week, thriving local. Steadily applying improvements during their tenure, they have redecorated the place entirely, and remodelled the rear bar and other arrangements in the pool room, all from their own pockets.

Liquid entertainment is in the form of well-kept Hatters and Best, live entertainment supplements this on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings when single or duo artistes play to an appreciative crowd. For those seeking a partner, the Thursday Singles Night has really taken off. The pub is always a feature in OT as it hosts one of the leading teams in the Stockport Super League Darts. The players are such a draw, apparently, that the pub is packed for the Tuesday matches. On Sundays, some of Stockport's elder dartsmen take part in a charity knockabout dubbed 'Silver Arrows'. Vinnie and Irene's efforts have not gone unnoticed at Robinson's, as plans have been approved to extend the pub into an adjoining property the brewery owns. This will house a new toilet block and games room, whilst the existing outside toilets will be razed to provide a beer garden and some car parking.

This well deserved award, made to both celebrate the pub's continuing success and Vinnie and Irene's efforts at restoring its fortunes, will be presented on Thursday 23 May from 8.00pm on, and a great night is in prospect. MM.

How to get there: the pub is only a short-ish walk from Stockport Town Centre. Buses 192 and 199 will drop you on the A6 near Longshut Lane; Marple buses 358 or 383 will drop you on Longshut Lane. The pub is round the corner to the right.

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

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

Column Widths, single 84mm, double 172mm. Image height 26cm. NB Advertisers who supply camera ready artwork designed for another publication that cannot be resized to our standard sizes will be charged the equivalent column/centimetre rate plus a surcharge of at least 30%. Adverts that require unusually large amounts of design work will have the extra work carried out by a studio at full commercial rate.



Duty Cut Splits Brewers (cont)...

The valid point made was that it would only have cost the Treasury a few million pounds more to make the upper cut-off limit the same as the European average, a move which would have benefited all but the largest of the independent brewers.

In addition some of the smaller family brewers (and largest micros) whose production falls around the upper cut-off point are on the horns of a dilemma. Do they continue to expand and so risk losing the duty cut 'bonus', or even should they cut back production to benefit from it.

In Time for the World Cup?

Whatever the brewers' views on the merits of the duty cut, all were unanimous in the criticism of the way it was announced.

"14p off a pint in village pubs and all in time for the World Cup", said the Chancellor. Well, no.

This is misleading, and downright wrong, in fact, for a variety of reasons. Firstly there's the little matter of getting the system up and running. Given the time scales involved, it's unlikely to say the least that any brewer will have had their duty cut by the time the World Cup finishes, let alone starts.

The main criticism, though, is that the Chancellor's comments ignore the reasons why the small brewers wanted the cut in the first place. While some may reduce the price of a pint, particularly the very small pub brewers, most will use the extra cash for investment, consolidation, expansion and, in some cases, even to give their owners a decent living.

For example the Fisherrow Brewery in Edinburgh has announced that it will use the money to buy an additional dray and employ telesales staff. And in Yorkshire, the owner of the Captain Cook pub-brewery was about to sell up to Jennings. He cancelled the deal as the tax relief will allow him to employ a pub manager and allow him to concentrate on brewing. The announcement was also made in such sweeping terms that the casual listener might think that all beer would be reduced in price whereas in fact almost none of it will be. Don't expect a cut in your local Robinson's, Lees, Hydes and Holt's pubs as they haven't had their tax cut. As a notice in one local Robinson's pub explained, they are simply back where they started.



FESTIVAL SPONSORS KEEP PRICES DOWN

Sponsorship at this year's Stockport Beer & Cider Festival has allowed the organisers to hold down prices by over 10p a pint. They are also able to continue the well-received practice of holding the price of some beers at £1 per pint prior to 8.00pm each night.

Jim Flynn, the Festival Organiser, told Opening Times "Without our sponsors we would have to operate a higher mark-up on the beer and cider. Their involvement clearly shows how the Festival has become an important date on the Stockport social calendar. My grateful thanks go to all of them."

The sponsors declared at the time of Opening Times going to press are:

- ★ The Stockport Express – sponsors of the Festival itself and the Family and Quiet rooms.
- ★ Frederic Robinson Ltd – sponsors of the Festival glasses and t-shirts
- ★ Hydes Brewery Ltd – sponsors of the Festival tombola
- ★ Ye Olde Vic, Chayham St, Edgeley – sponsor of the Festival Special beer brewed by Pictish Brewery of Rochdale.
- ★ www.Beerbarons.co.uk – sponsors of the festival programme.

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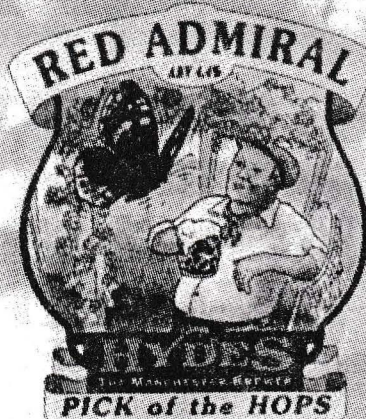
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Family Brewers Focus

The end of this month should see the first of what is planned to be a series of new beers from Holt's. The first beer to come off the new 30-barrel plant will be Baton and will be on sale at the end of May/early June. Unusually the beer will be available in two forms: a 3.6% brew for the Holt's tied estate and a 4.3% version, known as Gold, for the free trade. Different pump clips showing the ABV have been ordered. Presumably the Gold will be rather more expensive than the 3.6% version, but it will also be available to Holt's tied houses if they think they can sell it.



Lees have a new seasonal out this month. Scorchers at 4.2% has proved popular in recent years and makes an early return for 2002. A light, golden beer with a refreshing hop finish, it is ideal for the early summer months.

Lees have also agreed a sponsorship deal with Cheshire County Cricket Club for the forthcoming season. MD William Lees-Jones said, "The move to sponsor Cheshire County follows many years of support for Lancashire County League and the Central Lancashire League with the Lees Bitter Wood Cup." OT readers will have seen the amusing poster adverts for Lees Bitter. Among the more humorous was that with the tag line 'Ribbed for Extra Pleasure'. Sadly the busybodies at Alcohol Concern complained to the Advertising Standards Agency, saying that the poster implied that a pint of Lees enhanced sexual performance! The surprise is that the ASA upheld the complaint! If Alcohol Concern didn't like that, they'll be beside themselves with the new Greene King advertising for Abbot Ale. Devised by McCann-Erickson, it shows a woman lying on a bed writhing, with the strap line "Some things get better given longer"...a reference to the 7-day brewing period for this premium bitter (what else?).



Hydes and Robinson's also have new beers out this month. Hydes have 'Red Admiral', the latest of the 2002 craft ales featuring just one hop variety. This should be a refreshing, tasty beer at 4.4%. Robinson's come to the end of their current run of bi-monthly seasonals with the welcome return of Young Tom. Essentially a blend of Hatters and Old Tom, this was one of the best selling of their seasonals last time around. Hopefully we will be able to let you have news of the next run of beers in the coming months.



Micro Magic

As usual, there are a whole clutch of beers coming out from our local micros. This month pressure of time and space had prevented a full round-up but these are some of the highlights...

Pictish of Rochdale is producing Black Diamond again. Although not labelled as such, this is a 3.8% tasty mild. Pictish has also produced one of its occasional 'extras' recently. This was a return of the Honey Ale brewed with Mexican Honey and fermented out that little bit longer to remove the sweet, cloying aftertaste that characterises many honey beers.



In Heywood, the Phoenix Brewery is currently at capacity but, as ever, has a range of new beers coming on stream. Currently available are Mayfly (4.4%) and a mild, Black Shadow (4%). Out later this month are Tennis Elbow (4.5%), Midsummer madness (4.5%) and Sticky Wicket (4.7%). The range and quality of the beers produced by Phoenix is consistently first rate, little wonder they picked up two gold medals recently (see article on next page). Bank Top has produced two beers to mark sporting events in Bolton, both commissioned by the local council. Boneshaker (cycling) and Spitting Feathers (Badminton) are both pale, 4.2% session bitters. American real ale lovers will also have the chance to sample two of Bank Top Brewery's ales at a festival in Boston this month. Brewer John Feeney is exporting some barrels of Smokestack Lightning and The Haka, and the casks will be returning to the UK filled with American real ale for a summer beer festival. John also tells us that the long-anticipated brewery move may finally come about in the next 6-8 weeks.



At the LAB in Denton, sales of the mild "Jet Amber", brewed exclusively for the 2002 Mild Challenge, have exceeded expectations and supply. A second batch of the mild has been brewed and it may become a permanent feature as a result of its popularity.

The LAB has brewed two new beers for the beginning of May. The first is "Heywoods Delight" (4.0% ABV) which is a lovely hoppy beer with a sweet malt taste and a nice brown colour. The second is "Houghton Wheat Beer" (5.2%) a robust yet hazy strong pale wheat beer with a lot of bitterness. Both are already proving popular with the locals.

The brewery has also been commissioned to brew a special for the "Stalybridge Beer Festival". The beer will be called "Canal Knowledge" (4.2% ABV) - using amber malt to create a pleasant biscuity tasting malt flavour with plenty of bitterness and a pleasant florally hop finish.

Dave and Sue Welcome You To

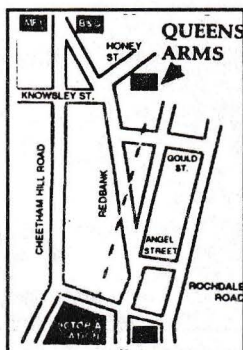
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A WARM WELCOME IN A TRADITIONAL PUB

SHAW'S BEERS BREWED AGAIN IN DUKINFIELD

Tim Jones visits the region's newest brewery...

You'd have to be well over 70 to have enjoyed beers from Shaw's Brewery on Park Road in Dukinfield.

The old brewery dating from 1856, and still visible on Park Road, was closed by John Smiths of Tadcaster in 1941. John Smiths has acquired the brewery for its tied house estate (which extended to 60 pubs, including the Gun Inn in Hollingworth and the Pack Horse in Hayfield) - a familiar tale in brewery history. But now real ale enthusiasts and local CAMRA members Neil Hay and Phil Windsor have revived the old name by opening a new brewery in part of the old brewery stables block, next door to the original.

Phil Windsor has built the micro-micro at the back of his plastics business - Windsor Fabrications - and his influence is obvious in the small brew plant. The set-up comprises two fermenters - of polypropylene - and stainless steel hot liquor, mash tun and 'copper' vessels - these from old cellar tanks (remember the 80's!). The six metre by four metre, five-barrel plant (with garden shed for malt store) is neat and tidy, and well-engineered. They have bought around 20 stainless steel 9-gallon firkins and are in the process of setting up a bar coded tagging system to keep track of this significant investment.

The pair consulted widely before embarking on this venture, with advice from such established micros as McGuinness, Riverhead, Saddleworth, Coniston, Tiger Tops and the other recent local pub-brewery at the Lowes Arms, Denton. Neil picked up tips on the brewing side while Phil sneaked an engineer's eye over the plant and set-up.

The one beer at present is Shaws Bitter (although it appears as Best Bitter on the pump clip). At about 4.2% ABV, it is intended to be a traditional session bitter. The first brew was well received but brewer Neil thought it was short on bitterness to balance the malt flavours, so he doubled the hops (they don't use extract) and improved the boil, with more input from Phil on the engineering side. The resulting beer is more bitter and slightly stronger at 4.3%.

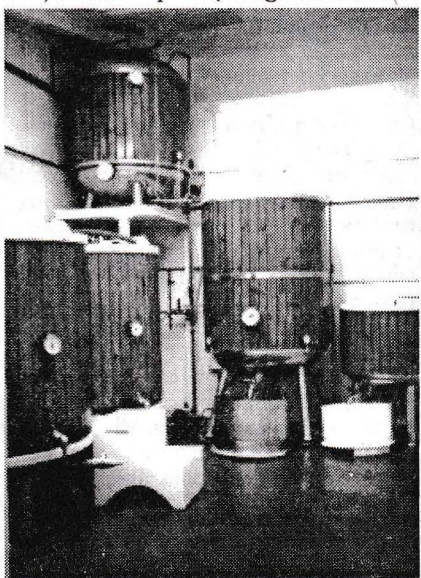
Ingredients include Maris Otter malt from Fawcett's of Castleford and Challenger and Goldings hops; Neil and Phil are also intending to tinker with the recipe to get the beer they want. They think they are pretty close.

Neil, who distributes the beer himself in the small company van, managed to get the first brew into a wide range of outlets. The second brew has also travelled far and wide including Stalybridge Station Buffet, the Royal and Kinder Lodge at Hayfield; Pack Horse, New Mills; Sportsman, Strines; Old Original, Scouthead (Oldham); and in Ashton, the Dog & Partridge (Waterloo), Station and Ladysmith.

It's early days for a micro but if the enthusiasm and attention to detail Neil and Phil have shown, and the interest from the local free trade and real ale lovers for the first brew follows on to the second (and subsequent) brews, the future looks rosy. It's all down to how many pints are sold...so it's up to the real ale drinkers to back the brew. Keep your eye out and give it a try. It would be nice to think that the new Shaws is set to be around as long as the old one.

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 217:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Peter Edwardson, Chris Walkden, Dave Sheldon, Phil Levison, Steve Smith, John Taylor, Mark McConachie, Jim Flynn, Dave Preston, Tim Jones, Richard Hough, Tom Lord, Chris Walkden, Anthony Firmin.



GOLD, SILVER & BRONZE FOR LOCAL BREWERS!

Three of our local brewers have triumphed in winning highly coveted prizes at this year's Brewing Industry International Awards.

The awards, which are held every two years, are considered to Oscars of the brewing industry and this year attracted nearly 700 beers from the UK and overseas. The first round of judging took the form of a series of blind tastings held in Burton-on-Trent in February following which the finalists in each category were announced.

Last month, in a ceremony at London's Guildhall, the final selections were made, followed by the presentation of the various awards, and some of our local brewers came up trumps.

Joseph Holt's took the silver in their class, 'International Dark Mild, Stout & Porter', for Holt's Mild, the highest ranking mild in the competition and a result of which Holt's are justifiably proud.

In the 'International Strong Beer' class, Robinson's picked up a bronze for Old Tom in 'Class 3', for dark beers with an ABV of 7% or more. While Robinson's have a large range of excellent beers, it does seem to be Old Tom which wins the awards for them, as well it might, being perhaps the classic barley wine (although it's no longer badged as such).

In the 'International Cask Conditioned Ale' category, attracting 147 entries, there was further local success.

In 'Class 1', for draught ale up to 3.8% ABV, the gold medal was won by Phoenix Brewery for Navy, In Class 3, for draught ale between 4.6% and 6.9%, they won a second gold for Wobbly Bob. Phoenix's Tony Allen is cock-a-hoop. "It took me a week to stop smiling", he told Opening Times when we contacted him.

It's also a triumph for Phoenix brewer Richard Bazen, for while Wobbly Bob has been brewed by Phoenix since its days as the Ellesmere Port-based Oak Brewery (and now has something approaching cult status), Navy is in fact a recreation of his much-loved Navigator, produced by the short-lived Bridgewater Brewery. Congratulations all round.

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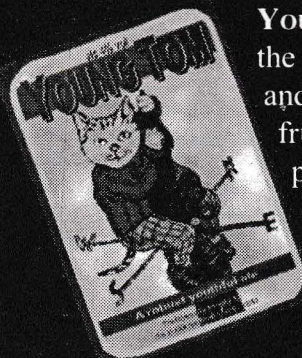
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CAMRA
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Robinson's COMPETITION



YOUNG TOM (4.0%ABV)
the seasonal ale for May
and June is dark with a
fruity aroma and a
palate with a good
balance of ripe malt
and peppery hops.

In this month's competition, we're
offering you the chance to win a
Robinson's fleece. The navy jackets
come complete with the Company's
logo and are available in three
sizes. There will be another
competition next month, when
we'll also be announcing the
winner of the April contest.



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

1. Name the famous 8.5%ABV
brand produced at the
Unicorn Brewery?
2. Which Robinson's beer is
named after the founder of
the Company?

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

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

STAGGER

with John Clarke

Bramhall & District

We begin on a Friday at ten to eight at the Jolly Sailor on Bramhall Lane, Davenport, badged a "Steak & Ale House" and owned, I think, by Scottish & Newcastle. Completely revamped since I was last in this pub, plenty of room with a raised section, plenty of seating area, well decorated, a large L shaped bar & quite a few people in. The cask ale on hand was Courage Directors (OK), Bombardier (pretty good), Theakston Cool Cask (average) and Boddingtons which no-one tried. On the whole a nice atmosphere and a huge improvement from last time I visited.

Quarter past eight we call on the Shady Oak on Radford Drive once owned by Tetley's, but now in the hands of some pub company. It's well set back, not an easy pub to find in the dark if you don't know the area. A very spacious pub with lots of wooden beams and panels on the ceiling which complemented the pub considering it's not all that old. The back of the pub had a raised section, separate games area not too close to the bar together with other sectioned off areas for groups of people who wanted a private drink. Due to the sudden rush of punters (namely us), it took a while for me to get served. Only two cask ales on, Tetley's (pretty good) and Old Speckled Hen of which opinions varied from quite poor to very good. Half past eight we end up in the Three Bears on Jackson's Lane, Hazel Grove. Owned by Robinson's, this pub was recently built in the 90's. A smaller pub from the last two visited but still had plenty of atmosphere, which is always a good sign. Very well decorated with wooden panels with insets of coloured glass at the top creating reasonable sized bays for sitting in. On the pumps were Hartley's XB (fair), Robinson's Best Bitter (fair), and Hatters (better).

At ten to nine we bless our presence on the Ladybrook on For Road and owned by...Scottish & Newcastle? Laurel Pub Co? A very spacious pub catering for food, with separate pool room, and with an upstairs function room with a separate bar. Turn left as if heading for Bramhall itself on the roundabout, take the immediate left turn as you head uphill, which brings you to the pub. A very odd place to position a pub of this size you might think. The reason is that it is part of the original main road before the roundabout was introduced. The pub was due for a revamp in March this so let's hope we don't see return of the logos on the beams with saying such as "If you want to be original be yourself." Which seems a fitting statement for the beer. Twelve hand pumps of which ten were serving just Boddingtons (opinions varied from very below average to good). The other two had nothing. For the size of the bar the pub and its location, surely two of Boddingtons siblings could reside in the spare two.

Twenty past nine it's the Three Shires and nitro-keg alert (hand pump usually with Flowers IPA so they said). So twenty five past nine swiftly moving over to the Victoria owned by Boddingtons. An open spacious pub with a few separate rooms to sit in, we found it rather quiet for a Friday night. Lo and behold more lovely logos on the beams. Again, the best one for the pub "The nice things about standards, is that there

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are so many to choose from." And wow! What a choice, Boddingtons (below average) and Theakston Cool Cask (yeck!).

Twenty to ten we end up in Bramalls, an open roomed pub with the bar area in the corner with steps going up to a separate poolroom. Plenty of people in showing a well used pub serving the only cask Marston's Pedigree (and about the best beer so far). Quarter to ten we see the Belugas pub "wine bar" this means bouncers + us wearing jeans = we do not get in.

So heading off into the night we end up at the Smithy on Grove Lane, Cheadle Hulme at just about ten o'clock. Not the greatest of pubs, comprising of a vault with the darts and pool area. The other larger room is the lounge including a toy and bubbly machine in a certain part at the back. Webster's was the only thing on cask and got a universal thumbs down. We were heading for the Church but time was against us.

So our journey ends about twenty past ten at the Davenport Arms (Thief's Neck) in Woodford and owned by Robinson's. Which, of course, on the front page of Opening Times February 2002 came runner up in local pub of the year. Well what can I say about the place that wasn't said in February's issue (it's got an outside lav) but it must have been close between the two pubs because the Robinson's Best Bitter, Hatters and Old Tom were all very good indeed and easily the best beers of the night (by a long way). We make our way for last orders within easy reach of our homes (you would of thought some people would have gone straight home after drinking all that. Not me!!!!



The Davenport Arms (Thief's Neck)

On the whole it was a refreshing, enlightening stagger that took in a very wide range of pubs all within easy reach. Don't forget this a personal write up and can't be taken as a once and for all judgement of the pub or their beers. Others on the Stagger might and most probably would give a different view. The two pubs that get my thumbs up were the Davenport & Bramall's for keeping a good pint and a good comfortable atmosphere to drink in. And remember **ASK IF IT'S CASK!** Don't let the side down.

MILDLY CHALLENGING

Dave Sheldon with a new slant on the Mild Challenge

It was Chris Walkden's idea. 12 pubs in 12 different areas and drinking 12 milds from 12 different breweries. Could it be done?

Chris had planned the route and worked out the bus times and connections so Chris, Paul Watson and I caught the 10.00am 313 from Cheadle Hulme. Changing in Stockport to a 330 we arrived in Hyde town centre for the short walk to our first pub, The Sportsman. We arrived three minutes before opening time at 11.00. Not surprisingly we were the first customers of the day and we were soon enjoying some Moorhouses Black Cat Mild. We had to resist the temptation provided by bitters from the likes of Plassey, Phoenix and Hartington but accepted 'a taster' of a new brew from Shaws Dukinfield Brewery. It was a very strange beer.

With a bit of time to kill we walked back into Hyde town centre and had bacon and sausage barmes before catching a 201 to Denton. The Lowes Arms opens at 12.00 and we were again the first customers of the day. The LAB Jet Amber had run out the night before so we had to wait for our friend, brewer Anthony Firmin, to connect a new barrel. This mild is made with chocolate malt and has lots of flavour. Anthony broke off from brewing some Frog Bog Bitter to join us.

Although the 201 bus runs every ten minutes, we had to wait twenty for one into Manchester City Centre. We were getting behind schedule now, it was two and a half hours since the pubs had opened and we had only visited two.

At 13.30 we entered The Smithfield Hotel. This pub was quite busy, possibly because Chelsea v United was on big screen TV. Paul, Chris and I don't usually drink too much mild so again our resistance was tested by a wide range of bitters form independent breweries. Fortunately the Greene King Mild was good.

We walked across the city centre to reach The Rain Bar by 14.00. We sat out the back in the fine weather enjoying some Lees Mild. Here we succumbed to sampling some of the excellent Brooklyn Best Bitter. On the short walk to Oxford Road we spotted the 86 bus and so dashed across the traffic for an expeditious connection. By 14.35 we were sat outside our fifth pub, The Marble Beer House in Chorlton, drinking Marble Uncut Amber. On this occasion it was OK but I know from visits to The Marble Arch in Manchester that it can be much better.

From Chorlton we caught the 168 to Burnage. Chris had driven over in the week to see where The Rising Sun was as none of us had been there before. The Banks's Original was excellent. We also took advantage of this pub serving food all day and having a no-smoking area in which to enjoy it.

Outside the pub we caught the 197 and we were inside The Moss Rose, in Heaton Norris (West), by 16.25. After some fine Hydes Light we set off on the lengthy walk to The Navigation, in Heaton Norris (East). This was pub number eight and the walk, fresh air and perhaps even the beer were starting to make us feel a little

jaded. There was a change to the advertised beer at The Navigation, Beartown Brown Bear being the mild on offer, again it was good.

Walking down Lancashire Hill we made our way to The Railway on Portwood in Stockport. It was now 18.00 and Anthony, from The Lab Brewery (see Lowes Arms above), was waiting for us. Following some fine Porters Mild, Anthony was to drive us around the remaining pubs.

It is just a short distance to The Swan With Two Necks in Stockport town centre. The Robinson's Dark Mild hadn't arrived. Not to worry though as the Robinson's Hatters Mild was in excellent form.

We arrived at the penultimate pub, The Victoria in Offerton, at 18.55. There was a surprise for us here. Instead of the expected Greenalls Mild there was Cain's Dark Mild. Whilst enjoying this we noticed that two other Cain's beers were also available, well worth the visit.

Finally we arrived back in Cheadle Hulme at 19.30. Our final mild was Holts in the Cheadle Hulme. This beer had won an award this week and I would have liked to have been able to report that an excellent day out had been completed with a worthy beer. Unfortunately this wasn't the case as this beer was barely drinkable.

So nine hours after entering the first pub we had successfully completed our challenge. My favourite three beers on the day were LAB Jet Amber, Banks's Original and Robinson's Hatters. Those brewers who have dropped the word 'mild' because it presents an old fashioned image, but know that they have a quality product if only people would give it a try, seem to have a good point. Beers this good deserve to be promoted and enjoyed.

STOCKPORT &
MANCHESTER
2002
MILD
CHALLENGE



STILL A POT OF BEER

Despite rumours to the contrary, the Pot of Beer (New Mount Street, off Rochdale Road) is most definitely not closing. There are new faces behind the bar, though.

Sue and Paul Higginson took over as managers on Tuesday 30 April and are already settling in well. Sue will be known to many from her 3½ years behind the bar at the Queens Arms, Red Bank. Sue and Paul also acted as relief managers at the Queens from time to time and it was Dave Price from the Queens who taught Paul the art of pub cellar work.

They have already made their mark on the pub by persuading owners Peter and Wanda Ward to take out the cask Boddington's Bitter. Currently the only permanent beer is the elusive Dark Mild from Robinson's which is accompanied by two changing guest beers, although as trade builds up this range will expand.

The couple hale from Cheshire, Paul from Winsford and Sue from Cuddington, neither renowned beer drinking towns. Indeed it was discovering the Beer House which prompted Paul to move to Manchester! Their aim at the Pot is, as Paul put it "to provide what I'd like to find in a pub".

This means not only quality cask ales but also good, traditional food. Due to Wanda Ward's other commitments, the Polish food has been taken off the menu but will be replaced simple high-quality meals using all fresh ingredients. Paul and Sue have a connection with North West Fine Foods, an organisation representing small and often specialist farmers. Expect to see wild boar sausages on the menu! Initially, the food will be restricted to lunchtimes only but simple snacks may be made available in the evening in due course.

Opening hours have been fixed at 12-11 from Monday to Saturday. The Pub will be closed on Sundays to start with although Sunday lunchtime opening may be introduced. Paul and Sue certainly deserve support in this, their first pub. Why not drop in next time you're in Manchester?

MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

Just where do these stories come from? Last year the rumour mill had it that this popular Northern Quarter pub was to become a champagne and oyster bar, a tale laughed off by Ward Tavern's Wanda Ward. She's not laughing so much now as the latest story has started to hit the pub's trade.

A couple of weeks ago I was 'reliably informed' that the Pot had been sold and was facing demolition to become a car park. Naturally, I was on the phone to Wanda straight away and, as I suspected, this is a load of old rubbish. There was a slight hiatus at the end of last month as Tam and Dave departed (quite amicably for personal reasons) and Paul and Sue took over. Ed(1) has promised a small feature on the new couple which should appear elsewhere in this issue and it's good to report that it's business as usual at what has always been one of my favourite N/4 pubs. Well, almost business as usual – due to other time pressures Wanda won't be able to prepare the Polish food so the entire menu will be in the hands of the licensees.

Elsewhere in the City Centre it's been a very quiet month. Out on Oxford Road the hoardings are now up around the site of **Kro2**, which looks as though it's going to be quite a sizeable operation. They are still up around the new **Wetherspoon's** on Princess Street as well. The opening has been put back – press reports said June but the hoardings say July.

Northenden Notes

On a visit to Northenden I found the pubs to be the usual mixed bag. Starting at the **Jolly Carter**, I found a rather desperate pub with keg beer, few customers and a 'to let' sign. Down the road at the **Spread Eagle** there was better news with a lone handpump selling Boddingtons Bitter.

In the centre of the village, the **Church** has just been refurbished to an excellent standard but no cask ale and, according to the landlady, no prospect of any. Very sad. Meanwhile down the road, next to the police station, is the ever-vibrant **Crown**, with Boddingtons on handpump. Perhaps the Church should take a few lessons from this pub if it wants to sell cask beer.

Round the corner down Mill Lane is the **Tatton**, a pathetic example of under-investment if ever there was one. Outside you think this place should have real prospects with a fine building on a riverside setting. Venture inside and, oh dear, a run-down pub with no real ale. Finally, up at the far end of the village, is the most up-market pub, the **Farmers**. With food to the fore, and now Taylors Landlord and Charles Wells Bombardier to go with the longstanding Greenalls Bitter. This pub is a credit to both area and those who run it. All the village needs now is a pub owned by an independent brewer.

Out and About

Robbies' **Airport Hotel** at Ringway has received a thorough redecoration with what looks like new fixed-seating to complement other new furniture in both the front lounge and the larger back lounge-cum-aircraft-viewing area, all very smart in autumnal colours. The latter has improved food facilities on tap and will doubtless be a hit with the regulars. The beers on offer are Hatters, Best and XB. Finding myself in Gorton (on the Mild Trail, of course), I popped in to the **Plough** and got talking to licensees Tony and Linda. In the two and a half years they have been there, they reckon to have trebled beer sales from a very low start point. Various darts, dominoes, crib and pool teams seem to agree, as they now base themselves here once again following that fallow period. Being a Robbies house it sells a very decent drop of Hatters and Best. Coming to the pub soon are inside Gents toilets; scheduled for work starting in May, the toilets will occupy the space currently taken by the outside facilities and the Ladies loos will be enlarged at the same time. As access will be by the current staircase corridor, no internal room alterations will occur. The beer garden will probably be spruced-up during that period.

Finally, a couple of late snippets – firstly, I hear that there is no longer cask beer to be had in the **Peninsula** (ex-Talbot) in Ladybarn. A sad loss if that's the case. Not too far away, the **Golden Lion** in Withington appears to be undergoing (another) refurbishment. I'll try an call in before next month's column is penned.

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