

'NATIONAL PUBS WEEK'

CAMRA - The Campaign for Real Ale, will be launching a new initiative - National Pubs Week - on 22nd February to encourage everybody to visit and show support for their local pub throughout this week. We want to encourage infrequent pub-goers to go to the pub in Pubs Week. The slogan is "There's a pub for everyone" and it's an opportunity to celebrate the enormous range and variety of British pubs.

Over 20 pubs close every month in Britain, with the majority of these being rural community pubs. CAMRA, with the support of a number of breweries and pub companies, will launch National Pubs Week by issuing posters, leaflets and beer mats to pubs around Britain.

Mike Benner, Head of Campaigns said "The variety of different pubs to choose from in Britain is unique and something we should all be very proud about. It is important that with so many community pubs closing every month we encourage both regular and infrequent pubs goers to visit their pubs in National Pubs Week. Pubs can offer great food, beer and a perfect environment to socialise with friends."

Benner continued "CAMRA's recent market research shows that over 80% of people prefer community and local pubs to town themed bars. This is a week to celebrate all pubs, especially those that offer the local community a place to socialise and those that are based in more rural locations." CAMRA will also be announcing their prestigious National Pub of the Year winner in National Pubs Week. Last year's winner was our very own Nursery Inn, Heaton Norris, This was a rare victory for a pub in an urban location as the majority of previous winners have been rural free houses.

Tony Jerome, CAMRA's Press Manager said, "It will be interesting to see which type of pub will win the National Pub of the Year award this year. The Blisland Inn from the small Cornish village of Blisland, won the award in 2001 but a town community pub, The Nursery Inn, won last year's award. This just goes to show the diversity of great pubs we have around Britain. We will also be issuing a wide range of positive stories to the media to support the launch of the first ever National Pubs Week. These interesting pub stories will hopefully give the excellent British pubs the boost they need and fully deserve."

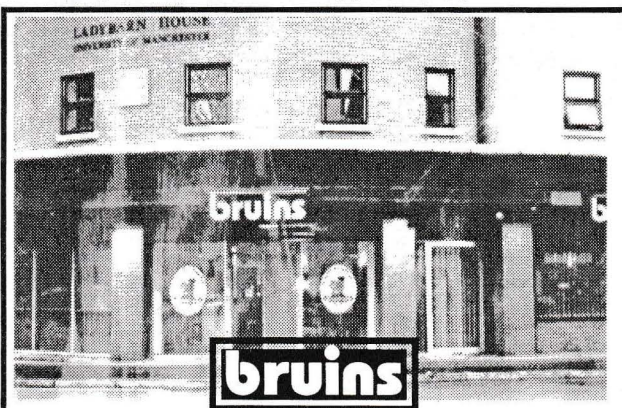
So what will YOU be able to do in this week?

☆ Why not take time out to visit some of the area's classic heritage pubs? Look out for our guide to these in next month's Opening Times.

☆ The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month Award will be presented to the High Grove, Silverdale Road, Gatley on Thursday 27 February. Why not also take the chance to call in at some of the other excellent pubs in East Manchester - this month's Stagger gives details of some handy nearby pubs.

☆ The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Year Award will be presented on Saturday 1 March. Look for details of the winning pub in next month's Opening Times.

It is estimated that there are approximately 65,000 pubs in Britain and CAMRA hope as many pubs as possible will get behind National Pubs Week by displaying specially designed posters, leaflets and beer mats and coming up with innovative pub promotions to attract more customers. For more information on the campaign visit www.camra.org.uk or call the CAMRA Campaigns team on 01727 867201.



Beartown Brewery's latest pub opened on 6 December and looks set to make a real impact on the South Manchester drinking scene.

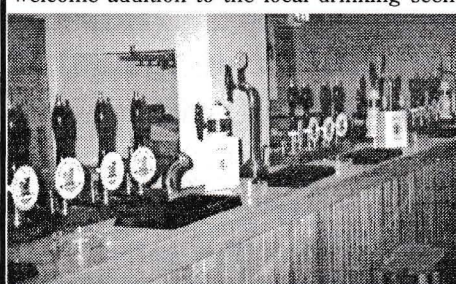
Sited in Fallowfield at the junction of Moseley Road and Wilmslow Road, Bruin's occupies the site of the former Bamboo café and a neighbouring phone shop and while hoping for a substantial student market, also aims to attract all manner of discriminating drinkers with the familiar Beartown combination of quality cask ales and foreign beers.

The pub, or bar as it is perhaps better described, is one large open-plan room distinguished by clean lines and a stylish American ash bar counter dominated by no less than 16 handpumps. There is plenty of seating but also ample space for vertical drinking as is expected in this type of venue. If there could be any criticism it is that the bare walls do make for a rather stark appearance, although no doubt this will change as the bar beds in.

Managers are Australian Dani Nash and her partner Mark Thorp, both of whom come to Bruin's with plenty of licensed trade experience behind them, Mark at the Red Lion in Withington and the Plough, Heaton Moor, and Dani at Heaton Moor's Blue Cat café bar. They certainly seem to have the right approach for this very new type of venture for Beartown Brewery.

When OT called, the 16 handpumps were dispensing four Beartown beers - Kodiak Gold, Bruin's Ruin, Bearskinful and Polar Eclipse, all sold at the usual low prices (the powerful Polar Eclipse was just £1.60) which should be a hit with the student trade. The Ginger and Wheat beers were also due to become permanent additions to the range with the rest of the Beartown portfolio rotated as and when.

Food is sensibly being restricted to bar snacks and this year will see the introduction of acoustic nights. All in all a very welcome addition to the local drinking scene. The next few



weeks, with the post-Christmas return of the students, will be crucial, but Bruin's deserves every success and seems set fair to achieve that.

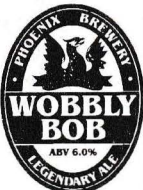
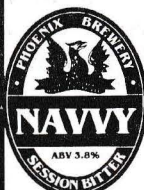
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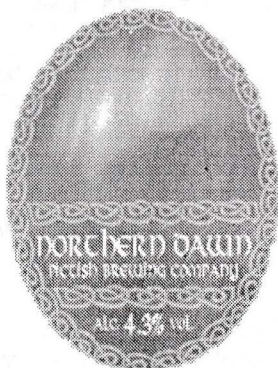
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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

This time last year we were celebrating the Nursery's success in the national Pub of the Year contest. This year the deadline for judging has been extended to 31 January with the results due to be announced in CAMRA's National Pubs Week, which starts on 22 February, so we'll all be on tenterhooks a little longer. Here at OT we are all certainly rooting for the Railway, Portwood, which is one of the four finalists. But even if it doesn't win, what a tribute this is for the local pub scene to produce two national finalists in consecutive years. This in itself is an achievement unprecedented in the history of the competition. By the time you read this, we will have selected our local Pub of the Year for 2003, which will carry our banner in the next contest. Which pub will this be? Well, you'll just have to read next month's Opening Times to find out.

★ ★ ★ ★

Predicting trends in the licensed trade is notoriously difficult, but one thing that stood out last year was the contrast between the difficulties in the 'high street' sector and the continuing health of the community pub trade. Added to that there are strong signs that the decline of cask ale is coming to an end, with most of our local micro brewers and all of our family brewers in robust health. 2003 could well be a turning point in favour of real pubs and real beer.

So, on that upbeat note, let us wish everyone connected with Opening Times, be they contributors, distributors, advertisers or readers a very happy and prosperous New Year.

★ ★ ★

A very small apology: avid readers of Opening Times will be aware that the current publication did not reach pubs until just after the middle of the month. We are aware of certain mutterings of "it's late", "scandalous" and even "lazy b*****s" from the frenzied masses. Well, as *regular* readers will know, we *always* publish later in January - the logistics of getting an issue together in the immediate hours after new year is beyond a volunteer staff. So just to be consistent, we are going to come out at a similar time in February as well! Look for issue 226 from Valentine's day...

John Clarke

P.B. Hutchings

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 225

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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PUB OF THE MONTH JANUARY 2003

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The Stockport & South Manchester Pub of the Month for January is the Mawson, Kincardine Road, Chorlton-on-Medlock.

The pub scene in South Manchester can roughly be divided into two, especially in the inner city area. The dividing line is Upper Brook Street, running south from the City Centre. To the west is Oxford Road and Wilmslow Road, awash with pubs and bars, many of them offering cask beer. To the east pubs are few and far between, and few of those sell cask beer. However in this pub and beer desert, there is one oasis.

This is the Mawson, on Kincardine Road, just off Brunswick Street near its junction with Upper Brook Street. Standing along amidst much redevelopment, the Mawson dates from the 1920s, perhaps a little earlier, and has appears to have altered very little since then. There's a lobby with three rooms off, all with original fittings in a warm oak, even the original bar shutters with brass grilles are still there. The cosy welcoming feel is increased by the red and gold décor.

This is a true community pub with a wide range of regulars from both the neighbouring housing estates plus staff and students from the University just across the road. For the past eight years the pub has been run by Rita and Tony Morris and it's a tribute to their stewardship of the Mawson that it has managed to avoid the problems that have plagued, and indeed seen off, other pubs in the area in recent years. It remains a safe, welcoming haven for all, both regulars and new visitors.

Naturally, there's good beer to be had, too. Three beers are available on handpump – Tetley Mild and Bitter (one of the few mild outlets in the area) together with a permanent guest – Coach House Dick Turpin.

The Mawson would be a good pub wherever it was sited, here, though, its survival and traditional qualities mark it out as something very special indeed. This very well deserved award will be presented on Thursday 30th January from 8.00pm.

The Mawson is well served by public transport. Buses 50 run down Upper Brook Street at regular intervals and it's only a short walk down Brunswick Street from the A6/Hyde Road junction which is well supplied with buses.

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

**IF IN DOUBT -
ASK IF IT'S CASK**

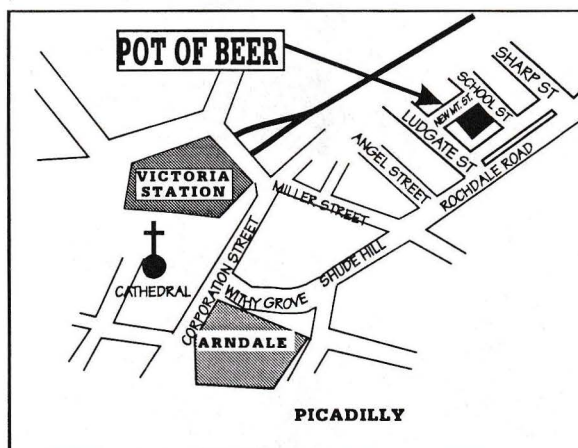


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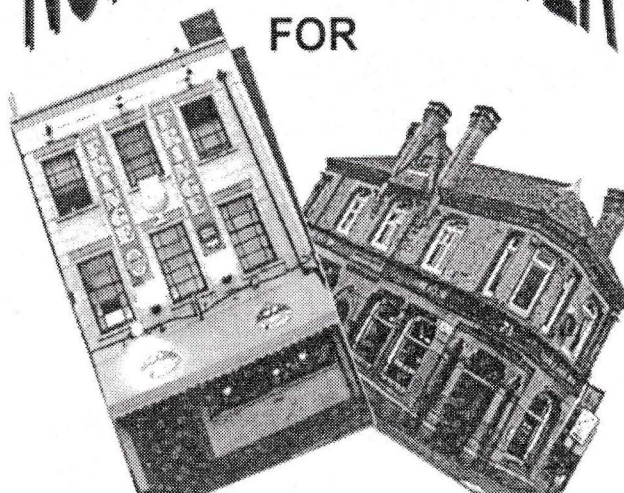
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BAR FRINGE &
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WINTER FAYRE

Pete Soane has been researching some tasty seasonal dishes – all made with beer or cider, of course!
Prime Old Strong Casserole With Dumplings

This recipe serves 4-6 depending on size of appetite

Ingredients

For the casserole:

1½lbs braising/stewing steak
2oz seasoned flour
2oz lard
2 chopped onions
6 sliced carrots
8oz chopped celery
8oz chopped swede
8oz chopped turnip
3 tablespoon tomato puree
Pinch grated nutmeg

1 bouquet garni
Salt & pepper
2 large tomatoes, chopped
1 chopped clove of garlic
1 beef stock cube
2 level dessertspoons soft brown sugar
½ pint Tolly Cobbold Old Strong Ale (or similar strong-ish ale)

For the Dumplings:

4oz self-raising flour
pinch of salt
2oz shredded suet

Method

1. Cut meat into bite-sized pieces, trimming off fat, and toss in seasoned flour.
2. Gently fry the onions in lard until soft then add the meat and fry lightly until it is browned.
3. Stir in tomato puree, seasonings and the sugar, then add the remaining vegetables.
4. Stir in the ale and the crumbled stock cube.
5. Cover and cook in the oven at gas mark 3 (170C/325F) for approximately 3½ hours or until the meat is tender.
6. Prepare the dumplings by combining all the ingredients together and then bind with water to make an elastic dough. Divide this into 6 equal portions and shape into dumplings. Add to the top of the casserole half an hour before the end of cooking time.

Eat and Enjoy! (With thanks to Tollemache & Cobbold Brewery Ltd)

Lyn's Kenford Kidneys

Ingredients

4 Lamb's Kidneys
2oz butter
1 onion, chopped
2 carrots, diced
2 leeks, chopped
2 sticks celery, chopped
1oz flour

¼ pint cider
¼ pint brown stock (use a cube if you want)
Pinch mixed herbs
Parsley for garnish

Method

1. Skin and halve the kidneys. Brown in the butter and set aside.
 2. Add the onions, carrots, leeks and celery and fry gently until soft.
 3. Add the flour and brown
 4. Sir in the cider and stock, stirring until smooth and then bring to the boil.
 5. Add the kidneys and herbs and simmer for 20 minutes.
- Serve sprinkled with parsley. Try this dish with simple boiled potatoes or crusty bread. (With thanks to the Barnsley Ale Report)

Portered Stilton Crock

Prepare this 2-3 weeks before required.

Ingredients

8oz mature Blue Stilton
1oz chopped walnuts
1oz sliced chestnut mushrooms

9oz unsalted butter
Approx. 2 tablespoons of porter

Method

1. Roughly grate the Stilton into a bowl and stir in the walnuts.
2. Sauté the sliced mushrooms in half the butter until soft and add to the bowl.
3. Stir in enough porter to bind the mixture and pack into a china tankard.
4. Melt the remaining butter and pour over the top to seal.
5. Refrigerate for 2-3 weeks. (With thanks to Susan Nowak and What's Brewing).



...is currently
busy with
another

project, but would like to recommend....

January 23 onwards - Rare beers & Breweries festival at the **Smithfield Hotel** on Swan Street Manchester. The list is amazing, many of the featured breweries being less than six months old. Unmissable.

January 30 - February 1 Bent & Bongs (Atherton) Beer Festival. Advert with details on page 10. Probably the only chance this year to drink proper German micro-brewed beer on gravity as well as a sumptuous range of winter beers and old favourites, leavened with some new beers.

LET'S WORK TOGETHER! CAMRA calls for unity to revive beer market

CAMRA, the Campaign for Real Ale, is calling on Britain's brewers to work together on a joint campaign to boost the beer market's ailing fortunes.

CAMRA believes the long decline both in cask ales and the overall market can be reversed by building on the current trend towards generic promotions.

Among the many generic campaigns currently running are CAMRA's "Ask if it's Cask", the Coors-Independent Family Brewers of Britain "Beer Naturally" initiative, the IFBB's "Real Beer Week", and Greene King's "Beer To Dine For".

CAMRA's call for action follows evaluation of the third phase of Ask If It's Cask, which starred the 4,000-year-old Goddess of Beer, Ninkasi. Research showed that 12-15 million people were exposed to phase three, either through the media or Ninkasi beer mats and posters - a huge strike rate, given its tiny budget.

CAMRA Head of Campaigns Mike Benner said: "With Ask If It's Cask CAMRA has shown what can be done with very low budgets. Imagine what we could achieve if we act together. Now we need to bring brewers and trade associations together for a co-ordinated generic campaign for beer."

Mr Benner said the first step should be a conference of key players to report on the progress of the current campaigns and draw on their individual strengths to create a single generic promotion.

"We need to act collectively or the public will get confused about the many messages from too many different campaigns," he said.

"It is essential that we agree a way to promote beer as a wholesome, natural and stylish choice."

"CAMRA would support a generic campaign for all beer types because we think it will build a platform for further promotion of real ale as the crème de la crème. Ask if It's Cask has exceeded our wildest dreams, with high levels of public recognition due to the support of over 10,000 pubs and plenty of extremely positive media coverage."

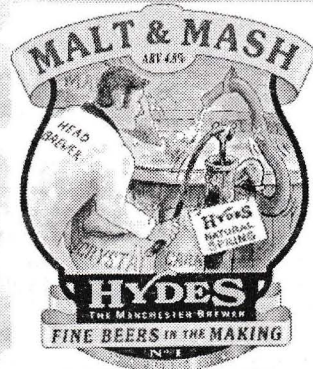
"It sets a precedent for generic campaigns and could be used as a model for a properly funded and co-ordinated initiative across the industry."

The extent of the industry's concern over shrinking sales was highlighted by Coors Brewers chief executive Peter Kendall, who told a conference organised by trade newspaper *The Publican* that consumption had dwindled by seven million barrels in 20 years. Warning that the traditional British pub would die if the decline were not halted, he urged the industry to take a lead from the wine trade.

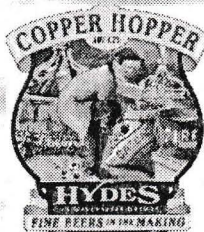
"Pubs will hold their position at the centre of British leisure only if they stock beers that surprise and delight," he said.

WAYNE'S WALDORF AWARD

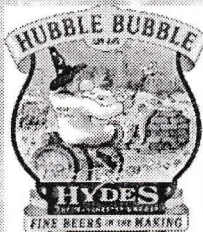
Pictured (right) is Wayne Nuttall, licensee of the Waldorf in Gore St., Manchester City Centre, holding his well deserved pub of the month award for December 2002, awarded on a busy and convivial night the week before Christmas, that showed just how good his beer, and the pub is!



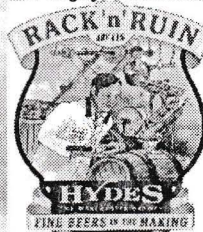
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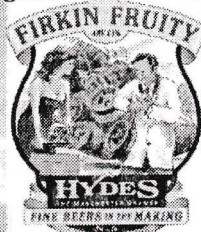
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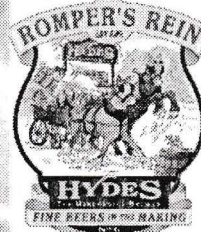
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STAGGER

with Mark McConachie

Six of the Best or East Manchester By Minibus

With the exception of Gorton, the suburban pubs of East Manchester now offer very little in the way of cask beer. Thus, the days of enjoyable crawls through the districts of Beswick, Clayton, Ardwick and Openshaw are now, unfortunately, gone. We have lost a number of pubs over the years to such things as redevelopment, population shifts, the inner ring-road, the Commonwealth Games and so on. These losses, coupled with pubs switching to keg / smooth beers, mean that the few remaining gems are now widely scattered. The purpose of this minibus crawl is to enable us to visit some of these remaining, special pubs in one evening at a fairly leisurely pace so that we can savour them at their best. I would imagine that with enough planning, one could do the same pubs in an evening by public transport albeit in a different order (I've given bus numbers from the city after each pub name for those who may wish to emulate us). Enough of the preamble, let's get to the pubs...

Our first drop-off was in Openshaw, the Oddfellows (buses 219 - 221) on Abbey Hey Lane. This is a two-room, terraced street-corner Boddingtons house that sells Boddingtons Bitter as its sole offering. Much of the pub's original floorplan still remains, as too do some of the marvellous etched windows that add so much character to an old pub. A small, comfortable lounge decorated with film star photos of yore is separated from the vault by the bar; the vault has a dartboard and various team sports photos as decor. All in all a pleasant and, seemingly, well-run pub that appeals to a broad audience (there were quite a few people in for a fairly early hour). The beer proved to be more than satisfactory too, I am pleased to note.

A very short walk (no need for the minibus here) away on Ashton Old Road lies Whitbread's Albion (buses 219 - 221). A largish house this, split longitudinally along the bar to give a vault / pool room to your left, and a reasonably plush lounge to your right; both were very quiet for eight o'clock it has to be said. Perhaps the

attraction was to be had later in the evening, as a karaoke-cum-disco was being set up as we enjoyed our beers. The beers were Boddingtons Bitter and Holts Bitter served to us by two most friendly and attractive ladies who made us most welcome with their good humour and charm. The Boddies was adjudged to be on a par with that in the Oddies, whilst the Holts was well thought of too. With the Albion doing Holts, this makes up for the loss of this beer from Holt's Pack Horse (now closed), and the nearby Lord Raglan. A ten minute walk east (or jump on to the minibus) will get you to

Holt's Railway on Manshaw Road, Higher Openshaw (it's those buses 219-221 again). A spruce-up had obviously taken place (did they know we were coming?), as the pub looked magnificent, both externally and within. I have never



seen the pub look so clean and bright; very well decorated, surely Holt's at its best! There were few people in though; do they know what they are missing? Three rooms, front vault with dartboard, front lounge and a long back snug; couple this with three beers from Holts - Mild, Bitter and seasonal, Thunderbolt. For once, the bitter went untried as we all plumped for the dark beers. The mild proved to be very tasty, whilst the Thunderbolt was positively drooled over by some of our party (one of whom dislikes most Holts beers). Given more time, I'm sure we could have happily made an evening of it there. Over to Ashton New Road next and the Strawberry Duck on Crabtree Lane (buses 216, 231-237), look for Mayne's bus garage. This is a free house set hard by Lock 13 of the Ashton Canal, extended and re-fitted a couple of years back to be, probably, the plushiest and coolest (the trendiest, if you will) pub in all of Clayton, if not all of east Manchester. Once a traditional boozier, now very much a melange of trad at the front of house / bar area, and cool at the much extended rear with its high, exposed roof and leather sofa-ed interior. A very impressive setup indeed and not what you might expect of a pub in the area; perhaps this was the draw, as the pub was the busiest we had experienced so far, and being enjoyed by a good cross-section of the community. Holts Bitter is the lone cask beer and was on truly splendid form, romping away with the Beer of the Stagger title. One of our party almost scored it as a maximum, such was the pleasure it gave.

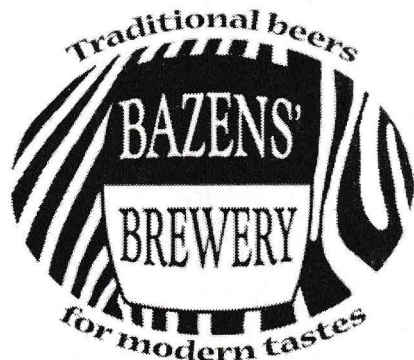
Walking west for five minutes along the New Road should easily bring one to Holt's Grove Inn (buses 216-7, 231-237). This is a two-room standalone house close to the junction of Clayton Lane, very tidily kept. On previous visits we have found the pub to be aswarm with eager chatter and much drink being consumed, but tonight there was plenty of room to spread yourself out; why so? As we were offered the choice of lounge, right or vault, left, we chose the latter in which to recline. This is a good sized room with bench seating aplenty, done out in trad style with enough football memorabilia and darting trophies to interest the eyes of any tired toper. Here too is displayed a thing unique to any pub in Clayton, a World War I Roll of Honour citing local men who had given the ultimate for their King and country during the 'Great War' of 1914-18. I only know of one other such pub war memorial in Manchester, and that, too, is within a Holt's house - the Duke of Wellington in Higher Blackley. Any OT readers know of other pub war memorials in the area? The beers, by the way, were a very reasonable Holt Mild and an even tastier Holt Bitter.

Returning to the bus for the last time as we were on our way to Beswick and the Seven Stars (Holt) on Ashton Old Road (buses 219-221). Once again the offering was Holt Mild and Bitter; the former went untried as we all plumped for the bitter; and a most agreeable choice it turned out to be. The Seven Stars is a large brick and terracotta street corner house that was extended in the eighties by the addition of a side lounge and car parking. This was to accommodate the then large number of people who made it their local. Sadly, custom has dwindled with the clearance of the surrounding housing - it now stands alone alongside the old Co-op building. It lives on, though, ready to host the new property dwellers that will soon arrive; it should get some business from Manchester City fans too when the new stadium opens later this year. I await its return to those thriving, bustling days.

Six different pubs, all splendid in their own way; and not a bad pint in any of them. Beer choice was somewhat limited, so if you do not like Boddies nor Holts, you're stuffed! For a change, you may wish to pop into the Forresters Arms in Openshaw as they do Robbies beers.

6

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Santa's Reinbeer 4.3%
Wass Ale 4.6% (available January)
Pacific Bitter 3.8%
Flatbac 4.2%
Best Bitter/Flying Zebra 4.5%
Freshers' Special 5.5%
Black Pig Mild 3.6%
Knowles' Porter 5.2%

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The Knott, Deansgate, Manchester

The Knott ("part of the Marble Beers Group") has had several incarnations since the former railway arch was cleverly built into and out from to form a bar. Most of these were ultimately unsuccessful 'style bars' serving nothing in the way of decent beer. Its takeover, initially by John Henley of Bar Fringe fame, heralded a welcome change of direction as "Knott Fringe Bar" and the subsequent merger between the Bar Fringe and Marble Beers operations has really seen the bar find its feet (and another minor name change) under the expert management of Paul Knox-Roberts and Marble director Jan Whitehead.

Externally the Knott looks to be quite small but the rambling interior is surprisingly spacious with the added attraction of a first floor balcony for al fresco drinking in the summer months. The furnishings and décor are eclectic - chunky wooden tables and chairs alternate with comfy chairs and sofas (and even a chaise long for the really decadent), a wall is decorated with continental beer posters - but all come together to create a welcoming and comfortable refuge from the traffic of Deansgate outside.

The Knott has always been strong on the beer front but late last year a brand new food operation was launched following the introduction of new catering facilities. Indeed the kitchen is essentially an extension of the bar and the food is prepared in full view of the customers - an admirable development.

So, what of the food on offer? When I called, it was 'between menus' - the special Christmas menu had finished and a new full menu was about to be introduced. This meant that the choice available may have been slightly restricted but never the less was more than adequate for any discerning diner. The small but perfectly formed menu included Leek & Potato Soup (£2.50), Halloumi Kebabs (£5.25, and a firm favourite, I'm told), Rib-eye Steak with White & Black Puddings (£6.25), Steak Club Sandwich with horseradish mayo (£5.25) and Roast Red Peppers, Cherry Tomatoes, Spinach and Goats Cheese (£5.25).

Well, it had to be the rib-eye steak and I wasn't disappointed. Stacked up in the modern fashion was a generous slice of steak, medium-rare as requested, two generous rounds of top-quality black pudding, several slices of rich and spicy white pudding and, beneath, wilted spinach and sautéed new potatoes. The garnish was cherry tomatoes and, if I'm not mistaken, a touch of balsamic vinegar. A well-constructed and thought-out dish, superbly presented. There were no puddings in evidence but, to be honest, I'd have struggled to cope with one.

To wash down this excellent food, there is quite a bewildering array of beery delights on offer. There are currently four cask ales available, two from the Marble stable, Manchester Bitter and the wonderful Ginger Marble, and two guests - Pictish Porter and Hop Back Crop Circle. Paul told me he would like to install a fifth pump if possible. Alongside this is an excellent range of German and Belgian beers, both on draught and in bottle. The excellent Antoon from De Koninck of Antwerp was on draught alongside, Hoegaarden, Budvar and Krombacher. On the bottled front, a highlight has to be Saison Dupont in 75cl bottles - but hurry as there were only four left when I called in early January and it's unlikely to be restocked due to unaccountably slow sales. Real cider and perry, supplied by the estimable John Reek of Merrylegs, is now available, too - Broome Farm Perry when I called. Highly recommended. JC.

Food is available at The Knott every day from 12 noon to 8.00pm. Phone 0161 839 9229.

CONTRIBUTORS TO OPENING TIMES 225:

John Clarke, Paul Hutchings, Phil Levison, Mark McConachie, Phil Booton, Frank Wood, Pete Soane, Peter Edwardson, Chris Walkden, John Taylor, Jim Flynn, Stewart Revell.



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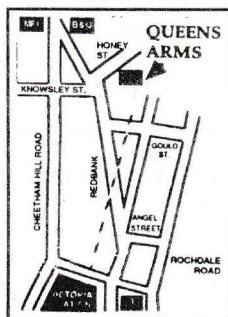
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FIVE GO MAD IN BELGIUM

A return visit by the (in)famous five to the excellent winter beer festival at Essen in Belgium ten days before Christmas provided an opportunity to have a look at a few other places. This is a report on the latest changes we encountered. For details of the Essen festival see my article in *Opening Times* (February 2002) or *What's Brewing* (December 2002).

We stayed in Antwerp and noted some worrying developments in the city. The **Stamineeke** (23 Vlasmarkt) is closed and up for sale and faces an uncertain future. This was a small bar with a friendly welcome and a large range of beers. **Aux Armes de Tirlemont** (29 Eiermarkt), the famous leaning cafe next to the Hilton Hotel, was also closed. The ominous notice on the door proclaimed "gesloten van ???". If neither bar reopens it will represent a significant loss to the Antwerp drinking scene. Additionally the **Kleine Kous** (25 Oude Koormarkt) remains closed. The excellent Winter version of De Koninck at 6.5% ABV was widely available (and was noted on sale nearer to home in the Crescent over Xmas!) My particular recommendations for Antwerp bars are **Quinten Matsijs** (17 Moriaanstraat), the **Oud Arsenaal** (4 Maria Pijpelincxstraat) and the old faithful **Waagstuk** (20 Stadswaag). A day in Brugge (or Bruges if you prefer) offered the chance of returning to some old favourites and also sampling some of the new entries in the latest edition of Tim Webb's *Good Beer Guide* to Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg. The in-house brewpub, the **Brugse Bierkaai** (9 Nieuwstraat) has beers brewed to new recipes, including a fruit beer, Biagra [sic] and a Kerstbier. To be honest the beers were very ordinary. Camra members receive a free beer if they purchase a sample taster of all the beers. The ever-reliable **Erasmus** (35 Wollestraat) had no fewer than five Christmas beers on draught, including Dupont's Avec les bons vœux de la brasserie. Some of us enjoyed food here also. Highly recommended. Other popular bars in the city are the **Brugs Beertje** (5 Kemelstraat), which tends to get very busy - a lot of beers, including new and rare brews from the local Regenboog brewery; **Zolder**, a cellar bar at 53 Vlamingsstraat; and the **Garre** (1 De Garre).

Of the new recommendations we tried **Kuppe** (19 Kuiperstraat), a nice bar with 100 pretty common beers on the (expensive) list and **Bargehuis** (2 Bargeweg), near the station. There was a private party on here and service was slow and inexpert. A reasonable list but I think we caught them at a bad time. Lack of time (and capacity!) didn't allow a visit to the **Ovene** (6 Braambergstraat) but this looked an interesting place from outside.

In Brussels we spent most of the day at the **Bier Circus** (89 Rue de L'Enseignement). This has reduced its list considerably since my last visit in August, but still has the widest range in the city centre. Another bar well worth visiting is **LopLop** (29 Rue d'Ecuyer), which is owned by a former British army officer and featured two Malheur beers on draught. Be warned that these are 10% and 12% ABV (as some of our party found out!!) Very good (albeit expensive) list in an establishment only a few yards off the Grand Place, with a warm welcome for visiting beer tourists. Not far away is **Bier Tempel** (56 Grasmarkt), a shop selling a wide range of bottles and glasses and ideal for those last minute take home presents.

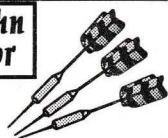
One other place we travelled to was St Niklaas, 25km southwest of Antwerp. This is a relatively undistinguished Belgian city, but it does have one outstanding bar. This is **Tropical** (1 Hospitalstraat). A large open fish tank greets one on entering this clean and smart street corner bar. The beer list comes complete with reproductions of the bottle labels and includes such rarities as Sinpalsken, Achilles and Slaapmutske, plus a good range of traditional gueuzes and krieks. Excellent service and the widest selection of croques I have ever seen complete the picture. Highly recommended. Other recent news is that the Oud Beersel gueuze blender in Beersel, near Brussels, has closed and is for sale. This is a sad loss. Their basic local cafe at 228 Laarheidestraat has to be seen to be believed and their dry, cidery lambic and gueuze are among the most authentic of the style.

Phil Booton - with help from Mark, John, Steve, Adrian.

**JOIN CAMRA (PAGE 19)
 & DRINK REAL ALE**

Stockie on The che

By John Taylor



First and foremost, I hope you all had a good Christmas and New Year, and didn't consume too much real ale. Remember your liver! It tastes great with onions! Anyway, back to the New Year and the Stockport Licensed Houses Super League is set up nicely for an exciting finale, with just four fixtures remaining until the end of the present season. Champions Reddish WMC are still sitting pretty in top spot, but only just, after suffering a recent defeat in the League after 43 consecutive wins - a winning sequence that stretched back to October 2001. What made it worse was that they lost out to their nearest rivals, the Royal Mortar. The victory included master dartsman Darryl Fitton going out in world class legs of 14 and 13 darts. They now find themselves just two points behind the leaders, with the four final matches for Reddish all against teams in the top six.

★ ★ ★

In the week preceding the champion's defeat, the top two played each other in the team knock-out semi-final and on this occasion they came out on top, and this was after they had found themselves 3-1 down. Embassy World finalist Darryl Fitton had started the ball rolling for the Mortar with two legs of 15 darts, and when the Lancashire stars Kevin Weir and John Hollins won games three and four, you would not have bet against the Hillgate side finishing the match off. But it didn't work out like that, and Reddish reached their first ever final thanks to Mick Allen, Vic Clegg, Dave Beckett and young Brad Clegg having the honour of winning the match and extracting revenge for last season's semi-final defeat to the same opposition.

So, the holders went out, but how would last year's runners-up face up? That team was the Union Inn who had played out of the Ash Hotel last term, and they were up against the Magnet. The Union had gone into this fixture on the back of two league defeats against the Printers Arms and great rivals the Mortar. The record of these players over the last 10 years was that they had never lost three on the bounce, so as you can see, the Magnet had no chance of winning!

The Union took first blood through Cheshire player Andy Wright. Martin James then quickly levelled things up. England International and Embassy World finalist Tony O'Shea then put the Reddish side in front again with legs of 19 & 14 and a maximum, but back came the Magnet again with John Beswick winning, including an outshot of 113. Dave Adshead then made it 3-2 to put the Union in front for the third time. Dave Tracey with the aid of a 180 then won his game for the Magnet by two nail biting legs to one over Ray Matthews. It was left to hero of the hour Frank Guest to take out game seven and win a great match for the Magnet, putting them in the final on 11 February at the Royal Mortar. Two semi-finals produced 92 tons or over, and the Union lads were left to re-write the record books after a disastrous December had seen them drop out of both competitions.

★ ★ ★ ★

Back to the league and bottom placed team The Jack & Jill are just one more defeat away from returning to the Premier Division after two seasons in the top flight. It's still no clearer as to who will be joining them, with only two points separating the next six teams. The highest number of points gained by a team who have been relegated presently stands at 14 and, with four games to go, the Nursery, Printers and Copperfields 'A' have 12, while the Royal Oak, Gregg St and Club Leisure are all on 14 points. Just one win from any of those sides could mean all the difference when the season ends on 28 January. It could even go to a play-off. Important wins in the last month include Club Leisure beating the Nursery 4-3 and the Printers Arms seeing off the challenge of third placed team the Union Inn. This was a week after the Printers had also beaten the Bobby Peel, so two great wins for the Cheadle side. Club Leisure also won at the Jack & Jill 7-0; Greg Street beat the Nursery 5-2 away; and the Mortar beat the Union 5-2, with Kevin Weir hitting two 180s. The Nursery got back to winning ways when they took out the Copperfields 'A' 4-3, and finally the Royal Oak had an important 4-3 win over North Reddish WMC.

★ ★ ★ ★

So, it's all to play for at both ends of the table, and we also have the World Finals of both competitions in early January. Keep your fingers crossed and, who knows, by the time you read this Stockport may have its own darts World Champion. Well, it's that time again - see you soon.

Steve, Johanne, Molly & sometimes Jess welcome you to

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CAMRA
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Family Favourites

All four of our local family brewers have new beers out this month. Is this a first?

Robinson's latest seasonal ale is the long-awaited Double Hop, a pale 5% ABV premium bitter. The beer has been available in bottled form for some time and promises to be excellent on draught, with a clean, crisp flavour.



Hydes launch the fist in their 2003 craft ale programme, this year based on a theme of "Fine Beers in the Making", which takes a look at various stages in the brewing process. The first off is Malt & Mash, a 4.8% russet coloured beer brewed with a combination of Pale Ale, Cara and Crystal malts.

J W Lees have also announced their 2003 seasonal ale programme which, as before, combines the return of old favourites with some brand new offerings. For January/February there's a new beer, Two-faced Janus, a 4.2% bitter brewed with modern hop varieties.



This will be followed by Brooklyn Best in March/April, a welcome return for the bitter 5% American-style pale ale using American hops in the brew to give a full-bodied bitterness – when introduced last year this became one of the best-selling of Lees' seasonal beers. May/June has another new beer, 1828 Anniversary Ale, brewed to celebrate Lees' 175th anniversary. This 4.6% beer is described as 'deliciously malty'. The popular 4.2% Scorchers is back for July/August with another new beer for September/October. This is Razzamatazz, a 4.4% beer brewed with a combination of British and American hops. Finally, the year ends with another welcome return of the excellent Plum Pudding for November/December. His rich, dark beer with a hint of fruit is now well-established as Lees winter seasonal.

Holts' latest seasonal beer will be on sale at the end of January. This is Blackwell, a 4.4% beer brewed using Cascade hops and of a colour somewhere between nor-

mal bitter and Thunderbolt. In another startling move, Holts now also have a website. This can be found at www.joseph-holt.com.

Micro Magic

As ever, the local micros have a plethora of new beers out this month.

Pictish Brewery is repeating last year's popular January special. Northern Dawn is a 4.3%



deep amber coloured beer with a malty taste and a bitter finish.



Phoenix at Heywood have the popular Jovian out again at the end of the month and Massacre will be back for St Valentines Day. Phoenix's Tony Allen tells us that business is booming and the brewery is brewing flat out. There are also limited stocks of the two winter specials Humbug (7%0 and Golden Glow (6.5%) still at the brewery. These have been kept back for longer maturation and will be released to the trade in the coming weeks.

Bank Top – has produced a new beer at the request of the Lord Mayor of Bolton. This is the 5% Celebration Ale to mark 750 years of Bolton Charter and was due to go on sale on 17 January. While it will be darker than is usual for a Bank Top beer, it is brewed with Cascade hops to give a moreish bitterness. Bank Top's John Feeney tells us that the brewery move has gone well and he, too, is brewing flat out at the moment.



Whim Ales – Hartington-based Whim are always popular in the local free trade and have started producing one or two additional beers. Currently available is Stout Jenny, a 4.7% stout brewed with oats to give a silky full finish and using Jenny, a new variety of hedgerow hops. The superb Cascade, using guess which hops, is also to be brewed again in the next few weeks.



Boggart Hole Clough – the Moston micro usually has a couple of new beers out and this month is no exception. Pitch Black is a 4.1% stout (as you may have guessed) and also in the pipeline is Winter Sun a light coloured 4.6% bitter beer.

Bazens Brewery – continues to go great guns. The New Year ale, Wass Ale, a 4.5% medium-brown fruit bitter has sold well and the plan now is to produce a monthly special which may loosely based on an astrological theme. The Kings Arms (Bloom St, Salford) continues to be a regular outlet for Bazens beers and they also sell well at the Waters Green in Macclesfield and the new Trackside in Bury where a 9-gallon cask of Pacific Bitter sold out in three hours. Indeed, business is such that the brewery has almost outgrown its current premises, so...

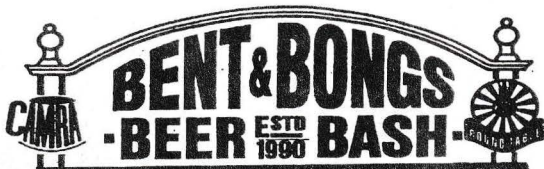


New Kids on the Block

Bazens are to move premises to a new site in Knoll Street in Broughton. They are to share premises and plant with a **new micro brewery** which is to be set up by David Facer who is currently the head brewer at Boddingtons Strangeways Brewery. David is currently sourcing some plant and the plan is that the two brewers will brew and sell their beers on an alternate basis. Each will use their own yeast strain so a degree of care will have to be taken in what is being billed as one of the first co-operative micros in the country. Bazens is hoping to make the move in March or April and in the meantime David Facer will be carrying out some test brews on the existing Bazens plant. More news when we have it.

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