

NAVIGATION Is LOCAL PUB OF THE YEAR

Top Award for Stockport Pub

It's usually a close run thing in the voting for Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA's Pub of the Year. This year, though, it was a different story as the Navigation, the Beartown Brewery tied house on Lancashire Hill, stormed to victory with an overwhelming majority of the votes cast. This long-time keg only ex-Wilsons pub was acquired by Congleton's Beartown Brewery in December 2001 and almost overnight transformed itself into one of the foremost cask ale outlets in the town.

Everything about the pub was been improved and the Navigation became a relaxing, comfortable place in which to drink – probably for the first time in years.

This transformation would be impressive in itself, but it is in the range of beers on offer that the pub really scores. In less than a week, the standard keg range (including beers, lagers and stouts) and the usual boring bottles were all ditched. In came six cask ales from Beartown Brewery. Bearskinful and Kodiak Gold are permanent bitter and the superb stout, Polar Eclipse, is the third permanent beer. The rest of the Beartown range rotates among the other handpumps – and such is the demand that a seventh pump had to be installed. Prices are keen too, with the beer either £1.50 or £1.60 a pint depending on strength. The only other draught beers are two imported German lagers and these are supplemented by a bottled range of Belgian and German beers. Real cider has also been successfully introduced – between three and five are always available, and many cider aficionados now consider the Navigation to be the top cider pub in the north of England.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the right people behind the bar and in Angella Lindsay, Beartown have been very lucky indeed. Angella has run the pub with impressive efficiency – firmly dealing with any troublesome customers but offering a warm welcome to the many new faces the pub has seen. Mention also needs to be made of daughter Chantal who is a regular face behind the bar, and whose efficiency and charm have won over many of the regulars old and new.

Angella was overjoyed when told the news of her win. "I was absolutely over the moon," she told Opening Times. "I'd just like to thank everyone involved with the pub, this award really does make all the hard work worthwhile."

It was a double win for Beartown as another pub, the Beartown Tap in Congleton has also won the local Pub of the Year from Macclesfield Branch. Beartown's Ian Burns was clearly a very happy man when OT spoke to him. "To have achieved Pub of the Year in a little over 12 months of opening at the Navigation comes as a real bonus and we are particularly delighted as it also coincides with the Beartown Tap receiving Pub of the Year from Macclesfield & East Cheshire," he told us. "We see this as recognition for the hard work put in by everyone at Beartown and in particular Angella and Chantal at the Navigation, and Steve King at the Beartown Tap. We would like to thank all our regulars for their continued support in all our outlets, and also thanks to Opening Times for the positive feedback and help over the period."

This very well deserved award will be presented at the end of National Pubs Week, on Saturday 1 March when a full house is expected. Get there early if you want a seat.

The Navigation is well served by public transport. In particular bus 203 will drop you very close.



Beartown's Navigation - Lancashire Hill

...AND KRO BAR IS RUNNER-UP

While the Navigation is a very traditional pub, Kro Bar on Oxford Road is a very different kettle of fish.

Uncompromisingly modern in its interior design and catering mainly (but not exclusively) for the student market, Kro Bar is perhaps not the typical 'CAMRA pub', at least not in the eyes of those who believe the clichés. In point of fact, Kro Bar proves the point that good pubs come in all shapes and sizes, and make no mistake, Kro Bar is a very good pub.

Converted from the former premises of the Manchester Temperance Society, the stylish interior and rear conservatory extension were designed by Manchester architects Stephenson Bell who have successfully incorporated a very modern bar into a listed Georgian building. Upstairs other public rooms have a more traditional feel and are decorated with old Temperance memorabilia found during the restoration of the building.

The owner of Kro Bar, Mark Ruby, is Danish and a Kro is a Danish country pub. As it says on the Kro website (www.kro.co.uk) the aim is for the bar to have the qualities of a Kro – good food, good beer and a warm welcome. Mark, ably assisted by bar manager Martin Judge, has certainly achieved these aims. The bar is lively and friendly, as you would expect from its location, and the quality of the food is legendary with a wide variety of freshly prepared dishes, often with a Scandinavian accent, available.

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IN THE EDITORS' VIEW..

This month we report on an important initiative from Interbrew. This giant company intend having the quality of Draught Bass and Boddingtons Bitter assessed for quality by the Cask Marque organisation. In total some 8,000 pubs will be visited with the aim of getting 2,000 of them full Cask Marque accreditation.

Thus far so good – and all credit to Interbrew for their obvious commitment to and investment in cask ale quality. But – there's always a 'but' – what about those pubs which are checked and fail? Cask Marque's Paul Nunny reckons that about 20% of pubs fail their assessment and that's based on a history of checking pubs where there is at least some degree of commitment to real ale. The 8,000 pub company outlet now brought within the scheme are likely to be rather more of a mixed bag so a rather higher failure rate can be expected. The problem is that even if very poor Boddington's or Bass is uncovered, Interbrew can do bugger all about it. Their contract is to supply the companies that own the pubs and are thus largely powerless to dictate where their beers are sold. It also remains to be seen if this initiative will address the main problem with Bass and Boddingtons in many outlets – their degree of maturation. The problem with these beers is that they 'drop bright' very quickly. In some cases, certainly with Boddingtons, they go on sale the day they arrive in the pub. OK they are fresh, sparkling beers but to even approach their quality of old they need 7 days or more in the pub cellar before going on sale. 10-14 days is preferable. Now two weeks stock is a lot of beer with a lot of cash tied up in it, and few pub company outlets can or (in the case of managed pubs) are allowed to afford that investment.

Until this major problem is addressed it doesn't matter how many boxes the Cask Marque inspectors tick, Bass and Boddies will remain disappointing in too many pubs. So – a real commitment to quality cask beer or half a million pounds worth of window dressing? The proof of the pudding will be in the drinking.

Congratulations and commiserations this month. Hearty congratulations to Beartown Brewery's Navigation in Stockport and Brewery Tap in Congleton, both winners of their respective CAMRA Branch's Pub of the Year awards. A remarkable double for this small brewer. Both will now go forward to Regional and, hopefully, National competitions for CAMRA's next Pub of the Year award.

This brings us to CAMRA's current Pub of the Year contest. The award is due to be announced during National Pubs Week, which starts on 22 February. We are sworn to secrecy regarding the winner, which, sadly, isn't Stockport's Railway. However, to reach the final four is an achievement in itself and licensee Alex Lord and owners Porter Brewing Co can take a great deal of pride in that.

John Clarke

OPENING TIMES ISSUE 226

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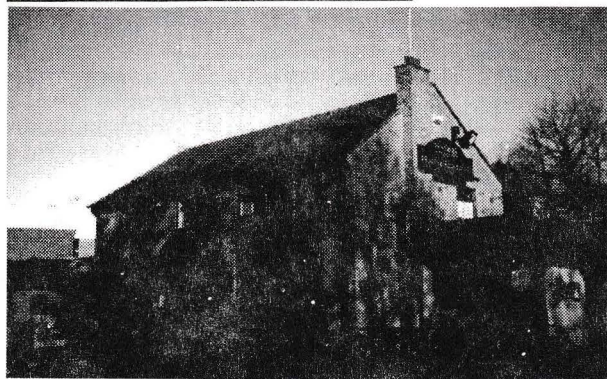
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PUB OF THE MONTH FEBRUARY 2003

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The Stockport & South Manchester CAMRA pub of the month award for February 2003 has been won by the High Grove on Silverdale Road in Gatley.

Tucked away in the centre of a large housing estate, it is Gatley's best kept secret; a pub that could accurately be described as 'difficult to find but well worth the effort'. About three years ago, Hydes extensively refurbished the pub, opening out the interior by adding a purpose built restaurant at one end with a lounge area at the front and public bar area behind. Much has been made of the pub's mahogany bar and traditional styling, creating a pleasant urban pub with a distinctive country feel. Inside there are many interesting local pictures and historical photographs of Hydes's brewery.

Then enter husband and wife team Brendan and Jan Adderley, an experienced couple with over sixteen years in the trade, mainly with local Greenalls and Scottish & Newcastle brewery pubs. Difficulties in working with these large corporate breweries have been well documented in OT, and so when Hydes's brewery offered Brendan and Jan the High Grove in Gatley, this was an opportunity not to be missed. Changes in the cellar followed, the pub became much cleaner and with a more enterprising and varied menu, trade was soon up. Brendan addressed beer quality issues, introducing Hydes bi-monthly craft ales and this, together with ensuring that the rest of Hydes beer portfolio was in the very best of condition, (Hydes dark (Welsh) mild, bitter, and Jekyll's Gold), increased sales even further.

The pub is now the focal point of the local community. You can be assured of good beer, food and a warm welcome when you visit. The High Grove is everything a good community local pub should be and so it richly deserves the pub of the month award. So why not join the local CAMRA branch to celebrate this award, which will be presented to Brendan and Jan during National Pubs Week on Thursday 27 February when, no doubt, a great night will be enjoyed by all. SB.

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

OPENING TIMES SPECIFICATIONS

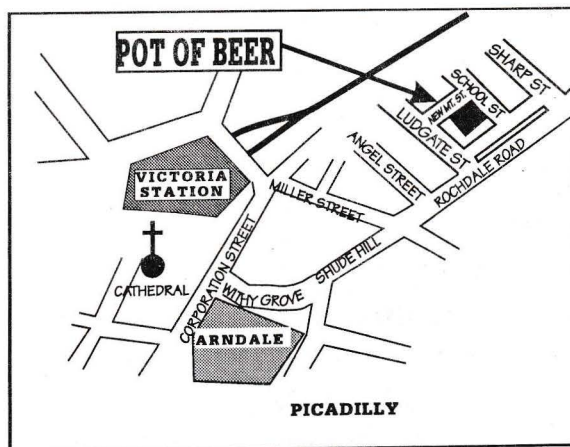
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...KRO BAR - RUNNER UP

...Continued from page 1

However, it is on the beer front that Kro really makes an impact. Given the type of bar this is, you could be forgiven for having very low expectations on the beer front. You would however be very wrong. A wide range of foreign bottled beers (both Belgian and German) are complemented by both interesting foreign beers on draught and, pride of place in the centre of the bar, five cask beers on handpump. These always include two or three guests, usually from micro-brewers. There's a real commitment to quality too, a policy which has resulted in very healthy cask ale sales in an environment where the bigger operators would have you believe it would be a non-starter.



ON THE EDGE

A recent "Five Years Ago" in Opening Times November 2002 referred to a rare beer launch at the Market Restaurant on High Street in Manchester City Centre. A bottled "Market Porter" had been specially brewed for the occasion by Dave Shelton, lecturer in Food Technology at Manchester Metropolitan University. The beer had been produced on the small brewing plant at the 'Toast Rack' in Fallowfield. A question was posed regarding another beer, brewed on a previous occasion, for the Market Restaurant. This was a celebration brew produced back in 1983, another "Market Porter", in a limited edition of 96. It commemorated the "the re-opening of the restaurant under the auspices of Lin, Anne and Peter". The beer was "brewed at home in Fenton, Staffordshire, by P E Rushton". At that time, the restaurant was at 30 Edge Street, not far from the present situation on High Street. Removal from Edge Street became imperative when everything was apparently in danger of slipping into a large hole, which had started to appear in the floor.



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INTERBREW SEE THE LIGHT?

Interbrew, the Belgian brewing giant that owns Boddingtons Brewery in Strangeways, have engaged Cask Marque to assess all of the 8,000 pubs selling cask conditioned Boddingtons Bitter and Draught Bass, even though they don't actually own any of the outlets themselves, reports Jim Flynn. Over the next two years 2,000 cask ale licensees will be sponsored for Cask Marque, the licensed trade's independent real ale quality accreditation scheme, with Interbrew paying half their fee - the maximum allowed under the rules of the scheme. The will double the number of pubs with Cask Marque accreditation.

These pubs will have all their cask beers quality assessed, whether or not they are supplied by Interbrew. In the remaining 6,000 outlets, only the quality of the cask Boddingtons and Draught Bass will be assessed and these pubs will not receive formal accreditation.

The cost of all this to Interbrew is estimated at £500,000, perhaps one of the biggest investments in cask ale quality ever made by one producer. It also amounts to a remarkable recognition that in a concerning number of outlets the quality of the beers leaves something to be desired. As a result, the reputations of what a decade or two ago very highly regarded brands have suffered considerably in the market place. Interbrew's research shows that if consumers are concerned about the quality of their beer, 34% will transfer custom to another pub and 49% would order a different drink next time.

This initiative, together with the increasing advertising of cask Boddington's Bitter must give real ale drinkers hope for the future. This is after all the first time a brewery company has sponsored such assessments outside their own tied estate.

There are however a number of barriers which Interbrew still have to surmount in their quest for improvement in quality. It has to be remembered that they control none of the pubs, and while they will supply licensees with support and encouragement, they will not withdraw products from pubs that don't come up to scratch.

The biggest question however is whether Interbrew are really converts to the cause of real ale. Over recent years they and their predecessors have continually treated cask Boddingtons Bitter and the 'smooth' nitrokey version as a single undifferentiated product. This has resulted in confusion in the mind of the general public and a loss of numerous cask outlets across the Opening Times area. Will this damaging marketing strategy and attitude of mind cease? Given that in those pubs where nitrokey Boddingtons is also no sale, Cask Marque have also been asked to assess this product, too, there must be grave doubts. Time will tell.

EARLY HOURS FOR STOCKPORT PUBS?

An innocuous item under 'Public & Legal Notices' in the Stockport Express of 15 January could herald earlier opening for Stockport pubs.

The notice was by the Clerk to the Licensing Justices and announced that on 10 February, the bench would consider a proposal to modify general licensing hours within limits set down by the 1964 Licensing Act. If granted, it will mean that pubs in the area will be able to open at 10.00am rather than 11 as at present.

So, what's brought all this about? The instigators of this move are none other than the JD Wetherspoon organisation, operators of pubs like Calverts Court in the town centre and the Kings Hall in Cheadle Hulme. They have selected certain licensing districts to try and obtain this extension in permitted hours and Stockport is one of those chosen.

It might not be all plain sailing, though. Legal experts in the trade press have cast doubts on their chances of success and it will be necessary to demonstrate a 'need' for the change. Having said that, given that general liberalisation of licensing hours is in the air, it may well be that the local bench will decide that no harm can come from this. Some traditional town centre pubs busy during the day but very quiet at night, might welcome the move as it would enable them to open when they have a greater chance of attracting custom. By the time you read this, though, the die will be cast - one way or the other.

STAGGER

with Dave Williams

Cheadle & Gatley

Our Friday night Stagger kicked off on a dark autumn night with just three of us putting our heads round the door of the **Red Lion** in Gatley which, as expected, sold no real ale. Not the best of starts. With our curiosity satisfied, we went across to the opposite end of Gatley's village green to the advertised meeting place, the **Prince of Wales**. This Hydes' pub, a listed building, was originally two cottages and recently had a visit by Rod Stewart. Inside, there is a lounge on one side and a fine vault with pew seating on the other. Cask beers were Hydes Mild and Bitter, both were tried and found to be pleasant enough without being anything special.

A few yards down Church Road was our next pub, the **Gothic**. Once a Methodist church, it then became Gatley Wine Bar and the Gothic, the only pub outside Merseyside owned by Liverpool's Cains brewery. We entered an open-plan, one-roomed pub, still with many original church fittings, which was already quite busy. Most of us found seats on the balcony (the pub was so busy, some had to stand) and tried the Cains Mild (very good), Bitter and FA (both good). Also on offer was the guest beer - Shepherd Neame Bishops Finger. Alas, there was little time to enjoy the pub as we had to race on to the next one to give us time to get the bus to Cheadle.

That pub was the **Horse & Farrier**, a recently refurbished pub, now a Hydes' 'Heritage Inn'. We all managed to pass the bouncers at the entrance and the door was opened for us by a uniformed member of the pub staff. The pub was very, very packed. The last time I visited the Horse & Farrier I thought it looked a little shabby and run-down but now it's much more plush. There has been an increase in the drinking area with even an old bottle store now turned into a drinking vault. We all found seats in the "Smoke Room", which was filled with Hydes' memorabilia. On the beer front we were advised by the bar staff that the Jekyll's Gold was 'going off' but fortunately Hydes Light, Bitter and the seasonal Winter Fuggle were all still flowing. One grumble here - the uniformed bar staff all seemed to be serving the beer with big heads, rather less than full pints, although top-ups were freely given when requested. The Light and Bitter were fine while the Winter Fuggle was rated a very good winter ale in excellent condition.

Leaving the pub we spotted our bus about to depart but a quick dash saw us all aboard and bound for Cheadle where we got off at Gatley Road. Opposite was **Weavers**, now an all-keg "Q-Bar" but our destination was the **White Hart**, a landmark former Boddingtons pub, remembered by one of our party as selling the best 'original' Boddies "I've ever had". Boddies Bitter is still sold at this rambling, open-plan, wood-panelled pub, catering mainly for a young, upmarket crowd. Of course, present day Boddies rarely, if ever, matches its past glories, and what we had here was perfectly summed up by one of our party as "a fine example of a mediocre beer".

Next up was walked down High Street to the **Crown**. This Hydes pub has a large, glass shop-window style frontage and inside is a large L-shaped room furnished in traditional style. Three beers were available on handpump - Hydes' Mild, Bitter and Winter Fuggle. The Mild was judged to be generally adequate while the Bitter and Winter Fuggle were both in very good nick.

Our next destination was down High Street, passing the **Vine** (once a fine pub and due for a major refit) - a few of us briefly checked this out but, you've guessed it - keg only! I'm told cask ale is promised for the future, though. Thankfully, nearby is another Hydes' pub, the **Olde Star Inn**. This pub has a fine frontage, and inside is a large, roomy, traditional local. We all sat in the basic front lounge area sampling Hydes Light and Bitter, both considered to be perfectly OK.

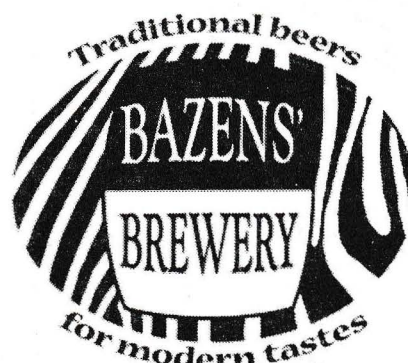
We drank up and moved down to the **George & Dragon** where two bouncers greeted us as we entered. The G&D is a spacious pub with wood-panelled walls, plus a very tiny hidden snug (complete with many Manchester City pictures on the wall). On this particular night loud dance music was playing and the pub was extremely busy. The beer fayre was Boddies, which was considered poor, and Greenalls Bitter (now an over-cloying and sweet beer) which was at best average.

Next up was a long and challenging walk down Manchester Road to the **Cheshire Lines**. Located next to the M60, this ex-railway station is now a Banks's "drive-in" pub. The interior is spacious and open-plan, with an island bar in the middle of the pub. Naturally, there is a lot of good railway memorabilia adorning the walls. The beer line up was Banks's Bitter, Marston's Pedigree and a guest, Hall & Woodhouse Tanglefoot. The Banks's and the Pedigree were both in extremely good nick, but alas the Tanglefoot was not quite so good.

At about 10.30 we made a bee line back up Manchester Road and raced into the **Ashlea**, a "Chef & Brewer" pub (ie Scottish & Newcastle restaurant-style pub), with a large amount of bric-a-brac spread around the interior. We swiftly drank either Courage Directors or Theakstons Best Bitter. The Directors was in poor condition, wit the Theakstons little better. We were all alarmed at having to pay over a pound, just for halves.

With just minutes to go for closing time, a few of us dashed up to the **Royal Oak** on Stockport Road, our first Robinson's pub. A karaoke was in full swing, but disappointingly the pub's back snug was locked out to one and all! Worse still, we found the Robinson's Best Bitter in a very poor condition ("the worst Robbies beer I have ever tasted in my life" commented one staggerer), whilst the Old Tom strong ale (no other beer, including mild, was available) was also extremely poor. The Royal Oak has normally always been a great pub with a reputation for top quality beer; it seems like we caught it on a rare off night, A disappointing end to the stagger.

In the whole this was a very stimulating stagger taking in a wide and assorted range of pubs, and a variable selection of ales sampled. Of course, this Stagger is based around one Friday night, and the beer ranges, quality and the vibes of the pubs themselves could be different at another time. Why not give these pubs a go yourself - it will be well worth it.



Sea God 4.3% (Feb/March)

Pacific Bitter 3.8%

Flatbac 4.2%

Best Bitter/Flying Zebra 4.5%

Black Pig Mild 3.6%

Knowles' Porter 5.2%

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NATIONAL PUBS WEEK

STARTS SATURDAY 22ND FEBRUARY 2003

The aim of National Pubs Week is to encourage more people to visit pubs more often. New research compiled by CAMRA shows an astonishing 20 pubs close every month and over a quarter of adults (27%) never visit a pub. If this trend continues then Britain's unique pubs will disappear very quickly!

Mike Benner, CAMRA's Head of Campaigns said "The aim of National Pubs Week is simple - to encourage people to visit pubs more regularly. Its slogan is 'There's a pub for everyone' and we seek to highlight the enormous variety of pubs in the UK. We are not only supporting the quaint country pubs but also community and town centre pubs as we want all of the pub industry to benefit from this initiative."

CAMRA, and a number of industry partners, are currently encouraging as many pubs throughout Britain to take part in National Pubs Week and organise a variety of events throughout the week to encourage more people to attend pubs more regularly.

To support the launch of National Pubs Week, CAMRA will be issuing a number of interesting pub press releases. These will include:

- ★ Announcement of the 'National Pub of the Year' winner - the 'Best Pub in Britain'
- ★ New research findings into people's pub going habits - what age groups, sexes and regions are visiting pubs the most / least, what pub promotions will attract more pub custom and the main reasons why people choose a particular pub.
- ★ The Pub is the Hub - A year on since the launch of this exciting initiative by the Countryside Agency and the British Beer and Pub Association, CAMRA takes a look at how the pubs market has changed.
- ★ Announcement of Britain's top ten Pub names - Has the 'Rat and Parrot' taken over from the 'Red Lion'? CAMRA looks at pub names through time and how they have changed.

Locally, the Macclesfield & East Cheshire Branch are holding events most days, while Stockport & South Manchester will be presenting both Pub of the Month and Pub of the Year Awards in this week.. See the CAMRA Branch Diaries for details. In addition, here are some of the area's heritage pubs - why take time out during National Pubs Week to visit some of these historic gems?

HERITAGE PUBS NEAR YOU Your Handy Guide for National Pubs Week

The Opening Times area is well blessed with historic locals of all shapes and sizes. Here we present a selection of some of the best. All sell real ale and all will repay a visit - National Pubs Week is the ideal opportunity to take time out and visit these rare examples of our historic public house heritage.



The Plough, Hyde Road, Gorton

This is a late C19 pub incorporating parts of an earlier building. The layout is virtually unaltered and comprises tap room, bar parlour, smoke room, pool room, all off a central hall, and an upstairs meeting room. The interior was remodelled in 1893 and most of the fittings installed at that time are still intact. The bar parlour, to the left as you enter, has been in continuous use since at least 1802.

Real Ale - Robinson's Hatters and Best Bitter

The Nursery, Green Lane, Heaton Norris

The Nursery was built in 1939, replacing a mid-nineteenth-century century pub. The pub is virtually as it was built. There is generous use of light oak including full-height panelling in the lounge and the leaded glass windows are decorated with an occasional coloured glass panel depicting horticultural nursery motifs - a spade, a watering can or a flower. In addition to the large lounge there is a bar lobby area, a smoke room/dining room, a vault with a separate entrance and a function room/dining room upstairs.

Real Ale - Hydes Mild, Bitter, Jekyll's Gold and Seasonal beer

The Circus Tavern, Portland St, Manchester

An utterly unspoilt pub which is a tremendous survival in bustling central Manchester. Just one bay, this early nineteenth-century stuccoed building,



has a corridor on the left leading to two simply-fitted public rooms, one behind the other, on the right. The servery is placed under the stairs and is only large enough for one person to perform the noble act of serving the beer. *Real Ale - Tetley Bitter*

Mr Thomas's Chop House, Cross St, Manchester

A tall, narrow building dated 1901 in the gable. It's a typical example of exuberant end-of-the-nineteenth-century architecture. The interior consists of three spaces, one behind the other, the rear two defined by a wide, green-tiled arch. These two rear areas are characterised by an impressive display of tilework, with a green dado running round the walls. Black and white tiled flooring throughout. The bar counter and back is modern. *Real Ales - Boddingtons Bitter, Taylor's Landlord, Guest Beers*

Peveril of the Peak, Great Bridgewater St, Manchester

This pub is an amazing sight. There are a number of pubs (especially in Birmingham) where interior walls are covered in tiles, but here the display is outside. This simple, two-storey mid-Victorian building was remodelled about 1900 and given a ceramic facing. One the ground floor it is yellowy-green, and above the orange name band it



is cream. The interior has three rooms and a dog-leg corridor which also serves as a drinking lobby. The woodwork dates from the time of the great remodelling. *Real Ale - Websters Bitter, Guest Beer*

Alexandra, Northgate Rd, Edgeley

Built in 1911, the Alexandra is beautifully intact. Only the back bar and the outdoor department have been altered. The entrance hall has glazed tiles with multi-coloured Art Nouveau motifs A room leads off each corner of the hall and each glazed door is etched with 'Tap Room', 'Smoke Room', 'Bar Parlour' etc.. The decoration continues up the stairs with an impressive coloured glass window on the half landing. A short corridor leads to an attached billiard room with exposed roof timbers and a painted glass skylight and a bay window with billiards etched in the glass. *Real Ales - Robinson's Bitter, Seasonal Beers*

Arden Arms, Millgate, Stockport

The Arden Arms has a beautifully preserved interior dating from the nineteenth century, with simple wooden panelling, bench seating and quarry tile floors. Three rooms open up off the lobby area around the bar and a fourth room can be accessed by passing

CAMRA's NATIONAL INVENTORY

What they say: "We have preserved its character"

What they mean: "We've knocked out all the walls and filled it full of junk"

Of the 60,000 or so public houses in the whole of the UK, it is estimated that less than four per cent have been able to escape drastic alteration in recent times. The number whose interiors might be considered of **outstanding** heritage interest has dwindled to around 200 or so. The National Inventory is CAMRA's pioneering initiative for bringing greater recognition and protection to the country's most priceless historic pubs.

What then is the 'National Inventory' and what is its importance?

The list of pub interiors is the culmination of 11 years' work, having started life as an 'emergency initiative' to take account of the turmoil facing the brewing industry following the 1989 Beer Orders and the large-scale pub disposals by national brewers that came in their wake. The idea, then and now, has been to identify and seek safeguarding for the very best of Britain's architectural heritage of pub interiors.

Hundreds of pubs have been looked at by a team of volunteer surveyors and while many worthwhile pubs were flagged up, far fewer met the, admittedly demanding, criteria. Time and again we encountered pubs which had been seriously compromised with walls and interior fittings ripped out, sometimes replaced with reproduction 'historic' interiors, but in many cases simply victims of the refurbishments of the Sixties and Seventies when little regard was had to our architectural heritage. Often we encountered surviving fragments, perhaps even an entire room, sitting incongruously amid the neon and plastic of a later age.

The range of pubs which have made it to the list reflects the very diversity which is the backbone of the British public house tradition. Apart from the classic 'gin palaces' we have also sought out plainer but still unspoilt urban and rural beerhouses. In Victorian towns and cities as much care was lavished on smaller domestic pub as on the great gin palaces, and since these pubs have perhaps had more need to adapt and change with the times, truly unspoilt

examples have proved elusive. Of particular rarity are truly unspoilt pubs from between the wars. Not only do fewer pubs date from this period but the larger 'roadhouse' style pubs have invariably been gutted over the past 20-30 years. It is in the smaller, domestic examples that the 1920s and 1930's pub survives, with such local pubs as the Nursery and the Swan With Two Necks being prime examples of this vanishing breed.

Apart from identifying the best of what is left, the National Inventory is also being used as a tool for these pubs' preservation. We have found that no more than half of the pubs identified had any form of statutory protection. Even where a pub was listed as being of historic importance, the listing description tended to concentrate on the interior features and generally overlook what was inside, what made the building work as a pub. In some cases this led to the false belief that only part of a pub was protected. Exteriors were lovingly preserved while all hell broke loose inside. This now is beginning to change, with more pubs getting listed status and the descriptions of those already protected 'beefed up' to lay greater emphasis on interior details. At the same time many pub owners have shown a greater appreciation and understanding of the remaining heritage qualities in their pubs.

The Opening Times area includes a large number of heritage pubs, many of which are on the National Inventory. Why not make National Pubs Week (February 22-March 1) the chance to visit some of these superb locals - just see our handy guide for one near you.

through the bar. There have been some structural alterations in recent years (new openings, a new room formed from former living quarters and some bench seating removed) but the quality that remains is very evident. *Real Ales - Robinson's Hatters, Best Bitter, Old Tom, Seasonal Beer*

Swan With Two Necks, Princes St, Stockport



Rebuilt or remodelled about 1930, this pub has not really changed since. The interior is simply organised with a corridor running the length of the building on the right-hand side, and leading (from front to back) a public bar, the servery (with a drinking lobby in front) and a lounge behind. Extensive use is made of wall panelling as was so often the case in inter-war pubs. The lounge, particularly, with its Tudor-style fireplace, succeeds in creating a warm, comfortable atmosphere. *Real Ales - Robinson's Hatters, Best Bitter, Frederics, Old Tom, Seasonal Beers*

Queens Head (Turners Vaults), Little Underbank, Stockport

A three-storey building in the town centre and part of a late eighteenth-century or early nineteenth-century block. Like the Circus Tavern in Manchester it is extremely

narrow and shows how many small urban pubs must have looked a hundred years ago. The furnishings are probably late Victorian. Behind the main bar are a couple of smaller ones. Make a point of having a look at a very rare survival behind the counter - taps which formerly dispensed wines and spirits. *Real Ale - Sam Smith's Old Brewery Bitter*

Stalybridge Station Buffet, Platform 1, Stalybridge Station

This is a marvellous institution - probably the last-remaining, truly traditional railway buffet in the country. It was part of the 1885 rebuilding at the station and consists of a conservatory and the main part of the buffet within the brick-built station buildings. In the latter there's a long, straight, marble-topped counter with shelving on the back wall. Stone fireplace and lots of railway memorabilia. To the right these areas have been brought into public use as part of the buffet; the extreme right-hand part was originally the first-class ladies' waiting room. *Real Ale - ever-changing range of guest beers*

Harrington Arms, Church Lane, Gawsworth

The Harrington Arms is actually part of a working farm and thus is a rare example of a once common way of making a livelihood - combining public house keeping with other activities. The main part of the pub is a three-storey red brick building of the late C17 or early C18, which has been added to in the C19. The public areas lead off a through corridor and are located in both the original and added parts. The servery is right of the entrance in a narrow room, which leads on to two further public areas. The tap room has simple seating and a quarry tile floor. *Real Ales - Robinson's Hatters, Best Bitter*

The Castle, Churchwallgate, Macclesfield

This whitened brick public house probably started life originally as late C18 dwellings which were remodelled later as a pub in the C19. The central entrance leads to public rooms left and right, the bar counter being in the small right-hand one; this has fixed seating and panelling. On the left is a smoke room which has fixed seating, bell-pushes, and painted slate fire surround. There is a serving hatch in the corridor. Towards the rear is a parlour with glazed partition to the corridor. *Real Ale - Theakston's Best Bitter*

Other Heritage Pubs

Pressures of space prevent us giving details of all the heritage pubs in the area. Apart from those mentioned above, these additional pubs are also well worth visiting:

Stockport - Blossoms, Buxton Rd, Heaviley: Multi-roomed Victorian pub; rear smoke room is unspoilt gem. Robinson's beers.

Manchester - Hare & Hounds, Shudehill: Unspoilt inter-war interior; National Inventory listed. Tetley and Holts beers.

Manchester - Marble Arch, Rochdale Rd: Stunning tiled interior and mosaic floor. Marble and guest beers.

Stalybridge - Grosvenor, Grosvenor St: unspoilt inter-war multi-room interior. Robinson's beers.



Marble Arch



MANCHESTER MATTERS *by Cityman*

The post-Christmas lull seems to have gripped the City Centre with very little news to report and, from what I can gather, not that much in the pipeline, either. The introduction of a bar billiards table at the *Knott* (opposite Deansgate station) though, is a welcome site at this excellent bar, which just seems to get better and better.

Openshaw Revisited

I therefore decided to pay a return visit to Openshaw, this time to check out what remains of the pub scene on and around Ashton Old Road heading back to the City Centre. It's certainly the case that the pub scene here is very much a game of two halves. In Higher Openshaw, out from the crossroads there have been very few pub losses and quite a few of the pubs serve cask ale. Head in the other direction, though and it's a very different picture.

The first port of call was the *Railway* on Chapman Street. No real ale and looking pretty run down with dirty windows and broken glass in the door. Nearby are the closed and boarded remains of the *Napoleon* (or the Jive Inn as it was called in its dying days) – a very depressing site, I must say.

Round the corner on Ogden Lane both the *High Bank* and the *Royal Oak* survive but neither offer any cask beer. On the main road, though, it's mainly a depressing collection of defunct pubs. The *Pack Horse* (ex-Holts) is closed, boarded and for sale; the *Smithfield* (ex-*Locomotive*) is closed, boarded and up for auction. The *Staff of Life* and the *Malcolm* are now private residences and the *George* has been converted into shops. The *Drovers* is also closed and boarded and has been painted a lurid green into the bargain. Add to that numerous demolitions (*Wrexham*, *Grey Mare*, *Travellers Call* etc) and it's all pretty dreary. In fact apart from the improving *Seven Stars* in Ardwick, only two pubs still function. One, the *Queen Anne*, is a keg-only free house. The other is an oasis.

This is the *Leigh Arms*, opposite Openshaw College. A former Whitbread house, it's obviously well-run and still sells cask beer in

the form of Marston's Pedigree and, wait for it, Cains Mild. When I called the Pedigree had just run out and the new cask wasn't ready yet. The mild, though, was terrific and obviously selling well. It's a pub I shall certainly be visiting again.

Out & About

Before setting off for Openshaw, I finally managed to get my head round the door of the *Friendship* in Gorton. No real ale.

I also visited a few pubs in the Bradford and Beswick area. The *Big Bradford* remains keg as do the other pubs on and around Grey Mare Lane. The former *Britannia* has also re-opened as *Summerbees*, aiming to cash in on the football trade from the nearby stadium. The *Britannia* was a excellent traditional Lees pub, with lounge and vault, cask beer but very few customers. *Summerbees* is open plan, café-bar style, keg beer...and very few customers. Perhaps it'll take off (and will certainly be busy on match days) but I have to say I'm not convinced. It will be interesting to go back in, say, 12 months time to see how it's faring. Heading back into town, I called at the *Mitchell Arms* on Every Street, a Banks's house with just cask bitter (and, oddly, keg Boddies as well). Another well-run pub, I can't help but wonder if the introduction of the keg Boddies has hit cask ale sales as my bitter was certainly past its best. Hopefully, I was just unlucky because I've had good beer here in the past.

Whilst in the *Mitchell*, I was told that the nearby *Bank of England* had reopened. It looked ramshackle and closed, but open it was and peering through the windows, it doesn't look like it sells real ale. Back in Didsbury, Paul and Irene Saxton are now settling in at the *Station* and are already making their mark. They are to introduce the W & D guest beer, axe Marstons Pedigree because of poor sales and replace it with Banks's (mild). Other changes planned for the pub include introducing Sky sports, joining the darts and quiz leagues, and next season to set up a pub football team and enter the team into the North Cheshire League.

Meanwhile, there's no news of their successor at the *Rising Sun*, Burnage. I'm told that several people have come and gone but as this was typed there was no permanent successor. Perhaps there will be more news next time.

And that's your lot!

8

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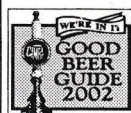
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The Ring 'O Bells, Marple

The Ring O'Bells is this year's winner in Robinson's Best Kept Bar & Cellar competition. Presentation night at the pub was accompanied by a very impressive array of pub food so a return visit to sample the menu was clearly on the cards.

The pub is a four square stone-build building of no little age, sited on the towpath of the Macclesfield Canal. There's something about pubs on canals - they always seem to be a cut above the rest and the Ring O'Bells is no exception. There's an attractive outside drinking area overlooking the canal, and this is doubtless a major attraction in the summer months. On a damp day in February, though, the appeal of the pub was inside and what a welcome refuge it proved to be.

While there has been some opening out over the years, there is still essentially a multi-room format with a bar and snug at the front, another room opposite the bar and a fourth room, often used primarily for dining at the back. The whole place is decorated and furnished in proper country pub style - that's warm and welcoming rather than twee and kitsch.

Late on a Thursday lunchtime the pub was still busy with diners although it should be stressed that this remains very much a pub with food rather than being an eatery that just happens to sell beer. An excellent pint of Hatters provided an ideal accompaniment to browsing the menu, which is wide ranging to say the least, running the whole gamut from snacks and starters to three-course roast dinners. The printed menu is supplemented by a daily specials menu and I ended up choosing from this. There was a choice of four starters priced from £3.25 to £3.95 and a number of mains ranging from £6.95 to £11.25. I went for the top of the range in each case with salmon, dill & lime pate for starters followed by fillets of steak with a black bean, mushroom and onion sauce.

The starter swiftly arrived and the round of pate surprised me with a mousse-like texture, but none the worse for that. The salmon and the dill blended perfectly, as they are wont to do, with a hint of citrus underpinning the whole confection. Accompaniments were a soft roll and a small salad garnish.

The main, served with rice and chips, although I could have had just either, was terrific. Large slices of tender steak, whole button mushrooms and tender onions complemented each other well with the savoury black bean sauce in the background. It was a generous portion and I just about finished. I also noticed a generous bowl of hotpot delivered to a neighbouring table, which also looked to be filling well-prepared dish. Its recipient certainly demolished it with obvious enjoyment.

There's a temptingly described range of puds available, too but, unusually for me, I couldn't manage one. I didn't even have room for another beer, although both Best Bitter and Double Hop were also available and, if anything like the Hatters, would have been something to savour. I'd been meaning to eat at the Ring O'Bells for some time and now I've been I'm just sorry that I didn't go sooner as this really is top of the range stuff. Highly recommended.

The Ring O'Bells is at 130 Church Lane, Marple. Telephone 0161 427 2300. Food is served 11.30-2 and 5.30-8.30 Tuesday to Saturday and from 12-7 Sunday. No food is available on Mondays and the catering operation will be out of action for the first two weeks in March. Phone ahead for details.



PUB OF THE SEASON

Macclesfield and East Cheshire's Pub of the season for Winter 2002/3 is the Dolphin in Windmill Street, Macclesfield, enthusiastically run by landlord John Lythaby. A Robinson's house, it is a traditional pub serving the local community (there are 7 pub teams!) and also making visitors feel welcome. Since arriving at the pub just over 2 years ago, John (a CAMRA member) has extended the beer range and has recently had extra pumps installed, so that he can serve not only his regular Best Bitter and Hatter's, but also Snowdon and occasional seasonals - including a welcome barrel of Old Tom on the bar in the Winter months. The Dolphin epitomises a good Winter pub - as well as the aforementioned Old Tom, there is a real fire, cosy rooms with gleaming brass and copper and it is within easy walking distance of the town centre. The presentation was made Monday 13 January.



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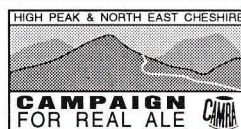
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FEATURED PUB The Royal Oak, Mellor

This month's featured pub is the Royal Oak on Longhurst Lane in Mellor between Marple Bridge and New Mills.

Situated in the centre of a brick built row of attractive cottages the Royal Oak is recorded as having been a pub as early as 1828. Throughout the 1800s Mellor was a hive of industrial activity with mills, forges, and quarries as well as numerous farms

During all this period the pub will have played its part in providing hospitality for the local workers and passing travellers alike who passed its door. Gradually as the industry declined the area became more residential but the Royal Oak continued to provide refreshment as it does today to both locals and passers-by.

The beers are Robinson's Hatters Mild, Best Bitter and also Robinson's seasonal beers all served through hand pumps and currently the opening hours are 5.30 to 11.00 Monday to Friday, 12.00 to 11.00 Saturday, and 12.00 to 10.30 Sunday.

Externally the pub is in keeping with the area having been there before much of the surrounding property was built. Inside the pub is cosy and friendly with an extremely good beer garden at the rear with very good views over the river Goyt valley to Strines and Marple.

The pub admirably fulfils a role of community focal point particularly acting as a base for several sports teams including lacrosse and cricket. There is also a quiz team in the Stockport and District quiz league against whom the author has had many close contests when playing for another league team, the Ring O Bells in Marple!! On the catering front part of the pub has been developed as an Indian restaurant with excellent food served each evening from 6.00 onwards. So here you can have the best of both worlds, good beer and a good curry, and on warm nights the delights of an excellent beer garden as well

Mike and Tracy the licensees are happy to provide sandwiches and snacks at weekend lunchtimes but they need to be ordered in advance. Mike also has plans for Friday coffee mornings.

All in all this is an excellent pub, doing well the job it is intended to do and long may that continue. The pub has many attributes not the least its warm and welcoming atmosphere and is richly deserving of continued support and visits.

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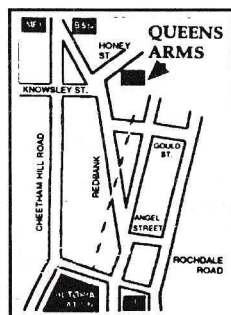
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