

25p

What's Doing

MAY 1995



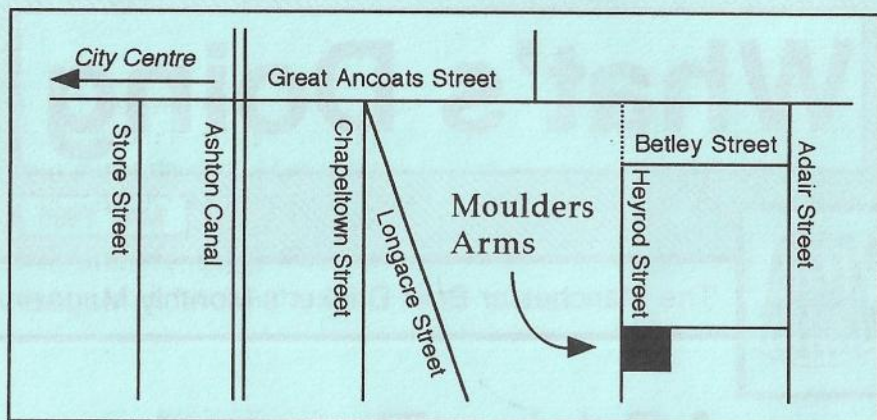
The Manchester Beer Drinker's Monthly Magazine

A Pub in a Thousand

The number of pubs which cater simply for the beer drinker is dwindling fast. The ones that are left, like the Moulders Arms in Ancoats, tread a fine line between over-popularity, with all the compromises that brings, and that decline we see so much of, characterised by rapid turnover of licensees, desperate gimmicks to attract punters and eventual closure and torching.

The Moulders, under the stewardship of Alan Southgate, a man with over thirty





years experience of running Manchester pubs, manages to keep to that line brilliantly. He serves just one cask beer - Burtonwood bitter - in excellent condition. The four small drinking areas are kept cosy, clean and well maintained without spoiling the simple, traditional style of the place. All types of people are made welcome and the food is best described as a bargain - tasty, adequate portions of hot pot, curry or liver and bacon, for example, priced between £1 and £1.75.

This area of Ancoats is a bit of a backwater and has seen a tremendous amount of change since pubs like the Moulders served workers in the local iron-casting industry. In the 1920s there were another seven pubs within a hundred yards of the Moulders - all gone. The beautifully maintained green and gold tiled walls are now a landmark among the modern factories and warehouses, so the pub is a valuable link with the past which is well worth seeking out. Don't put off your visit, though, because by the time you get round to it the Moulders may have succumbed to the encroaching gentrification of Piccadilly Village and become a caricature of a traditional pub. Or it may have gone for good.

Peter Barnes

Moonlighting

The latest news on the Moon Under Water, J D Wetherspoon's latest venture in Manchester, is that a ceiling has been uncovered in the building and found to be one worthy of Michaelangelo. Over £40,000 is being spent on renovating it to its former glory. There's no indication yet of an opening date for the pub.

New Manchester Pub Guide

Peter Barnes

Manchester Pubs and Bars 1995

A year ago What's Doing reviewed the new and much-needed 'Central Manchester Pubs'. The guide proved to be very popular and quickly sold out. Rather than bring out a reprint, it was decided to publish a new guide to keep pace with the continually changing situation in the city centre.

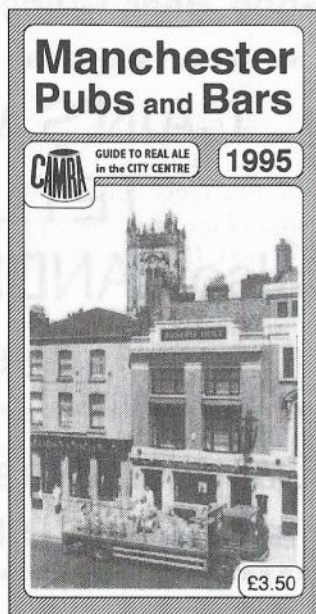
142 pubs and bars have been covered by a doughty group of 10 surveyors. (There were 17 in 1994 - it will soon be a one-man operation.) They have resisted the temptation to recycle the old descriptions, so it all comes up fresh and new.

Last time I commented that 'Central Manchester Pubs gets almost everything right'. This time they seem to have more or less perfected it. The photographs are all new and as varied and interesting as before; the descriptions show some signs of having been edited and honed; café bars, instead of being dismissed in a couple of lines, are taken as seriously as the pubs, and the guide is made consistent with the Good Beer Guide by identifying all 1995 GBG entries.

The value of the guide is enhanced by articles on suggested pub crawls, local breweries, cider, city food and a historical piece which explores the origins of our earliest licensed houses, including a set of 22 eighteenth century pubs which have survived to the present in some form. It is worth having the guide for the benefit of the scholarship of this article, regardless of anything else.

Is there anything wrong with it? Well, they forgot to list Fredericks as one of Robinsons beers in the local breweries section.

'Manchester Pubs and Bars' is available from city centre pubs, price £3.50.



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Kings Ale

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Spread Eagle

There is now Holts in Chorlton-cum-Hardy - and I don't mean as a guest ale. Joseph Holt plc succeeded in its second attempt to establish a tied house in this town-like south Manchester district. Their first attempt was a number of years ago, when they failed to get a licence for a small building adjacent to Chorlton Bus Station. But the company (and Holts drinkers) have been more than amply rewarded with a much larger building, formerly the Tara Hotel and before that a doctor's house.

It opened at 7pm on Wednesday April 12th and I was the second customer to order. (John Hutchins, the well-known CAMRA member, was the first.) The pub is called the Spread Eagle and is diagonally across from the Lloyds (Bass) in Wilbraham Road.

A lot of work has gone into cleaning the exterior and fitting out the pub, which has a very large room and a vault in what was the building next door. Opening times are 11am-11pm Monday-Saturday and normal Sunday hours; food will be available and there is a function room in the basement. On the opening night the beer was great and mild and bitter are sold at the usual managed house prices. Mine hosts are Ian and Jane McIntosh from the Red Lion at Irlams o'th'Height.

Chorlton

Not so very many years ago, Chorlton was regarded as a real ale desert. Then real ale was on sale in all but one pub - the Bowling Green (Bass) in Chorlton Green. Having not been inside this pub for a long time, imagine my surprise when entering recently I was met by handpumps. The real ales (which have been established for almost a year) are Stones BB and Worthington BB, and a guest ale from Bass' portfolio will be added shortly.

On Tuesday 11th April I went into seven Chorlton pubs and as far as I can remember the many and varied traditional beers on sale were magnificent. As well as the Bowling Green, the pubs were:

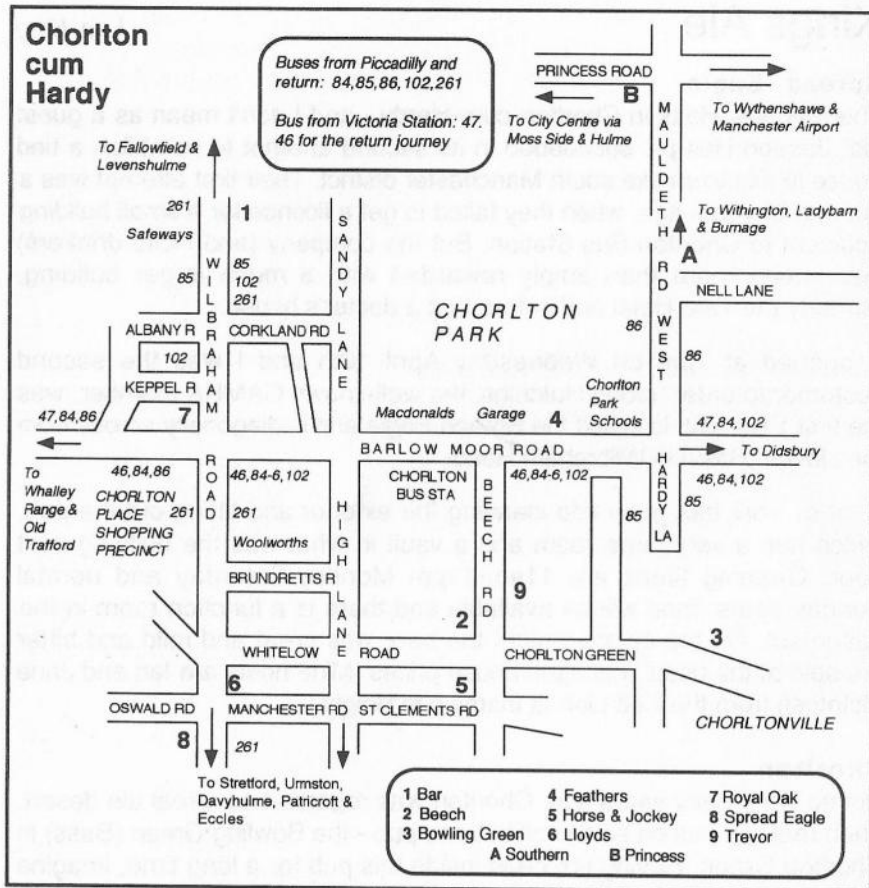
The Trevor (Greenalls): Greenalls Original, bitter, Stones BB.

The Beech (Whitbread): Chesters bitter, mild, Boddies bitter, Taylors Landlord and BB, Flowers Original, Marstons Pedigree, Morland Old Speckled Hen, Wadworths 6X, Courage Directors, Theakstons XB.

Horse & Jockey: Websters bitter, Ruddles County and BB.

The Lloyds (Bass): Draught Bass, Worthington BB, Stones BB, Thwaites Daniels Hammer.

Royal Oak (Whitbread): Boddies Bitter, Pedigree, Castle Eden.



Feathers: Chesters bitter, Castle Eden, Boddies bitter, Marstons Pedigree.

Also, I must not forget the latest offering from Vance de Becheval (of the Marble Arch). His 'Bar' has Ruddles County and Marstons Pedigree. Chorlton has all this and now Holts as well!

The map shows which buses to catch from Piccadilly Bus Station and Victoria Rail Station. Chorlton's pubs are not as compactly placed as they are in Didsbury and Withington, but it's not all that bad. An easy pub crawl route is to start at the Bar, go to the Feathers, then via Beech Road, where four pubs are grouped together. Then along St Clements Road to the Lloyds and Spread Eagle, finishing at the Royal Oak.

The pubs mentioned are in the centre of Chorlton-cum-Hardy, but there are two others, both selling real ale: the Southern (BodPubCo) and the Princess (Whitbread). Another Chorlton Pub, the Oaks, is no more.

New Brews

I'm indebted to Steve Baker and Graham Mitchell of the Labologist Society for information on newly-established microbreweries:

Blackmoor Brewery, Batley, West Yorks: Bog Standard Bitter 4.2%,

Batley Shampayne 4.8%, Dark Old Ale 5%

Greenwoods Brewery, Wokingham, Berks, have announced their first brew: Hop Pocket Bitter 3.8%

Hodges Brewery, Bishop Auckland, Co Durham: Hodges Traditional Bitter 3.6%, Best Bitter 4.1%

Also starting up are the Wylie Valley Brewery, Orton, near Warminster, Wilts; Jolly Boat Brewery, Bideford, Devon; Coombe Brewery, Ilfracombe, Devon, and the Beartown Brewery, Congleton, Cheshire.

Jennings of Cockermouth, Cumberland, are brewing Cocker Hoop Golden Bitter (4.8%), aimed at the guest beer market. The Castle Brewery stands on the River Cocker, or maybe the name of the beer is derived from 'cock-a-hoop', meaning: 1 In high spirits, 2 Boastful, 3 Confused: Askew. (The mind boggles.)

The Freeminer Brewery in Gloucestershire has purchased one of the small hand bottling machines from the West Coast Brewery with the intention of producing some special ales.

Transatlantic Tipples

Fifteen years ago the USA could quite rightly be thought of as a beer desert, with the notable exception of the Anchor Brewing Company of San Francisco. There were no more than 40 breweries, all producing cool, bland 'lagers'. At the last count there were 471 breweries, with all but a handful being specialist micro-breweries and brewpubs producing a full range of ales, stouts, porters, Bock, Weizen, Märzenbeers and many more.

Although the West Coast is the ale lover's paradise (Portland now boasts 19 breweries!) Hawaii has the highest beer consumption per head. A famous German drinking song suggests, 'Es gibt kein Bier auf Hawaii' - how wrong they are. Over on the mainland, Nevada has an annual consumption of over 300 pints per head, compared to the national average of 185.6 pints. While the playground atmosphere of Las Vegas helps in the figures for Nevada, the religious fanatics keep Utah down to just over 100 pints per head. California, surprisingly, doesn't appear in the top few states.

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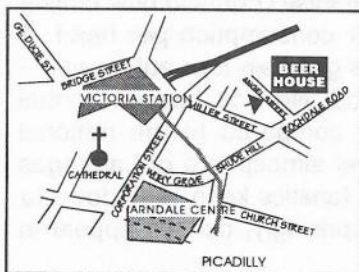
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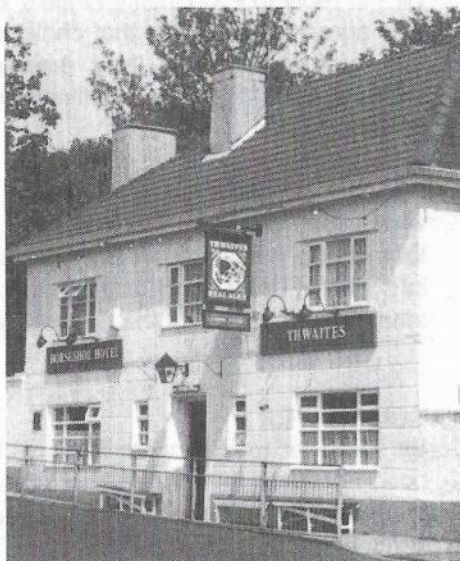


More cask ales from Thwaites

In April Thwaites launched their 'Connoisseur Cask Ale Collection'. Nine different cask beers - one a month - will be available to selected pubs. The beers are Daniels Hammer (5.2% ABV), Town Crier (4.5%), White Oak (3.8%), Scallywag (4.5%), Snigbrook Ale (4%), Thunderbolt (4.5%), Big Ben (5%), Fawkes Folly (4.8%) and Old Dan (6.5%).



The Horseshoe at Ringley is one of the participating pubs and was selling Daniels Hammer in mid-April.



More Café Bars

Whilst sipping his cappuccino in a fashionable part of the city, WD's café bar correspondent learned of two new bars about to open in Manchester. Arctic is opening in a railway arch opposite the Canal Café Bar on Whitworth Street West. The second bar is situated above the Chang Rai restaurant on Princess Street and will be run by the restaurant. The new city centre pub guide will soon need an update at this rate, although we doubt whether real ale will feature in either outlet.

Trafford News

Thwaites' only pub in Trafford, the Bay Malton on Seamons Road, Broadheath, has been refurbished. The split-level seating has been removed, the vault properly segregated again and a small outside seating area has been created, although there is only one table! Handpumped Thwaites bitter is the only real ale; the mild that was on sale when Thwaites first took over has been discontinued.

The Tatton in Altrincham, a long-standing entry in the Good Beer Guide, has broken with its 'Boddingtons bitter only' rule and is experimenting with a guest beer. The policy has worked well in several other local pubs, so let's hope that it is a success here as well.

Letters

Blackboards

Sir - In reply to P.C Chalky White's 'Blackboard Jungle' letter in April WD, I fully agree with his view that chalkboards provide valuable information for the customer, when they are concerned with beer or food. The information is usually attractively presented and makes a colourful and inviting display.

I do, however, deplore their use in pubs such as the Tut'n'Shive chain, where they display bad jokes, poor philosophy and weak proverbs. The theme pub boards don't provide talking points, if this is what they are intended to do. It is virtually approved graffiti. To my mind, many of these small boards cheapen the appearance of the pub.

S Barker

Robin's Rot

Sir - Further to Robin Pendragon's letter in April WD, it appears that he does not have a very good sense of direction where beer is concerned. Instead of heading to the beer deserts of Eire, France and Denmark, I suggest he visits the beer paradises in Germany and the USA. Despite Mr Pendragon's suggestions, all German beer is totally 'real' - free from any additive or preservative as defined by the Bavarian Reinheitsgebot of 1516.

Very few British breweries do not use additives - in fact, additive-free beverages probably account for about 1% of the so-called 'real ale' market in Britain. Although Belgium offers a variety of hop and malt related beverages, most of these are full of additives, such as fruit. Germany therefore has no challengers to its claim of producing the widest range of beer styles anywhere in the universe: from top fermented Weizenbocks to bottom fermented smoke beers.

Mr Pendragon suggests that Germans suffer short measure beer, but most German bars serve over the prescribed amount in a glass. The average German beer glass holds up to 35% more liquid than the amount being charged for. On his final point, it seems a shame that Mr Pendragon has overlooked Germany's more famous exports, like BMW, Mercedes, 'Oriana' and Claudia Schiffer.

Beinlos

Guidelines

Sir - The new Manchester pub guide makes for interesting reading, especially the historical bit, but some of the pub comments are, shall we

say, bland. Where is the critical CAMRA attitude of not so long ago? Imitation Irish bars selling Tetley bitter and student pubs are lavished with the sort of praise normally associated with some of the better real ale free houses.

I dare say the Irish theme will make way for something else in due course, and personally I'm looking forward to the return of the Bavarian bierhalle - German beers are much nicer than keg Guinness. But student pubs! When I was a student my friends and I stayed well away from those noisy, crowded places with their characteristic aroma of stale sweat, exotic substances and the previous evening's vomit. We went looking for good beer in decent pubs. Then CAMRA was formed and we all joined. It was a nationwide organisation dedicated to promoting real ale and the best of the country's pubs. Not any more, if the Manchester pub guide is anything to go by.

Educated Eric

Thought for the Day

Sir - Turning a page on the desk calendar today, I came upon the following: *That which is Bitter to endure may be Sweet to Remember - Old Proverb.*

Old Proverb? Surely an epitaph to Holts Bitter, circa 1980. It all but brought tears to my eyes.

P Jordan

Where is he?

Sir - Does anybody know what has happened to Brendan Dobbin, late of the Kings Arms in Chorlton-on-Medlock? It would indeed be a tragedy if his superb brewing skills have been lost to the world. I know people who would kill for a pint of Yakima Grande Pale Ale.

Geoff Atkins

What about a real lager?

Sir - As a keen home-brewer, I produce various real ales such as bitter, mild, stout and lager. I also enjoy the commercial equivalents from many breweries. However, although beers such as bitter, mild and, to a growing extent, stout, are readily available in cask form, lager is not. It is very popular in keg form, but no commercial brewery produces a cask lager. The only product that could be likened to a real lager is the 'Summer Ale'. Are breweries missing out on an as yet untapped market?

Gary A Page

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Lees Corner

Ken Holt

As part of Lees' continuing investment in their tied estate, the Park Inn, near Wythenshawe Park, has been refurbished and new handpumps installed. This managed pub is one of the brewery's busiest (two others are the Tommyfield in Oldham centre and the Lancashire Fold in Middleton) with a barrelage which is in the same league as Joseph Holt's bigger outlets. Near to the Park, the Jolly Butcher in Baguley is about to undergo the same sort of treatment, as is the Boarshaw Hotel in Middleton.

The Oddfellows in Peel Lane, Heywood, was bought from Control Securities in the late 1980s and is now established as a popular community pub under the tenancy of Ken Croombs. It has recently been refurbished and opened up, while retaining separate rooms, and has the added attraction of a crown green.

On a less positive note, two of Lees' best regarded licensees in the Oldham area - Barry Burton of the GBG-listed Bridge Inn and Tony Lees of the GBG-shortlisted Falconers Arms - are both leaving the trade after ten years and three years in their respective pubs. Both houses are well run and have a strong local following - the brewery is sorry to see them go but hope they may return to the trade in the future.

Finally, on a more victorious note, Lees are producing a one-off cask conditioned bitter for the VE Day celebrations, with the original name 'VE Day Bitter'! This 4.8% ABV brew will retail at £1.45 per pint and be available to the tied and free trade for a limited period around the VE Day holiday on 8th May. Pubs are required to order the beer in advance, and for every barrel sold the brewery will be donating £10 to the two main servicemen's charities. Let's hope this turns out to be a popular one-off and Lees can be persuaded to extend their current beer range to introduce this as a premium bitter.

Export

New from Whitbread: bottled 'draughtflow' export-strength Boddingtons bitter. A 'widget' will create the head and Whitbread are aiming the brand at the premium bottled lager market, to compete in the fridge alongside Becks, Red Stripe, Stella and the like. At a time when bottle-conditioned beers are on the increase, have Whitbread identified a new niche, or have they missed the boat?

Closed and Boarded Corner

Closures continue to affect inner city pubs and those in the suburbs. In Rainsough, the Staff of Life remains firmly boarded.

In Cheetham Hill, the troubled Griffin on Cheetham Hill Road is shut once again following some St Patrick's Night trouble, allegedly. Over in Newton Heath, the Swan on Oldham Road is boarded and sign-less. It was trading as an Ascot Holdings pub and its future is now seriously in doubt.

Two Ancoats pubs have closed (both were on keg beer): the Bass house on Merrill Street, the Falcon, is closed after 'licence problems' and the Crown on Old Mill Street is boarded and vandalised. The Jersey Lily and the Smiths Arms remain shut, so the situation in Ancoats is worsening. Is the malaise of Miles Platting slowly spreading outward?

The latest Salford pub to be boarded up is, surprisingly, the Corporation on Cross Lane.

Ice cold in the Alex?

Bass are launching a new concept premium lager which can be served at a mere 2° Centigrade. Perhaps Bass have found a niche in the market for a pre-dentist visit drink!

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CAMRA Good Beer Guide 1994/1995
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Minimum Six Handpumps

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Winton and Monton news

Mark McConachie

Winton and Monton lie to the north of Eccles and are bounded by Worsley and Swinton. In all there are eight pubs in the two villages and a recent survey made the following discoveries...

At Magic Pub Co's Jolly Carter on Worsley Road there are enough fishing nets and mirrors to throw a stick at - see the article on Magic elsewhere in this issue. Down the road at Robinsons' Brown Cow, Hatters and Best Bitter have been joined on the bar by Old Stockport Bitter at £1.12. It is a most welcome addition and the decision to rename this marginal beer appears to have been a wise one.

In the shadow of the M602 motorway at the Egerton (BodPubCo) and Ellesmere (Holts), little appears to have changed. After walking up Parrin Lane to the Bridgewater Canal you come to the Bargee (free?), where the regular Robinsons BB and Courage Directors were joined by Hatters Mild at £1.25.

Over at the Blue Bell (S&N) on Monton Green there is Directors again, but this time paired with Theakstons BB. The Blue Bell is the area's biggest and most expensive-looking pub - the lavish interior is a big improvement on how it was in its Chef & Brewer days. Outside, the place is styled 'Two pubs in one'. I take this to mean it is a classy business eaterie at lunchtime and in the evening a trendy, upmarket disco pub. Whatever it means it appears to smell of fish and chips at all times and the prices are a bit steep.

Bypassing John Smiths' Drop Inn (and why not?) we reach the Park Hotel (Holts) on Monton Road. Considerable changes have been made here too (see previous WDs). The car park has been extended on to land to the left of the building and the pub itself appears to be larger in all directions. Both lounge and snug have been made bigger and a new bar is in place in the vault. It is hoped that the Bridgewater mural will return and that the windows will not be the present wired Georgian glass variety. (I live in hope of the free-flow electric pumps being retained, too.)

Northumberland Cheer

The closed Ascot Holdings house, the Northumberland on Chester Road, Old Trafford, is set to reopen. The interior is undergoing extensive work and the shabby exterior is being repainted. We've no news of what beers will be on sale, but this part of Old Trafford could do with a decent local.

The Berwick Arms

FREE HOUSE

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* * * * *

Open 12.00 until 11.00 Monday to Saturday
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* * * * *

Range of traditional ales includes:

John Willie Lees Bitter

Guest Beer Boddingtons Bitter

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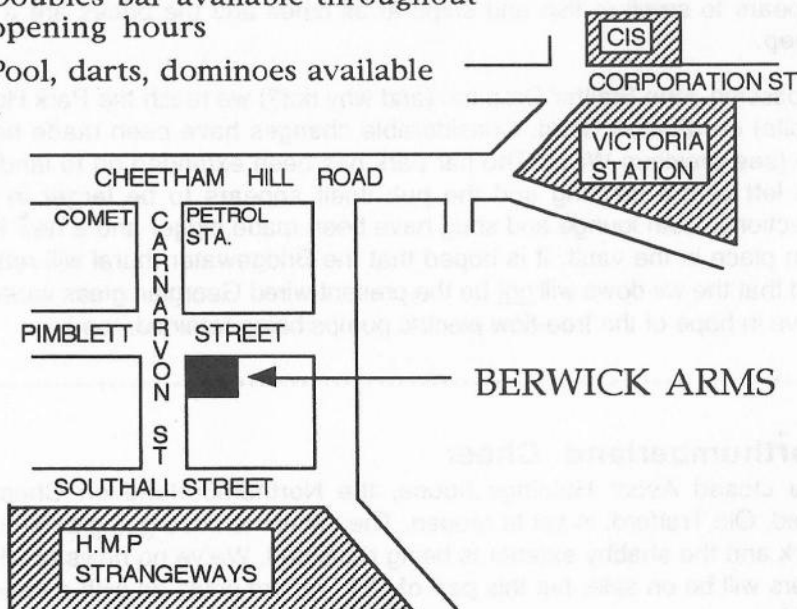
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Large selection of bottled beers, lagers, ciders,
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Doubles bar available throughout
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Pool, darts, dominoes available



Upmarket Café

Alphonso Mang O'Frites

Those of us who believed the New Shalimar to be the best Indian Café in Manchester were dismayed when it closed at the end of last year. The owner, however, had not given up but was merely seeking new, larger premises. These he found on the corner of High Street, next to the Hogshead. The building was formerly a clothes warehouse (Paradise Fashions) and needed considerable work to turn it into a café and takeaway. An expenditure not much short of £100,000 has resulted in the poshest café in the city centre. Saeed Moosavi, an Iranian (or Persian, as he prefers to call himself) worked in Rusholme before opening the New Shalimar and his expertise is reflected in the quality of the food.

Purists may be somewhat disappointed in the extensive menu, which includes such non-kosher fare as chips, pizzas, burgers and omelettes. However, the traditional Indian

dishes are prepared with great care and the quality is as high as anywhere in Manchester. This may sometimes involve waiting for five minutes or so, unlike, say, the This and That, but it's well worth the wait. Prices, as might be imagined, are up on the competition, but are, nonetheless, value for money. Rice and 5 at £3.50 is described as a Customers' Challenge.

If the Chandni thrives, then Saeed will have succeeded in bringing the concept of the ethnic café out of the back streets and on to the High Street and widening its appeal to a clientele who may be wary of seemingly grotty establishments. Clean premises, clear glass windows and decent crockery don't compromise the concept of ethnic purity when the quality of food is maintained. Pizza and chips might even keep the kids quiet whilst mum and dad try karahi keema, palak gosht, lamb jalfrezi and gulam jaman.

CHANDNI

— HIGH STREET —

TANDOORI TAKE AWAY

68/70 HIGH STREET
MANCHESTER 4



SPECIALISING IN ASIAN AND
CONTINENTAL DISHES

Stalybridge reopening

The Grosvenor on Grosvenor Street reopened at the beginning of April after being closed for some eighteen months. It's a Robinsons pub and it sells a good pint of mild (£1.18).

Kids' Cert

Considerable press coverage has been given to conditions imposed by licensing benches on pubs which have been granted Children's Certificates. These conditions have in many cases gone beyond the spirit of the law which is emphasised in Home Office Circular 57/1994 (reproduced here). The only conditions laid down in law are that the environment must be suitable for under-14s to be present and meals and soft drinks must be available. Other conditions CAN be added, but such conditions as no

smoking, gaming machines switched off, toilets, high chairs, nappy changing facilities, laminated glass, gated staircases and guarded fires are clearly unreasonable, if not impossible.



"While Licensing Justices are free to impose these conditions as they see fit, they may wish to note that during Parliamentary debate on Children's Certificates the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State of Corporate Affairs stated that the Government's intention was that there will be the least possible alteration to the normal operation of the bars concerned. He went on to say that in drawing up proposals for a system of Children's Certificates the Government have tried to put in place a régime containing adequate safeguards to ensure that accompanied children under fourteen will not be allowed into premises that are unsuitable, but that do not impose unnecessarily expensive and time-consuming burdens on the police and courts who will have to administer it, or the licensees."

It must be remembered that Children's Certificates only apply to bars. Children can still go into pub rooms which don't have a bar without any conditions whatsoever. It is ludicrous for magistrates to insist on conditions in a bar which don't apply elsewhere. Manchester bench has imposed few conditions and Salford has imposed none, other than a requirement that a notice be prominently displayed indicating the part of the premises to which the Certificate applies and the permitted hours. The standard Certificate covers until 9.00pm and 30 minutes 'eating up' time is allowed. It is helpful if customers know this.

Kiddiephobes might think it's a good thing for magistrates to make it hard for pubs to get Certificates, but we do need to move with the times. Parents do want to take their children into suitable pubs. Let's allow them do that and the rest of us can go into the remaining pubs which would rather close than permit kids across the threshold.

All steamed up

The Knott Mill area will gain a new free house in June - and an interesting one at that. The 'Ministry' nightclub at Deansgate Station is being converted into a real ale outlet by the Head of Steam company (formerly Legendary Yorkshire Heroes). This company is planning a chain of 'Victoria Station Buffets' and their first outlet at Euston Station is already in business: the Deansgate site will be the second.

It will open on 14th June and there will be up to nine real ales, including Batemans, Shepherd Neame and Hop Back, plus a Victoria-style food menu, whatever that is. The buffet will boast a scale model railway together with many other rail-related artefacts. There will also be a shop selling items of model railway interest and Dinky toys. Several different drinking areas will be created and, needless to say, a Children's Certificate has been applied for.

Magic Nonsense

The city centre pubs of the Magic Pub Co (the result of a sell-off by Grand Met) are getting the 'Irish' treatment and new names to boot. All of the pubs style themselves 'The Irish Pub' and there are some ridiculous names - Seftons on Corporation Street is now Paddy's Rat and Carrot (yes, really) and the Rising Sun on Queen Street is Paddy's Wig; Paddy's Goose on Bloom Street retains its name.

Inside, the Irish theme, if there is one, is extremely thin. All one sees is a clutter of various objects adorning the walls, an eclectic array of furniture and (Paddy's Goose excepted) genuine sawdust on the floor. What is so Irish about all that? The range of beers is unchanged - Websters, Boddies and Bass - although in the Rising Sun this was joined by Wadworths 6X and Fuggles IPA.

Over in Winton, the Jolly Carter retains its name but has had the same treatment, sans sawdust. Bass XXXX mild has been retained but the wall separating the vault and lounge is no more.

It would appear that Magic are merely jumping on the 'Irish' bandwagon. As one CAMRA member said, 'The next Host Group?' Quite.

Changes at the Angler

After some six years, Manchester's famous Jolly Angler is to be thoroughly refurbished. Licensee Mick Reynolds is to paint alternate walls in green, white and orange to reflect the pub's Irish flavour. Joking apart, the pub is to be redecorated in plain, no-nonsense style; the toilets will receive some attention, a new jukebox is promised (oh, no!) and Sky TV too. However, it's a fair bet that the changes won't be too radical.

The Oldham Beer Exhibition

A view from the floor by Robin Pendragon

As far as I could make out, the organisers did not put a foot wrong. The event was properly advertised, the venue was suitable, a fetching range of beers was on offer and the peripheral amenities could only be criticised by someone looking for trouble. What I think I had failed to grasp was the significance of the phrase **Oldham** Beer Exhibition. At first glance, it simply means that the event is being held there. On closer scrutiny, it means that it is being held **for** the people of Oldham, with all that this implies.

Having been round most of the local beer ex's. I think I know a lot of the faces by now. The same ones turn up most years at most of the events. And with just two exceptions, they were all missing from Oldham. I have to assume that the missing faces had all been once, and that was enough. (The 1995 event was the ninth.) Let me explain.

Until recent living memory, the typical Oldham resident rose at 5.15am. The cotton mills and engineering works are nearly all gone now, but Oldham habits die hard. They are still early risers and prompt to a fault. By the time I got to the beer exhibition, every table and most of the seats had been colonised. And seeing as I got there ten minutes after the kick-off, I have to assume that those there before me had arrived an hour or two before the organisers opened up.

So, I stood for a bit, then found a truly lousy seat, just before I remembered something else about Oldham people. Because of all the closed-down cotton mills and engineering works, many have exchanged generations of grim neutrality for a political position somewhere to the left of a lesbian social worker. And I happen to have a big, black beard. The extremely nice blonde man serving at my end of the counter served at least four people who arrived after me before, one nostril daintily elevated, he got round to me. My drink had the sort of head on it I was complaining about two issues ago.

The nouveau politique of the modern Oldham resident must include some sub-section about taking your kids to beer exhibitions. The place was swarming with them and explained the



barrel of lemonade lurking amongst the beers on offer. One moment I will not recall with relish was when an Oldham mother fished her rugrat's toy plane out of my beer, smiled menacingly and informed me that little Crighton was suffering from hyperactivity. Pre-1979 he would have been suffering from a ringpiece full of clog.

I had also marked myself out as hailing other than from Oldham by wearing shoes. And a shirt. And trousers, none of which are adopted by the locals. They wear athlete's gymnasium or track footwear, tee shirts and blue jeans. Persons not so attired, and therefore from somewhere foreign, are going to have a hard time. In my case, an Oldham person tried to elbow me out of the urinal I was using. Fortunately, not many Oldham persons grow much above six feet and seventeen stones or he might have succeeded, too. I am sure his stains will wash out.

Rather more significantly, the more interesting beers mentioned in What's Doing were unavailable to us who travelled up during the day, being reserved for the locals to drink on the Saturday night. I was refused three drinks on these grounds, though another "foreigner" claimed he had been refused five of the listed drinks. I tried a "First come, first served, surely?" sort of argument with one bar person, with no success. This, more than anything else, rammed home the significance of that phrase, **Oldham Beer Exhibition**.

I will remember the virulently green peas, somewhere between nickel sulphate and fluorescein, on my lukewarm pie; my discovery that the venue used to be the home of a friend of my family; the person four places down from me being served what looked like a pint of blood (actually a trendy decolourised and tinted product which probably started life as beer), and the androgyne shoving a double buggy through the drinkers with her belly - pint in one hand and fag in the other. And I won't be back.

More di-diddley

A few weeks after their Fallowfield pub began separating students from their money, Scruffy Murphy's opened on Grosvenor Street, All Saints, last month. There's a traditional layout - a sort of 'instant Dublin used look' - and ubiquitous di-diddley music (often canned, live at times). The one real ale is Tetley bitter (£1.42). Keg Guinness is £1.82.

Salford Quays may be getting an Irish theme pub of its very own - Hanrahan's have applied to open premises there.

Trust Holts to buck the trend - their hotel with the Irish name, the Tara, is now called the Spread Eagle.

Rupert

'It's all gone serious, hasn't it?' Tish was bemoaning the new-found earnestness in the Campaign. 'It's not too long ago that we used to have a great laugh, ten pints, biryani gobbling competitions in the K2, throwing up in the canal, taking the piss out of regional bosspersons and effete southern jessies. What's happened? All the zest and zaniness seems to have vanished.'

'It's just you, you boring old fart,' Bunty retorted. 'If you look for it there's lots of fun about. Since I came out of the slammer, I've had to behave myself but even a good boy can have a lot of fun without cracking too many heads or burning many hostelries down. A campaign that gives standing ovations to Tubs Caries and Rumpleshirtscream and makes Opening Tripe Organ of the Millenium can't entirely have lost its sense of incongruous juxtaposition. You're getting old and cracking up, Tish. How long is it since you got legless and slept with a rugby team?'

'That's got nothing to do with it. Are you trying to say they'd have given an award to Manky Ale if it had still been around? No, they actually thought Opening Tripe was wonderful and that Tubs spake not with forked tongue. It's the same everywhere. We now seem to celebrate cyber bars for the aurally challenged and are compelled to swig apoplexy like the besmocked

denizens of Loamshire whether we like it or not. We encourage faceless bureaucrats to run things for us and allow people whose bibliophilic experience is limited to rag books and colouring to run our books bit. We don't even laugh about it any more. Boris Pratt and his mates are all there being desperately worthy and giving one another gongs. We've gone respectable.

Meanwhile the big beer makers are pissing all over us. They've shut more breweries than they ever did, they've merged and combined till three of them own two-thirds of the breweries. They're badge-brewing beer, marketing real ale as a niche product and charging the earth for it, wrecking pubs and knocking them down if they're not building bouncy castles in them. All the romance has gone as well. Don't brewers run off with married women any more and name beers after their paramours? It's all very sad. I might be older, but it's not what I joined up for. We're just a cosy social club with lots of members, part of the establishment. Why aren't we doing the beer equivalent of standing in front of veal lorries? Even old WD's lost its edge, smarming up to the great and the good. How long is it since this organ's been chucked out of a pub or told Mr Frocksel to stick his amber nectar up his arse?'

'You've convinced me,' said Bunty. 'Who do I sort out first?'

Branch Diary

Rochdale, Oldham & Bury

Tues 2 May 8.30pm, Branch AGM, Eagle & Child, Higher Lane, Whitefield. All members welcome.

Tues 16 May 8.30, Committee Meeting, Black Horse, Rochdale Road, Shaw

Tues 30 May 8.30, What's Doing collation, Flying Horse, Town Hall Square, Rochdale

Sat 30 June, Real Ale Ramble, Saddleworth. Meet 11am at Wagon, Uppermill: 12.30 at Navigation, Dobcross

Contact: Peter Alexander 0113 2324023(w), 0161 655 4002 (h)

North Manchester

Wed May 3, Eccles Crawl: Bird in Hand 7pm, Ellesmere 8pm, Crown & Volunteer 9pm (all Liverpool Road).

Wed 10 May 8pm, Regional Meeting, Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, Manchester

Wed 17 May 8pm, Branch Meeting, Queens Arms, Honey Street, Cheetham

Wed 24 May, Visit to Porters Brewery, Haslingden. Book with Secretary

Tues 30 May 6pm onwards, WD collation, Queens Arms, Honey Street.

Wed 31 May, Little Hulton Crawl: Dun Mare 7pm, White Lion 8pm (both Manchester Road West), Bell, Manchester Road East

Contact: Roger Hall 740 7937

Bolton

Contact: Richard Spedding 01204 61244 (h), 01204 521771 x2305 (w)

Trafford & Hulme

Thur 4 May 8pm, Knutsford Crawl: Builders Arms, Mobberley Road, then Legh Arms, Cross Keys, Freemasons, Lord Eldon, White Lion

Thur 11 May 8pm, Church Inn, Flixton; Roebuck, Lord Nelson, Manor Hey

Thur 18 May 8pm, Branch Meeting, Saracens Head, Warburton; Rope & Anchor, Dunham; Vine Inn, Axe & Cleaver, Bay Malton at Seamons Row, Oldfield Brow.

Thur 25 May 8pm, Vine, Kennedy Street, Manchester; City Arms, Royal Central, Peveril of the Peak

Thur 1 June, Branch trip to Stockport Beer & Cider Festival. Meet 8pm at Festival. Phone Branch Contact for details

Contact: Roger Wilson (0161) 832 8237 (w) or (0161) 941 5602 (h)

Contributors to this issue: Bernie Jackson, Stewart Revell, Keith Egerton, B Aldred, Mark McConachie, Paul Mason, Roger Hall, Paul Roberts, Ken Holt, Peter Barnes, Leo King, Robin Pendragon.

WHAT'S DOING contributions should be sent to the editor c/o 88 Ringley Road, Stoneclough, Radcliffe, Manchester M26 1ET. News and letters must arrive by the 20th of the month for inclusion in the next month's issue.

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