

What's Doing

JUNE 1996



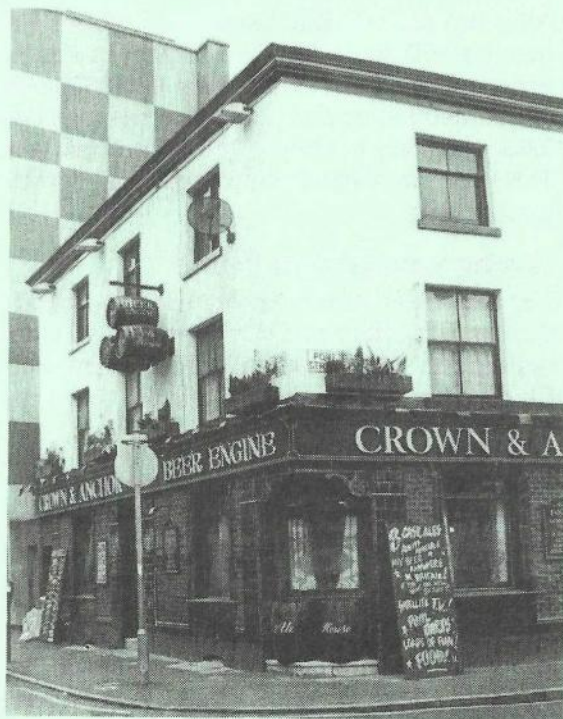
The Manchester Beer Drinker's Monthly Magazine

Changes at the Crown & Anchor

There are new licensees at the Crown & Anchor (Beer Engine) on Hilton Street in Manchester city centre - Wayne and Becky from the Duke of York (Beer Engine) in Eccles. At the moment the C & A has two banks of four handpumps and Wayne hopes to get two banks of five so that he can provide a changing range of guest beers as well as the usual Landlord, Pedigree and Castle Eden. A new menu is being implemented and meals are available 12 noon to 2.00pm.

The big surprise is that the pub will have its first-ever beer festival in October, with at least twelve real ales available. What with real ale festivals at the Beer House, more handpumps at the Smithfield on Swan Street (Alison's place) and now the improved C & A, Manchester city centre is booming!

Leo King



New Holts pub

On 20th May the Edington Arms in Hindley became a Holts managed house. Originally the Legh Arms (Matthew Brown), this pub was bought by John Edington several years ago and turned into a very successful free house selling Holts mild and bitter and five or six other beers from breweries large and small. (Did anyone ever find out where 'Savages Head', the house beer, came from?) Only Holts will be on sale from now on.

John Edington has gone off 'for a rest', but will he be back? It was after taking a rest following the sale of his first venture, the Drop Inn in Monton, that he opened the Edington Arms.

Elsewhere in Hindley, Peter Yates's Bitter is on sale at The Wiganer (Whitbread) at £1 a pint. This is the 'house beer' for Yates's Wine Lodges, believed to be brewed by Moorhouses.

Over in Wigan, another recent Holts acquisition - Traditionals on Woodhouse Lane - will be closed until August so that the building can be refurbished. The name will be changed and the pub will have a vault.

Monks Hall

After the story of the licensing of Monks Hall, Eccles, featured in last month's WD there has been renewed interest in the building. Banks's Brewery, who put in the original £200,000 offer a year ago, are still keen to get their hands on it, but there has also been an approach from some folks who want to convert the old hall into a business technology centre. This will have a video conference suite, computer training and - naturally - a cyber café.

Wetherspools in Bury

The expanding pub company has now found itself a nice big building in the centre of Bury and work has started on converting it into a pub and restaurant. The building, which once housed the offices of Bury Corporation Tramways, is next to the Two Tubs, facing the parish church.

Thumbs Up!

There are strong rumours that the Harp & Shamrock on New Mount Street, Manchester, is to reopen. The backing is expected to come from Whitbread, rather than Marstons.

Old Pint Pot

The £1-a-pint best bitter at the former Adelphi Riverside in Salford (WD last month) is brewed by Scottish Courage. The in-house brewery may be opening some time in June - there's been a delay because of a disagreement among the contractors.

Closed & Boarded Corner

Mark McConachie

The former Notts Castle on Oldham Road, Miles Platting, is now named Choudry House and is operating in some other field of business. Across the road, the Bird in Hand has reopened, albeit with some of the upper floor windows still broken - strange place!

Not so far away in Ancoats the Falcon (Bass) on Merrill Street is now burnt out. This followed a short period of being boarded up.

Our old chums Ascot Holdings, who have an unfortunate knack of letting pubs slip from their control into dereliction, have sold 251 pubs to a new company called Mayfair Taverns. Mayfair will also be running the remaining 193 Ascot pubs until they are sold, so Ascot are getting out of pub ownership altogether. Let's hope that Mayfair will do a better job of looking after the pubs.

Bamford News

The Burns Tavern (Bass) on Norden Road in the village of Bamford (north of Heywood, south of Norden) has gone over to real ale and is selling Worthington BB. At the other end of War Office Road, Whitbread's Winston Churchill has an increased beer range: Boddies, Higsons, Flowers and a guest (Spring Hops when our correspondent called).

Across the road and at the end of Crimble Lane is the Crimble Hotel and Restaurant. Part of this is the small Lowry's Bar, which sells two beers - Worthington and a guest. The guest was a rather good Highgate Saddlers.

Seeing the light

Back in December, Trafford licensing bench refused an application from Bass to turn the former Woollies building behind the Bulls Head in Sale into a pub. In May Bass appealed and the appeal was allowed. The venture will cost some £650,000, including refurbishment of the Bulls Head.

The metamorphosed Woollies will be known as Edisons and will feature such essentials of late twentieth century taverns as Internet access and a £125,000 light and music installation.

New bar in Bolton

'Durdy Nellie's' Irish theme bar was due to open at the end of May. The building is on Bradshawgate and our Bolton correspondent reports that it has been painted a rather bilious shade of green, or maybe that was just the undercoat.

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Letter

Boddy Blow

Sir - In a city fast becoming used to 'doubles', this is one with which I am not too happy.

For some years now I have been gently persuading Mr Joe Pullen, owner of the Wendover Hotel in Monton, Eccles, to install traditional beers in his hotel. He finally got Boddingtons bitter on and kept it in excellent form. The beer sold well, even at a price which was high for the village of Monton: the GBG-listed Park Hotel is next door and sells Holts bitter at £1 a pint. Now the traditional bitter has been taken out and replaced by Boddingtons on 'draughtflow dispense' - the 'mark of a perfect pint', to quote the Whitbread sales jargon. The reason for the change? There was too much wastage! Now there may be little or no wastage, but if there really was any before, why was the price increased by 5p a pint in mid-May? Double Boddy Blow indeed!

Sean Kilgarriff

Queens Arms

Following a visit by a sub-committee, listed building consent for internal alterations to the Queens Arms in Patricroft was approved by Salford's Environmental Protection and Planning Committee. It is expected that the work will begin this summer.

The final layout may not be to everyone's satisfaction as it is a compromise between the original plans of the owners and the wishes of conservationists. Nevertheless, the value of listing buildings has been vindicated. Without a listing process, the alterations could have taken place with no consultation and debate. Applying for listed building consent has meant that all issues have been aired.

Buildings of character with important historical associations do need to be treated with care, but pubs are also businesses which need to adapt to changing social circumstances if they are to survive. Listing ensures that both these views are considered.

Now that approval has been given, let's hope that the alterations are carried out in a way which both emphasises the Queens Arms' character and improves its trade.

Angler angle

The Jolly Angler, Ancoats, has withdrawn Hydes Light in favour of the low gravity Westwoods bitter. When and if Westwoods is no longer brewed, will Light be restored? Can the Hydes estate support two low gravity beers?

Mild and Trafford & Hulme

Roger Wood sends the following update to his list printed last month...

The Holts pub on Firsway, Sale, is not the Buccaneer - it's the Brigadier.

Rothwells (city centre) sells Batemans dark mild, not Banks's mild.

Some new outlets:

Robinsons Hatters Mild - Kings Ransom, School Road, Sale

Chesters mild - Beech, Beech Road, Chorlton

Websters Green Label - Britannia, Flixton Road, Urmston

The Britannia has been acquired by the Magic Pub Co and extended from a café bar into a public house with Hungry Horse food. The full real ale range is Boddingtons bitter, Bass Toby Cask and Worthington Best Bitter, Websters Green Label. Doormen are employed at weekends.

Stalybridge News

The Cherry Tree on Huddersfield Road (ex Church Inn, Marstons) was closed a few months ago owing to a lack of custom. In the town centre, the Riverside (ex Commercial, ex Wilsons) has been refurbished by Vaux and reopened. Vaux have also refurbished the Rose & Crown near the railway station.

The Organ on Acres Lane (Wilson's) has a new landlord who also runs the Grapes in Heyrod (Thwaites), on the outskirts of the town. The Stocks Inn on Stocks Lane is now selling Websters at £1 a pint.

The saddest news is that the British Rail Property Board has ordered the closure of the famous Stalybridge Station Buffet. Landlord Ken Redfern was given until 27th May to move out.

Insurer buys pubs

A subsidiary of Guardian Royal Exchange has bought 1,410 pubs from Intreprenuer Estates for £262m, bringing further turmoil and uncertainty for the current licensees. All the pubs, including 160 in the North West (ex-Wilsons, Websters or Host Group) will be sold on.

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.

WHAT'S DOING ADVERTISING: Full page £50 or £200 for six months, half page £35 or £150 for six months, quarter page £25 or £100 for six months. All adverts must be accompanied with payment. Cheque payable to What's Doing.

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BACK NUMBERS: 15p per copy. Send stamped addressed envelope to Roger Hall, 123 Hill Lane, Blackley, Manchester M9 6PW.

To join CAMRA send £12 to Membership, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4LW.

Rochdale News

Mark Herdman

McGuinness Brewery

There's a new beer in the McGuinness range - Utter Nutter, a 4.6% 'strong, dark and full-bodied bitter', according to brewer Eric Hoare. The Nutter made its debut at a recent beer festival at the Station in Ashton and has now joined the growing range of McGuinness beers at the brewery tap, the Cask & Feather at the junction of Oldham Road and Drake Street.

For those interested in seeing how the Nutter and the other McGuinness beers are brewed, brewery visits can be arranged by contacting Eric on 01706 711476.

While the Cask & Feather, which sells most of the McGuinness range and has the brewery on the premises, attracts much attention, the other McGuinness pub is often overlooked. This is Whittingtons on Oldham Road, the next pub out of town from the Cask & Feather, and it sells McGuinness Best Bitter.



Mucky Duck

Pub refurbishment seems to be in vogue in central Rochdale. In addition to those pubs mentioned last month and aside from a couple of keg emporia, the latest alterations have been at the Mucky Duck (formerly Gullivers) on Drake Street. Whilst not the most radical of refurbishments - the uninitiated might have difficulty in spotting the changes from bare brick walls and bare floorboards to ... bare brick walls and bare floorboards - some minor adjustments have increased the floor space available for drinking and, presumably, bands.

Beer-wise, the offerings appear to be along the lines of Matthew Brown, Youngers and John Smiths bitters and Theakstons bitter and Best, one of which was apparently a guest! However, if you like your music loud and heavy, this is the Rochdale pub for you.

What a relief!

The Government has unveiled plans to lower business rates on village businesses, including pubs. CAMRA has welcomed the proposals, which could lead to some rates bills being halved.

The smaller rural pubs will benefit, but there are plenty of urban pubs which are struggling and could do with a little help as well. Around 1,000 of our 62,000 pubs closed in 1995. A reduction in beer duty to bring us into line with the rest of Europe would do much to reverse this trend.

Moston News

Mark McConachie

A recent crawl of Moston Lane revealed some interesting changes which may even be indicators of what is to come in the pub industry. (The same pubs were visited two years ago, when the real ale market was perhaps at its most buoyant.)

The Thatched House (Bass) appeared to be bucking the trend towards nitrokeg and is now selling Toby and Worthington BB. Two years ago this was a keg pub. Moving westwards to the Blue Bell (Holts), all was status

quo - very reasonable Holts mild and bitter. It was the same story at the Museum (below) - in 1994 the pub sold Wilsons bitter and Lees bitter and continues to do so. It was nice to see the prices had remained very keen - both beers were a pound a pint.



Across the road, the Ben Brierley (the second of four Bass houses on the crawl) had handpumped 4X mild

and Stones two years ago; this time it was Stones only. Next was the Mowers (Bass again), which used to sell Worthy - the beer was 'not on' according to the bar staff. At Labatt's Bricklayers the handpumps stood forlorn: where once there was Wilsons there is now Flowers IPA Smoothflow.

The Moston (Whitbread), just off Moston Lane, was busy and the healthy trade may explain why the beer range has not changed in two years - Chesters mild, bitter and Boddies (no nitrokeg falseness here). It was a different story at the Old Loom - Creamflow Stones, where once had been Worthy. Another Bass house, not surprisingly.



The crawl finished on Rochdale Road, where there was no change at the Golden Tavern (Wilsons) - a packed house and Wilsons and Lees bitters at 95p - astounding value! Over at the Top Derby (Vaux), Samson had been replaced by bitter, and finally, the Farmyard (Whitbread?) was doing Boddies and lacklustre Holts.

So three pubs have gone keg and another has halved its range. These were all big brewers' pubs or pubs with supply agreements with them. Bass comes out as the main culprit here; they never had a good record with real ale in the North West and what few changes they made in the right direction now appear to be being undone. The only bright spots of the crawl were the real ale conversion of the Thatched House and the great value and lively atmosphere in both the Museum and the Golden Tavern.

Ashton on Mersey update

Ashton on Mersey has two pubs and both have been extensively refurbished. Bass's Buck Inn had signs indicating that the work was completed and it was open again, but a visit revealed that it was clearly unfinished and some of the decor already looked worn. Loudspeakers abound everywhere. Although there's a separate vault, the lounge also has a large TV screen and across the front of this, and in the seating area, there is a dartboard and throwing area!

Signs outside proclaim 'Hand Pulled Ales', dripmats inside advertise Worthington Draught, but in fact the only available cask ale is Draught Bass, quite well priced at £1.40, but unfortunately a little sweet. The Worthington is actually the 'Creamflow' nitrokeg version.

Hydes' Old Plough has had considerable structural work and an extension built at the rear. The bar has been moved further back so there is more room for drinkers at the front. The former 'cocktail lounge' upstairs is a dining room and this has been opened up at the back to overlook the back room, which now has a large window to the rear. Unfortunately there is no vault. The pub stays open in the afternoons and food is available most times except 3.00pm to 4.30pm weekdays. There's an 'early bird' special offer - two main courses for £5 - from 5.30pm to 7.00pm on weekdays.

The Old Plough now has baby changing facilities, so the aim is to make it a family pub. Beers are Anvil mild and bitter and Billy Westwoods bitter (which looks like becoming a permanent addition to the Hydes range) served by metered electric pumps into oversize glasses.

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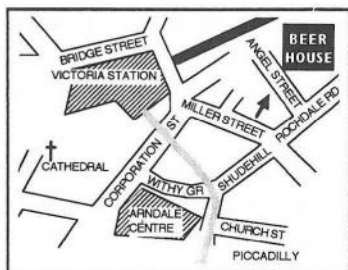
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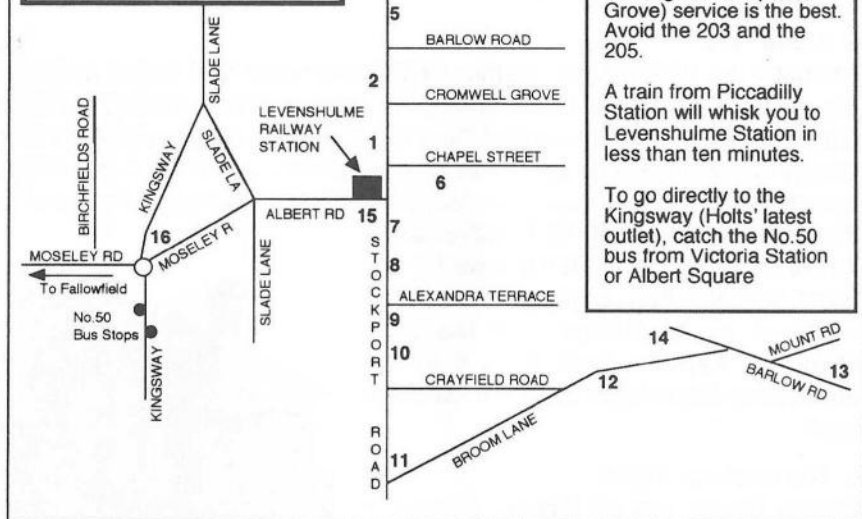
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Leo King



GETTING THERE
Many Manchester-Stockport buses go through Levenshulme. The regular 192 (Hazel Grove) service is the best. Avoid the 203 and the 205.

A train from Piccadilly Station will whisk you to Levenshulme Station in less than ten minutes.

To go directly to the Kingsway (Holts' latest outlet), catch the No.50 bus from Victoria Station or Albert Square

Pubs north of Albert Road (towards Longsight)

1 Hennigans Café Bar

A small, basic one-room bar near to the former Palace Cinema on Farmside Place. Open all day. Boddingtons bitter at £1.30 a pint.

2 Church Inn

Quite large, renovated, comfortable Greenalls pub. Greenalls bitter is only £1.22 a pint during happy hour, which is from opening until 7.00pm. Why not try Greenalls Festival Bitter? This low gravity session beer is only 99p a pint (all day at this price). Disregard the John Smiths Smooth bitter.

The next three pubs are now owned by the Magic Pub Company. Each has an Irish theme, sort of.

3 The Farmers Kipper

Formerly the Farmers Arms, ex-Threlfalls/Whitbread. A nice, busy pub with a pleasant atmosphere. Boddingtons bitter, Toby Light. Open all day including Sunday. Live music Thurs, Fri, Sat, Sun. Cards, darts (men's and ladies' teams). Reasonably behaved children welcome up to 6.00pm. Look out for the many clocks.

4 Brody Mulligans

Formerly the Midway. This very large ex-Wilsons pub sold no real ale for a long time before the Magic Pub Co takeover. The place was modernised

some time ago in a dowdy, darkish barn style and it is not much different now. The pub was busy and quite lively on my visit on a Tuesday afternoon. Real ales are a house brand (99p a pint), Websters Green Label, Boddingtons bitter and Draught Bass. Open all day including Sunday.

5 Little Vic

Formerly the Victoria and another ex-Wilsons outlet that hadn't sold real ale for donkeys years. It's a small pub, open all day including Sunday. Outside it says, 'Recommended Real Ale Cellar'. Real ales are Websters Green Label (I have to admit this was delicious) and Toby Cask Bitter. Ignore the large, illuminated Boddingtons bitter dispenser - the beer is the free-flow nitro stuff. So Boddies are at it now - shame on them! Karaoke Fri and Sun; vocalist Sat night. Children are welcome up to 6.00pm and there's a children's karaoke from 3 till 6 in the afternoons. Darts team and card school in vault.

6 Horseshoe (right)

Chapel Street, just off Stockport Road. A medium-sized ex-Wilsons pub with a vault (hooray, at last!), open all day. Nice pub. Real ales are Wilsons bitter and Websters Yorkshire bitter. There is also the John Smiths smooth nitro stuff again. Can't see the sense in it. Children welcome up to 7.00pm. Karaoke Thurs, DJ Sat and Sun.



Pubs south of Albert Road (towards Stockport)

7 Union

A former Clarkes of Reddish outlet, now a Boddies pub and probably the smallest in Levenshulme. It is a real man's pub and not for the faint-hearted, but that doesn't necessarily mean that the Union is a boxing booth. Always busy and always noted for drinkers crammed in the lobby and on the stairs, making it difficult at times to get to the bar counter. There are two small rooms, plus a vault and a pool room: The pub is popular and well known. The real ale is Boddies bitter and it's always in tip-top condition. The Union is one of those places which doesn't seem to have been altered since the day it was built. The vault adds character, as do the drinkers. Well worth a try, if you can get to the bloody bar, that is.

8 Pack Horse

Yet another ex-Wilsons pub (I don't know who owns it now) which is quite

large with comfortable seating. It's a locals' local with all types of characters, similar to the nearby Union. A plain, no-nonsense pub with a vault/pool room. Looking through the crowd at the bar, I think I saw three handpumps (without pump clips) and there were two others dispensing the long-time favourite Holts bitter at £1 a pint. This was really on form. The Pack Horse has satellite TV, a function room and serves hot and cold meals.

9 Fiddlers Green

Outside it says, 'A Websters free house'. Inside, there's not a drop of it. Basically this is an Irish bar with a counter full of multi-colour, illuminated dispensers for the fizzy stuff. While I was looking for a concealed handpump, the barman asked me what I wanted. It was no use saying, 'I'm looking for real ale,' so I had to force myself to drink a half of John Smiths nitro-keg. Ugh! Pity really, it's a comfortable and intimate place.

10 The Levenshulme

'The Levvy' (*right*) is an ex-Wilsons pub at 959 Stockport Road. Basic but quite comfortable with an open-plan layout, an L-shaped lounge, another room and a pool room. The sole bitter is Wilsons, sold at £1 a pint Mon to Fri, 11.00am-4.00pm. (£1.30 other days and other times.)



11 The W heatsheaf

Situated at the corner of Broom Lane, this is an ex-Greenalls outlet now owned by the Devonshire Pub Co. It's a fairly large pub, open all day, and the real ales are Theakstons best bitter, Boddingtons bitter and Old Tub Thumper (the landlord told me that this was just another name for Matthew Brown bitter). The Theakstons mild is dispensed from a font stating 'brewery conditioned', so beware! The pub has Sky TV, disco and Irish entertainment on Fri and Sat nights. Sandwiches always available; hot meals Thurs and Fri and Sun lunches soon. Children welcome. A nice pub.

12 The Sidings

A sizeable Holts pub (Levenshulme's first) on Broom Lane. Excellent beer, open all day. Food available - great Sunday lunches - the restaurant area is part of the large lounge, and there is a large vault.

Pubs east of Stockport Road

13 Polygon Hotel

A nice little two-room Boddingtons (ex-Clarkes) pub on Barlow Road. From here it is just three-quarters of a mile to Reddish, once the home of Clarkes Brewery, hence the Boddies outlets in this area. The Polygon sells Boddingtons bitter, but I urge you to try Boddies Old Henry. This 4% abv bitter is stronger, yet cheaper than the standard bitter and it sells here at just £1 a pint. I hope it catches on as it is a beautiful, delicious drink, believe me!

14 Blue Bell

This is a medium-sized, comfortable pub on Barlow Road with Sam Smiths' great beer spoilt by gaseous dispense. Say no more!

Pubs west of Stockport Road

15 Railway

A Bass pub, similar to the Fiddlers Green. There's a long bar counter with fizz pumps and no real ale. Beware - in any pub - the brightly-lit, yellow font for Boddingtons cool, smooth, nitro-bitter.

16 The Kingsway

A recent acquisition by Holts and a very large pub. (Holts love 'em, don't they?) It is a former Groves & Whitnall and Greenalls house and it seems like it last sold real ale a million years ago. Well, in its G&W days, anyway. The Kingsway is between seven and twelve minutes' walk along Albert Road (I did it in nine minutes). The restaurant closes on 26th May for refurbishment and towards the end of July the pub will close for two weeks for a complete refurbishment and the fitting out of a large, circular bar. The vault will remain. Children are welcome. No live music - well, it is one of Joe's.

So there you have Levenshulme. Not bad at all. Only three of the sixteen outlets don't sell real ale. A good real ale free house like those in the centres of Manchester and Salford would be an asset to this south Manchester district, but at best Levenshulme has a fair choice of real ales to offer. Cheers!

Irlam Magic #3

Rumours abound that Colin, the sheep farmer of Irlam's 'Starvin' Sheep (aka the White Lion), has obtained the licence for the closed and boarded Tiger Moth on the Moss Vale Estate (as mentioned in WD April). It is said that he will be putting a manager in **and** that Joey Holts will return to this once popular pub. Colin is now selling Holts mild in his 'Starvin' Sheep' at 95p per pint - is this the cheapest pint in West Manchester?

Holts Corner

Stewart Revell

Of the five tenanted pubs Holts bought from Greenalls (WD April), two have now been converted to managed houses - the Pack Horse, Higher Openshaw, and the Duke of York, Bolton Street, Chorley. There has been no decision as yet on the other three tenancies (Railway, Moses Gate; Volunteer, Darcy Lever; Chapel House, Dukinfield).

I hear that the Brooklyn on Green Lane, Bolton (ex-Greenalls managed pub) is to have a major refurbishment next year. The outside of the building needs cleaning up after years of neglect and the rooms are in need of redecoration.

The brewery's replacement for Regal Lager - Diamond - made its appearance last month: 5% abv and selling for £1.20 per pint.

Higher Irlam Nomads

In the eighties the White Lion vault was closed down in an upmarket exercise and the White Lion Nomads darts team was born. They found a temporary home at the Nags Head until that vault was closed in another alteration, so then the team became the Nags Head Nomads and moved to the Boathouse, where they still are.

In the nineties the White Lion vault was reopened and the pub now has a ladies' darts team, a men's darts team and a pool team. The players are refreshed by Holts mild (95p) and Holts bitter (100p).

Then new management at the Nags Head reintroduced the vault and another Nags Head darts team was born. However, along came the Magic Pub Company and they turned the Nag into a Hungry Horse pub restaurant. Plenty of steak but no vault. So the Nags Head Nomads (2) have been made welcome at the White Lion.

Barton news

The Barton Arms, Cawdor Street, has withdrawn its guest beer. Boddingtons bitter is available at £1.28, Chesters bitter at £1.24 and Bentleys Yorkshire bitter at £1.05.

The Kings Head, Barton Lane, is selling Greenalls Original as well as Boddingtons mild and bitter. Is this the first example of Greenalls beers in the old BodPubCo estate?

The Dutton Arms, Barton Road, once a Boddingtons cask beer house, is down to just one real ale - Boddingtons bitter. The mild and OB are now keg.

The Packet House on Liverpool Road has lost its cask mild.

Pub Design Awards 1996

Entries for CAMRA's awards, which are run in association with English Heritage, must be submitted by 1st July. To qualify, a pub must have been completed and opened or reopened during 1995. The award categories are:

- 1 New built pubs.
- 2 Conversion of existing buildings to pub use.
- 3 Refurbishment and conservation of existing public houses.
- 4 The English Heritage Award for conservation with minimum alteration.



If you can think of a pub deserving one of these awards, why not ask them to submit an entry? Entry forms can be obtained from:

CAMRA Pub Design Awards, 239 Hatfield Rd, St Albans, Herts AL1 4LW.
Phone 01727 867201 Fax 01727 867670.

Labatts sold

Belgian beer group Interbrew (Stella Artois, etc) has sold Labatt Brewing UK to Whitbread. This will increase Whitbread's lager share in the UK, but quite what it means in terms of the Labatts pubs remains to be seen.

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England beklagt das Pub-Sterben*

Paul Roberts

What is a visit to England without a pub crawl? That is the question asked at the beginning of a full page article about the decline of the British pub, published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* - Germany's leading broadsheet.

Such has been the decline that even foreign journalists are beginning to feel the loss of a once wonderful institution. The article is grim reading for any German fans planning to travel to Euro 96 and imagining that there are still nice, cosy, welcoming pubs on every corner: 'Since the war, the Britons have been plagued by deaths of pubs...6,000 pubs closed in the last two years...British drink less and less beer...'

The 'virus' that has infected the 'treasure of cordiality and enjoyment' is the theme pub - Irish bars, rock'n'roll pubs, bars furnished in pseudo-antique Victorian style, etc. The SZ journalist, Florian Beck, is very well informed and it's a pity that British breweries and pub owners aren't subscribers to the newspaper!

The SZ believes there is hope, in the form of J D Wetherspoon. The article praises in detail the way that JDW has transformed old cinemas and banks into pubs maintaining the values of the last century - drinking establishments where the only noise to be heard is that of customers' chatter. (Why can't CAMRA beer festival organizers take heed of this? They are more guilty than the pub owners when it comes to providing 'entertainment' at Concord-level decibels!)

CAMRA receives a special mention in the SZ article, with membership information and details of the Good Beer Guide.

**England mourns the death of the pub*

Greenalls Prophet

The Warrington-based pub and leisure group announced increased interim profits recently. Commenting on these, MD Peter Greenall said, '...We are investing to attract eating customers, and when people come to eat it boosts the drinks sales.' That may be so, but it does not bode well for the small pubs (Greenalls or ex-BodPubCo) that do not fit into the grand design. The future seems uncertain, with the possibility of more disposals and conversions to eateries.

Contributors to this issue: Stewart Revell, B Aldred, Keith Egerton, Leo King, Roger Wood, Roger Hall, Mark McConachie, Sean Kilgariff, Brian Gleave, Mark Herdman, Paul Roberts, John Hutchinson, Bill Collier.

Rupert

So Boris Pratt pops up in the Guardian again. You'd think he'd have enough to do looking after his own enlarged organ which looks more like a Sunday supplement these days. And what's he banging on about? That's right, nitrokeg. Memories of when CAMRA first began slagging off the big brewers for keg beers. Now keg beers have re-emerged and the punters actually like them. So, what to do? Have we reached the position of defenders of the stage coach in 1840 or steam train enthusiasts of the 1950s? Are we a bunch of crackpot anoraks standing in the way of the inexorable march of progress or do we have a point to make? From the way the Campaign's pussyfooting about, you'd think the former were the case.

What's happened to the aggressive stance we once took? If we believe O'Smooth's is crap then perhaps we should say so. 'O'Smooth's gives you CJD and makes you impotent and unattractive to the opposite sex!' Mind you, many Campaigners are that already. But, the thrust is there. Smack the brewers where it hurts and don't let our sneaking admiration for a long shelf life, OK-ish sort of beer shine through our reticence.

Knocking copy does work, but only if the product you're knocking is bobbins, as they say in Slumley. If we've got something against O'Smooth's and its rivals, then let's spell it out. Otherwise punters will think we're obsessional purists, toeing the party line and ignoring the facts. Why is nitrokeg a bad thing? Is it because it reduced choice? Does it threaten to consolidate the big brewers' monopoly? Does it taste rotten? Why and how? What ingredients are used? Does the beer not mature properly? Could it? In blind tastings can people tell the difference? How central to CAMRA is cask-conditioning if the same results can be achieved in other ways?

If we don't want cask beers to go the way of the steam train, as an interesting product with little relevance to the modern world, then we've either got to go all out and fight nitrokeg or accept it whilst ensuring real ale's continued niche. What we shouldn't do is faff about like a fart in a colander and hope it'll go away. It won't. Boris thinks that nitrokeg couldn't be a better 25th birthday present for a movement that thrives on controversy. Well, the movement's got old. It wants an easy life. It may have 50,000 members, but if it won't campaign about nitrokeg it's dead in the water.

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Branch Diary

Rochdale, Oldham & Bury

Tues 4 June 8.30pm, Branch Meeting, Beer Emporium, Union Street, Oldham

Tues 18 June 8.30pm, Committee Meeting, Red Lion, Bury New Road, Prestwich

Thur 27 June 8.30pm, What's Doing collation, Flying Horse, Town Hall Square, Rochdale

Sat 6 July. Advance notice of Independents Day Campaign by coach

Contact: Peter Alexander 0113 232 4023(w), 0161 655 4002 (h)

Trafford & Hulme

Thur 6 June 7.30 Bleeding Wolf, Hale, followed by Roebuck, Bulls Head, Railway & Chapel House in Mobberley; finish at Greyhound, Ashley.

Thur 13 June 8pm, Ducie Arms, Devas Street (off Lloyd Street, behind University), followed by Salutation, Church, O'Sheas 2, Salisbury and Thirsty Scholar

Thur 20 June 8pm, Plough, Ashton on Mersey, followed by Buck, Brigadier, Huntsman and Cock Robin

Thur 27 June 8pm, Romper, Ringway, followed by Unicorn and Bulls Head, Hale Barns, Bleeding Wolf, Cheshire Midland and Railway, Hale.

Thur 4 July 8pm, Saracens Head, Warburton, followed by Rope & Anchor and Vine, Dunham, Hogshead and Orange Tree, Altrincham

Contact: Roger Wilson 0161 827 0765 (w) or 0161 941 5602 (h)

North Manchester

Wed June 5, Bolton Crawl. Sweet Green Tavern, Crook Street, 7pm; Man & Scythe, Churchgate, 9.30.

Wed 12 June 8pm, Committee & Social, Robin Hood, Droylsden Road, Newton Heath

Wed 19 June 8pm, Branch Meeting, Hare & Hounds, Shudehill

Tues 25 June 6pm onward, What's Doing collation, Queens Arms, Honey Street, Cheetham

Wed 26 June, Cadishead & Irlam Crawl: Coach & Horses 7pm, George 8.30, White Lion to finish (all Liverpool Road)

Contact: Roger Hall 0161 740 7937

Bolton

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

Wigan

Contact: John Barlow 01257 427595 (h) 01257 426464 (w)

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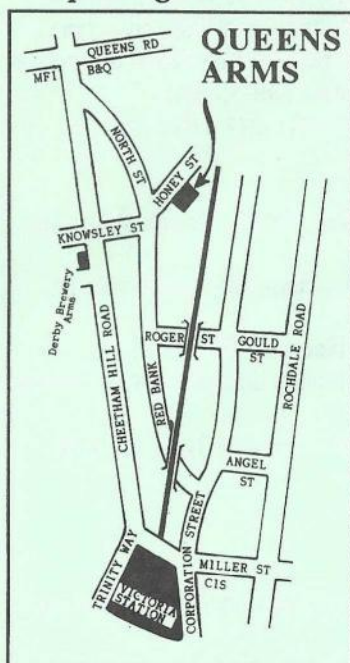
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*We're in the Good Beer Guide and
CAMRA's Good Food Guide*