

30p

What's Doing

JULY 2000



The Manchester Beer Drinker's Monthly Magazine

BIG BREWERS SELL OUT

The pubs are Japanese, the beer Belgian - so that's all right then?

Last month it was announced that both Whitbread and Bass are to get out of brewing. Both companies are to sell out to Interbrew of Stella Artois fame. At a time when beer consumption is falling in Europe there can be only one reason for Interbrew to spend money. There is no sense in acquiring extra capacity when there is massive overcapacity in the industry. The reason must be the acquiring of brands. The range of brands perhaps explains the difference in the price paid. Whitbread with Boddingtons and Murphys fetched £400m, whilst Bass with Bass, Carling, Caffreys, Tennents and Worthington went for £2.3bn. The brewing turnovers are £1.1bn and £1.84bn respectively.

Buying brands rather than capacity means that the breweries in this country are vulnerable. It might be argued that real ale breweries are safe, because there is no tradition of brewing these beers in Belgium. Yet a focus on global brands means that beers which do not fall into this category may be axed. Choice will inevitably diminish. Whitbread has already discontinued Boddingtons mild and Oldham mild. How much longer will beers like Flowers, Trophy and, from the Bass stable, M&B and Stones continue to be sold?



Worthington
Bitter



There is something of a paradox in brewing. As concentration increases through mergers and takeovers, choice seems to improve. Big brewers have vastly reduced the range of real ales they produce. Local and regional brewers continue to diminish. Yet small independent brewers continue to be established; most seem to thrive. Twenty-five years ago it was just about possible to find twenty different real ales in Manchester city centre. Today in the golden triangle of the Northern Quarter you can find perhaps fifty different brews in around ten pubs including the Marble Arch, the Queens, the Beerhouse, the Pot of Beer, the Smithfield, the Hogshead and the Castle.



Perhaps in the scheme of things it doesn't matter who owns the brands we don't drink as long as the market is free to allow independents to survive. The separation of brewing from retailing, whilst causing turmoil in the industry has, nonetheless, encouraged variety and choice at the point of sale. Retailers will, of course, stock the heavily advertised global brands but they will also serve traditional ales as long as the demand is there. The popularity of beer festivals and pubs serving several real ales is testimony to that demand. Long may it continue and long may we continue to ignore Interbrew just as we have managed to ignore Anheuser-Busch.

Closed and Boarded

Miles Platting loses another pub - the **Grey Mare** (Burtonwood, ex-Tetley, *right*) on Varley Street is shut. On Oldham Road, the long derelict **White Hart** has been demolished. It is a sad fact that there is no operating pub on Oldham Road between the Wheatsheaf in Ancoats and the Bulls Head in Failsworth!

Pub closure malaise has spread eastward, too. Droylsden has two pubs boarded up - the **Cotton Tree** and the nearby **Astley Arms**



Out and About

Whitbread

with Grognard

In the long poem *Don Juan* by Lord Byron, he asks the fascinating question, 'Where's Whitbread?' The company will long be remembered in Oldham as the financial force behind Boddingtons' takeover of OB and its subsequent closure. But then, this was simply 'standard operational procedure' by Wetbeds, carried out across the length and breadth of England against local breweries.

They replaced patently unnecessary and unwanted regional brews with their own glorious creations, backed up with national advertising campaigns - 'It's Tankard that makes you excel' (we always changed the verb to 'expel') and 'He's only happy 'oldin t'Trophy!' - and followed up in the 1980s and 90s with 'Boddingtons - the cream of Manchester', as that once most excellent bitter was blandified out of all recognition.

Once in a while they seemed to have a twinge of conscience and a need to prove that they were still capable of brewing decent ale when they tried. About the mid-90s they introduced their Cask Connoisseurs range (a bit of a pretentious title) with offerings such as Glorious Goldings and Oyster Stout made with real oysters. Down twenty pints and win a T shirt as well. All these to be found at your local Hogshead. I've still got one of those shirts somewhere. Who knows, one day it might be a collector's item.

Anyway, the range came to an end, to be replaced by that irritating Abroad Cooper, Castle Eden and Flowers. But now they don't brew them any more, in fact they brew nothing at all. Boddingtons is now owned by Interbrew, which may be referred to as the only famous Belgian of the 21st century. It's total victory for the corporate bean-counters after over two centuries of brewing.



Wetherspoons

And talking about profitability, Wetherspoons seem to go from strength to strength. Though, of course, there's always something to criticise: the £1 a pint John Smiths designed to attract the local intelligentsia, the pint with that thick, rich, creamy head and easily worth 25p in extra profit which you can get topped up if you don't mind waiting two or three minutes while she takes an order for chili con carne and chips, or having to mountaineer to the upstairs toilets when your ankle's playing up, or the unbearable tensions of wondering if the Greene King Abbot will make a return appearance and what idiot decided to sell a 3% guest mild at £1.59 and why do morons always get mobile phones for their birthdays. Also, why....

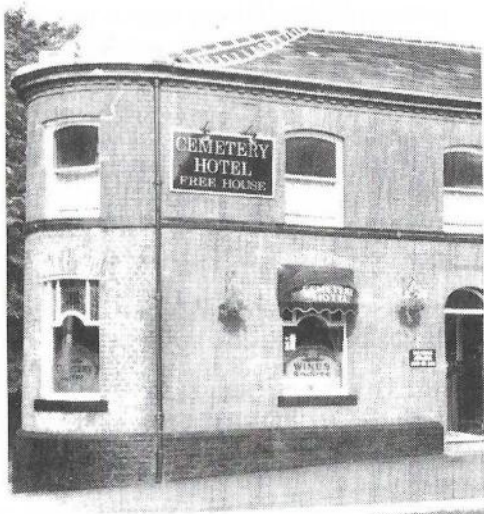
That's OK. I feel better now.

Pictish Brews

The local CAMRA branch held a bit of a do in the **Ashton Arms**, Clegg Street, to celebrate the success of the Oldham Beer Festival. The usual range of Porter ales was supplemented with a guest ale, **Brewers Gold** from the Pictish Brewing Company of Rochdale. At 3.8% it is an excellent session beer with a notably spicy nose. The brewery also produces a premium ale, **Celtic Warrior** (4.2%) and **Pictish Porter** (4.4%), which at present I have not tried, and one due to be released as **Summer Solstice** (4.2%), the timing of which is self-evident.

Richard Sutton, der Meisterbrauer, gave me a list of places which had served or would serve his ales, the most regular outlets being the **Cemetery Hotel**, Rochdale; the **Old Vic**, Stockport, and the **Wheatsheaf**,

Littleborough. The other free houses of this area will no doubt be offering the beers to those of discerning taste.



Stockport strife

I might have sampled the full range of Pictish at the Stockport Beer Festival, but by Saturday afternoon they were off. In fact, a lot of my favourites were off, including Landlord. That and the limited seating tends to disgruntle, but consolation was found particularly in Okells **Manx Bitter** (3.7%), **Roosters Jerry Cask Lager** (4.3%, an interesting

experiment in brewing a German-style lager beer) and Phoenix Hopwood (4.3%), a beer which has steadily improved in taste and strength over the years.

Conspicuous by their absence were Mr Porter's distinctive brews. There has been a severe dislocation twixt he and the local CAMRA concerning the non-inclusion of his **Railway Alehouse** in the 2000 Good Beer Guide owing to a change of landlord. Mr Porter has written, expressing his opinion of this in his usual frank and forthright manner, to receive the reply that the rules are the rules are the rules, etc.

But it does make you wonder what CAMRA is about when a pub serving eight real ales is dropped on a technicality, while in the 1999 version an Oldham pub was included for offering only one real ale and two months later it went smooth.

Anyway, Mr Porter organised a couple of attractive young ladies to hand out leaflets at the entrance to the Festival to remind beer punters where the Railway is and to announce his own Beerfest at the **Albion Ale House** in Clayton le Moors on 20th-23rd July. With any luck it will include Pictish and Landlord.

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The Bury to Rochdale Crawl

Regular travellers between Bury and Rochdale via Bell Lane and Rochdale Old Road (the 469 bus route) cannot have failed to notice a proliferation of pubs. They can make an interesting crawl, as Alex Koval reports...

Starting at the bottom of Bell Lane, the first pub you come across is the **Cotton Tree**, a small, rather garish karaoke pub which is, of course, keg. Never mind, it's only a short hop to the GBG-listed **Old Blue Bell**, which sells wonderful Holts mild and bitter. Keeping to the right, you come to the **Golden Fleece**, a Hydes pub with an interesting beer policy. Officially, it sells Hydes Light, but finding the beer on sale is a rarity. Just to make things more difficult, the pub appears to have eccentric opening times. Next along the road is keg Thwaites at the **Church Inn**, followed by Burtonwood fizz at the **Grapes** across the road. And don't even think about a drink at the **Old Crow**, because this 'fun pub' remains a cask free zone.

It's better news at the **Spotted Cow**, which may only boast one cask beer, but it is Joey Holts. This friendly, lively pub seems to be one of the busier ones on Bell Lane. Next, the **New Inn**, once a rather down-at-heel pub selling a decent pint of Wilsons. Then came the makeover and in came the keg.

On to Rochdale Old Road now, and the **Fairfield**. This is a small, cosy pub selling an excellent pint of Thwaites and a decent curry. It's 'buyers beware' at the **Brown Cow**, where despite signs boasting otherwise, there is no real ale. Another pub to have had a facelift recently is the **George & Dragon**. Once again, this has meant the removal of cask beer. Far better is the **Old Gamecock**, which boasts cask Boddingtons and Tetley. There is a comfortable conservatory and outdoor seating.

It is something of a hike to the **Wagon & Horses**, where once again the beer is fizz. This pub used to sell a good pint of Bass. From here on, the pubs take a decided upturn in terms of real ale. First along the road is the **Bird in Hand**, an attractive little place



well known for its food as well as its beer. There are Bass, Stones, Boddingtons and most interestingly, Highgate mild, which was put on after Bass scrapped its mild and the landlord, a mild drinker himself, sought another. The pump is positioned at the back of the bar and is not easy to spot. And by the way, the Bird in Hand is the only pub on this stretch marked in the local A-Z.

Further up on the right is the **Hare & Hounds**, an excellent Thwaites pub consisting of several small drinking areas. I was particularly struck by the tiny games room incorporating a pinball machine. Directly opposite is the **Winston Churchill**, a large Whitbread eatery offering Boddingtons, Flowers and Pedigree. Here the 469 bus turns left into Bamford, and you can do the same to reach the **Grapes**, a one-roomed local selling Robbies Best Bitter. If you retrace your steps and head towards Rochdale, you'll eventually see the **Elephant & Castle**, another large Whitbread pub, selling Boddingtons, Pedigree and 6X. The **Dog & Partridge** is yet another Whitbread pub, offering Boddingtons, Tetley and an excellent pint of Spitfire. Approaching Rochdale, you come to the **Cemetery**, a well-known free house offering excellent Taylors beers alongside various guests. Local micro Phoenix usually figures prominently, which is fine by me. Next stop is Rochdale town centre - but that's another story.

Mildly Marble

Mark McConachie

Mark Dade of the Marble Brewery has always said that he never wanted to brew a modern-day mild. So he has created Amber Kitchen Ale (4.7%, £1.65), almost a recreation of an early twentieth century AK Ale, a lightly coloured, lightly hopped ale of around 1050 og.

To my mind, this is the best beer that Mark has ever produced, being exceedingly moreish and it doesn't taste anything like 4.7%. The taste is somewhat akin to that of Harveys beers from Sussex. Sales have been very good at the Marble Arch and especially in Chorlton. I hear that my esteemed colleague Daddy Bell purchased four-and-a-half gallons to take home!

Following the very successful N/4 ABV Tour, there have been a number of changes at the Marble Arch. The main room has a different layout with new or re-upholstered furniture. A six-foot high-backed settle, together with a leather Chesterfield breaks up the drinking space dramatically. The back room has also been altered.

A guest beer (ie a non-Marble beer) has been introduced at weekends and an off-sales service started for Marble beers. Off-sales prices are: Marble Bitter, N/4 - £1 per pint. Summer, IPA, Porter - £1.20 per pint. A five pint polypin costs £2.50 and an 18 pint polypin £4.50.

Blackley crawl

In mid-May Mark McConachie checked out the pubs and ales of Blackley, starting at a cavernous ex-club in Crumpsall...

This was Lees' **Imperial**, which now only sells Lees bitter. We crossed the River Irk into Blackley for Burtonwood's **Millstone**, a small house set in a fork in the road and on a very steep slope. It is a cosy pub, decorated with a myriad of old Manchester photos, with cask bitter and Forshaws.

Back-tracking to Bottomley Side, we made for Wilsons' **Old House at Home**. It seems to be catering for the younger market these days. The two cask beers were Websters YB and Peter Yates bitter.

Two Holts houses were next. Offering bitter only (despite the presence of a mild handpull) was the smart-looking **Fox**. Not too many punters in, however, and the landlady told us she was thinking

of trying smooth mild soon. Nearby is the far larger **Golden Lion** (left), with its splendid bowling green. Both mild and bitter were available here, but the mild is normally only on smooth unless you specifically ask for the traditional. This we did, and top notch it was too.



(Bus 65 goes to Blackley village)

Ale at Kings

The Kings Arms on Bloom Street, Salford, has replaced Navigator with Cains 'King 'Ell Ale (geddit?) as the regular beer.

White House revamp

Great Ancoats Street's premier free house has been redecorated externally and original tilework beneath the windows has been revealed to great effect. Inside, Bridgewater Salford Pride has joined Holts on the bar.

Peter Kershaw

Peter Kershaw, Chairman and Joint Managing Director of the Joseph Holt Group, died on 31st May, aged 85. He was the great-great-grandson of Joseph Holt, who set up the Derby Brewery in 1849. Peter Kershaw went to work in the brewhouse after the Second World War and became Brewery Manager in 1953. He became Chairman when his uncle, Sir Edward Holt, died in 1968.



In the 1960s and 1970s, when keg beers were being promoted by many brewers, Peter Kershaw preferred to maintain production of traditional beer at low prices. In 1971 he wrote, 'I believe that the public have realised that many independent breweries brew what might be called an old-fashioned draught beer, as opposed to keg and tanker beer, and that the price is considerably less. It is, of course, more trouble to look after, but I believe something the customer is looking for'.

Holts became a limited company in the 1950s, but more recently the issue of shares on the open stock market was considered to be of no benefit for the future of the brewery. Earlier this year there was initiated a process to bring it back into the control of the family and other directors, with Peter Kershaw as president of the new company.

The continuing success of Holts Brewery in the 21st century owes much to the influence of Peter Kershaw.

Stewart Revell

N/4 movements

The **Bar Centro** on Tib Street is now in the hands of Tony and Linda (ex-Pot of Beer), who will be making some gradual changes and putting on cask beer for the first time. By clever utilisation of an under stairs area, two real ales will be introduced to begin with.

The **Pot of Beer** is now being run by Nicola Mathews, former assistant manager at the Beer House. She plans to introduce a breakfast service and a champagne Sunday brunch (only available by phoning the pub). All day Sunday and Bank Holiday opening is also on the cards.

Near and Far

Bridgewater Ales

with Daddy Bell

Bridgewater's **Beltane Bok** proved an intriguing but popular choice at the Oldham Beer Festival at the end of April. On first tasting it had something of the quality of an under-strength barley wine; but on later encounters it reminded me more of the SSB (Stephen's Special Bitter) of a year ago - in hue, in gravity and in flavour. Altogether, it was well worth the considerable time and effort which Richard Bazen had put into devising and brewing it.

The only other Bridgewater special I can recall recently was **Bridgewater Packet**, a 4%er which was first available (I think) in the **White Lion** on Liverpool Road in the fourth week of May. Otherwise, Salford Pride has put in a reappearance, selling for £1.25 (and in very good form on 17th June) in the **Albert Vaults** on Chapel Street. In the same pub and at the same price, a month earlier, was a particularly good batch of the 4.2% Ash Blonde, an ideal thirst-quencher for spring and summer in Salford (or indeed anywhere else) - pale, clear and nicely citric from the Cascade hops.

Richard's brews have also cropped up in the estate of the other micro-brewers: I spotted several Bridgewater pumpclips in Porter's **Ashton Arms** in Oldham.

Securing and keeping new outlets, and brewing flat-out to satisfy the created demand, is an exhausting process. Perhaps this is a pivotal point in the development of Bridgewater Ales Ltd, and in Richard's (and Danny's) own careers in brewing. There may be exciting changes in prospect by the time this edition of WD appears.

Festival favourites

It seems ages now since the N/4 ABV Tour (May 18th-21st). I didn't even attempt to drink my way to a single T shirt, but I did particularly appreciate the Okells Old Skipper in the Marble Arch and Roosters Hillsborough Hotel Special in the Beer House. The extensive list of cask beers (not to mention imported bottles and other drinks) showed some refreshingly (or sometimes depressingly) familiar names, but with enough novelties to satisfy even the hardest-to-please scratchers.

The latter were out in force again for Ian Casson's Flaming June Festival at the **Beer House** (June 1st-4th), where the Saturday afternoon seemed especially busy. Fat God's and Warwickshire breweries were represented by seven beers apiece, collected by Ian himself. Warwickshire's Ragged Staff (5.5%) was a particularly worthwhile choice. Ian is wisely having mercy on himself (and on us) by allowing a longer than usual break before his next festival venture in high summer (July 20th-23rd), but before then Idy and Sal will have tickled all our fancies with a Midsummer Ales and Cider festival at the **Crescent** (22nd-25th June).

Salford

On Ordsall Lane (where the Albion - shut for twenty years or so - finally succumbed to demolition in early April) the **Bricklayers Arms** (Holts) has been given an extensive and expensive internal makeover. The first hint of change was the shock of clear glass in all the windows, which exposed the usually retiring and self-effacing customers to the gaze of passers-by. The lower part of the glazing is now misted over (with stick-on transfers) so all concerned are now spared further embarrassment.

Inside, the entrance to the lounge has been repositioned and a window opened through into the vault. There is new wallpaper, upholstery and

furniture throughout, though the room and the vault retain their individual

characters. Picnic tables have appeared in the yard, which is no longer the haunt of large, fierce dogs. As well as all these welcome

manifestations of the new regime (with Geoffrey Morris as licensee), there is the marked improvement in the beer quality (including some wondrously good mild) and an altogether brighter atmosphere.



Holts evidently have every confidence in the future of the Brickies: it is a pity that they don't extend this to the Eccles pubs of which they are seeking to divest themselves.

Down South

I always purport not to venture far beyond the North West, but occasionally I have to spend a day down south, which gives an opportunity to test the reliability of the Good Beer Guide. It proved a good companion in **London** on May 19th. I started with the first Central London entry, the **Jerusalem Tavern** (pictured) in Britton Street, Clerkenwell (in the borough of Finsbury, according to the street signs). This is an early Georgian building with an early nineteenth century shop front and some of the worst uneven and discoloured floors I've ever seen in a building in use; but I take it

they're genuine, like the wall tiling depicting the seasons, rather than designer grot. It was hard to tear myself away from such congenial surroundings, or from such fine beers: the pub is a tied house of the St Peter's Brewery in Suffolk, and six of their brews were on tap from mock mini-cask ends behind the bar, as well as a wide selection of their own beers in bottled form. All those I sampled were excellent, and with brim measures.

O'Hanlon's pub not too far away, at the corner of Tysoe Street and Rosebery Avenue, has a more contrived decor, but both the Firefly and the Port Stout were well worth drinking.

Much later in the day, I popped into the raucously busy **Euston Flyer**, a Fullers pub in the Hogshead idiom, opposite the British Library, where a pint of the Honey Dew Organic beer was £2.25 - a fairly standard price everywhere I went. The cheapest beer of the day was in the **Head of Steam** at Euston Station - a pint of 4.5% O'Hanlon's yellow Hammer for £1.95: prices here overall were just under or just over £2 a pint.

In **Oxford** on May 30th I again took the GBG, rather than my own memory, as my guide. En route from the station I paused to mourn Morrells Brewery, and then sought out the **Wharf House** in Butterwyke Place, by Speedwell Street. This spartan free house, formerly a long-standing Halls pub, has a good local trade as well as a 'green' atmosphere. Hook Norton Best and RCH Pitchfork are the regular beers, but I opted for a pint of Moor (Somerset) Crossbow 851.



The non-GBG **Castle Tavern** at the corner of Paradise Street is still signed as a Morlands pub; the two cask ales available were Greene King IPA and Ruddles Wheat premium beer. Also absent from the 2000 GBG is Fullers' **Head of the River** by Folly Bridge, where I again chose Honeydew. The pub has too many incongruous design flaws for my comfort, with bric-a-brac everywhere, including old petrol cans, ropes, chains and pulleys.

Back to a GBG 2000 selection for the **Hobgoblin** (ex Bulldog) at the Carfax end of St Aldates, a Wychwood house with an excellent choice of their own and other good beers. Their M4 mild (3.6%, £1.50) was a very good accompaniment to a late lunch.

GBG 2000 *The Millennium Pub Trail*

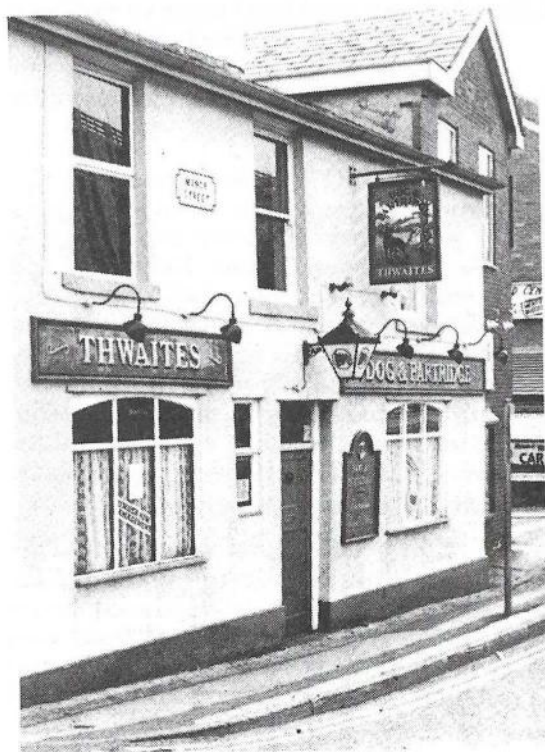
Part Five

Steve Smith and Mark McConachie began their latest outing with another train ride, this time to Bolton...

We headed for the far side of town and the excellent **Howcroft Inn** on Pool Street. This is a multi-roomed Walkers house offering the all too rare mild, along with bitter, Tetley bitter and guests, including beers from the nearby Bank Top Brewery. The pub holds regular beer festivals and boasts a well tended bowling green (packed in summer).

A roundabout stroll back through the town took us to the **Dog & Partridge** (below), a basic Thwaites house on Manor Street. The beers are mild (back on cask again after being in danger of disappearing altogether) and bitter. We opted for the former, which was served in oversized glasses - and a generous measure, too! The pub has a traditional vault and a spartan lounge decorated with sheet music along the walls.

Next up was the **Hen & Chickens** on Deansgate, handily placed around the corner from the bus station. This is a comfortable and relaxing Greenalls pub, offering bitter and mild plus an interesting range of guest beers. We tried the Batemans Spring Breeze, a 4.2% hoppy ale. The pub was renovated a few years ago, resulting in an open-ended vault and split-level drinking and dining areas (good value lunchtime meals and snacks).



Going via Newport Street and passing the **Clifton Arms** (we'll revisit soon) we walked to Bridgeman Street and the **Lodge Bank Tavern**. This is one of the few Lees houses in the area; a friendly place, spacious and well

kept. GB mild and bitter are available and we deemed them the best beers of the night.

Our final call was the **Sweet Green Tavern** on Crook Street, almost opposite the rail station. This is one of those places which never seems to disappoint; plenty of drinking areas and a lively clientele. There is a house beer brewed by Moorhouses (special, a blend of Premier and bitter). On our visit there was also Moorhouses Black Shamrock, along with the standard Tetley bitter.

Around Bury

Our next trip involved a bus ride from Bury which took us to within a cockstride of the **Hark to Dandler**, a 'try also' GBG entry on Walmersley Old Road. The pub is almost up in th'hills, a few miles from the town centre. There is a friendly atmosphere, a spacious lounge and pool room and superb Lees GB Mild, bitter and their seasonal beer, Malted Mayhem.

Nearer to the town centre at the beginning of Bell Lane is the aptly named **Old Blue Bell**, the first of four Holts houses we would encounter during the evening. It is a lively locals' pub with a traditional vault, a lounge divided into two parts, a well kept back parlour and the usual Holts mild and bitter.

On the opposite side of town, the **Rose & Crown** on Manchester Old Road is a popular pub featuring many beers. It reverted to its former name after some years as a 'Tap & Spile'. There are three rooms off the main bar with scumbled walls decorated with railway memorabilia. The beers included guests from Titanic and Riddleys.

On the 135 bus route towards Whitefield, there is that fine, double-fronted Holts house, the **Blue Bell** on Manchester Road. Mild and bitter again, and a comfortable interior in the Holts style.

Whitefield itself has the 'try also' **Wheatsheaf** on Bury New Road (*right*), close to the Metrolink and bus stops. It is a



basic Robinsons pub, with lounge, vault and pool rooms, selling Best Bitter. Music is prevalent and it can sometimes be noisy.

Next, the **Eagle & Child** on Higher Lane, a smart, popular mock-Tudor roadhouse boasting one of the finest bowling greens in the area (floodlit, too). This Holts pub, comprising vault, lounge and snug, is not to be missed.

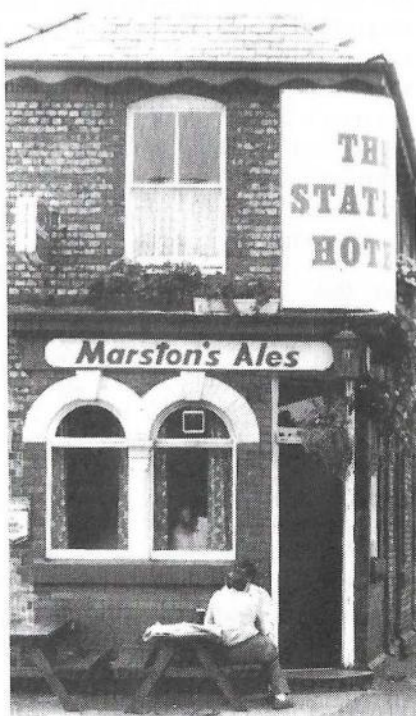
Going through Whitefield to Besses o'th'Barn, one comes to the **Coach & Horses** on Bury Old Road. This is one of Joey Holts' oldest houses, in the shadow of the Metrolink viaduct and within hearing distance of the M60 motorway. The old lounge, snug and taproom layout remain and the pub was the ideal place to round off our day's wanderings.

Due South

There are frequent bus services to the pleasant village of Didsbury, where our starting point was the **Station**, a Marstons pub on Wilmslow Road. The beer range has been modified: Banks's Original replaces Batemans mild, Banks's bitter replaces Marstons and the Head Brewer's Choice has been refined and re-badged as 'Be My Guest', a mixture of the former with Banks's and Camerons seasonal beers.

It is much the same story at the other Marstons pub, the **Royal Oak**, also on Wilmslow Road, although Marstons bitter has kept its place alongside the Banks's. Pedigree remains in both outlets. Both pubs have three comfortable rooms and cheese and paté lunches are a speciality at the Royal Oak. Recent modifications have included the removal of the brass anti-spill rails from the tables.

Around the corner on William Street is another of Didsbury's finest, the **Fletcher Moss**, formerly the Albert. The pub has been completely changed inside to reflect a more upmarket approach and there is now a conservatory along with more spacious areas, polished wood and a local history theme. Hydes mild and bitter are the beers.



Letters

Guidelines

Sir - I sympathise with your correspondent David Sheldon (*Letters, June*) but feel it useful to respond to his complaints about the two Good Beer Guide pubs in my branch area.

The pubs concerned were surveyed by two very senior branch members, namely myself for the Tandle Hill Tavern and our ex-Chairman, Graham Chinn, for the Black Horse, Shaw. The Lees seasonals were available at the Tandle Hill Tavern at the time of survey and would have remained so if it were not for poor sales. I am gratified, though, that the mild and bitter were both good.

As for the Black Horse, Graham assures me that the landlord confirmed at the time of survey that seasonal beers were available. I, too, am disappointed that they are not, but lead-in times for the Good Beer Guide do inevitably mean that some things might change. (A useful tip when searching out Lees seasonal beers is to telephone ahead first.) The reason why the Black Horse is in the Good Beer Guide is simple - the members voted for the pub and, in support, Graham tells me he has not had a bad pint there.

I regret I can offer no explanation for the punch up!

*Peter Alexander, Chairman,
Rochdale, Oldham & Bury Branch of CAMRA*

More about Uncle Igor

Sir - A couple of years ago I went on a bit of a crawl around the Lake District and my last port of call was the GBG-listed Water Mill at Ings near Windermere. Amongst the many guest beers on offer was 'Uncle Igor's Falling Down Water'. From what I can remember it had an ABV of about 22% and was sold in special 1/3 of a pint glasses at nearly £3 a time. Tasting notes? Well, let's just say it didn't taste much like beer and was pretty awful really, a bit like a cross between meths and sherry!

R S Ramwell

Greenalls

Sir - Regarding Kim Rampley's letter (*May WD*) about Greenalls' St Helens beers tasting better than the Warrington-brewed beers; I remember drinking both and I certainly agree that St Helens beers were of a 'robust' flavour, very hoppy and malty. The Warrington beers were much lighter and the semi-sweet taste certainly didn't linger as long as the St Helens taste.

However, I remember a St Helens drinker telling me that Warrington beers had 'a slight perfume odour and a fruity-wine taste - excellent!' His verdict on the St Helens beers was: 'The stuff's tasteless. Probably brewed with hops and cement.' On the other hand, a

Warrington drinker once told me that St Helens beers were 'powerful' and 'a real man's drink!' The beer brewed in his home town was 'Boys' beer - there's more taste in Tizer!

So they both escaped their home towns to drink their favourite tippie. I would like to meet the two again to hear their opinions on the stuff that is now brewed elsewhere. Myself, I preferred the St Helens beers. Today? I'm not interested!

Leo King

Around Bolton

Trotter

Just outside the town centre on St Georges Road is the **Oystercatcher Brasserie**. Although the pub is in its fourth incarnation - originally the Crofters Hotel, then Magees and more recently Gallagher's Oyster Bar - the revolving front door and most of the wood panelling remain. A selection of broadsheet newspapers is available in the spacious brasserie area and the vault is now the bistro dining room. On my visit the handpulled beers were Tetley bitter, Boddies, Pedigree and Robinsons bitter, together with a Czech beer, Staropramen.

Regarding David Sheldon's letter (*June WD*) about his experiences in three Lees pubs which are listed in the Good Beer Guide as selling seasonal beers, I cannot comment on the Shaw and Middleton pubs, but I do know about the **Lodge Bank Tavern** in Bolton.

I note that he visited the pub in February. If he had consulted his GBG properly, he would have seen that Lees do not begin their seasonal ales season until March. Before the Guide was published the Bolton CAMRA branch checked out the Lodge Bank Tavern and I have certainly tasted Archer Stout (March/April) and Fudger Ale (May/June) there.

However, there is a possibility that the licensee may have dropped the seasonal ales after the GBG came out - I will look into the situation.



Wigan and district

Dave White

The **Scarbrick Arms Hotel**, Wood Lane, Wroughtington, has been gutted and converted into a shrine to pale wooden furniture known as the **Mulberry Tree**. The emphasis, as before, is on food, with a separate restaurant area. Tall chrome stools stand by the coffee bar and public bar, and sunken spotlights beam down from the ceiling. The Flowers IPA and Wadworth 6X are about as exciting as these beers get, but I can't imagine any non-diner wanting to stay for more than a quick one.

The **Wheatsheaf Hotel**, Miles Lane, Shevington Vale, now serves Marstons Pedigree alongside Greenalls and Tetley bitters. Sadly, the Greenalls mild has gone keg.

The Wigan CAMRA Pub of the Year award for 1999/2000 goes to the **Bold Hotel**, Poolstock Lane, Poolstock. Trivia buffs will be fascinated to learn that your roving reporter had his last pint (well, three, actually) of Burtonwood mild here a year or so ago, and the Bold still serves Burtonwood bitter, plus a guest ale. A date for the presentation has yet to be decided, but when it is, the Bold will be well worth a visit.

Still open

Contrary to the note in last month's WD, the licensee of the Stanley in Eccles assures us that the pub was not closed at 8.30pm on a Tuesday in May, or on any other day.

WHAT'S DOING contributions should be sent to the editor c/o 88 Ringley Road, Stoneclough, Radcliffe, Manchester M26 1ET, to arrive no later than first post on the 20th of the month for inclusion in the next month's issue.

WHAT'S DOING ADVERTISING: Full page £52.50 or £210 for six months, half page £36.75 or £157.50 for six months, quarter page £26.25 or £105 for six months. All adverts must be accompanied with payment. Cheque payable to 'What's Doing'.

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To join CAMRA send £14 to Membership, CAMRA, 230 Hatfield Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4LW.

Contributors to this issue: Alex Koval, Bob Potts, Steve Smith, Mark McConachie, Roger Hall, Dave Crookell, Stewart Revell, Roy Bullock, Paul Warbrick, Dave White, Daddy Bell

CAMRA Membership gives:

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Roll On Wetherspoons

Dave Crookell

A recent foray into Swinton town centre revealed something of a real ale desert and a J D Wetherspoons outlet could be just what is needed.

The **Weavers Arms** on Swinton Hall Road, once a reliable Boddies pub with the cream of Manchester and the occasional guest beer dispensed via handpump, had but one solitary wicket boasting Tetleys mild at 99p a pint. This mild must have been in the pipes for some time, so we opted for Boddies nitrokeg bitter at an extra 59p a pint. Whatever happened to the days when you could swap a bad pint for an alternative and any price difference was ignored? On top of all this it was a woeful karaoke night.

Over at the recently refurbished **Bulls Head** (motto: For your Pleasure and Entertainment...) things were no better, the only cask ale being the ubiquitous Theakstons bitter, which had just gone off (in terms of availability, not acetically). After a quick visit to the cellar the barmaid returned to announce that there was no more and offered the dreadful Tetleys Smoothflow bitter as an alternative.

We didn't venture into the **Football**, but I imagine we would have found a similar situation, and as for Yates's - we had left our ear-plugs at home.

The sooner Tim Martin & Co get their act together in the public toilets at Carbuncle Corner the better, although there is of course a positive side to the present state of affairs - you can get up in the morning after drinking in Swinton town centre and feel like you've not been out. (Thanks to Trevor Crookell for this somewhat cynical observation.)

Incidentally, I thought that the inventor of the WC as we know it today was Thomas Crapper (Letters, WD June) so how about commemorating him in the name of the new pub?

"Just popping into the Crapper for a quick one."

Maybe not.

Oink

The **Lima** on Peru Street, Salford, was demolished in May. The pub, built about thirty years ago by Whitbread, had seen a few makeovers and changes of ownership. In the 1990s it was called the **Squealing Pig**.

Over in Hulme, the **Red Admiral** (Robinsons) on Hulme Walk was demolished in May.

Rupert

*So, farewell then, Ebenezer Drab,
Or Mr Eb as you were known.
Good, cheap beer for the working
class,
That's how your profits were made.*

These resounding words of Eric Jarvis Thribb are redolent of another era and sound the death knell, not only of a stalwart of local brewing, but also of a whole tradition, going back some two hundred years. Ebenezer Drab, who has died at the age of 104, may not be the last of a generation of intransigent backwoodsmen, but his demise signals the end of futile resistance against the tide of modernity. Only last month the eponymous Mr Callow of that dynastic brewery fought off criticism from his modernising shareholders, but this too must surely end.

Drab's empire was built on a simple formula - no nonsense, no frills pubs, local to the brewery with cheap, good quality real ale. There are those who would argue that, because the beer is the cheapest in the country and the brewery one of the most profitable, there is no need to change.

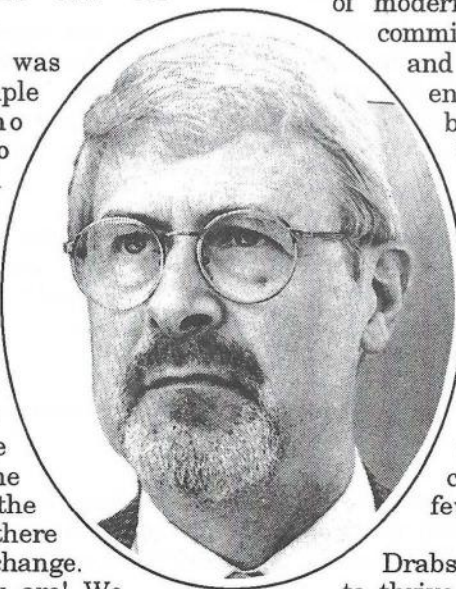
How wrong they are! We are living in a global economy and to compete, brand awareness is

paramount. Historically, Drab's expenditure on advertising has been pitiful. Growth through word of mouth recommendations is surely brittle and can easily evaporate. Sustainable growth depends on deeply embedded brand loyalty, reinforced by advertising and point of sale displays. In an aspirational world, low prices are equated with poor quality and must rise significantly.

There are already signs that Drabs recognise the need to change. The double-sided beermat was an innovation of the 1980s and the last decade of the century saw the introduction of nitrogenated beers in an effort to discontinue the dwindling sales of cask conditioned mild. With the death of Ebenezer, it is likely that the brewery will continue to espouse the trappings of modernity. Mr Perry is

committed to progress and will not allow the enterprise to slip behind the giants of the industry. After all, how many people are there who want to drink high quality real ales at 30p a pint less than the going rate in traditional, multi-roomed pubs of character? Very few, I would suggest.

Drabs cannot continue to thrive unless it changes or allows itself to be taken over by someone with vision.



Branch Diary

Rochdale, Oldham & Bury

Sat 1 July, Independents' Day Coach Trip. Details from Branch Contact

Tue 4 July 8.30pm, Branch Meeting, White Hart, Platting Road, Lydgate, Oldham

Tue 25 July 8.30pm, Committee/What's Doing Collation/Bury Beer Festival Organisation Meeting, Ashton Arms, Clegg Street, Oldham

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

email: P.Alexander@Virgin.net

North Manchester

Sat 1 July noon, Treasure Hunt, Beer House, Manchester

Wed 5 July 8pm, Social, Sinclairs, Cathedral Street, Manchester

Sat 8 July noon, NERDS meeting, Crescent. Followed by Hydes Brewery visit.

Wed 12 July, Peel Green & Patricroft. Grapes 7pm, Bird in Hand 8pm, Stanley 9pm

Wed 19 July 8pm, Branch Meeting, Beer House, Manchester

Sat 22 July, Regional Barbecue, Queens, Honey Street, Cheetham.

Bar at noon, barbecue 1.30pm onwards

Tues 25 July 6pm, What's Doing collation, Queens Arms, Honey Street

Wed 26 July, Stockport Crawl. Winters, Underbank 7.30-8pm; Red Bull, Middle Hillgate, 8.30pm

Wed 2 Aug 8pm, Social, Ape & Apple, John Dalton Street, Manchester

Contact: Roger Hall 0161 740 7937

Wigan

Wed 12 July 8pm, Branch Meeting, Globe Hotel, High Street, Standish

Sun 13 August 1pm, Branch Meeting, Bowling Green Hotel, Wigan Lane, Swinley; followed by barbecue,

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

email john@misltd.co.uk

South East Lancs

Thur 6 July 8pm, Branch Meeting & Social, Railway, Golborne.

Thur 10 Aug 8pm, Branch Meeting & Social, Musketeer, Lord Street, Leigh

Contact: Mike Thomas 01942 817335

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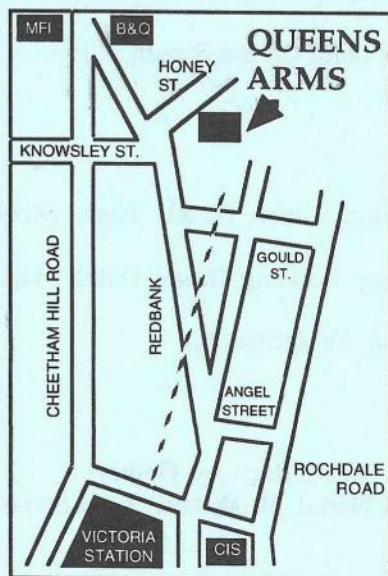
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