

30p

What's Doing

MARCH 2001



The Manchester Beer Drinker's Monthly Magazine



BEST CELLAR

The Ring o'Bells in Middleton is this year's winner of J W Lees' Best Kept Cellar competition. The photo shows Sue Bagley, landlady of the Ring o'Bells, with William Lees-Jones (Joint Managing Director of Lees), Jack Partington (Area Manager) and Giles Dennis (Head Brewer).

Lees seasonals

The 2001 series of seasonal brews from J W Lees began in January with **Dark Magic** Oak Stout (4.2%) - a traditional stout brewed with an infusion of oatmeal.

Lees Seasonals *continued*

Dark Magic will be followed by:

March and April:

Cereal Filler Rye Beer (4%).

May and June:

Moonlight Oak Dark Mild (3.8%).

July and August:

Scorcher Summer Ale (4.2%).

September and October:

Red Dragon Welsh Honey Ale.

November and December: **White Bear** Wheat Beer.



Wigan Beer Festival

The 14th Wigan Beer Festival will be held at the Mill at the Pier from 8th to 10th March 2001. This year's festival is based on the '2001 - a Beer Oddity' theme. There will be 47 different real ales, and some of



them will be very different - such as the Heather Kelpie, made with seaweed. Oakham White Dwarf, Traquair Bear Ale and Carlows excellent Stout are expected to be stars of the show.

Tickers may go for Alcazar Vixens Vice, Foxfield Wigan Pearle and Valhalla Simmer Dim. A brand new cider will be making its debut - Bellywinder from near Worcester. Visitors

possessed of the more conservative palate may be assured that old favourites and 'normal golden bitters' will be on sale as well as the oddities.

Crown

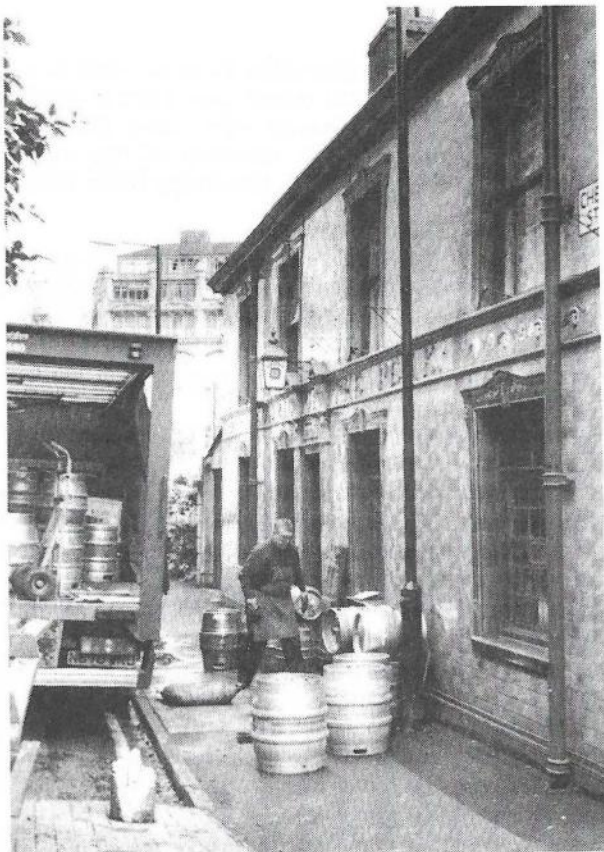
Hale Leisure have applied for a 2.00am licence for the **Crown** on Deansgate (*WD last month*). They want to turn the former Wilsons pub into a dance venue. Just what the city centre needs!

Head up

An outfit called Moth Developments has put in a planning application to redevelop the Lower Turks Head on Shudehill as a bar, restaurant and shop with living accommodation upstairs.

Cask Club

The Peveril of the Peak on Great Bridgewater Street is to be one of the first pubs in Manchester to participate in the Unique Pub Company's 'Cask Ale Club', a venture which has been successfully tried out in Yorkshire and the North East. The club is a joint venture with SIBA (the independent brewers' association) and supplies pubs which have signed up with a regular list of 'approved' beers.



At the Pev, this means the replacement of Websters bitter (hurrah) with a true guest ale. Cask Ale Club beers are expected to be available from mid-February.

Landlady Nancy recently celebrated thirty years at the pub. Terry and Kath retired from the **Circus** on Portland Street in February, so is Nancy now the longest serving landlady in Manchester?

Nip Inns

Nomura have bought almost 1,000 pubs from Bass, which makes them the UK's biggest pub owner, pushing Punch Taverns into second place. Will we notice any difference?

Oops

Last month, one of the beers at the Crown Inn, Bacup, was listed as Ironical Bearing. The line should have read 'ironically bearing the same name as the website - www.barearts.com'.

Out and about

with Grognaard

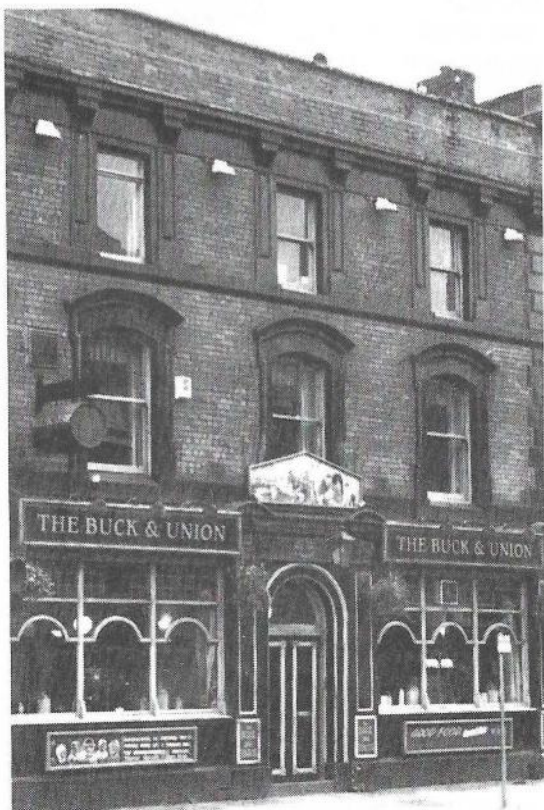
So the annual **Winter Ales Fest** is come and gone - it nearly makes you sorry that winter comes only once a year. As usual, there was an excellent range of ales on offer, with the emphasis on the dark and seductive; lots of nosh, courtesy of Idy and Sal of the Crescent in Salford, and Hydes, with its dinky little kiosk and technicolor pump clips.

It seems unfair to say there was a best ale, with so much choice of taste, but personally I would go for Gales Festival Mild. My only criticism would be that third-pints were not on offer this year and this is not the fault of the organisers; apparently the boys from Customs & Excise said they were illegal. Since when, I wonder. And why, I should add.

On leaving Campfield about 4.30pm on the Saturday we decided to drop in at the **Beer House** en route to the bus stop and home-town. In retrospect, this was not one of our better ideas. I sampled a half of ale whose name I should remember but can't, and while the taste was excellent, the price (£1.05) seemed a bit steep. Not that I said anything, but my eyebrow must have betrayed my surprise (it never has learned discretion) and I was promptly given a brief lecture on the cost of bringing ale all the way from Tipperary.

What was I supposed to answer? It's a long way to Tipperary? I was tempted, but wasn't in the mood for raising the pace of the discussion, so I just drank up and left.

I was half-inclined to visit the **Pot of Beer** which, like the Beer House, was holding its own winter ales festival, but time was pressing. A pity, since I later learned that landlord Ken Birch, formerly of the



Bridgewater Brewery, has since departed. A pity, as Ken was the convivial type of host we could do with more of.

Still in Manchester, a week later I called in at the **Piccadilly Tavern**, passing the **Wetherspoons** which was shut and bolted (United or City playing at home?) and there were no changes for the better here. The doorway was guarded by Gog and Magog in black overcoats - a sight to intimidate Godzilla - and inside all the handpumps had been stripped. So no more Hancocks at £1 per pint and one more excision from my visiting list.

However, in Oldham the news is definitely of the cheerful variety. The **Buck & Union** on Union Street has recently changed hands and is now in the experienced charge of Tony and Linda, ex of the Pot of Beer and the Bar Centro, Manchester. The Buck had been running downhill for the last few months with high prices and no clear policy as to what sort of place it is. A recent redecoration left it looking like a 'whitened sepulchre', but a friendlier, more homely image is planned. Many of the depressing large white lamps have been coloured up in a free-flowing style and at the unofficial reopening on Friday 16th February the place was well attended, with Sue and Dave of the Queens, Cheetham, appearing in a strong supporting role. Oldham's social scene can only benefit.

centro café bar

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In the City (3)

Continuing Trotter's tour...

The last leg ended on the fringe of Piccadilly, so next the pubs at the Victoria end of the city. First, **Cloisters Bar** in the Mitre Hotel, beside the Cathedral. The bar has been given a brighter look, with a bare wood floor, a pool table at one end, and it now has a more pub-like atmosphere. The single real ale is J W Lees bitter, selling for a reasonable £1.20 a pint.

Round the corner are the repositioned Old Shambles pubs next to the Triangle (ex-Corn Exchange) and facing the all-new clear glass M&S store. The pubs are now at the hub of activity in a transformed area of the city.

The three-storey facade of **Sinclair's** is a replica, but the pub has its original interior, with two small, wood panelled rooms downstairs and two larger rooms upstairs, with some of the original beams exposed. Photos on the walls show the various transformations of the Old



Shambles over the years. The real ale is Sam Smiths Old Brewery Bitter.

The **Wellington** is still connected to Sinclairs, but now at an angle, and here only Bass is available. The two pubs share an outdoor drinking area.

Having gazed at the water feature, I made my way up Withy Grove, across the tramlines and up to the **Hare & Hounds** on Shudehill. What does one say about this pub? It's a gem. Beautifully tiled outside and in, with leaded glass and polished wood. Singalongs accompanied by a piano player in the lobby are a regular feature and the beers on offer are Tetleys mild and bitter plus Joey Holts.

Finally, it was follow the tramlines round to the **Hogshead** on High Street, a large beer emporium which has been a regular entry in the Good Beer Guide. Arrays of wickets sell a wide selection of ales and there can be up to four beers on gravity at the back of the bar. I sampled O'Hanlons Red Ale, Smiles Blond and one from the Marlow rebellion range entitled Hangover From Hell, which I'm sure I had the following morning.

THE CRESCENT

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Beer Garden

Letters

Road Rage

Sir - Who does Roger Hall think he is? (WD Feb) 'The local pub, particularly in what were working class districts, may have had its day' Oh aye? 'It doesn't matter within reason where the pubs are.' Not if you're a middle class prat with a posh car, it doesn't. But what about if you're getting on a bit and fancy a quiet pint with your mates?

Not that I'm snobby enough to read the *Guardian*, but some bloke told me it said assaults in Manchester had gone up by 225% between 1997 and 1999, and licensed premises had gone up by 241% at the same time. Funny that, isn't it? If you get your ideas from figures, that is. Anyone with common sense would know that if you cram all the pubs into the city centre, you're going to get trouble.

And I, for one, wouldn't fancy a piss up in the city at 70. Not just because of the climb on to the bus, or the cold, or the fact that you get back late, or that you're dying for a pee all the way home. But because I wouldn't fancy being mugged by some pillock (or 'student' as they call themselves these days) who's mixed his ale with his charlie and doesn't know what he's doing.

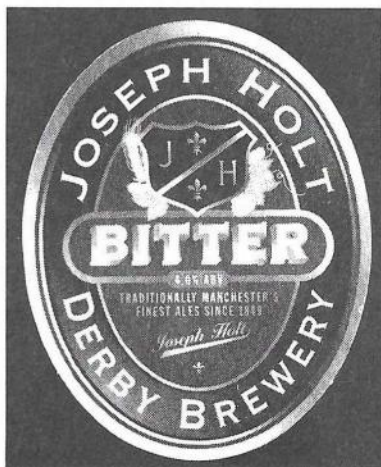
It's about time planners and anyone else with fancy ideas - Mr Hall included - gave a bit of thought to the older generation. Not all of us **do** have cars. And some of us **do** have mates nearby and would like a place to drink in.

Old Tom

Mat matters

Sir - There was a time when you knew where you were with a Holts beermat. It was made of a thick pulp, was printed on one side only, could soak up many times its own weight in spillage and served as a sturdy wedge under a wonky table leg. Then in the 1980s came the double-sided mat - thinner and with a reduced soakability quotient. Now I see that Holts have produced a new mat for the 21st century and it is a colourful thing, but like all beer mats these days, it curls up when it dries out, producing glass stability problems. Does no-one make a decent beermat? Has the ancient craft been lost?

Eric Drab



Centro happenings

Bar Centro (*below*) on Tib Street is selling **Tib Street Tipple** (4.3%) from Boggart Hole Clough Brewery and **Bitchin' Bitter** (4.2%) from Sarah's Hop House in Golborne. Both beers are said to be true brews rather than blends and if they go down well they will become Centro's house beers. If not, brews from other breweries will be tried on a monthly basis. Hydes Jekylls Gold will remain as the standard offering.

Managers Tony and Linda have moved to the Buck & Union in Oldham and John Kennedy is now in charge at the Centro.



Entrepreneur's corner

The Abbey Inn in the centre of Oldham, a once formidable cask ale house, has a 'to let' sign outside.

In Harpurhey, another fine free house, the Junction on Queens Road, has a prominent 'for sale' sign. Let's hope a suitable buyer with a commitment to cask ale can be found for this real community boozier.

Boarded

The Braziers Arms on Hodson Street, Salford, was boarded up last month.

Contributors to this issue: Mike Goode, Dave White, Brian Gleave, Steve Smith, Roger Hall, Mark McConachie, Michael Lynn, Leo King, Daddy Bell, Paul Warbrick, Kevin McPhillips, Roy Bullock.

King's Ale

Leo King

More badge brews

'Badge brews' with the names of long-closed breweries continue to appear and some operating breweries even have their products brewed elsewhere. Further to the list in January's What's Doing:

Greene King of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk brew Rayments and Simpsons beers (the names of two bygone Hertfordshire breweries). They also brew Morlands of Abingdon, 113 miles away.

Courage, once a London brewery, had their Directors and best bitter brewed in Bristol and these now come from John Smiths in Tadcaster (208 miles from Bristol).

Shepherd Neame of Faversham produce Masons, the name of a Maidstone brewery closed long ago.

Wilsons and Websters, formerly of Manchester and Halifax, now come from **Mansfield Brewery**, who are also responsible for Matthew Brown (once of Blackburn), Home Brewery (Nottingham) and Youngers Best Bitter - brewed 241 miles away from the original brewery in Edinburgh. Home bitter is also brewed at **Theakstons** of Masham, Yorks.

Mitchells & Butlers (Bass) of Birmingham brew an assortment of badge beers - Charringtons (once of London, 113 miles away), Butlers (Wolverhampton), Joules (Stone, Staffs) and Everards. Why? The Everards brewery is still operational. Joules is also brewed at the Bass brewery in Burton on Trent. Other beers from the M&B brewery are Atkinsons (a long-gone Birmingham company), Aitkens 80/- and Fowlers 90/- (two former Scottish brews), Butlers (ex-Wolverhampton), Masseys (ex-Burnley, Lancs), Wenlock Brewery (Shropshire) and Tollemache & Cobbold (Suffolk).

The **Tollemache & Cobbold** brewery is still operational and produces Pains (St Neots) and Hancocks (Cardiff).

Back in the early 1960s a Canadian (I forget his name) started a series of takeovers and amalgamations in Manchester, central and north Lancashire and the West Riding of Yorkshire, resulting in companies called Hammonds United Breweries, Northern Breweries, Lancastrian United Breweries, Charrington United Breweries, Bass Charrington, then Bass - you know the rest. In Lancashire, this claimed breweries in Manchester, Ashton-under-Lyne, Liverpool, Blackpool and Barrow in Furness.

Manchester lost three great breweries in this process - Hardys Crown Brewery (Hulme), Openshaw Brewery (West Gorton) and Cornbrook Brewery (St Georges, near Hulme). And what did we end up with? That crap Brew Ten.

Lower Turks Head

The Lower Turks Head on Shudehill, derelict for many years, now has scaffolding applied to the full height of the building. It was a Manchester Brewery pub and still had its original tilework on the outside, complete with the 'MB' motif over the door. It became a Wilsons pub and the Watneys, Grand Met, etc, takeovers followed. The interior was beautiful in its heyday.



Could we be getting another Northern Quarter free house? Could it survive among the other Northern Quarter outlets? The Smithfield on Shudehill (the former bank building, not the Swan Street one) opened then closed, opened again, then closed again.

A new Wetherspoons in the area won't help. Is a Wetherspoons in the Printworks really necessary? I don't think so! There are only so many drinkers to fill these places. During the week many pubs are slack and a few of them sometimes close on weekdays.

A dear do

I hear complaints about expensive beer at the Smithfield, the Beer House, the Hogshead, etc, but the prices can't be that bad because these pubs sell beers from the four corners of Britain, and we have to consider the costs involved in getting them to Manchester.

By contrast, I went into Mr Thomas's Chop House on Cross Street with friends and ordered two pints of Boddies and a white wine and soda water. The cost was £6.10. One-and-a-half pints of lager came to £3.60. (I kid you not.) Transport costs here are minimal, since the brewery is barely a mile away. Also, Boddies bitter is only 1034.5 og. I didn't note the price of the Flowers (or whatever the other beer was) and I won't be going back to find out, that's for sure.

Luckily, Holts' Ape & Apple is only a few minutes' walk away.

Birtle beer

Finding themselves in the Birtle area of Bury, Dillan Bizwarp and Countryman ascend the windswept hillside overlooking Fairfield Hospital and Jericho...

The whitewashed Church Inn stands next to the old church of St John the Baptist and beyond is the disused Castle Hill Quarry, all dark and quiet. Judging by its position, the pub must be of some age and indeed, the inscription over the entrance reads 'c1760'. *(The photo dates from the 1950s.)*

Despite the pub's relative remoteness, there are four cask ales on sale - and one of them is a mild. These are Theakstons BB, Taylors Landlord, Moorhouses Black Cat and a house beer, Church Inn Bitter, brewed by Moorhouses.

The bar area, decorated in plain style and warmed by two coal fires, exudes rusticity - the low beams appear to be thoroughly original. Part of the pub doubles as a restaurant and bar food is also available. Friday is cabaret night, featuring various tribute bands and soloists together with a four-course meal.

The Church Inn is on Castle Hill Road, Birtle, and can be reached by the 469 bus from Bury (alight at the filling station just before the hospital). Bus 470 actually turns round in the pub car park, but it only runs two days a week.



Ready to roll

Beers from the Boggart Hole Clough Brewery have begun to appear and were expected to be on sale at the Bradford Beer Festival in early March. In Manchester, as well as Bar Centro (see elsewhere in this issue), Bar Fringe is expected to be another outlet.

Boggart Hole Clough's working plant is reconditioned equipment from Bridgewater Ales and consists of four fermenters, five conditioning tanks, a copper, mash tun and cold and hot liquor tanks. The liquor tanks are wall-mounted above the other vessels. The brewery's malt comes from Simpsons and yeast all the way from the Orkney Islands; several different varieties of hops are used.

The initial beers include Boggart Bitter, a 3.8% session beer; Angel Hill (4.2%), hoppy and distinctive; Darkside (4.4%), a red ale but in the Porter style, and the exclusive beer for Bar Centro, Tib Street Tipple (4.3%), a full-bodied, darkish bitter. Pump clips made from logs in Boggart Hole Clough will add to the local flavour.

Marble brews

The new brewer at the Marble Brewery is James Campbell, who has taken over now that Mark Dade is running the Boggart Hole Clough Brewery. James has worked at a number of Firkin breweries - Sheffield, Birmingham, Brighton and Worthing - and in Ireland at Messrs Maguire. Recent beers from the Marble have been a lot less cloudy, but not much will change.



Here and there

with Daddy Bell

Neither laughter nor tears seems an appropriate or sufficient response to Rupert's tailpiece in February's *What's Doing*. What can have happened to him to transform the tone of joyful expectancy in his January contribution to the tirade against 'deranged depressives' with which he supposedly dignified the February issue? Whom or what are we to blame for his mood swings, unless it be the improbably exotic duo with whom he reportedly attended the National Winter Ales Festival? Even if he didn't enjoy it (except perhaps masochistically), I did - thoroughly - as did thousands more satisfied customers and volunteers.

Perhaps a small scale, pub-based beer festival would be more to Rupert's liking? The **Crescent** in Salford pulled off one of its best yet with Idy and Sal's Candlemass-tide event. I share the Beer Monster™'s admiration of the Pictish Claymore, but I was equally impressed by up to half a dozen others. The Durham trio were excellent: Cathedral Gold (5.1%) from the cellar was very fine; the 4.3% Dark Secret (on gravity in the vault) was a nice mix of malts; while the Millennium City (6.5%, also in the vault), though initially none too clear, turned out to be outstanding, especially when it became the tipple of choice at £1 a pint in the week after the festival proper.



Another welcome discovery recently was the range from Tindall Ales of Ditchingham, encountered first in the **Beer House** (well done, Ian) on 13th February, but also in evidence at the **Ship & Mitre** festival in Liverpool later that week. The 3.8% Resurrection was a particularly favoured beer, with a slightly bitter aftertaste.

An era has ended in the history of Salford pubkeeping with the retirement of Iris Johnson. A formal farewell and thank you at the Greengate Brewery on 9th February was followed by an evening celebration at the **Welcome** in Robert Hall Street, with a superb buffet and a copious consumption of Lees mild and bitter. The *Manchester Evening News* covered the story on 10th February and on 13th February the licence was transferred to Christine Ingham (pictured with Iris).

We wish Iris well in her retirement (only a few yards from the Welcome) and hope to have a CAMRA social evening at the pub soon to express our own thanks.

I'd not been to Failsworth in ages, so I stopped off there for an hour (by train) on 8th February. It was good to revisit the **Millgate** (well remembered from its brewing days) where a pint of Lees seasonal ale, Dark Magic (a 4.2% stout) turned out to be dark, soft, mellow - and only £1.30 a pint! (Bitter is £1.35, mild £1.31). Could not this example be copied in other Lees houses where customers have hitherto resisted the seasonal brew on the ground of price?



I also looked in at the **Bricklayers Arms** just by the station, having spotted its new Jennings signage on a previous journey. The pub is larger inside than you'd expect - a four-roomer, in fact - but the big disappointment is the beer. Old Smoothy and Cumberland Cream are both nitrokeg beers, a travesty of what Cockermouth's brews can be. Any chance of a rethink, and a conversion to cask ale?



The centre of Eccles is a muddy and slippery mess at the moment, but that doesn't deter the dedicated drinker. Towards the end of last year it looked as if by now the **Crown & Volunteer** (Holts) would be contributing to the mess, as a brick-strewn croft instead of one of our best-preserved late 1930s pubs.

The good news is that the pub is still there and still open, and that its current licensee, Neville Doe, is making the most of his opportunity, offering a pie or pasty (with mushy peas) for just 50 pence, and a singalong every Friday evening from 8.30pm. Sunday hours are 12-3pm (last orders 2.30pm) and 7-

10.30pm. The 'sold' sign is still up, and it's too soon to say for certain whether the Crown & Vol has a bright future or just a few more months of vigorous life: but it's well worth a visit, to lend your own custom and encouragement, and enjoy the mild and bitter from Holts.

Boggart Hole Clough's Tib Street Tipple, with its finely crafted wooden pump clip, went on sale at **Bar Centro** in the third week of February. It is attractively dark red in colour, with a soft taste and a pale oatmeal head, and is in a very different idiom from Mark Dade's Marble Brewery products. But it augurs well for the future, if the rest of the Boggart Hole Clough range are anything near as interesting.

Bustling Bolton

Trotter

It's good to see that the real ale establishments in the town centre are pulling in the customers on Friday and Saturday nights.

The **Spinning Mule** (Wetherspoons) always has a lively mix of clientele and must be commended for serving the likes of Adnams Broadside, Shepherd Neame Spitfire and Bishops Finger at the set price of £1.49, alongside microbrew ales. In fact on Saturday 17th February the Spitfire (4,5%) was on offer at £1.29 a pint.

The **Old Man & Scythe** continues to be a magnet for real ale and cider drinkers and has some excellent guest beers in addition to Boddies, Joey Holts and Flowers IPA. Local buskers perform at the far end of the pub early Saturday evenings.

Across Churchgate, the **Varsity** attracts the youth/student type, but it does sell Banks's and Pedigree real ale.

At the other end of town on Deansgate, the **Hen & Chickens** continues to come up with good quality guest ales, and in here an array of characters like the white van man, the hairy monster and other ex-salty dogs prop up the bar, discussing the meaning of ale and other topical items.

The **Malt & Hops Ale House**, next to the Swan on Bradshawgate, was open for a brief period over Christmas and New Year, but now it's closed again.



Wigan and district

Dave White

Things appear to be looking up in Appley Bridge. I recently reported that there was work in progress at the **Inn Between**, Appley Road South (*WD Jan*) and on Appley Road North, the **Railway Hotel** has reverted to cask beer following a change of licensee. The ales on sale recently were Tetley bitter, Taylors Landlord and Moorhouses Black Cat mild. There are three other pubs within easy walking distance and the trains and buses stop nearby, making Appley Bridge well worth a visit.

Last month I remarked that Skelmersdale New Town was a real ale-free zone. Well, not quite, as the **Tanners** on Elmridge at Tanhouse sells Websters Green Label on handpump. Not much to write home about, I hear you say, but an improvement on the other ten pubs in the New Town. Meanwhile, back in Old Skelmersdale, the **Derby Arms**, High Street has reopened, offering Greenalls bitter.

The centre of Ashton-in-Makerfield may have little to tempt the discerning drinker, but the outskirts of town are beginning to improve. The **Cross Keys** at Stubshaw Cross was refurbished last year, and handpulled Burtonwood bitter has belatedly been reintroduced. The Cross Keys is on Golborne Road and should not be confused with a pub of the same name on Bolton Road which advertises traditional ales, but offers only fizz. On the other side of Ashton, the **Golden Ball**, Wigan Road, Landgate, sells Burtonwood and Boddingtons bitter. It was a surprise to find this pub open at all, let alone serving real ale. A welcome watering hole, nevertheless, on the dry stretch of the A49 into Wigan. Elsewhere, the **Ashfield**, a keg Banks's boozier on Bryn Road, Bryn, awaits demolition.

There was a time, not so many years ago, when you could leave the grounds of Haigh Hall near St David's Church and find three good pubs, nary a cockstride away. Not any more, alas. Cask conditioned beer has died the death at the **Balcarres Arms**, Copperas Lane, whilst the **Red Lion** on Haigh Road has gone over to smoothflow and is now a restaurant. The third pub, in case you're wondering, is the **Victoria**, on keg Thwaites.

Back to the centre of Wigan, and the **Market Tavern**, or more recently **Steppes**, has resurfaced as the **Tavern**. Another change of name doesn't alter the fact that Mesnes Street isn't really where it's at these days, as all the kids prefer to frequent the bars on the King Street/Wallgate circuit. The Tavern looks much the same inside as it did before, and is still keg.

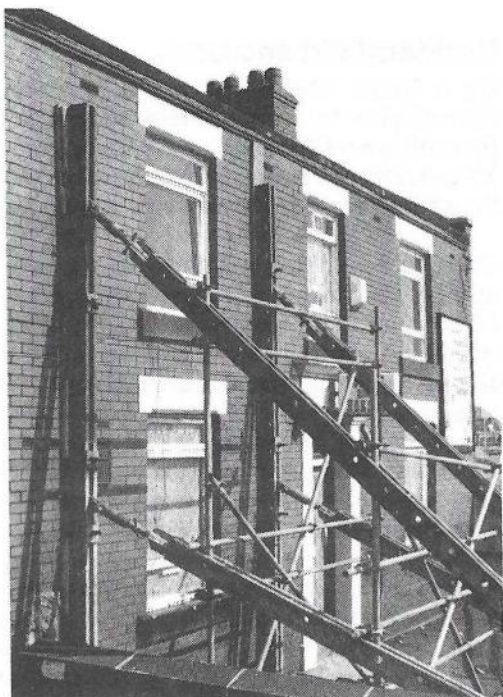
Finally, a plug for the **2001 Wigan Pub Guide** which should be on sale at the Wigan Beer Festival this month. The guide covers every pub in the Wigan branch area (nearly 300 in all) and is priced at £1.50. More details next month.

The incredible sinking Boat

The old Boat & Horses (*right*) on Broadway in Chadderton is being demolished, but Lees GB mild and bitter can still be enjoyed in a temporary erection. This has a style reminiscent of an 'OK Diner' silver effigy portakabin. There's not much room, though, and the place does get packed.

Blackley pubs

Two pubs in this fair suburb remain closed. The Red Lion (*below*) is still in a state of semi-rooflessness and the Top Derby seems never to open, although it is not boarded up.

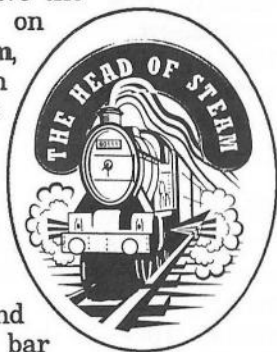


Huddersfield and back

Kevin McPhillips

On a spare afternoon/evening, consider taking a trip by train from Manchester to Huddersfield. There is a frequent service from both Piccadilly and Victoria and a non-stop train does the journey in about 30 minutes. A Ranger ticket costs around £2.50 and that is valid as far as Marsden, just two stops from Huddersfield.

Once in Huddersfield, there is no need to leave the station as there are two worthwhile bars on Platform 1. The biggest is the **Head of Steam**, which serves three or four draught beers, with Black Sheep a particular favourite. A wide selection of food at reasonable prices is available in the dining room; a second room has deep armchairs and sofas (don't be lulled into spending all your time there) and the third room is the bar proper.



Two minutes' walk away is the **Station Bar** and a more dedicated drinking atmosphere. The bar usually serves two real ales, with Black Sheep again popular. There is a pool table for sportsmen and Thursday evening is trad jazz night - rumoured to bring in a larger attendance than Huddersfield FC.

Before boarding the train back towards Manchester, one can take in a bit of culture by looking outside the front door of the station to view the monument to Sir Harold Wilson.

Returning from Huddersfield, the first stop is Slaithwaite (pronounce it as you will) and downhill from the station there are two pubs. To the right is the **Leg of Mutton**, selling two or three real ales. No prizes for guessing one of these. On the left is the **Commercial** with draught Tetley.

Next stop is Marsden and just outside the station is the **Railway**, a popular Burtonwood local with draught bitter. For sportsmen there are two games rooms and for musicians a piano. Further downhill - in this area everything is either uphill or downhill - is the **Swan**, owned by Thwaites, a recommendation in itself. Across the stream is the **Riverhead Brewery** stocking a selection of its own brews. The brewery is inside the pub. Would glass fermenting vessels add to viewing pleasure?

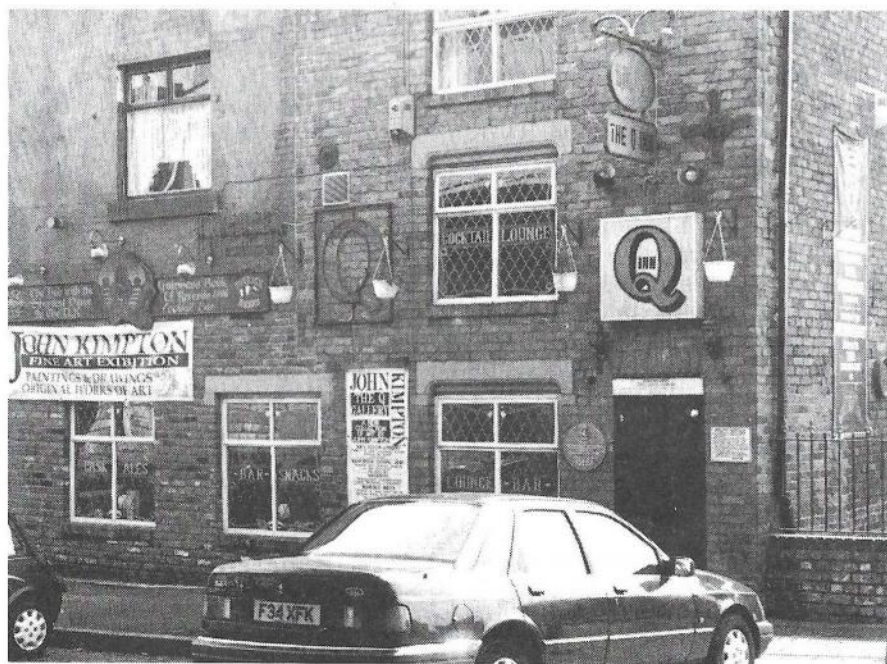
Back on the train for the next leg to Greenfield. Over the road from the station is the **Railway**, serving two or three ales. This is a cosy local, open all day at the weekends but evenings only during the

week. Live music is provided at the weekends. Press on to Stalybridge, with its well known **Station Bar** on the platform. The folk nights at the weekend are very popular. Outside the station towards the town centre there is the **Q** (*below*), and the **White House** is a few minutes' further on. Both are worth visiting.

The final stop before Manchester is Ashton. Opposite the station is the **Prince of Orange**, a Robinsons house. If you can still walk in a straight line at this stage, continue directly across the town centre for ten minutes until you find the aptly named **Station bar**, situated on the bypass. There's plenty of good beer available here, along with a conservatory and beer garden. Railway memorabilia includes a selection of photos of trains going into tunnels, if you like that sort of thing.

Also in Ashton, on Oldham Road, is the **Burlington**. This pub sells draught beers, including Hydes, at low prices in a convivial drinking atmosphere.

I don't think I can recommend trying this itinerary in both directions, at least not without some advance training. I heard of one drinker who tried it in the return direction on Christmas Eve. He got as far as Stalybridge and after a few pints dozed off. He regained consciousness on Boxing Day. His wife was not pleased.



Rupert

This month I was mostly going to be writing a polemic about pretentiousness and prudery. But a certain contributor to Opening Tripe and the Nestfeathers' newfound puritanism will have to wait, as hotfoot news comes in concerning Ben Chestnut and his fortunes or, rather, his lack of fortune.

I suppose Ben's one eternal quality is his resilience. Time and time again he bounces back from catastrophes largely of his own making to engage in some new venture. It's also fair to say that initially he makes a decent fist of what he's doing. The subsequent fall from grace is the stuff of tragedy.

Ben's licences are in the hot dinner tally. So what happened this time? Well, it depends who you talk to. Some say that whilst Ben was out his feline companion dragged some bedding on to a heater so that both Ben and his accommodation were gutted. Other more unkindly folk point to pecuniary disputations between the man himself and the owners of the Foaming Tankard. There are also differing accounts of the relationship between Ben and his erstwhile assistant.

Tales of the Old Bill being involved and Ben hiding out on a narrowboat in rural Wealthshire are clearly untrue as he has been spotted in his quondam haunts in Slumley. Whatever the real story turns out to be, one thing is certain. Ben will bounce back. Watch this space.

Not everything was hunky-dory at the amber nectar show. A disgruntled slap-head writes to order a new vademecum and takes the opportunity to moan to WD's dispatch department about the excessive queues which forced him to give up and go to the nearby Yak for sustenance. What does he expect? Popular events are by definition likely to be full so those who can't sort their lives out and get there early are likely to be disappointed.

Quite frankly, we are probably better off without his sort. There's more than enough soi-disant aficionados of amber nectar to share experiences with in a like-minded sort of way. And it made clocking on for ten grand, so who cares?

I'll come back to pretentiousness and prudery next time.

Pub Hunt

The 2001 Independents Day Pub Hunt will take place on Saturday 7th July, starting at 12 noon in the Beer House. Teams of up to four people.

Branch Diary

Regional Meeting

Wed 14 March 8pm, Hare & Hounds, Shudehill, Manchester

North Manchester

Thur 8 Mar 8pm, Good Beer

Guide non-city centre final

selection meeting, Marble Arch, Rochdale Road, Manchester

Thur 15 Mar 8pm, Social, Farmers Arms, Swinton

Wed 21 Mar 8pm, Branch Meeting & AGM, Crescent, Salford

Tues 27 Mar 6pm, What's Doing collation, Queens Arms, Honey Street, Cheetham

Wed 28 Mar, Chapel Street Crawl. Kings Arms 7pm, Mark Addy 8pm, Old Nelson 9pm.

Contact: Roger Hall 0161 740 7937

Rochdale, Oldham & Bury

Tue 6 March 8.30pm, Branch Meeting, Arthur Inn, Bolton Road, Bury

Sat 10 March, Coach Social, Macclesfield/Congleton area pubs.

Details from Branch Contact

Tue 27 March 8.30pm, Committee/What's Doing Collation, Rose & Crown, Manchester Old Road, Bury

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

email: P.Alexander@Virgin.net

Wigan

Wed 7 March. Help set up the beer festival (mid-morning onwards)

Thur 8 - Sat 10 March. Fourteenth Beer at the Pier, Trencherfield Mill. See elsewhere for details.

Sun 11th March. Help dismantle the beer festival (before noon)

There will be a branch meeting at Trencherfield Mill during this period

Fri 6th April Trip to Phoenix Brewery, Heywood. Depart from the Orwell, Wigan Pier, at 7pm. £10 in advance to Deano on (01942) 323034

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

email john@misltd.co.uk

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.

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: £3.30 for six months, £5.80 for twelve months. Send cheque/PO together with your name and address to Roger Hall, 123 Hill Lane, Blackley, Manchester M9 6PW. Cheques made out to 'What's Doing'.

Dave and Sue welcome you to

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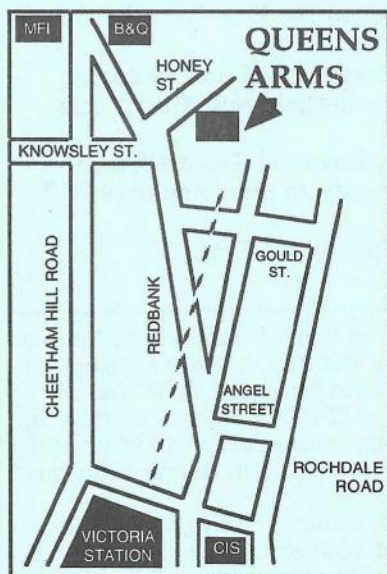
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