

30p

What's Doing

DECEMBER 2001



The Manchester Beer Drinker's Monthly Magazine

BEER HOUSE BOUNCES BACK

The Beer House came back into the mainstream of Manchester's Northern Quarter activities when it took part in the N/4 A-Z Tour in November. The pub is now part of the Innspired pub chain and has been managed by CAMRA stalwarts Lynne and Allan Whitehead since mid-October. Licensee Lynne was previously assistant manager at the Buck & Union in Oldham.





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M E M B E R

SETTING *professional* STANDARDS

Beer House

Regular beers at the Beer House are Greene King IPA and Jennings Cumberland Ale; in early November there were guests from Adnams, Aspinall, Bass, Leyden, Pictish, Salamander, Taylors and West Yorks, and there was also Cheddar Valley Cider. For the A-Z tour, Allan lined up a beer for every letter of the alphabet, from Alcazar Ale to Zimmer Frame. About 20 different breweries were represented.

The Beer House has a comprehensive lunchtime menu (11.30 to 2.00pm) and free chip barmes have been reintroduced on Wednesday and Friday evenings from 5 to 6.30pm.

Boggart Hole brews

The 4% Log End, a dark brew with a chocolate flavour, has been on sale at the **Bricklayers Arms** in Moston for a bargain £1 per pint. The pub is arranging for Boggarts Brew to be their regular beer.

Workshop Brewery 1 (4.2%) and Workshop Brewery 2 (4.5%) were the first cask beers brewed by local licensees and others as part of the seminars Mark Dade is providing for groups wishing to try their hand at brewing. The two beers were on sale at **Bar Fringe** and the **Beer House** during the recent Northern Quarter festival.

The N/4 Festival Ale (4.5%), a specially produced, bottle-conditioned beer, was available in cask form at the Bar Fringe.

Boggart Hole's Christmas brew will be a 5% beer in the style of an Irish red ale.

Ashton Arms

The Ashton Arms in Oldham will cease to be a Porter's pub in January. Dave Porter has decided to let his lease lapse, citing a combination of high business rates, ever increasing costs brought by Government employment legislation and the general appalling trading conditions in Oldham.

Red Rose festival

To celebrate Lancashire Day, the Smithfield Hotel on Swan Street, Manchester, is holding a Lancashire Beer Festival from Thursday 29th November. Landlady Jennifer will be providing up to ten beers and maybe some specials from Lancashire breweries. Traditional Lancashire food is also promised.

Hat & Feathers

Greene King IPA and Moorhouses Black Cat have joined Holts bitter at the Hat & Feathers on Mason Street, Manchester.

Ancoats

Manchester is busy smartening everywhere up for the Commonwealth Games next year. Ancoats, which is between the stadium and the city centre, has had quite a few bob thrown at it to make it a bit tidier and much of the money has been spent on refurbishment rather than demolition, so it ain't all bad. But why does the development corporation want to slap a compulsory purchase order on two of the very few pubs still operating in the area?

The **Edinburgh Castle** on Blossom Street and the **Cheshire Cheese** on Oldham Road are the pubs in question - let's hope the CPO is just to secure their future rather than knock them down. The **Edinburgh Castle**, in particular, is too good to lose. While they're at it, they could try and get someone to operate the **Crown & Kettle**. It's a brilliant building with an excellent, if idiosyncratic, interior. Now that the Northern Quarter has established a reputation sans pareil, surely it could become viable again?

Glossop

The **Bulls Head** in Old Glossop (the one with the Indian Restaurant) has reached the national quarter-finals of the Ethnic Pub Food of the Year competition. Judging will take place in London in February next year. Back at the pub, the former kitchen and reputedly the oldest building in all of Glossop, has been converted into a cosy, low-ceilinged snug, effectively doubling the accommodation for drinkers, as distinct from diners.

Down at the **Star** by the rail station, Boggart Hole beers are making guest appearances; Angel Hill was available in late October, along with beers from Abbeydale, Phoenix and Pictish.



New Boat and Horses

The Boat and Horses on Broadway, Chadderton, was officially opened by the Mayoress of Oldham last month. The new pub serves the full range of John Willie Lees ales from a 76-foot bar, believed to be the longest in Manchester. There are spacious seating areas, a traditional tap room, exposed beams and stone flooring. The restaurant offers roasts, grills, pies and platters and daily specials. Food is served from 12 noon to 9.30pm. The new licensees are John and Sue Ketley from the Cross Guns Inn at Egerton, near Bolton.

The Boat and Horses was saved from demolition in 1988, when there were plans to construct the M60 through the site and culvert the Rochdale Canal at the side of the building. The plans were changed after representations from CAMRA, canal societies and the brewery, but the construction of a new Broadway bridge affected the foundations and part of the building had to be propped up until a new pub was built. For the past year, Boat and Horses regulars have been catered for in an American-style diner which the brewery hired for use as a temporary pub.

The photo shows the Lees-Joneses with Sue Day of the Horse Boating Society and John and Sue Ketley.

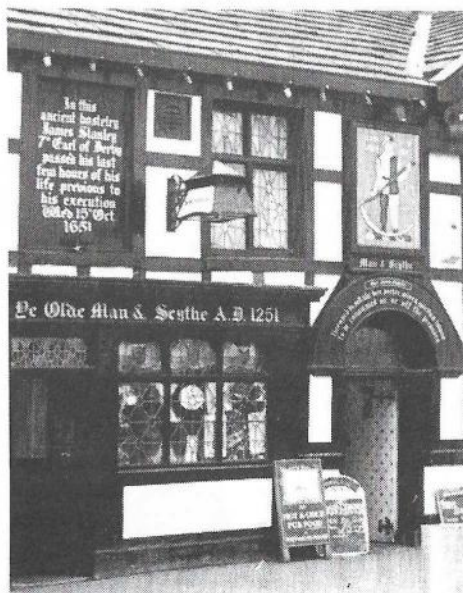


Hallowe'en saw the start of Wetherspoons' Legendary Beer Festival at the **Spinning Mule**. Beers from Brakspears with names taken from Arthurian legend, such as Excalibur bitter (4.4%), were featured, and to commemorate All Hallows Eve there was Wychwood Hobgoblin (5.0%). Both were good value at £1.29 a pint.

The phrase 'legendary beer festival' conjures up an image of hundreds of different real ales, spicy German sausages and maybe a 70s rock anthem tribute band at venues such as the Howcroft or the Formby Hall - events that raise funds for local charities. Wetherspoons' interpretation appears to be two or three real ales that have been conveniently named after legendary figures. Some bright spark conceived the notion that the Spinning Mule should honour legends from the popular music industry, so there were CDs stuck to the back of the bar and cardboard LP covers pinned to columns. An area was designated 'The Cavern' and adorned with black cardboard cutout guitars bearing the names of the Fab Four in the kind of display you might find on a junior school classroom wall (no offence, kids). Had there been background music featuring tracks from Revolver or Sergeant Pepper, then this could have been forgiven, but it was all rather incongruous, especially when you consider JDW's policy on music.

Over at the **Old Man & Scythe**, the ever-changing guest ale policy appears to have been curtailed, but there is still a commendable

regular line-up of Holts bitter, Tetley bitter and Old Speckled Hen, with usually one from Flowers IPA, London Pride or Boddies. When in good condition, the Speckled Hen is, in my humble opinion, one of the finest pints in Bolton. Its smooth, sweet flavour provides a splendid contrast to the acerbic bitterness of Joey Holts. On several occasions recently, however, the Hen has been undrinkable. The reasons given were that it is difficult to keep for any length of time and it does not sell well because of the price, £2.20 a pint. The solution to the problem should be simple enough then...



Northern Quarter Festival

Between 15th and 18th November, imbibers and tickers were invited to crawl around the nine or so pubs which involved themselves in the proceedings. There were some notable one-off brews, especially from

the Boggart Hole Clough Brewery. There was a beer championship and tasting at the **Marble Arch** on Rochdale Road, featuring an impressive range of forty-two organic beers in cask and in bottle. Oxfordshire brewers Brakspear came out on top in the ale section and champion with Live Organic, a 4.6% brew.



Bar Fringe had a specially brewed Bank Top beer, Knock Back (4.2%), and other participating pubs had some interesting and unheard of microbreweries' delights. The **Beer House** had an A to Z of beers and the lovely landlady Kath at the Castle on Oldham Street had the full complement of Robinsons beers - all nine of them, and not just for the festival, as this is their regular range.

The **Smithfield Hotel** was not part of the Northern Quarter festival, but they had their own mini-fest. If they had been part of the festival, the Nathans

English Stout, a 4.7% cask ale from the Dovecote Brewery would surely have been the champion beer of the whole proceedings. This was a rich, black, smooth-tasting concoction, with a burnt aftertaste - a classic English ale.

Hydes

What's Doing's tasting panel reports that Hydes' latest seasonal offering is one of the best beers they have ever done. The 5% Dutch Courage is reminiscent of a winter warmer; dark, with a hint of liquorice and extremely drinkable. While stocks last, it can be sampled in the Jolly Angler on Ducie Street, Manchester, a 2002 Good Beer Guide pub.

In the City

Trotter resumes his tour...

First stop was the **Mitre Hotel** for a pint of J W Lees bitter. Priced at £1.20, it must be the cheapest pint in Manchester. From the Mitre, it was off to the **Pot of Beer** (*below*), off Rochdale Road, on the fringe of the Northern Quarter. Half a wall separates the lounge from the main bar area and the pub must have the smallest gents' lavatory in Greater Manchester. The ales available were Robinsons dark mild (£1.51), Boddies and a guest from Cotleigh. This was Magpie, a seasonal beer priced at £1.80. For cider lovers, there is Miles Black Rat, 6.5% and £1.78.

From the Pot, I made my way to the **Beer House** and tried the Thwaites Reward and Titus' Tipple from Salamander. The latter is based at Dudley Hill, Bradford, and brewing began in January 2001.

Swan Street next and the **Smithfield Hotel**, where I tried Brokers (4.3%) from Warcup, a brewery based in a converted milking parlour at St Bedes, Gwent. The final tipple of the evening was Norton Ale from Shoes Brewery, based at the Three Horseshoes, Norton Canon, Hereford.

Several nights later I resumed the tour in the **Hat & Feathers** on Mason Street, off Swan Street. The pub has a tiled exterior and the walls inside are decorated with old boxing photos. The two real ales were Greene King IPA and Holts bitter.

Next, round the corner to the **Bar Fringe** which, according to the 2002 Good Beer Guide, is 'not for the faint-hearted'. The jukebox music is predominantly Prog-Rock and note the special feature - a motorbike and a metal dustbin above the entrance. The bar has a sawdust-covered floor and specialises in Belgian beers, but up to four real ales are sold. On my visit there was Flannery's Celtic Gold from Spinning Dog Brewery and Jack's Nasty Face from Boggart Hole Clough.

From the Bar Fringe, I headed for the **Bar Centro** in Tib Street, a more sedate bar, where I tried the 5% seasonal ale from Beowulf. I rounded off the evening with a visit to the **Land o'Cakes** on Great Ancoats Street. Holts bitter and Cains dark mild were the real ales in this large, open-aspect pub.



Here and there

with Daddy Bell

Well said, Rupert: 'enjoyment consists as much in the atmosphere of a tavern as it does in the quality of the amber nectar it purveys... consuming real ale should be part of a balanced life, rather than its sole aim.' These sentiments, from last month's *What's Doing*, together with a comment by Eddy about 'quintessential pubness,' set me pondering on that perennial question: 'What more is there to a real pub than real ale?'



It's easy enough to suggest some archetypal characteristics, of a kind you might associate with an Ealing comedy: blazing log fires, irrespective of the season; polished horse-brasses and other metalwork; tantalisingly unavailable barmaids; large soporific cats; a whole cast of complementary characters you wouldn't mind talking with, and plenty of nooks and crannies to escape from any or all of them if your mood was more reclusive. George Orwell brought such a pub to life years ago in his original, but imaginary, *Moon under Water*. Richard Boston tried his hand at evoking such a place back in 1976 in his *Beer and Skittles*, where he concluded that the most important consideration was whether or not a pub could pass the vegetable marrow test.

Many modern pubs are not going to qualify for 'quintessential pubness' status if such (to my mind, quite sensible) criteria are going to be applied: it would be hard, for example, to think of a Wetherspoons pub, irrespective of its name, which would pass muster. But there are pubs with a multiplicity of real ales - pubs which year after year North Manchester CAMRA members enthusiastically vote into the Good Beer Guide, pubs which as often as not contain a brace of 'stereotypical tickers' - which achieve or come close to that 'quintessential pubness' which may be elusive but is not, I trust, utterly illusory.

The **Kings Arms** in Bloom Street, Salford, had the briefest of closure periods to allow for essential cleaning and restocking. A new company, Acorn Day, with John Hughes, Mike and Christine as directors, is now running the pub. Very promising and far-reaching developments are scheduled for early next year, but already the beer range has been revised: Pictish Brewers Gold is a fixture (and has been on excellent form lately), together with a couple of Storm beers, a fortnightly appearance of Archers Golden, and others from a familiar wholesaler.

Congratulations to Christine and Roger Ingham at the **Welcome** in Ordsall, as winners in the managed houses sector of J W Lees' Best Kept Cellar Competition. They are persevering with the brewery's seasonal ales, although the bitter and mild are, not unnaturally, the usual tipples for most. I was the first in the Welcome to buy a bottle of Heathcote's Organic Lager (5%), mainly to see if I recognised it from the national competition of a few days before (I think I did); but it's hardly likely to attract many buyers at £1.95 for a small bottle, flavoursome though the lager is.

Some excellent stouts and porters were among the best things at the All Hallows Tide festival at the Crescent in **Salford**. It was busy from the outset, and some very popular beers (e.g. the very pale Silver Frost lager from Dwan) did not last long on handpump. My main pleasure derived from Mr Perret's Stout (Wickwar, 5.9% - very like an export strength Guinness), the Dubhain Extra Stout from Dwan, and the Finns Hall Porter and Dragon Smoke Stout (both Beowulf, 4.7%). Also distinctive were the Black Bee honey porter from Phoenix and a beautifully toffeeish Bonfire Brew (5.4%) from Woods. I was intrigued by the Bridge of Allan Bramble Special Brew (4.2%), not a dark beer but somewhat opaque - one day a cloudy gold, the next more pink grapefruit in hue.

Even before the festival, the Crescent had on such dark delights as Hanby Black Magic Plus (a pleasing tartness) and Pictish Sambain Stout, and since then there's been the pleasure of Green Tye Coal



Porter. The **Crown** (Heaton Lane, Stockport) provided a beautiful pint of Hart Criminales Porter; Porter's Porter was on superb form in the **Railway** in Stockport, Orkney Dark Island likewise in Manchester's **Lass o'Gowrie**; and even Wetherspoon's **Moon under Water** was worth calling in for a pint of an old favourite, Oakhill Black Magic Stout.

And, of course, there was the National Organic Brewing Competition at the **Marble Arch** on November 15th - an exhausting experience for thirteen judges, myself among them. Tasting some 35 beers in fairly quick succession was quite daunting, but Peter Haydon from SIBA would allow no slacking, and James Campbell, the Marble's brewer, ensured that there was always another jug waiting to be poured out. Our task was no easy one, but a consensus of opinion was soon obtained, certainly at my table, where the company included Roger Protz, Barrie Pepper, Paul Corbett from Charles Faram (a hop expert), and the head beer buyer from Safeway, sponsors of the competition. The winners: ales - Brakspear's Live Organic; lagers - Brakspear's Naturale; specialities - Pitfield Stout. Live Organic was the overall champion. There were two bonuses: I think we persuaded Roger Protz that the 2003 GBG should include all Irish real ale breweries; and he (totally unconnectedly) bestowed a memorable kiss on a fellow judge, the irresistible (and unresisting?) Idy Phillips.

So absorbing was the competition, physically and mentally, that it was only on the Saturday following that I gave any time to the Manchester N/4 A-Z tour. In a crowded Marble Arch, the talk was much of the results. I gathered that two of the Marble Brewery's own beers had been well in contention and were well regarded by the judges; Uncut Amber was on special offer at £1.55 a pint as a 'thank-you' from the brewpub. Some of the entries from other breweries were on sale in the Marble Arch: I wondered whether one that in sampling before I had thought both cabbagey and banana-y could be identical with one I now found darkly spicy.

In the **Beer House**, I learned from Lynne that the two Workshop beers which had attracted our attention on the Thursday evening (after the judging!) were produced at Boggart Hole Clough by guest brewers: Workshop One by Bar Centro, and Workshop Two by Knott Fringe Bar. (I suppose I'll have to go and try my hand at some point.) There was just enough room in **Bar Fringe** to squeeze in myself and a pint of Bank Top Knock Back; there were four Briscoe's (Otley) beers on in the **Smithfield** as part of its own mini-festival, but I went straight for a pint of Jeanie's Half Century, a one-off from Rooster's.

Seasonal salutations to one and all.



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Atherton Crawl

North Manchester CAMRA toured Atherton on Hallowe'en. Dave Hallows, appropriately, took notes...

First call was the **Wheatsheaf** on Market Street, where a large lounge surrounds the bar and there are separate rooms at the front for dining and pool. The real ale was Lees bitter. Next was the **Letters Inn**, facing the far end of Market Street, a pub with a separate vault and a lounge in the 'homely cottage' style. Tetleys is advertised outside, but within we found Lees bitter again.

After a short walk back, and with the expert knowledge of my learned friends in CAMRA North Manchester, we found the **Pendle Witch** (Moorhouses) on Warburton Place, via a narrow alley off Market Street. I've never seen so many guest ales in a Moorhouses pub. As well as their own Black Cat mild, Premier bitter, Pride of Pendle and Pendle Witches' Brew, the guests comprised Hallowe'en Surprise (Old Mill), which I tried first, so no surprise there, Trick or Trick (Caledonian), Spooky Brew (Phoenix), She-Devil (Wychwood) and Wizard's Wonder (Coach House).

This single-room beer house has an impressive bar festooned with beer badges. It is a friendly place and on the night there was a couple dressed as a witch and a warlock, so I felt at home. However, I was dragged away a short distance to the **Atherton Arms** (Holts) which had both cask mild and bitter. The newish building is a former Labour Club with massive rooms. The lounge has pictures of the old Atherton colliery and the vault is magnificent, with a seating area in front of a satellite TV (unusual for a Holts house) and a full size snooker table.



Wigan and district

Dave White

In the August edition of *What's Doing* I reported that the **Prince of Wales**, Market Street, Hindley, had started selling real ale at weekends after an absence of many years. This is still the case, although the beer, usually a rotating guest, is still not available during the week. A safer bet is the **Red Lion** on Ladies Lane. This ex-Matty Brown house hadn't sold real ale since dinosaurs ruled the earth but likewise now offers a guest beer (Cains bitter when I called in) on an otherwise all-keg bar. The Red Lion is less spartan than the Prince of Wales, and the beer is on all week.

Still in Hindley, a rumour has been circulating since the summer that the **Plough** on Atherton Road is to begin brewing beer. At the time of writing, however, this once-fine pub is still closed and boarded up.

Over the road in Hindley Green, the **Alexandra Hotel**, Swan Lane, has dropped cask Boddingtons bitter in favour of the nitrokeg version. The pub operates an imaginative guest ale policy, though the supply can be irregular and the beers themselves can be, well, different. Traditional Tetley bitter remains.

Good news for those hankering after information about Poolstock. Trapped between Wigan CAMRA favourites the **Orwell** and the **Beer Engine**, the **Honeysuckle** on Pool Street had, until recently, only Boddies bitter to recommend it. Once again, however, the pub sells guest ales, including the elusive (to me, at any rate) Mayflower brewery range. Meanwhile, in New Springs, the **Kirkless Hall Inn**, Albion Drive, now has a guest beer from the Burtonwood approved list, although the brewery's own products here are, sadly, keg.

The **Brocket Arms Hotel**, Mesnes Road, Wigan, will by now have reopened as a 'Wetherlodge'. A visit to the Brocket is like a variation on the Monty Python cheese shop sketch, in which the interesting beers have usually just gone off by the time I get served. Not recommended, unless you like Theakstons bitter.



News in brief... someone in Billinge has decided to give the **Pavilion** on Main Street another go. The pub is now called the **Jarvis Bar** and reportedly sells real ale, though I can't confirm this yet... the **Griffin Hotel**, a keg underachiever on Standishgate, Wigan, was recently closed, despite a sign outside which states 'Under new management'.

The Millennium Pub Trail

Part Twenty: Travels through Tameside

The Dray Twins take a trip to Ashton-under-Lyne...

The new Good Beer Guide entry here is the **Caledonia Hotel** on the main pedestrianised area of Warrington Street, off Stamford Street. The pub has been radically altered (for the better, perhaps) in the manner of a corporate clone, reminiscent of some big brewers' outlets. Thus there is an open-plan, split-level room with stained wood, plaid carpeting, Regency striped and floral wall coverings and other 'homely' bits and bobs. To the rear is a canopied, flagged drinking area with aluminium tables and chairs. The pub does a good line in lunchtime and early evening food and recently gained second place in the British Meat Steak Pie Competition. The ales are from Robinsons: Best Bitter, Frederics, Hatters Mild and the seasonal beer.

A short distance away on Audenshaw Road, Guide Bridge, is the imposing **Boundary**. A smart lounge now incorporates part of the old vault area and a conservatory has been added, used for the busy catering side of the business. Marstons Pedigree, Theakston Cask Ale and Websters Green Label are supplemented by a range of mostly independent guest beers. The pub holds annual beer festivals in an attached marquee and it has developed a cult following.

Denton next, and the excellent **Red Lion** at Crown Point on Stockport Road, a pleasant, semi-circular red brick pub. There is an oddly-shaped, opened-out bar area, with an oddly-shaped collection of rooms to match, richly furnished with wood panelling and stained glass; a trophy and games room at the rear, a front parlour to the right and a larger room by the bar. This Hydes house has Anvil Light and Bitter from electric dispensers.

Walking towards Hyde, the next pub was the **Lowes Arms** on Hyde Road. This former Boddingtons pub has been revitalised and is now home to the LAB microbrewery, launched a few months ago. Apart from the obligatory Boddingtons Bitter, the regularly featured beers are Broken Broom (3.7%),



Broomstairs Bitter (4.3%), Frog Bog Bitter (3.9%), Haughton Weave (4.5%) and St Annes Ale (4.8%). The pub has a traditional vault and a main lounge incorporating a restaurant.

The last pub on the crawl was Wetherspoon's **Cotton Bale** in Hyde Market Place, just off the pedestrianised shopping area. This place, converted from shop premises, is always busy. The interior is long and narrow with small lounge-type rooms and to the rear is a no smoking area with a pyramid-shaped skylight. The pub is furnished in the usual Wetherspoon style and the real ales are Boddingtons Bitter, Courage Directors Bitter and Thwaites Mild, plus guest beers.

Holts corner

Stewart Revell

Holts recently brewed another batch of **Sixex**, the 6% beer that is sent away for bottling into 275ml (nearly half a pint) containers. This year an extra quantity has been produced for racking off into casks, predominantly firkins. Most of these are destined for the free trade (arranged by Taffy, Holts' beer agent) although some will be going into their own pubs. Only about 10% of the Holts estate will be selling the handpumped Sixex over the Christmas period, the **Railway** at Didsbury being one of them.

The results of the brewery's trial of the 4.5% special beer are being evaluated. Reactions have been mixed; many pubs sold out within a few days, while others are not doing as well. It is too early to say if Joe's will brew another batch, but if they do, I am informed it will be next year at the earliest.

The revised opening date for Holts' latest pub, the **Pepper Alley** in Bolton (ex-Millstone), is Thursday 29th November.

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Millstone

The Millstone on Thomas Street in Manchester has reopened. The bar room now sports wooden rafters and beams attached to the ceiling; there are television screens above the bar and elsewhere and simultaneous piped music. Neon signs, imitation stone columns, a log fire and all kinds of bric-a-brac are dotted around.

The real ale is Theakston Cask and there is a promise of more, with two further handpumps on the bar and a chalkboard for 'regular beers'.

Letter

Quintessential Pubness

Sir - Rupert (*WD November*) really should get out more!

At the age of sixty I continue to lead a varied, full and well balanced life, taking in elements of romance, heartache, friendship (both enduring and transient) and always conviviality. I've had a fifty-year fondness for steam locomotion, and for forty years have sung British folk songs to British and European folk. I

still enjoy drinking a variety of beers in a wide cross-section of pubs, in the company of a diverse selection of fellow imbibers. The consumption of beer is often a pleasurable adjunct to some of my other interests, but is also partaken as a purely enjoyable experience in its own right, and it is a joy to seek out, or stumble upon, those free houses stocking a wide range of beers. I judge pubs, landlords and beers on their own merits.

Of the landlords I've met, some have undoubtedly been miserable and uncommunicative, but by no means have they been found only in free houses, and they have been well outnumbered by the jovial, sociable ones. It's also true that the customers often contribute greatly to the atmosphere within a pub, sometimes in spite of, and to compensate for an introverted landlord.

The company of 'tickers' is usually a pleasurable and often educative experience, and I do enjoy visiting the pubs favoured by the tickers, which are used by discriminating local people too. Microbrewed beers and the pubs they get sold in continue to fascinate and excite me, and I just can't remember the last time a beer from the likes of Drabs or Boringsods excited me. The bonhomie and 'pubness' in such establishments as the Maltings in York or the Fat Cat in Sheffield would surely please anyone - no hint of the mortuary in them and a most uncadaverlike clientele.

Perhaps if Rupert did get out a bit more he could enjoy his drinking again. Obviously, a diet of Drabs and more Drabs has failed to stimulate either his tastebuds or his spirit of adventure, and is putting him in serious danger of becoming a stereotypical, sour, jaded, cynical old recluse. I do hope not!

Tony Molyneux



Water, water, everywhere!

Grognard

(S T Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner*)

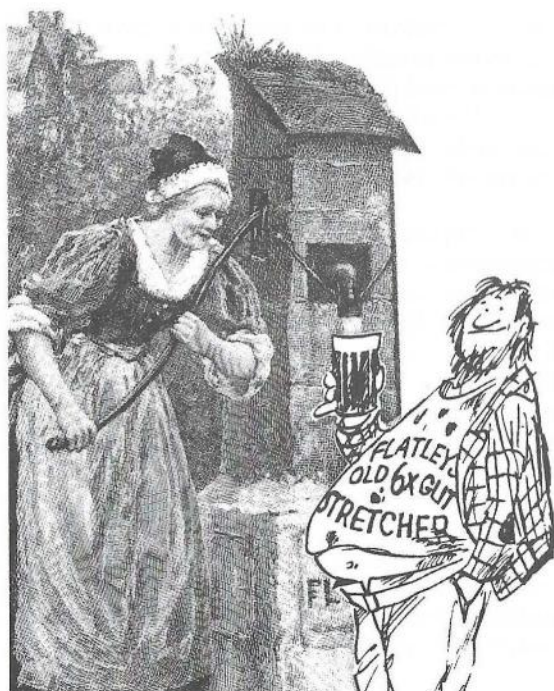
Those unaware of the profit potential of pure water should holiday in the Malvern Hills as I and the family recently did. Without claiming to be compiling a history/travel guide to the area, I can definitely state that the motivation for the picturesque communities, which fringe the hillsides in stone-clad elegance and solid nineteenth-century dignity, was the presence of vast quantities of the wet-splashy stuff emerging, pure and unadulterated (and icy cold) from out of the old crystalline rock which is the core of the hills.

The virtues of Malvern water have been known and appreciated since pre-Roman times, but it was the development of the railways in the 1830s and 40s which opened up the hills to the Victorian middle classes, who flocked in their thousands to take 'the cure' in this bastion of bourgeois respectability.

The process was simple enough in theory - drink a gallon or two a day to flush out your liver and kidneys and take a cold plunge to stimulate the circulation and move the bowels. But, human nature being what it is, various refinements were introduced to enhance the effectiveness of 'the cure'. Impressive as a sado-masochistic exercise was the 'waterfall', where a tank holding fifty gallons was emptied via a three-inch bore pipe from a height of thirty feet on to the head of the patient/victim below.

Tennyson, that most admired of Victorian poets and sometime Poet Laureate, commented, after a course of water treatment, that he was 'half cured and half destroyed'.

During the twentieth century the spa towns and hydro hotels gradually declined in popularity and today, if you wish to sample your favourite aqueous tippie, all that is



necessary is to visit any supermarket where the shelves will be awash with plastic containers whose contents originate from most of the countries between Iceland and Italy. Malvern water is marketed by Schweppes for an impressive 99p a litre, but then, it is in glass.

The water has a multiplicity of purposes - cooking, tea, coffee, maintaining the ph of your hair or whatever; but for me, as a home brewer, it makes sense to purchase five of the 5-litre containers to make a batch of pale ale, which is very sensitive to extraneous substances in tap water.

So I naturally felt somewhat envious of those fortunate Malvernians who have access to unlimited quantities of the pure stuff - springs on every hillside shouting (or gurgling) 'Come and get it!' There is one at West Malvern where we stayed, on the main road with free parking, squirting out about threequarters of a gallon a minute and all you provide is transport and containers.

Yet the Malverns is not noted as being a brewing centre on the lines of Burton on Trent or Tadcaster. The only local I discovered was at the Castle in Great Malvern where they do a homebrew, a sad underuse of nature's bounties.

Now, however, a new venture has opened for the real ale lovers of the Malverns which began with the thought, 'What if?' Beer duty is charged at the brewery on fermented ales which are then sent to outlets and beer agencies. But 'what if' we just distributed containers of wort which the buyer sets up in his kitchen (or wherever) and adds the yeast to ferment and finish himself? Free delivery for a ten-mile radius around West Malvern and 35 pints are his for £19.99, or 57p per pint. As the average is £1.80 a pint in the locals, this is a fair saving for a pure water ale.

If the venture is a commercial success, it might well be exported to other parts of Britain as a viable alternative to expensive pub or supermarket pasteurised bottles. Unfortunately they won't be using Malvern water.

Another one?

Rumour has it that vacant offices on the corner of Princess Street and Cooper Street are being considered for the site of Wetherspoons' fifth central Manchester outlet. The nearby City Arms might expect to benefit from the trade that would be attracted to this part of the city if Punch Taverns can match Wetherspoons on price. This would be quite an achievement, as on a recent visit Adnams Southwold bitter, at a meagre 3.7%, was £1.95 a pint!



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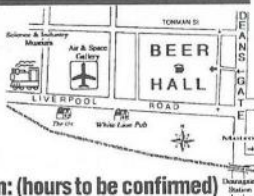
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Festival Opening & Admission: (hours to be confirmed)

Thursday 24 January: 5.30 - 10.30pm (£2),

Friday 25 January: 12 - 4 (£2) & 5.30 - 10.30pm (£3),

Saturday 26 January: 12 - 4 (£2) & 5.30 - 10.30pm (£2).

Card-carrying CAMRA members: FREE on Fri Lunch & Sat Eve,
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Festival Contact: Steven Prescott 01942 719037

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Pub Profile

Countryman

Fishermans Retreat, Twine Valley Park, Riding Head Lane, Turncum-Shuttleworth, near Ramsbottom.

The Fishermans Retreat is a traditional, stone-built pub/restaurant in the modern style in the grounds of Twine Valley Farm, a trout fishery, hence the name. Work began on the site in 1991 and the pub opened in December 1992. It is just over the Greater Manchester border in Lancashire and can be reached off the main A56 Whalley Road via Bye Road at Shuttleworth, or off the A680 Rochdale Road at Turn village.

There is a bar set out in the 'country kitchen' style, with a low ceiling, bright patterns and an emphasis on quietness - no television, juke box or games machines here. Entertainment is provided in the form of the 'big chair', which looks as though it was built for the Jolly Green Giant himself.

The pub is popular with families and diners, with a good range of main meals, daily specials and snacks, all home cooked, so that means you get proper chips. To wash down the chips there is an innovative beer range; several handpumps dispense regulars Moorhouses Black Cat, Ruddles County, Theakston Best Bitter and Timothy Taylor Landlord, and guests include Caledonian Golden Promise (the original organic ale) and Dent Rambrau (4.5%). Thirty or so malt whiskies are stocked and there are regular whisky tastings 'for cold winter evenings'.

Other events include tribute band concerts, and beer festivals are usually held in a marquee attached to the downstairs lounge bar. There are good views of the surrounding area from the outside seating and extensive grounds. It is nice to sit here in the twilight, watching the setting sun fade from the heavens and the stars popping out, whilst supping an excellent pint. The Fishermans Retreat is open all permitted hours; telephone 01706 825314 for more information.

Buses 476, 482, 483, 486 and X44 stop outside the **Pack Horse** on Whalley Road, then it's about a twenty minutes' walk away. The X44 service operates from Lever Street Bus Station in Manchester. Alternatively, there is the 244 from Rochdale which passes through Turn village.

Contributors to this issue: Pete Cash, Dave Hallows, Paul Warbrick, Dave Crookell, Steve Smith, Stewart Revell, Leo King, Roger Hall, Daddy Bell, Dave White

Rupert

It's always good to meet up with old acquaintances even if the circumstances of that meeting are less than propitious. Notwithstanding dire warnings from Geoff Dregs, one of the Campaign's founder members, I went to an international forum of the Real Ale section of the Gay Dwarf Reform League. Dregs had previously been unfairly pilloried for daring to criticise Slumley, where he was born but hadn't lived for decades. On this occasion he was critical of LAGRAD, a gay offshoot of the Campaign, suggesting that this was cliquish and divisive. Believing that nothing could be more natural than meeting with like-minded people, I set off for West Dagoland. Bunty, who is neither gay nor, by any stretch of the imagination, of restricted growth, came with me for the ride and to ensure my wellbeing, as he put it.

Sadly, nice as Lismal is, it is not blessed with much amber nectar of the real variety. A few pints of Madeira and vintage port are infinitely more dangerous than ale. Vitriolic bitchiness deteriorated into an unseemly brawl and Bunty was arrested before he could protect me. I woke up in Lismal Infirmary with a black eye and a

broken leg. In the bed next to mine, I noticed a familiar face; it was none other than Jamie Frotter, whose hands and head were heavily bandaged.

I assumed that someone had trodden on his fingers whilst he was frothing in the choirstalls of Lismal Cathedral and he'd cracked his head as he jerked up in agony. But, no. It's said that lightning doesn't strike twice, but it can. There aren't too many cities with iron horses on the streets but Lismal is one. Staggering from the Alfama and heading for the Bairro Alto, Jamie was once again mugged at a tram stop. His assailant cracked him over the head, stole his wallet and left him on the track, where his fingers were crushed by an approaching tram. I am fearful that he may froth no more.

However, Jamie did want me to put the record straight lest the good folk of Oldfort, where he now dwells, get the wrong impression. Yes, he was banged up in chokey, but it was all a terrible mistake. Not only was it a travesty of justice in that he was innocent, but no crime actually took place. He was completely exculpated by the judge. Whether he received compensation to allow his globetrotting, he didn't say.

Ace of Diamonds

The former Bird in Hand on Oldham Road, Miles Platting, is being advertised as a free house. Aluminium shutters are firmly in place over the windows and the pub appeared closed in the early evening, so there's no telling whether there is real ale on offer.

Branch Diary

2002 National Winter Ales Festival Meeting

Sunday 9th Dec 12.30pm, Crescent, Salford

North Manchester

www.camra.org.uk/nmanchester

Wed Dec 5th, Paramount (Wetherspoons), corner Oxford Road and Portland Street, 7pm. City Arms, Kennedy Street, 8pm. Grey Horse, Portland Street, 9.30pm.

Wed Dec 12th, Monton Social: Park Hotel, 8pm. Drop Inn, 9pm. Both Monton Road.

Wed Dec 19th 8pm, Branch Meeting: Hare & Hounds, Shudehill.

(Note change of venue)

Saturday Dec 29th 12 noon, What's Doing collation at Queens Arms, Honey Street. Followed by Northern Quarter pub crawl and early evening curry at Nawaab, Rochdale Road.

Wed Jan 2nd, Irlams o'th'Height Crawl: Waggon & Horses 7pm.

Wellington 7.30pm. Red Lion 9pm.

Contact Roger Hall 0161 740 7937

Rochdale, Oldham & Bury

Tue 4 Dec 8.30pm, Branch Meeting, Arthur Inn, Bolton Road, Bury

Tue 11 Dec, Christmas Social. Venue to be confirmed

Thur 27 Dec, Drown the Turkey Crawl/Committee Meeting/WD

Collation, Start from Smithfield, Swan Street, Manchester

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

email: P.Alexander@Virgin.net

Wigan

Thurs 13 Dec 8pm, Branch Meeting/Christmas Social at the Mayflower Brewery, off Chorley Road, Standish. A minibus leaves the Orwell, Wigan Pier, at 7.30. NB: Winter wear is recommended.

Wed 9 January 8pm, Branch Meeting, Colliers Arms, Wigan Road, New Springs.

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.

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'.

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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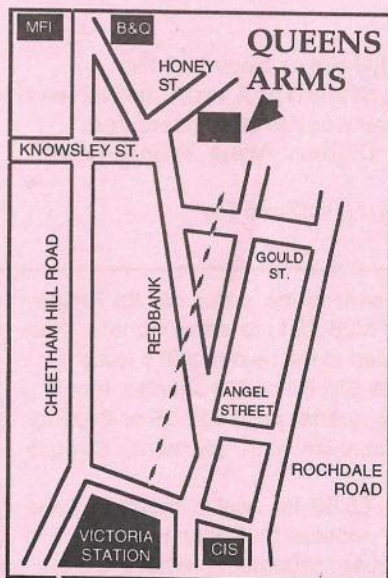
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