

The Not Oxford Road Pub Survey – 18th July 2008

Having worked at the University of Manchester for a few years, I have come across several pubs dotted around the outskirts of the University and the Manchester Royal Infirmary. Although I'd visited some of the pubs once or twice, I decided to make a concerted effort to visit them all.

I'd been planning to do this survey for sometime and chose a Friday in mid summer hoping for some decent weather and the pubs to be open with Friday afternoon customers, but not too busy. The intention was to visit these pubs while avoid the better known pubs along Oxford Road. The pubs on one side of Oxford Road are in the Stockport and South Manchester (S&SM) CAMRA area, on the other side they are in Trafford and Hulme (T&H) CAMRA area, as noted below.

So, having met a friend of mine who is a bit of a real ale novice, we set off to educate him on the joys of beer. First stop was to be the Mawson (S&SM) on Cabot Street, near the junction of Upper Brook Street and Brunswick Street. Not unexpectedly, we found they don't serve any real ales, despite the sign advertising cask ales. Later I found the Mawson is on the CAMRA Heritage Pubs inventory list, part 1. I can't say I noticed significance of the décor, but surely such an important pub in CAMRA's eyes should be serving real ale. Maybe there should be a campaign by Stockport and South Manchester CAMRA?



Mawson, Cabot Street

Without stopping, we headed off along Kincardine Road in search of the Tilted Falcon, only to find it has been demolished and is now a building site. We were then approached by a burly, surly workman who queried what we were doing and kindly pointed out the pub was no longer there.



Building Site where Tilted Falcon used to be, Kincardine Road

Hoping for some better luck, we headed off towards Grafton Street and to the Bowling Green (S&SM). We were slightly relieved to see there was one hand pump on, serving Black Sheep. We felt we'd earned our first pint of the day but were a little disappointed with the poor quality. The Bowling Green pub itself is a run of the mill one room pub, with a beer garden which was presumably once the said bowling green. Next we head along Grafton Street to the Grafton Arms (S&SM), arriving there as the first of the afternoon's frequent showers started. This is a typical Holt's pub with a large lounge and a vault. Knowing what to expect, we stopped for just a half of standard Holts bitter, while we waited for the rain to stop.

Continuing our stroll along Grafton Street we passed the boarded up Grafton Hotel and Gallery Bar (S&SM). I'm not sure if they ever sold real ales but it was a free house according to the abandoned sign propped up against a wall. Anyone interested in such things should get round there and collect it quickly!



Sign from Grafton Hotel

We then crossed over Oxford Road, and into Trafford and Hulme territory. We passed the Contact Theatre Bar (T&H) (no chance of any real ale here) and continued along Devas Street across the car park to the Ducie Arms (T&H); I anticipated this would be one of our successes of the day and we were pleased to see they had Wychwood Wychcraft and Jennings Cumberland Ale (if I remember correctly). As we entered the pub we were overtaken and subsequently served by the same bar person who'd served us in the Bowling Green! What are the chances of being served by the same person in two different pubs on the same day?! We both went for the Wychcraft which was ok – slightly better than average. Apart from the bar woman, we were the only people in the pub.



Ducie Arms

Next we set off towards the Kro @ the Old Abbey Inn (T&H) in the middle of the Manchester Science Park. The rain had started again and hunger was starting to kick in, but we were disappointed to find the kitchen had closed. We stopped for just a half of Caledonian Deuchars IPA as that was all that was available and a packet of crisps, hoping for better luck on the food front at the RNCM Bar and canteen.



Kro @ Old Abbey Inn

On the way we passed the Czech Bar (T&H) on the junction of Higher Cambridge Street and Booth Street West – no real ales here unsurprisingly. Upon arrival at the RNCM Bar (T&H) we found it to be closed and there was just a meagre selection of sandwiches in the canteen. However we did notice there were a number of hand pumps behind the bar and decided to return after it reopened at 6pm.

So we headed off again, back along Booth Street West, past the soon to be knocked down Game Cock (T&H) and up Boundary Lane towards the Arch (T&H) – still boarded up after a shooting there last year.



Game Cock Sign

Next stop was the Cavendish (T&H) where we were challenged as to why we were “filming” and were we from the Greater Manchester Police! We explained the purpose of our visit and luckily some of the other clientele weren’t quite as aggressive. We beat a hasty retreat as there were no real ales to be found in the Cavendish. Likewise at the Church Inn (T&H) in Cambridge Street, although the clientele were much more jovial here and were quite keen for us to stay and sample the JW Lees Smooth Bitter. Interesting the pumps still had clips on, even though they haven’t been serving cask for a few months, apparently.



The Cavendish

So on to the Salutation (T&H); this Greene King pub had Greene King IPA and Thwaites Original on, so we went for the later. Again this was an ok pint, slightly above average.

As things hadn’t gone exceptionally well so far, we headed off to the Sandbar (S&SM) as we knew they’d have a decent selection of real ale. Passing the Scu Bar

(S&SM), Footage (S&SM), Trof Deaf Institute (S&SM) and The Pub (S&SM) (no really ales at any of these I'd expect), we met up with my partner at the Sandbar. There were four or five real ales on here, including Moorhouse Blond Witch and a couple from Beartown Breweries including Bearly Literate, which we went for. Much like what we had drank previously, this was slightly better than average. Finally as promised, we returned to the RNCM Bar. As we entered, we were hit by the general hub-bub of noise from what closely resembled a school canteen, which is more or less what it is. However we were delighted to find a selection of six real ales behind the bar, including three from Hornbeam. We went for the Black Coral Stout and this was the outstanding beer of the day. The RNCM Bar is a real find, if you can put up with the surroundings. There is going to be a beer festival there on the 19th and 20th September, which might be worth going to if it is not overrun with students!



The Bar, RNCM

Adam Bruderer. More and higher resolution photographs available from the author and at <http://www.adambruderer.com>