

# Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action.

Newsletter – September 2023

Welcome to the September Newsletter, for me, a year has passed already! To celebrate it I've left my best 'Tale End' story till last and it is a belter! And when I say 'last', well that's until I think of another and again, please if you have a Tale End you'd like us all to enjoy then send it in to me. All the local beer festivals are now behind us with just the big hitters in the region left to go. I've been a busy boy again this month and visited the Isle of Man for the 'Amateur TT' races and of course there has to be a beer report from there too. Now the price of beer is cheap for the Manx and that poses the question; 'what if our beer was cheap too?'.

We have photos of the POTY award for the Drayman's Son. There's residue from the Iceland trip when I pay tribute to Agnes Anna Sigurdardottir who founded the Kaldi Brewery from scratch. This newsletter will, we hope, keep you up to date with changes and what's on in not just your local branch/patch but some festivals near enough to visit. My details are at the foot of the page.

**Beer Festivals coming up are** (Key: NC (*non-CAMRA*). M (*music*). F (*food*));

**Norwich Beer Festival.** F. M. Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> October. [Norwich & District] Likely Ely branch run and trip on the Thursday or Friday. Let us know of your preference?

**Haddenham Winter Beer Festival.** Friday 10<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November. Held at the Robert Arkenstall Centre all proceeds are towards the Robert Arkenstall Primary School. Details to follow.

**Ely Elysian Winter Beer Festival 2024.** F. Provisionally Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> (Trade session) and Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February. The Maltings, Ely.

**Tasting Beer the Right Way** - Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> September

is on and the date above at **The Maypole** in Cambridge at 6:30pm. £12pp. Spaces are limited so please put your name down in the comments on the Facebook page ('Ely & District CAMRA') or email [elycamra@yahoo.com](mailto:elycamra@yahoo.com). Thirteen places have gone and there are currently seven places left.

**Papworth Brewery and Ely CAMRA create an Ely Beer Festival Brew for February 2024** –on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December 8.50am at the unit in Earith. Design and create a brew leading to a beer for our Beer Festival in 2024. Just watch the whole process! Expected time; 9 – 3-4pm. Go to the tap room/Crystal Ship drinks afterwards. Bring your own lunch but a pizza van does get there from around 6pm plus. All welcome, to book a place, go onto our Ely CAMRA Facebook page. Lift offered, other lifts may be needed. Crystal Ship bar opens 2pm. No cost, it's free. *This is not a Piss-up!!!!*

**Rural Pub Run & Trip** on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> December. Mini-Coach. 11.30am-7pm. Ely Station and back. 8 Ely area pubs. Price approx. £25-£30 includes food. More details next month.

**Ely Branch holds SGM for accounts to be signed off**

Only a year ago we had to do the very same thing which so damaged the 2023 Ely BF, the branch held an SGM on the first Tuesday of September at The Cutter and we had Andrea Briars from the Norfolk Branch come over to adjudicate and the accounts for the 2023 Ely BF were signed off. Mum's the word though..... I haven't even told you THAT much. Next branch CM is at The Plough, Little Downham on October 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7.30pm for 7.45pm sharp.

**Ely Beer Festival Meetings**

The first meeting was held on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> August at the Drayman's Son and we got confirmation today (Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> Sept) that it will revert to the old format of 3-days; Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> Feb to Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb (provisionally). There isn't much detail at present and the next meeting will be at The West End, Ely on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September for a 7.30pm start, anyone interested in helping is most welcome to attend. More detail as we go.

**Lewkel News**

**Plough & Harrow, Littleport** has a whole new cellar. Landlord Dom is pushing on with real ale and what with GK producing polypins, he should we hope, find them profitable. **The Crown, Fordham** suffered major fire damage on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> August. It is presently an Indian curry house owned by Admiral Taverns. The pub, under the dark and mysterious Roger Marjoram took over from The Chequers as Fordham's local of choice in the 1980-2000 period but relinquished that title in the noughties to the Fordham British Legion at the foot of the hill. The Ely Standard says that the Fire Safety Officer wanted the beautiful chimney stacks to come down for safety reasons immediately.

Recently Admiral Taverns, along with the owners of the Fountain at Soham had requested planning permission to build on their respective car parks and although both have car parks opposite the pubs (across a VERY busy road at The Crown) CAMRA has a policy of not contesting car park conversions. Your rural rep (ahem) made it clear at a committee meeting about these two PPs that CAMRA's policy was 'not very good' and a sailor did blush..... Alas 'Mongo just pawn in sea of life'. I'm assured by a CAMRA representative somewhere up in the stratosphere that if you try and save a car park, it implies that CAMRA supports D&D somewhere we don't want to go.

But I had visions of The Crown losing its car park and given that my mum and dad's funerals were here I do know a little on the subject. I saw a future whereby someone had parked on the opposite side of the road – it's the church car park – and got mortally wounded just crossing the road for a beer at the reception, there was then a funeral service for said person after which someone crossing the road (with tear-filled eyes and wipers going flat out) got mortally wounded and so there was another funeral service and everyone went to the church service, then crossed the road to the reception and someone got mortally wounded..... and well, you get the picture. Look, if the Python's had done it, you'd laugh, OK?

Having been to **The Townhouse** almost every Sunday for 25 years I called 'enough' last summer as my friends moved away and now I'm just an occasional visitor but twice in a month the beer has been off in the poorest fashion but just how it has been for the last 5 years or so. Vinegar or close too, I have finally managed to have a Lacon's Encore recently but that makes it 5 pumps off and 1 working in two visits. So, what's the problem? Well one hurdle would appear to be that the nightclub section is finishing in the early hours and nobody has the task of cleaning the lines from which the beer ran out earlier. This overnight delay in cleaning causes problems for the new barrels. Was it always thus? Does anyone want to be doing that job at 2-3am? A word with a staff member told me of the excellent wages commanded by staff working that late and basically, you can pour 10 pints away cheaper than employ someone to do the lines. We hope to report an improvement and we ARE optimistic.....

The **Swan on the River** at Littleport had a lovely pint of Woodforde's Wherry on recently, a perfectly safe bet from which to start but not one to keep the masses coming back, let's see if they vary it up a bit?



**Left;** last pub to get that POTY photo for this year; The Drayman's Son with co-owner Dan Chinery being presented with their 'susstificate' from our Branch Chairman Tony Gimbert. Well done to them and keep up the excellent work!

Look further down for a report on the Drayman's Tap Takeover.

#### **LocAle relaunched**

**The Albert, The Townhouse** and **The Drayman's Son** are listed as our LocAle pubs which is when pubs agree to promote small micro-breweries within a 35-mile radius "as the crow flies" which is up 5-miles from the previously recommended 30. Although it was said at the recent CM

that LocAle now covers more than 8 brewers I make it far, far more. But this 'crow flies' thing? It's got so sticky that in the end the only answer was to put a tacho on the crow. It then transpires 'old Bob' of no fixed abode was 'tampering with his tacho', he was supposedly claiming 'sleeping out' and 'extra mileage allowance' but instead getting a lift home for a cuddle with Mrs Crow! At the last count Bob now made it that there were a promiscuous 52 LocAle brewers in the Ely area, the crow has unfortunately been sacked and the DVLA informed.

The relaunch includes a new sticker but the problem for CAMRA stems from 'local'. It means different things to a towny to a bumpkin therefore old Bob gets to take all the blame. Wanted; honest crow.

#### **Greene King roll out the (half) Barrel**

News that Greene King are making pins (4.5 gallons or 36 pints) available in all their beers is fantastic news for the small pub that turns over very little real ale. The IPA and Abbott, Speckled Hen and the first of their seasonal ales; New Tricks are now polypins and all the others will be rolled out in turn.

Why is it such good news? Well Monday to Wednesday or even Thursday can be dead rubbers for the small pub and so the beer sold has to be between say; Thursday and Sunday. It has to be gone by Sunday evening or just poured down the drain. Simple maths tells you that the choice has been to sell either 72 pints or not to even start over those 5 days but there's no in between. The public footfall can be all over the show, something on the box, weather, holidays, pay day and then the old hatched, matched and despatched; all play a part. If you get a polyp in, you should never be too far away from emptying those barrels come Sunday evening. By matching the pumps to the footfall, the landlord sells a better pint and we get more choice. It should be win-win for everybody as the landlord is never more than 36 pints from safety. Expect other breweries to follow.

## The Chequers, Sutton



The first thing you notice is how spotless the pub is and the nice artefacts mounted around the walls of the pub, they really make the Chequers feel homely, it has a feminine touch. On the Friday evening I visited, the average age was well up, the conversations lively, it had a great atmosphere. The only pub in Sutton is run by Maija Cartwright who, has been at the helm of this Admiral Taverns pub for 31 years and wasn't there on my trip but I was looked after by Tina or 'Tish' as she's better known who has pulled the pumps at the pub for 15 years.

The GK pub has two ales on all the time and Tish says they stick to GK IPA and Adnams Ghost Ship and they were served to perfection, indeed, the

GK IPA was so right that that was the best I've had it for a very long while. Said Tish; "If the customers want anything else they will tell me". Having visited the social club I know that the pub is altogether the nicer place to have a pint but I'd love to get Maija and Tish to try a 3<sup>rd</sup> beer and change it as an 'interest point'. You never know.....

## Report on Peterborough Beer Festival #44

Held on Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> August. Excellent effort again and still to my friends and I our favourite. Old games, the food stalls around the outside are the very best you'll find, toilets are clean and tidy, live banging music, always very cool and dark inside even this year on the hottest day, no lunch break, easy to get in and out. There's nothing not to like. I rather ruined 'the experience' by picking all of one genre of beer dulling my taste buds. The glasses are the best, very memorable and the one keep-sake of the year for sure. The Key Keg selection is the absolute best and grows every year. What a shame the train is at 9.45pm! If you haven't been, try to, it is the best in East Anglia.

## Prince Albert Beer Festival 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> September

Landlord Mike excelled himself with an excellent beer festival finding hidden treasures from the small breweries around the region. One particularly nice touch was the quality programme he'd had printed. I can report that by mid-afternoon on Sunday all the beer was sold, all 23 barrels. So here, for your eyes is that excellent programme;



### Casks

- |   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| 1. 52 Degrees Kulu (West Yorkshire) 4.5%                            | 8. Lord's Yorkshire Black Gold (West Yorkshire) 4.1%            | 15. Only with Love Brewing The Old Bear Bitter (East Sussex) 4.2%   | 20. Wolf Brewery Honey Lavender (Norfolk) 3.8%       |
| 2. Barnham Brewery Oaks (Norfolk) 3.6%                              | 9. Mils Three Ship of the Fens (Cambridgeshire) 4.3%            | 16. Only with Love Brewing Yacht Rock Extra Pale (East Sussex) 3.8% | 21. Pastore Raspberry Waffle Sour 4.0%               |
| 3. Castle Rock Just Can't Get Enough 4.0% (Dorset/Dorsetshire) 4.0% | 10. Moon Gazer Cheeky Jack (Norfolk) 5%                         | 17. Selkirk Lament Dream (Dorsetshire) 4.0%                         | 22. Three Blind Mice Duality v (Cambridgeshire) 3.8% |
| 4. Charnwood Brewery Tuscan Bay 3.6% (Leicestershire) 3.6%          | 11. Nine Valley Brewery Leap Dolly 3.8% (Northamptonshire) 3.8% | 18. Thunderside Jalap IPA (Dorsetshire) 5.9%                        | 23. Three Blind Mice The Confessor (Berkshire) 10%   |
| 5. Electric Beer Brewing Gliss (Somerset) 4.6%                      | 12. Nine Valley Hop Smash 5.0% (Northamptonshire) 5.0%          | 19. Titanic Plum Porter 4.9%  |  |
| 6. First Chop Cal West Coast IPA 4.8% (Wiltshire) 4.8%              | 13. Northcote Wild Goose 4.1% (Somerset) 4.1%                   |   |  |
| 7. Green King Mitchell Molar 6% (Durham) 6%                         | 14. Oxbelt Brewery Idaho 7 (West Yorkshire) 4.0%                |   |  |
- Key Kegs**
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- Ciders**
- 1. Broadbush Rhubarb 4.0%
  - 2. Dreyer's Daring Dog Dancer 6.5%
  - 3. Newton Court Grogging Goose 5.8%
  - 4. Sooty's Cloudy Strawberry 3.8%
  - 5. Sooty's Cloudy Strawberry 3.8%
  - 6. Sooty's Cloudy Strawberry 3.8%
  - 7. Spinney Abbey Monk and Dandelion 6.1%
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## A Beer Run & Trip to the area West of Cambridge

I made a promise some time ago to Cambridge's Ali Cook to go on one of the mini coach trips with the Cambridge group and assured him I'd not find time till the Winter but there I was with pet pooch Franki (Four Fingers IV) an 11-year-old Jack Russell dog awaiting the coach at 11.45am on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> August on the Tennison Road/Station Road corner. The meet time has now been put back to let the Ely train get in so I was now out of excuses.



The 16-seater mini coach had space for just two more I believe and for 25 nicker I was in. We were off to the South-East of Cambridge which I took to be all the 'S's but we shot west towards all the H's out past The Hoops at Barton and alighted at The Willow Tree in Bourn which is almost solely an airy-fairy wedding venue and despite something like 8-10 young girls, service was hard to come by. The beer was a forgetful elderflower fizz and after a fair trip to get there you thought; it just has to get better. And it did!

Luckily the 2nd pub was a proper old red tile floored watering hole with a very happy landlady (below) who could hold a conversation. It was The Chequers at Little Gransden and I shall be back! Three ales were on and I took a half each of Lacons' Falcon Ale 4.2% and their Norfolk Gem at 3.6%. The Falcon was a rich, dark beer and the Gem was more of a malted mead. Lovely! We watched England's Women get back to 1-1 against Columbia and then were on our way again.

Pub 3 was the Royal Oak in Pottton, Beds which is where we ate - bang on the right time - and a good spread it was too. We even left food uneaten. Despite 6 real ales, they were all household names and so I had a pint of the rarest, a Theakston's Best Bitter 3.8% and it was like dishwater; alas bottom of the barrel. But memory of the Royal Oak is clouded by one of two sending offs I had playing rugby in my 43 years in the game. An injustice brought about by the crowd; I'd previously sat with my head in my hands here at this, the Pottton RFC 'clubhouse' in disgrace. Time to go me thought!



After lunch we headed to The Three Tons at Guilden Morden just inside Herts. I had about 10 raucous rugby tournaments that finished in this pub so very happy memories here! The community-owned pub was saved by local villagers banding their money together and after being closed for few years it was opened again and was so changed that I didn't recognise it from its interior, just the exterior. We had two halves of Buntingford Brewery's best here; The lovely biscuity (think; wooden barrel scraped into your beer) Twitchell

3.8% and the Hurricane 4.0%. Initially everyone before me kept QT about the Twitchell having turned but I soon announced it and sure enough they all then came out of the firkin (wood) barrel! No problem said the barmaid and the barrel was changed and fresh glasses charged! Thank you! The Twitchell was now exceptional.

Next (No5) was another old favourite of mine, The Pig and Abbott at Abingdon Piggots. It was here that I sang 'Allouette' to actress Susan Dando and she took it with much grace and then we played proper golf with a putting club and a golf ball around the 45-degree walls of the U-shaped pub using all the walls to bounce round to the hole which was an uphill blind putt through an archway of stacked beer mats. Par I believe was '3' ably demonstrated at the time by the late great much-missed Shaun Gadsby. I lost mine in the rough (4 stools and a table). Did we really do that? Oh yes, we did!

Well, the Pig & Abbott hasn't changed a bit! There were 4 beers on and I again had the two Buntingford Beers. The Bass Best Bitter was on again and soon changed to Elgoods' Down Under. All our beers were well kept I'm pleased to say but, the real action was out on the patio! You see, there's no way of getting round this but Gladys Emmanuel the legendary 'deva' of Cambridge CAMRA was giving Ely's scraggy Franki Four Fingers a bunch of fives under the table! Apparently, Franki playing it cool for 4 pubs was just "mossying on over" to give her his best one liner but this wasn't going to impress Madam who snapped at our Rocky - I mean Franki - but he never took a backwards step! I lifted her majesty by her body belt and got her to calm down but Gladys had broken another heart! That cute little choo-choo in Ale magazine.....yeh, right!

Pub 6 was the Plough at Shepreth. I've done nothing here - yet. It's a part time pub just open three days per week but what a great little watering hole it looks and all just 100m from the railway station! The landlord, an ex-rock 'n' roller if ever I saw one looks like he probably played Woodstock but the whole pub is a shrine to music, musicians and has a stage for live bands and next to it, a disco with nothing but '33' albums ready to play and I doubt it'll be Mozart! One for Fil and Til this, I had a pint of the Twitchell (yet again!) but I could have had the Hurricane (again) or Proper Job (or one more)? Given it's a weekend only pub, to see FOUR real ales on was a sight to behold! All beers were excellent and it was later voted pub of the day. Like music? Visit it, you'll love it.

Pub 7 was The Chequers at Orwell. This is a Freehouse and had three beers on. I had a pint of Lacons' Cloudless and a half of Woodforde's Bure Gold. I thought the Cloudless was excellent and Gold was typical Woodforde's and 'safe'. Our last stop was to be in Harston at the Brewboard Tap Room and as I looked up at the board, I realised they had a red available; Cardinaldred at 4.6%. It was a gorgeous beer and soon most of the party were trying it and agreeing.

And so, that was it, I was delivered back to the railway station and somehow, I and Franki made it back, I left his lead at Brewboard so my light sweater had to act as his dog lead which drew a few glances on the station platform but it did the job and I don't need any excuses to go back for more Cardinaldred (sin)! Ale of the day was Lacon's Falcon. Five new places for me and I suppose my conclusion would be; Don't look at this hoping to drink different beers in rural communities, that isn't its strength and your unlikely to get a weird variety. Its strength is in the buildings, in the people, the landlords, the banter among yourselves and if you try something new, great!

### **In Theory, If Beer was Cheaper.....**

It's just a theory but would pubs be in such decline if beer were cheaper, if it were £1 or £1.50 a pint cheaper? We'd have villages of people drinking right? Would that do it? I can imagine there are a few different answers out there because it is the first thing people say isn't it. You know the monologue, it's been said enough. It's all just theory...

Well actually, it isn't all theory, because it's for real in one part of Great Britain; The Isle of Man.

Situated in the Irish Sea equally distant from England, Scotland and Ireland and has its own government (about the oldest continuous parliament in the world), is independent of the UK government, wasn't in the EU, never had VAT but, they are British Citizens. I've just completed my 31<sup>st</sup> trip over there and have spent one year of my life there just in holidays!



*The walls vibrate at The Mines in Laxey as the Electric Trams graze the wall. But Laxey has something far more famous than trams, a wheel!*



The cheapest beer I had on this trip was £3.10 and the most expensive was £4.20 per pint. The pubs are generally in a healthy condition with hardly any closing. In the last 10-years, the Britannia has closed and the Central has gone part time in Ramsey, the rest are how I left them. Tholt-y-Will at the foot of the only mountain (Snaefell) closed 30 years ago on account of being remote. The tourist trade has been declining for 60+ years ever since Freddie Laker and Ryanair dragged our backsides down to Spain for the same money. This means the new business of 'offshore banking' continues to grow and pubs close for office buildings in the financial sector of the capital Douglas which was in recent times named by the late - Queen Elizabeth as a 'City'.

*Bar visual; Ginger Hall Hotel*

Of course, some pubs will have huge car parks in built up areas and they have gone as real estate, especially in Douglas. The Liverpool Arms beyond Onchan near Baldrine (Bald-rhine) was in a remote location; the Manx Police are hot on everything, while friendly and open, they're no pen pushers the Manx police are out and about.



The Island sees long term viability in pubs and is happy to let their character show, you know; 'Irish character' (needs paint); The Glen Mona Hotel in Glen Mona has re-opened despite needing lots of work and I hear its going back to full-time soon. It won't look immaculate; it'll just be a boozer, only the pubs in Douglas get the full makeover. The town that REALLY punches way above anything in our end of the UK is Peel, over on the west coast. Peel has about 9 pubs in a town the size of say Littleport? Littleport has 3. Most hotels on the Isle of Man outside of Douglas are old school B&B and rely on being a local boozer in the evenings. Ramsey has 5 pubs and compares in size to Soham which has 3. The numbers vary heavily but the good ones are rammed and you walk through crowds of people sideways on. The more customers, the more the costs get divided amongst us all.

There are two standout places to drink in Peel, the first is the Miller's T'ale which sells 5 beers from the UK and the other being The Creek which only sells Manx beers and they have 9 pumps going. The standout in Ramsey is 'The Traff' (The Trafalgar) while the Ginger Hall Hotel is also exceptional being located at a very famous point on the TT course with a pretty bar mirror and the TT course on the ceiling. Generally, there is way more ale drunk in the Island than over here and you could make a holiday of it chasing beers and pubs.

### **The Drinking scene on the Isle of Man**

Back in the 1980s the two breweries were Castletown and Okell's (Owe-kells) and the beer was tasteless and delivered in the northern style; a huge northern head on it and your glass comes looking like a Guinness storm has just broken out inside but eventually settles while the froth acquired atop the beer to this day is poured through spritzer being smashed against the bottom of the glass. Things changed in the late 1980s with Bushy's Brewery serving a better tasting froth from their own bar down on the front promenade in Douglas and then expanding around the island, Bushy's wasn't just a beer, it used a Fox and lots of TT inspired clipart to make its way past the other two. Castletown stopped brewing, Bushy's now making beers with the Castletown name on them while Castletown have concentrated on pub management but if The Britannia closed you have to question progress because it was near the bus and tram depot, the public toilets and food takeaways yet it is no more. Public Toilets are open all the time or may close at midnight in some areas. Okell's have great many pubs tied up and you'll find their tasty MPA (Citra) and Bitter is all that most pubs under their belt supply. They aren't making ground like this I feel.



*The Creek Inn, Peel has 9 local real ales and a pump spare just in case they get busy. The Kaneen's "Roy" (Hodgson) is to die for. Peel is about the size of Stretham with 9 pubs, several pubs have 6 pumps on.*

Bushy's is still in a few pubs but there are two brewers that are making a big hit; Odins and Kaneen's. The Odin's make a good range of 4-5 beers while the Kaneen's Brewery is on the TT course in Union Mills and founder Peter Kaneen is making some high-quality beers. His red beer named 'Ruy', the Gaelic for red (pronounced; Roy) is known as a 'Roy Hodgson' in The Mitre at Ramsey! This is exceptional as is the EPA Peter brews and he tells me that when asked at the brewing college 'where are the best hops' everyone else replied "NZ and the USA", to which Peter replied; "England". So it's his 'up yours' to anyone who cares; it's delicious and he is right of course! In their own pubs Okell's own beers are mostly all they sell it would seem, such as at The Mines in Laxey.

There's so much to do in the Isle of Man you'll never be bored. If you like Celtic and Norse ruins, electric trams, steam engines and horse-drawn trams, fine eating and beer at just about £3.30-£4 per pint then do have a stab at it. There are even tales of wild wallabies, 4 motor cycle museums and the countryside is gorgeous. There are flights from Luton and Gatwick and the public transport system is excellent when there, you can make a holiday using just the public transport. You can take your dog on the ships that go from Heysham or Liverpool and drive your own car over there and insurance cover is in your standard policy.

There's a lack of diversity though with few non-Europeans and all I saw were 2 East Asian tourists and 2 Buddhist monks on the same trip on the tram up Snaefell (from Laxey) only later to knock on a stranger's door in the middle of the countryside to get some directions and stumbled aghast, upon the spitting image of Mahatma Gandhi in lungi (you may unfairly have called it a bedsheet), sandals, the waft of curry and who couldn't speak English! After staring at each other for 30-seconds he just closed the door and I stood there for 2-minutes just gathering in what I'd just seen....

BTW, always go and see the fairies at Fairy Bridge if you want good luck or to put a stop to the bad, it worked for me several times when I used to race over there and in the end the mechanics and other teams would often just simply demand a rider after teething troubles to; "get up to that bridge and ask the fairies for a spot of luck....NOW!".



### Tap takeover at the Drayman's

It was great to see the Drayman's Son trying something different in a Tap Takeover in late July and the brewery of choice was Ampersand of Diss in Norfolk. I tried several of their beers – only in order to find the right one of course! – and their equivalent of Juice Rocket was deemed dare we say, even nicer. But I did notice that over a period of a year or more, the Keg list gets longer and the cask list gets shorter and this thought was confirmed by the head barman "cask sales are down" he said. This is also confirmed by Greene King who make the number 9% down for 2023.

### Naming a Beer by a colour; is that its taste or its colour?

Just a few months ago I was under the impression that a 'gold' beer was a sign of a rich, full-bodied deep taste to a beer, obviously some kind of lighter colour and the story was complete. Exmoor Gold being a prime example but alas pretty much everything is 'gold'. An Amber beer is gold, a Blond is gold, what the hell it's a mess!

As a very young man I tried some 'Brown' and of course all beers were "brown" in colour but "Brown" also defined the taste and type of beer and 'nut brown' was another. A "light" was simply

*Tap takeover by Ampersand at the Drayman's Son* a light brown colour rather clear beer and had a softer taste so the colours gave you an indication of the type of drink you were on. Today citra isn't luckily a colour but a 'type' of beer and is not colour related. The problem now is that blond and light and even dark mean nothing anymore and it isn't just Iceland that abuses the term 'Indian Pale Ale' – everyone's at it. The term 'session ale' hasn't been defined by anyone and therefore you get the rather churlish comment that 6.0% is a session ale providing you drink only one over two hours.

How did we get to this nonsense! Let's take the 'Ruby' or the 'Red' both of which are not only a taste but a colour as well, both are close to each other but because it isn't defined, the brewers have been left to name them themselves and due to commercial fortitude most smartalecs have called their beers a 'Ruby Red' even though the taste has been clearly one style of bitter or pale and now the lines have been blurred.

Luckily, Stouts and Porters (same thing) have been black for ever and a day and have crept out the brewery tittering behind their hands! 'thank goodness we're not involved in THAT argument!'.

Why did SIBA or CAMRA or someone else not sit down and sort this out for good? Someone will know.

### Kaldi Brewery – a female lead.

Further to our article last month about Iceland, I thought to pass on to you the story of the Kaldi Brewery where I could have spa'd in a bath of beer overlooking the fjord a thousand feet below but settled for two knock-out beers instead! It transpires that the owner and founder is Agnes Anna Sigurdardottir whose husband was a fisherman forced to quit after 26 years due to a knee injury and a new family income was still needed. At the time Agnes watched a TV programme about a microbrewery in Denmark and flew there to ask questions of the brewer, and received, great





advice. The idea was to use the fresh water off the Solarfjall Mountain that the village of Bruggsmiðjan sits on and brew the beer near home and the result was Iceland's first microbrewery in 2006. Nowadays the whole family are involved.

Those that don't know, you can take the surname of your mother or your father and then tag on the end 'dottir' or 'sson' which to us makes things difficult to follow but Icelanders ask for your name AND where you are from to find out who you are which is exactly the same as P.C. Fordham asked of me as a boy! So, you see, it's just the same!

## The Tale End

This month I thought I'd mention that I've always been known as "Taffy" except for a small period of time when I became "Tom Caxton". Back in the mid-1970s it was a big thing for me to go to Woolies in Newmarket and get a homebrew kit and make my favourite liquid at home – aged 14-15. In those times we mostly had 'airing cupboards' with shelving for the clothes to dry and later be transferred to your bedroom chest-o-draws but the space around the circular boiler at the base was used inefficiently and ours had room for a 10-gallon dustbin down the side.

The kits of the best-known company were Tom Caxton who made kits to brew; bitter, pale, stout, lager and I recall a dark too. The kit came in a metal can with a huge cap under which you could find the instructions, finings and yeast. I followed the instructions and gradually over a year or more I became quite adept at these brews and would make 40 pints at a time with one coming out and a new one going in straight away. I'd have darts tournaments in my bedroom, I became a popular drop-in centre, watched the 5-Nations with a beer and the usual boyish bragging at school led to 'well come on, let's have some!' and so I started selling it to school friends. I always bottled it in used Corona bottles I had collected and the lid always mentioned 'return bottle for 2½p deposit'. Some of the beers also had an 'eggy smell' which I've since found out was sulphur and due to our hard water.



Part of the brewing process was to deposit 1 teaspoon of sugar in each bottle beforehand and then sucking on a hose I would syphon the beer from the bag and fill each bottle before flicking over to the next leaving a tiny splash there and abouts on the wooden floor inside the airing cupboard. Part of the joy of being ignored by your busy parents is that you think it up, you do it and nobody stops you and I was now the biggest brewer in Fordham. First in a field of one! 15 and with the world at my feet. Instead of JD Wetherspoons it could have been DJ Lloyd...isn't the world lucky!

Sales at school were going well (the exports), I'd take a huge Pan Am airways bag to school each day (the dray) and deposited the bottles in boy's (the clientele!) lockers (the cellar) with each bottle pushed deep inside, cloth unfurled and put back in the bag; the drop-off therefore remaining unseen. Many a pupil couldn't quite understand why my bag looked so heavy and why a glass type 'chink' noise emanated from it instead of the rustle of books or PE kit. I kept mum.

Sales mushroomed and I gave customers the same 2½P back as the shops, then cleaned the bottles, rolled them in boiling water to remove the old labels and to start all over

again. Alas though, my business empire was about to come tumbling down for I had a Judas in the camp for little did I know but I was already on the Headteacher Mr. Albert Lawrence's radar.



**I have trade for you Mr Lawrence, Bandits; one, heading; Soham, make angels one-five. Over.**

You see, Soham Village College had its own school Army Cadet Detachment and we met each Friday from 3.45pm until 6pm and soon there was to be a weekend camp at Waterbeach and orders were flying in thick and fast from fellow cadets as nobody wanted to be there without beer. We'd finish 'regular' Friday cadets and then on this particular weekend coming up, meet for the bus to the exercise on the old airfield at Waterbeach Engineers. Fellow cadets had 'booked their order' (the tab) and a cheery evening for 14-to-16-year-old cadets was a brewin' with some booking lager and some dark, ale or stout but ALL wanted a fizzy beer! So, each bottle got 1.5 teaspoons of sugar for that extra boost so you should be thinking not so much fine ale as; "champagne on the rostrum" - ale! Because it went everywhere and that's just how they liked it!

The Headteacher sensed - using his radar stations at Stanmore and Biggin Hill - that, young Taffy-boy was heading for Waterbeach Airfield at the weekend and needed intercepting at any costs; he must not get through! The Judas, the lad that broke under the threat of 'no tea tonight' was the son of the local Sally Army family who'd cracked under interrogation and so I was 'dobbed in'. It was now within the head's control and my time; limited.

**That's right Stanmore, I confirm, one Bogey is entering your area now. You should see him at any moment. Over.**

I may have got away with it a bit longer but alas, on the Thursday, the day before Waterbeach, I was on my way to a lunchtime 'drop' which required walking into the school and to a locker and this required a valid excuse to the prefects guarding the doors to enter and 'I've got to go somewhere' cut no ice on this occasion with fellow Fordham boys (normally a code green) on duty and I can still see it now in slo-mo, a terrible scene....awful, awful, awful, for I walked past diminutive Chris Bayes and he swung me round him in a kind of horizontal judo throw and if I took the outside line, my Pan Am airways bag (full to the brim) took the centrifugal outside-outside line and crashed heavily against the lobby wall right in front of the school hall doors where we held assembly each morning. I knew I'd got to be taken down now, if the smell of beer didn't get them then the sticky feet would. I was, right now, completely buggered.

I hopped it pretty sharpish and 'naughty boy' hid resembling Harry Lyme in The Third Man because I thought they'd come straight for me, I asked myself; "what the hell now?" but they didn't come for me straight away, nor for the rest of the day.



A Corona bottle; they smash easily

I wrongly did a double or quits on the Friday, the day of the camp and loaded my bag again, then endured assembly first thing and the only thing anyone could smell was stale beer, I didn't look up much, hymn 458 suddenly needed re-reading several times and I could also feel everyone looking at me. I went to Physics and the Irish teacher boomed out; 'anyone know where I can buy some cheap home brew?', the class tittered; 'bloody hell, they all know'. As the temperature rose that day, the smell in the hallway seemed to get worse as everyone went through there to change lessons and we resembled a brewery and not a school. Still when 15, I had a business to run and orders to fill; and rather irrationally had brought another 6 bottles to school, I really wanted everyone who'd asked for their beer to have their order and didn't think of preserving myself; weekend camp or not - or the extra pressure I was placing upon myself. This poppy was now getting too tall and due for the chop, perhaps I should go on the run? You know, a large bar of chocolate, a bottle of milk, I might get as far as Cambridge? I'd never been naughty but I'd really surpassed myself with this one.

Around mid-morning, the Head's secretary - Mrs Woods - came in to a lesson and asked for me to come out. My father was called and he came into the Head's office, oily cloth cap and filthy, smothered mechanics overall, there he stood without a word to me and out of his comfort zone. He shook hands with Mr Lawrence - who, then looked down at the deposit of oil my father had given him and I thought; 'oh yes! 1-0 to the Lloyd's!'.

But it was but a small pyrrhic victory and given the “I can deal with this or you can Mr. Lloyd” my father agreed to deal with it and deal with it by God he did! While I carried on at school, he smashed and threw everything in the rubbish never to be used again (he commandeered my brew bin for workshop use because the Lloyd’s never waste anything) and regular cadets was off at 3.45pm. I could still attend the weekend camp though and GO was a 6pm meet for the bus.

Going home after school and feeling ‘crushed’ at being caught, at missing cadets, I now saw what dad had done; my brewing career now laying there, shattered in the bin. I was feeling pretty low and I daren’t even take one bottle to camp for myself, I might have my bag checked, best not to invite MORE trouble.

So, I got a lift with mum and was back to Soham VC and headed sheepishly for the foot of the steps onto that full sky-blue council bus used for the weekend camp, my two schoolteacher officers of Geography and Metalwork – now off-duty so to speak, were chortling fully up the front. ‘Oh God! this is going to be bloody awful; I shouldn’t be here; this is going to go completely wrong’. So, in total silence I stepped onto the bus when suddenly; a massive roar went up from all the cadets as they shook their Corona bottles approvingly! As I walked the coach, I was cheered to the echo (shades of TE Lawrence/Peter O’ Toole on the wrecked train) and pulled to and fro which removed my beret, but I was shot, my emotions were completely gone, it had been a long, such a very long day but I was however, back among the boys and a sobering lesson learnt.

And so, for 6-months after this, I was known around Soham Village College as ‘Tom Caxton’ as children passed it to adults, who passed it around and it got back to my parents again and again so that even when I served fuel at home on the pumps our customers had a damn good laugh over it, it was then and still is I hope you agree; quite a tale.

**Tom Caxton**

Photos of Corona, Tom Caxton kit and Kaldi Brewery from the internet. Please help us tell others; if you know something then tell us about it and we’ll pass it on. If you have something to discuss and debate, a taxi, a train you want to organise; why not join the Facebook page; ‘[Ely & District CAMRA](#)’ and belt it out there? If you have any news for this newsletter then drop me a line via email at [david@taffmeisters.co.uk](mailto:david@taffmeisters.co.uk) or text me on 07951010542. The views expressed here are those of myself and don’t necessarily represent those of the CAMRA committee.

David ‘Taffy’ Lloyd