

Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action.

Newsletter – December 2023

STOP PRESS!

IT'S ON!

Ely's Elysian Beer Festival 14 is go!

Welcome to the (belated) December Newsletter - it was worth the wait!

The month of December! It's Christmas and you'll perhaps be needing 'winter fuel' then? Right, now get down the pub and buy some – it's £5 a pint!



Merry Christmas to you all and welcome to the very belated December edition of Ely CAMRA's Newsletter. I'm getting over a malingering bout of Covid-19, my first, so pub visits are down but as it's a 7-week month we still cover a whole host of things from November and 2/3rds of December. It's also the first edition where my enthusiasm has waned for so much as a moment; I'm fed up with reporting on pub changes to this degree. The second is that although I'm not involved in the EEBF saga it has still drained me and everyone around us, this is two years on the trot and enough already. Changes like "will be doing" becoming "did do", losing copy as weekends pass, it needs to settle down. What effect it has had on both chief organisers; Tony and Wiggy long-term we shall see. Put it this way, any more hassles and I can't see WHO will want to drag 'our' sorry backsides through all this again next time! In order to get this out, anything said of the BF meeting on Tuesday 19th is of necessity; short.

To other things then; this issue we've reports on the very recent Papworth 'Brew a Beer for a Beer Festival' (7th) and then two days later, our Rural Run & Trip (9th) around the pubs of the Ely District. Then we have The Fountain in Soham which opened 14th and the BF budget was approved on the 18th. We've been busy!

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

Ely Elysian Winter Beer Festival 2024 F. Friday 2nd – Saturday 3rd February. The Maltings, Ely.

St Neots 'Booze on the Ouse' Beer & Cider Festival Thursday 14th – Saturday 16th March 2024. Priory Centre, St Neots.

Cambridge Beer Festival 2024 F. 20th May 2024 – 25th May 2024. Jesus Green, Cambridge.

***TBC* Peterborough Beer Festival** Tuesday 20th – Saturday 24th August 2024. Embankment, Peterborough.

***TBC* East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival** Wednesday 21st – Monday 26th August 2024. St Edmundsbury Cathedral

Ely Branch News

One last mention of the last Ely Elysian Beer Festival earlier this year in 2023; when getting the final figures, I'd forgotten to comment so I admit it and apologise. Our comment in March that the 2023 Ely Elysian Beer Festival "..... may have lost some £3,000-£4,000 for the overall festival for CAMRA" came from the organisers very own mouths but proved to be very wide of the mark and I didn't set the record straight when later we learned it broke even down to almost the last penny and I'm here and happy to say it. The hole in their earliest figures is simple enough to explain; the money you paid for your beer went straight to HQ and until HQ tell you, you don't have all the figures, so; schoolboy error at the time - you bet. Anyway, it's all in the past but better late than never hey?

Ale Trail Saturday 17th February 2024 (provisional)

The 'Ely Ale Trail' is back again and set for Saturday 17th February when there's no Rugby 6-Nations on the box. We'll start at The West End at 12 noon and work our way around the city to finish at around 6-7pm. You can drop in and out at any point along the trail and the ale trail is a great way to dip in (or out) and see if you like a bunch of low-down mongrels like us. The route will doubtless move onto The Prince Albert, The Cutter, 3At3, Drayman's Son, The Minster and good luck after that! More details and timings next month.

The **next Ely Branch Committee Meeting** is on Tuesday 9th January with AN EARLY 7.30pm start for the BF committee which will wind up first and main committee 'stuff' will be done afterwards. The newsletter will be out on about the 12th and I don't have to tell you that we'd love your stories so please write them up and send them in.

Will we remember it as the 'Bloody' 14th Ely Elysian Beer Festival?

At our committee meeting of Tuesday 5th December, Chairman of both the main committee and the Beer Festival committee, Tony Gimbert explained how the request to go ahead with the beer festival in 2024 was being halted by the funders – CAMRA – due in much part to our basing our figures on the poor 2023 BF and it only breaking even. All figures have to be based on the previous year and no further back and so the barrel figures have been dropped from the previously 'regular 70' to just 60 and then lowered again. This means the sums then hardly add up and other revenue streams have to help out like deposits on glasses and the price of the beer itself. The overheads stay the same but HQ were cutting off our income.

On then to Tuesday 19th December. The BF committee meeting with CAMRA head honcho Chris Rouse in attendance. The sum total is that we aren't blameless in these delays and have brought a few of them on ourselves and whereas the committees can be flummoxed, Chris would want and did demand answers! A more open system might have got us there sooner but as the Irish farmer probably would say; "we are where we are – and I STILL wouldn't start from here!".

Let's look forward then and what have we got for the 14th Ely Elysian Beer Festival 2nd-3rd February 2024. We have 70 real ales on plus 6 key kegs that can be cask if required (mmm...?) plus 16 ciders. We have 800 glasses being "logo'd" programmes being produced and Wiggy has the beer list in hand. The Maltings will be left with the food again which we hope is as good as last year. The beer list will be put out there the week of the festival and we know that great store is put by this for the long-distance beer twitchers before they will come. Advertising is down to just leaflets, Facebook, and posters as time is so short. We do have engineering works on the railways on Saturday 3rd so if you have southern friends coming up, you may want to work around that one.

Volunteers for the BF 2024

We are always indebted to you CAMRA members for your willingness to come forwards, serve beer, attend the entrance area, dish out the glasses and tickets and we want to say that you are needed again! We love you that much that we want you back again! If you could volunteer a session (there is a set time for either an afternoon or an evening session including organised breaks with food and drink (the masseur you pay for yourself). If you can support the event, the email address is elycamra@yahoo.com and mark it as 'volunteer'. You'll then be sent a 'volunteer form' which you mark off the areas you'd like to work in and the sessions you can do. You'll then need to attend the early evening before the BF (Thursday February 1st) for an induction which is about the do's and do nots, for your safety – and everyone else's and how it's all going to run and your job is defined. But look! You then get a load of beer tokens and get told to go off and enjoy yourself for an hour plus. That's thanks in advance! Remember, 99% are out to have a good time and a right laugh. We'll have your back for the other 1%.

Lewkel News - Rural

No sooner had we uploaded the last newsletter for November 3rd at 5pm than someone at 6pm, in the pub, spotted that **The Maids Head, Wicken** was due (and has since) opened again on Friday 17th November. The response on the Maids Head Facebook page is unequivocal when it says 'new owners' but in truth Colin J. Murfitt still holds the deeds. A week later, I get a call for one of my Bar Billiards tables (I have 15) from the new leaseholder; Scotsman Kevin Henderson. "I was a chef at St. Andrews for many years before moving down over twenty years ago. I worked for Oxford Inns for 20 years covering 15 Hotels before I decided to have a wee go myself. I had the Missing Sock at Stow-cum-Quy for a time and have taken **The White Pheasant, Fordham** off Calvin (Holland) and we've done so well there what with the turnover well up and I decided why not try The Maid's Head as well!".

The pub started with just one ale; St. Austell's Proper Job and the food was due to start the next week but alas finding a chef near Christmas was difficult and Kevin was concentrating his culinary skills back in Fordham at the White Pheasant. The second weekend saw three real ales on offer, all were excellent; Doom Bar 4.0%, and two from Lacons; a top favourite Norfolk Gem 3.6% and also Saint Nick's 4.2% which has great character too. Since then, the kitchen has opened and the restaurant is open. Beers remain the same three and the St. Nicks is excellent.

Meanwhile, down the road at **The Five Miles from Anywhere**, they still have 4 pumps on and, if numbers matter, then they are the rural daddy! Ordering Greene King's Fresh Legs, a 4.0% Golden Ale, one of GKs seasonal-rotating beers, it was most definitely the bottom of the barrel so it was exchanged for a regular; Mauldons' Mole Trap 3.8% which I find a funny tasting thing! You'll never say it's a 'more-ish' beer but could possibly call it a 'less-ish' beer. Then that was followed up with Old Speckled Hen 4.8% - dropped from 5.0% - and I note the name 'Morland' is dropped from current GK advertising. People wonder why Greene King are annoying or just simply the bogey man of brewing; well, it's because of things like this! News of the new owner is that a woman from London, fresh to the trade and due in around the middle of January 2024.

Just over the area border, **The Red Lion, Swaffham Prior** is back open with veteran Ulsterman John O' Grady who's having one more crack at this the only Bateman's owned pub in the area. It was closed for 10 months but Landlord John and Ukrainian partner Lana have got it all back on track and the food started late November. The pub offers the usual assortment of good Bateman's Beers and also Timothy's finest Landlord as part of the rotating guest beers. John hails from Northern Ireland and it took me just seconds to get him onto a favourite subject of his; Irish Road Racing and the TT races for it turns out, half the customers are petrolheads too.....so happy days for me!!

News from Bruce Pattern out at Haddenham is that **The Cherry Tree, Haddenham** has now been sold. It is planned to run the same business (a Café) without change, but by one family instead of it having to support two.

While in **Haddenham**, planning permission has been granted for a small street-facing garage to be converted to a Micro-pub and Café. Situated facing The Green (and a cemetery!) on the Earith Road we await, but look, the only choice in not-so-small Haddenham is a fizzy Social Club, a Café or a Gastro pub! Now I reckon the goal is open and the goalie has gone off for a cuppa tea and sandwiches! If no cellar then perhaps we'll have to settle for fizzy keg which gets a 'tish-tish' from CAMRA but maybe they also might imitate the 3At3 and have some key keg? Yes please!

The Fountain, Soham closed on Wednesday 15th November with an all-you-can-drink for £15 and that pretty much drank the place dry. By lunchtime the next day, John and Zoe had already left for their retirement cottage in the Cotswolds. Craft Union (an offshoot of 5,000+ pubco Stonegate), the new owners then set about the reface the following Monday opening on Wednesday 13th December. Mine hosts are John and Sylvia from Nottingham they picked Soham and it's their second pub. They have 4-hand pumps ready but started with Doom Bar and Timothy's Landlord. The very bright pub has around 10 TV screens showing every sport, its well lit and you can now see how ugly everyone is! John says they can have a guest beer ON TOP of whatever the two baseline pumps are and I'll be dropping a few names on him and see what he can do. Of course, the TTL was perfectly served and having not had a drop of ale at the Fountain for 5 years, I grossed out but was bored already by evenings end. Prices? Well, they said that they would be cheap and the Yorkshire Fizz is under £4 while the TTL and Doom Bar are £4.10.

The Village Inn, Witchford opened on of all days; Friday the 13th of October and is serving food Wednesday to Sunday. Business partners Steve Wallis and Lee Davison have taken up the reigns having previously managed The Castle in Harrow, London. Steve said that we're a bit slower up here to which I replied that it must be nice to (still) have the shirt on his back! They have two real ales on as we speak; Fuller's London Pride and normally GK's Abbott which will have given way to GK's seasonal legend Rocking Rudolph by the time you read this.

The **Three Pickerels at Mepal** has gone to two beers for Christmas, not sure of the brewers but here we go... Greene King's Fireside 4.5% & Downham Isle's Goose 4.5% on presently, then that will be their Main Street Citra 5.0% and Lacons; Saint Nicks 4.2%. Clear information is sometimes hard to get when you're the pedantic one and they can't see the point of the question.

Local News - City

A trip into Ely's Townhouse for excellent cover rock band Highway Star was enjoyed while slurping away merrily at three beers all in tip-top nik; Bradfield's of Sheffield; Farmer's Blonde 4.0%, Phantom's Black IPA 4.2% (t 'was not for me, not for many I suspect...) and Timothy's finest Landlord 4.3%. It was so engrained in me that the beer would be slightly off that I had to do a double-take on the first few sips. The bad old days are behind The Townhouse we hope. I'm pleased to see that they are keeping with the obscure and rare as I do like to chase the unknown. Gary; keep it up.

Cambridge Branch Rural Trip

On Saturday November 18th, Cambridge branch went off into the Eastern hinterland with an over-subscribed mini-Coach. I reported on their previous trip back in September and what a good day it was. Excellent work by the Cambridge Team. They managed 10-pubs this time with the sensible drinking halves and the not sensible probably being clearly visible by the end! The Red Lion at Swaffham Prior, Dyke's End, Reach were the starters before heading off towards the Balsham pubs and visiting the highly acclaimed Chestnut Tree at Weston Colville. This was about the last time the award-winning landlord and landlady were in da house as they departed the next week. If you do want to go on one of Cambridge's excellent days out, look out for them on their [CAMRA page](#) and book early. The branch has around 4 trips per year.

No GBBF 2024

News arrived on Monday 11th that the Great British Beer Festival has been called off for 2024 at Olympia. CAMRA say they couldn't get the date they needed and it's too late to go anywhere else. How did it get to this point though?

Papworth Brewery

Creating a Beer Festival Beer! – Thursday 7th December

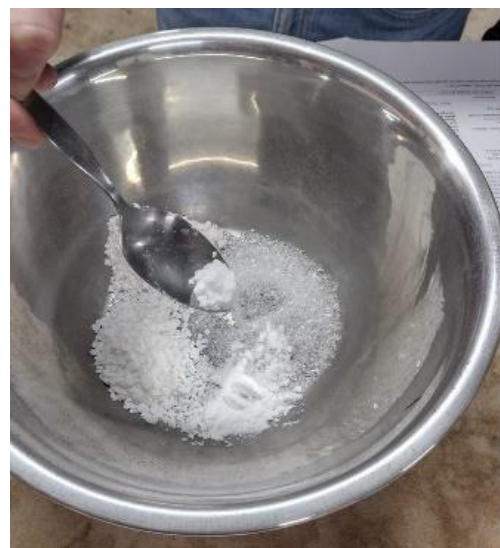


*The Monster Mash
(by the Crypt-Kicker Five)*

Business partner and head brewer Chris Jones invited the Ely branch along in the summer to create a brew for our Ely Elysian Beer Festival but for us, without a budget agreed I had to drop the 'for the EEBF' moniker and just call it 'create a brew'; what a palaver! Chris wasn't put off by the fact that we only found 3 people that wanted to create it in Dan Marsh; the landlord of The Dyke's End at Reach, Fil Utting-Brown (our treasurer) and myself and so we ploughed on!

The default set months back was 'brew a red beer' and had our committee been prepared to discuss it, we could have changed it but discussion was barred – because we didn't have a budget. Chris had prepped and got everything ready. He'd been online to find an award-winning red beer from the USA and the ingredients of which the owner shared; what a good place to start!

Wearing warm woollies and jackets we set too with the neutralising of the water (see below), before pouring in 17KG of mild and crystal malts, then torrefied wheat and



Neutralising of the water with salts

roasted barley. I shall not waffle on technically but just to say Chris explained everything as we went and we remained clean and tidy at all times. By lunchtime, we had extracted the juice from the malts and this wort was joined by Challenger and Fuggle hops. Lunchtime itself was spent back at the Three Kings, Haddenham which had GK IPA, Grainstore's Red Kite 3.8% and Butcombe's Chris Moose 4.1% which were both OK if a little too cold.

We carried on after lunch and left at 3.30pm much the wiser and with the yeast about to be slipped in. The brew worked away feverishly through to about the 15th of December and was then put into two firkins (72-pint barrels). One will go straight into the Crystal Ship tap room either just before or just after Christmas with the information on our Facebook page so keep an eye out for it. The other may find its way somewhere else – you know where!

The resultant beer is 4.8% just as the original brew was in the USA. In fact, all temperatures did as they were expected too and on occasion we looked really organised!

I came up with dozens of names for the beer and everyone agreed I need locking away. The best one (apparently) was an off the cuff remark on the way to the loo and by the time I came back they'd all forgotten it; I ask you!!!!

"We'll have the beer on in the Crystal Ship for the weekend before New Year's Eve. We've called it Red Mist, as we all thought that was the best of the names you gave us. Casked beer lasts for months, and a malt forward beer like this will probably actually get better with age - so yes, the other cask will be in perfect shape for the festival" said Chris.

I can't thank Chris and Papworth Brewery enough for going above and beyond to do this and I hope you try some of Papworth's amazing beers in their tap room named The Crystal Ship; especially come spring and summer next year, they have good beers all year round but in the summer they're fantastic!



Rural Run & Trip – Rural Pub of the Year? Saturday 9th December

We start with the embarrassing news that when I priced this trip up and gave Til the figures, I said we'd lose £1 but I took the wrong column of figures and turned it into a £17 loss. Come the day, I did the walk of shame and appealed for just the one extra £1. Oh! the ignominy! Til (social secretary) and I (rural pubs thingy bloke) set this up as a look at the best 7 of the 22 rural pubs in our area and we had some high-profile drinkers with us. Both the East Anglian and the Cambridge BF organisers were with us....but not the Ely!



Big Pat at The Rising Sun, Isleham. He kept us all well entertained!

porter and that for the rest of the day he was drinking essentially light bitters – which is true but more of later. I visited The Griffin the next lunchtime.

Meanwhile, over at **The Rising Sun**, landlord Pat who usually opens at 1pm was ready for us with GK's IPA and a winter ale named Fireside plus Wolf Breweries Granny Wouldn't Like It. All were well kept and Pat kept everyone well entertained with chit-chat! The pub has 4 darts teams, 2 pool teams, a cribbage team, a children's creche and many of us didn't want to leave!

The day started cold and with drizzly rain but everyone met up in a good mood. Our mini-coach from Lords Travel sold all 16 places with a month to go but was suddenly just 13 as 3 called off on the morning with dicky tummies. No matter, we got to **Isleham** and split as we wished with 7 heading for **The Griffin** at which Bruce Pattern reports the beer was very good on all three pumps. Elliott Bayle was later to mention that the Old Growler was a really nice dark



The Christmas display at the Five Miles – a big effort!

We then headed for one of last year's dual winners, a busy **Tharp Arms, Chippenham** where they had put a great spread on for us which we couldn't quite devour it all, there were plenty of 'punters' (it is a Newmarket pub after all!) there and the beers were Adnams Broadside, St. Austell's Cornish Bitter and a shock in Old Brown Mouse by TBM! Yes, it was like home from home for Ely folk and John reported that having put it on the night before, we were lucky to have any. "The locals have discovered it and it was selling fast, I didn't think it would even get to today". Was this a way of tickling up the twitchers among us who regularly get to drink it? Was this Taffy; 'insider trading'? Well, all three were well served in this immaculate pub. A comment that comes up is that the bar on the left feels a little soulless and of course dogs aren't allowed in. But Bev and John had bust a gut and the beer and food were excellent.

Still on schedule, we headed for the **Carpenter's Arms in Soham**. None of the owners were on duty here but the pub was already busy. The three real ales were Timothy's Boltmaker, Fullers' London Pride and Marstons' Pedigree. I'd had the Timothy the night before so stuck to the Pedigree which was near the bottom of the barrel while the Fullers was fine. I thought the Carpenter's would be a sure winner with the group but it left everyone just so-so. Why? Perhaps we'd previously been molly-coddled. Perhaps a lot of things.....

We moved on to the **Five Miles from Anywhere** or, as Bruce Pattern calls it, the Five Miles from Nowhere. Inside the door was a bright Christmas display and for 3pm the pub was very busy with three staff serving. The No Hurry was very much on the list for having FOUR real ales which is more than anyone else. The Mauldon's Mole Trap and GKs Speckled Hen and the St. Austell's Tribute (nearly) always on and a rare Butcombe's Rare Breed. The Rare Breed had to be returned and the others were fine with the usual report that the Mole Trap is a 'funny old beer'.

Next up in the twilight was the **Three Kings at Haddenham** which is accepted to be mostly a 'gastro pub' but for the time we were there (between meals) it was the perfect old school pub. The landlord, a great character was serving GK IPA and Grainstore's Red Kite on arrival (see above 'Papworth Brewery') but it took a dive immediately as it dried up so Oakham's JHB came out and as a light crisp beer I found it refreshing! It was a lovely pub but did we not take it seriously because 'they' don't take their beer seriously? I'm beginning to think, it is OK me trying to see things in an unbiased way but unconscious bias may be among us all and maybe others don't have to make my conscious 'effort'.

On to **The Chequers at Sutton** where the landlady had the most amazing Christmas decorations in her immaculate pub. Maija Cartwright, sticks mostly to GK beers and so we had Speckled Hen or IPA and both were served immaculately. I was so pleased everyone saw beyond the choice of beers and appreciated the setting. We were though now at the other end of the day. By now, Elliott was reminding me that we should leave soon as I'd become too relaxed about it all but the schedule really was very accurate and some made a half last a long time, most had a pint which was about right while others shovelled in a pint and a half (ahem!).

And so, to the last pub, the second of the dual Rural POTY winners of 2023; **The White Horse at Witcham** at which we could have suffered from jaded taste buds but



Look closely and you can see the tree is perfection
The Chequers, Sutton

luckily most knew this was well worth perking up for! John had his usual Elgood's Cambridge Best Bitter on along with Butcombe's Original and they really were well served. The pub was busy for 6pm and immaculate as usual. By now everyone was mingling and giggling away and people's characters started to shine through with some wishing they'd kept them hidden a bit longer!



The author – a little too relaxed?

We left the last pub and arrived back home at The West End, Ely on time. A great day out! The coach was comfortable, clean, darkened windows, tables and seats reversed. No pub let us down but I feel two pubs will suffer in the POTY.

It was very similar to my trip with Cambridge branch back in August where I learnt that rural pubs have to accommodate the usual and not the rare and after 7 pubs the rare is what you hark for! It is, for no other reason why we hark for 3 and 4 pump pubs hoping to find Porter, Citra, Brown or Red!

What did people make of it? Well, Cambridge's Ali Cook said; 'I really enjoyed the trip! I was (happily) surprised by the standard of the pubs'.



I hope Til and I are around to do this one again next year, the pubs welcome someone acknowledging their efforts while the locals perhaps take it all for granted. Thanks to organiser Til plus to Michelle for her time and effort.

Note to self for next year, try and reverse the route and see pubs in a different light! If The Griffin continues its progress, if the Fountain in Soham comes alive as does the Maids Head in Wicken, we can expect the overall standard to improve.

Rural POTY (23 Pubs and Clubs) (with some) scores now on the doors

After all the scores are in, our 7 judges have placed the following 4 pubs at the forefront (in no order) and a group will do a final all-in assessment during Jan/Feb 2024.

- The Rising Sun, Isleham
- The Tharp Arms, Chippenham
- The Chequers, Sutton
- The White Horse, Witcham

Congratulations!

Continuous Clash

It always makes me smile when people say that "X beer festival" clashing "doesn't affect us", a notable one being the 'Booze on the Ouse' which was held at St Neots on the same weekend as our very own Ely Elysian Beer Festival in February this year. Well, it does clash if you live anywhere between Ely and St. Neots or in the Midlands! Clashing beer festivals are part of life but just shouldn't be happening on the first weekend of February and our 2024 BF clashes this time with the Colchester CAMRA Winter BF having picked the same weekend for their Winter Festival and when, according to most diaries, there's nothing for a week or two either side. You'd think a little effort could have been made to co-ordinate these two especially? We need to stick to one weekend which unfortunately in recent years we haven't and failing that, run it by others.

Last year's BF was on the 14th February, this year the 3rd and next year we're back to January. Without trying to be a 6-year-old (liar, liar pants on fire!) I just want to say to them; "C'mon Ely and Colchester; talk!".

While talking of 'clashing', two of the biggest East Anglian; Peterborough and the East Anglian - held at Bury St. Edmunds - Beer Festivals clash (see BF dates diary above) AGAIN in 2024 and it looks set to continue as they both fancy the same Bank Holiday week in August.

Ely Rugby Club/EOSA

I'm pleased to report the perfect pint of Adnams Ghost Ship on Saturday 16th at the club. The club are still trying! Given that the pipes come from the first floor to the bar, you can imagine the hard time EOSA have keeping real ale in good order. Well done for trying!

Norwich Beer Festival – no 2024 event

It seems almost certain that Norfolk CAMRA won't be offered the St. Andrews and Blackfriars Hall for 2024 due to a major refurbishment needed for the old building. We're assured that the hall will be back for 2025.

Real Ale Pumps up in our area – on the up.

Is it possible that real ale pumps have gone up in the area and that CAMRA, the Ely Branch, this newsletter should all feel that they've had something to do with it? I've drawn up a list of the 23 rural pubs, 2 clubs and the 12 City pubs and make it that there are another 10 pumps out of town. The list of handpumps below is a guide.

We need to find out what the RBL, Sutton have?

Pub	'22	'23	Pub	'22	'23
The Tharp Arms, Chippenham	1	2	The Three Pickerels, Mepal	1	2
The George & Dragon, Snailwell	2	2	The White Horse, Witcham	2	2
The Maids Head, Wicken	2	3	The Village Inn, Witchford	1	2
The Griffin, Isleham	2	3	The Anchor, Little Downham	2	1
The Rising Sun, Isleham	2	2	The Plough, Little Downham	2	1
The Bell, Kennett	?	?	The Isle of Ely, Downham Road	-	-
The Carpenters Arms, Soham	1	3	The Crown, Littleport	1	1
The Cherry Tree, Soham	1	2	The Plough & Harrow, Littleport	0	1
The Ship, Soham	1	1	The Swan on the River, Littleport	1	1
The Fountain, Soham	2	2	The Ship, Brandon Creek	3	3
The Five Miles from Anywhere	4	4	The Chequers, Sutton	2	2
The Red Lion, Stretham	2	2	The Rugby Club, Downham Road (club)	0	1
The Three Kings, Haddenham	3	3	The Fountain, Ely	1	1
The High Flyer, Ely	1	2	The West End, Ely	4	4
The Kings Arms, Ely	1	2	The Cutter, Ely	3	4
The Lamb Hotel, Ely	-	-	The Drayman's Son, Ely	5	5
The Minster, Ely	5	4	The Yard, Ely	0	0
The Hereward, Ely	6	6	The 3At3, Ely	0	0
The Townhouse, Ely	3	3	The Prince Albert, Ely	7	7
The RBL, Fordham (club)	1	1		78	88

Norwich BF 2023 reply

Taking you back a month to my wasn't-too-happy description of this year's Norwich BF, Ian Stamp was speaking on CAMRA Discourse saying the reason for the beers not being in alphabetical order is that; "On Wednesday and Thursday lunchtimes the cellar staff have to get 40-50 empties out and 40-50 new casks in, which then have to be positioned, cleaned and vented. And then have their lunch. We don't have the luxury some festivals have of just putting up casks and selling them". So, there it is. I am nothing if not even handed and you've also heard their point.

The Tale End

Back in around 1983 the Tharp Arms at Chippenham had one of those drinkers who stay for a short but vibrant time and then they're off again. I appeared at the Tharp one midweek evening and the subject had got around to the Yard of Ale glass (also known as a 'Cambridge Yard') that hung directly over the customers heads at the bar like Damocles Sword. The landlord, Ron Chalkley, wasn't easily persuaded until two or three of us promised to do it and thus, Ron got down the Yard and gave it a thorough wash first, the plastic bag may have protected the insides but people had been smoking 20 Woodbine directly underneath it for the last X number of years so things might have been a bit 'tasty'!

One of the three was a man named Les from Red Lodge and set at 6' tall, weighed a mere 11 stones, strong as an Ox but stuck in a time warp he had a mullet, huge shirt lapels and bell bottom flares that didn't meet his buckled shoes for he WAS a slave to fashion but just in the wrong decade! He was immaculate, clean and tidy of traveller origin and said it how it was so you never needed a dictionary for Les. Normally travellers were declined service because each one allowed in to drink would usually be the thin edge of the wedge and you'd have 6 the next week and a fight the week after! He was there with the good lady (usually a very good sign) and it transpired he wasn't the 'thin edge of the wedge' – but all this adds a little character to our story.

People were a different shape then! People's workout was 'work'; they were fit through their work which meant Les looked pared down rather than beefed up and you could see he was as fit as a butcher's dog.

I seem to recall that there were 3 sizes of 'Yard' with different sized lengths and size of bulb; 1 ½ pints, 2 ¼ pints and 3 ½ pints? How true this was, I don't know but just handling the thing was like fumbling with nitro-glycerene and the landlord couldn't just hand it over the bar any-old-how because after all it was a Yard long. When full it would want to hit things and shatter so Ron would appear through the serving hatch with the yard showing great caution and all the chairs and tables had to be booted out the way - for it needed big space.

The landlord's job didn't stop there because when it went mostly wrong the beer went everywhere and 'a yard' was best done well away from your finest Axminster! Ron, I believe, had a 2 ¼ - pint Cambridge Yard and that night 'Alfie' Noakes took first shot at around 2.30 minutes and wore most of it, next was myself on about 52-seconds and Les did it in some 40-seconds. While drowning in beer, landlord Ron and others kept telling us to 'twist it' or 'twirl it' but all any of us ended up with was a face full of beer!

You see, it isn't like drinking from a glass, you can't close your mouth and stop the beer, you have to stand there with a mouth like 'Wallace' (...and Gromit) and control the beer using only your epiglottis, you begin just drinking the beer at the flare end and life is simple but then you want the beer in the narrow neck and there isn't enough of it, you're in a hurry and it won't come, but then and then boy-oh-boy does it come and THIS. IS. WHERE. THE. TROUBLE. STARTS!



You see, to get just a mouthful from the narrow flue near the bulb you had to raise the yard horizontally and fast but, the beer in the top of bulb (see left) is now higher than the flue and so starts to empty in huge waves while cavitating – it's glug-glug-glug followed by wham and it's in your face! You're also

trying to control the beer with your throat. When it comes at you it does so as a large bow wave overriding the trickle that is in the flue and makes a run straight at the bridge of your nose and between your eyes – and there's nothing you can do because your first reaction is to push the bulb end down but there's loads of beer now sitting in the flared exit and it keeps going in your mouth and that is a mouth remember, that you cannot close! When you start again, very gently, it charges for your face yet again! All breathing pattern has now gone, your shirt is soaked and brown, floor is covered, face; a mess.



(above photo) Former Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke was previously the world record holder for the fastest drinking of a yard of beer, when he downed a scone pot in eleven seconds as part of a traditional Oxford College penalty.

I visited the Tharp some 2-3 days later and Les had been in every night and was now down to 15-seconds as he'd had one yard every night that week. Like a dog with a bone, Les wasn't letting go! So, Ron set him up for his 4th go and off he went, but it was now that you saw his artistry for Les had changed, he was now to a yard of ale, what Rudolph Nureyev was to ballet!

He started to twist the 'Yard' and make the bulb oscillate in a small circle of say 2-3". The twirling pattern rolled the beer around the bulb (centrifugal force) and the beer in the thin neck always seemed to get to the bottom of the flare and in his open mouth at the right time. What all the spinning and oscillating did was a weird thing; it allowed the air to go up the middle and keep the beer to the outside of the bulb. The air swopped with the beer in an uninterrupted stream and he'd had now taken control. He was cheered on as he drank with both twirl and oscillation and by altering the pace at which he did it, he could drink at the speed he could cope with and all this was as though he was pouring beer from shall we say a jug; into his mouth. What a sight!

Soon, we'd see a huge pour of beer leaving the bulb and heading for his face and the crowd forewarned of the wall of beer coming with a "w-h-o-a-a" but a quick oscillate and it all thinned out and he was back in control. On that night I think he did it in something over 10-seconds and a week later he'd entered a competition in which he came second and earnt a good few quid too. He was now down to 8-seconds for 2 ¼ pints and was truly an artist! Back then, newspapers and brewers were offering serious money in competitions, so Les was off and visited us less frequently but came back to tell us of his big winnings. Next thing we heard; he'd entered the National Championship in which he came second - no doubt earning a lot more! Sometime many years later we found out he'd died young but he did though for a while, that devilish young traveller, turn drinking a Yard of Ale into ballet. Here's to you Les!

Interested in writing about the pubs in Ely? Interested in talking Cider? Regularly visit different locations and happy to write of them? Please drop me a line?

The photo credits this month go to; Wiki for Bob Hawke. Black Bucket Brew, Cambridge CAMRA, Fil + Til Utting-Brown, Michelle Butler. Technical support/IT; Paul Butler.

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 [Ely CAMRA Branch's Facebook](#) page 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 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