

Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action

Your Ely Branch Newsletter – April 2024

Welcome to the April Newsletter

This is my last newsletter. It's come to an end and at my end it's a mixed feeling but for you I'm sure it's a welcome relief! For this last newsletter I thought it only right that I went to the Cambridge branches favourite rural POTY of 2023; the Chestnut Tree at West Wrattling and I've even visited the 2024 winner; The Three Horseshoes at Stapleford too for good measure! Your village locals have mostly had a visit and there are some really pleasant surprises with nothing but praise and good news and who wouldn't love a month like that.

Branch Dates

Ely Beer Festival 'Wash up' for the staff was held on Saturday afternoon 23rd March. This was free beer and nosh for the Beer Festival hard grafters that could make it down to the **Prince Albert**.

There was a branch meeting on the 2nd April at The West End but with secretary Michelle Butler resigning the month before, news is hard to come by.

The AGM is on Tuesday 16th April 7.45pm in the Prince Albert Garden Room. All positions can be applied for, nominations and second for positions on the day as well as nominating beforehand to the chairman Tony Gimbert.

Next Branch committee meeting is at The White Horse, Witcham on Tuesday 7th May, 7.45pm start with a presentation to the pub at the start.

Membership Numbers are holding at 490+. In Mike Playle's last report he tells us that the Ely Branch membership has stood firm this last 18-24 months on or around 490 to 500. This is very commendable.

Lewkel News

I have hammered the rural pubs this month and of course **the Dyke's End, Reach** got another visit and some Lacons and Colchester beers were had along with the 'house' Wherry and all in tip-top nick. While there, in walked Mark from Moonshine who tells me that he's pulling back to a four-day or even a three-day week and it's definitely his last Cambridge Beer Festival in May. While I'm 'Reaching' out I will mention the Reach Fair which is about 800 years old and ALWAYS held on the May Bank Holiday Monday 6th of May just like it's been no doubt for hundreds of years. Dan Marsh, the landlord of the Dyke's End will have a small beer festival out on the village green with some 8-12 barrels and they'll all be lovely, I know that before I even think about them! I recall being there one year and a Scottish piper in full kilned-out attire laid supine on the beer crates sleeping off copious amounts of drink. As he breathed in and out, up and down went his chest and the stop and start of his bagpipes gave off a whinnying cry. Hilarious! Was he wearing anything underneath? I can't say for sure but the ladies were smiling!

Tom at the **Tharp Arms, Chippenham** was looking good the other Sunday. Recently out of hospital he had Lacon's Firebrand – a delicious Brown Ale – and one other on. Recently recovering from an uncalled for stay in Addenbrookes Tom is back at the pump and I believe that if he hadn't been laid low during our POTY pub pints perusal back in February, he'd have had the touch but he wasn't and well, he's 'ere now innhe! He reckons being down to two ales on Friday has been OK but they do a good summer trade at the Tharp and he along with Bev are just about ready for three again on a Friday with the same rule again; 3-2-1 by the end of Sunday. Smart cookie.



It's a start! The Village Inn, Witchford with a lovely drop of Sea Fury

London, is keen on real ale. "In my other 4 pubs there's only one that even has a pump for real ale but here it's different. We've had one or two (different beers) in and they've gone really well. I intend to go to two pumps and get

A walk to **The Village Inn, Witchford** brought one of the biggest surprises I've had in a long, long time! Last time I was there (last Summer); no beer, no service and no customers. This time, I arrived midweek at 6pm and some 25 people were in the pub which prompted a claim; "you should have been here an hour ago, there were twice as many!". The only ale on was Greene King's IPA and on meeting up with the landlord, he said that it had been a most difficult barrel to have come 'clear' and had only gone on two hours before. Lee, who is also the tenant of 4 other pubs; mostly in

the regular (branded) beers in to start then try the smaller breweries. We were going to be more food orientated but it isn't viable here, the cost of a chef per shift versus income doesn't work so, we let the chef go and we'll crack on with being a 'drinking hole'. No music, no pool, just people; and you can't get a lot more in here anyway!". Impressed at this promise of better things I visited on a Sunday after Easter and the GK IPA was joined by Sharp's Sea Fury Special Ale and Steve who is house minder keeps it well. Being a branded beer, it has a sparkling head and is full bodied – it's also nicer than that other Sharp's beer, Doom Bar which is far too sweet for me. The footie was on the screen on this visit. Anyway, try it sometime!

Now, if there's one village pub we should all 'hope for the best' it has to be **The Plough, Little Downham** which has been underperforming given the great pub that it is and the amazing Thai food they also serve. Well, how can you put this, Wutt is totally on it and has never shirked a job yet. He's doubled up to two real ales and on my visit midweek it was Eagle Brewery's Bombardier and St. Austell's Proper Job. The beer was spot on and I mentioned to Wutt that getting to three pumps was the 'magic number' if he could. "No" he said, "midweek is the problem. I think I'll stick at two. I am trying different beers to see what people want and I've had Papworth here too. But as a free house I'm getting calls every day and I can't get any work done!". I can see that Wutt WILL go with three in the end but his problem is 'residue'. That "residue" is from when things weren't so good there, when the beer was the wrong choice and not looked after so well but dad Pete did have an eye for a bargain! As I stood meeting old friends and asked of the beer, they were equally asking me of mine back and it was then that I noted that they were all on the Guinness, all ale drinkers and all in abeyance! It'll take a lot to extricate them off it too!

Remember the walk in the last issue that finished at the **Snailwell G&D?** where I had a strange drop of Wadsworth Amber Bitter which wasn't good, well it seems that Carlsberg Marstons have brought out a new style of beer that is double fermented and leaves the factory with no yeast left to mature and continue the living product. Instead of lasting 4 days, the beer is good for over 10 now. So far so good but, CAMRA officials don't like it being poured from the old pull pumps without a very clear disclaimer type message on the pump clip.

What should matter of course is the flavour and taste of the beer in all this and if the LL can get 10 days out of a beer then good luck to them – especially the small struggling pub! Now if my well-loved tipple were to still taste exactly the same I'd be happy with that. The niceties of 'is it a live beer' are lost on me sometimes and the line between 'is it' or 'isn't it live ale' are getting hard to define. In some ways it gets 'sillier' but definition IS required. Maybe it's time CAMRA took it by the horns and announced first tier and second tier ales with cask being (of course!) tier 1?

The White Pheasant, Fordham is NOT a real ale destination, indeed it's hard to call it a pub, on a recent visit hoping that 'there's a little area for drinkers' would suit me, it turned into nowhere to stand or sit and good job I'm bright red anyway so as to hide my blushing! Families looked on as I tried to sit at a dining table and gave up, stood at the bar again but got in the way and then admitted defeat and stood outside....just for the relief! Turns out that there's a pair of tables on a Wednesday and Thursday night they take the cutlery off. Mmm! Quite! Just fizz on tap so I can safely say that this IS the last report from the White Pheasant for a good while.

Sister pub but not run the same way; **The Maids Head, Wicken** and Beverley Gilbey (nee Hobbs) has been an integral part of the Maids Head for 20-25 years and just doesn't get rattled! An Isleham gal, she usually deals with a one-thing-



Bev the Barmaid, long time 'Maiden' at the Maids Head. Beer quality is right up!

at-a-time mindset and the staff gravitate to ask her opinion first; and of course, one-at-a-time! I remarked recently on how the beer quality at the Maids Head had shot through the roof! "It's the lines" she remarked, "they were simply too old, we've had new ones installed and now life is so much easier!".

I ought to mention that they have somehow dragged the beer temperature down over some 6 years in what I think were two stages of 6 and 2 years ago.

The front lounge is purely for foodies and that is where the ale, pumps and clips are but luckily, the beers are ALWAYS marked up on a blackboard in the bar. Kevin Henderson, the owner has gone for half micro and half branded ales and you'll see 2 or 3 pumps on but it'll be

3 pumps for sure come the summer. There are many nice pubs to 'sit in the garden' but not many can claim a common with enough room for children to run and run or, to have a proper game of knock-about footie! In the summer the south facing frontage absorbs the sun all day, 12-hours and the walks to the pub are superb too. Why not try and work up a thirst/hunger by visiting Britain's oldest Nature Reserve; Wicken Fen, to have a great walk and to then hit the pub and complete the family day out?

The Rising Sun, Isleham and Pat seems to be sticking to three real ales and now he's come through the winter, that isn't going to change. The IPA, Abbot and Adnams'; Nelson's Revenge all complement each other and are served bang-on. Judging by the full tables of diners, I'd gather the food is quite good there too. On hearing that his pub had come 4th from 24 in the rural section he said; "fourth out of twenty-four? I'll take that all day!!!!". I then pointed out that the pub as a community asset stands head and shoulders above anything else in the Ely patch of CAMRA. I'm sure you're very proud Pat and so you should be!



The Rising Sun, Isleham. Rural POTY 4th and easily the best rural community pub

The Griffin, Isleham has fallen backwards again. Oh! Bloody dear! Just when you thought it was safe.... Recently the Wherry and Old Grumpy Porter were lovely while a Parkway Bitter was rancid and replaced straight away with no questions. The barman had just walked in straight off his holiday and I gather there was an element of left not meeting the right. Blips in form like this are worth considering and accepting at face value but you can't let lightning keep striking the same old places twice – and then twice more!

The Ship, Soham soldiers on with just the Greene King IPA on tap and this month it was very cold but still good too. Molly and mum still run the pub and have a beer festival each August Bank Holiday weekend and it's a cracker too! If you love bands and ale then this is well worth going to. A food van will likely be in attendance. They'll have 6-8 real ales on and a couple of ciders from Spinney Abbey of Wicken. Just remember, there's a train station and so it's straight up the hill to the right – Clay Street, Red Lion Square, turn right and it's 50 yards. Dogs are welcome!

The Carpenters Arms, Soham. Now getting it right!



The Carpenters Arms, Soham continues to mix it up with a nice mix of branded and micro beers and always in top notch condition. It is some time now since even an average drop and truth be told it was probably on our rural trip back at the beginning of December 20023.

The rural scene as we leave it

If another rural trip were to be run this December, already the pubs on that list would have changed radically in the time since. In would come The Griffin, Isleham (if no more slip ups); The Maids Head, Wicken (served one year +), The Fountain, Soham (served one year +) and the Plough at Little Downham (big improvement). Maybe the Village Inn at Witchford will continue its good work too and they will also have served out a year plus. We shall see...

The picture is very healthy at the moment. Can this newsletter take any credit for it? Only in that we publicly say what and where the good beers are rather than directing the landlords to just say 'hold a beer festival to find out' which isn't really moving the poor fella forwards is it? When I heard this piece of worldly advice had been sent out, I realised I come from a world of the self-employed, a world where what you create physically, rather like a doctor, tells you straight whether you got it right or not. For both of us, decisions are what we're paid to make and after so many years you can sniff out the right direction; and get on with it. But the rest of the world isn't like that....

There are now 14 more rural pumps in 21 months than when I started the newsletter 21-months ago. “Nothing more needs to be said” as Roger Daltrey once sang on *Getting In Tune*.

Pub	'22	'23	'24	Pub	'22	'23	'24
The Tharp Arms, Chippenham	1	2	3	The Three Pickerels, Mepal	1	2	2
The George & Dragon, Snailwell	2	2	2	The White Horse, Witcham	2	2	2
The Maids Head, Wicken	2	3	3	The Village Inn, Witchford	1	0	2
The Griffin, Isleham	2	3	3	The Anchor, Little Downham	2	1	1
The Rising Sun, Isleham	2	2	3	The Plough, Little Downham	2	1	2
The Bell, Kennett	?	?	?	The Isle of Ely, Downham Road	-	-	-
The Carpenters Arms, Soham	1	3	3	The Crown, Littleport	1	1	1
The Cherry Tree, Soham	1	2	2	The Plough & Harrow, Littleport	0	1	1
The Ship, Soham	1	1	1	The Swan on the River, Littleport	1	1	1
The Fountain, Soham	2	2	4	The Ship, Brandon Creek	3	3	3
The 5 Miles from Anywhere, Upware	4	4	4	The Chequers, Sutton	2	2	2
The Red Lion, Stretham	2	2	2	The Rugby Club, Downham Road (club)	0	1	1
The Three Kings, Haddenham	3	3	3	The RBL, Fordham (club)	1	1	2
The High Flyer, Ely	1	2	2	The West End, Ely	4	4	4
The Kings Arms, Ely	1	2	2	The Cutter, Ely	3	4	4
The Lamb Hotel, Ely	-	-	-	The Drayman's Son, Ely	5	5	4
The Minster, Ely	5	4	4	The Yard, Ely	0	0	0
The Hereward, Ely	6	6	6	The 3at3, Ely	0	0	0
The Townhouse, Ely	3	3	1	The Prince Albert, Ely	7	7	7
The Fountain, Ely	1	1	1	<i>Overall Pumps in Pubs</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>88</i>

+14 extra taps in the countryside in two years. The city is -1. 13 more taps overall.



In the City

The Townhouse, Ely is starting the hard yards back to Real Ale. Somewhere that quite frankly could have as many as 5 ales on pump has suffered TERRIBLY in the past from very poor lines. Let's forget those days, let's forget the fact that someone had our money pint after pint, week after week, month after month and year after year and no, stop, I said stop, put it behind you! It's gone, you can't have your money or your time back, you pass this way just once my friend!

All beers without exception had a tang (why the hell did we accept it?) and so here we are with new management two years on and we've just moved from one real ale (always Bass Charrington's Premium Ale as I have seen) to two but we obviously concentrated on the beer this time and not on the pump clip! (see above). But, you know, I bet we'd all take it that way round, right? So, I'm pleased to say the Tribute was a 'tribute' to the pub and Paul, Michelle and I scoffed a few down. Keep it going!

The Kings Arms, Ely is a hotbed of activity. A secret source tells me, The Craft Union pub lost the last manager a month or so ago after a drop-in team turned up with an abacus and well you know. A "young" dynamic couple from very close to me at another Craft Union pub (come on, guess where!) were 'parachuted' in to hold the fort and upon inspection a massive clean-up was required and then new cleaning staff found to continue this as well! The pub was returned to spick and span and new landlords are due imminently – job well done and completed and back to Soham for the couple – one pub is enough! Said source tells me the pub 'could easily support 4-5 real ales; if they get their act together and there are plenty of ale drinkers go in that pub don't you worry'.

The Ely Branch

We're not a happy branch at the moment and for over 12-months now we have been losing good people as though torn off limbs, a sad site and one that we may not recover from. One of CAMRA's rules is that if you want to have a Beer Festival; you must have a branch and meetings thus the Ely branch exists to enable the Elysian BF to live. The branch has been run exclusively as the Chairman's Fiefdom this year. How long can it continue, the AGM will tell..... I couldn't make the April CM and as to why there are no minutes of the meeting, well, read on.

Paul and Michelle Butler

People come and people go but it is a big loss to the branch that secretary Michelle and husband Paul (web site and Facebook page) threw in the towel after the recent March meeting. Michelle has been a dedicated member of the branch over the last two years. A trail of broken people who have done worthy stints litters the trail and no doubt others will be fed into the meat grinder but really, just for a little effort, a little appreciation, that's all people ask why does it happen?

Paul – an IT man - has been brilliant for myself in turning the newsletter to PDF, creating the link and generally keeping the newsletter functional. He and I put the 2023 BF programme together and what a great programme that was. May we never go back again! He drove the van and checked the stock in and out, filled it and emptied it before turning to the racking, and then serving customers as well. He doesn't shout and doesn't always get heard but is later usually proven to be right. They will both be missed.

Ely Branch in the News! <https://discourse.camra.org.uk/t/gbg-ely-cambridgeshire/23467/117>

We've made the news for all the wrong reasons. A question was put up on CAMRA Discourse, the web site for us 'the afflicted drinkers of ale' and the questioner asked 'why is the Prince Albert not in the Good Beer Guide (GBG)?' I think even 'we' in the branch would ask that one too!

So, let's start at the beginning. You can join the WhatPub <https://whatpub.com/> app/web site using your membership number and it's designed so that you visit a pub and score each beer as you slurp it. The marks are 0-5 in half points and anyone can vote on any beer anywhere in the UK as long as they are a current CAMRA member.

Each area branch is allocated so many places in the GBG and for the Ely Branch it is five; be they pubs or clubs. The criteria for some time has been that the WhatPub scores or under its other moniker; National Beer Scoring System (NBSS) must be used and the points dished out here must make up who appears in the GBG. It is compulsory that the scores from WhatPub are used to create the five pubs with very little room for getting out of it. The only caveat is 'local knowledge' of why a certain pub shouldn't be there! Alas, 'someone' (ahem) told them our scoring system of "asking around the table" (for city pub) or using the POTY (rural) to judge for ourselves was very wrong and made them exasperated and very, very upset.

The GBG is a book printed annually by CAMRA listing all the best places to drink beer with a very short description of that pub and there are set numbers allocated to each branch. To finish, you'd think that the NBSS would simply take over automatically at the press of another button but no, we have been putting the list in. Our member in charge of WhatPub and NBSS appeared just a couple of times at committee meetings and there was no comment on our bad ways.

Back to the Discourse and it's topped out at 129 comments. Initially it was confirmed by the many what an amazing pub the Prince Albert is and then the question; 'how come?' They then found out that the voting system for The GBG in 2023 was a show of hands which is when the discussion mushroomed. This opened up a whole debate that moved away from Ely specifically (you're just doing it completely wrong – now go sort yourself out) but either way, we are meant to be scoring on the WhatPub page every time we have a beer. So, let's move forward, and do just that from now on. Cambridge branch beer score every time and let's do the same and better that we do it than total strangers get to do all 'our' judging.

BEER FESTIVALS. Key: NC (non-CAMRA). M (music). F (food).

[The Sun Beer Festival, Waterbeach](#). NC. Friday 3rd – Monday 6th May. It's back but we have few details! It's just a station away down the choo-choo track.

[Wicken Beer Festival 2024](#). NC. M. F. Saturday 11th May. The Recreation Ground.

[Cambridge Beer Festival 2024](#). F. Monday 20th – Friday 25th May. Jesus Green, Cambridge.

Blackstone Engine Bar Beer Festival. NC. M. F. Friday 24th – Sunday 26th May. Denver Windmill, Sluice Road, Downham Market PE38 0DZ. Folk music and acoustic. Spoons, tap dancing, possible Morris Dancing? Around 20 beers and 15 ciders. Live bands and food. Cracking walk from the station.

The Cutter Inn Beer Festival. NC. M. F. Friday 14th – Sunday 16th June. 42 Annesdale, Ely CB7 4BN. Expect 12-16 real ales and 4-6 ciders in a marquee to the rear of the Inn.

Wilburton Beer Festival. NC. M. F. Friday 21st – Saturday 22nd June. The Recreation Ground, Wilburton.

Haddenham Beer Festival. NC. M. F. Friday 28th – Sunday 30th June. Recreation Ground, Haddenham. 60 Ales and Ciders plus a Gin bar. Parking is difficult. A band on Friday and Saturday evening.

The Chequers Beer Festival. NC. M. F. Cottenham. Friday 12th – Sunday 14th July. 297 High Street, Cottenham. 30 real ales on and meant to be very good.

Peterborough Beer Festival F. M. Tuesday 20th – Saturday 24th August. Embankment, Peterborough. Probably the best big beer festival in East Anglia.

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

The Ship Beer Festival, Soham. CB7 5HD. NC. M. F. Saturday 24th – Sunday 25th August. 8 real ales including the pub pumps, several live bands each day, local ales usually from Burwell or Moonshine Breweries. 2-3 Ciders. ¾-mile from Soham Station by Red Lion Square.

EVENTS COMING UP

Reach Fair. Monday 6th May on the Fair Green in the middle of the village. It's over 800 years old. The Dyke's End will have 8-12 barrels on and you know they'll be good!

Cambridge Beer Quarter. Monday 24th – Saturday 29th June. Started back in Covid-19 and continues, perhaps not as strongly. Seven pubs a mile from the railway station make an effort to put lots of extra beers on and there's a programme to stamp as well. You trapse around enjoying yourself!

Ely Folk Festival. NC. M. F. Friday 12th – Sunday 14th July. Stuntney Estate (next to Ben's Yard) CB7 5TR. 28 real ales from (very) local brewers. Free bus service to and from the festival to the railway station every 30-minutes.

Cambridge Rock Festival. NC. M. F. Thursday 1st – Sunday 4th August. Stuntney Estate (next to Ben's Yard) CB7 5TR. Recently relocated from Cambridge to Ely this festival reportedly has 50-60 beers. If you like rock music and beer where else better to go!



Rural Pub of the Year out of 24. You can afford to smile John! Presentation of his certificate is at the May CM being held at the pub on Tuesday 7th May.



Rural Pub of the Year Winner; The White Horse, Witcham

And so, to the Sunday after Easter and Landlord of the Witcham White Horse; John was delighted at the news of winning Rural POTY out of 24 pubs and clubs – and this year; outright saying that he was “just pleased that everyone enjoys a lovely pint here”.

The beer on tap was Parkway's Norwegian Blue which was happily neither 'late' nor 'pining for the fjords!' I could mention the slight hint of brown/nut, the excellent head the full body and of course; the BEAUTIFUL PLUMAGE! Sorry, I'll get my coat.....

The toilets are worth a visit when at the White Horse - the ladies toilets that is (just don't get caught...) but the service is always delightful and the pub spotless.



Rural Pub of the Year Runner-up; The Tharp Arms, Chippenham

Yet again these two pubs slogged it out but after last year when the Chairman magically changed it to a draw from a Tharp Arms win, this year the positions have been decisively done by no less than 12 people scoring. The first 8 were the volunteer scorers on the rural trip back in December, these scores were kept and then the **Rising Sun, Isleham** and the **Tharp** were visited on one Sunday and **The Chequers, Sutton** and the **White Horse** the following one by a keen group of 4. Thanks must go to Fil, Bruce, Michelle and Paul for supporting myself and giving up two Sundays for this. The points gap was so thin between the Tharp and the 'orse that there was never more than a one score margin between them.



The Tharp probably lost it because on the question of whether the pub demonstrated a 'Sympathy with CAMRA's aims', the fact was, there were old pump clips yes, but no posters out for our Elysian Beer Festival. The Tharp is in Chippenham and you drive past Fordham, Soham and Stuntney to get to the Elysian BF. It is 14 miles and the village is serviced by Newmarket and Mildenhall. In the meantime, the White Horse is beyond Witchford and it is Ely that serves the village....and they had the poster up. The margin was that small. Tom took it well and understood that when two pubs serve good beer, both make you welcome, both have good fires, toilets, beer garden and car park; when all is equal, it is going to be a small split hair that separates you! I feel vindicated as well for doing this on my own last year. In 2023 it was a dead heat and if these two pubs hadn't been 1 and 2, I would surely have been open to opinions of bias towards my old local.

City Pub of the Year; The West End House

What a change of direction for choosing the City POTY winners! Darren (Daz), the landlord came in a clear first despite a limit on his choice of beers compared to other pubs. The beer is as immaculate as his pub and eventually class shines through! So, Darren's choice is from a short list of 50 or so beers but in them are very few gems; St. Austell's Proper Job and Best Bitter, Lacon's Encore for a nice amber, Timothy Taylor Boltmaker and Doom Bar for the sweet-toothed. But it's so much more than the beer, the pub has the rarest of things; four rooms! Also, a couple of fireplaces and lots of bar memorabilia upon which Darren works so hard to make you welcome to come and visit. The presentation is on Saturday 13th April at 2pm at the West End House. Well done!

Pub of the Year - Ely Branch

Disappointingly, the choice was made in one weekend of WhatsApp messages because it had been forgotten! It was then another straw poll between the West End and the White Horse for who goes forward to county level and challenges other Cambridgeshire pubs and heading all the way to the National finals. The West End was the winner.



Three Horseshoes Beer Festival, Stapleford. This wasn't your ordinary 16 ales BF, the 'shoes are 2024 Cambridge Branch Rural POTY winners and quite rightly have an excellent reputation for excellent ales and it has 5 pumps on all the time. For a village, this is exceptional. The beer list is above the usual..... The walk from Shelford station is 12-15 minutes and very easy and you'll be ready for your first pint!

The problem with Easter Sunday is that the beers, although good still just aren't 'sprightly' but all were served well. I've been 4 times this year and have yet to try their most famous tippie which is Barnsley Bitter which is so popular it is now permanent.

The pub also produced this lovely programme (left) which had a nice touch of quality about it!

It's worth repeating that on a recent rural coach trip that started at the pub, it won the trip POTD at the end out of a 7-pub trip with all being the rural cream in that area. This and all the beer scoring as they slurped directly fed into the WhatPub app as the trippers voted heavily for the pub. But I'd love to see organiser Ali Cook try a Freudian experiment and put it not last but nearly last (to disguise the most recent drink of the day) and ask for the votes THEN on the way home? Up for that Ali?

Chestnut Tree, West Wrattling Cambridge Branch's Rural POTY winner in 2023 and for many previous years

For years the Chestnut Tree has been on the Cambridge branch radar as a rural pub serving great beer. Starting in about 2013 the then landlord started acclimating the CAMRA rural POTY certificates and only retired last summer. New landlord Mark has kept up the same very high standards and the lounge/restaurant was full of diners all evening both early and late shifts.

The pub has a tall ceiling and a feeling of spaciousness but not overly of being old. The real ales on – and there were 4, were; Lacons Falcon Ale, Greene Kings; IPA, Church End Brewery's Pew Porter and Hopback's Crop Circle. All were perfectly served and I'd advise you go and either bicycle or take a long drive around the area on a Summer's afternoon both before and after. It is gorgeous roundabouts. My fellow drinkers weren't for mixing though so you'll perhaps need your own company on the trip and the lasses behind the bar were a bit young to want to converse with this old fossil!



The Crystal Ship at Earith, a Papworth owned tap room/pub held a Beer Festival over the Easter weekend and it was very successful selling out of all their first line beers. I finally got to try our 2023 Elysian BF first-to-sell-out, the Xtreme

Ales Black Forest Stout which I would obviously have tried at the time but the whole essence of "first beer to sell out" is that you're too bloody late!

Anyway, it was very sweet, too much for me but I can imagine like sweets it is 'more-ish' for some. Their other beer was named LoX StoX & Two Smoking Daryl's and was a



powerful 7.0% beauty. My favourite was just a nice Electric Landlady by Baker's Dozen. Just a nice refreshing single hopped Mosaic pale ale. On a warm Easter Sunday and after a walk in the sun it was fab. I'm more than pleased to not be stuck on one type of beer and the Crystal Ship with 7 real ales had everything and I say 7 because they actually use their keg pumps at the back using (I believe gravity) to put another 4-5 ales on during busy times. 12 real ales just 7 miles outside Ely, I can't believe it!



So, to finish then, my twist on keeping real ale;

A Beer Strategy

So, as I draw near the end of this newsletter, I'd like to repeat a huge lesson I picked up two years ago on the Norwich Beer Festival 2023 trip when I popped in the Kings Arms and the landlord Steve Perllman taught me all about having a BEER STRATEGY. Essentially, you take your strongest selling beer, in this case it was Timothy Taylor's Landlord and at the right moment, the Landlord runs out or in any case, near the end of an evening the most popular beer that has finished is not replaced. This draws all the drinkers toward other beers that are equally fine and as its later in the evening taste-buds no longer worry as much; 'wot ya got!' is the cry. If planned correctly that barrel of beer that has just 4-5 pints left; good now but tired tomorrow lunchtime, is gone come 11 o' clock.

Tomorrow the landlord spiles and taps a nice fresh barrel mid-morning and off we go again at Noon. The more beer you sell, the more control you have and can stop any one beer as the barrel finishes and the public is driven on to other beers, the less there are, the quicker they sell out. Of course, they can start drinking from a semi-full barrel and not the one you want to see the back of but it is a learnt skill and while not immediately obvious to us the customer, it can become the thinking landlady's money saver. It means better beer come noon on Saturday and nothing wasted means more profit. Does anyone really lose here? No.

Some would be cheeky enough to turn a pump clip around at 9pm and mumble to their armpit. BUT IT GETS THE JOB DONE! And nobody needs have a bad drop.

Three Pumps

After much study of how pumps sit in the scheme of things, the 3-pump pub is the desired bottom line. With two pumps there's much compromise in variety and it'll be two middle of the road beers that don't offend or is that; 'offend the least'! But at three pumps we can cover almost anything over a period of time. We can court the drinker of the more extreme beers while keeping the mainstream of ale drinkers happy.

The centre ground can be largely summed up as session beers, light or golden, pale or amber. Moving onto three pumps we can over a period hold a porter followed by a citra, by a dark and rich and also extra strong beer, nut browns, chestnuts and stouts while the two pumps maintain the centre ground. Suddenly customers get very excited by "what's next?". All this time, the landlord is learning what the customer wants, the info, should be pouring in while the beer pours OUT!

Then there's a crisis....

The customers will feel they should have a say in it. The landlord has to tough this one out and no cock-ups! A mixture of branded national ales and micro pub beers can see you through. Even when the customer admits to liking a new beer, he'll now ask the landlord to stick with that beer or get it back on tap immediately. At stake is the principle that it is the landlord's risk and it's the landlord's choice. They have to stick with it...but no cock ups! No raspberry porters! There are more customers in continually changing than holding still.

Stick or Twist and then Twist Again?

It's been proven too often in this last two years and no doubt long before, that BEER ROTATION creates the most interest and sales. Slow down and stick to a few favourites again and again leads to a loss of sales so just keep moving on, all the time rolling over new tastes for the customer. Sure! Have a gem back now and again but on three pumps perhaps not too often. If you're like the Three Horseshoes at Stapleford on 5 pumps then yes, you can.

Chalkboard

Have a chalkboard that tells the customer what is coming. Because a few beers come back again and again then perhaps have a few boards on hooks and keep the boards available. Also, show the customers what they just missed! Put 'old' pump clips on a vertical pole at the back of the bar. Coming..... now here.... You missed! It's a simple formula that works!

Pumps at Work

A good pub will know how many customers it's likely to see and be trying to expand outwards when the time is right and to contract in when it isn't, being realistic is hard, in pub life it costs real money. Starting with one barrel to last the week moving to one full and a half-barrel (a 'Pin') on say Friday and Saturday and the beer can be put on in such a way that the pub is back down to one barrel for the slog of Sunday evening, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Some will even go to 3, then 2 and then to the 1 and all in time for Monday.

Finally.....

Thanks to Paul for his help and support which withstood an assault most recently, to Fil for his contributions, to all those that sent in photos or gave permission to reprint them!

Photo permission this month, Bruce Pattern.

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