

Taffy's rural report

June 2024

Ely Branch of CAMRA is still seeking a newsletter editor but here is Rural Officer Taffy Lloyd's Rural Report for the last month. He's been a busy boy!

June 2024's News – Rural

We are in rude health compared to two years ago. 12 rural pubs are now currently serving excellent beer which a year ago was as little as 6 or 7. The brackets for the pubs that are heading towards a year of non-stop excellent ale; (The Griffin) and The Rising Sun of Isleham, Tharp Arms of Chippenham, (Fountain) and Carpenters Arms of Soham, (Maids Head) of Wicken, The Five Miles, Upware, Three Kings of Haddenham, Chequers of Sutton, (Three Pickerels) of Mepal, White Horse of Witcham, (The Village Inn) of Witchford and (The Plough) of Little Downham.

Wicken Beer Festival – Huge profit

This was a top event and in my honest opinion, the best beer at a BF I've ever had. Each pint was full of life! This compares to a year ago when the beer was all flat and dead and I said so. How they turned it around, and at that on a warm day I don't know but they did! Well done everyone. One member was able to tell me; "We're waiting on final numbers but we made over £7000, a record breaker! And yes, we sold out of all 20 barrels of beer and 30 barrels of cider and had just six burgers and a dozen or so sausages left at the end". The proceeds are to be spent on the Wicken recreation ground.

Wicken Maids Head – Local Ales

Two Papworth's (Half Nelson and Crystal Ship) and an Xtreme Ales; Triple Hop

This is I believe the first time a 3-pump pub has had all local ales on sale. An extremely good result for local beers even if you can't agree that Xtreme Ales of Peterborough are within the 30 miles of the pub as the crow flies!

Changes at the Fountain, Soham

Theakston's Best Bitter and London Pride have joined the Doombar and TTL on rotation. They have stopped the Ossett beers for now it seems so it looks like bright beers for a while.

As suspected, the pub lost their ale drinkers when they had the rough month sorting another group pub out and, because it's TTL and Doombar on, will the hardened real ale drinker be rushing back? The quality though, has thankfully recovered, well done Phil! The Fountain is a pub that could well go back to some micro beers but they need to hold onto their core business first.

Littleport Crown

The busy central pub had Bateman's 5G recently which was a really nice IPA. Then the night before the Bikes & Bands gig, there was no real ale at all followed later by a rushed GK IPA that hadn't settled. I'm in touch with Sara (business partner to Bob) and trying to talk with her about trying some micro ales.

Littleport Dry of Ale!

It is possible therefore to say that at times, there is NO REAL ALE available in Littleport and when you consider Isleham has 6 pumps and that pro-rata to Soham's 9 pumps; by its population, Littleport should be pushing 7 pumps you have to say to Littleport; "what happened?".

Isleham; The Griffin and Rising Sun

The Griffin recently had three ales on in Woodforde's Wherry, Nethergate's Old Growler and Wychwoods' Hobgoblin all perfectly served while the Rising Sun had just GK IPA on as Pat was on holiday. All the beers were tops, while a week later with Pat back, the Abbott was back too. The Griffin is also now a Rural POTY contender. If we gave an award for 'most improved', it would be here, but will landlord Mike break into a smile at the news?

The Tharp Arms, Chippenham

A recent trip had Wadworth's Henry IPA at a meek 3.4% and a lame Lacon's Bloom at 4.0% and both were well-served but instantly forgettable. One of these beers next to something with some 'attitude' would have been really nice and our Chairperson Martha tells us that at the committee meeting; "They had Wadworth's 6X on which was fine but the Lacons Encore was splendid a 4.5 for me.". That's praise indeed!

Three Pickerels, Mepal

Had a superb drop of Mile Tree's Rolling Mile at 3.9% on recently and apparently, it's the second consecutive barrel of it. Our man Bruce says they had the excellent Oakham's JHB on recently so, we hope that Aaron will give us a choice of two beers there this summer - and keep up the variety!

Three Kings, Haddenham

The pub is covered in real ale and cask certificates, old beer bottles and pump clips up on a high glass window (see the opening 5 photos- all from the pub). Serving three real ales, the GK IPA at 3.6% and the Oakham's Inferno (4.0%) were both spot - on the other untried beer was the Wherry. Forget this being marked down as just a gastro reserve, it's still a pub and if you, our CAMRA members keep visiting it, it will be keeping it that way!

The Shed – only this one's in Haddenham!

The building that has a roller shutter and has received planning permission to sell alcohol has done nothing yet.

The Village Inn, Witchford

Continues to sell a nice Sharpe's Sea Fury Special Ale which is not dissimilar to Sharpe's Doombar but has a bit more to it. The GK IPA is four feet away so you 'may' initially think they host just one ale depending on which end of the bar you're looking at but look again... I've been drinking here since last Christmas and so far, so good! But the pub needs to try a beer with a little more clout and character to it otherwise all these bright beers are too similar and just takes sales off each other.

The Five Miles from Anywhere

A visit last night saw a big improvement in their beers and the Mole Trap has gone! I realise that to say that the loss of this Mauldon's ale after many years is not nice but it was after all a nothing beer.

What we had on instead was GK's IPA, Morland's (but GK brewed) Speckled Hen both really nice and a 'bottom-of-the barrel' we think False Nine, a GK Football related pump clip and 4.0%. I have no idea what that is on about but maybe a footie fan knows what 'False Nine' means in the game? GK do love their footie and rugger related names but they do seem a little 'Blackpool kiss-me-quick-hat' about it all. No class methinks.....

I also felt the temperature of the beer was down, only a degree maybe but the halves were good, I'd imagine the 2nd and 3rd drinks that come from the barrel and not the line would be spot-on. Well done Dave! I reckon ale at the 'No Hurry Inn' could now be worth many a visit....

Not visited this time;

The Red Lion, Stretham and The Chequers, Sutton, Cherry Tree and Ship of Soham, Anchor of Little Downham.

Out of the area

Two Rivers Brewery/Blackstone Engine Bar, Denver.

Although in Norfolk Branch, it's worth mentioning that the Two Rivers Brewery had several excellent beers on at their recent Beer Festival and one; Hares Hopping 4.5% was my most enjoyable IPA style beer of the year.

Coming up are three real ale beer festivals in three weeks. The Cutter of Ely, Wilburton's and Haddenham's.

That's it for this month.

The views below are those of Taffy and not necessarily those of CAMRA or the Ely Branch.