

December 7th 2024 - Rural Coach Trip

The 'infamy' trip

Saturday December 7th, a date which will live in infamy.... (Teddy Roosevelt)

11.40am meet at Ely Railway Station.

<https://www.facebook.com/ElyAndDistrictCAMRA/posts/pfbid0pscZ88V8nkG9VHCwJU8CuPm5pKQhhCB9gN5E5QS5fijzgrHhDEYuhPTNm2sECihol>

Trains alight from Cambridge at Ely; 11.25 and 11.36. Leaving at 11.45am, we get back at around 7.30-8.00pm.

Trains departing Ely to Cambridge; 7.18, 7.27, 7.50, 7.53, 8.18.

Price is set at £29. Transport is again a Lord's Travel 16-seater mini-coach.

8 pubs of which a pair share a location, will be visited in the rural backwaters of the Ely Branch. This will be the second branch rural trip and the prices are frozen at last year's prices and so **£29** includes a spread in one of the pubs. If we reach 22 persons, we can take the larger mini-coach and it can be £27.50 each.



First call! The Griffin, Isleham last year was a pleasant surprise. Three real ales and one, Nethergate's Old Growler was Elliott's (right) 'best beer' of the day! The Griffin and Rising Sun are the last ports of call this year....

To pay, send a PayPal payment of £29 to David's business; Taffmeisters or bump into him with cash.

The 8 pubs should, we hope, represent the best snapshot of rural beer in the branch and the route is changing quite a bit this year with us going anti-clockwise this time. So, expect some new pubs to be on the list of which it could be any of these; The Plough at Little Downham, The Village Inn at Witchford, Three Pickerels at Mepal and The Maids Head at Wicken and one that we visited but is now on the list is The Griffin of Isleham. All these are looking to be picked for the first time while these two have upped their game; The Carpenters Arms of Soham and the Five Miles from Anywhere of Upware. Pubs and thereby the route, will be sorted by the end of September.

We have a short-list of 12 pubs but only 8 can be on it, indeed there's an argument for two trips of 6-7 pubs in the future. The standards have gone up over the last two years. Cambridge Branch has a Rural Trip on Saturday 27th July, all welcome. See their web site for details.

The Red Lion, Stretham

Arriving on the most recent Sunday both I and Franki Four Fingers were in need of a cooling liquid but I'm luckier than fido and get to sit in front of the pub's open window on the west facing front. The shady side has a cool breeze coming in through the window onto the back of my neck and all I need now is the right amber nectar and I'll be happy! So, serving two perfectly good ales in GK IPA and TTL I go for the Landlord which is virtually permanent now. The landlord of 321 years gets his beers from Marston's. His biggest weakness used to be the poor choice of beers with Wadworth Amber and Doombar being the choice but things have gone the right way....

A walk to Little Downham

1. The Anchor, Little Downham

A first visit here for some time I wasn't even expecting any real ale. Expectations low, upon entering I was pleased to see a Doombar on pump, now you may quote that back to me one day; "Taffy, pleased to see Doombar!" Well yes, it was perfectly served by General Manager John Oakley and I was a sucker for the beaming smiles from two pretty barmaids to his left and right so suddenly I felt like a million dollars! Yes, even with a Doombar!

John explained that the pub's owner had taken a severe course of action which, I'm guessing was early this year and

invited Heineken in every 6-weeks to 'deep clean' all the lines and pumps etc. As part of that mini-contract, they take some of their beer from Heineken.

I spotted the pump clip for the previous weeks Lacons Loomis, the insipid beer reported on last month from the Tharp Arms and John agreed that it didn't taste of much. A photo on my phone of the previous week's pumps showed the Anchor having also had the Wadworth's Henry's (just 3.4%) on which I also wished I hadn't had recently. Wadworth seem to have a laser guided aim at the average. I am beginning to think either these barrels are bargains or John is just unlucky.

The interior of the pub lacks and is all very 'pure' yet what with the old fireplace could be changed far more easily than one would normally think, somehow you just want the place to look more 'knackered'. But let's thank the Anchor for sticking at it and putting in place a plan to keep the customers happy and improve business. So, we moved on to The Plough with myself fairly hugging the south of Main Street to keep in the shade.

2. The Plough, Little Downham

One year ago I reported about the old regulars being out the back drinking Guinness and when I said holding two beers; "oh these! They are delicious!" there was an audible silence at the news...

Well, a year later and the 3 men at the bar were all on the Humpty Dumpty Reedcutter, a gorgeous Pale Ale but not the Euro '24 inspired Woodforde's Lionheart 'Goal'den Ale which was a typical Woodforde's ..."well it was alright, but..." Type beer and deservedly had no spectator support. They expressed complete satisfaction in the beer at the pub while Wutt, as usual, said nothing just sitting in the corner with a knowing smile.

I wouldn't say Humpty Dumpty or Woodforde's are micro brewers but they aren't exactly Adnams or St. Austell's either are they? This brewery middle ground is also where the Carpenters (Soham) has placed themselves with Joppo being a Woodforde's and Moongazer and Wolf.

Cutter Inn Beer Festival report

Not in 'rural' but a beer festival I hope that continues. I spent one and a bit day enduring sideways rain and lashing storms – that's tough love for you – but went through the beers twice over the two days. None of the beers were poor or off nor were any outstanding, just well served and it was down to the company you kept if you had a good time. There was music on both Friday and Saturday to keep you entertained and the ambience was great (between showers!). On the Sunday, I spotted the Cambridge Bitter had some kind of off flavour suspected to be Chlorophenol (Chemical Name: 2,6-dichlorophenol) which smells like mouthwash, band-aid, antiseptic, disinfectant, and has a medicinal or hospital characteristic and bless the young barmaid, she took it off straight away.

We hope that Kirsty and the team found it worthwhile despite the weather's no-show. Is it enough to sell the same beers you have everyday IN the pub outside at the beer festival? Doesn't the pub want to try new beers on the public, among the sniffers and slurpers before picking the select best to retail in the pub? I can't say people will be back for a third year of the average and although the BF has our support, excuses to tie shoe laces or just to navel gaze for the day may occur next year I suspect.

The Cherry Tree, Soham

Gastro pub manager Kyle seems to have his head screwed on and reports that he's happy with the two real ales he keeps in Greene King's IPA and the St. Austell's Tribute. This is a Gastro pub serving value for money meals and the customers want a nice bright beer to wash it down with. "We do rotate a little" said Kyle, "but our customers aren't demanding anything different". I can't and won't complain at that but with bright beers, you still have to select two different flavours and one needs to be a driver's drink at around 3.6 - 3.8% so it isn't just a walk in the park. What let's the pub down is the total lack of a bar top to stand or sit against, you have to take your beer and walk away which is fine but there could still be a bar top against another wall with some stools surely?

Carpenters Arms, Soham 2nd Beer Festival Date Change

The festival is now moved back a week to Friday 9th – Sunday 11th August. Landlady Kayla sited staff holidays as the cause. A beer list and numbers are due soon.

Littleport ale less? Not for long!

Having said last month that Littleport sometimes had no real ales in any of its three pubs and was therefore at times 'Ale less' I'm happy to have been corrected by Chairman of the Littleport Ex-Servicemen's Club Adi Keating.

Littleport Ex-Servicemen's Club

Adi Keating was soon in touch after last month's Rural Report that said that Littleport was practically ale-less to say; "Well we serve 2 real ales!". So, having been assured by punters over the road that there were none, I stand corrected; proof that you should go and find out for yourself. So, a visit on June 12th saw me drinking a couple of beautiful Speckled Hens while giving the GK IPA a break (just this time mind) which were spot on; all bright and frothy!

"We sometimes have three (pumps) and then again sometimes, just one," said Adi. "We get our beers from Bateman's usually and we have their 5G ready to go on. The club are interested in trying some different micro ales but Adi isn't an Ale drinker himself so he is getting all the ducks lined up to have a go.

As some of you saw in the last newsletter (April 2024), I've been developing a Beer Strategy and an Ale Strategy and I gave Adi and the head barmaid copies. So, if you're from Littleport, support the club when, or if, they get them in. I thoroughly recommend the club and the efforts they're making.

A Trip to Sutton

A lovely walk with panoramic views from just south of Witcham Toll brought me into the underside of Sutton where I intended a bargain two-for-one trip fully expecting a bustling RBL and an empty Chequers. So, what did I find?.....

The Royal British Legion Club, Sutton

One of the few social clubs big enough and likely enough to have real ale outside of - correction - anywhere in or around Ely area is the Royal British Legion at Sutton which is a huge modern premises including a bowling green and is situated near to sports and recreation fields. A Saturday evening visit for ale brought about 'nil poi' and I was saved from yet another pint of Doombar with the barman saying, 'it's settling'. 'Really' I thought, 'it should be ready presumably for closing time when the crush really starts!'

It beggars belief how little imagination so many pubs are showing when this sweet-toothed beer shows up again and again. So, no wonder, just as Saturday evening started to hit its straps that the tap was thankfully out of action. OK, I'd travelled a fair distance to sample it but my heart was happier than my head. I was told it was £2 entrance fee for non-members and then I was still charged 40p more than the advertised rate for my beer as well. The same went for the round that I bought for old friends found. An expensive evening out and glad to move on.

The Chequers, Sutton

I hung around waiting for 6.45pm before taking the walk to the Chequers with Franki-Four-Fingers just hoping even that Maija would at least be open and as I approached, I could hear dozens of voices for what was Sutton's 2nd XI Cricket Team drowning their sorrows. So much for my expectations.....

The pub was full, and then all the dogs decided to have a meeting in the middle turning dog leads into corn dolls. Maija was on duty and the beer was Speckled Hen and GKs IPA and both perfectly served as we've come to expect. What with my screaming tinnitus and the dog pulling so hard I made my early excuses and was away but not before I told Maija that she'd come 4th from 24 pubs in our 2024 Rural POTY but she was nonplussed and all too busy and onto the next customer. They pay her bills.

The Rising Sun, Isleham Community Service Award from Ely CAMRA

Big n' beefy, bubbly and babbling (ahem!) Landlord Pat Pearce received a CAMRA community asset award from Chairwoman Martha Zantides at the Tuesday (2nd July) Committee meeting held at the village pub. The message imparted from CAMRA Chair Person Martha at the award ceremony was; "Pat's known to Isleham people as a 'can-do' man. The Rising Sun is host to the communities Cricket and Football teams and as well as sponsoring them, he also supplies after match teas at no cost to several pool and darts teams. He also hosts a pre-school nursery club and his pride in Isleham shows through with these lovely framed photos that adorn the pub of old faces and places". Hopefully the certificate more than makes up for coming third in the Rural POTY for 2024 and being the first NOT to get a certificate.

Rural Pubs (still) For Sale

A look online shows that the Kings Head, Wilburton is still on the market for £400K. No sign of the owners looking to 'out' the Lazy Otter so that stands still and degrades. The Crown at Fordham, now nearing completion has likely lost the car park as planning permission WAS received for two dwellings there. There must be concerns over where customers will park as only 6-8 spaces are being provided in what is left. A rumour has it that the pub had no takers – even at a reasonable-it-would-seem £330,000. It does seem likely that customers will park opposite the pub on the church's grounds and if they trundle over there and get it wrong, they'll be getting a lot closer to God than they bargained for.

Papworth Brewery in Earith/Dyke's End in Reach

A Saturday visit to the Crystal Ship, Earith and I was reminded good and proper what micro beers, real ale is again after drinking so much corporate ale lately. The array can be seen in the photos (top). You really must go. My favourite brewery was followed by a trip to my favourite watering hole on Sunday, I decided after checking out my 24 pubs plus clubs 'lewkely' to reward myself with a tippie in the best small pub for miles.

The Papworth Fenskater was on and it was perfect for a summer's day. Life was goodish. Look at the background for Dan's most recent beers (his left) and coming up (two to his right). Worth a trip?



Left to right; The amazing Seville Sunrise, Red Kite, Colchester's Freakshow, Robin Goodfellow, Whispering Grass, Crystal Ship, Mad Jack and Wheatsheaf's Isolation Smoky IPA. The far left and right were something else!!!!

Franki Four Fingers

On the way back along the Devil's Dyke a jogger came past Franki and I on the narrow Devil's Dyke at 4pm. Franki got ushered by her forwards again and again and in the end was lost. Anyone that went near him he fled like a bullet.

I went backwards and forwards along the dyke and gave my call card to people. Eventually he crossed the busy Burwell to Cambridge Road and kept running. I tracked the countryside by walking along the dyke to the Nmkt racecourse and then doubling back. I was ~~bu~~ exhausted and still no sign. A caller told of a sighting on Heath Road at 10pm so I drove there and then called for him there for an hour. At 11.30 we received a call from the Dyke's End pub. Dan said he'd gone to pull the sign in at the end of the evening and Franki was sat at the door!

He took him in, watered him, called me and I got there for midnight, he'd done 3 miles in less than an hour and gone back to the one place he knew and could that he could rely on. That's ma boy!

Perhaps not so rural news.....

Those Norfolk Nippers are Nipping Inn

The Norfolk branch is trying to slip into Ely rather like the Normans did before them; unnoticed on Saturday 13th July, no chance! Keep an eye out for them, strange creatures that they are! Their accents will give 'em away for sure. Call sign is 'custificate'. If the piece of parched paper you got as an award at school is answered 'certificate', you know where to chuck 'em; in the Ouse! After all, it does lead back to Norfolk. Then we'll gives ya'll a custificate.

City limits

I rarely pop into Ely nowadays and that's because I visit so many rural pubs. So, it was nice to nip round the middle 4 pubs on Saturday and see what the city has to offer. But what a disaster it turned out to be. There was no ale in the Townhouse at all. In the Lamb Hotel I had a lovely half of GK Abbott Ale and a chat with the lovely Jamee (my

spelling) and what could have been awkward turned out to be a lovely chat about all things ale at the hotel. They have been trying the various GK beers and they do get a lot of the usual GK snobbery which I so dislike. This is one pub that Ely CAMRA could help with. They deserve more support including from the Ely CAMRA branch.

Onwards then to the Kings Arms which had a TT Landlord and a Charles Wells Bombardier which was not at its best being somewhat murky. This is still one more pump than the pub had 6-months ago so one hopes the sales match this.

Then it was on to the Minster where I recognised a rare gem in the corner and that was a lovely pint of Ringwood's Boondoggle and so finally, on to the 5th and final bar; The Hereward. With 5 of the 6 pumps in use, the Black Sheep was my go-to beer but it was badly off. This was swapped for a London Pride and some 45-minutes later the Black Sheep was back on so I had another pint – which was awful and had it changed again for a London Pride. It was the same barrel, I'm sure. Well, this time I had a 'go' and the staff were soon cleaning the line properly. I can't say what the problem was or the outcome as my time had come but as you can see, out of five pubs I had a bad time in three of them. Let me back into the Countryside quickly!

Diary Dates

SOHAM BEER FESTIVAL CHANGES VENUE! Friday July 12th 2024 at 5:00 pm - Saturday July 13th 2024 - 10:00 pm Beer & Music Festival – 2024. Soham Town Rangers Football Club. Julius Martin Lane, CB7 5EQ. 800m from the railway station. We've asked the Soham Rotary Club for details but had no reply.

The Chequers Beer Festival. NC. M. F. Cottenham. 12 July–14 July. 297 High Street, Cottenham. 30 real ales on and meant to be very good. <https://chequerscottenham.co.uk/>

Bouse Fest. NC. F. M. Wednesday 17th – Sunday 21st July. Unit 24 Earith Business Park, Meadow Drove, Earith, Huntingdon PE28 3QF. 25 Real Ales, 15 Ciders. Classic vehicle show; Wednesday 6pm, live bands Thursday-to Saturday. <https://www.facebook.com/TheCrystalShipEarith>

Sutton Summer Beer Festival. NC. F. Thursday 25th 6pm – Saturday 27th July 11pm. St. Andrews Church, High St, Sutton. https://www.facebook.com/events/418651701057148?active_tab=about

Peterborough CAMRA Beer Festival. Tuesday 20 – Saturday 24 August 2024. Embankment, Peterborough. <https://pboroberfest.camra.org.uk/> Probably the best big beer festival in East Anglia. The Embankment (Behind Key Theatre), Embankment Road, Peterborough, PE1 1EF.

Prince Albert 8th Annual Beer Festival NC. M. F. Friday 30th August – Sunday 1st September. 30 Real Ales and Ciders, live music, likely food will again be the pulled pork, pizza, bratwurst, burgers and hot dogs. This is usually a top do and landlord Mike doesn't hold back on the ABV%, if it's a good drop and 9% well, then it's a good drop and 9%! Details not fully released yet. 62 Silver St, Ely CB7 4JF.

East Anglian CAMRA Beer & Cider Festival. M. F. Wednesday 21 – Monday 26 August 2024. St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Angel Hill, Bury St. Edmunds. IP33 1LS. <https://burystedmundsbeerfestival.com/>

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. 2-4 High St, Soham. CB7 5HD.

The Dykes End Beer Festival. Wednesday 2nd – Sunday 6th October. NC. F. M. More details to follow but be prepared for the micro beers and some rare gems. Well worth the visit; especially on a nice day on a bicycle. Use the Ely river bank, on to Padney, 5 Miles from Anywhere in Upware etc. Fair Green, Reach. CB25 0JD.

NC = non-CAMRA

F = Food

M = Music