

Taffy's Rural View

October 2024 edition.



Coming Up

Just six pages this month so, clearly, I'm slacking. I've found out about the Fordham Crown and the plans for it, I have had a serious weekend in Horncastle, Lincs and realise the hardships the town faces.

Date of the Elysian Beer Festival

We have provisional dates for your diary; The Elysian Beer Festival (EBF) is expected to be Thursday (Trade night) 6th and then the main festival will be Friday 7th – Saturday 8th February 2025. Everything is on the table to be discussed including what to do with the Thursday itself. Originally, the EBF was booked for the 30/1 – 1/2 but there is a determined attitude to keep it in February thus the date change. I'm sure that we'll firm this up in the next month.

The Facebook Page. For those that don't know or indeed couldn't guess, I am looking after the Facebook page as well just so as it looks like we are a branch 'on the go' and I hope you find between the weekly reminders there and this newsletter that you get out more

and feel like drinking more ale! Here are some figures for you, we have 910 followers which is over double the 2023 figure (I believe it may even be treble). We have 65% men and 35% women. Our age demographic shows 45-54 is the largest group just from 55-64 years. Of those liking anything on the page; 340 are from Ely, 47 from Cambridge, 29 Norfolk, 27 Peterborough and 23 Huntingdon. Post engagement is 309.

The Cambridge influence

Now under the watchful and steady eye of three Cambridge Branch members in our new Chairman Will Smith and Secretary Ali Cooke, we also have a third in committee member Helge Nereid in support and between them they are seeking out what we want from the branch as committee members by meeting us. That being the case, we didn't meet on the usual first Tuesday; October 1st but will in fact have the next branch committee meeting on Tuesday 29th October at the Village Inn, Witchford with a KO of 7.45pm.

Our Branch Rural Coach Trip - December 7th 2024.

See Events at the foot of the newsletter for details.

The Crown, Fordham

As luck would have it, the onsite building company were able to put me onto the mystery owners which turned out to be Admiral Taverns and the rep for the area who explained that the whole rebuild of the pub had been held up by red tape for the listed building. 'We hope to open next March' said Peter Savory 'the pub was completely burnt out'. Admiral Taverns are to be applauded for sticking at this one and indeed, bringing it back as a pub instead of a curry house.

The car park has been reduced to around 10 parking spaces but none of this is Admiral's doing, they bought out the Hawthorn Pubs estate – some 200 pubs in 2020 and Hawthorn had already done the dirty deed and received planning permission for two housing plots on the old much larger car park. The job done and it was too late. There is I can say; parking potential out the back and there's still a hole in the fence if they'd like me to show them where a ten-year-old can definitely squeeze through!

The village has been cosy with just the (British) Legion down the hill for 35+ years. Back in the 1960s and 1970s the Chequers was the pub and the drinkers happily drove, cycled and walked to the legend that was Bill and Rene Rampley's pub. Bill had the touch and ran all the outside bars and catering in the day all around the area. Every outside bar and Dinner & Dance had Bill's bar. Bill squeezed waitresses and waiters into the Ford Granada that ferried a happy team and still went back and ran the bar but, alas he was gone by about 1979. I used to serve Bill petrol in his old ex-WD Austin lorry and one day he popped in and I had to tell him that we'd run out of four-star petrol, so Bill just re-set the ignition on the lorry and I filled it with paraffin instead....they don't make either of them like that anymore!

In the 1980s Roger Marjoram ran a tidy job at the Crown and nobody (the drinkers) from the Mildenhall Road end of the village had cause to go down past the Crown except to get to the Recreation Ground for Fordham, like all villages at the time ran 3 football teams, a Tug-o-War, and 3 x XI Cricket teams challenging to be one of the finest village teams in the Country.

So good were Fordham and Isleham at cricket that first in what was then called the Haig (National) Village Cricket Competition, Isleham lost to Welsh "village team" Gowerton (to the cry of 'Come on Glamorgan!') in the 1974 final and then the following year, Fordham also met the Welshmen in the semi-final. In the very late 1980s, villagers perhaps counting the pennies started walking the 200-yards past the Crown and dropped down to the Legion where they saved a few pennies and have stayed ever since.

That is 35 years that Admiral have got to turn around from a dead start but they do have a 200-yard head start.



*Above; The Kings Head likes Toby jugs and Batemans. I will have to look up what a Bateman's DM was back in the day?
Below; The view you'll find in 'The Thatch'. John Smiths all round unless you want the old Mexican two-step. The XXXB was very good*

A Trip to Horncastle, Lincs

Having raced both road racing motor cycles just past Horncastle at Cadwell Park followed by enduro (dirt bike) racing with the Banovallum Club which is based in the small town, I have over 30 years racing between them and thus a huge affection for the town. So, it was a nostalgic trip back to see what it had to offer in real ale because in all those years I arrived on the day to race but I always noted the mass of pubs with the small high street holding some 7-10 pubs and lord knows what laying beyond them.

My hotel was the Bull Hotel which was a lovely old English hotel with a small clean room. I popped down to the bar and caught all the builders starting their second shift.... Horncastle was starting to buzz!

I started with a Cumberland Golden ale and a Hobgoblin Gold which were both fine if not cool. Unfortunately, before crossing to the Kings Head – known as 'the Thatch' due to it having the only thatched roof in the town centre - which is a prominent Bateman's pub and looked forward again to some Bateman's beers after my recent trip to the Red Lion, Swaffham Prior last month.

First sign that things might not go right in the CAMRA listed pub was catching the half pint glasses in which I was about to be served in the light and they were badly stained. I can't say if they were dirty or 'soap dodging' but oh

dear! The Gold was nice enough, the XXXB was lovely if only for the fact it's a dark, strong English ale and I'd just had 4 Golds but the XB had a tang and it was only 5pm Friday! Again, these were not 'cool' beers and all that means is that the beer will go off quicker. I noticed the locals were all on John Smiths; numbering 6, 7 or 8 of them and so I engaged with them and the only Batemans drinker said; 'I stick with the XB, he gets through plenty of it but everything else gives me stomach ache!' to which others nodded vigorously!

In walked my big Springbok mate Rudie at this point and so I diverted back across the road to The Bull opposite where I had the Courage Directors (excellent) and the Ringwood Razorback which, unfortunately, I didn't recognise.



After friends had gone, I went up to the only other CAMRA listed pub in Horncastle; Old Nick's Bar which is run by Landlord Ross Ellis and where one of the landlord's daughters; Elizabeth, brews their beer behind the pub and all ales for sale are her wares! The brewery; Horncastle Ales, had me licking my lips as from left to right I tried halves of firstly; Hell Cats (4.2%) a hopped blonde which is named after the Horncastle Hell Cats Motor Cycle Club that used the pub as their base for decades back in the day and well, also named in memory of those that didn't make that last corner...



Proud of his daughters brewing talents, landlord Ross with four of their current beers. The Dreadnought (right) is something special.

Next came Pale Rider a 4.1% light ale. I'm not sure they should have a pump clip photo with Clint Eastwood on it but well, Clint has been in, threw back his shawl, tapped his pistol and then disgracefully spat right in the dog's forehead while disobeying the no smoking ban saying "you've got to earn it Tuco"!

Well, he did spare Ross so, that seems like a bit of a deal then! This was a simple, good pale ale if my memory isn't the hazy thing here.

Oh! and the next ale was Dragon's Flame a 4.8% a chestnut based strong ale and it was gorgeous. But the best of all was the last one named Dreadnought a 4.5% mixture of Stout and Mild with roast chocolate flavours and it was my beer of the day. This beer should, and will, pull awards.

I got speaking to the landlord Ross, a man the more opposite of 'the man with no name' it is harder to imagine. He shared his opinion on several things with the big breweries being among them and I gathered that the name 'Dreadnought' is his message to all of 'em! But at least Ross and Elizabeth back up their words with their actions. The pub was though, low on numbers and there were no outlooking windows, it was just like a northern club - you know the type - you found out who was not inside by walking inside! With the dark painted walls and blinds down, the pub had no light with which to peek in OR out! This then is a sports bar pushing real ale..... so, I hope it works out. Ross has the pub up for sale so doesn't appear (I'm told) in the 2025 GBG and Elizabeth and dad should be moving the brewery and selves over to the Fighting Cocks to re-open it sometime in the future.

I then dropped to The Admiral Rodney's, a hotel bar rather than a local yet was immediately engaged in a chat and so was sorry to leave the one real ale; a well-served St. Austell's Tribute which had been perfectly acceptable.

I went back down back past 'The Thatch' and The Bull and tried The Ship. All three pubs reside in the street named The Bull Ring. The Ship had just one real ale on and no customers - what a shame. The landlady was as nice as could be though and the Sharpe's Doombar was soon down and I crossed the traffic lights heading for Harper's which is a newish bar with young drinkers and not an ale in sight! Fish n' Chips next at Mermaids and then onwards to the last pub.

The Black Swan had few customers and three real ales on. I knew it couldn't be true and it wasn't! The Black Swan's, Black Sheep's Golden Sheep was poor and the TTL was about passable. I should have tried the Bass Best Bitter but I wanted out as I was the only person in that side. I nipped back to Old Nick's Tavern for a full pint of Dreadnought and met Ross's wife Sally remarking on how great their beers were. So, I had a good lasting memory of Horncastle and come Saturday after a lazy walk around the town, I headed off for Skeg-Vegas and the world championship for F1 stock cars stopping at another CAMRA listed pub on the way, The Red Lion at Raithby which is just outside Spilsby. A shout out for this beautiful little country pub. Three perfect ales in TTL, Batemans' XB and Ferry Ales Brewery's (FAB) Leader which was an excellent English strong ale but a bomb dropping 4.7%.

As for Horncastle; well, I went there with the secret desire to see 'if' it might be where I wanted to retire too but, at this rate there'll only be 2-3 pubs left soon. In the last 15 years, 10 pubs have closed and only earlier this year, in May, the Red Lion closed its doors and IT stands right in the heart of Horncastle. It just seems that people can't sort out a good boozier anymore but then, a good boozier used to be a place where you went to meet people and everything else was a bonus. But now stood in small numbers, you notice everything else all the small things. The Irish though would call our pubs; posh and yet theirs are the busy ones!



The Fighting Cocks today, flooded during the rebuild and so back to square one! The likely home soon of Horncastle Ales



Finally, a message from the Chairman of Fenland CAMRA Branch who cover the Horncastle area

"Horncastle, like many small rural towns has lost several pubs. There are still six pubs in the town including Old Nick's Tavern with its microbrewery. The King's Head (Batemans Beers) has again made it into the Good Beer Guide. The Fighting Cocks (was) due to reopen, but flooding from the local river has put it back for several years. The town has one of the infamous Sam Smith closed pubs (Red Lion), showing no signs of re-opening soon. There are two other pubs a couple of miles from the town centre. For the size of the town, it probably has as many pubs as can be supported these days".

Malcolm Phillips, Chairman Fenland Branch, CAMRA. Thank you, Malcolm.

Change of manager at The Townhouse

After a long period of no ales whatsoever, it's hoped that the Townhouse, under new management can turn things



The Red Lion, Raithby (above and left). Lincolnshire has a huge thing about the Lancaster bomber, the RAF and such like. Definitely worth the trip and in the GBG.

around but there's no sign of it at the moment. A very recent trip netted no real ales still. The pub suffered from among many things, a spate of toilet seat thefts which the pub bizarrely refused to replace which isn't very nice for anyone! Asked if they had any evidence a spokesperson (might have) said; THEY HAD NOTHING TO GO ON. Sorry, I'll get my coat!

Training staff and management

Perhaps then this is the time to tell you that a training course has been designed and dropped. Work was carried out with the help of Jez Stone (more on Jez in a minute) and was designed for staff to learn all about stillage, serving real ale, what goes wrong and how to spot it and a look at a beer stocking strategy. Oh! and a little taster to learn all the flavours! This was being designed from scratch and the help of Jez's hands on experience. Jez is chairman of the Huntingdon Branch of CAMRA and is a part-time barman at the Crystal Ship. He can also be found at loads of beer festivals doing the stillage and is just a great person to know anyway! So, all was in hand when the branch hit its crisis and the SGM. The idea of the course was to bring standards up with a cheap-keep-it-real local course in which everything could be done in one day. It would have been hell, tasting all those beers but you know, someone's got to do it.



The arte décor at The Village Inn, Witchford

New kids on the block

I'm keeping an eye on all the new pub landlords that may make the rural trip and may go for Rural POTY and so a recent trip to **The Village Inn, Witchford** was well worth it with the Timothy Taylor Landlord being spot on. The only beer on the day with the London Pride having finished. It was fine and makes it about 6 times in 12-months while the present landlord; Lee has been in charge that the beers been bang on. In that time, I've had one 'cloudy but fine' beer.

Do try the pub! The décor is lovely with lots of great framed art and photos. The owner being the one with the interest and motivation that brings it in!

Another pub that has turned the corner and doing well is the **No Hurry Inn, Upware**. This continues to serve brightly beers and all now from Greene King. A recent trip netted three real ales while the much-used 4th pump had an afternoon off. Green King's IPA plus Morland's Speckled Hen and Golden Hen were 100% but so-so similar. These beers only take sales off each other and the one beer that could change all that is GK's Abbot Ale!



The IPA and Speckled Hen are identical and the Golden Hen has a slight hint of citra otherwise it's also identical. The Five Miles from Anywhere that is in the middle of nowhere at a place that's called Upware? (you heard me!). The Great Ouse comes down from the right and past the Camera. The 'river' to the left is the Burwell Lode that immediately splits again with Reach Lode.

The beers were excellent as they have been throughout 2024. So, now that finally the beer quality and condition is excellent - they fight with each other over the same customers? Of the three GK beers, I'd like to see Abbot being one. It has though been an excellent effort and it seems miserable of me to raise the bar again but I'm sure they are getting most of the sales they should have had all along and varying it up would complete it. Think 4 pumps and lots of choice on two of them. Fact is though, Greene King would be pleased of 2 of those pumps for their services provided and in a dream world we'd walk in to two exciting flavours which we think GK may actually hold some of.

Cask Ale Week 2024 Veni, vidi, vici.... It came, we didn't mention it, it went quietly.....

Celebrated at CAMRA HQ level this apparently didn't make much of an impact at branch level. There were a couple of ales brewed to celebrate the occasion and publicity packs were available. Can we do better? I think we can. My

local, the Fountain in Soham had a 'buy 6 real ales and get the 7th free' card. I filled out two of them in my joy of Fuller's London Pride. The Craft Union pub had this and Hobgoblin Gold on for the duration with the TTL as back up. The local is getting quite a bit of heat because the landlord has the damn impertinence to join in on Facebook to talk of things like his stand on banning drug users, rubbish strewn all over his premises and as a result, the Soham people can be quite vindictive online.

That's it for this month and hope to catch you at the bar....it's your round!



Festivals and Events

NC = non-CAMRA. F = Food. M = Music.

Cambridge Branch Mini-coach Tour of Rural Pubs on Saturday 19th October at 12:00–19:30 (Cambridge Branch)

This is a tremendous way to try lots of different rural pubs – and fast! Drink just a half, a pint or if over-ambitious 2 pints at each pub (but at your peril). Usually, a couple of halves is sufficient at each drop. Roughly 7-8 pubs are visited and kept as a secret – even during the trip! Visit Cambridge CAMRA web page for details.

Stop Press; Now Full!

Branch Committee Meeting

Tuesday 29th October at the Village Inn, Witchford.

With a KO of 7.45pm. All branch members are welcome to join us as we start to engage you; the members that would like to contribute in the future or just to see what happens.

Our Branch Rural Coach Trip - December 7th 2024.

Two months to go! Route Sorted. It's a Mystery Tour. Numbers; 14. 2 spaces left.

Numbers still stand at 14 but some faces have changed and deposits taken which sorted one or two out. The mini-coach that takes 16 passengers around the 8 pubs being visited will go in an anti-clockwise direction this year with the Witcham, White Horse being the 3rd or 4th stop for a great lunch spread that you'll be ready for. If we have any vegans, please let me know and I can address this.

The 8 pubs that Ely branch will be visiting should represent the very best of the rural scene – except that we're having to leave 4 off! We can also say that of the 8 we're visiting, 4 are new this year. Visiting the rural backwaters of the Ely Branch last year was sold out early. This will be our second branch rural trip and the prices are frozen at last year's price; **£29.**

Presently we have 14 places booked with 8-weeks to go. We will consider the 22-seater if more are interested.

The details are;

11.40am meet at Ely Railway Station. Get on the Lords' Travel mini-coach.

Trains alight from Cambridge at Ely; 11.25 and 11.36. We leave at 11.45am and get back at around 7.30+pm.

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

Transport is a Lord's Travel mini-coach.

All CAMRA members and with a non-member welcome.

If you'd like to book a place, email Taffy on david@taffmeisters.co.uk please.

I put this together in August. It is a guide to drinking in the Ely Branch areas rural pubs.

An Ely Branch Guide to our Rural Pubs

<https://ely.camra.org.uk/dl.php?id=223624> We've now put together a guide of the rural pubs and clubs in our patch.

Follow the link above to download it. It's CURRENT and will be updated in the future; as we keep revisiting them.

We reckon its worth making a nice bike ride or walk out of a few of these. By all means pass onto your friends.

Disclaimer; The views expressed here are mine and not necessarily those of either CAMRA; branch or body.

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