

Taffy's Rural View

November 2024 edition.



Coming Up

A rather good 11 pages this month mainly due to me getting a lack of 'EPA' off my chest. It's about the English pint of IPA also known as an 'EPA'. Why is it that the quiet beer is **not** seen, **not** heard and **not** for sale?

There are visits to The Green Man at Colne and the Rose & Crown in Somersham as they came highly recommended and I'm not disappointed. I meandered into The Chequers, Cottenham expecting nowt and can't wait to go back!

Local pubs get a good look too this month after a little rest in the summer with the Little Downham Anchor on the up, so is the Ex-Servicemen's Club at Littleport. I catch the last day of The Crown at Littleport under Robbie Carey and I have a 'thin' lunchtime at the Tharp Arms at Chippenham. Also, The Maids Head continues to improve, I go onto Forehill in Ely and it 'needs a bit of attention'. I've noticed I can say all I like about the rural pubs but when you relate to the city pubs I mention, that we can have a good chat about it and I enjoy the banter.

Elysian Beer Festival date

We start this month with the dates for your diary of the Elysian Beer Festival 2025 (EBF) which is still provisional; Thursday (Trade and training) 6th and the real deal is **Friday 7th – Saturday 8th February 2025**. Originally, the EBF was booked for the weekend before but there's a determined attitude to keep it in February and thus the date change.

Our Cambridge influence

Now under the watchful gaze of for many, through this frankly 'awful' time we're being supported by three Cambridge Branch members in our new Chairman Will Smith (Cambridge Branch Chairman of 19 years) and our new Secretary Ali Cook (Public affairs, Pubs Protection, Social Sec) and also a third in Helge Nareid who is now on both committees. Between them, they have given up a huge amount of THEIR time already and spent October meeting most committed members and sought out what we want from our branch. That being the case, the usual committee meeting didn't take place at the beginning of October instead being at the end on Tuesday 29th October at the Village Inn, Witchford. Meetings for now are moving to the last Tuesday of each month with November's scheduled for Tuesday 26th November (at The Anchor, Little Downham 7.30pm confirmed and all welcome) but just to keep us on our toes, the last one of 2024 would have been New Year's Eve. We're committed yes but.....

The First Beer Festival Meeting

Took place on Monday 28th October, the evening before the main committee meeting and was at the West End House with 12 in attendance. The main news is that BFO, Tony Gimbert is calling the 2025 Elysian Beer Festival his last. We'll wax lyrical later about Tony's years but Will Smith has offered to be joint BFO so that we have some continuity when the day comes. The BF team can't wait to get going but they'll have to hold on just a bit longer for the all clear.

First Committee Meeting with the Cambridge team

Meeting at the end of the month at the Village Inn, Witchford, we had an excellent attendance of 11. I don't like platitudes so I'll say what I can and get out. A secure e-mail system for committee members will be organised. We'll also check if we have a branch remit and action it if we don't. We're looking to get a Brewery Liaison Officer in place which has proven difficult but now instead of smoke and mirrors we have a plan; this will also include the Spinney Abbey Cider Brewery which it seems, had been forgotten.

Membership; We have around 463 members currently which is a 5% drop from the 490 or so that Mike Playle announced at the March CM but I'm assured that you have to interpret the figures as it isn't altogether clear. In the past, the branch has done very well and been able to keep good support despite a national drop-off.

CM hosts; The Village Inn, Witchford.

I know the pub is up to it but so now does the committee – and so now you do too! The beer was top notch and the Punch Taverns pub had gone for Timothy's Boltmaker and Greene King's Abbot Ale and both were excellent. We're talking top marks here.

Lease Owner; Lee Davison is on site most of the time, while Steve Wallis (who I had down as a business partner) has

now left and a team of people are now looking after the cellar and pub. Our host for the night was **Ben** who, I should have photo'd in his brand-new Timothy Taylor Boltmaker T-shirt. I reckon Ben had 'secured' it from TT HQ! These London boys, I tell ya! They never miss a trick! He was also later to tell me just how surprised they are at the popularity of the Boltmaker. I guess like many of us, the popularity and status of the Landlord makes one presume that it is Timothy Taylors best shot when in fact, many believe that the Boltmaker is.

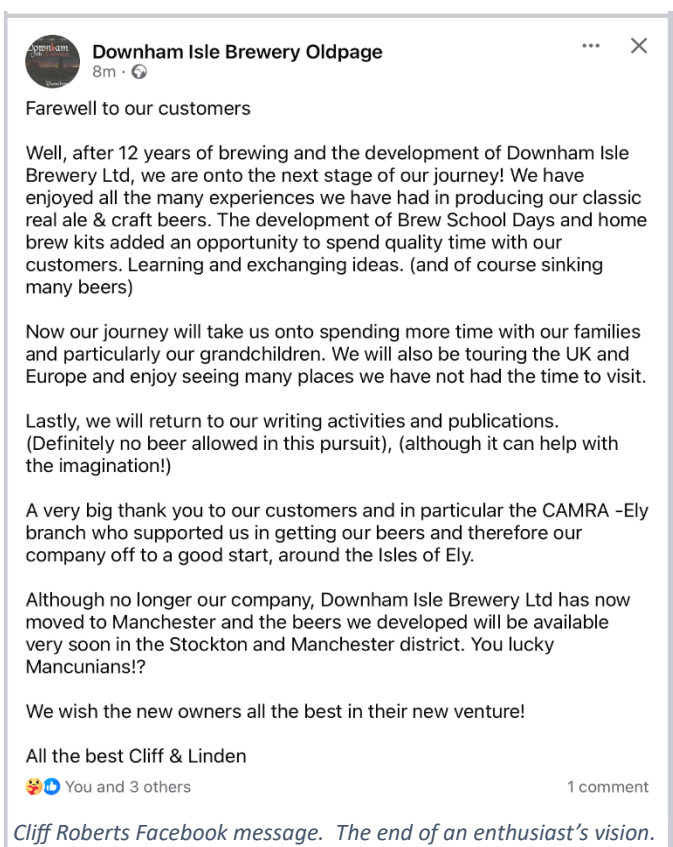
Thanks to the Village Inn for making us so welcome and for the great beer.

Downham Isle Brewery stops

Cliff and Linden Roberts have decided to pull stumps on their Downham Isle Brewery, he's found someone to take the brewery on and moving on himself to greener pastures. The Brewery which had more 'evolved' than 'founded' has been around since 2016 and the support of our members was reciprocated both ways. It would appear that the Brewery; recipes and equipment are all on their way to Manchester.

Lazy Otter, Stretham

Yes, it's back again, no sooner did we say last month it was 'no movement' than the owner has been trying yet again for permission to convert the pub to private dwellings. A fine pub still stands empty and our branch will be objecting to this change of use in writing again. We believe the Lazy Otter was a viable pub and a much-loved community asset. Plenty of riverside locations still do well and that is the way to see this, it isn't a road traveller's pub like the old Travellers Rest (Chittering) or the Slap Up Inn (Waterbeach) before it. It's a riverside location just like the successful Ship at Waterbeach, No Hurry Inn at Upware or Ship at Brandon Creek.



Downham Isle Brewery Oldpage
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Farewell to our customers

Well, after 12 years of brewing and the development of Downham Isle Brewery Ltd, we are onto the next stage of our journey! We have enjoyed all the many experiences we have had in producing our classic real ale & craft beers. The development of Brew School Days and home brew kits added an opportunity to spend quality time with our customers. Learning and exchanging ideas. (and of course sinking many beers)

Now our journey will take us onto spending more time with our families and particularly our grandchildren. We will also be touring the UK and Europe and enjoy seeing many places we have not had the time to visit.

Lastly, we will return to our writing activities and publications. (Definitely no beer allowed in this pursuit), (although it can help with the imagination!)

A very big thank you to our customers and in particular the CAMRA -Ely branch who supported us in getting our beers and therefore our company off to a good start, around the Isles of Ely.

Although no longer our company, Downham Isle Brewery Ltd has now moved to Manchester and the beers we developed will be available very soon in the Stockton and Manchester district. You lucky Mancunians!?

We wish the new owners all the best in their new venture!

All the best Cliff & Linden

👍👍 You and 3 others

1 comment

Cliff Roberts Facebook message. The end of an enthusiast's vision.

Our Branch Rural Coach Trip – The Infamy Trip - December 7th 2024. 2 spaces left. LAST CALL!!!!!!

One month to go! Route Sorted. It's a Mystery Tour.

Fourteen booked, two places left and these numbers are solid with deposits taken but we can still take 2 more.

So, the small detail for this month is the scoring of the beer on the trip – if you want to. We'll be offering everyone the chance to score each beer and pub on the trip. If the trippers would like to, they'll get a paper upon which to mark all their beer scores with up to 10 marks for each beer in the pub but the average of them will be used and also 2 marks for the pub itself making a maximum of 12.

The mini-coach takes 16 passengers around the 8 pubs being visited going 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 and of the 8 we're visiting, 5 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 of £29.

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.

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

All CAMRA members and travelling with a non-member welcome.

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

How will the Rural POTY and GBG pubs will be judged?

See the lower pages of the newsletter for judging information.

A walk from Somersham to Colne – and back

Making a right mess of getting to Colne one Sunday – having forgotten that Earith Bridge was closed – I made my way up Sutton bank and back down the other side of the Levels to Somersham from where I walked through the countryside to Colne. I have to say it was a varied and picturesque walk and well worth doing. Beforehand I'd have said 'flat and fen peat' and instead I got 'rolling and loam'. I'd have said 'open and bare' and instead I got 'hedgerows and trees' so how wrong could I have been? I was going to visit a pub that has been on my list for some time having been told often how good the beer is.

The Green Man, Colne

I strolled into Colne, a pretty little village – not much built in or on and liked it, then, rounding a bend I refrained from asking a lady 'where's the pub?' because sure enough, I looked up and there it stood, the village pub!

In the front door then and the bar was on the right where a pool table completely dominates the room making it feel like an old 80's youth club but luckily nobody else remembers that far back so do I get away with that thought?

The bar fell silent upon my entry and I broke the atmosphere – and probably a lot more – with the request for a 'high six'. Nobody laughed. They did kindly make room for me by leaving.

I could see the Oakham's Citra but a quick word told me that the lounge held Hophead by Dark Star, a very heavily hopped blond which tasted stronger than its 3.4% ABV. Next was the Milton's Nike a very dark sweet beer, hardly the 'ruby ale' in either colour or taste Milton suggest but still, a nice 4.7% ale and while here I'll mention that Guinness is said to be a ruby beer too but it also struggles to convince me. I've no idea in what light they got this here "ruby", maybe they were in Soho?

I gathered from the barman/chef who'd been working at the pub 20 years, that a longstanding landlord had kept excellent beer until around 2019 and when new owners arrived, there was a frightful fret with staff unpaid and many glad to see the end of it. I had a chat with what turned out to be the current lady owner; Charley Orpwood who, was thoroughly engaging. She's had the pub a year-and-a-half on the tail of a full refurb. The pub, an Admiral Tavern, came up just right as Charley holds the White Swan, Bluntisham too and so went for it. Charley rotates her beers without one particular beer sticking but she insists on always getting in the Theakston's Old Peculiar each Winter. There is a 4th pump but the pub is inclined not to use it at all rather than intermittently.

I finished with a half of the original Citra itself, the Oakhams original that gave its name to the whole genre just as we say Hoover or Caterpillar still to this day about well; hoovers and caterpillars! This was of course loaded up with citra hops and was my only beer not spot on, a touch of dry wood in the taste tells me I may have had the first beer off and of course this was the only beer in the bar side so it had no audience especially after all my five-fingered friends had left. What do they say; 'out of sight – out of mind'?

I don't think you have to worry about this pub's beers, they are going to be well kept. Definitely going back and need to tie it in with the Earith bridges being open next time.

Rose & Crown, Somersham

I made my way back with Franki to Somersham and finished at the Rose & Crown right in the heart of the village and a very busy Stonegate pub which always has two real ales on. The landlord is Matt Sterry but Matt had left a lady at the helm who knew her stuff and made man and dog feel really welcome, Franki got a biscuit or two and generally I thought how lucky I had been with these two pubs. I ordered an Ossett's Silver Rat a very hoppy 4.0% which I drank all Christmas last at The Fountain, Soham. I couldn't tell if I was happy to see it again though as it can be both a



blessing and a curse all in the same glass and after that I just tried the freshly tapped St. Austell's Tribute (4.2%) and both were well served. However, as time passed, a new customer entered, a big chap about my age who, stepped up beside me at the bar I asked if he liked Tribute? "No. It's just another very so-so beer" he opined – and I thought '....and I thought I knew what I was talking about....'. He'd nailed it.

EPA and Beers closely related

Too much hopped beer in one day brings it all to a head...

Before the above two pubs were visited on that weekend, on the Friday afternoon, I'd started drafting the article you'll read below. I have felt this way for some time and it takes a 'final straw' moment to get the keyboard whirling. Little did I imagine I'd be drinking all the beers mentioned above and that they would so easily demonstrate the tale. That I would drink; bang; a heavily hopped ale, bang; a heavily hopped dark beer and bang; the original super-hopped Citra itself. Then back to Somersham and bang; the most hopped beer in Ossett's Silver Rat you're ever likely to drink followed by, well, yes let's leave it to the big quiet man again; '.... just another very so-so beer'.

A lack of English Pale Ales with 'attitude'

Are the brewers getting it wrong or is it the landlords? Is there a lack of choice created because what sold sells? Let's start with a silly example; The only beer for sale is a hoppy beer and the only beer customer want is an EPA. How long does it take for all the brewers and landlords to realise they are selling the wrong beer? The brewer sells to the landlord the beer the landlord chooses. The landlord mostly doesn't ask the customer what he wants.

Change is impossible in Room 101

Take Landlord X well known for his light ales, citra'd or hopped, or occasionally golden. He doesn't ask all his customers what they want. He definitely doesn't ask the customers that no longer frequent the pub? He finally relinquishes one day.... No! no! HE a-c-c-i-d-e-n-t-a-l-l-y gets an EPA in! Yes, THAT is how it happens. The first customer says; "You've changed the beer! Why? I come here and I don't like change!". One customer says; "My mate Fred likes EPA. He might come here for this?" to which the landlord says; "but he isn't here now is he? this is a one-off mistake and it is back to hoppy beer again tomorrow". A third customer THINKS the beer is lovely but having heard the first two shuts his mouth, keeps his head down and carries on.

What we have – hopped beer

The most prevalent ale now is the blond bitter that is sweet at the front and highly hopped at the back of the mouth also and second are the blond Citras that also prevail. These ales taste nice enough – especially cooled right down and we enjoy the extension of choice the Kiwi and American hops have brought to the British palate but they should have added too but seem to have replaced the English Pale Ale and I'm suggesting that drinkers would enjoy EPAs if only they were served.

Keep that cellar temperature down

The super-hopped and the citra hopped beers both do it for you when they are cold and to a lesser extent (there's no 'more' to this, just 'less') when 'cool' which suppresses the hop taste but, it's the second half of the drink as the temperature rises that gets you as the hoppy bitterness or citra hit can make you wince. The more prominent the hop, the cooler it has to be served and also drunk immediately. The two beer flavours are very temperature related.

Landlord it's your bill

Don't get me wrong, done well, I enjoy them but they are sometimes the only choice in town. As a pub's electricity bill hits new heights each summer, as the air conditioning unit rattles into life like a Lewis gun and while it's nice to have a cool cellar, let us remember, they are mostly air conditioned for the sake of the ale. The lager goes from whatever cellar temperature to chilled through the cooler unit and is not reliant on the cellar temperature – but the ale is. So, the bills for all this belong in the ale sector. Should we hope our cash-strapped landlord isn't number crunching when he sees his bills? This is a ruinous exercise for the landlord/landlady in these cash conscious times.

The EPA

English Pale Ales (EPA) is what is termed 'a malt led' beer. Brewed with lots of malt and the old English variety of hops it doesn't need super cool, it isn't necessary! A cellar temperature, cool EPA will taste the same from the top of a cool glass to the bottom of a room temperature glass with the flavour unaltered. A heavily hopped or citra'd beer, as it warms morphs into a nasty, bitter thing that makes one of your eyes wince. It is for instance, no coincidence that the very same taste of citra (read also; 'mango' or 'tropical') can be found on the chrome taps marked Camden or Beavertown who're quite open about it; their beers taste best chilled and with a dew on the outside of the glass. It's the same genre of beer. Three Blind Mice's Juice Rocket is a lovely ale but it is an even better Key Keg all chilled out and if you recall I had Lacons Encore out of a way-over-cooled handpump at The Ship at Brandon Creek back in the summer and it was the best I'd ever tasted it!

Where are the EPA's?

So, where are the London Prides, Abbott Ales, Wadworth 6X, Adnams Southwold and the Exmoor Golds etc? Well,

while I'm pleased of the 'rotation', I didn't expect the EPA type of beer to be dropped? Is it because it appears old fashioned or indeed has an unnoteworthy description?

In the whole Ely Branch area, there's a chance that the Carpenters Arms, Soham is probably our busiest rural pub, there are plenty of customers drinking ale from the three taps. Sitting in the pub, I regularly get chatting with the ale drinkers, these mature chaps don't use technical words on the subject, but identify straight away with what they like and it is invariably; a good English Ale. I can usually guess which ale they are going to go for next; anything like a malted EPA and usually its simply the nearest they can have with the least hops and the darkest colour which often indicates roasted barley.

The Prince Albert, Ely

Mike has 7 ales on tap. Greene King IPA, Greene King Abbott, Black Sheep Bitter, TBM's; Old Brown Mouse and very often these four are joined by either St. Austell's Tribute or Timothy Taylor Landlord. That is 5 of the 7 yet the Albert is the only pub that does this in this ratio.

We know Mike knows his stuff; we know his customers drink it so it has to be the (other) landlord's choice?

Force-fed

In order to pick up a penny, landlords are dropping two and make no mistake, this is with the landlord; he's the one who makes the final decision. Take beer festivals too, we have a lack of EPAs at these too and often there are just maybe 2/20 beers that are of this now, rare origin. At two Ely city pub beer festivals in 2024; no EPAs in the marquee.

Beer Festivals

I visit beer festivals and its all, golden, blond, hopped, citra. It's east coast, west coast or New England pale ales. We're not gaining new drinkers though but, we are perhaps losing the old drinker who knows what works, what they want and also took us 250 years to get there!

Pubs

On our rural trip of December 2023, only one pub out of eight, 3 beers out of some 20 for sale; had a dark EPA and that was Nethergate's Plum Porter at The Griffin, Isleham with two more pubs offering GK's IPA.

An English Pale Ale



Bitterness

Hops

Malt

Timothy Taylor's Landlord, we are told, will not compromise their quality but, I have to say it is a spring chicken here, a 25-year-old beer. The very soft taste notes that can easily be rubbed out, a beer brewed to fit the widest possible audience and possibly stands for nothing, and has no 'attitude'?

Drinkers, rightly, want some 'attitude' in their beer but Tribute and Landlord haven't helped, they may be without hop and citra override but it's difficult to describe them as anything especially when next to one of the best brightly beer leaders; (IMHO of course!) Fuller's London Pride. What should now be happening is that the micro and national (with a small 'n') brewers should be creating high quality

low hop EPAs and they aren't. The answer could lay with the micro brewers who, could give it some attitude!

The solution

We need to push our very best micro-EPA's and get them into pubs. The CAMRA strength is that we are a consumer organisation and our opinions are those of knowledgeable enthusiasts, of customers and people who know what they want. We don't have a vested interest. So, we need to find a way to let landlords know what we want and when he says 'what does it taste of?' we can say; "well, not citra, not over hopped, and not stout", it's because, in the beer game, this time, LESS IS MORE.

Sod's Law – Lacon's Phantom Dark IPA 4.4%

Wouldn't you believe it, having written the above piece on EPAs, Lacon's have just released a dark beer that needs a good look from the off. As you may have spotted, Lacon's has a wide distribution network but a lot of pubs have their beers on rotation – which we also like! So, a new, dark malted IPA that could go for sale everywhere deserves our attention! My first contact with this lovely drop was three days after Somersham at the Maids Head, Wicken. I went back the next evening for my hoodie. This deliberate act (what do you mean 'he forgot it?') - meant I could try the same beer again and while I sat there 4 of 4 customers came into the pub and went straight onto the Phantom. Let's hope this is the one!

Lacons though seem to be all over the show placing it. First of all, it used to be a pale ale but they wanted to keep the name for this, their new dark ale. They didn't just say that though, we just find out that they altered the recipe out of sight. Then we have the release; mid-October (I write this on the 17th) with Halloween images on the pump clip and artwork which should make it a two-week wonder but THEN they are telling us it is a winter warmer ready for the festive season as well!

Well, there's the rub! If it's a dark beer, it's always called 'festive season', 'winter warmer' and for a 'chilly night'. Basically, the ad department have been fed a line and if they visited a beer festival in the middle of July or August, such as Peterborough, with the perspiration dripping off the end of the nose, they would find that 50% of the attendees are still drinking UNDERHOPPED light or dark ales and that Christmas can wait.....bah humbug!

Lacons

Having written to Lacons (pronounced Lake-ons I can confirm) I was honoured to have head brewer Hamish Cross call in reply. Thank you and it was all my privilege. Hamish is a Kiwi who has spent time in Australia and now has a connection with Norfolk – the good lady! On a phone line that had blanks and what with my tinnitus I just about got most of it. "This is actually the second year of Phantom but we'll be changing the name very soon, probably in the new year and will rebrand it as 'Contrast'. We've found that the sales of Phantom drop off HARD after Halloween and there's still the winter to go but the word Phantom and the general Halloween promotion make it happen that way possibly".

He then went on to mention that a dark beer isn't a risk for the winter season but the demand isn't there for the year round. "We have the Falcon Ale which is a dark beer and of course we have the St. Nicks for the festive season; another dark ale". But Hamish is convinced there's a disconnect with few drinkers going beyond the IPA type beers (heading to the dark side) there just being no market for it.

EPA - clear?

The 'average Joe' used to grab his light ale be it; light brown in colour, it was light pleasant and low ABV. If it was dark, it was heavy of higher ABV and so the rules were simple. But the citra and cascade hop came along completely altering the flavour and the colours of English ales. The customer used to know but is now confused by the description of light, of blond, of amber and of gold because it doesn't mean anything until you know the hop count! Hops or Citra override everything; (citra is a hop BTW).

This is when the customer hangs on to Timothy Taylor Landlord like a survivor of a sinking ship seeing a piece of driftwood. People I suggest, don't want or like over-hopped beers in the numbers people brewers think. Customers are getting caught 'once' in pubs but most especially at beer festivals that rotate their beers and they are suckered in by its blond looks and the descriptions that describe the colour but not the type of beer. It is now a mess and out of this, someone needs to get it right eventually...

Put it this way, you've had one beer from the not-so-cold cellar and the next choice is now Dark Star's Hophead or Fuller's London Pride. It's your choice?



Anon.

Influential

After a shared email with Chris Jones, head brewer at Papworth Brewery, Chris tells me that they have brewed a beer with a true piece of Ely in its DNA! Having acquired wild hops from the Almonry Garden in Ely, Chris had a crack at brewing with them; "The plant has been there for years and no one knows who planted it, or when, or even if it might be a wild seeded variety (and hence possibly unique in the hop world). The beer



A great drop and much needed; Lacons Phantom. The brewery will have dropped it after another batch and before the new year is in

had no name and so the name 'Almonry Garden' came about - by default as nothing else came to mind. "The fresh hops presented a lovely spicy aroma, but the flavour they imparted on the beer was very subtle, if anything at all. But the plant will still be there next year, so we will brew it again since the beer was so lovely, and maybe next time we'll eek out a little bit (more) of (the) hop flavour".

We look forward to it.

Chippenham, Tharp Arms; The Sunday lunchtime crew. Where art thou!

My old local in Chippenham of 47 years is struggling on a Sunday lunchtime, after a lovely walk in a circuit out to Badlingham and back I was ready for a pint of Lacon's Norfolk Gem (3.6%) which was, as usual; bang on. It had been put on with Lacon's Encore on Friday but now stood alone. You can't fault the beer at the Tharp, It's always good. However, oddly, we did have a beer there that had little head on it not only on the Rural Trip of 2023 but earlier this year too and it was critical I'm afraid as it was during the judging of Rural POTY. Months later, one or two of us talked it through and started questioning the beer and not the serve. It turned out that we hadn't had a pint of St. Austell's Cornish Bitter with a head on it. Too late..... the scores were in.

But I'm more concerned why the villagers aren't attending the 'Sunday Service'? There used to be around 30 men and a few ladies in the pub, every Sunday. The place was humming! I saw just two other customers over an hour from 1pm onward. Sunday lunchtime was a typical drop-in and come either 1 or 2pm sharp they would leave for the Sunday roast. They always tried to sound reluctant to leave but, well, you know, even beer had to know its place at 2pm on a Sunday.

Get well Tom, keep bugging on mate!

The Chequers, Cottenham

A daytime drink on a Wednesday should be the prelude to some 'excuses' for the beers condition and thus my expectations were low on popping into The Chequers which, is situated on the main drag through the village recently but not only did I find two darker beers on than the fact that all three ales were spot-on!

I tried a new brewery named Lincoln Ales and their best bitter which was a dark malted ale and backed that up with Dark Star's Hophead again and for some reason it wasn't at all over-hopped like at the Green Man and I finished with the Adnams Southwold Bitter. The interior is lovely and fresh looking, clean and it is food to the right during the day and drink to the left. I congratulated the barman on his beer to which he retorted; 'why thank me, I didn't brew it?' and I replied 'no you didn't but, you didn't muck it up at your end either!'



The Chequers at Cottenham. Three real ales and very nice decor

The Ex-Servicemen's Club, Littleport

Deciding to walk to Littleport from the Welney Road, I had to create my own footpath at one point but the club was the first 'pub' I came to. Chairman Adi Keating warned me that he was mega busy so I kept clear and headed for the bar. Just the Greene King IPA was on and it was served very well, I could see the previous beer was St. Austell's Proper Job and the barmaid warned me; "it hasn't picked up after the summer so we're having just one ale on at a time at the moment" she seemed in pain. They still rotate the beers but although getting their beer from Batemans and wearing Batemans' polo shirts, the club rarely serve it.

I noted that they had on the John Smiths and the Caffreys Ale. The JS and Caffreys both rely on a creamflow head and lots of conditioning (read; bubbles). This to me means that two beers are fighting each other and makes 3 in total. Soon, with little coming back, it became clear the staff were busy, busy. At least the customers were

remarkably friendly and I felt downright welcome with Franki-Four Fingers hogging the show.

The problem is clear to me now; they just aren't that bothered. Adi isn't an ale drinker and it's nobody's job to think through an ale strategy. No one person has the knowledge. An old saying I made up from the tuning of engines and carburettors applies across to beer here too; "95% of the people have 95% of the knowledge but only 5% of the people have the other 5%". They are the people that need to grab hold of this if they want to grow the ale sales.

I spoke to a wee Scotsman - well he was sat doon at the time! - and he said 'I like my ales with a touch more bitter but we keep having sweet ales, it's all we get, so.....' I've offered to sit down with Adi and discuss 'ALE' but the staff have years behind the bar and it's their kingdom. Shame because what they serve, they serve very well, indeed I am going to upgrade their Rural Pub Guide status. On the way out, I met a busy Adi in the Foye recommending the Lacons Phantom and wished him good luck.

The Crown, Littleport

Sunday 27th October was the lease owner Robbie Carey and co-manager Sara's last day at the pub with Sally Spencer due to go in on the Monday having taken the Bateman's lease on so my trip wasn't blessed with an ale as it was the day before the handover. This is the end of Robbie's 15 years at the pub while Sara joined him more recently. Originally, he was looking for somewhere in Littleport that he'd like to drink in himself and took the lease of the pub when it came up! The result was a friendly local - just like Robbie. Most days over the years he's gone into the pub and was looking after the ale until around Covid-19. But he's not too good on his pins now and well he's called time.

By the time I wrote this, the pub was again open under Sally who had been a barmaid at the pub and put in a bid to take the lease on. Now given the heck of a time that Batemans went through to get someone good in the Red Lion at Swaffham Prior, I'd imagine a volunteer like Sally was better than 'ten pressed men'! I hope they did you a good deal Sally!

I hope to have a word with her and see if we can't get the real ale count up in Littleport. It stands today at; **Littleport (HT; 1-8) 2, Soham 8.**

I smiled when a staff member said that one or two groups travelled into Ely for real ale, but that there was no demand for it in the pub.

Is it the Littleport people not wanting ale or is it that real ale has been run down? You're also wondering why I write the score? Well, let's see how we go shall we?

The Anchor, Little Downham

I'm delighted to say that the beer has completely turned the corner and you know, due to the steps made in the summer, that this is a solid change and; 'forever!'.

I jest but yes, go for a drink there with confidence. It was good to see the pub very busy and it had a good vibe to it. There are always plenty of staff around and you never wait long to be served. A young fella by the name of Harry was very helpful and also that magical word; keen! We both learnt something, mine was to realise there's now a complete TWO generations between me and Harry and I need to up my game.

All the staff wear tight black tops and trousers and you get to think that Tom Cruise (dangling from a wire of course) or Diana Rigg (for the oldies) are going to serve you or as Diana might have said; "was that one karate chop sir? Or two? I really can't recall!".

It is now being upgraded in the Rural Pub Listing for the Ely Branch area along with the Littleport Ex-Servicemen's



Dave 'Boy' Green is one of Robbie's friends and a good man by all accounts. This photo sits front and centre in the pub – or did.

Dave can be seen here holding both of what were affectionately known as his 'Muck Spreaders'. A proper lewkel legend is Dave and he still resides in Chatteris, is a lewkel businessman and philanthropist. And he doesn't need to employ bouncers....

Club. Congratulations!

I mentioned just how good the beer was and although Harry said they hoped for a bit better, I mentioned that Wutt, down at the Plough, had really got his real ale act together and it would be a tough ask to have all the customers transfer and that, having two good pumps was a 'force multiplier' and that if the Anchor can get to two, they can certainly share those precious customers.

So please support this pub! Tell them how good their beer is and then go back – and say it again! I've sent in some paperwork which I hope the pub will take up trying to keep 2-pumps going and maybe have a Pin (36 pints) from Thursday evening through to Sunday. From that, you learn what the customers want because with two taps, you're learning, you're carrying out your own poll; your own survey.

As I know that the Anchor can get Lacon's beers I reckon their Norfolk Gem, Falcon Ale, Encore and now also (for a little while) the Phantom dark ale would all be good beers to choose.

Fore Hill, Ely

I made a rare trip over to two pubs on Fore Hill in late-October, the first I came to was the **3at3** which is getting very expensive. The Hellas was a good drop but the stout was a late parrot. On offer were key keg ales at mostly around £4.40 per 2/3rds and that is £6.60 per pint! Some are now at £7.50 per pint.

The staff as usual were really friendly and making Franki and I most welcome and the terraces were full with everyone in T-shirts and on October 26th I might add! Global warming? Donald says..... Anyway, I'm sure the staff appreciate this run of good weather as the patio is a really nice setting.

Next was the **Drayman's Son** which has had just 4 real ales for some time and was once at 8 but it seems the demand is no longer there. The prices were £4.50 for the household TBM and £4.80 for the guest beers per pint which are reasonable enough but, the Old Brown Mouse (4.2%) and the Egyptian Cream (4.5%) weren't themselves nor was the beer temp which was up a little as the beer is always very cool but this was above 'cool'. The Slight Attacks by Pentrich (3.4%) was simply a poor weak beer while the Poachers on the Broads (4.4%) by Wolf was a nice decent amber beer (temperature noted).

We've had good days and we'll have them again but you just can't take your eye off real ale can you? Really, a legend like the Drayman's should really be knocking out 5-6 real ales still but I feel the selection of the beers needs a look. Maybe I'm not there when the great beers happen, I always seem to be there for the passable or the average while somehow, someone like Dan Marsh at The Dyke's End seems to laser-target and get the very best so, how come he can do it?

New Pub in Haddenham opens in November – The Barn

On the road out to Earith, behind a set of rollover shutters at the end of The Green in Haddenham, a new 'Mini-pub' is being readied. The name will be The Barn and the hoped-for opening date is anywhere from the middle of November onwards, the fact is, as soon as it's possible! The owner, Stuart Chapman wants it to be a 'club' which you join with the money going to charity but underneath it is clear he has concerns about any trouble and how he ought to deal with it the right way. We'll leave that bit to him.

Residing in Haddenham for over 40 years, Stuart from Willingham originally is working hard; "This will be a family-run affair", "the family names are 'Weaver & Ashfield' so that is what it will say over the door and; The Barn". I've seen photos of the inside of the building and it looks great with the red brick being left 'Sans Pant'. "Although you'll have to be aged over 21 to enter, we hope to still make this a place for the family to visit".

Asking about real ale he said; "We've got Adnams looking after the lines and pumps plus I've been in touch with Papworth and Three Blind Mice, two local brewers I'd like to support so I won't have to drive too far for my beer



then!". I then went with him through the idea of Key Keg too before he said; "We'll be more of a 'Coffee Shop' during the day which my wife will run and we intend opening from Wednesday to Saturday. That's the current thinking anyhow".

The Barn can be seen about 100m after you've turned towards Earith and it's currently behind a khaki-coloured metal rollover door.

Our Mr Bruce Patten 'doorstepped' the work team for some exclusive photos which even the Daily Pint were demanding copies of but no, we're holding back at Stuart's request as he wants people to see it ready to go. You'll just have to wait! We've been promised an opening date soon and you'll get the 'heads up' on our Facebook page.

Townhouse Lease for Sale

After some three years at the pub, Lessee Gary, is calling it a day and putting the (rest of?) the lease up for sale. The pub still doesn't have real ale on offer and we surmise post-covid the footfall just isn't the same. It is though, hard to fathom why the front area of the pub has almost become a storeroom among some of the other strange decisions. Debbie Belcher (formerly Bartlett) still owns the pub.

How the Rural POTY and GBG pubs will be judged

Intro

First of all, those on the trip can beer score or decline it, it's NOT a problem!

I'm forwarding 12 pubs to be judged for this year's top 3 spots for the GBG and 1st to 3rd for Rural Pub of the Year (POTY) The first and second will be winner and runner-up of the Rural Pub of the Year while 3rd place will join them both in the Good Beer Guide (GBG). The rural winner then faces off against the Ely Branch's city winner for the Branch Pub of the Year.

Thanks to Bruce Patten's suggestion, the committee agreed that of the 28 rural pubs and social clubs 'rural' should be upped from 2 to 3 places in the GBG for 2025. The city of Ely and its 12 pubs now go for the 2 places in GBG.

Round 1 – Scoring on the trip

Those on the trip will be asked to give a score for each of the 8 pubs they visit on the day with scores being 0.0 to 10.0 for each beer and they will then average out and there's 0.0 to 2.0 for the pub itself. This makes it a maximum of 12 points per pub and in line with the later official CAMRA scoring which is out of 120. When all the scores are collected, either the first 3 or more (where there is a natural gap in the results) will go forwards. There are a further 4 pubs that won't be on the trip also to be judged afterwards. By lunchtime the day after the trip I will be announcing on our Facebook page 'the trip 3-4 pubs' and the 'missed 4 pubs' and all (around 8) these will then need judging and I'll also mention those pubs that have made a great improvement in the previous 12-months.

Round 2 - Judges required

The final 7-8 rural pubs need whittling down to 1st, 2nd and 3rd and the scores will be close! The trip scores will be considered when choosing the pubs to go forward into the next round. We are looking for volunteers to visit the '8' (or, say visit 4+) and score using the CAMRA judging sheets and criteria. But it's also important that you compare everything you've seen with someone. So, we want you to either visit with someone or take a car load and then sit and discuss what you've seen with a fellow judge or to meet someone soon after your visit will be fine too!

After all, four eyes are better than two, different perspectives are good, you can't try ALL the beers but you can share the info about the ones that you tasted. After all, sometimes you don't go to the bar or visit the loo but your friend does. Visiting two pubs per trip is ideal and also remember that 12 noon on a Thursday isn't the same as 9pm Saturday, try and visit at the same times on similar days. It is fun and why wouldn't it be?

Finally, the scores are collated by myself and the first three found.

Events

Ely Rural pub Coach Trip. Saturday 7th December 2024. 'The Infamy Trip'. Two places are left. Eight pubs visited on a very comfortable mini-coach. Buffet lunch included. Contact Taffy for details (below). £29 per head; pay beforehand online or cash on the day. Non-CAMRA welcome with a CAMRA member. Buffet lunch at the 3rd or 4th pub. Organised by Ely Branch of CAMRA.

Festivals

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

Bishop's Stortford Beer Festival, 15-16 November 2024 [Herts & Essex Borders]

Southend Beer Festival 21-23 November 2024 [South East Essex]

Colchester Winter Beer Festival, 29 January - 1 February 2025 [Colchester & North East Essex]

TBC **Elysian Winter Beer Festival**, 7 February – 8 February 2025 [Ely Branch of CAMRA]

TBC **Chappel Winter Beer Festival**, 27 February - 1 March 2025 [Essex Branches of CAMRA]

TBC **Cambridge Beer Festival**, 19-24 May 2025 [Cambridge & District]

Colchester Summer Beer & Cider Festival, 28 May - 31 May 2025 [Colchester & North East Essex]

TBC **Thurrock Beer & Cider Festival**, 3–7 June 2025 [South East Essex]

Braintree Real Ale Festival, 5-7 June 2025 [North West Essex]

TBC **Peterborough Beer Festival**, 19-23 August 2025 [Peterborough & District]

TBC **East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival**, Bury St Edmunds, 20-25 August 2025 [West Suffolk & Borders]

TBC **Chappel Summer Beer Festival**, 9-13 September 2025 [Essex Branches of CAMRA]

TBC **St Albans Beer & Cider Festival**, 24-27 September 2025 [South Hertfordshire]

I put this together about 4 months ago and it is now due for updating.

An Ely Branch Guide to our Rural Pubs

<https://ely.camra.org.uk/dl.php?id=223624> We've put together a guide of the rural pubs and clubs in our patch, the current edition is 4 months old and due for change soon. Follow the link above to download it. It will be updated in the near future; as we keep revisiting the pubs and clubs. We reckon it's worth making a nice bike ride or walk to a few of these and by all means pass the info onto your friends.

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

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