



Coming Up. One and a half months of news...

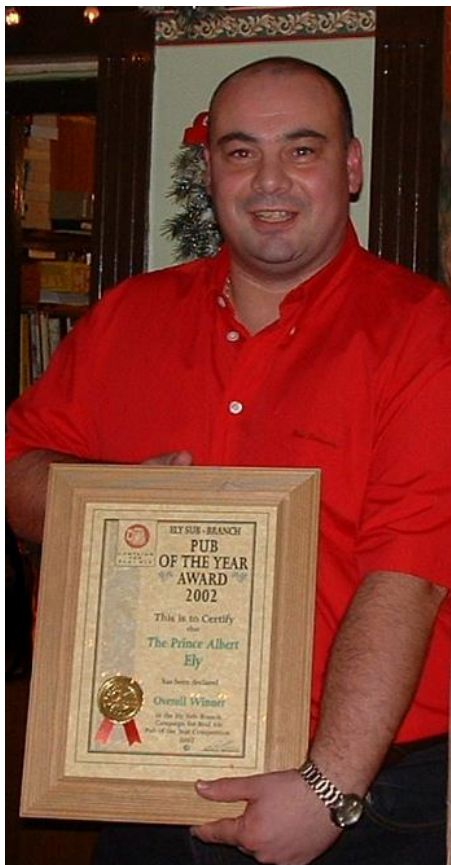
Twelve pages, the biggest so far. We start with the great news that we have a new bar to visit in Haddenham named The Barn and the landlord Stuart Chapman has 2 real ales on. The Griffin in Isleham has gone to 4 well-kept ales and well balanced they are too! Landlord Mike Missing is still doing it his way.

We have a report of the branch rural coach trip; what a day out! As a result of the trip, the judging has continued and the rural voting has narrowed us down to a few pubs. The winner? Read on to find out!

The Lazy Otter, Stretham must remain a pub! That's the verdict of East Cambs Planning Committee. The owners have been applying for conversion to private dwellings.

The Kings Arms is opening again in Wilburton under a new name in around March 2025.

Visits this time to Witcham White Horse, The Chequers in Sutton, The West End in Ely, Fountain in Soham, Three Pickerels in Mepal, The Griffin and Rising Sun in Isleham. There's the new pub; The Barn, The Carpenters Arms in Soham, The Red Lion's at Stretham AND Brinkley plus a lovely trip to the West End House and The Prince Albert followed by a short but 'orrible trip around the very centre of Ely.



Wiggy in '02 when he represented an award!

Wiggy's resigns

Yes, the day has come although no clear reason offered, Phil Wignall resigned from all committee positions which included for the beer festival; head of beer ordering and the cellar team as well as a vast amount of knowledge going back to the very first festival some 14 years ago. A founder member of the Ely branch near 25-years ago, on the main committee he was standing as Vice-chairman and Whatpub co-ordinator, we don't believe Wiggy is irked in any way but maybe he's retiring soon and is putting it all together for a bit more travelling and to carry out his passion for visiting breweries and brewery taps.

On behalf of everyone, thank you for all you've done Wiggy and can I just say the fish n' chips will always be vinegared in the public car park without you! Good luck!

Membership

Our membership officer Phil Eden was able to attend the November CM and dropped some crunchy numbers on us. Would you have guessed that **80%** of Ely branch membership is a-ged..... sorry, that should be aged between 31 years and 70 and that 77% are men? We have around 464 members. Will Smith, our chairman said; "CAMRA is committed to introducing initiatives to attract people of all genders and ages, Ely branch will take advantage of those initiatives to make everybody that cares about saving pubs feel welcome to join us."

November Committee Meeting

The Anchor, Little Downham. Tuesday 26th November

Just the one real ale on – Hobgoblin Gold - for this which, ran out after a round. Something of a disappointment but we are optimists – we have to be! There are just a few items we can mention and one is that the East Anglia Region now consists of only four counties with Beds and Herts gone. We were reminded that we can call upon very seasoned 'professionals' at the CAMRA Towers in our fight to keep pubs open utilising their knowledge and experience.

There was a debate over the beer scoring and how much the NBSS should be followed. The answer was 'a little' as we just are NOT scoring our beers often enough! In fact, we could guess from the statistics who some of the scorers

were! We guessed that Bruce had been to the Bell at Kennet and that yours truly has been scoring dozens and dozens when the average is just 2-4 beers among just 2-4 people. The answer is; we must do more so, come on! Read December's CM for a good news update. Pubs scores are submitted using the CAMRA WhatPub beer scoring app. A step-by-step guide on how to use the app is soon to be published on our branch website.

The 15th Ely Elysian Beer Festival

Friday 7th – Saturday 8th February 2025

The BF group have got it just about all in hand with another meeting due on Tuesday 17th December. With Wiggy standing down, a sub-group overseeing the beer is being headed by Will. Interestingly, Fil Utting-Brown will be away leading up to the event and gets back on the very day of the trade and training session; Thursday 6th February! The poster is done and occasion glasses will once again be produced. It is hoped that the staff T-shirt will also become a kind of 'event T-shirt'. We shall see! Cambridge's influence is obviously big again in that we need their support and it's a case of getting everyone up to speed this year to 'maybe' go on our own next year.

For those that don't know 'Ely' the eel was drawn up by our Max in many variations for the 2024 beer festival and Max gave our dear Ely some teeth, anyway, never mind whether in real life poor Ely had any or not, some thought he looked like a T-Rex! Ely duly visited the dentists and had them all out. The committee; now happy! I ask you.....

So, for this year, little Ely has kept his mouth shut! In fact he's so miffed, he's morphing into something else and I can see a nice fringe with a 'Rebel Yell' and I can't say I blame him!

Billy Idol anyone?

Lazy Otter, Stretham - Planning application. Our objection

An objection to the change of use application has had been put in by our branch to East Cambs District Council on Monday 11th November. This was put together by our branch secretary Ali Cook who knows a bit about these things and submitted through my name. I'm among other things now, the Rural Pubs Officer and it fell fairly into my court. Hopefully, I'm demoted to 'deputy' due to this and even better I'd like to be 'acting' and so my title could be Deputy Acting Assistant Rural Pubs Officer, Ely Branch of CAMRA. Feel the power.

The Lazy Otter, when seen as a roadside pub; may seem to have been in a struggle. Over the years we've seen the Slap -Up Inn at Waterbeach, The Travellers Rest at nearby Chittering, The Kings Head, Wilburton all roadside pubs close but, all the riverside pubs seem to have survived well enough, indeed to thrive. Take the Five Miles from Anywhere, Upware, The Bridge at Waterbeach, The Cutter at Ely, The Swan on the River at Littleport and The Ship at Brandon Creek; all still there with only one disappearing that I can think of? With the other roadside pubs gone, does that not leave more business for the Lazy Otter? *Anyway, back to the Lazy Otter and we are were hopeful that something good would happen one day.* With the A10 to Ely getting busier, it should find enough business.

7-8 February 2025

15th Elysian Winter Beer Festival

Beer • Cider • Food

15th

The Maltings

Ship Lane, Ely CB7 4BB

Friday 7 February 11:00 - 22:00
Saturday 8 February 11:00 - 20:00

Admission: FREE to CAMRA members with a valid membership card or £3, for Non-CAMRA Members

Under 18's will not be permitted

Facebook: Ely & District CAMRA

CAMRA
Campaign
for
Real Ale

Lazy Otter, Stretham – Planning Permission Declined

Just before our committee meeting in late November, earlier in the day, we heard the good news that planning permission on the Lazy Otter has been turned down yet again. Indeed, the owners, who'd been found to have created some living space in the pub and had been told to remove it; had still not complied. Let's hope 4.5 years after the pub closed, someone will have a crack at opening it again as a riverside pub? After all, it isn't a true victory until it is a pub again.

The one that closed; Remembering the Fish & Duck



The Fish & Duck on its way out in 2009. Photo courtesy of The Endless British Pub Crawl

Many moons ago, we had another riverside pub in the shape of the Fish & Duck which was loosely located outside Stretham. Who remembers that? I only ever went a couple of times but I'm told it was popular enough – for a while. I'm sure that yet again, from the riverside it was a nice pub and only a gang-plank-step away, so to speak! But from the roadway it was a tough ask to get too! First opened in the late 1970s it was situated at the Fish & Duck Moorings, the site of an even earlier pub of - naturally - the same name. Having

travelled miles, you now faced a 1-mile drive along a single-track road beside the Cambridge to Ely railway line just to get there. Nowhere was near it and if I recall, it had a succession of poor bar managers that hit the wrong note. Everyone takes an 'attitude' with their pub and aims at a sector of the market but if the focus is wrong it can be the end of you. Normally, there are a few chances – not for the manager though – a new broom sweeps clean – but new chances for new managers and optimism is yet again; high. Each manager starts from a lower and lower place if the wrong ones muck up until in the end the last one has only narrow amount of time and a small chance of succeeding.

But sometimes there is just something fundamental wrong and it isn't picked up, it gets missed. Throwing a disco when all your customers are pensioners, ballroom dancing for teenagers, you get the picture. Sometimes it's not even the managers fault, an owner who makes the wrong decision that the manager can do little about would be one example. I reckon this is where The Townhouse is headed right now.

The Kings Head, Wilburton

There is a change of license to Stretham Convenience Store Ltd, with a trading name of "Wilburton Flame Bar & Restaurant" dated October this year 24/00958/LIQ_02. Helge Neirad dropped this one on me and I followed it up with a trip to the shop and contact details passed to me. Dean is the man taking on the new venture. He said; "Pam left around 3 months ago and I've been in there working on it for 2.5 months now. We'll concentrate on mainly Indian and some English cuisine. I have a further 3 months' work left before we open and I'm going to have two real ales on and they'll be micro beers, I've already had a chat with Stuart up at The Barn and got some ideas of what I want". I'm hoping that the name Kings Head will still be used but I'm afraid it's set to have the new moniker over the door.



Which King of England is this a likeness of? I'm struggling to think it was anyone with a lovely great big bushy beard like this but, I suspect it's a mixture of many. Maybe George V?

Rural Coach Trip – The Infamy Trip - December 7th 2024

We managed to get the coach down from the West End House on time but our problems were already manifold; Storm Darragh had caused delays for our Cambridge members trying to join us. With smart use of our phones, we got everyone together and arrived at our first stop just 6-minutes behind schedule, at 12.06pm, it paid to think something could happen and it had!

The Plough, Little Downham. Two beers greeted us in Wantsum's Galaxy a 4.5% single hop light pale ale and the Woodforde ale; Nelson's Revenge a fruity IPA of 4.5%. Unfortunately, the NR was off very quickly and Papworth's Off the Lip (4.5%) was the fresh barrel. Yet again we had a quiet start, almost eerie in the way this so often happens but Will and I were awoken soon enough and reminded that no dogs are allowed in the pub and so we drank our beers outside where Gladys Emmanuel told Franki 'we're not mates' - he didn't look too worried.

The Plough already had several people in and the TV was showing some footie. While we liked the ales and the pub, perhaps some were looking for more 'house' input.

On then to pub two and we chose **The Village Inn, Witchford.** We hoped for two ales to choose from but the Tribute wasn't to be seen and lucky then that the TT Boltmaker was excellent. 'Not as nice as the committee meeting night' said one and the interior in a month had all changed to framed footie shirts. The locals still liked it, the Cambridge boys; not so much and I have to side with the latter here. It'll change again I'm sure as it's the landlord's hobby.

The third stop was the only pub that must know you're coming; **The White Horse at Witcham.** Our 2023 and 2024 rural POTY winner was laying on our food spread. There were three beers in Frome's Funky Monkey a 4.0% darkish IPA, Mighty Oak's Wonky Donkey; a soft floral blonde 4.3% ale and finally the solid household favourite; Elgoods Cambridge 3.8%, a light fruity bitter. For some, the White Horse serves its beers near the top of the temperature window while others see it as helping bring out softer notes in the beer. Fact is though, over a pint, the beer does get warmer (IMHO of course!) and the Elgoods wasn't right. The Funky Monkey went down a bundle with everyone and again, it's – shock - a dark beer at the White Horse! John nodded to this as we had giggled at the same thing just the month before. The warmth of both Linda & John really shone through and everyone loves going there.



John & Linda at The White Horse. John's serving a Wonky Donkey. Me? I'd have said "you've had enough now get out of my pub!"

We'd got ahead of the schedule and the driver had let it out, from his list that, our next pub was The Barn, Haddenham but, I had to tell everyone as The Barn only opens from 5pm, we were off to the **Three Pickerels, Mepal.** The spick and span lovely riverside pub had two real ales on and I purred with delight! They'd said there would only be two ales once in the year, Christmas; and there they were! Arron, the manager said; 'we simply can't get through two barrels a week so it's a Christmas only thing'. The beers were Hobson's Choice by the City of Cambridge Brewery; a 4.2% light ale and also Green King/Hardy & Hansens Rocking Rudolph a malted 4.2% Christmas ale complete with little flashing lights that do annoy if your stool happens to be plonked in front of them!

Disappointingly it seemed, the group made a choice entering the pub and posted up a sign for me which I sensed; "ready when you are Taffy!". Some posted very good scores for the two beer and others weren't so positive and

amazingly, their scores paired up! It was either a 7-7 or a 5-5. Mmm? But all scored the pub itself down. The young ladies behind the bar keep an eye on the restaurant side which needs two personalities....not easy. It is a whispering genteel restaurant atmosphere....church like almost. I'm still pleased I recommended the pub. The single pump beer choice at the Three Pickerels is always excellent and the beer well served, perhaps a little cold for some but 'worthy of inclusion'. Is it a pub, no, not really. It is a riverside bar and to be a pub would need a rethink.

There was then a long drive that took us to the **Maids Head, Wicken**. Standing in a beautiful setting, full of local drinkers, it usually has a decent choice of three real ales on but it is so up and down, it disappointed with the choice of Sharpe's Doombar but also had Lacon Saint Nick's 4.2% a chestnut beer which wasn't clear but tasted fine and this is a recurring problem at the Maids Head with many beers and I can say this being a regular user for Bar Billiards. Nobody had the Doombar and as the Facebook message had said beforehand, it served as an excellent comfort break. They had had the opportunity to shine but dropped the Brasso.

Back on the coach and another decent trip to get to the **Tharp Arms, Chippenham**. Equal POTY winner 2023 and runner-up in 2024, we hoped for big things but alas first, the bad news that Tom had been taken to hospital that very morning and is poorly. Bev was with him and the daughter was in charge. We wish Tom well.



All except our shy Chairman taking the photo but at least Gladys got in! From left to right; Phil, Lucasz, Wrecker, Paul, holding Gladys, Fil, Taffy with Franki, Helge, Bruce, Catherine, Ali and Peter.

The safe bet was to keep one real ale in St. Austell's Tribute 4.2% a brown refreshing pint. I found it fine but it just wasn't scored very highly and it was their only bullet in the gun unfortunately! A 45-minute break while the coach driver was on his 'break' plus a team photo and we were off again.

On then to the last stop and that was the Isleham duo of The Griffin and The Rising Sun. I did the RS first last year but knew that I wanted to see everyone's take on what the (new) Griffin would be like, so went there first – as we all did. Four pumps still (see the report below) but someone had a vinegared Wainright's; Worth the Walk. This was changed (but not forgotten on one scorecard!) and so now there were three. The all-round amber Woodforde's Wherry 3.8%, TT Landlord 4.1% and Nethergate's Old Growler a 5.0% Porter from Nethergate. When you have 4 pumps on you can afford a porter or stout that's as black as night. You'll be appealing to a minority of drinkers and it will be appreciated given that those that love it have travelled so far to have it! **THAT WAS EXACTLY THE SITUATION.**

To say it was popular is an understatement. The scores were off the scale!

I stayed for the other two which were excellent and then joined others at **The Rising Sun** where Landlord Pat was a bit quiet. Mind you, as last one in, he had reason to be an Old Growler with me - he knew where I'd been! I wasn't going to miss my GK Abbot Ale at 5.0% though. It is my 'go to' at the Rising Sun while most had the Woodforde's Tinsel Toes 4.4% a Christmas malted beer. One Abbot drinker gave it 10.0 – but that was the drink scoring!

So, that was it! We got back to Ely Railway Station dropping off the Cambridge crew bang on time at 7.30pm and then further on a few went in the West End House. Franki, my faithful dog who'd been great all day, led me onto the train and got me home – another great trip.

Where would you like to go for a trip? Drop me a line with your thoughts.

Scoring the Rural Trip

I'm delighted to say that 11 of the 12 trippers scored and the result is that we have a top 3 to continue; The Griffin, Isleham.
The White Horse, Witcham.
The Village Inn, Witchford.
In 4th and 5th (about) equally were The Plough, Little Downham and The Rising Sun, Isleham.

The next stage for Rural Pub of the Year

The committee was told on Wednesday 11th December, just after the trip of the outcome of the scoring by the passengers from the Rural Trip and of the one pub that we'd push forwards that couldn't be on the trip due to time constraints. That one pub to be added was The Carpenters Arms, Soham.

So, all four finalists will now be visited. Would you like to get involved and score as well? Drop us a line and get ready to go to straight away. All this needs to be done during the rest of December and early January. Contact Taffy at the bottom for details.

The Crown, Littleport

This next part is not with my CAMRA hat on but purely me trying out further my 'Pump' and 'Beer' Strategy on new landlady Sally. I took the time to visit her and found her very receptive to the offer of help which was very pleasing. Essentially it is a list of the types of beers which I narrow down to 3 basic types. I also show what can be put on a single pump growing business to two and finally to three pumps. With three pumps you take one of each type of beer. (See below at The Carpenters Arms, Soham).

Taking Sally's list of beers, I split them into the 3 groups for her. Beers are ridiculously difficult when a brewer's advertising section gets going with it. It's a license nowadays to say pretty much anything and all because 80% of our names are based on the COLOUR of the beer! "A light, hoppy, golden pale with a nice bright amber glow and neat malt and citra aftertaste" would cover everything except stout – or vampire's blood.

New Pub in Haddenham opened in November – The Barn

This opened on Wednesday 27th November with Adnams Best Bitter and Ghost Ship. Stuart Chapman was very anxious it seemed leading up to it as all the tradesmen as usual needed longer or came in a bit later. You're always reliant on other people aren't you!



The pub is a lovely size for 20 people and with more you get cozy like the old days and 'meet thy neighbour!'. The team got through the first fortnight and have learnt so much which we all have to do.

It's actually a great little watering hole in which you instantly feel at home. Haddenham folk are already chuffed to have it because the second week saw Papworth's Off the Lip and Fen Skater on. Amazingly, the two tasted the same. Mmmm? Week one and Stuart neatly sold the Adnams by late Saturday when he closes for 3 days. In week 2, the Papworth pair were gone Friday night leaving 'what for one day?'

I'm going to be hope that the pub goes to one brightly and one micro beer on gravity like the Adnams and Papworth but I'd also go to pull pump dispense to keep the beers full of life. Then I think, the oft flat micro beers will buck up under the pull pump. Anyway, the best of luck!

Prince Albert, Ely

My French mate Antoine and I have been visiting the Cutter regularly but we have ventured further into town now and this is the second of the three trips. The Albert was its usual Friday night bustling self with an orange stout on which I just missed, a GK seasonal Special and then the usual suspects which you'll know are; GK Abbot, GK IPA, Black Sheep best Bitter, TBM Old Brown Mouse and I believe Tribute(?). We both tried the Black Sheep and Old Brown Mouse in different order and he positively purred at the Old Brown Mouse! It seems we have similar tastes. The beer in the Fountain at Soham has been challenging to say the least so our night out was because we'd clocked up some long-distance beer credits.

West End House, Ely

Our first pub though was the furthest from the railway station – The West End House. I haven't been in the West End for two months and now this was thrice in two weeks and you can normally name Darren's beers off by heart. Not so fast! Firstly, he has changed the Timothy Taylor Landlord for Boltmaker and it was excellent. I'd love to do a case study of the customers and I'm sure they would say; 'I'd never heard of it but now I like it more than the TTL'. I'm sure the TTL will be back and they'll rotate but I am betting that the Boltmaker will get the bigger shout here. I also went in the next midweek and the second beer was the 'guest beer', the Wantsum Hurricane 4.5%. Firstly, Darren has had the last of Kent brewer Shepherd Neame's famous Spitfire. Yes, the beer that launched the funniest advertising campaign ever is no more. I'm not sure why and it'll come out in the wash but I'm told SN are leaving the brewing industry and so the landlord cast around to find some Wantsum, also from Kent. Achtung mien Heinkel, if ex-RAF serviceman Darren has only gone and lost a Spitfire and found a Hurricane!



Someone asked me what was the difference between the Spitfire and the Hurricane and I replied; "about 30mph".

The Wantsum Hurricane on the Friday was lightly cloudy and had soft hints of Elderflower which I liked although there was some debate over how the beer should taste and appear. It took a little getting used to but, by the end I was attuned. A check showed that it was meant to have a touch of citra as a New England IPA so when I went in on the following Thursday, it had a new amber taste and was delicious. I'm in no way disappointed by this, if it hadn't tasted right, I'd have said something and the fact that it tasted fine will do. Even Harry Houdini needed a bit of luck!

Search in 'Google Images' and 'Shepherd Neame Spitfire adverts' for hours of politically incorrect humour that is...sorry, sorry, "WAS" once upon a time funny. My favourite; Lager ist Gut! (beware of German propaganda)

During November, Darren utilised a clause allowing him to cast around for a genuine guest ale as, being ex-RAF himself, he enjoys the custom of our current and retired servicemen after the Remembrance Sunday Service in the city centre. What will be the new permanent beer? We'll see. You bet your 'Cats Eyes' Cunningham we'll see!

Carrot anyone?

The Rising Sun, Isleham

Pat reports business to be very good and along with a really nice drop of IPA or Abbott, he'd just finished a Lacon's Phantom. "That went really quickly but I can't get any more" he said. On a Sunday lunchtime, there were around 70 people in the pub mostly dining.

He gave me two identical drops of draught beer from Greene King. Level Head 4.0%; Hoppy aroma, with delicately balanced tropical & grapefruit notes. Prior Life 3.4%; Fruity and refreshing unfiltered all-day IPA. Soft tropical notes of lychee and mango. Grapefruit citrus aroma with floral back note.

No matter what Greene King's tasting notes; they were identical! Good old GK!

The Carpenters Arms, Soham

A rare treat, on the day of the last newsletter (I ranted on about a lack of EPAs, remember?), I got to the Carpenters which, always has three real ales on and they were all EPAs! The Bass Premium Ale 4.4% is a regular and was its usual self, a dark beer doing well, the Woodforde's Once Bitten is a Deep Copper and 4.0% and tasted on this occasion very similar to the Lacons Phantom a Dark Ale at 4.4% which was also on.



Above; Happy to see three dark ales for the first time. Right; Amber, Amber, Gold. Are these two line-ups balanced? The Bure Gold is down as a Gold, but has hints of citra proving names can't be trusted

I didn't think the Phantom was itself but the other two were great and it was a rare treat to not just enjoy but to enthuse over the three outstanding beers. Enquiries were made by Joppo for more Phantom but they aren't brewing anymore for now. The pub though, had three dark ales followed by three GALPs (Golds, Ambers, Lights and Pales) which I believe isn't ideal but again, it's the pubs decision, it really is.

A shout out too for the staff at the pub who have taken up knowing all about the beers served, what they are and what is next etc, maybe it is in response to or not but this was a comment in a newsletter in the spring/summer about last December's Rural Trip and we're pleased of it anyway whatever the reason! It really IS a local and the dog roams free, all customers are known by their names and your anticipated drink is often already poured which I suppose nowadays is all wrong but I love it! On the wall is a Woodforde's Brewery poster inviting you to take in some of their bracing walks - before naturally enough entering a Woodforde's pub at the end. Booklets with route's are available at the bar.

The Chequers, Sutton

A midweek trip out to The Chequers found the pub doing well for a Thursday evening and most customers were on the two ales be they GK's IPA or Morland's Speckled Hen. Miaja's pub was its usual immaculate self. The landlady finishes at the end of February 2024 and said; 'that's it for me, that's the day I stop, they're getting the keys back!'

I think there's a lot of potential at this Stonegate pub and the ale list is quite good, yes, mostly brightly beers but selected well I reckon it could do really well.

The White Horse, Witcham

John was his usual chirpy self when I popped in and found the ever-reliable Elgoods Cambridge on and a new one on me from Black Country and Bradley's Finest Golden 4.2% – or BFG – which was a nice dark malted beer. Now you heard that right! At the White Horse, a dark beer. Whatever next!

Both it and the Cambridge were lovely. When asked 'where are the Parkway Brewery beers?' that have almost become a part of the pub furniture he mentioned; 'I think they may have gone! The rep is on gardening leave and the brewery phone number isn't answering!'

If so, that's a shame – it's always a shame. John always tries to keep a beer under £4.00 per pint and it looks like the last brewer that could help with that, has gone.

That means that someone else gets a chance. Linda had recently said that with things how they are, that much hoped for 3rd pump with perhaps an occasional EPA or dark beer have all but vanished. (see Rural Trip above for news that John & Linda went out to that third pump).



The Fountain, Soham

I've stuck with the pub; I've reported on poor beer and now it is time to report on the good beer! People ask 'why do you still go there' but I have invested in Phil and Sylvia and now I hope, they'll invest in me. We have the always good Fuller's London Pride and Wychwood's Hobgoblin Gold and we'll ask nicely for others like Theakston's Old Peculiar, Landlord and Boltmaker etc and whatever else, cross our fingers!

After months of pain and poor pints.... Oh! how we suffered! – the Fountain is back on the right path. For over 4-months now we've had the perfect pour – no, really - we have! Yet through this, Phil and Sylvia, who are celebrating a year at the pub in mid-December, are yet again finishing their third stint of looking after the Kings Arms in Ely where, finding a new manager to run it has proven difficult and yet, at the same time, this time, the beer back at the Fountain has been really good. Surely this means good staff? – yes, of course but also staff they can trust. The landlord is a no-nonsense man and aged the same as me at 63, he knows what works and what doesn't. Chatting with Phil is easy, a love of old skool moto cross, motorbikes in general, scooters (Si, Lambretta avanti!) and of course remembering when you could buy 3 pints for a £1 - that is always worth a story!

'The Wychwood Hobgoblin is permanent!' said a determined Phil a few months back and so he flits between the Hobgoblin Gold and the Ruby. The other beer was usually the Marston's Pedigree which isn't much of a beer and is about to be stopped of course (it's one of the Carlsberg 11). Even with the Pedigree, beer drinking numbers are up at the pub due to the solving of an oft Soham problem; undesirables! This element have been thrown out (they missed me though!) and I hope to persuade from INSIDE the pub as a regular customer that, the London Pride, Theakston's Old Peculiar and TT Boltmaker are worth a try..... I'm not leaving even if I fail and I have to stop whinging. I reckon there's more to come!

I don't think Isleham is surrounded by enough chimneys to be a Real Ale emporium but, hold the thought of a country pub like the King of the Belgians at Hartford, or Ely's The Prince Albert – but on our country patch. Perhaps the pumps could though be arranged with the light to dark on and from left to right; like The Maypole in Cambridge?

The pub's got all it needs to be a real ale home with more than the present 4 ales on. Anyone who's self-employed will tell you; 'You can't get the staff!' and while Mike's in charge, I don't think his staff are too worried what it is they pull and so in the end, that old greasy pole always brings you down!

Red Lion Stretham

The pub has had to drop the 'Carlsberg 11'; the Wainright's, Banks, Eagles and the Cumbernauld's that it used to get in and now 'settles' for Timothy Taylor Landlord – not bad. No tears for the lost I suspect! A recent visit showed it to be the only real ale on and a fairly cold one at that. Just what TTL doesn't need; cold, the subtle flavours going unreleased.

The Griffin, Isleham



The Griffin, Isleham

Count them! Four pumps at the Griffin. What a difference in 24-months. From 3-2-3 or any combination of poor pipes and flat heads to four gleaming beers. Real pride and care is now being taken and even a word to another customer to ask if his beer was 'still OK'? The selection of beers is a credit as well.

The Wainright's Worth the Walk is a nice light amber, The Woodforde's Wherry is his session ale while the TTL is 'the attraction' and his middleline GALP. With these three, he can afford to keep an old favourite of Mike's; The Old Growler which is a lovely drop from the Nethergate Brewery.

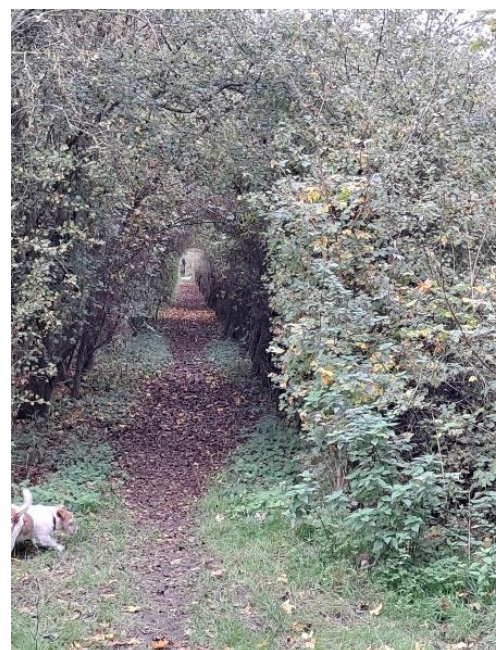
Red Lion, Brinkley

Old pubs are not so hard to find but often the image is let down somewhere with just the smallest hint of Formica. Well, there's none of that at the Red Lion in Brinkley. Built in 1562, the fireplace is a monster 6 feet wide and churns out fantastic heat on one lump of coal. Thank God we've made progress since then!

The lounge to the left is dedicated to dining while the bar to the right can do either. Real ales in fantastic condition are; Earl Soham Brewery's; Victoria Bitter 3.6%, Brandeston Gold 4.5% and Adnams Broadside 4.7% plus the Adnams gets varied up. The nice young lady behind the bar thought that Earl Soham was, well, at Soham! But (if you don't know) it's on the scenic route from Stowmarket, east onto the A1120 to Yoxford on the Norfolk Coast. Those of us from Soham loop south and know it but if you're from Ely, you'll be going 'over the top' and be none-the-wiser!

The Three Pickerels, Mepal

Still continues to serve the perfect pint AND a micro beer at that, in November it was Wolf Brewery's Sly Wolf 4.4% which was an under-hopped nicely balanced blond beer. 'That might be the last from Wolf' said a young lady behind the bar. 'We've done all the Xtreme's and Wolf beers now and we're not sure what (the landlord) is getting next'.



The tunnel of leaves and trees. It's actually three times this in length. View is from the A142. Franki is just making sure we won't be lost getting back!

Armistice Sunday was quiet but they tell me that trade has been good. When asked if they were going to two ales, the staff were certain that a second will be going on in mid-December.

Mepal; A lovely walk

There's an excellent walk from the very edge of Sutton to Mepal and if you park at the far end of Tramar Drive you can cross the road and walk through a nicely shaped tunnel through 400 metres of shrubs and trees. This then takes you past recommend it. Cambridge Machinery Sales and even more 'tunnel' onto Mepal. A local dirt lane has been



The back entrance to the Three Pickerels, Mepal. The pub is virtually new with tens of thousands £££££ spent. A lazy day in the countryside by the river - this is the place.

levelled and stoned making it drier and easier but unfortunately, there's 400m that will get muddy in December to February crossing the farmer's field. But don't let the point be lost, it is a very pretty walk and I highly recommend it.

Why the emphasis on two ales? Well, I think the Three Pickerels are not optimising their 'local pub' aspect and I'm sure that having two real ales to choose from would release some of that aspect but the pub needs to look less minimal and pure. The beer is always well kept and the pub also has GKs Level Head and Beavertown's Neck Oil on draught. So, if you do want to try the pub and you find yourself able to get there in mid-December for what will be more than likely two pumps then your timing could be very, very good!

Anyway, the driving around those parts is beautiful and you should make the Red Lion, Brinkley a destination stop along with The Chestnut Tree at West Wrating just down the road.

Oh Ely!

A trip into town again to introduce my French friend to more Ely pubs. Last month was the West End House and The Prince Albert but this month, I gave the warning that "all these pubs will be a nightmare and all over the show" and that's just how they proved. Sticking to the very middle of Ely we first hit the **Minster Tavern** where just one beer was on for the poor barmaid had barely started pouring the Deep 61 when the pump suddenly drove froth at her showering her in froth! Three pumps were out of action awaiting their chance. So, it's Friday night and now 3 from 4 pumps aren't working at 6.30pm, yup, this can't go wrong, can it?

Never mind and on to the **Kings Arms** where the new manager Steve George is still learning and feeling his way. The London Pride was fine but the Hobgoblin Gold was dead in the glass which, I can't qualify why but, it was a touch above cool. There's so much to learn – and fast and the job can unnerve you. I hope he gets the support he needs.



So never mind again! On to the **Lamb Hotel** which just doesn't get any better. The Speckled Hen and the IPA tasted the same, identical. Like two IPAs which means the Old Speckled Hen had been shot and stuffed.

Never, never mind! On then to the Townh..... sorry, NO chance -The Townhouse doesn't have any real ale on at all nowadays. We await it's return.

So, to **The Hereward** which never gets it all right at any time but can be half

right most of the time. Six pumps always look good but it's a case of quantity and not quality in our most important branch pub. Why 'the most'? This is the place where young man and woman meet real ale for the first time and where they likely try real ale maybe for the last time. We went for halves of two Milestone beers, the Honey Porter (4.5%) which was lovely and the XX Anniversary Ale (4.5%) which was flat. The Moongazer Jumper (3.9%) was a tremendous amber to finish.

The very heart of Ely has so little right about it and it has been like that at all these pubs for a very long time now bar **The Minster Tavern** which, did though, have an excellent beer run pre-covid for a couple of years. We all remember it, we can all date it, it's THAT rare and it just shouldn't be. Perfectly poor planning leads to poor performance! There is room for a pub to make a serious go of real ale in the centre of Ely but it remains to be seen who wants it enough. It really is a case of not the dog in the fight but the fight in the dog.

There are No CM notes from 11.12.2024. Just one or two items have been added above.

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]

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.

Photos this month are provided by; The Endless British Pub Crawl, Wiggy, Shepherd Neame, Nethergate and someone who loves pub signs!

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