

Rural View by Taffy. 1

January 2025 edition.

Coming Up

Another bumper month and why not? 12 -pages again and it WAS Christmas after all! Two beer festival meetings and two committee meetings; the troops have been busy!

You just have to admire the work the 'Cambridge 3' are putting in, it is relentless and all the time they travel and live that much further down the road than us 'lewks'. I have found it hard going myself, I haven't had any form of break since I started overloading in about April last year. Anyone fancy looking after the Facebook page?

When the time comes, we've got to pick up where 'the 3' leave off and there are signs of many people getting involved. Paul Butler is back (he never really went away) and Phil Eden and Martin Hughes are fully involved now. We need another 3-4 committed members and we'll start to tramp on. We can't look upon those who won't stir. We need to make them invisible or we'll do nothing but go mad ourselves!

We start with a request for festival volunteers, then some BF information, then a little SGM and CM news. We'd like your participation in two things; details on pages 1/2. I've updated the Branch Guide to our Rural Pubs; have a look and see who's up and who's down, that is just below or via a link permanently at the foot of each Rural View. Secondly, we'd like you to visit our shortlist of Good Beer Guide pubs; there are 15 of them and they need scoring. Details on page 2.

Also, I visit all 5 real ale houses in Soham in one week and the best beer is going to surprise you! That's pages 3/4. News of two pubs are reopening on page 4. We revisit The Barn at Haddenham on page 5 to check it's still good and the Three Kings in Haddenham as well; all on pages 5/6. The Maids Head, Wicken has a misty line I now confess has been like it all year and Bruce, Ali and myself name our best beers of the year and where we had them on page 7.

I get to visit the two dry-of-ale pubs at Littleport and ALSO The Ship at Brandon Creek one evening on page 8 to get that far flung outpost done. I question Greene King's strategy and ask is there an "obvious" beer missing as well as finding out that CAMRA Discourse members will only miss one of the 'Carlsberg 11'. Which one? It's on Page 9.



7-8 February 2025
15th Elysian Winter Beer Festival
Volunteers Needed

Scan me!
For more details

CAMRA
Campaign for Real Ale

On page 10, Cambridge Branch report on their Strolling Social around Ely on the eve of Christmas and it turns out we're doing OK. We've got all the beer festival dates for the year ahead in 2025 on page 11 plus a comprehensive list of bus routes to take if having a rural drink courtesy of Phil Eden.

Let's Start Then!

Volunteers needed for the Elysian Beer Festival

Firstly, we appear to be shortest as we (go to press) of those able to put up on Monday 3rd February at 9am or take down on Sunday 9th February. Can you help unload and load?

Each year the branch has a good supply of willing volunteers that decide they'd like to serve real ale drinkers for fun. Each year we get so many yet each year we wish we had more!

Training for the 2025 beer festival is on Thursday 6th February from 7pm onwards and if unable to make it then it can be done just before any shift you agree to work on.

There are three shifts per day in which you can take one of the shifts between opening at Noon and closing at 10pm. Each shift you do comes with free beer tokens and a food token to be used at the Maltings Bar. There are several areas we could do with a

hand. The first is being a barperson serving the beers and ciders – simple enough. Another is in the entrance lobby where we take new memberships, sell the £20 beer tokens, deal with enquiries and bring in the empties.

There are two more that get forgotten; designated first aid and security. The first aid; we have cover and equipment for while security isn't as bad as it sounds! We just need to ensure that the venue is secure and that people are safe and happy. You'll find a dedicated team of people who want to enjoy their hobby, are humorous and want their enjoyment to be contagious!

Please consider giving just a shift of up to 4-hours of your time and in return you'll get some food and beer vouchers. We can't do this without help and we do all our voluntary work in order to enjoy the great drink named cask ale or real ale!

If you can help - even if it's just for a few hours - please fill out our volunteer form:

<https://ely.camra.org.uk/dl.php?id=241190> and return it to FestivalStaffing@ely.camra.org.uk.

The 15th Ely Elysian Beer Festival

Friday 7th – Saturday 8th February 2025

The beer ordering group met just before Christmas to select the ales for this year's festival. Some 78 casks will be there with a couple of back-ups and what with 16 Key kegs and all the cider the list comes to 104 beers and ciders. The ordering started during the break and will continue now all the way through with Will Smith getting the casks sorted, TBM the key kegs and Mike Playle sorting the ciders. Most breweries will have two ales on and if there's a brewery bar then they are allocated around 4 plus ales.

We've gone for almost 20 light ales, 20 IPA type ales, 20 dark and strong ales and 10 porters and stouts. The last 8 barrels are coming from Three Blind Mice and right now I don't know what they'll supply. Within this, we have all levels of ABV all the way from a 2.8 to an 8% ABV as well as having low and no alcohol beers.

This year we've aligned our own taster notes much tighter against the lists of available beers and hope you'll like the beers we are familiar with, had ourselves and push forward among ourselves, basically we've become more cohesive.

On top of this we have a first for our BF! All six on the shortlist for Champion Mild of East Anglia are at the festival and they will have to be judged! All that quaffing and slurping, well.... we'll do our best. But from starting out behind schedule and by holding beer selection and beer festival meetings every 14-21 days, we have caught up and after our CM of 07.01.2025, we feel we're about ready. We just need you, the volunteer, the helper to make it happen.

SGM followed by a CM at the 3at3

December 11th

An SGM was held on Wednesday 11th December at the 3at3 just off Forehill. Held to approve four years of books which the Deputy Regional Director for East Anglia, Chris Rouse had put together Chris had worked hard to get everything ready just in time for the evening. The monkey is now off our backs and members gave the nod knowing that we'd be getting our budget for the branch beer festival approved pretty quickly after the meeting.

We then turned sharply to a regular committee meeting (very sensible!) and the most important part to come out of it was our approach to the Good Beer Guide (GBG) pubs that we will list plus the separate judging that goes into Pub of the Year (POTY). The Cambridge Three (not to be mistaken for the Soham One!) have burnt the midnight oil again and devised a system that can work in our branch which is so much smaller than Cambridge's. CAMRA requires branches to consider the members beer scores when choosing their GBG entrants. We have done this in creating our shortlist and now need our own and members from adjoining branches to score those shortlisted pubs that they have visited recently. See below on how to take part.

POTY is also taking place now through to March and is judged by the committee members who are already visiting the candidates. 4 Rural pubs are vying for best Rural Pub of the Year and 5 city pubs also for City Pub of the Year. From the two winners, we'll pick the Branch winner.

CM at the 3at3.

January 7th

The committee is creating a sub-group to handle campaigning and planning issues including three existing planning 'situations' involving pubs past and future. Headed by Ali Cook who is in this role at the Cambridge branch, it's hoped we can be navigated around fairly quickly with his help. Our first item is the planned pub on Cam Drive, Ely. This is at extremely short notice for us of just one week (Read about this on page 11).

We slid past beer festival news as it's all good but we have been offered the chance to judge the Champion Mild of East Anglia; and we intend to do it to the best of our ability. Membership is holding at 460 before the influx at our BF so all is good there.

There was talk of an award for the best Club of the Year. Luckily for me, all 5 active Clubs in the branch are Rural and I offered the 3 that have ale on regularly (a start you would agree). The meeting was both exciting and exhausting.

The Good Beer Guide – a guide to voting for the five entrants

Two things first; CAMRA creates a book that appears each September named 'the Good Beer Guide' in which the best 4,500 pubs for real ale are listed. Each branch is allocated a set number of places and the first thing is, that it isn't a 'pass mark', it isn't the very best 4,500 in the whole Country but it IS the best in each branch in the whole country!

The Ely Branch is allocated FIVE places and the committee deemed that given 24 (soon to be 26) are Rural and 13 are City pubs, the allocation would be 3 Rural to 2 City. You the members, are asked to beer score all the time and although you score 24/7 and 31/12 the tally-up point for our year was in December for the next coming book. A pub scoring above 3.4% average is now in the final judging. This year, we have 9 rural and 6 city pubs and while it's only been the beer to here, the judging now slightly alters. We now need you to mark the shortlisted pubs that you have visited in the last six months. The easiest way to do this is online <https://ely-gbg.camra.org.uk>. Log in with your usual CAMRA password or you can score in person at a CM. Last marking day is Sunday 9th February. The winner will be revealed at our February Committee meeting.

You should still continue to beer score everytime you have an ale and we can also see which of our pubs are currently serving the best beer monthly – clever chaps! And towards that next December tally point.

Pub of the Year – a guide

This is done at the committee level and short lists are drawn up for the rural and city winners. Awards are given to the winner of both. In order to judge either group, a committee member must visit all in that sector and when the rural faces off versus the city for branch POTY which is the main award, you must have visited both the group winners in order to make caste vote.

The short list for Rural is these 4;

[The Carpenters Arms, Soham,](#)

[The Griffin, Isleham,](#)

[The White Horse, Witcham,](#)

[The Village Inn, Witchford.](#)

The Short list for City is these 5;

[The High Flyer,](#)

[The West End House,](#)

[The Prince Albert,](#)

[The Drayman's Son,](#)

[The Cutter Inn.](#)

The Committee will sniff, slurp and quaff its way diligently around the pubs in a job that is a delight to do! It'll be decided at our March 4th branch CM (held at the High Flyer) and we have until March 16th 2025 to submit our results to CAMRA.

Branch Guide to our Rural Pubs – first update completed

<https://ely.camra.org.uk/dl.php?id=241791> Six months after the initial guide went up, we've updated the guide of the rural pubs and clubs in our patch, the current edition was renewed on 31.12.2024 so follow the link above to download it. The good news is that several pubs have been promoted at every level with just the Tharp Arms stepping down from Outstanding to Excellent and if you've been reading last month's Rural trip; you'll understand.

I visited all 5 establishments that sell real ale in Soham over seven days. Here's a brief report on the regular 4 plus, one you that you would have never expected

Equally best pint of Abbot and IPA in the Branch Lounge or Bar, Soham Town Rangers

A bold statement. The lead out pub for a pint of either Abbot or IPA is of course the Prince Albert in Ely and I have to say that the Soham Town Rangers clubhouse is on a par if not better. Of course, on a par as a first visit means longevity and consistency are unproven but, the beer was superb on my Friday night drink and so, I got my friend to try it on the Saturday evening too. The temperature is spot-on and the one thing that gets mucked up so often.

Cop this! The lounge bar serves cold IPA and Abbot while the clubroom bar serves cellar temperature! "It's an anomaly of the cellar" said the bar manager Johnnie. Later I had a pint of 'mix' (Abbot and IPA) and that was glorious too. The lounge is situated to the left of the clubhouse while the bar/clubroom is serviced by an entrance canopy when looking from the front and best avoided for those that don't play the game.

Johnnie later revealed that he's one half of Spinney Abbey cider! "I'm Johnnie and the other Johnnie (from the farm) is known as Jay". Despite an excellent pint, real ale oddly enough is not his poison; It's lager. But anyway, a good effort for someone who doesn't drink ale.

The lounge is like any nice relaxing lounge with the exception that the club likes a huge football screen in there as well! I'm going to drop in again and again. As a typical club room, it's best to enter with your own friend as the other customers can tend to be in tight groups.

The Ship, Soham

Has got one really good thing going for it, it's just £3.80 per pint. If going for a session I'd consider getting two pints in and enduring the first to get the T.A.T.T. of the second bang-on! An over cold pint of IPA greeted me and was still too cold as I got near the bottom, it just isn't fun! The pub can't buy good publicity I'm afraid. Very cold beer, a frosty atmosphere, a beer festival with 4 beers and lots of work to be done.

The Cherry Tree, Soham

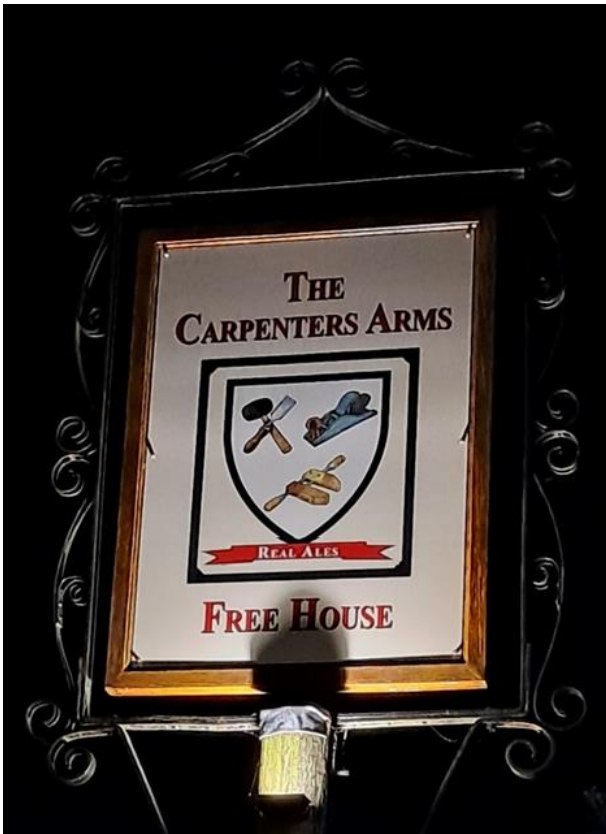
There's nothing so lonesome, morbid or far than to walk in the bar of a pub with no.....bar! Gorgeous beer awaits you in the form of GKs pair; IPA and Abbot and if with a meal, that's going to be great but for the drinker; there's nowhere to go. It's quite understandable that the pub received beer scores of 4.0 recently on its two ales, but really? No bar means no good and with two sides to the service area and no bar well then that's doubly so. Give us a bar to sit at please especially as there is room. One piece of good news though, I asked of the 'no dogs' to which the manager said that it was OK in the lounge and I was very appreciative on a cold winters evening. I sat in a room of 6 people spread out and 4 were tapping on their phones; conversation was completely non-existent. They talk of long; drawn-out winter nights and I had just discovered one.

The Fountain was fourth and the Hobgoblin Gold and Fullers London Pride are both excellent. Landlord Phil reports that they are asking owners Craft Union for a guest beer; "It'll be local if we get it for sure". I offered that Old Brown Mouse by Three Blind Mice was the only beer to be considered. I also chucked in Timothy Taylor's Boltmaker as the other replacement for the Hobgoblin Ruby and the Marstons Pedigree. The beer is excellent still, the dogs that they fostered have all left now (all 4 were related so they were kept together) and the Kings Arms, Ely is standing alone at last.....well, until the next time that is! Numbers at Christmas were excellent and the quiz sold out.

But there's always a complaint isn't there, especially when it is 'your local'. The attack of the TVs is constant, even when there's nothing on.

But NOT The Comrades Club, Soham.

Run by a small committee, the Club was at a zenith going into Covid-19. Even draught beer often wasn't to be seen and occasionally at best you might see a Tetley's tap. Membership numbers were high and after much cajoling the pub took on real ale on one pump. Despite selling out every drop, the club didn't re-order so the beer was always 10 days apart. Like all social clubs, they become a popular place for a wedding or a wake on a Friday and so the beer was never reaching the weekend. Then, unfortunately, along came Covid-19 and the beer turned to rot in the pipes. This was the excuse needed to stop real ale.



Two photos, two messages; Real Ale sold here at the Carpenters Arms, Soham

...and finally the fifth I visited; **The Carpenters Arms, Soham**. The pub is battling for the best rural pub in the branch and quite frankly the case for the pub is strong. Real Ale is a big thing in the pub, take it away and a lot of customers would disappear. Even the year-old pub swing sign in front is crested with the words 'REAL ALES'! When accrediting the pub with points for 'do the pubs values fall in line with those of CAMRA's' we can look at that and say an emphatic 'yes!'.

Pub News; (**also see page 11 – Cam Drive)

Opening, Closing and awaiting.....

We are expecting two pubs to open again in early 2024. The old **Kings Head in Wilburton** which is now Wilburton Flame opens this Thursday 16th January. "We aren't starting with real ale but it will have a bar as well as the restaurant".

The Crown, Fordham which will open around late February.

The branch had success last month regarding **The Lazy Otter** near **Stretham** and its request for planning permission to turn it into a guest house being turned down but there's been an appeal again. So, we have to battle on.

We're reviewing another pub to see if the planning permission has been exceeded. Details to follow.

A pub on **Cam Drive**. ** see below.



Wilburton Flame. No ale at the Inn.....well, to start with.

A Picture is worth a thousand words

I took this photo (left) on the Rural Pub Trip. What you're seeing are three consecutive pints of Frome's Funky Monkey a 4.0% darkish IPA. The pub is **The White Horse, Witcham**.



The first one is with Peter Holmes (top right), the second (nearest camera) is of mechanic Wrecker's (you might have guessed it from the nails) and the third is mine as I had ordered.

We had a similar situation a year ago when several of us visited The Tharp Arms, Chippenham and The Rising Sun, Isleham when judging for POTY. Whatever Bruce drank took the head straight off his beer! The rest of us had varying amounts of head to the bottom of the glass though.

Seeing that Michelle's 'lippy' had made no change to her drink we could dismiss this for Bruce (but I still have my doubts!) but it remains unexplained. There is a point in all this where, especially looking for a head for beer scoring, you just HAVE TO cut the landlord and his pub some slack, you have to be sure. Anyway, the beer was great either way.

The Barn, Haddenham

Landlord Stuart was on duty come Boxing Day and Ally and I did a monster walk trying to burn some excess pudd off and don't you say a word!!!! OK, the fine walk along the river bank of the Great Ouse south of Aldreth was far longer than my mental vision but it was much needed. Wet trousers and soaked feet, we entered and I had first the Adnams Southwold and then the Ghost Ship. Quite flat to look at of course the beer is though lovely.

Barely has he opened and been encouraged by all of us but there's a note of caution here. Gravity beer lasts when racked above a cellar in the winter but it is going to be tougher in the summer. Even one degree higher and life will ebb out of the beer, life it can't afford to lose. Add to this that hopped beers suffer drastically when they're warm and when do we drink light hopped beers? In the summer.

I don't like offering a problem without a solution, it's part of my 'self-employed' DNA. When someone says 'your beer is warm' he's a know-all but if he's giving me the problem and a solution, he's someone trying to help me. I feel the pub MUST get the temperature down first and how much that costs will matter a great deal in the next move. Two pubs can help a great deal at this point and both are legends of the gravity pour and both sell the Adnams using gravity dispense, the first is the White Swan at Conington and even more so; The Queens Head at Newton.

The Three Kings, Haddenham

I have a confession. This is our branch unlucky pub for 2024. The pub is well up on the Taffy Lloyd pubometer. The recent rural trip could only visit 8 of the 12 great pubs the branch currently has. By promising to visit 4 new pubs in this, the second year, the Three Kings could make the cut IF we visited The Barn as well but that would be closed come our passing it at 3pm. We could have visited it as it's enroute but, it was too soon between the Three Pickereles, Mepal and the Tharp Arms, Chippenham. The toilet breaks have to be placed correctly and The Maids Head, Wicken won the lavatory seat so to speak. My final point is that when asked of the 4 missing the trip, which one of them I would forward for POTY, I offered The Carpenters Arms, Soham. It wasn't a mistake to leave out the Three Kings, it came 4th last year and since then it hasn't changed but others have! What could it do about it? Invest a little more time in being personal, invest in time with the customers. The owners are very business-like and deal with customers. A visit on Boxing Day saw the usual Greene King beers IPA and Fireside plus Grain Store's Rutland Best Bitter (3.4%). All well served but almost everyone in the pub was on lager...



Maids Head malaise?

One pump all year at the pub has given a misty beer. I could have said it earlier but I was just trying to call the pub 'unlucky' which was my clumsy effort at protecting it. However, it is time it got sorted. The pub has 3 real ale pumps but all 3 are in the dining area and as such I can't see what's happening. The beer on this one odd pump tastes fine. It has a good head, good body and all that is wrong is the view through the glass because it's misty.

I approached CAMRA Discourse for some help from some veteran Landlords and the advice was that the beer was either getting heated or chilled - hard! - before getting to the pump at the normal temperature. Another piece of help from Linda and John at **The White Horse, Witcham** was that the line will have to be changed. It was a lesson that flummoxed John on entering his pub nearly 20-years ago. The advice offered at the time; "you'll do nothing with it". The offending line was replaced and – no more problem!

At the beginning of the year, the Maids Head had 3 real ales on and stood to be a “go-to” real ale pub IF Bev could get her head around stocking ale and running everything else all at once! Rescue (for Bev!) came in the form of Ian Braybrooke, a long-time barman at the Maids Head and in the new position of manager taking on both this pub and the sister pub at Fordham; The White Pheasant. Ian has been serving on and off at the pub for the best part of a decade and hopefully this will all be sorted out soon. I hope this will allow one mind to focus on the quality of the beer; we’ll let you know!

Beer of the Year 2024

I’ve asked Bruce Patten back to give us his favourite beers of the year and he’s joined by Ali Cook our branch secretary. Ali is everywhere! Like a whirling dervish he can be anywhere at any time! It looks like the vast majority of hits are with the darker ales.

Ali Cook’s Choices

Thankfully NBSS retains records of all the beers that I have scored. Here’s my top 5 for 2024;

*My first 4.5 rated beer of 2024 was in the Dove in Bury St Edmunds. **Mighty Oak’s Old Man and the Sea**. It’s a rich stout, chocolatey and fruity. Excellent pub, excellent brewery, excellent beer.*

*In February, on a trip to Nottingham, I discovered **Carnwood’s Vixen** in the Hop Pole in Chilwell. It was a well-balanced copper best bitter in excellent condition.*

*In April, while judging for East Anglia CAMRA’s Pub of the Year, I had a delicious **Earl Soham’s Victoria Bitter**, dispensed direct from the cask, at the King’s Head in Laxfield (Suffolk). Fantastic old village pub and a great beer to make the journey totally worthwhile. In October I had a delicious **Stewart Brewing’s Stewart 80/-** (80 shilling) in the Oxford Bar in Edinburgh. A traditional Scottish beer to neatly sum up a trip to the Scottish capital city. Great pub too.*

*My only 5-star beer of 2024 (all the others mentioned and some others beside were 4.5s) arrived on Christmas Eve in the Champion of the Thames in Cambridge (Cambridgeshire CAMRA Pub of the Year). If you know the pub and its traditions, you’ll have already guessed that it was **Greene King Abbot Reserve**. They only advertise its availability both on the chalkboard outside and on the handpump by a simple star.*

Taffy’s Choices

Looking back at 2024 I supped some great beer. Here are the ones I enjoyed the most;

Captain Bob by Mighty Oak Brewery.

I had this at The Cock, Monks Eleigh near Lavenham.

Phantom by Lacons Brewery.

A seasonal dark ale for Halloween, served at its best in the Carpenters Arms, Soham.

Abbot Ale by Greene King.

Served at its very best in Soham Town Rangers clubroom. Who’d have thought it!

Dreadnought by Horncastle Brewery.

Served in the brewery’s tap bar Old Nick’s Tavern in Horncastle.

Norfolk Topper by Barsham Brewery.

The Blue Bell, Stoke Ferry. A lovely light ale for a hot August day (photo right).

Mystery Beer.

I visited the Red Lion, Swaffham Prior and had a Mild that sparkled on the tongue. I didn’t note the name but it has to have been Bateman’s Dark M yet I’ve had nothing like it since!



Ali Cook; Scoring under the table?





And finally, from Bruce Patten, his best four real ales of the year are;

Fuggles by Wantsum. At The Plough Lt. Downham.

Old Tom Berry by Robinsons. At the Carpenters Arms, Soham.

Chocolate Luxado by Xtreme. At the Peterborough Beer Festival.

Barbarian Best by Roman Way. At the Black Horse, Rampton.

Three pubs in an evening

The Ship, Brandon Creek

A recent trip after Christmas netted one good result; the beer was warmer than the very cold ales I drank there in the summer. Although a Freehouse, the pub sticks closely to some Greene King regular beers plus the Lacons Encore. I tried the GK Fireside first which wasn't right but after an argument with the barman, I recommended I try a fresh drop and sure enough; it was fine. Initially I could smell the mustiness (he couldn't). The Fireside,

the London Glory and the IPA were all similar in taste and condition so I ask why is the Ship serving all three together? The following morning, I chatted with landlord Justin and followed up with some suggestions for different beers. Justin reminded me that their drinkers are driving so they need low ABV beers. My suggestions were; Lacons' Norfolk Gem at 3.6%, Lacons' Falcon Ale at 4.2% and Timothy Taylor Boltmaker at 4.0%.

The Swan on the River, Littleport - no ale

I've found out that the owners, a married couple; live on site. Although a forlorn hope, I will try again to see if the landlord can be persuaded to give it a try. The pub already has GKs Level Head and "Beavertown's" Neck Oil on draught. I've left a message for the manager Niimal and followed it up with an email recommending a couple of beers.

The Plough & Harrow, Littleport - no ale

My last stop was at the Plough which is on the southern end on the road to Ely. Previous landlord Don, who took the pub off tenant Steven Shipp has relinquished it back to Steve at the beginning of December and the two remaining hand pumps have even been removed so there's nothing deader than dead. The previous landlady, Lin Paling is now a customer. The pub is yet again dead with a small group of people hunkered down staring at their phones, sitting at the bar in silence. It felt like "people are waiting to get well" a line from a favourite 1971 film of mine.

*Greene King, all the gear.....

By chance I was at Ely Rugby Club (EOSA on the Downham Rd) for a match just before Christmas chatting to a lady when I discovered she has a very good job at the Bury St. Edmunds brewery. It would be unfair to give a name or directly quote her as she was truly 'off duty' and well, the most revealing part was that she said how Greene King



tries many beers but they keep coming back to the IPA and the Abbot. As an example, she said that one of the keg beers (I'm not sure but it might be the citra'd East Coast?) is to stop.

Further, GK recognise that the two old favourites just keep on going; IPA and Abbot. Much as they try new flavours and types, it's the oldest beers that march on!

Surely though, the beer they need to brew is shouting at them? With IPA at 3.6% ABV and Abbot Ale at 5.0% ABV you could drive a dray pulled by a team of four through the middle! Isn't it about time they introduced something significant of around 4.2 - 4.3% ABV? What we lewkels might call 'mix'?

BTW; Did you know IPA in cask is still 3.6% ABV? It is the bottle and the keg beer that have been reduced to 3.4%.

Banks' Mild – CAMRA want it back!

You may have noticed the news that now that Carlsberg and Marstons have split with Marstons walking away with the pubs and Carlsberg with all the breweries; that Carlsberg axed 8 real ale and 3 keg beer brands in December? It reads like the trail of bits left behind by the Tasmanian Devil from the old cartoons! Marstons, Eagle (formerly Charles Wells), Jennings, Wainright's and Banks have all bitten the dust. Are the CAMRA members on Discourse upset? No. Well, no but, bar one dissenting beer! The members never liked the latest incarnations and are not too worried about seeing the back of them despite the fact that we should be fighting for every ale that is stopped. It is after all a double-edged sword. The big breweries changed the recipes, they even kept the recipes but changed the water and where the beer was brewed (same poor results) and took little account of how it altered the character of the beer. So, this can be seen by some as justful punishment. Carlsberg won't be bothered; they are just shrinking the market down, culling the over-populated national ale scene.

By the rules of natural justice, our lack of concern SHOULD come back to bite us. After all, it makes us appear as beer snobs to say nothing of watching closures on one Monday but then to fight like hell the next Monday which others would call hypocritical. Oh! And the one beer that Discourse members thought worth saving? Banks' Mild.

Strolling Social of Ely

Introduction

Cambridge CAMRA have a Strolling Social every couple of months or so. We usually visit pubs in a cluster of villages in the branch area but our December Stroll is always out of branch. Previously we have visited Bury St Edmunds, Peterborough and St Ives. For December 2024 we chose Ely where we enjoyed the company of several Ely branch members.

First stop was the **Prince Albert** where we had a choice of eight beers on the handpumps. As I almost always drink the Three Blind Mice Old Brown Mouse here, I decided to try a couple of their other beers this time. I started with a lovely half of Titanic Plumb Porter and followed it with a Timothy Taylor Landlord.

Ely CAMRA's Pub of the Year, the **West End House** was our next pub. They had four cask ales for us to choose from. I enjoyed halves of Oakham Inferno and St Austell Proper Job. Pub three was the Minster Tavern. It was very busy, full of locals, visitors and "Tinsel drinkers". Here we had a choice of five cask ales. My half was a tasty Santa's Porter from Milestone. The strollers, although enjoying their beers, were keen to move on to somewhere less busy.

Our next stop was the pub I was most looking forward to visiting, the **High Flyer**, as I had never previously visited it and had heard good reports of its beer. The pub was bigger than I expected. It specialises in food and is divided into rooms. We gathered in the bar which we had to ourselves. Here we had a choice between St Austell Tribute and Adnams' Southwold Bitter. I chose the latter.

Next up was the somewhat smaller **3At3**, Real Ale and Craft Beer Cafe which has only existed a few years. Here we had a choice of six membrane keg beers and a large selection of bottled beers. I selected two thirds of 6% Burnt Mill Green Path, an IPA hopped with Citra and Mosaic. It certainly lived up to its billing and was very enjoyable.



Phil Eden, Paul, Michelle and Ingvar in the Cutter Inn



We then moved on to the **Drayman's Son**. Although not as recently converted to pub use as 3At3 many will still recall it as a shop. Here we had a choice of five cask beers, nine keg beers and several ciders. I chose The Beast, a dark mild collaboration brew by Shiny & Furnace. At 5.5% you might think that it was on the strong side but I could have gone for the Implosion, a 10% Mr Winters Imperial Stout instead.

The final pub of our Stroll was the **Cutter Inn** on the banks of the river and strategically only a short walk from the train station. Here we had a choice of four cask ales. Two of them locally brewed which is great to see in a Stonegate owned pub. But I didn't choose a local one as I couldn't resist the I'm

Already Here, a 5% German-style porter brewed as a collaboration between Moongazer and Brid's Cross Brewing which is a brewery I'd not previously heard of. It turns out that Brid's Cross is based in Rochdale and had released their first commercial beer 15 months earlier. It was a lovely beer to end a very enjoyable Stroll around Ely with some lovely people. Many thanks to all participants.

Cambridge & District CAMRA's Strolling Socials and other events are all listed on their website's Events page. www.cambridge-camra.org.uk/events/ Why not join us sometime.

Getting there by Bus with Phil Eden

Committee member for Transport Phil Eden has a keen love of old buses and coaches being Chairman of a members group at Bury St. Edmunds. Here he's found which bus furnishes a drop to which pub out in the countryside.

The below information can be found in upgraded form on our web site at; <https://ely.camra.org.uk/viewnode.php?id=242278> (highlight, control and click)

ELY & DISTRICT CAMRA - Visit our district's rural pubs BY BUS.

Bus services in the Ely area, have in many cases been improved recently, many now run hourly. Below is a list of services with links to timetables, and a list of pubs on each route. All buses depart Ely, Market Street, stopping at all marked bus stops on route!

Plan your visit to/between pubs, and support our rural hostelries!

Some require a short walk away from bus route marked **.

NOTE: There are NO late evening or Sunday services, so don't miss the last bus back!

ZIPPER 1 Dews Coaches (see also 9)

- Witcham, White Horse
- Haddenham, Three Kings
- Haddenham, Barn**
- Stretham, Red Lion

ZIPPER 2/3 Dews Coaches

- Witchford, Village Inn
- Sutton, Chequers**
- Mepal, Three Pickerels**

9 Stagecoach/A2B (see also ZIP1)

- Stretham, Red Lion (toward Cambridge)
- Littleport, Plough & Harrow
- Littleport, Crown

9A Stephenson's (see also 125)

Ely, Isle of Ely, Leisure Park

112 Stephenson's

Soham, Fountain Inn

Soham, Red Lion

Soham, The Ship

Soham, Carpenters Arms

Soham, Cherry Tree

Fordham, White Pheasant

Fordham, Chequers

Fordham, Crown (re-opens soon)

125 Lords Travel (see also 9A) (Please note, limited outbound service only)

Ely, Isle of Ely, Leisure Centre

Lt. Downham, Plough

Lt. Downham, Anchor

****A Pub on Cam Drive**

Two district councillors in Christine and Alison Whelan visited the committee meeting and gave the committee an insight into the need for a pub on Cam Drive. With over 1,000 houses being built, a shopping area is projected to be built and part of that is the need for building a pub. The Co-op will build a (mini) supermarket but without a pub they'll withdraw and the mall/centre becomes unviable for anyone and so, no pub – no shop, no shopping centre.

They have had as much as 20 years to get this sorted but it has come down to the last 7 days and a mad rush. One thing that came through this for me was that the pub they think they need is big with dining etc. I suddenly realised how blinkered the view was and wasn't alone when one member suggested that one of the smaller shops would be the right size for a 'pub'. Anyway, you can't always grasp these things when they are delivered live in a committee meeting and they left with our best wishes. We'll keep you posted....

Festivals

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

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

Elysian Winter Beer Festival, 7 February – 8 February 2025 [Ely]

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

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

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

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]

TBC **Bedford Beer & Cider Festival**, Wednesday 1 – Saturday 4 October 2025. Corn Exchange, Bedford

TBC **South Woodham Ferrers Beer & Cider Festival**, Thu 2 – 4 October 2025. Village Hall, South Woodham Ferrers.

TBC **Norwich Beer Festival**, Mon 27 October – Sat 1 November 2025. St. Andrew's & Blackfriars' Halls, Norwich.

Events

We aren't holding the **Ale Trail** in February or any time soon this year. It is hoped that if all goes well, we'll be able to create a new date later in the year when more of you will like the warmth on your backs!

Look out for me

I'll be in attendance on the Friday and if you'd like to make my acquaintance, please do! If you can help me (with my next article) then great but, if I can help you then even better!

For the first time in it's 15 years, I'll be missing a day at an Elysian Beer Festival. I've tickets for the Saturday England v France game and will also miss the take down on the Sunday.



AND THAT'S THE END OF IT....

A Funny Girl and Dark Malted Ales this winter

Cast around you and dark malted ales were everywhere this Christmas and more than I can remember. I've only had one citra'd ale in three months and that was Tydd Steam's unique New Mexico Pale. Having it at the Carpenters Arms I couldn't help notice the accompanying smell was of the stuff I collect between my toes! Yes, revolting fungal growth – the very same smell! While holding this thought (sorry!), it turns out our Barperson is trained in testing the ale to see if it is OK and as it's not her tippie, she's allowed by landlord Joppo to eloquently describe the beer 'in her own words' and naturally being a young lady, her descriptions aren't remotely tainted with either fungal or crudity but they are still the same; funny!

"Tesco carrier bag" is Fuller's London Pride (forgive me if I've forgotten) and I'm sure there was an 'old leather belt' also 'rotting vegetables in a brown paper bag' and a 'lager the morning after' (probably a tin of Fosters; I know that smell!) which is perhaps a smell we can ALL relate too!

But what a Winter for dark ales, even the White Horse, Witcham has got in on the act! Back at the beginning of October, I got an early sniff of Lacons Phantom and it sold well everywhere with several pubs like The Rising Sun, Isleham asking for more but being unavailable. Through to Christmas and everyone had a rich winter ale on wherever you went.

Yes, there will be a time very soon for the Golden, Ambers, Lights and Pales but will it be Citra? I think there will be less. Well, we'll see soon enough – and that's the end of it!

An Ely Branch Guide to our Rural Pubs

<https://ely.camra.org.uk/dl.php?id=241791>

NEW EDITION!!!! We've put together a guide of the rural pubs and clubs in our patch, the current edition was renewed on 31.12.2024. Follow the link above to download it. It will be updated in the middle of the year; as we keep revisiting the pubs and clubs. We reckon it's worth making a nice bike ride or walk out 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. David 'Taffy' Lloyd. david@taffmeisters.co.uk



Contrast is coming!

Do not adjust your sets! I have it from Lacons that their Phantom will be back for a third year but titled 'Contrast' from now on. With a kind of "Halloween is over!" vibe, the old Phantom had a self-imposed out-of-date locked in what with the bats, belfries and the gravestones! Limiting themselves to one batch for 2023 and 2024, the release date is sometime in September and we hope this great dark IPA will link up with natural hunting ground; cold winter nights!

**My 'one' has since been confirmed by Lacons as two but they are promising more in 2025*