

Lights, Bitters, Camra Action.

Newsletter – February 2023

By David 'Taffy' Lloyd

This month;

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Grovel & Introduction

This was meant to be your January newsletter but we got in a frightful fuddle and sent out the November issue again, our chair having the full brunt of the beer festival to contend with. We apologise and putting such behind us we welcome you to a January++ February edition with lots to report on.

For those that are new members from the beer festival, firstly we're glad you joined! Secondly, we need to tell you what you have here. We started a newsletter just 5-months ago aimed purely at Ely & District Camra members and I've been given carte blanche so far with write ups on village pubs and beer festivals but alas, the computer is not my friend so bear with us while we keep it simple at the start. We're still feeling our way but I'm pleased to let you hear a new voice in Ron Buchet's Lambic exploits to Belgium (pages 4-6) so this newsletter will, we hope, keep you up to date with changes and what's on in not just your local branch/patch but some festivals near enough to visit. My details are at the foot of the page.

AGM – Tuesday 4th April

The AGM will be held at The Albert on Tuesday 4th April with a 7.30pm meet for a 7.45pm start. Nominations for posts on the Branch Committee can be either be in writing, signed by a proposer and seconder, both of whom being members of the Branch and accompanied by proof willingness of the named to stand or be in person during the AGM with a proposer and seconder, both of whom shall be members of the Branch. You can always also offer yourself for a position, and then we go through the process on the day. If you fancy taking a post but aren't sure what, attend and chat with us about being co-opted in. Posts are; Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, City Pubs Officer, Rural Pubs Officer, plus other posts that are supplementary. For sure we need a new Secretary as Lloyd intends to concentrate on future Beer Festivals.

Ale Trail - Saturday 22nd April

We have an Ale Trail around Ely's pubs on Saturday 22nd April meeting at the West End PH at 2pm. Just turn up and join us. The trail will take us via the West End, Prince Albert, The Fountain, The Cutter, The Drayman's Son, The Royal Standard, and finally the 3at3. If you have the legs or the willpower, anyone left will make for the five City centre pubs. Other than the words; "we're off!" you're unlikely to get more than a nod nor a wink as existing unless of course while climbing Forehill some of you choose to roly-polly back to the bottom and then; "your name will also go on ze list! Vat is it?".

Cambridge Beer Festival Run (Trip) - Friday 26th May

We have a Cambridge Beer Festival run organised for Camra members in our area, the date is Friday 26th May and we'll meet in front of the station for 11.00am and break into small groups for travel discount tickets although I suspect the already cheap prices won't be much cheaper! 11.17am is the outward train and you can pick your own time for the return but I suspect it'll be the 6.30pm or 6.37pm train for most. Non-Camra members can accompany members. Would it be right to call this a CBF 'run' or a CBF 'trip'? Well, let's just call it; The Cambridge Beer Festival Run & Trip and that will describe it all very well indeed!

There's a 10.49am Soham train into Ely that'll bring you in in good time too. No need to book – just arrive. The general chat is of 'good' or to 'like' a beer and some mark their programme (ahem!) out of ten but the chat is never technical or geeky just enjoy it like we do, so we'll see you there, right?

13th Elysian Beer Festival Friday 3rd - Saturday 4th Feb.



OK, so new management took on the festival late in the year and between Ron Buchet and Lloyd Vella they put in a vast amount of work to get us there. Consensus is that it went well for our customers, the beers were excellent but we are unlikely to have made a profit for Camra this time. Then we have the lower footfall; about 20% down and mostly on the Friday and we estimate we sold around 70% of the beer and cider. At this moment we haven't met to thrash it all out and there's an awful lot of thrashing to be done so perhaps we can explain a little more after we have done next month.

Anyway, the first beer sold out was the fantastically named 'Black Forest Stout' by Xtreme Ales of Peterborough (see the photo, left), the next was my festival favourite; Colchester's; 'Sweeney Todd' what a lovely red beer! The first cider to sell out was BumbleBee's Strawberry Mojito.

Left. Xtreme Family Brewers; Martyn and Cath Hunt were on hand for a photo; 'Black Forest Stout'. Where's the knife – I want a slice!

Where to spend the tokens in Ely area?

There are just two pubs that take the tokens; The Minster and The Hereward.

Look forward to seeing you again – can we stay in touch?

Many of you will have joined again at the festival but please, when you do, remember to tick the box that allows our branch to keep in contact with you. We aren't giving your soul over to the devil and a 'go Meercompare' campaign, your friends won't receive this newsletter if they did tick it.

What's in a name? Beers without a name at our Branch Festival.

Just have a look at those names in your Elysian Festival guide and you are hit with some lovely descriptions like these three; 'Black Forest' stout, 'Egyptian Cream' and 'Strawberry Mojito' cider which all happened to **sell out**. In the mean time I pulled barrels off the racking on Sunday morning and most heavily laden were named simply; 'Pale' or 'Bitter'. So, you'll know what to make of that, what's needed is to build up a picture of a favourite food and name it! The Americans would tell us Brits off for; 'not selling what we do' and is there a finer example? All that effort to brew and transport a beer and it's called 'Pale'. I ask you....! Surely the brewers have to have some imagination? It might even be that our buyers should turn down a beer purely on name....and why not! It's probably been disguised for a few years as we sold out every drop and we couldn't notice or record this and one imagines that typically come Saturday evening with choices narrowed, the named; 'Pale' was discovered, it sold and we never knew any better; but we could see it this year. *If they can't name 'em, we shouldn't buy 'em!*

Other festivals coming up are;

Booze on the Ouse Thursday 16th March to Saturday 18th March

Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots PE19 2BH

Sutton (Spring) Friday 17th to Saturday 18th March 2023

(non-Camra – NC, Food - F) St. Andrews Church, Sutton. CB6 2RH.

Three Horseshoes, Stapleford NC F.M Good Friday 7th to Monday 10th April 2023. Excellent little BF, just ¼ mile from Shelford Railway Station. In its second year. Pub awarded Cambridge branch rural pub of the year 2022.

Eddington Beer Garden, Eddington Square, Cambridge. Friday 28th – 29th April.

Black Horse, Rampton NC F.M Friday 28th – 29th April.

Cambridge Beer Festival - Summer. Monday 22nd to Saturday 27th May 2023. Jesus Green, Cambridge

Wilburton NC. Friday 23rd to Saturday 24th June. Wilburton Recreation Ground

East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival Wednesday 23rd to Monday 28th August 2023. St Edmundsbury Cathedral

The Cherry Tree, Soham



Re-opened in November after an expensive refurb, this Greene King pub has thrown most of its coin at a proper wooden structure to the rear in the beer garden which will please smokers and those avoiding a summer meltdown with its slate roof, concrete ground. Two 'huts' are built for either drinks or quick food. For the freezing winter day I was there we had the use of outdoor heating lamps which we

The White Horse, Witcham

Freehold owners Linda and John have had the pub a decade now with the pub looking very spick-and-span, a lot of care is taken just like the care John takes with his beer. The pub is situated just off the village green in Silver Street and the one thing you won't spot is that the knight upon his charger over the entrance door is not wielding your usual sword or lance but a pea shooter instead. I visited the Sunday before Christmas having walked what I call 'the Witcham Toll byways' to get there and both Linda and John were extremely welcoming!

Aroma, Appearance, Temperature, Taste

My first drink was Talking Parrot by Parkway Brewing of Somerton, Somerset followed by a couple of Jericho Blonds (Settle Brewery), both were 100% on the A.A.T.T. Richter Scale. John asks for good value from his wholesaler and that's why he will always sell you a beer for less than £4. Which is great value, especially if he picks well because you know he'll keep it well.

I did check-up though and it says John started with 3 real ales all those years ago and I can't help feel a front of house leading brand would lift sales a little higher.... but it's their business and choice, and it's doing well.

Surprisingly, this isn't a 'LocAle' pub (meaning; always having a beer on tap brewed within 30 miles) and further mention on the subject brought about the comment that the pub has tried to buy beer directly from the two local brewers but both delivery and an advantageous price weren't forthcoming. "It was cheaper to use my wholesaler" he resigned. I think John's wrong, it's the traffic congestion around Coveney....

co..co..co..couldn't do without but all that wood appeared to be untreated for outdoor use and nails had split through the wood beams in many places. The beers on tap were a very well served sweet 'Rev. James' or the usual IPA which is just £3.60 a pint. The toilets have had good money spent on them at last but are still tiny and the décor in the lounge has been brought up from the 1960s to about 1992, well what do you get for £100,000 nowadays, really!!!

The Cherry Tree is a good value food and drink pub with a huge garden, they know the customers they want and it lends itself to family trips with the children where you can keep an eye out for them on the huge grass area but a "proper ale" (or indeed any drink) drinking hole it isn't, there isn't even a real bar as such but more a place to stand first in a queue and order food or beer or both even, if a pub was setting itself up to be giggled at, surely one with no real bar would be cause enough! For an ale in Soham, the choices still are two ales on at both The Ship, The Fountain and three at The Carpenter's Arms.



Wall display at the White Horse, Witcham

The pub had another Parkway brew in the Summer that was a hit that all thirsted for more of named 'Jail Bird' and they'd like it back please! Apparently, it had been brewed as "A.N. Other" craft keg recipe yet had struck all the right notes nationally and not just with John's regulars.

I'm not sure about the two large sofas that dominate one end of the pub, I'm sure they have their merits but I did love the German Nut Cracker Soldiers. These beautifully brightly painted German soldier figurines - one was 6' tall - were all around and make a picturesque, bright display.

The Maid's Head, Wicken. Changes at the Maid's Head with the Calvin Holland headed business leaving and smaller shareholder, Scott Osbourne taking on the pub. Scott has been the resident chef for some time and he has started off with new man 'Carl' as the bar manager. Now Carl was unfortunate enough to meet me the night before he started in his new post, he seems to have mostly recovered from my request for colder beers; "This was all in hand just as I came in" he said after the new year. Well, the beers I had on that Sunday were 100% perfect. I wasn't looking forward to some honest reporting on 'iffy' beer and luckily, I still don't have to say it. I've waited a long, long time for the Maid's Head to cool down, so have more than a few customers and I think Carl will drive this on to three real ales again especially this summer. They keep two on at the moment in Doombar or Greene King IPA with Black Sheep. Luckily for me my household favourite Black Sheep was on and it was a treat.

What's the busiest Country/rural pub on our patch?

Five Miles from Anywhere, No Hurry Inn, Upware

Well, that isn't really challenge. There's only one pub that knocks 4 real ales out in the boonies and that is the Five Miles from Anywhere - The 'No Hurry Inn' (no hurry-ing...). A recent visit to watch 'The Frigidaires' saw 4 beers on and an array of bottled alcohol-free beer which was most awful last time I tried, I think the AF Old Speckled Hen had had the hen stuffed IN and not ON the bottle while still breathing so help me, It was enough to turn you to alcohol!



Four real ales in the Countryside?

Maldon; Mole Catcher, Morland; Speckled Hen, Greene King's; IPA and London Glory are all middle of the road similar bitters and that's a shame because with 4 ales on they could support 'Locale' AND try either say a citra, porter, dark or red otherwise they're all competing with each other for the same customer?

The temperature is 'OK' in the winter but at the height of the summer the beer is too warm. It is always served well though and never off. The Mole Catcher (a bitter) is worth giving a try. The food is excellent and the landlady is famous for working herself into the ground and always making sure things are right.

Going over, always reminds me of going 'home' to rural North Wales as a child, the relations would talk of the 'hot' pub which we'd travel 10 or 15 miles to get too without seeing a car, a human or sheep (I'm lying about one of the 3!) only to be hit by a blast of noise, a wave of heat and have to push the door against the back of a customer just to get in! Rural? Maybe, but never quiet; and that's how the No Hurry is.

How much for a pint?

Inflation is back, the scourge of any economy has been with us since lockdown and it is still running rampant at around 9% PA which is a figure nobody in business can avoid and must be passed on so, how does this affect us, the drinker?

Well, it's a great chance for everyone to make money out of us. A strong reason is the chaos in pricing that comes with it, four years ago, 'old Pete' who knows these things had a grasp of it and you just asked old Pete and he'd give you the SP on it; "£3.60 in the Kings Arms and £3.70 in The Minster" but now, today, you talk to old Pete at the bar and he's given up counting! This is exactly where any industry wants us – you've heard all the excuses; I'm not repeating them. So, I pay £5 for a Beavertown's 'Gamma Ray' in The Fountain, Soham; £5.75 for the Beavertown 'Neck oil' in The Minster and £6.50 for the said beer in The Royal Standard. So, forget your 10p here and there, this has gone rampant.

So, what's happening? Well, it's going to have implications yet again and beer prices appear to have increased 25% in 4 years. I'm sure Camra will provide figures but that is well above inflation and turning your pint into a luxury item and so begins your next roll-on effect. Remember, the pubs were amply protected during Covid-19 and I've been told so. The regular drinker has job, bank account and household under some kind of control but they are either professional or older, and there's a lot of 'older' out there. We have a generation of twenty-somethings not

participating in anything their parents did, their life styles aren't just what has been happening since WW2 being; 'last year plus 3%', they've kicked ass and left the building. They aren't at the Nightclub which used to be a must, they don't watch paid live sport, they've become invisible to everyone except perhaps their parents and they also aren't in the pub. What they are meant to do is keep our football and rugby clubs alive, to keep our designer fashion clothes shops open and to buy beer in our pubs while eyeing the talent!

With no long-term certainty, one thing we need back is the 'price-counters' like old Pete who needs to keep going for the 'happy hour' here or the 'two-for-one' there because prices have been let off the hook and we need him being noticeable for his penny-counting antics again, he'll be doing my job for me (sorry, I splash the cash) and you, and everyone else who **should** care will have him to thank because beer is presently a luxury product and the poorer man takes a crate of cheap lager home from Tesco's while the gap in price all the time of course is getting wider. If beer keeps going up relative to people's spending power, you know how it's all going to end....

I'm so glad to report of some help and it comes from our head-of-the-beer-festival Mr Ron Buchet (a Belgian surname). His self-styled name is 'Master Lambic' and if you read-on, you'll know why;

Master Lambic returns to Lambic country (and Belgium!) by Ron Buchet

A very early start on a Friday morning last November saw myself and three friends in the car on our way to Brussels. With a couple of days to go we found we'd picked the wrong weekend, as Friday in Belgium was Armistice Day and a lot of breweries were shut. Therefore, a quick change of plans, and on arrival in Brussels, park the car, and grab the train to Brugge (Bruges).

First stop had to be Staminee de Garre (or just 'Garre' as a lot of people know it). It's a cafe tucked down an alleyway near the main square in Brugge, in an old 14th Century building (I think) and has been in every Belgian Good Beer Guide. Famous for its house beer at 11% (which you are only allowed 3 25cl glasses of), its eclectic beer menu of about 120 beers, the old wood panelling with the beers come on trays, expertly poured which is getting rare unfortunately and a little plate of cheese or nibbles to go with the beer, which is also getting very rare these days, and non-intrusive classical music in the background make this a must visit, it is very relaxing. In fact, I lost yet another afternoon in here.

We eventually decided to go for food, after a short walk round, ended up on the main square with a reasonable deal for 4 Stovelees (Belgian beer stew) and 4 beers. It was fine; however, I've had much better. Then off to the Bruges Bertje (Bruges Bear). This is another long-standing entry in the Belgian GBG, unfortunately there was something on and it was packed. Right, down to the T'zand and the Zandloper, which has 18 taps plus bottles and a couple in here saw us running for the train back to Brussels! Brugge has many excellent bars and is a great place for a few days Belgium Beer drinking unless you are looking for Lambics or rarer Saison beers.

Back in Brussels we moved into our accommodation for the weekend, then headed out to the Barboteur, a beer takeaway shop and cafe about 20 minutes from where we were staying in Brussels north. Never been before and glad we made the effort. 18 taps, an excellent range of bottles to drink in or take away, although mainly seat about 35 people, the service was good. I'll seek it out again. Then to bed via the kebab shop LOL!



Staminee de Garre

Saturday saw us driving out in the morning. First stop was Girardin Lambic brewery. First time here, they only started selling out of the brewery just before covid struck, and were doing tours. Sadly; no tours, you have to book in advance to buy beer to takeaway (Friday and Saturday only, see their Facebook page). However, a 75c of their Black Label Geuze was 4 euro a bottle. Steal! Unfortunately, however they have stopped making Framboise, as the raspberries have gone up 270% making it not worthwhile for them. Pleasure to meet the female brewer.

Next a drive down to Tilquin, which is one of the newer lambic breweries, and is still mostly a blender. Pierre was about so a chat with him (the owner, great to see him again), and a couple of beers from the taps,

then purchase takeaway from the shop. Tilquin do a lot of experimenting with different fruits and grapes, and make some spectacular lambics.

Right, back to Brussels, park the car and head out to Cantillion in south Brussels (it's about a 10-minute walk from Brussels south station). It's not only a brewer and blender of limbic, but also a museum of the Geuze. The lambics are fantastic and its very popular. I finally got a photo of myself with the owners, their son does most of the work now. So, into the bar as the tour would have taken too long and we wanted some beers. A Fou Foune (Apricot), last year's Zwanse beer made with oranges (Fantastic) and a St Lanvinus (make with pinot grapes) were enjoyed, then the bar and brewery closed.

We then walked around the corner to a new microbrewery L'Ermitage. We couldn't stay as they had just done the floor and one of our group started choking, so we drank up and moved on. We all had a different beer and they were very 'samey'.

Therefore, a walk into Brussels central looking for food and more beers. Couldn't find anywhere with space, it was really busy and a restaurant bar I know called Nuetsnigenough was fully booked (again a range of about 60 beers to go with really good Belgian cuisine) so we had to put up with fast food.

A visit to Moeder Lambic Fontainas resulted in a disappointment as their beer range was poor and they have stopped stocking bottles by the looks of it, or they had a problem. So, push on to the Poecheneliekelder, just across from the Mannekin Pis. This bar is an old favourite of mine, but was extremely busy. We managed to get a table inside, but only two beers in 3 hours, slow service, I think we were being ignored. Very disappointed. However, I'll give it another go next time and see. Approx 130 beers on list and small food.

We went for another walk but a couple of bars I know were shut, so we ended up in Brewdog by central station for a couple of 50cl of Bruge zots which were good, then headed off to bed.

Sunday, after a later start than we wanted, we headed out to Oud Beersel to visit the cafe bar on the brewery. It was complicated by railway engineering works and meant we couldn't get to Drie Fontenine.

However, as we found it was well worth the trip. I have some vague recollections of the bar back when it was the tap house for the Vandervelden limbic brewery, which closed in about 1994. It was bought a few years later and renamed as the Oud Beersel brewery and makes some great lambics now. The bar had been turned into a flower shop, during covid it came on the market, the brewery bought it and have transformed it back into a bar. The old tiling on the outside was once again revealed and cleaned up and looks fantastic. The bar isn't quite how it was, but a lot of the original wood panelling remains. Anyway, 16 draught taps with some special lambics on, some very good- looking food saw us while away most of the afternoon. It also meant we didn't get time to go out to see De Cam, who only opens on a Sunday, oh well! next time.

We then made a small detour up to a bar in the guide I hadn't visited before, Vieux Spijtigen Duivel in Uccle, for another Stovlees. An old bar, old wood panelling etc and still a solid list of 130 beers. Worth a visit if you are out that way.

It was getting on and after just missing a train and after a long wait we headed back to the accommodation, where the others wimped out, I headed out to a new brewery I wanted to check out in Brussels north, because the Schaer-beek area of Brussels has been nicknamed "the city of donkeys,". The Brewery; 'La Mule' opened in spite of - or perhaps because of - the global pandemic that all but completely shut down the service sector. German-style beers



Stovlees

(cont.) are being brewed out of what used to be a stable house for the horses that pulled the old trolley cars back in the 19th century. What happens when you

combine a horse and a donkey? A Mule. Well, like those that Schaerbeek residents of centuries past took to the Brussels market, laden with sour cherries for making Kriek? A mule - or Brasserie de la Mule, in this case.

And to finish each Month. The Tale End.

A nice try!

After a read of our quarterly Camra magazine 'Beer', we're told that porters are 'all the rage' at the moment, indeed the plethora of porters and stouts for sale at the festival tell it too but, I recall a few years back up at the Rugby Club on Downham Road, I bumped into committee man Max who told me a lovely tale of how EOSA (Ely Outdoor Sports Association), had bought a crate each of Guinness' throw-back porters named 'West Indies' and 'Dublin', the beer at the club is often a chilled Greene King 'East Coast' so Max persuaded me to try it.

It's a lovely drop, with a slight tingle on the tongue, the Dubliner especially has a lovely texture and I could see that I'd be drinking much more porter.

But it all came about because nobody would even buy the first bottle off the shelf, Max then bought the beer from the club and took it home expecting to suffer, you know, to "take one for the team" so to speak but no, it was actually a lovely drop and after he'd finished the two crates, he asked for more and also persuaded EOSA to re-stock it again and proceeded to put members in touch with their real inner needs. Nice one Max!

Still, it could be worse!

I'm stood in the Turk's Head near Twickenham in November, this a Fuller's owned pub saw us 'preparing' for the England v Japan (3pm KO) game and the only beer on all 20 pumps was Fullers 'London Pride'. 15 young members of staff on hand to serve 200+ drinkers. Alas come 1pm, in front of me a much older member of staff looking ill and ashen faced announced he'd just run out of beer completely.

Next time.....

For our next edition, I'd like you to write in to me with your experiences of our beer festival and we'll have a letter's section for that issue. We can deal with letters up to around the 15th of the month so there's plenty of time to reflect and let us know how you feel it went. Please make it clear if your letter is for publishing or I can quote you or, if it's for background and not quoted or name withheld. I think there are enough options there.... Get involved.

why not join the Facebook page; 'Ely & District Camra' and belt it out there? If you have any news for this newsletter then drop me a line via email at david@taffmeisters.co.uk or text me on 07951010542. The views expressed here are those of myself and don't necessarily represent those of the Camra committee. Photos this month; Myself and courtesy of Google. David 'Taffy' Lloyd

Very quiet on visiting it, however I sampled all their beers from the taps, which are very much in the German style they are called and good beer in fact. I also bought a can of their saison, which I tried later on back in England, and it was also very good. Well worth the trip out.

I then popped round the corner back to Barboteur for a nightcap before heading back.

Monday was a visit to a supermarket and beer wholesaler for more bring home beers and a short stop for food back in Bruges. Fantastic to get back to Belgium finally!

Ron Buchet

