

Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action.

Newsletter – March 2023

Editor; David 'Taffy' Lloyd

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. Contact details are at the foot of the page.

This month;

1. Calendar of beer festivals. Beer Festivals News in brief. Landlady leaves the Littleport Plough & Harrow. Use our Facebook page.
2. Cheap beer in Ely? A drink in The Rising Sun, Isleham.
3. The Griffin, Isleham. Red Lion, Stretham. Branch AGM 4th April 2023.
4. Ale Trail around Ely, City of Ale Festival, Norwich, Cambridge Beer Festival.

Other festivals coming up are;

Easter Beer Festival. NC. Red Lion, Histon. Thursday 6th – Easter Monday 10th April.

Three Horseshoes, Stapleford NC. F. M. Good Friday 7th to Easter Monday 10th April. Excellent little BF, just ¾ mile from Shelford Railway Station. In its second year. Pub awarded Cambridge Branch Rural POTY 2022.

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

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

Wicken Beer Festival, NC. (Usually music) Saturday 13th May, Recreation Ground, Wicken. CB7 5XZ

City of Ale Festival Norwich 25th May-25th June 2023. The Waterfront, 139-141 King St, Norwich NR1 1QH.

Cambridge Beer Festival - Summer. 22nd – 27th May 2023, Jesus Green, Cambridge. (Ely branch 'Run & Trip' Friday)

The Cutter, Ely Beer Festival. NC. Friday 16th – Sunday 18th June. 16+ ales and 2 ciders.

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

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

***TBC* Norwich Beer Festival. Monday.** F. M. 23rd – Saturday 28th October [Norwich & District] Likely Ely branch Run & Trip.

NC (non-CAMRA). M (music). F (food).

Organised Branch Events (more details at the bottom)

AGM – Tuesday 4th April. The Prince Albert, 7.30 for 7.40pm start.

Ale Trail - Saturday 22nd April around Ely, starts at the West End at 2pm. All welcome!

Cambridge Beer Festival Trip - Friday 26th May. 11.17am train to Cambridge. Meet at 11am at the entrance.

Festivals News

Tis the season and we start with the Wicken BF which is back after a three-year break which is only rivalled by Cambridge, I think! This is very much a rock music and beer festival and you have to speak up if you're going to be heard.

Also showing is a BF at The Cutter Inn, this is a first for the manager at the pub and Ely CAMRA is giving some support on the beer selection I believe. We gather there will be more than 16 real ales on and that is more than enough to find a few of your favourite type of tippie! I can't say I envy them keeping the temperature down at that time of year.... June to late August is a tough time when doing these things-just ask the Townhouse and Soham Rotary. BTW, we still don't have a date for the annual Soham BF.

Plough & Harrow, Littleport

News that Lin Paling has left the Plough & Harrow at Littleport and we'll let you know the status next month. The P&H is a rather unsettled pub and deserves a long-term landlord. Let's hope it's the next one!

Facebook Page

The branch is going to try and up the use of the Facebook page over the next few months and hope you'll support it with anecdotes of your own. If you're up for the 'Ale Trail' or up for the Cambridge BF 'Run & Trip', up for a position at the AGM; let us know on the Facebook page. Presently it's a much-under-utilised tool that's for communication amongst ourselves such as signing up for trips etc. <https://www.facebook.com/ElyAndDistrictCamra>.

This brings me to the second part of last month's look at inflation and its effect on our pint. The relating subject is;

Cheap Beer Pubs

Last Summer (2022), I wanted to take in the North Norfolk Beer Festival again up at Sheringham, this one is on a railway station platform at the seaside resort with old Steam Engines - part of the North Norfolk Railway - chuffing in and out a mere 50 yards away and one that I've been to for the two years up to lockdown, I decided from Soham to take the train the 'wrong way' and get to Stowmarket to then get to Norwich but on arrival to swap trains it turned out that 'Old Trigger' had been a bit too 'trigger happy' and had got on the line and well, sadly, you know the rest..... This left me at least 4 hours to twiddle away and so I took in the only pub open in Town, a JD Wetherspoon on Ipswich Road and was determined to make the most of a Friday at 11.40am. What I found were 8 real ales on tap, all in perfect order starting with Greene King's IPA at a mere £1.90 per pint and the other 7 at £2.10 per pint. I also had a pint with a curry and made good a day which, had gone badly wrong.

Whatever the story with JDW, and I don't know the truth of it, their buying power is now I suggest, nothing to do with beer being near it's 'sell by date', the old wives tale - which may or may not have been an old truth but more to do with what today, would be a negotiated price before brewing that's relative to taking multiple-scores if not hundreds of barrels of beer about to be brewed from brewers and pass the saving on to you the customer for which they are prepared to be a high turnover low mark-up high profit business while helping cashflow for the brewer and don't think the brewery don't make money out of this either, no sympathy please! They will be changing their business model and making money while upscaling as part of their own evolution and as my mate used to say back in the yuppie late-80's; they'll; "get with the programme!". JDW's chain of pubs makes serious cash from very early at a time that's before other pubs have even opened the door for the day. The smaller pubs only choice, their one choice, is to pass their costs on to you the customer. It is all but impossible for a city pub to change its business model from cost covering to pack 'em high and sell 'em cheap, the dye is cast, they're stuck.

Wetherspoons are everywhere and this scribe thinks that Ely should have one too! Ely is a very desirable, but very expensive City and a cheap pint can't be found. There hasn't been a spit 'n sawdust pub selling cheap beer since the old High Flyer of 30+ years ago* so OK maybe not a JDW but maybe a 'Soham Cherry Tree (see last month) of Ely' would do. From what I can gather, the pubs nearby get it in the ear but pubs on the other side of a Town are often unaffected. Drunken behaviour is said to increase with the cheap booze being more readily available.

But really, for 100% of users like the 'Spinsters shake-a-leg meet' every Thursday, it's an affordable pensioners win-win and come on, we're all heading that way! It would probably keep prices keen in the rest of the City and, depending on the location, probably take out one big pub – at a guess. Rumours were that JDW had found an appropriate building on the left of the entry to the St. Mary's St. car park but that it was an inappropriate change of use for the building. Ely is still spoilt for buildings that are suitable for the change but maybe not in YOUR location. The old Deans bar is one, the old courthouse would have been another. And then of course you only have to wait an hour and there's a bank closing for good, there's even a Police station looking a bit vulnerable.... I hope it doesn't go at the Fore Hill end of the City but there will be a JDWs one day, there's a JDW corporate pin hovering over the City.

A walk to **Isleham** (pronounced with a 'Z')

I walked the dog to **Isleham** recently on this a regular trip of mine, it's a 'proper job' this one starting at the Soham bypass lake and heading out to Fordham Moor and on to Concord farm, Hall Farm and coming into the village behind the very old Priory. An excellent walk with good views of the River Snail, Sheep, Cattle, and deer and always here; plenty of Heron on the river banks of the Snail.

The Rising Sun, Isleham

Patrick Pearce has been the landlord for 18 years now and keeps a nice pub, character oozes from this old building – no need to lay it on with old horse brasses - he does have a peculiar stock of beer for Free House because he is signed up of its own will to Greene King and proud of it too! Patrick values a good cellar service and a hassle-free life above all else and GK provide that, Patrick; "Green King's cellar service is 'same day' while Lacon's is 48-hours which is no good on a Friday!" He suggested they fit Landlords out with a few bits of kit. "Well, once you've been a landlord ten years you have learnt a bit you know!". The day I visited, the IPA

had finished earlier in the afternoon but the Abbott was excellent, also on was Belhaven Black a sickly-sweet stout which along with a Bitter that the

Comrades of Soham stocked some two years ago that was totally nondescript; puts poor old Belhaven bottom of the Lloyd Register'. He remarked of Covid-19; "I could see we'd have to close, so I didn't order any stock in, and during that last week of March 2020 I sold out, I then left bags of bottled beer on the back doorstep and kept going like that.

Sadly, it was the little fish that bore the brunt; no not his humblest customer but literally, the little fish. Patrick got a smart meter in and found the 3 tanks were costing him £1.70 each per day! So, you now see the only tank that survived the Pearce cull! (photo below).



The Griffin, Isleham

When I started this newsletter, two pubs worried me and I often asked myself should I 'let it pass' or 'tell it how it is' or even 'fluff the bad news up a bit', well luckily, after years of poor beer at this pub, it has been rescued in the nick of time and I can say that the beer is excellent. The Griffin has turned the corner as far as serving the beer goes. 'Hair of the Dog' out of the Pennine Brewing Co. was excellent and the Wood Wherry also, for years we might get one half decent beer and the other would be vinegary but no more.

The pub is, like The Rising Sun, a Free House and a very old building, in this case it is in need of much money spent on it and is on the market for sale. Owner, Mike Missen is stepping back a little and has a manager 'John' from Ipswich and now the lines are cleaned and the beer excellent. The pub shows footie and has a pool table but is still very much an older men's watering hole. There's a large marquee to the rear and beer garden with plenty of parking. Along with the Maid's Head at Wicken which also has upped its game, they (or should it be me....) have dodged the Lloyd bullet.

The pub had a major fire in the kitchen 2 years ago and hasn't served food since while Mike has fought the insurers. There's character in both the pub and its customers and at last it has good ale too.

A walk to The Red Lion, Stretham

Our walk on this occasion was a simple short one from Quarterway house on the Ely Road around to Stretham, plain and simple we could and should have started in Little Thetford. Those that are new to the area may not know that back in the early 90's a lorry driver, coming up from Cambridge fell asleep at the wheel and demolished the old house! What the inhabitants upstairs asleep in bed said of it wasn't recorded though.

Landlord Alan Oxbury has been at the pub for 30-years, surely our longest serving local landlord? I couldn't help notice the layout of the bar was not good with three burly men blocking the entire approach to the bar counter. I can imagine ladies bolting for the lounge or the terrace PDQ. The lounge bar is big and roomy so maybe swop the two sides? It's been done before but any road up, the outdoor drinking area is fine with covered area and picnic tables in the open.

The beer on tap was Eagle's 'IPA' at 4.0% and I followed that with a Wordsworth Amber 3.6% which was only mildly Amber (a blessing for me) and close to pale ale and both were excellent. The beer is rotated in a similar fashion to The White Horse at Witcham, always something new and interesting on tap.

Alan talks of the days when he had as many as SIX beers sharing a common overspill tray and come the end of the evening he would collect "the drips" and pour it through a funnel into pint glasses for customers. It had a price and a name too! Its name was 'Noggin' and customers could get a cheap pint of Noggin for just 50p; "sometimes it would be dark, or darker, there might be a touch of coke or lemonade in with it too!" and its funnier when you know those old Stretham boys; they wouldn't have noticed either way....

Organised Branch Events

AGM – Tuesday 4th April

The AGM will be held at The Albert on Tuesday 4th April with a 7.30pm meet for a 7.40pm 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 (vacant), Treasurer, Membership Secretary, City Pubs Officer, Rural Pubs Officer (vacant), Social Secretary (vacant).

Our Ely branch **Ale Trail - Saturday 22nd April**

We have an Ale Trail around Ely's pubs on Saturday 22nd April meeting at the **West End Pub** at **2pm**. Just turn up and join us. The trail will take us via the Prince Albert, The Cutter, The Drayman's Son, The Royal Standard, plus the 3at3. If you have the legs or the willpower, anyone left will make for the five City centre pubs.



City of Ale Festival - Thursday 25th May – 25th June.

Having read Ron Buchet's article on Belgian lambics and sasons in last month's newsletter should, I hope, have perked your interest in these beers and finding out more about them. Well four well respected Norwich breweries have been busy bees and visited Belgian breweries and teamed up with them to create some new flavoured beers which will all be unveiled at this year's 'City of Ale'. Tindall Ales have teamed up with Hof Ten Doormal who create their beers by growing everything themselves, Grain Brewery have teamed with Braxatorium Parcensis (a form of laxative?), Moon Gazer with Watt Brewery after also visiting Hof Ten Doormal while Poppyland are joined with Brouwerij de Courieur. The festival launches on Thursday 25th of May at The Waterfront, Norwich and you can catch up further on both the [Facebook](#) page or on the [web site](#). It will be interesting to see what beers these breweries have come up with and this one could be worth a look.....

Cambridge Beer Festival Trip - Friday 26th May



We have a Cambridge Beer Festival 'run and trip' 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! The afternoon session is 12 noon till 5pm before closing for one hour and opening again at 6pm. The 11.17am train is the outward train and you can pick your own time for the return but I suspect it'll be the 5.29pm or 5.37pm train for most. Non-CAMRA members can accompany members. Please help us tell others; if you know something then tell us about it and we'll pass it on. If you have something to discuss and debate, a taxi, a train you want to organise; 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; courtesy of Ely CAMRA and myself.

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