

Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action.

Newsletter – June 2023

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. David 'Taffy' Lloyd.

This month;

1. Calendar of events. Lewkel news. Haddenham BF.
2. Cont. Three Pickerels, Mepal. Walk to Lt. Downham
3. The Anchor + The Plough, Lt. Downham.
4. Cont. 4-5. The Tenant Landlord.

- 5+6. Cambridge Beer Festival – report. Visiting The Plough, Caldecott in Rutland with Phil Utting-Brown.
7. Cont. Former Rural Pubs officer for Ely; Bruce Pattern asks; what's in a name? With 'all in a name'.
8. Membership numbers. Ely branch CM. Soham BF.
9. The Tale End. The 'froth' comes off a brewery trip!

Beer Festivals coming up. Key: NC (non-CAMRA). M (music). F (food).

[The Cutter Inn Beer Festival.](#) NC. M. F. Friday 16th – Sunday 18th June. 16+ ales and 2 ciders. Annesdale, Ely CB7 4BN.
[Burwell Cricket Club.](#) 23rd – 24th June. Friday 6-10pm – Saturday 2-11pm. Watch a match and have a beer! 10 ales and ciders. Burwell & Exning CC, Exning Park, Exning CB8 7NN.

[Wilburton Beer Festival.](#) NC. F. M on Fri. Friday 23rd – Saturday 24th June. Wilburton Recreation Ground CB6 3RB.

[26th Festival of Beer & Brewing, Stowmarket.](#) NC. M. F. Thursday 29th June – Sunday 2nd July. Evening music. ¾ mile from station. The Food Museum, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 1DL. £4. Free entry to CAMRA members.

[Haddenham Beer Festival.](#) NC. M. F. Friday 30th June – Sunday 2nd July. No music on Friday but a huge turnout of bands on Saturday and Sunday. The Wicken BF that wasn't? The Recreation Ground, Haddenham CB6 3SR.

[Cambridge Quarter Beer Festival.](#) NC. M. F. Monday 3rd – Saturday 8th July. 7 Pubs put on extra beers not so far from the railway station, 250 ales in a quirky 'walk-about'.

[Soham Beer Festival.](#) NC. M. F. Friday 7th – Saturday 8th July. Usually; 30 ales and 8 ciders. Really big on music. Just 400M from Soham Railway station.

[Sutton Beer Festival.](#) NC. M. F. Thursday 27th July – Saturday 29th July. £3 entry. St. Andrews Church, Sutton.

[Peterborough Beer Festival.](#) M. F. Tuesday 22nd – Saturday 26th August. The 44th Festival and probably the best marquee based. They call it the biggest in the UK after the National BF. If you like your music, this is the one! About ½ mile from the railway station. Embankment Road PE1 1EF.

[East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival.](#) M. F. Wed 23rd – Mon 28th August. A huge festival, half in the Cathedral and half under canvas. Live acoustic music. Trains 1-mile. St Edmundsbury Cathedral, Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds IP33 1LS.

[Chappel Beer Festival.](#) Tuesday 5th – Saturday 9th September. East Anglian Railway Museum, Station Road, Wakes Colne, Colchester CO6 2DS.

[Norwich Beer Festival.](#) F. M. Monday 23rd – Saturday 28th October. [Norwich & District] Likely Ely branch run and trip.

[Ely Elysian Winter Beer Festival 2024.](#) Possibly Thursday 1st (TBC). Fri. 2nd February – Sat. 3rd February. Maltings, Ely.

The next Ely Branch committee meeting is on Tuesday 4th July. 7.45pm start at the White Horse, Witcham. All members are welcome to come along and join us and join in.

Lewkel News

I took in the **Wicken Beer Festival** on Saturday 13th May and a good choice of 20 ales were available and 4 ciders. The one-day festival opened much later at 4pm it being one of those damp cold overcast days on deep damp grass when keeping warm was a tough ask. Everyone was in great spirits and they had little trouble selling the beer fast. No obvious signs of a band before 8pm but again, nobody was worried. The beer was good other than being also mostly rather flat. Three excellent beers were; The Fat Cat Brewery (Norwich) and their 'Tom Cat' at 4.1%; was a really nice Pale Ale, equally Magpie Brewery (Nottingham) and their 'Jay IPA' had a gorgeous aftertaste at 5.2% and in third was Moonshine Brewery (Fulbourn) and Blood Moon 5.5%. But overall, it's a shame Wicken BF have taken this route.....

Coming Up - Haddenham Beer Festival. Friday 30th June – Sunday 2nd July.

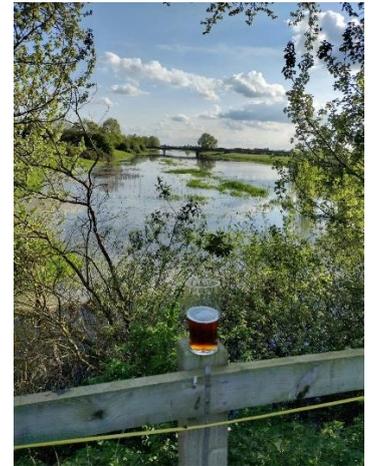
No music on Friday (adult night) but a huge turnout of bands on Saturday (all the family, bouncy castle and entertainment for the kids) and Sunday (just music and drink the barrels dry). The Recreation Ground, Haddenham. CB6 3SR. This properly sorted festival has been running since 2015 so this is the 7th time. No pets. Family welcome! Food available but you can bring your own food and your own chairs etc. Parking is difficult so the suggestion is fork left at the water tower and park in Wilburton Road (you know the one; it leads to the Cherry Tree Pub). There is an admission fee and T-shirts are available pre-event so you can look pre-cool! Profits will go to many local charities.

Now Haddenham, Bucks has a Beer Festival on the same weekend so do NOT put your son on the sat/nav coordinate duty! This could so easily go wrong couldn't it.... while on the M11 heading south.... "I'm sure this isn't right Rodney?". "Dad, trust me on this! Technology, it's the way forwards you're such an old fossil!". "but, Rodney THAT was the turning for Harlow we just passed!". Anyway, there are 60 real ales and ciders and the music is on two stages; just how Wicken used to be.

Coming up - The Cutter Beer Festival. Friday 16th – Sunday 18th June.

Not much information on this other than 16 real Ales and 2 Ciders.

The **Three Pickerels at Mepal** has been run by sisters Emily and Molly for 10 years. And after undergoing a major refurbishment since lockdown in 2020 they've made the most of the Riverside venue's location and outstanding view, they serve Greene King's cool fizzers; Ice Breaker and East Coast IPA and a guest ale that changes weekly. You will regularly see in their turn beers from; Elgoods, Lacons, Papworth, Adnams, St. Austell and Woodforde on hand pump. On the particular Sunday I was there, the day after the Coronation, the Elgood's Coronation Ale was served perfectly and the taste was outstanding (can we have it all the time Elgoods please?).



Professionally modernised, attractive, beautifully lit but also nature has played its part let's not forget! You can't beat the view at this part of the New Bedford River

There's really nothing quite like it anywhere that I can recall, it's a modern foodie with a bar area, it doesn't have a foot in the past, it is simply beautiful in wood panelling, marble, lots of glass and tiling and in one bar area; soft sofa-type furniture around all but the bar while another area overlooks the New Bedford River through lots of glass, the bar itself is mainly tall stools and tables. Looking into the bar is a covered salubrious wooden 'bus shelter' (I couldn't think of another term) with low tables on more decking, beyond that is a BBQ area and after that is a spectacular view up river. While down the sides are seated bays jutting out over the river. The decking and verandas have uplighters below the willow trees and again it's all soft and low sofas. Don't think of it as a local's pub, the bar counter is so tall you can't stand and lean on it so you'll likely move away.

The real test will be summer profits versus Winter doldrums and then how they create an atmosphere in the pub. It invites the well-heeled and trendy and it sets one single focused, very, very, strong image and I hope the food matches the quality of the setting. But sometimes people don't want to have a meal in a pub with places for 100 and the problem, the 'knotweed spread' starts on Monday nights being quiet, then Tuesday, and so on over a winter. Foodies will tell you that diners don't create the atmosphere; that comes from the bar area. The Three Pickerels isn't aimed at swamp donkeys so local people will generally give it a miss because it doesn't ask to be a "local" and I'm sure the owners aren't too worried about this but it needs an area at the bar that feels a little warmer. Anyway, we shall see. I will be back.... Luckily, the old Aston Martin DBD open top still turns a few heads and I shall take it up there and show the old girl orf! - 1/72nd scale of course! Vroom! Vroom!

A Walk to Little Downham

Knowing every path and Byway in the Little Downham area I feel qualified to say the best walk you can take is the one from Ely bypass at the Coveney Road turning. There, having just turned into Coveney Road is the Byway on your right taking you past Hurst Farm and onto Hurst Lane. This is an excellent walk with great views all round. It's a Byway so it is 2-track and used by dirt bikers (the responsible type) on legal dirt bikes with headlights etc. Just fan them down and they'll slow if you have a dog off the lead, they're generally good chaps – just a bit excitable. Nearing Little

Downham just as the village comes into view, you're faced with a fork for either pub and take the left fork for The Plough and the main drag for The Anchor.



The view back to Ely looking up Hurst Lane

The Anchor, Little Downham

It was a Bank Holiday Monday and I was first in just after noon where I met manager of the hotel,

The Plough, Little Downham



Stable door, post in the middle. Lovely old fireplace.

Sunderland "sap-put-ter" Pete has been at the pub over twenty-two years and is due to retire in October but; he has said that before! Don't worry, he's got a

restaurant and bar, the all-in-one; 'David' who had the Doombar on for me to try and well served it was too.

"We normally stick to the brand names because we have customers that don't want to try something different so I normally stick with Timothy Taylor's; Landlord or another well-known brand. Anything else and the beers go off in the line".

The secret appears to be that there isn't one for the Anchor, they keep various hours and this casts off customers with one local telling me it was why he didn't go up there much. "Friday night is really good because the old boys get in there and tell some great tales but you don't know when they'll be open".

I mentioned to David a different way of increasing his ale business but that takes a huge leap of faith and if there was a pub that could turn things around it is the Anchor and where CAMRA or maybe a wisened old landlord (ret.) could build up their ale trade.

CAMRA knows its beers but we are mere amateurs for 'tis real people that keep real ale in real pubs.... And the amateurs that talk of it.

I reckon only a devoted effort for cask ale would make a difference here with the hotel and restaurant keeping the place tickety-boo, why should they worry? I moved on, disappointed that it isn't better supported and went on to the pub where the hardened drinkers frequent....

son, daughter and their outlaws as well on standby to take over so I hope there's a smooth transition if this is finally the time.

Pete and his son Wut keep their beers really well yet they are down to just one hand pump since Covid. "Before it we sold twice as much as they do now" said Wut. Maybe they were looking for a naïve ale drinker for this, a Bank Holiday Monday and nearly found it in me! All that was available was; **Titanic's** 'Raspberry Pale' at 4.7%. I wisely took just the half and regretted it immediately. Not. My. Cuppa. Tea. And do you want to guess how it went down.....!

Pete admitted that it was hard to shift; "wey eye, I'll be having a bit a trouble shiftin that wun!" he said giggling.

Customers told me of other times like this in the past and patience had worn thin what with the occasional (but rare) iffy pint with some converting to ness-a-guin. You can be right 98% of the time but it's the 2% that

gets you into trouble. I do though, look at the pub and it shouts to need 2-3 hand pumps but no; just the 1.

The pub once came 7th in the CAMRA Best Pub National Competition and so, not happy with the Raspberry Pale on the Monday, I went back the following Sunday (trying to give it every possible chance) and had the Oakham's Bishops Farewell a golden ale* that I thought was more an Amber at 4.6ABV and it was perfect. On a list of local pubs where there's always someone 'earthy' to speak to for great beer and great chat The

Plough comes at the top and is still today how the old Tharp Arms, Chippenham was to me some 25 years ago. There's nowhere like it with its low ceiling and compact setting. If you like village boozers this is the one and all the customers are great folk. The village boasts a Primary School, two shops, a chippie, two boozers, a garage and no through traffic. I can also tell you that most of the old Ely Rugby Club players moved to Little Downham. So, I ask; why aren't YOU living there!

*Next month 'Golden' beer – what is it?

Food at the Plough

Pete's wife Wasana, is Taiwanese and a superb chef, her reputation goes for miles and if you haven't heard the secret of this little pub's food menu then you must try it before it has any cause to alter. It really is the best!

The whole family are keeping it going at the moment with bills approaching £400 per week just for his utilities. The Government's August subsidies can't come soon enough I'm sure. I can't say enough good things about The Plough and Little Downham in general and those cracking walks top it off. The villagers just don't.....sorry, DO know how lucky they are!

The Tenant Landlord

A very rough guide to taxation and the spaghetti of a mess things can get into

Recently a tenant landlord (TL) invited me to do some of my line of work for him and we got talking about his business situation after the job was done and his situation is like it is for many landlords; just so messed up and the bane of their lives is the 'messy contract'. This particular one has sub-let from a previous tenant and so the owner enjoys stopping him getting his own fresh contract so that our man can invest in the future of the pub and get a return on his money spread over a longer period.

To the owner of the pub, the perfect TL puts £10,000 - £30,000 into the pub and yet can clear off straight away for which there's only one way that happens in a panic and you can guess how! The owner then says to the next 'wannabee' TL; "I, (chokes slightly) just spent £30,000 on the place so the rent has gone up" knowing full well not one penny of it was their own. Life for the owner is therefore sweet. Tenancy agreements can often be sold on, so a smart TL will want a long agreement then front end it with lots of purchases that add to the TL's business turnover and profit. The TL then, has years to extract said profit from that building extension and justify the money spent. Some will want to front end the tenancy with every effort and sell the tenancy on with greatly improved books to show that there's good profit in the pub and so = happy days.

If you buy a £100 tool, you get 20% back at tax time but with 'Capital Investment' a large investment, you can claim the value/cost back over seven years on the books at 20% per year. So, that £10,000 project gets you £2,000 off the next tax bill but the work is now only worth the £8,000 and so you get 20% off that next year (£1,600) and the project is now worth £6,400. This continues for the seven years until it is 20% of diddly-squat and your TL claimed nearly all the money back that it cost. At the end of a tenancy in this country, any modification or alteration you've made to a building must be agreed beforehand with the owner and must stay when you leave.

An owner though, can see it another way; if they let you have a long tenancy, you'll build up the business hard and sell the lease on (profitably) with plenty of time left and excellent books, so now they deny you that long agreement (and that chance) and see you to the end of your shorter tenancy and do it because they can and because they like to keep this TL because they aren't sure what the next one might be like. So, now our TL won't spend unnecessary money yet is still forced by many clauses in the agreement to hand the pub back looking mint and if you did spend on anything, it's theirs too. You'll know from this then that some owners want to see you suffer.

All this forgets one thing and that is that TLs are putting in their own hard earned money – already taxed once and hoping it's a good idea, an idea that will change things at the pub for the better and they aren't 'Mystic Meg's so it can go spectacularly wrong; a band stand that is never used because a neighbour complained over the noise or a look to the pub that doesn't work.

Some ten years ago, a hard-working joiner who had two businesses in Ely, the large family et al took on a pub and the risk of a completely new trade. Using his building trade skills, he extended and found old workings behind walls which he made features of and the place went from a low-key pub to a fantastic gastro but only for a matter of days because well, read on.... So far so good but now we have a kitchen, we have to have inspectors of said kitchen and upon inspection they failed it and all the work should have been fudged to get it through and up and running at the minimum cost wasn't. Our man did the whole 9-yards running to £30K (allegedly) and having done all this he couldn't afford the dray that week so was thrown out pretty much immediately by the big brewery owner. He'd broken the contract and the owners could legally do it and, unsurprisingly, the owners probably couldn't wait to do it. They now had a spectacular pub to put on the market with bags of unharnessed potential and at a higher rent. That is for them, a win-win situation but to the owner it's a bloody harsh lesson in business.

A short report on Cambridge (summer) Beer Festival 2023



The piping is like the worst nightmare of a Grateful Dead roady! (above) Fast Track. No Taster. (top) the lager choice

Organised and run by Cambridge CAMRA branch. Perhaps I can only speak of my own day but the train and bus journey were smoothly taken with the bus to look for being the 'citi' and thanks to Mike Playle, I made it on the right one. My first stop was over at

Pastore (pronounced pas-tor-ray) of Waterbeach in the Brewers Bar area and tried a little of their least sour but it wasn't for me. Then I took a Three Blind Mice Juice Rocket at 4.5% and described as a session beer... This was a lovely start and then I moved over to the Lager

bar next to the Cider Bar for no other reason than A) Try something different and B) To be around as Mike was due back soon. I had the Landbier by Fuerst Wiscek (5.0%) and then their Pils (5.0%) and enjoyed the Pils especially. There, I've done it! I tried two types of beer in the first hour and now normal service was to be resumed.

As the Friday was the penultimate day, beers were selling out and just like Ely, it is your 4.0% that go first and I was left looking at mostly 5.0% ABV+ drinks and later started to suffer. A halt was called at 3pm and so I chose to go up Castle Hill and visit the Castle Inn and the Architect opposite where I ate. On arriving back at 5pm the queue was over 800 yards long and while I stayed in it for 30-minutes I realised my day was done and time to go. I'd had too many strong beers earlier on.

Whilst my glass made it home, my programme and notes were sadly lost. The CBF was really well organised, the huge effort and organisation was clear to see. The toilets need a mention as they get 12/10!

I couldn't help think how impressive the whole beer festival perhaps looked to a foreign visitor. I'm glad Cambridge allow tasting, it isn't abused.



About 1pm Friday at the CBF 2023

I can't get over the madness of this two-hour stop between 3-5pm though where we all have to vacate the site. Others achieve this in one hour and if they can do something about the queue to get in, they will sell even more beer!

Here's a beautiful pub to visit when heading west.

The Plough at Caldecott in Rutland County by Phil Utting-Brown

Blink and you'd miss it! If Rutland is the smallest county in England, then Caldecott must be one of its smallest villages. Lying where the three counties of Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Lincolnshire meet, the Plough Inn sits on the A6003 on the second curve of an S-bend and motorists must pass it in a flash and think "that looked like a nice pub?". Well, I can confirm that it is!



Debbie and Gene get their just desserts!

Locally sourced Stone the pub is over 200 years old

Safe in the hands of Gene and Debbie Plower for twenty five years and boasting its CAMRA pub of the season award, a variety of furniture seems to have been sourced from bars and living rooms and combined with some subdued lighting, William Morris (strawberry thief) wallpaper, table lamps and books crammed with local information you get the feeling that you are in the front of someone's house: a feeling enhanced by an abundance of wooden panelling stretching through to a passageway to the spotless toilets so long that I felt I must have left the county.

Of course, there is no sight more welcome in any hostelry than a proud row of hand pumps and the Plough Inn has four. Dismayed as I was to have been seconds too late to enjoy the Butcombe Bitter, it's successor; Nene Valley's Woodcock's Relish at 4.3 ABV was a satisfying substitute as was their Egyptian Cream Stout at 4.6. I passed on the Ossett White Rat [4.0] having experienced it recently in The Albert and spent the rest of the evening - probably unwisely at 5.0% - enjoying Fallen Angel, courtesy of Nuneaton's Church End Brewery.

Very little is seen of Mrs Plower - unless you happen to run into her helping out on the greengrocer stall at nearby Uppingham market on a Friday - as she is busy in the kitchen. The Plough Inn has a blackboard of a dozen main courses [so good we ate there twice], all home cooked, offering among others steak, pies, fish and balti options as well as five or six vegan meals and when you've had enough of the beer Gene will run you through his huge selection of fabulous Lyme Bay Country Wines, when he's not pulling pints or waiting tables.

And thus, we wandered home on the lookout for osprey, which frequent the region. Alas, gazing skyward, I tripped on a kerb, fell flat on my face and everything went . . . *dark*. Fil

For that visit; The Plough Inn, 16 Main Street, Caldecott, Market Harborough. LE16 8RS.

Former Rural Pubs Officer Bruce Pattern has some unfinished business with the Ely Branch. A book full of his muses?
Bruce's Babble

All in a Name (from March 2018)

I popped into my local the other day, peering in eager anticipation to see which ales were on offer, and spotted a pump clip which brought an instant smile to my face. It made me wonder how many times have I felt compelled to try a brew purely because of its amusing name. Could it have been a clever marketing ploy, I mused, or was it simply because the brewer had an impish sense of humour?

After enjoying a couple of pints, I returned home to dig out the latest edition of The Good Beer Guide and turned to the back where the beers within were listed in alphabetical order. It wasn't long before I began chuckling to myself.



The first beer which toyed with my imagination was the brainchild of the Corinium Brewery, Cirencester. It suggested to me that, over the years, what we have understood to have been a well-known salute, could actually have been a regular question put to that famous roman emperor whenever he popped in to a convenient hostelry – Ale Caesar?

The Rock and Roll Brewery, Hockley nr. Birmingham has surely created an instant hit by naming the king of its beers Brew Springsteen - a bit heavy for some perhaps. Another celebrity ale has emerged from The Brew Foundation, Winkle, Cheshire – Janet's Treat Porter – something to sink your teeth into, no doubt. Then, of course, there's that gem from the Box Steam Brewery, Holt, Wiltshire – Piston Broke – must have been addictive!

There are many more, some which are not officially recognised, having evolved by mixing two ales in one glass. For example, I have enjoyed, more than once, a popular winter concoction in some Adnams pubs known as Mother-in-Law. It's a blend of Old and Bitter!

Then there are some wonderful names for the breweries themselves. My favourite is situated in Coldharbour, Surrey and was, no doubt, influenced by the neighbouring village of Leith Hill. Just the thought of a pint of Tallywhacker or Crooked Furrow from The Leith Hill Brewery could be enough to strike terror into the hearts of the squeamish. And what was the name of the brew in your local which inspired this article, I hear you ask? Daleside's Old Leg Over!

Cheers!

Bruce

Bruce visited the 2023 Cambridge Beer Festival

It was great to feel the adrenaline pumping once more as our rather long in the tooth group of grain appreciation enthusiasts cycled, midweek, from Haddenham to the Cambridge Summer Beer Festival.

We took the scenic route beside the river from Waterbeach, passing ducks, swans, runners and rowers until the marquee loomed in the distance across Midsummer Common like a white oasis in the desert.

Our thirst grew as we waited in the enormous queue in the midday sun. At last, the gates opened and we flowed in orderly fashion to grab a programme and glass and find a table - they filled up quickly. Spoilt for choice, we headed through noisy throng to behold the wondrous sight of the extra-long bar.

A half or three of strange sounding ales slipped down, without hardly touching the sides, supplemented by a quarter loaf of bread, cheddar and pickle. In no time at all time was called at 3pm and we were required to depart happy and full - well almost - we had to rest on the way home at the Red Lion Histon to recharge our batteries from a choice of only nine ales on hand pump!

A very good day was had by all followed by a peaceful snooze. Here's to the next one!

Cheers!

Bruce

Branch numbers and newsletter circulation

Numbers of Ely branch members has been boosted to 485 with 37 new members signed up for CAMRA membership at the CBF so we need to thank Cambridge branch for all their hard work!

Of those, 335 take this newsletter which is 69%. The other 31% presumably thought they were going to be inundated with double glazing or today's new one; die, get incinerated, don't trouble the family and leave your money on the table when you go.

Ely CAMRA June Committee meeting (including dates for next year's Ely Beer Festival)

The meeting was called as an SGM as the accounts had to be ratified but nothing has yet been received from the previous treasurer and a trip from Saffron Walden for the official CAMRA officer proved unnecessary. However, said officer is well up to speed with many articles of CAMRA doctrine and we learnt heaps from him. We thanked him for a trip wasted and have invited him to do it again ... when we're ready.

A well-attended meeting at hosts 3at3 (who opened up especially for us) saw us all agree to the winners of the City and Rural pubs of the year but we can OFFICIALLY still not tell you who the winners are because now we know the winners it is to be a surprise! I can tell you that the city POTY was done by vote while the rural vote/system has not been to anyone's satisfaction. More of which next month.

Chairman Tony Gimbert is now also voted in as the Beer Festival Organiser and we can say right now that it will be on AT LEAST Friday 2nd - Saturday 3rd February 2024 at the Maltings BUT it is up to the BF committee to decide whether the Thursday (1st) evening is back. So, although we don't know much yet, we do know this; you have 'the weekend of event' date.

Tony is to get the Cambridge notes on all the beers from CAMRA's National Brewery Information System and also the Nat. Brew. Scoring System. This will allow Ely branch to look at how it can help pubs pick the right type of beer taking into account, how good we the neutral drinkers think the beer is, its type and its ABV. Note; at the moment, pub chains usually just offer a list of beers and the gravity and often nothing more.

Soham Beer Festival – Walter Gidney Pavillion, Soham

Held on Friday 7th and Saturday 8th July this is usually held in the Town pavilion at the height of the summer, the beers tend to suffer a little by day two. The Soham Scouts and Guides do the burgers and Blue Shed a local recording studio organise the big stage with live bands all the way through both days. Always bring your own easy chairs and sit out on the grass taking it all in and chill as the evening cools down. There are 30 real ales on again and 8 ciders. The Soham rotary have organised this for 15 years now and I've never missed a day but now will miss the whole festival. Started as only a beer festival, it's now 75% about the music. The new Soham Station is just 400m.

The Tale End

The Tharp Arms, Chippenham visits the Greene King brewery circa 1983

A brewery trip with other regular pub goers can be a great source of chat for years to come if it is heralded 'a great one' by all and my first still has that status. Our trip to Greene King Land (BSE) was held by my old local; The Tharp Arms, Chippenham. The landlord, a legend to this day was North Londoner and ex-Royal Navy man Ron Chalkley who got us all signed up and the mini-coach was by Neal's Taxi's from literally opposite the pub!

Ron was a larger-than-life landlord who specialised in a bit of leftover tarmac, chopped wood, pheasant (out of season), fish (out of season), getting your car MOT'd and moving stuff from here to there plus excellent beer and was, when young, one of 8 children in one bed (so legend has it) and now here he was, a man never seen to stop working. On the day we duly met, the first instruction from him was made clear to all but mainly at myself; **"Right, no questions lads, none at all, nothing, zilch, nada, an' YOU Taffy especially you; no questions! We know you're always asking 'how' but not today!"**. I had no idea why I was being picked out other than the fact that I did indeed have 100 questions and he could read my mind.

The tour started with drinks early doors at the pub and the laughs began. Every silly little nuance we all had was picked out and pulled up for all to see. Old Dick needed the loo getting in the minibus and once more before we had even left the car park and then again 5 miles up the road when we all joined him.

Ron shepherded us into the brewery and we set off on the tour with the leading, oldest and veteran brewery trip leader and Scottish lassie; Lydia. The tour leaders know what they want to say 'off-pat' and they are sure to be clear, audible and tell you what you need to know in the shortest way and always; to avoid confusing the brewery tourist with something that can be misunderstood. Lydia took us around and at each area asking at the end of each stop; "are there any questions?" to which the reply was an off-putting deathly silence and I'm sure she felt that she hadn't picked up on our vibe or maybe we were just 'a strange bunch?'. I'm still none the wiser at this point about why it was important to keep quiet. We got to the big Copper beer fermenters where Lydia opened the round glass hatch to peer inside and she mentioned the foam on the beer needed removing and I finally blurted out "but how?" and I got that look from everyone, the one that people SAVE for me! Lydia's reply was a sprightly; "well, we suck it off!".

As we prepared to move off, someone else gave an exaggerated; "um, Lydia, what do you do with the foam again?" and none the wiser she replied pragmatically; "nae problem, why yes, we suck it clean right off the top, oh yes!". Quickly, another question followed; "I really don't get this Lydia? What do you etc". Well, you get the picture by now..... and we all cried with laughter and my question is now considered a great one (by a large group of one) and for years after, old customers at the Tharp would quip on sight of me entering; "AND what do we do with the foam!". Now I know why old men like a few (daft) young men in tow on such occasions!

Anyway, why the rush? Well out of the three trips around the brewery, we were the first to finish and enter the tap room where we demolished all the free beer and sandwiches before the second and especially the third crew (containing several David Lloyds no doubt) got in and found just drips and crumbs.

As we stood enjoying our 'clever tour' the other two younger tour leading ladies gathered with Lydia and we could see her explaining with a perplexed look her trip and then the two girls could be seen to explain back to Lydia in return 'something' and it was then that her facial expression changed as though the poor girl had scored an own goal. This then got another mighty cheer from the Tharp as the penny was seen to **at last** have dropped!
Great days are made of such mischief!

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 trip 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 'shove it, chuck it, toss it', Cambridgeshire Community Archive Network and Rutland CAMRA branch, Corinium Brewery.

David 'Taffy' Lloyd