

# Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action.

Newsletter – October 2023

Welcome to the October Newsletter,

This month we have a bit more lewkel news than normal. We visit a gem of a pub holding a Beer Festival in Denver, I question Greene King's decision to reduce the ABV of their IPA; of all the brewers that **REALLY** shouldn't try it... Report on our excellent Tasting Beer Correctly trip that went so well and I've also rounded off with another Tale End I've remembered! We've several committee members who tantalise me with tales of great trips but where o where are the reports! I've given them the hurry up. This newsletter will, we hope, keep you up to date with changes and what's on in not just your local branch/patch with some festivals near enough to visit. My details are at the foot of the page.

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

[Regal, Cambridge BF \(JD Wetherspoons\)](#). F. Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October. 36-39 St Andrew's Street, Cambridge.

[Sutton Sausage & Cider Festival](#). M. F. Friday 20<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October. St Andrew's Church, Sutton.

[Norwich Beer Festival](#). F. M. Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> – Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> October. [Norwich & District CAMRA] Likely Ely branch run and trip on the Thursday.

[Haddenham Winter Beer Festival](#). F. M. Friday 10<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> November. Robert Arkenstall Centre, Haddenham. CB6 3XD. Proceeds to the Robert Arkenstall Primary School.

[Ely Elysian Winter Beer Festival 2024](#). F. Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February. The Maltings, Ely.

[Cambridge Beer Festival 2024](#). F. 20<sup>th</sup> May 2024 – 25<sup>th</sup> May 2024. Jesus Green, Cambridge.

## Ely Branch CM news

The branch held a committee meeting on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> of October at The Plough, Little Downham. The next meeting is Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November provisionally at The Royal Standard. Start is 7.45pm and all CAMRA members are welcome.

## Ely Beer Festival Meeting

A very healthy 15 souls arrived for the second meeting in late September and although the budget isn't cleared by HQ for us to progress, it is imminent and on schedule this next week. In the meantime, the logo and posters are in hand. It has been decided that Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> will be induction and trade evening leaving the BF as the Friday and Saturday again. Many questions raised over the viability of a BF glass so we'll see what comes of that. The next meeting is on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> October; 7.30pm at the West End pub and as usual, anyone wishing to help do attend. We have been invited to take the last weekend of January in 2025 and again in 2026. This avoids the Six-Nations and if Booze on the Ouse stay where they are too! But as to rail strikes ... we'll have to see if that one arrives.

## Lewkel News

**The Fountain, Soham** has been sold at last, on the market for several years the pub has a new owner in Stonegate Pub Co Ltd who own 5,000 UK pubs but who are likely to open it under the Craft Union Pub Co Ltd brand of the business. Stonegate who already own The Hereward and The Minster in Ely use the 'Craft Union' brand at the Kings Arms to push high value pubs with the TV for sport, pool table etc but food isn't on the menu for the Fountain just like it isn't at the Kings Arms. The pub changes hands on 15<sup>th</sup> November when Zoe & John vacate having been there since around 2006 and the pub will be closed for a fortnight before opening on around the 1<sup>st</sup> December specifically in time for the Ely Branch rural pub trip - not. The pub has stuck to just Doom Bar and Ghost Ship for the last ten years and ale drinkers will be delighted at the thought of matching the Hereward/Minsters 5-6 real ales and not the 1 real ale of the Kings Arms; it has us salivating already!

The **Lazy Otter, Stretham** has had planning permission for change of use (to flats) turned down for the final time. The Parish Council (and CCC) saw through the fact that the building trade owner had used a change of applicant so they weren't we guess; amused. We really hope someone will bring this back as a pub.

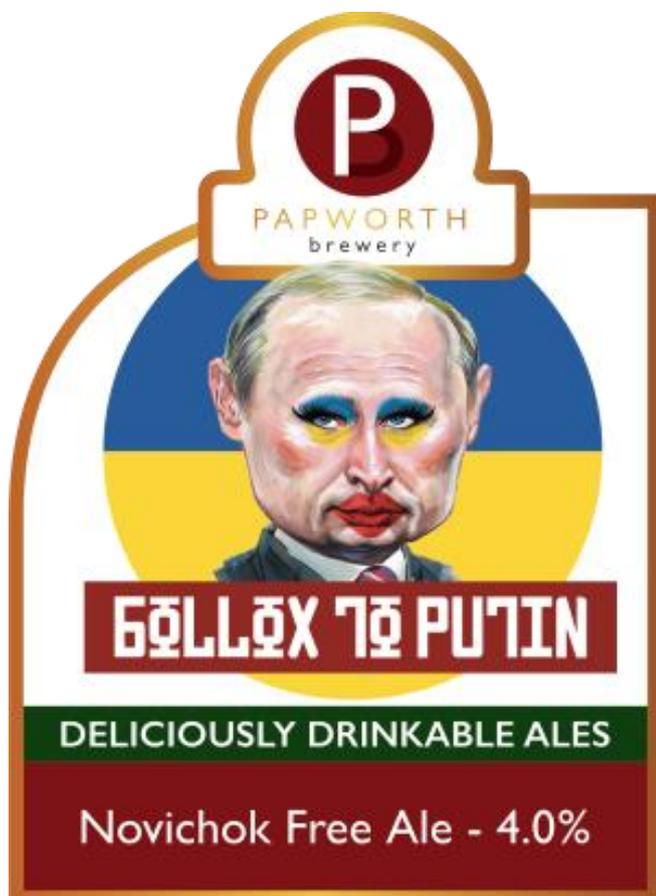
This may also mean I can still hopefully carry out my fantasy re-enactment of the Live & Let Die powerboat chase along the Old Spring, The Cam and the Great Ouse and have the finishing spectacle of my beer belly storming up onto the lawn with the V8 engine spitting flames and JW Pepper looking disgusted ("why there goes my brother willy-wob!"), then, through the French doors and arriving at the bar only to be told; "You might be bloody James whatsisface but you're not from round 'ere, now get outta moy pub!".

**The Carpenter's Arms, Soham** still has a marvellous 3 real ales on and we're learning that co-landlord 'Joppo' has created space by standing the barrels vertically and using a special spile system to do it. So, where's the fourth barrel we all hoped for? Not sure and until recently no problem as all was heading upwards; but the beers are getting 'samey'. Not sure why, maybe all the variety was while looking for the select few, the easy route and not looking for the variety per se. Bass Best Bitter, a Timothy (BB or Landlord), Lacons/St. Austell and Wolf's Lupus Lupus have been on mostly everytime I've frequented over the summer. Perhaps the foot has slipped off the throttle - temporarily.

**The Village Inn, Witchford** is now permanently closed. The landlord 'Tim' had been there since Christmas 2022 and now the pub is advertised looking for a new tenant. You may recall just two months ago, we gave the Village Inn a 'no report' as there was no beer on at all. Fortress Investment Group acquired Punch Taverns in December 2021, this being a PT pub.

**Tharp Arms, Chippenham;** our rural pub of the year was serving on a recent Monday Marstons Fever Pitch (4.2% ABV) and it was spot on. **The Cherry Tree, Haddenham** has been put up for sale Freehold for the asking price of £350K. Formerly a pub, it has in recent years been a café/bar and given that the Three Kings in the village is a gastropub, maybe, just maybe, somebody will take it and open it as a full-on boozier again? We can only hope! **The Fountain in Ely** is for sale (Freehold?) actually, it's been for sale for years – if you asked! Long time owner John Borland has done some 25 years at the pub and usually has one real ale on. He's got some nice flats above that are accruing a nice bob or seven, so expect a long-drawn-out affair as it has been until now. The **Maid's Head, Wicken** had three beers on a Wednesday but this ambitious set up was floored as the Lupus Lupus by Wolf wasn't on and after a pint of Timothy's Boltmaker; that was gone too! Luckily the Landlord (the beer that is) was on and excellent too. Alas there's trouble 't mill and landlord Scott Osborne (is due/has) left at the end of September. It didn't help when he fell off his MX bike two months ago and spent 6-weeks with his forearm in plaster. He looks like a man who can't reconcile either landlord or customer, both being so very fickle to work with. Best to clear your head I think Scott and start again – and good luck!

While mentioning fractures, I hear that local CAMRA members Martha Zantides and partner were hit recently by a cyclist riding illegally on the pavement and their wrists didn't fare so well either, get well ladies and a box of straws are on the way!



*You should see her husband!*

#### **Papworth Brewery Trip – Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December**

This, I rather impolitely wrote last month as 'this is not a session' but it wasn't put quite so eloquently! I apologize if you were offended but anyway, we'd love to see you there so you can watch the whole process of beer being brewed throughout and finishing sometime mid-afternoon. Bring a packed lunch and drink with you and dress in roughs. There is a brewery tap room 50m away named the Crystal Ship which opens at 5pm and there's no charge for this but do please put your name down on the Ely Branch Facebook page when it opens (around the 10<sup>th</sup>).

Papworth have invited us to watch a brew being produced and it's been a 'given' that we'd be pleased to see it at our BF in February but as we keep having to say; until the budget for said BF is approved; NOTHING IS CERTAIN!

Myself and a friend visited The Albert recently finding Papworth's Hop Priest on AND the pump clip looked a hastily placed mono photocopy but, undaunted, we polished off a few with my FRIEND not deviating – a thumbs up. Chris Jones, the founder and head brewer will make the BF brew himself for us and Chris's background is as a qualified scientist and he's serious about the water he uses and adds salts to get the water right before he starts.

If you've been on many a brewery trip then perhaps, you'd like this time to get involved and watch it being brewed. If you are driving and can offer a lift then please put your name forwards on the Ely Branches Facebook page. I can take three.

### Rural Pub Run & Trip – Saturday 9th December

All CAMRA members are invited on the trip which, now has the nod and we will be travelling by Mini-Coach 16-seater with Lords Travel. This should be another excellent social event organised by Til Utting-Brown (see below) with the RPOTY (report below) side sorted by myself. The price is provisionally £25 per head but may have to be £30 as we are looking for CAMRA funding. It includes what appears to be a sumptuous buffet lunch at the Tharp Arms, Chippenham at around 13:00. The buffet will have homemade scotch eggs, homemade sausage rolls, gammon joint, selection of cheeses, crackers, chutney and Pizzas. Vegetarians catered for.

I ask aloud; is this the real bottle washing 'do' we never had in March this year? Well, it is now!

Trains from Cambridge 11:00 for 11:14 at Ely and 11:05 for 11:25 and 11:20 for 11:36 arrival at Ely.

Meet at 11:20am; Ely Railway Station Car Park 11:30 to 11:40 leave.

**The Carpenter's Arms, Soham** arrive at 12:00, 12:40 leave.

**Tharp Arms, Chippenham** arrive at 13:00, 13:50 leave. Buffet lunch.

**The Maid's Head, Wicken** arrive at 14:20, 15:05 leave.

**Five Miles from Anywhere - No Hurry Inn, Upware.**

Arrive at 15:20, 16:00 leave.

**Three Kings, Haddenham**, arrive at 16:20, leave 17:00.

**The Chequers, Sutton** arrive at 17:10, leave 17:50.

**(Three Pickerels, Mepal – our reserve pub in case).**

**The White Horse, Witcham** arrive at 18:00, leave 18:40.

Ely Railway Station Car Park 19:11 arrive.

Trains for Cambridge leave at 19:18, 19:27 and 19:50.



*Til Utting-Brown; Getting it done*

Again, we'll ask you to put your names down for this on the [Ely CAMRA Branch's Facebook](#) page. Final price next month.

### Greene King's IPA now down to 3.4%

You may not be aware but, the government on August 1<sup>st</sup> set a lower tax rate for beers under 3.5% ABV which the brewers may or may not choose to take advantage of. They also brought beers over 8.5% down to the same standard tax rate. Because supermarkets push so hard in the low alcohol area, it's considered by the government to have 'evened up' the battle between the supermarket and the pub, I fail to see how it has done any such thing and the industry doesn't believe it has gone anywhere near far enough. With many great beers coming in at 3.8%, the drop to 3.4% is just a 'hop' too far for some and they have stayed where they are and will pay the standard rate of tax.

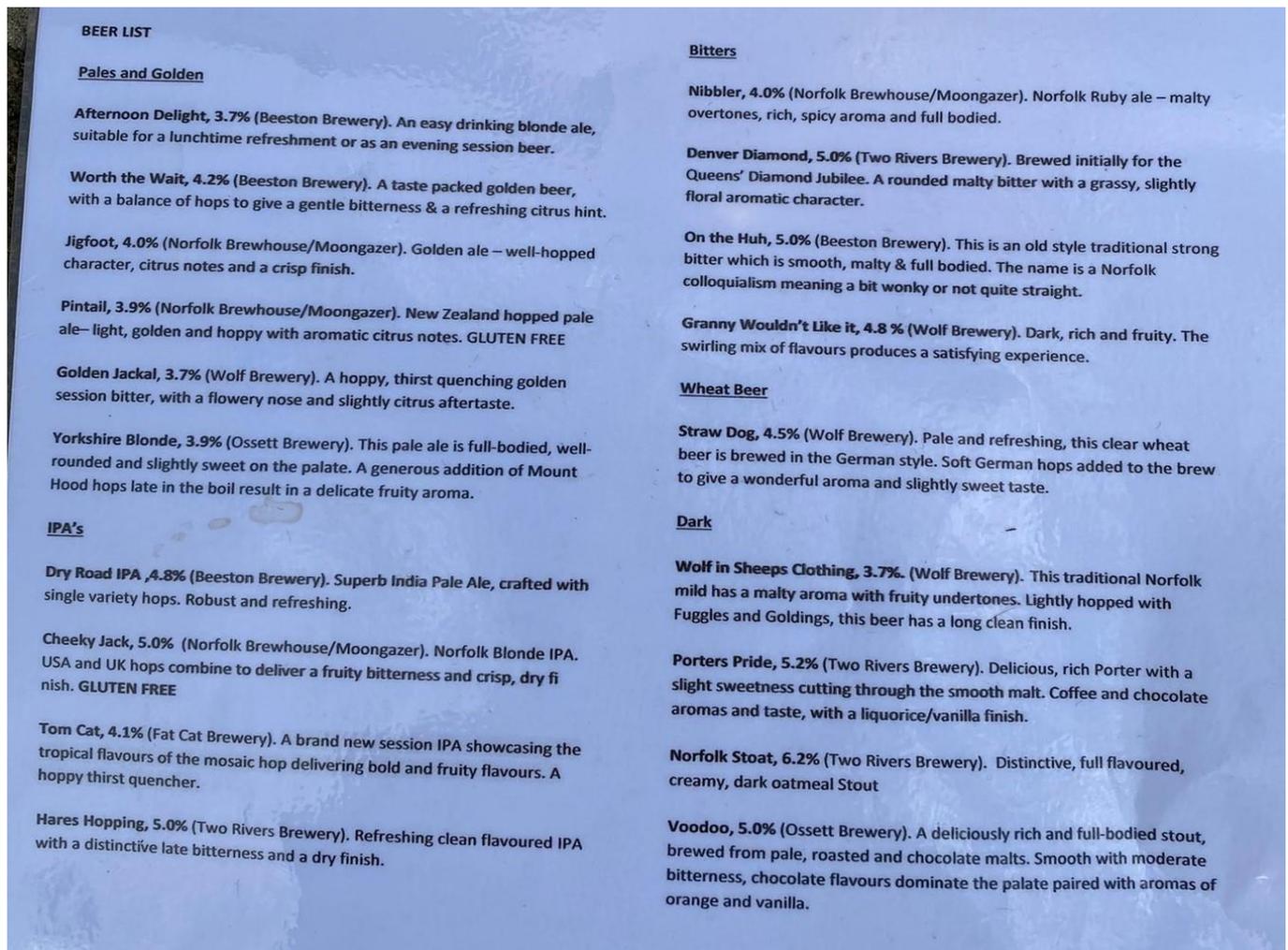
Greene King's until recent IPA at 3.6% and the daddy of East Anglia has though made the move and has in the last fortnight started selling the 'new' IPA at 3.4%. The savings have definitely been passed on if the pub prices seen so far are anything to go by - no argument there. You would imagine that GK have the history and the clout to have tried out a few provisos in their short 224 years. But NO, it would seem not, the beer seems to have lost the other half of its soul the first of which died in 2009 with the change to hop oil instead of real hops and now there's nothing of the original taste left.

Of all the breweries that couldn't afford to get it wrong, it was Greene King - but they have. Some will claim that they don't care and that the world market will like a weaker beer but what about all the GK landlords here at home? What will they do when sales to older valued customers fall? As an example, Lacon's Norfolk Gem is such a full, rich beer at 3.6% ABV it seems impossible to think that it would lose so much of its rich flavour should they try to drop the ABV to 3.4% and it IS worth the extra 50p anyway. I guess the thing is, you need to start with something before you lose it.



*Could Lacons' have done it better?*

## A Quaint Little Watering Hole; The Blackstone Engine Bar, Denver



*Keeping it visual; a very good choice of beers*

Recently I took in another Beer Festival on the outskirts of the village of Denver near Downham Market. With the old Jenny's Arms closed due to subsidence, it has been left to the Bell Inn and a new pub at the far end of the village to push on. The Blackstone Engine Bar is set in an Old Windmill as the last building in the village on Sluice Road. The pub opened in 2017 and has several real ales on in a lovely old building with many features dating from the Victorian era. Two Rivers Brewery brew off the same site so the predominant beer for sale at the festival was their own - the Denver Diamond which is normally a 4.7% but was 5.0% on the day and was a beauty! (such are the vagaries of a small brewery!). This was a stunning drink and I can't wait to try it again. I also tried an excellent bitter in Beeston Brewery's quirkily named; On the Huh. Brewers; Moongazer had 3-4 beers on and there were other rare guest ales too.



*The Old Mill workings can just be seen on the right*

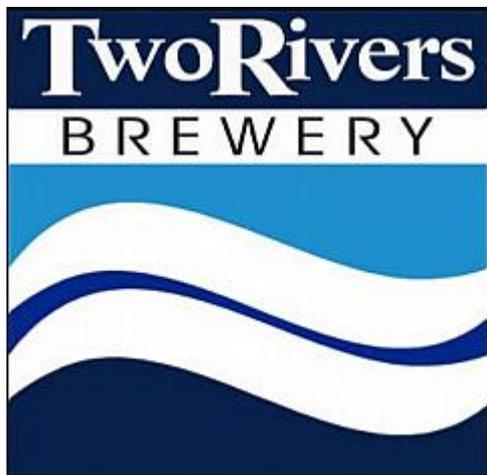
The catering gazebo was selling West Indies street food, well – Trinidad & Tobago to be exact – I was corrected on this, but to me it'll always just be just another inch on the map!

The live music, changed regularly and there was traditional East Anglian 'stepping' and we spotted Ely BF helping-hand; Michael Czarnobaj stepping out. There are shops selling cakes, trinkets and one selling ice cream being laced throughout the building and there are two grassed drinking areas front and rear. Eerily, when the acoustic music stopped you could hear a pin drop as it is silent at that end of Denver.

Added to this I had two lovely walks; one there and one back from the Downham Market Railway Station being around 45-minutes each way. If you keep an eye out, the Blackstone Engine Bar will hold regular Beer Festivals throughout the year and it's well worth the trip.

### Two Rivers Brewery, Denver

Founded by John Nash in February 2012 Two Rivers Brewery is located at Denver between the banks of the Great Ouse and Bedford Rivers, the brewery initially concentrated on bottled ales, and very early on had four of these beers featured in the CAMRA good beer guide and they've received numerous CAMRA bottled ale awards ever since. Cask production was added in 2013 initially to supply the newly founded Drayman's Arms, Ely and also surrounding East Anglian Free Houses. The brewery used to supply the Ely Beer Festival on an annual basis but nobody is sure what happened to that outlet! They do however, still supply the Ely Folk Festival every year. The brewery now has six regular ales, one seasonal green hop ale and various single run ales as well as when requested, brewing three house ales for The Wellington at Feltwell.



The Blackstone Engine Bar brewery tap was started around 7 years ago and the bar has been awarded the Norfolk area CAMRA Cider pub of the year on several occasions. It holds folk nights twice a month, an unplugged acoustic night once a month and a live music event once a month. Beer Festivals are run occasionally each summer and autumn. The Denver Windmill site also hosts the Norfolk Makers Markets on a Sunday once a month. The bar and other facilities are available for Private Hire.

### Norwich Beer Festival Trip

#### Monday 23rd – Saturday 28th October

This is a great BF; I think it's the old church that makes it click plus the humongous effort that Norfolk CAMRA put in. Doors open at 11:30 and the daily break is between 3-5pm when they turf one and all out. You can drink through happily till 3.15pm but to get back in you need to be queueing from 4.30pm and even then, it is a long queue, many take advantage of Norwich's beautiful and many varied pubs for a bite to eat. There's a very short queue on the right of the front door for CAMRA members which when not there, you can't see! So, ask a steward near the entrance if it's unclear to you. Ely branch members will be going in dribs and drabs but a few are taking the Thursday as it's a little less crowded. [Click here](#) for details of times and costs. There are no railway strikes due at the time and remember, CAMRA members enter for FREE!

### Our 'How to Taste Beer Correctly' Evening at The Maypole, Cambridge



....and these are just one drinker's glasses!

Fourteen of us gathered in the back bar at The Maypole on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> September for this exercise in teaching 'we' beer drinkers in the art of tasting our beer. We were joined by some 6 Cambridge branch members and 'Gladys Emmanuel' (yes, she the star of stage and screen!) was there too.

Will Smith, the Cambridge branch editor of 'Ale' magazine took the beer tasting and brought forward 4 unnamed ales for us to try and a mystery 5th which I see as-5 mystery ales then! Given a list of colours, of flavours we were invited to hold up the drinks to the light, smell them through closed hands and then to taste them. I'm so pleased that nobody gurned or spat their beer unlike that wine tasting rabble! We were even invited to taste the next beer and go back to taste previous beers again and that brought clearer results sometimes, all in the cause of identifying

the make-up of our beers. Well, I'm giving away his tips here; no wonder the rest of you weren't there; that's too easy! There is an advanced course that CAMRA offer but I think we all felt confident we can now taste beers and identify them correctly now. The best way it seemed was to compare what you 'thought' with your colleague doing the same thing and then subtly you alter the curve of your own conclusions.

The beers we'd been drinking were; Shott's Farm and their Two Tone, then Tydd Steam's Barn Ale, then Milton Pegasus and the fourth was Tring's Tea Kettle Stout. The final guest beer was Cherry Chouffe.

The event was a combined Ely and Cambridge event and importantly, we didn't just support an event, we got something big out of it and enjoyed it too! Thanks to Will Smith, Til Utting-Brown and hosts The Maypole; great job!



*Genuine smiles!*

### Tale End

You may have read the Cambridge Branch news that The Jolly Millers in Cottenham has been granted planning permission to convert the old place into residential use. Well, here is one happy memory of her as she disappears; My time playing rugby has given me the richest of memories and I'm privileged enough to come from an era mostly free of encumbrances and before attitudes had to change. We had a great attitude to fun! It was; "A is for Attitude and it comes first".



*Jolly Millers, Cottenham opened in 1842, once burnt down in 1898*

I know many beer games at the bar and they usually fall into two groups; the first is catching the uninitiated and the second is competition. The best of the uninitiated games is the 'three-man lift' in which three players lay on the floor and bind like a front row but with the addition that the outside players lock their legs around a leg each of the middle man and hold his arm around their shoulder thus forming a solid platform to be lifted. Along comes the club's 'strongman' and a lot of smelling salts, chest thumping and roaring goes on as the strongman gets ready. At this point the man in the middle who really had to be forced to join in simply declares; "look I've done all this before. Let someone else have a go!" leaps up and a new volunteer is found named Mr A. Fuwel who having got the gist of it thinks that this is all rather jolly and lays in the same position getting locked in tight for their lift. Tight isn't the word, I mean TIGHT, so tight the man in the middle can't move, they are; 'as one'. Mr Strongman checks for grip of the middle man because this is where the lift will be centred and will need to loosen the fellas belt a little, then some more, and some more for good grip. Next, he moves away but he's back with a pint of beer and sips a little while smiling down at Mr A. Fuwel and the look on his face as he realises that he's about to get a beer 'n balls trouser shampoo has to be seen!

Usually though, it is a genuine **competition** between players from both clubs and the best of these is the 'Boatrace'. This consists of 4 players from each club lining up facing each other in a transverse line along a central table. On the word 'go' the drinking starts from the same end and so the first player of each side lifts their pint from the table and downs the pint as fast as possible and then turns the empty glass upside down on their head so that the drips or the

inch of beer are on his own head and discourages flouncers. When that has happened, the next player can then and only then lift their pint from the table. Simple enough but it is difficult to be fast and smooth and of course you need to be able to drink quickly without breathing. The fastest of the drinkers are in fact open throated 'swollowers' who simply open up and pour it down and the best for miles was Ely Rugby Club's Treasurer of old; Robert 'Harry' Corbett – a 2-second pintman he just poured it in. Next would be the large gulpers like myself who could drink it in 3-seconds and 3 gulps but the average being 5-6 gulps in 5-6 seconds.

Over the years I'd found the key drinking position in the boatrace was number 3, 3 could make up ground and give 4 a chance or he could calm 4 down and give him a good solid lead, leading early just encouraged the opposition to cheat in order to catch up and for your own players to overtry; 3 was the key player. My Sunday team was the Old Sohamsos, a social team from, you guessed it; Soham. Over the seasons of Sunday social rugby, we began to notice we didn't get beaten in the bar. Our number 4 wasn't a big; man nor drinker, a Kiwi from Canterbury, 'Wardy' was a fast winger and applied thought to it and always did a great job. It was numbers one and two we had to worry about but usually we had some older men and we were OK and we could cover for a young lad but not for two of them. Young lads need to breath it would seem (ridiculous, I know!) after just a mouthful of beer, gasping and snorting out of all proportion to the tiny amount already drunk, they hadn't sorted out their breathing before the drink and so the rhythm of breathing was wrong before they started instead trying to do it in the middle.... very messy!

Eventually Carl and I worked it out that we, the Old Sohamsos hadn't been beaten for about 10 boat races and it had felt good that as "boatrace!" was called, Carl and Taffy were the first names our chaps wanted and our glasses would be charged. We continued winning and counting to 15 times but our rugby days were fading



like our fixture list so our record of 'masters of the boatrace' was safe; but only because it was also uncontested! The beer of choice is always bitter and even the lager drinkers took bitter, it being 10p cheaper and doesn't 'repeat' on you; so bitter it was. A ref would be found and he also got a pint but his was to top up all the miscreants who managed to drop 3" of beer just getting to the central table – accidentally of course! "oops! Sorry about that, lads! 3" gone tish, tish!" was met with "no problem, sir! Let me help fill that right back up to the brim for you!".

However, everyone could make one more local fixture and we were all up for it which was now rare. Local rivals Cottenham RFC or in this case I should say "après" à Le Jolly Millers pub. The game had been played in a great atmosphere as both teams played together on Saturdays, schooled together etc and I also think most of us knew this wouldn't be happening much more often (it hasn't, that was the last one). That atmosphere transferred to the Jolly Millers and suddenly someone roared assertively; "boatrace!!" and we agreed warmly. Unfortunately, we had so many drivers that day, all we could get were two youngsters at one and two, then myself and Carl at anchorman. "One more time mate? I don't think I can do this much more often!" he said, but I just reminded him of our record and how we needed to do our best to keep it.

The race started terribly for Sohamsos as our number two got stuck and twice needed to breath, he neighed like a horse with the beer exiting his nostrils, he'd got it badly wrong but then they all do the first time and at least he was having a go. I couldn't care though, all I wanted to see was THAT glass upside down on his head. As I took my turn, at three my opposite; Mickey George, was finishing his pint and we were to all intents and purposes a full pint behind and Carl and I were finishing on a losing note, you don't come back from this far behind without a miracle.....

With years of practice, I'd gone down to my pint, squatted, my chin down at the table, breathed out, then out and out again, then; waited..... suddenly two's glass was on his head and I was off. I drew in the beer sucking from the glass and pouring hard in equal measure while lifting the glass and standing straight and after two gulps I was arching backwards, the beer was down, the glass inverted atop my forehead...empty. The Cottenham supporters were now frenzied and were roaring out like a football crowd but I just slumped head down and gasping, my job done and I caught sight of Cottenham's anchor James Kilsby 2" down their final pint, not too quick but with plenty of time while Carl was picking up and though I'd made up a lot ground it was from way too far back and we were done for – or so it seemed....

Now, I wiped my lips I needed to breath and I sucked in much needed air, looking down I'd put the glass on the table and then suddenly I was hit and bashed with lots of cheering and yelling, someone then hugged me, put my head to his chest in a head hold and held it there so I could see nothing, the roar.....! I appealed; 'What hap.....what happen.....' I couldn't be heard, everyone was going wild, I stopped appealing and I could neither smile nor cry because the roaring was at either; the spectacle or, at winning or, at something funny and we had still lost; 'I've never seen anything like that before', 'that's a first!', 'I don't believe what I just saw', 'oh to see that one again!'. It took something like a minute before I got someone to calm down enough to finally tell me?

"After Mickey George put his glass on his head, their anchor, James Kilsby drank to within an inch from the bottom when suddenly Mickey's beer re-appeared; ON JAMES' FOOT!".

So, it seemed that James had stopped drinking when his foot warmed up! He'd looked down and screwed his face up at the sight of finest chunder on his nice shoe. And that, as they say; is how we came to win!

Signed; Carl and Taffy 16 times 'boatrace' winners (and still) undefeated.

The photo help this month is from; Michelle Butler (2), Til, Two Rivers Brewery, Papworth Brewery + Cambridgeshire Heritage, Google. 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 [Ely CAMRA Branch's Facebook](#) Facebook page 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](mailto: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.

David 'Taffy' Lloyd