

# Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action.

Newsletter – January 2024

## Welcome to the January Newsletter

Happy New Year! (alright.....be like that then!). Well, this month is all about revving up for our 14<sup>th</sup> annual Elysian Winter Beer Festival. We trust we're all revved up ready to go and for those of you who are volunteering to help I'll start with a big thank you, we honestly can't run this without you.

We hope it's going to get back to 2022 with a full sell out of all the beer and a packed hall, what a weekend that was! I had the horrible job of pulling down the barrels come Sunday morning and all I found were about 6 smelly pints of a black liquor in one barrel that had to be poured down the drain with the rest all being empty. No (real) waste there then. But we are battling a shortage of time and publicity so we're relying on you dropping a text or two on your friends to come out and try 'fresh' beer or as you know it; real ale.

This month's Tale End, is, I think; the last one! The last because when I tell you it's a true story; crashed the car, I had 12 pints, drove with 8 passengers and that I also was high on Coke (o-Cola) at the time; well, I'm sure you'll also want it to be my last too! But before you call the rozzers and use this as a confessional, please have one last look at one of my long-winded tales before dialling 111. I hope you've enjoyed them as much as I have writing them and putting back together some great memories, I'd do all of them again but just not get caught next time.

## BEER FESTIVALS AND EVENTS COMING UP. Key: NC (non-CAMRA). M (music). F (food).

[Cambridge CAMRA 'Minibus trip'](#) 27<sup>th</sup> January. Limited places (16). £25 includes a lovely spread. Usually, 7-8 pubs which are always a surprise. Book with Cambridge CAMRA. Starts at 11.40 to allow [Ely](#) folk to get from the station bang on time!

[Ely Elysian 14<sup>th</sup> Winter Beer Festival](#) F. Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> – Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February. The Maltings, Ely.

[Cambridge CAMRA 'Strolling Social'](#) 10<sup>th</sup> February. Cambridge branch are striding around the city to pubs short-listed on the City's CAMRA short-list. Will the beer be any good? Of course!

[Ely Branch Ale Trail](#) around Ely. Starts at The West End pub at 12 noon visiting 7 pubs (see below)

[St. Neots Beer & Cider Festival 'Booze on the Ouse'](#) F. Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March. Priory Centre, St Neots Priory Centre, Priory Lane, St Neots PE19 2BH.

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

[Peterborough Beer Festival](#) F. M. Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> August. Embankment, Peterborough

\*TBC\* [East Anglian Beer & Cider Festival](#) F. M. Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> – Monday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2024. St Edmundsbury Cathedral

## Ely Branch CM News

The branch held a committee meeting on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January which was a week later than normal and followed it up with a beer festival meeting on the back.

## Elysian 14th Winter Beer Festival

Up to 72 Ales, 10 Key Kegs, 16 Ciders. That's what is on offer as we head towards the big event. I don't see that many beers as any restriction at all so that means that the team are happy to pick up from 2022 and not from 2023... and let's hope that confidence is well placed?

We have the catering being done in house by the Maltings which I loved last year, none of this lettuce malarky – proper pork pies and pickles, something that would anchor a boat! The bar shape is being changed even though, other than the Cider Bar last year it was a step forwards.

Brewers; Downham Isle, Mile Tree, Moonshine, Papworth, Ampersand and Three Blind Mice all have brewery bars and it's good to see Downham Isle 'back in the game' after a long lay-off while Mile Tree from Peterborough are new but have a local connection in that the owner; Richard McAndrew, is a Fordhamite and brother to our Lewkel lad John!



I'm more than pleased to see Papworth Brewery from Earith there and I hope you'll really have a good crack at their beers because I do go on about them enough! The last two are Ampersand of Diss with who I reckon will hook up with Three Blind Mice to make it happen as Ampersand came over and did a tap takeover at the Drayman's Son late in 2023.

### Volunteers

Now on behalf of the branch I do implore more of you to volunteer and give a session of help if you can? I for instance just lose the Monday to setting up and the Sunday to pulling down. We had plenty of help in 2022 and last year half that and struggled. Bar staff are needed and as a small branch, we never have enough volunteers for this event. Whether it's on the entrance counter or in the hall and behind the bar; there's always help that is needed. Training is provided and we have an evening for that; Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> February, you can even tick off the sessions you want to do on our [volunteer's form](#).

### Admission

Will be £20 and for that the CAMRA members will get: £17 worth of drink tokens and £3 for the glass. For the non-members it is £20 entry which goes; £3 entry/£3 glass/£14 tokens. After that a £20 token is £20 (really!). You do of course get the programme which should have a map of how to get lost in Ely and that all-important beer list.

The glasses are refundable at the end of your evening or you can buy our 'event' glasses which this year have only been printed (on) in limited numbers so are a collector's item indeed. We are happy to say; we will sell out. Prosecco, water, soft drinks and 0% Ghost Ship are also available and if you are a designated driver in a group, you can cadge free soft drinks etc for the duration probably in the cider area.

The chosen charity will be [Willderland Farm](#) at Haddenham.

### Sponsorship

We're offering belated but excellent opportunities to hook up with us and advertise your business. Food, drink and accommodation should all be interested in this on and let's not forget taxis!

- If your company would like to sponsor the beer festival or a keg of beer in return for advertising, then email us at [elycamra@yahoo.com](mailto:elycamra@yahoo.com). We need adverts by 23<sup>rd</sup> January latest.
- £100 full page advert, £60 ½ page, £35 ¼ page. Approx. 16-page programme, 2000 copies printed for festival.
- T-shirts in hand sponsored by The Prince Albert.
- Beer tokens are sponsored by Le Spice with discount at the restaurant upon showing the wrist band.
- Programmes are sponsored by 3@3.

### And Don't Tick when joining.....

When joining, do not tick the box that says 'don't contact us' because CAMRA won't allow spam advertising anyway but ticking it stops us getting to you; branch information and a copy of our newsletter and that we can't have can we!

### Anyway, Lewkel News

The first news of the year is to correct a link I was given where we said the tenancy for **The Plough, Little Downham** (JHB is on this week) was for sale when in fact it wasn't. Dad has retired for real this time and we're pleased to see Wutt will continue, he really is an extraordinary fella and has been known to keep your own personal beer tab in his bonce longer than 'deep blue' could concentrate on a game of chess – and no mistakes! Mum and the girls in the family still run the Thai food side so it's business as normal there. I reckon this really is a 3-pump real ale boozier when all things are right and at 1-pump something is-a-miss so let's see if this former Ely Rural POTY can get back to former glories! The question is; was it your dad's beer or yours Wutt? The Plough may have been given a helping hand because....

Meanwhile, down the street, **The Anchor** has stopped serving real ale completely according to locals only for one of our heavyweight ale drinkers dropping in to find a Christmas Special on! As reported in the summer, the interest just isn't there from the manager who has the hotel reception, a restaurant AND the pub to run. If though, you are having to 'downsize' your business then the business needs re-organising. Life's hard enough as it is.

The **Drayman's Son, Ely** has been closed for a refurb and should open again on Wednesday January 17<sup>th</sup>. The work has consisted of cellar work mainly, while the kitchen is at last being put to proper use with beer taps and handpumps being installed which will allow the cask ales to be livelier than the old gravity dispensing system.

**Red Lion, Soham.** Owner of the restaurant/gastro with a small bar at the rear: Peter Leonard passed away from cancer in November 2023. He was a Soham boy and his late father's old butcher's shop was just 3 doors away and after making his fortune in London he moved back to Soham some 10 years ago taking on the Red Lion which he funded diligently seeing through an enormous restoration of the pub and today it looks beautiful inside out thanks to his efforts. The Guardian printed a tribute to him, he was 69.

The **Cherry Tree, Haddenham** appears, we're told, to be closed for good. Recently it's been a weird kind of coffee shop which given it's on a back street in a small village should tell you everything. What could they have done better? It closes its doors for the final time on the 14<sup>th</sup> January.

The **Royal British Legion, Fordham** HAS BEEN the only watering hole of note in the last decade with all three Fordham pubs going gastro on us all. It serves TWO real ales in Greene King's IPA and Fuller's London Pride and I'm told they do get shuffled around a bit. The Pride was in excellent shape and all at 5pm on a Wednesday....not a bad effort.

I say 'has been' because as you may recall from last month, **The White Pheasant** – now run along with the **Maid's Head, Wicken** by Scottish Chef come landlord Mr Kevin Henderson who has made a section of the bar area a PUB AGAIN! Mind, I shall check it out and no, I'm NOT expecting to fight to get to the bar....

While here in **Fordham, The Crown** rebuild is fully underway with Church Street partially blocked off while it happens. What will it come back as we ask aloud?

John Borland's **The Fountain, Ely** is now closed Monday and Tuesday and starts with a fair leap from the traps on Wednesday. The problem with that though is that it was a term used in the British industry as "segment retreat". You take the weakest part of your business and lose it 'happily' but of course, all the others (days) are weakened too! It only ever finishes one way....ever.

As a studier of the British Motor Cycle (British spelling) I read of how we plucky Brits didn't care about the moped and then the 125cc, then the 250cc. "We don't mind losing this sector" said BSA MD Mr Eric Turner (yes, ERIC and NOT Edward) back in the late 1960's. "In fact they can start on these little Japanese machines and migrate to a real Motor Cycle with the BSA.....". Do you want me to tell you how that turned out?

**D'ya Lyck Dags?** (quote from 'Snatch')

For those that don't know me, walking the dog to pubs is killing two birds with one stone in my all-too-busy life so any pub that doesn't accept dogs is usually off the list. So, Franki Four Fingers IV of Fordham to give him his full Crufts (worst mongrel in class, placed 27<sup>th</sup> 2015) title goes with me everywhere. The only pub barring said Fido is now down to just the one; **The Tharp Arms, Chippenham** because last summer, **The Ship, Soham** agreed to have dogs back in again. I look forward to bringing you all up to speed on The Ship next month.

Franki (and his owner) meanwhile regularly get a laugh because as people with five fingers reach out to him, they always ask me; "why do you call him Franki Four Fingers.....?". I think you know how THIS ends too.

### **Ely City POTY for 2024**

We're thinking about it. We're really, really, really going to be good at it.

### **Rural POTY for 2024**

After our Rural Run & trip in December we have narrowed the best 7 pubs down to just 4 and during January and February - to keep them guessing - a small group of 5 will be checking out our best 4 pubs.

The four pubs are – as we enter the final phase – The Chequers, Sutton, The Rising Sun, Isleham, The Tharp Arms, Chippenham and the White Horse, Witcham. The judges are Michelle, Paul, Fil, Bruce and myself.

## Papworth Brewery

Red Mist – a red beer.

The **Crystal Ship, Earith** is putting the first of two barrels of beer named Red Mist up for sale on 12<sup>th</sup> – 13<sup>th</sup> January and branch members intend being on hand to try it. This is the beer brewed on our trip to the brewery in last month's newsletter. We'll let you know how well it went next month and if it didn't we won't let you know anything. You can't say fairer than that!



## Ale Trail Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February 2024

The 'Ely Ale Trial' is back again and set for Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February when there's no Rugby 6-Nations on the box. We'll start at The West End at 12-Noon and work our way around the city in a different direction to last year to a finish at around 6-7pm. You can drop in and out at any point along the

trail and the ale trail is a great way to dip in (or out) and see if you like us. The route will doubtless move onto;

Start; West End; 12-noon

The Albert; 1.30pm

The Minster; 2.30pm

Townhouse or Hereward 3pm

The 3at3; 3.45pm

Drayman's Son; 4.45pm

The Cutter; 6pm

If interested, again email myself or go on the Facebook page and we'll have started a thread on it so sign on there. All CAMRA members/non-members are welcome.



*The 2023 Ale Trail was in April. Who'd have guessed it? All this beer and it's all amber coloured!*

## Cambridge CAMRA

Bookending each side of our own beer festival, Cambridge branch have two events worthy of a trip; on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January Cambridge CAMRA '**Minibus trip**' one of which I wrote of in September and is a great day out. Places are limited to 16 and it costs £25 including a lovely spread at about the third stop. The pub details are always a surprise, especially for this one because the pubs are being marked for Cambridge branch Rural POTY. The mini-coach is very comfortable and the start is at 11.40 just 100m from the railway station on Station Road which is aimed at allowing Ely folk to get from the station to the pick-up bang on time! There are usually 7-8 pubs on the trip. Book with Cambridge CAMRA [here](#).

Then, two weeks later and after our EEBF on February 10<sup>th</sup> Cambridge CAMRA have a '**Strolling Social**'. The branch is striding around the city to pubs short-listed on the City's CAMRA short-list. Will the beer be any good? Of course! Visit [here](#) for details. Note; we then have our Ale Trail in Ely on the 17<sup>th</sup> (see above).



## Some of the Best Beers of 2023

Looking back, I drank many outstanding beers through the year but one stands out as the best and it was 8 Sail's Ploughman's Lunch which I had when at the **Dambusters Inn, Scampton** in April. This 'biscuity' beer was my favourite of the year. Biscuit is another term for 'tasting the wood of the barrel'. Your favourite at the Ely Elysian Beer Festival 2023 was the Xtreme Brewery's Black Forest Stout which you loved the most along with the much pre-loaded (by myself) Colchester's Sweeney Todd a marvellous red beer. Three Blind Mice's Old Brown Mouse is a best of its class while my outstanding session beer has to be Lacon's Norfolk Gem at just 3.6%, just how did they do it? I would add Moon Gazer's Pintail as my favourite amber bitter and Papworth's Papillon, Whispering Grass and Fen Skater as best lighter beers for the summer air.

When asking our Beer Festival beer selector; Phil 'Wiggy' Wignall, what were his favourites for the year, I think he was heavily influenced by his recent trip to Prague and maybe Czech Budwar type beers so here it is;

Castle Rock ~ Something Pacific 5.0

Nozib ~ IPA Variety #14 Milkshake NEIPA (CZ)

Papworth ~ Tooty Fruity 3.5

Secret Project ~ Swimming on Tatami 4.8

Three Blind Mice ~ Big Blue Shoe 5.7

Twice Brewed ~ Tiny European Cars 2.7

Tydd Steam ~ New Mexico Pale 4.6

Unplugged ~ Lullaby 7.5 (ESP)

Wasted Degrees ~ Iceberg 6.5

Zichovec ~ Juicy Lucy 6.5 (CZ)

I note that he enjoys Papworth's Tooty Fruity and Tydd Steam's New Mexico Pale both of which are brewed (very) locally! I've not tried the Twice Brewed but at only 2.7% ABV that's in his top 10 and at such a low ABV, it has to be special.

One of our 'beer twitchers' is Bruce Pattern who takes often fastidious notes and if it does nothing else, it means 'twitchers' are likely to be distanced and unbiased in their appraisal of beer and where and when they had it.

Here are Bruce's top beers for 2023;

Wantsum Red Raddle 5%	Adnams Broadside 4.7%	Hop Back Summer Lightening 5%
Grainstore 10:50 5%	Papworth Fen Skater 4%	Burwell Judy's Hole 4.5%
Colchester Brazilian 4.6%		

I've not had the Wantsum or the Grainstore. Looks like Bruce has also entered a light, a coffee/dark, and a red beer; let's say a bit of everything! My favourite local rural pub that sells micro-brewery beers etc is the Dyke's End at Reach and landlord Dan Marsh divulged his list of great sellers for the year 2023. Of course, they are great beers, it goes that a great beer sells quickly. Dan's list should be something all local pubs look at with keen interest. First was Tring Brewery's Side Pocket for a Toad (see below) which people were coming back the next day just to finish the barrel before anyone else could get a try. Then Papworth's Papillon, Moon Gazer's Ritual, then their Mash Up, Gig Foot (can't find the brewer) and back to Tring's Festive Fox and Tea Kettle Stout finishing with Three Blind Mice's Juice Rocket. So, there you are, if you have any great beers you'd like mentioned then I can but you need to make the effort to write in!



The Dykes End, Reach

## Wanted!

Someone to help with this newsletter each month.

I don't want to walk away, I want to continue but I'm looking for a City reporter and an overall editor while I would be very active writing a rural report. I'd like to do a rural write up each month and other items but if someone could write an intro, give the diary dates and get up-to-date CM news I think that that would swing it?

## Old Ely Pub Photos

Trawling a Facebook page; Ely Cambridgeshire Photos Pictures Local History I've picked up a few old photos of Ely's history in pubs.



*The Cutter Inn in the distance. Floods are nothing new to Ely. Looks post-war and possibly 1947?*



*The George & Dragon on the corner of Lynn Road and Chapel Street. Ely Service Motor Co. is now the Lighthouse Centre.*

## Caption Competition (for the above photo)

A free pint at the beer festival for the best caption to the above photo. Mine is;

***"C'mon Jaspa, a quick one in the Minster and then home! Mum's cooking sausages today!"***



## Elysian Fields

At a committee meeting in March 2023, a member described the 'Elysian people' and I mentioned "we don't say that" which bodes the question; what does 'Elysian' mean? So, let's clarify the name that's in the title of our beer festival. The word 'Elysian' is from the Greek legend of the "Elysian Fields" and is essentially a place of paradise.

I thought I remembered a quote from 'Henry V' in which the term 'follow me unto these Elysian Fields' but, alas, I feel I have thunk it that many times that I'm making it up and can't find the quote or a reference. A person's state - if of pure bliss - is said to be of 'Elysium'. So, The Maltings are the Elysian place and I hope you all end up feeling Elysium all over! When did we start using either Greek term as a 'lewkel' reference? Well, we're not sure but this old fossil (right) did it in 1995 and 1997. Ely Elysium, I should have copyrighted that!



## The Tale End

When young and foolish, I used to reckon New Year's Eve had to be the evening of the year and a proper party, I guess my 1977 New Year's Eve was a cracker but now everyone was holding back for the forthcoming 1978 evening of festivities and the story stems from motor cycles (English spelling).

The then modern 1978 Yamaha RD250 did 90-95mph but also guzzled fuel like the Tory Canyon and dumped it at the same speed - a measly 22mpg. What a bike for a 17-year-old though; wheelies, searing acceleration and an engine note you wanted to 'play' all day; it really was exhilarating. But reality dawned when filling up on a Friday with the cash from that small brown wage packet (cash naturally) for it mattered not whether you dawdled or not - you got just 22mpg, then add the fact that the lads had bought the bikes by taking out "24-months on the knock" which was the term for Hire Purchase along with "the never-never" and your money was spread as thin as a fag paper. The repayments and the fuel costs made a boy cough into his now non-existent and imaginary beer; The 'stink wheels' - as they were nicknamed - now had to stay in the shed and mid-week especially, the lads were noticeable by their absence!



*The Tory Canyon 250*

I haven't got round to the beer bit yet - in fact this month I don't anyway - but if I say, come New Year's Eve, nobody had any money and they all made the "choice" (sic) of staying in the Tharp Arms you'll know why and my thoughts were; 'there must be something we can do?'. So, when I was told of a party at the Jude's Ferry pub in West Row, I conjured up a plan. I would take us all there and back and stay on coca-cola or, more to the point, I hoped to stay high



*Hey! Jude's Ferry at West Row!*

on coke all evening what with everyone else having a great time and I figured I'd forget all my inhibitions and join in the fun - and, as it turned out, that's exactly what I did and it wasn't even a loss not to be drinking. The lads bought some 10 rounds - I had 10 free pints of coke. The deal was a steal and we all had a great night out!

The next year, NYE 1979, we had the same problem. Stay in the Tharp for a NYE of village dreariness or - as everyone looked on expectantly - hoped that I'd repeat the Jude's Ferry offer again, which I did and so picked everyone up at 7.30pm and off we went. Everyone recalled the 10-pints and said I had to beat it, and I did too with 11 pints of coke - and it was now that the word started to spread.

For 1980, the Tharp had been invaded by the bikers from the Rising Sun, Newmarket and we were a little worried about this as these bikers were heavy dudes and the fights down The Rising Sun in Newmarket were legend. These boys all rode the Kawazaki Z1000 or 'Zed 1' as it was monikered. The lads had different nicknames; Maggot, Bogey

and Radar while others were Engine, Chalkie, Tub, Hub, Bubble, Spud and Spon; but they turned out to be decent enough lads and lasses and as we got near to NYE, once more it came up and the new crew wanted in; “11 pints of coke? This I’ve got to see!”, it was to be 12-pint Taffy this year though it seemed. I borrowed the biggest old car; a large brown Rover SDi 3.5L from my father’s garage in Fordham and my first job was to drop my younger sister off at the Rosary in Exning for work and then pick up the Newmarket crew.



*The Rover Observatory*

On the way back to Fordham with 6 in the car and 2 more to come at the house, I found a Labrador in front of me at Derby Cottage (now an Osteopaths on the county border) and moved to the offside, but so did the dog, I went back to the nearside, but so too did the dog! Suddenly the car spun and I flew into someone’s hedge while the dog ran into the very same garden and back to its master who, didn’t even have a gate – I ask you... A word with the owner solicited a ‘P\*\*\*-O\*\*\*’ and so we crawled back to my house where dad pulled the wing out by hand and said I was good to go. Two more bodies jumped in and we were eight strong in a classic 2-4-2 formation with the girls on the back seat and two in the boot laying with faces planted against the flat tailgate window studying the Great Bear and the North Star.

We got to the Jude’s Ferry over an hour late at just after 9 o’ clock yet I was still expected to beat my record and 12-pints in just under 5 hours which was the ridiculous target. Randy Mandy thought all this coke drinking a silly joke and bet me that she would match my pint with double Bacardi & Cokes and I thought; ‘yoeuw! you’ll suffer for that!’.

I went at it hard and hammered down the early pints and people started stacking them and pointing out their driver’s mission and the general thought was; “an extra pint, and an hour and half less to do it in? No chance!”. But my character wouldn’t allow me to quit! Mid-evening and things took a turn for the worse – for Mandy that is, her little pint pot body struggling, she started to drool from one corner of her mouth and I watched the life in her eyes go out as she listed to port 30 degrees before gently rolling out of sight and under the table....

We saw the new year in and I was already up to 8-pints with the function due to finish at 2am. The music had stopped at 1am with the score on 10 pints and I had an hour to sink 2 more. Everyone was heading off, all except our little group and people stood asking what the hold-up was with stupefied admiration – or not.

11-pints, 11 and a half, 11 and three-quarters, an inch to go, I just could not take another drop. The stomach was ready to explode. The last inch should have been easy, but it proved impossible. By now the staff came through to see what it was all about and also; can we go home please? I had quite the little belly on me by now and my toes had disappeared. It became increasingly apparent that if I could burp or pee, I could drink but no loo visit meant no drink. I had a belly massage but that made me giggle, I walked round and around the room and finally at 2.05am I put the last drop down, 12-pints of coke in about 4.30 hours.

Everyone was happy they could leave, a great evening, a funny incident, a story to be told, and now it was “home James and don’t spare the horses!”. All got in the car, the tailgate was dropped on our last two star-gazers, we were ready..... or were we?

For there was no driver and it became increasingly obvious there wouldn’t be one for quite some time. It was clear that we weren’t going anywhere. Everyone got out of the car and had to again had to wait only this time just ANOTHER 30-minutes. And the reason for all this? The driver couldn’t even bend to get in!

### **Wanted!**

An editor of this fine  
readable newsletter is  
required

Lots of copy supplied by  
outgoing editor and  
several other contributors

A very enjoyable hobby!

So sorry there was no beer in the last story but I guess the headline was the best part. This is the last Tale End for now as I can’t think of any more stories that are CAMRA legal and I guess you don’t want to share yours!

The photo credits this month go to; Michelle, various breweries.

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](#) 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