

Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action

Your Ely Branch Newsletter – February 2024

Welcome to the February Newsletter

Well, it came, it saw and it conquered! That was the headline news on the 14th Elysian Beer Festival. Given how little we could say just 8 weeks ago about the event, the result seems almost surprising. A report follows further down.

Soon talk needs to turn to our AGM in early April and the positions that need fresh blood; young, dynamic and full of ideas! So, we start the recruiting process here – and why not! A good branch needs good members to form a good committee! We know that Social Secretary is coming up as well as needing an editor for this very newsletter. Tony Gimbert has said he'd like to step aside as our chairman and concentrate on the Beer Festival 2025 and we can't blame him for that.

Ely Branch News

The branch held a committee meeting on the 9th January and beer festival meetings on the 2nd, 9th & 23rd January. The February CM was held on the 6th February at the Prince Albert. Next meeting is 5th March, venue is The West End, Ely.

Lewkel News



The **Drayman's Son, Ely** was closed for a fortnight into the new year for a refurb (left) and opened again on Wednesday 17th January. The work has consisted mainly of cellar work, 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.

Tharp Arms, Chippenham. News that Landlord Tom has a bit of trouble in the works which we hope goes well for him. Get well soon fella!

A recent visit saw a lovely Cornwall Best Bitter on as Bev is currently a cellarman down. Sitting at the table I dived for the chair nearest the log fire which was throwing off a warm winter glow. Lovely!



Tharp Arms Best Bitter. Using the family crest of the Tharp family that owned Chippenham Park for a century

BEER FESTIVALS Key: NC (non-CAMRA). M (music). F (food).

[Sutton Spring Beer Festival](#). NC. F. 8th March – 9th March. St Andrew's Church, High Street, Sutton.

[Booze on the Ouse St. Neots Beer & Cider Festival](#). Thursday 14th – Saturday 16th March 2024. Priory Centre, St Neots.

[Crystal Ship Beer Festival](#). NC. F. M. March 30th. 32-33 Earith Business Park, Meadow Drove, Earith.

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

Blackstone Engine Bar Beer Festival. NC. M. F. Friday 24th – Sunday 26th May. Denver Windmill, Sluice Road, Downham Market PE38 0DZ. Folk music and acoustic. Spoons, tap dancing, possible Morris Dancing? Around 20 beers and 15 ciders. Live bands and food. Cracking walk from the station.

[The Cutter Inn Beer Festival](#). NC. M. F. 14th – 16th June. 42 Annesdale, Ely CB7 4BN. Expect 12-16 real ales and 4-6 ciders in a marquee to the rear of the Inn.

[The Chequers Beer Festival](#). NC. M. F. Cottenham. 12th July – 14th July. 297 High Street, Cottenham. 30 real ales on and meant to be very good.

[Peterborough Beer Festival](#) F. M. Tuesday 20th – Saturday 24th August. Embankment, Peterborough. Probably the best big beer festival in East Anglia.

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

EVENTS COMING UP

[Ely Folk Festival](#). 12-14 July. NC. M. F. Stuntney Estate CB7 5TR. 28 Real Ales from (very) local brewers. Free bus service from the railway station every 30-minutes.

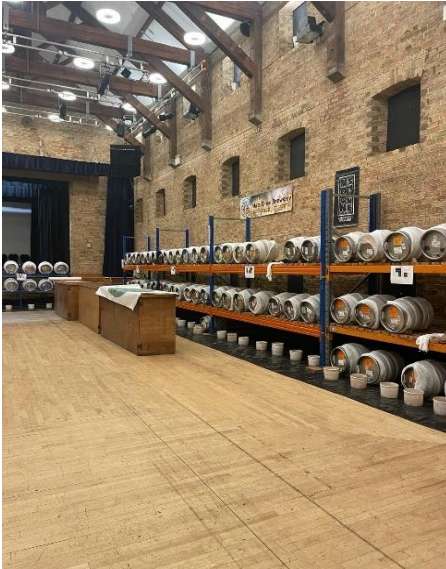


Opening Trade session on Thursday

Elysian Beer Festival 2024

Business as usual!

That were the thoughts of a few when they saw large numbers turning up for the opening session on Friday the 2nd. Queues of hardened ale drinkers formed around the corner and down towards the river and despite the lack of lead-time publicity, the key piece of info was always out there though and that was the “when” being; “February 2nd & 3rd 2024”. Over 6,000 pints of ale and cider were sold. The core of the work was done by Tony and Wiggy and turns out they know a thing or two about the job.



Thursday's trade session was well attended with the members of the chamber of commerce enjoying a tipple and also there were the ladies of the 3At3, Joppo from The Carpenters Arms, Soham and Peter still tinkering about from The Little Downham Plough. (see 'changes' below)

I started with the festival special, the Red Mist from Papworth and the aroma was like a bouquet of roses and had a nice full-bodied taste. It had aged and improved well since tasting it back in early January as brewer Chris Jones said it might. I gave it a 9.

For Friday's opening day the hall was full and the beer was clearly labelled and numbered. A quick chat with Mike Playle and again – like last year - it was the name of a cider that was selling it and the best names and first to sell out were; Fanny's Bramble from Sandford Orchards and the hotly tipped Chilli Ginger from Cockeyed Cider. The name – it would seem – is everything! After all, what separates one from another really when you've never had them before? Nothing. It reminds me of a time as a child a family member would ask us all to back a horse in the Grand National family sweepstake and your Auntie's money would likely go on the fancy jockey's silks and an uncle would know a

bloke who lived on the street sharing a name with another. It was 50p each way and your horse always fell even if it was only 'eventually'!

Supping onwards, Wiggy's choice of the New Mexico Pale by Tydd Steam was very good and Mile Tree's Citra Blonde was a stunner with a nice last message on the back of the throat. Tydd Steam's Roadhouse was a proper bitter and Moonshine Brewery rarely let you down so the Crescent Moon was very good.

More worryingly for me was that I didn't enjoy a single beer Saturday as time and barrels ran down. Beers could be lifeless with lacking body or condition, having neither a head or buzz on the tongue.



Our cellar team of Ali and Bob trying on Wiggy's T-shirt

A sandwich message to finish; great work by all the staff, outstanding even and good to see the locals back four-square.

Given time next year, hopefully we can pick the best of the beers from more brewers but time was against us this year and of course the Saturday beer choice got limited as is the intended nature of beer festivals.....we run out if we're good at our job!



The number of drinkers was amazing! All those people there and yet almost from the identical position we were in a year ago? How so? Same Rugby clash - if not worse as there was the excellent France v Ireland on Friday this time, same short publicity run and some of the rail problems; OK fair enough; not a full-on strike. We won't look a gift horse in the mouth though. We looked to have only a few barrels left in total at the end; 5-7 barrels worth and the cider was down to just a couple of small units, so it was definitely a success. The date for next year is provisionally 31st January – 1st February.

Changes

How do you feel about the trade session being incorporated into an opening night on Thursday and have a 3-day festival? Maybe just a little less crowding which many people have never liked and don't come back. There were very few from the trade there and the vast majority of pubs are tied (up) anyway. Opinions?

Bitten

Festival organiser Tony Gimbert was mauled by a loose dog while walking through Cherry Hill Park on the Saturday evening. This shook-up Tony as the dog came out of the dark and went back just as quickly. Cuts to hand and chin, he was back in the hall on Sunday morning for the take down, a gutsy performance. Elliott managed to drop a steel beam on my left foot right on an old break, made me hop a bit too! Rumours that I got brain damage are unfounded; as women may tell you; no matter which end you hit me you're still 3' from my brains.

Papworth Brewery

Hours after the Earith to Haddenham road was declared open in mid-January, a few of us made a visit to the Crystal Ship in Earith to sample the red beer we'd brewed (December edition) which we left to Papworth Brewery to name from an Ely CAMRA shortlist.

I wrote at the time; The name is Red Mist and at 4.7% you'll want a rich flavour to the beer and that's what we have. The colour is a lovely deep red. How was it then? "It's a lovely beer and one that joins many good beers out there. Is it outstanding? Perhaps not but Chris Jones, the head brewer has said that it will get better with age in the barrel and be about right for... for...the Elysian Beer Festival"! The BF proved him right.



The Crystal Ship and 8 real ales and a cider on pumps; impressive!

Ely Folk Festival 2024

The Ely Folk Festival on the 12th-14th July is an expensive way to have a beer festival (with a bit of background music!) for us but it is worth it because if you look at the beer list from last year, you'll see that it's an excellent stand-alone event. It's at Stuntney Estate CB7 5TR (adjacent to Ben's Yard) again for the third year. There's a shuttle bus service between Ely Railway Station and the festival which runs every 30 minutes.

Why are we telling you all this these months ahead? Well, to go you need to book up online and the cheapest 'early bird' tickets have gone leaving tier 2 and tier 3 prices. Camping on site is available. On the next page is a list of last year's beers and what a nice 'lewk' look it had too with all the beer being East Anglian.

REAL ALES 2023

 Lord Conrad's - Slap N Tickle - 4.3% - Pale (V) Light ale brewed in two stages with American hops and a lasting finish	 Downham Isle: Main Street Citra - 3.7% - WCIPA Citrus, lemon and melon flavours & a mid range bitter finish. Try it cold with a slice of lime! (V)	 Milton: Minotaur - 3.3% - Mild A rich dark mild with bags of chocolate malt.
 Lord Conrad's - Summer IPA - 5% - IPA (V) Hazy summer IPA loaded with sunshine hops.	 Downham Isle: Goose Ely - 3.7% - American IPA Excellent malt profile with a distinctive hoppy finish. (V)	 Milton: Justinian - 3.9% - Bitter Crisp pale bronze-coloured bitter. Attractive bitter orange flavours persist into a satisfying lasting finish.
 Papworth: Mild Thing - 3.5% - Mild Ale Amber mild ale, smooth light roasted malt flavours with delicate hop finish	 Three Blind Mice: Old Brown Mouse - 4.2% - Bitter A traditional full bodied and malty best bitter.	 Milton: Pegasus - 4.1% - Copper Complex copper-coloured beer. The initial hoppiness is balanced with a long fruity, malty finish. Very moreish.
 Papworth: Tooty Frooty - 3.5% - Summer Ale Fresh fruity hop flavours with hints of peach and apricot. Vienna and Munich malts provide a sweet malt body, perfectly balanced by Archer and Rakau hops.	 Three Blind Mice: Juice Rocket - 4.5% - IPA A juicy, hoppy session IPA with Citra, Mosaic & Columbus hops. (V)	 Milton: Minerva - 4.6% - Golden Ale Brewed with US, NZ and British hops for a powerful hop punch and satisfying bitterness. First brewed in collaboration with Prof. Mary Beard
 Papworth: Mad Jack - 3.8% - English Bitter Fuggles & East Kent Goldings hops, caramel overtones, gentle citrus aroma and a long hoppy finish.	 Three Blind Mice: Amarillo & Mosaic - 4.2% - Pale New England style pale ale with Amarillo & Mosaic hops delivering orange and tropical juicy fruit notes.	 Moonshine: Moonshine Mild - 3.5% - Mild Dark mild, slightly sweet, smooth & fruity, with coffee and chocolate notes.
 Papworth: Old Riverport Session - 3.8% - Stout Balanced roasted malt, hints of coffee & chocolate and a dry finish	 Nene Valley: Blond Session Ale - 3.8% - Pale Ale Light golden session ale with a refreshing citrus hop finish. (GF)	 Moonshine: Cambridge Pale Ale - 3.8% - Pale Ale Pale coloured ale: a well balanced beer with a smooth malt profile that is complemented by a restrained hop flavour.
 Two Rivers: Denver Diamond - 5.0% - Strong Bitter Strong, rounded bitter & malt taste with a grassy, slightly floral aromatic character	 Nene Valley: Australian Pale - 4.4% - Amber Ale Rich golden ale with floral aroma, citrus & tropical fruit flavours from Australian hops. (GF)	 Moonshine: Sundowner - 4.3% - Light Light coloured with a rounded hop flavour from New Zealand, Nelson Sauvin and El Dorado hops.
 Two Rivers: Hares Hopping - 5.0% - IPA Refreshing clean-flavoured IPA with a distinctive late bitterness and dry finish.	 Mile Tree: Hopfire Pale - 4.0% - Hoppy IPA Triple hop, full-flavoured pale ale with a long lingering bitter finish.	 Moonshine: Heavenly Matter - 4.1% - Golden Ale A crisp, clean, straw coloured light bodied beer. Huge hoppy citrus, tropical fruit aroma and taste & a generous bitterness in the finish.
 Two Rivers: Porters Pride 4.5% - Porter Rich porter with slight sweetness & smooth malt. Coffee & chocolate aromas and liquorice/vanilla finish.	 Mile Tree: Meadowgold - 3.8% - Golden Ale Pale gold with lots of hoppy aromas.	
 Two Rivers: Norfolk Stout - 5.8% - Stout Distinctive full-flavoured, creamy dark oatmeal stout	 Mile Tree: Rolling Mile - 3.9% - English bitter Copper brown ale with a rich malt flavour and subtle hop aroma.	

Last year's beer list for the Ely Folk Festival

(V) - Vegan (GF) - Gluten Free

Who Runs this Pub anyway!

The purest thing about CAMRA is simple enough; getting pubs to sell real ale but for some of us it bodes the next question; "now you're selling it, can you serve a better ale than you are?". Not all pubs from round these parts though are free to sell just what they would like to, some in fact are trapped by more than just a contract and this came to my attention and is all too real when I visited to two pubs in two afternoons recently.

I took the posters and comp tickets for our BF trade session around to each and every rural pub but at the stop-off at The Chequers, Sutton, I especially wanted to chat with landlady Maija about whether she could turn her hand to serving other real ales - as well as her usual - to perfection. A customer growled on hearing me; 'we only need Doom Bar here' but Maija continued often saying things like 'if my customers even like a change, or want it' added to which her list of real ales available via Admiral Taverns (AT) was quite poor (IMHO). The obvious route was a beer off AT's list that would wedge open the door for her but oh dear!

I left gutted for her because she could sell 5 real ales (if she had two sets of arms and legs) such is the good quality of her beer. Onwards then and that weekend I visit Bev at The Tharp Arms which is a Freehouse and we have a quick chat about her beers and she has become very knowledgeable in recent times has Bev. We then came to a crux point about obscure real ales; "Well, Tom had a few dissenting voices but stopped them with; we're trying them, we're giving them a go!". The result was, the next weekend there were no complaints because Tom had everyone enjoying all those different beers!

Then we came to 'that' beer, you know the one, yup; TTL. Timothy's finest and its benchmark beer Landlord to which Bev fessed up; 'They used to ask for it but they've stopped now that they've tasted better'.

I have said a couple of times here how I want to go the extra mile to help but the biggest obstructions are the myopic attitudes of the twitchers who repeatedly warn off even trying to help a pub. It means we can't even get info that CAMRA holds such as the beer list that AT supply and to get the very best from that list for someone like Maija. What I'd really like is at least the backing to try and, not be continually told that 'CAMRA wouldn't like it' or 'be careful'. Oh well! We should never let a good turn go unpunished!!!

Rural Pub of The Year (POTY) 2024

After our Rural Run & Trip in December we narrowed down the best 7 pubs to the best 4 and during January a group of 4 of us checked out those best 4 again. The results will take another daft 3-months to reveal but I can say that 12 people's views and points accumulated into the final score and just 1 mark separated each 1 from 4. It was VERY tight.

Cambridge CAMRA – Rural Mini-Coach Trip



Beer of the day in pub of the day. Crouch Vale's Amarillo in the Three Horseshoes, Stapleford.

Bookending each side of our own beer festival the Cambridge branch had a CAMRA '**Mini-Coach Trip**' on Saturday 27th January where this time I left Franki Four-Fingers behind so as not to steal the limelight from one Gladys Emmanuel!

This trip was to a very high standard with the vast majority of beers being from the small micro and independent breweries and all were short-listed for the 'Good Beer Guide'. I was picked up on the junction of Tennyson Road and Station Road at noon and we were off. Full this time really meant; 'one down' because unfortunately it was all couples on the waiting list... We set off a little late and the first pub was the Three Horseshoes at Stapleford where the usual gorgeous Barnsley Bitter I look forward to was off and instead we

had Amarillo by Crouch Vale and Dragonshead Stout from the Orkney Brewery. Both beers were superb! What a start!

Next, we went to a pub that is always in the GBG and that's The Queens Head at Newton and Alan came round for the £25 for the trip which is great value. Here the beers were being served direct from the barrels and I stood up the Lacons Encore for the Adnams duo of Southwold and the Old Ale the latter being a lovely old mead type beer. I got chatting to two gentlemen from the car trade in Coventry right where the cars were made in the 1960s and 1970s and could have just stayed there for the afternoon listening to a 96-year-old and 'Junior; aged 80 but alas, we were off again!

Next up was the Green Man at Thriplow which had 3BMs Shine on Me (a pale ale) and Buntingford's Polar Star on but you knew it was a foodie in that people didn't seem welcome to stand or sit at the bar which doesn't go down well with the Russian (re; CAMRA) judges! The beer was a little lifeless here. These last two pubs had a good fire going though!

By now, I've got to know my travel companion 'Ingvar' who is originally from Sweden and holds the position of LocAle officer on the main committee. He seems my ideal opportunity to climb down from a pint-per-pub and at our next pub that was the ambition. It was The Chequers, Fowlmere a pub built in 1651 and this, our 4th pub is rammed and like all foodies they're going for it. The beers here are Oscar Wilde by Mighty Oak (a mild), Three One Six by Grain and Chequers Best by Nene Valley. So, it's "never mind the halves let's get drinking" some of these and so I had the '316' which was superb and the Oscar Wilde which was what all milds are; pleasantly nice!



This isn't a slow shutter speed, this lad was seriously quick....honest!

Next, we zoomed over the A505 and made for the last village in the county at The Pheasant, Great Chishill. This was where we had some rather disappointing food in the form of boxes of chicken and prawn dippers....so we'll move on to the beer swiftly which was Side Pocket for a Toad by Tring and Fuller's London Pride. A half of the SPFAT was only OK.

That was our 5th pub and now we crawled all the way back towards Cambridge getting to the Hare & Hounds at Harlton (below). There'd been a big shoot on locally and there were plus-fours, green wellies and black labradors everywhere. Yet again, here in our 6th pub, mid-afternoon and the pub was rammed and the fire roaring. The beers on were Rocket Ales Bloodhound Bitter, Lister's Little Red Coat and Milton's Sparta. It seemed rude not to try the first two and the Bloodhound was (the usual) average while the Red Coat was a really nice drop.



The M11 then beckoned and in the twilight, we headed up to the White Swan at Conington which is no longer recognisable inside from 10 years ago. It's had a complete facelift inside and here again, like the Queens Head; they sell their beer direct from the barrel. I had a half of Adnams Broadside and the bar staff offered us the last vestiges of a function; flans, quiches and sandwiches which we devoured as soon as. The fire was again excellent. A fire doesn't rob the room of moisture quite like radiators do and the fuel for them in the countryside is always free.

Next, we crossed the A14 to the Three Tuns at Fen Drayton and what a cracking pub this is, four real ales on, busy, a fantastic fire and again, as always, friendly staff. Woodforde's supplied two; Wherry and Albion as well as an Xtreme Ales Pigeon Ale and TTL. I went for the Albion and the Pigeon Ale and they were both outstanding. So spoilt rotten, we headed for the last pub, The Bank in Willingham which is for sale and by now it was 7 o'clock. Five real ales greeted us from a blackboard (photo right); Grizzly by Brew York, Siren Soundwave IPA, 3BMs Café Noir Coffee Stout, Pastore's Il Crumble (Sour) and Rothaus



Party member Sue Thomson happy to be hemmed in next to this fantastic fire at the Three Tuns, Fen Drayton



The Three Tons at Fen Drayton. Beer of the day for some of us was the Xtreme Ales Pigeon Ale....and pub of the day to some too!

passengers and I caught my train back some one-hour late but who cares.

Strolling Social. Cambridge Branch. After the Elysian BF, this weekend, there's a 'Strolling Social' on Saturday 10th February when again members will be supping at potential GBG pubs for 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.

Hefeweizen. We plumped for the Brew York which was nice but the Siren Soundwave was outstanding! We headed back to the city and a quick hand vote was taken for the best beer and best pub which were taken by both Amarillo and the Three Horseshoes. I'm convinced beer always tastes very good when it is just good at the first pub and nothing lights you up quite like that first one! The same happened with the Ely Rural trip when the day started in Isleham and both pubs got high marks.

We dropped off happy



Caption Competition

Oh dear, we did struggle with a caption for the photo below. So, the winner is a self-praising; *"C'mon Jaspa, a quick one in the Minster first and then back home! Mum's cooking sausages today!"*. The George & Dragon is thought to have closed in 1978.



The White Hart in Ely on Market Street has been closed for 40 years now and these three photos look to be from near the end so early 1980s perhaps. I caught the tail end of the pub being open and it looked poor and even smelt damp as I recall. It was the first port of call from Ely Rugby club when I started there and we would leave the 'chicken hut' on the Paradise Fields and head across the Prickwillow Road going through the Cattle Market to have fish n' chips in the Market Street chippie. Next port of call was the White Hart whose last landlord was a bit of a legend named Dick Taylor. A

larger-than-life character Dick was highly thought of. I believe he left us about 25 years ago and sadly his son 'Richie' quite a character himself, passed away just last summer far too young (early 50s).



I believe it was demolished as part of the cattle market being fully developed. Originally, they were going to keep a façade but that proved difficult, the council no doubt showing pangs of guilt after destroying the Corn Exchange some 25 years before decided to keep the right-hand end of the building only. If you can tell us more about the pub that would be great!



I see from the book Ely Inns by Reg Holmes that it was a 14th century Inn and the magistrate's courts were often held there. Four legions of German soldiers were once billeted there and received 500 lashes each. Another incident was that the Littleport and Ely rioters of 1816 met in front of the Inn and fired their guns off approvingly when someone sweetened the rioters up with some platitudes. We're not sure what was said but free beer WAS involved which then led to them moving off through the city and wrecking it!

At the AGM on April 16th (TBC), a few positions will be coming up for renewal, not limited to but will include the following:

Required; A new Chairman

Tony Gimbert would like to concentrate on the beer festival for next year and being the chairman of both is too much so please step forwards if you'd like to help steer the committee.

Required; A Newsletter Editor

In order to improve this esteemed piece of vitriol, we have managed to placate an IT editor in Paul Butler which means someone is watching out for my gaffs basically! But an editor who balances up the newsletter, demands copy, cajoles us into trips, bullies us into submitting stuff on time; but is mostly just 'required'. All contributors will be subservient to the editor.

Required; City Pubs Officer

We have never found anyone to report on the rude health of our city of Ely pubs but it's a gaping hole you'll agree as most of you have actually never stepped beyond the city for fear of 6-toe-ites. Take this job and you'll have a valid excuse never to have to leave it again!



Photos this month from Martha Zantides, The Ely Cambridgeshire Old Photos Pictures Local History Facebook page.

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 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