

Lights, Bitters, CAMRA Action

Your Ely Branch Newsletter – March 2024

Welcome to the March Newsletter

This is my penultimate newsletter and I shall do one more to cover the April period through the AGM which is on Tuesday 16th April at 7.45pm in the garden house of the Prince Albert. And now a bit of shameless pleading because if you think a newsletter is a valuable contribution to your life then how about taking on the job of editor for a year or three? It's the perfect job for the retired person and what with a great social scene and reports supplied each month; there is much material both natural and chased down. The events are found by checking National, East Anglian and Cambridge CAMRA sites. Many events are annual so it's a case of checking on last year and seeing if it's a-coming-around-again.

You'll have to make your own mind up on whether the newsletter has helped but in this last 18-months we haven't called off any events and while membership in general declines; our branch membership numbers hold steady. Drop me a line if you want some kind words and pushing into the job but for me it's simply stopping me from doing other things and I ask 'why am I employing a gardener and a cleaner so that I can produce a newsletter?'

Branch Dates

Ely Beer Festival 'Wash up' for the staff will be from I suspect around noon on Saturday afternoon 23rd March. This is free beer and nosh for the hard grafters is at the Prince Albert. Everyone who volunteered at the beer festival in any capacity and actually turned up are cordially invited.

The next branch meeting is on the 2nd April at The West End at 7.45pm.

The AGM is on the 16th April 7.45 in the Prince Albert Garden Room. All positions can be applied for, nominations and second for positions on the day as well as nominating beforehand to the chairman Tony Gimbert.

Membership Numbers are holding at 490+. In Mike Playle's last report he tells us that the Ely Branch membership has stood firm this last 18-24 months on or around 490 to 500.

Last Month's Delay

Last Month's newsletter went out on time but alas the newsletter was stopped in its tracks due to comments I made about our beer festival. Nobody spoke to me for 11 days and I had to watch two weekends worth of 'events' fall off the waggon and indeed we lost three weekends in the end which is a veritable month's worth – give or take. Never mind any truth in the matter, I resolved this with Wiggy who was the perfect gentleman and I modified two sentences making sure I stuck to just my basic perception of 'it' in this the most subjective of er.... subjects!

Ely Branch News

A post-beer festival debrief was held on Tuesday 13th February at The West End in quite a jovial mood with some 16 attendees. One or two worthy facts came out such as; 622 CAMRA members attended, 1,573 members of the general public, 689 glasses left the premises by fracture purchase or loss. Just a slurp under 6,000 pints were consumed and we made an awful lot of money for CAMRA. Come on HQ, admit it, you didn't think Ely could do it did you! Well, we did!

Plenty of chat about how we all paid and also that annual problem of the 'free taster' which we all have different opinions on. Our position is boxed in by CAMRA who say that 'beer should not be free' but then when you see what the staff get through you do wonder what the occasional drop given away really means in the scheme of things? *Mine is that for the newcomer, they need help, the old pros who 'try it on' don't but of course we have to have rules and our ability to say "no, madame!" to CAMRA's saying 'yes you can' would give us some power back but it doesn't work the other way around. Onwards and upwards then....*

So, with those heady profits will come the wash up afternoon and enough free beer to keep us all happy till next year. I used to run a rugby tournament and wouldn't let the lads near a free beer, after a few years we had no volunteers. The bank account looks good of course; now that the club has folded – so, some expert.

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

[Regal. Wetherspoon Beer Festival](#). NC. F. Tuesday 6th March – Saturday 17th March. Regal 36-39 St Andrew's Street, Cambridge. Up to 30 Real Ales including 5 international brewers over the course of the festival. A mile from the station. Tasting notes for all festival beers can be found [here](#).

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

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

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

[Wicken Beer Festival 2024](#). NC. M. F. Saturday 11th May. The Recreation Ground.

[Cambridge Beer Festival 2024](#). F. Monday 20th – Friday 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. Friday 14th – Sunday 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.

[Wilburton 24th Beer Festival](#). NC. M. F. Friday 21st – Saturday 22nd June. The Recreation Ground, Wilburton.

[The Chequers Beer Festival](#). NC. M. F. Cottenham. Friday 12th – Sunday 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](#). NC. M. F. Friday 12th – Sunday 14th July. Stuntney Estate CB7 5TR. 28 Real Ales from (very) local brewers. Free bus service to and from the festival to the railway station every 30-minutes.

Lewkel News

A walking visit to **The Snailwell George & Dragon** saw Banks Amber Bitter (3.8% ABV) on with Wainwright's Amber Bitter (4.0). Starting (wrongly) with a poor pint of the Banks it was a hand pulled very, very cold, cloudy beer and I have to doubt if it was cask while the Wainwright's seemed fine and at cellar temperature but when I asked the locals about the bitter they just laughed! Well, laughed as they supped their Guinness! Just two weeks earlier **The Fountain, Soham** had a beer festival (see below) on the 24th of February, they introduced two Ossett Brewery beers; White Rat a 4.0% Hoppy pale ale best served and drunk cool and fresh and Silver King, a 4.3% American Pale Ale - but I'd call it just a good pale ale – are going down well with real ale drinkers. What I hadn't realised when these two replaced the TTL and Doom Bar in the bar was that the TTL and Doom Bar still remain on the lounge pumps! A favourite saying of mine is; "A is for ATTITUDE and IT COMES FIRST" and I have to say that going from 2 to 4 ales when the last landlord was down to one ale says it all. Full on Phil!!!!



beer so far. These are in all ways award winning and I'll bet **The Dykes End** gets an award or two this year. **The Carpenters Arms, Soham** has varied things up and been pushing through many different Woodforde's lately and the pub clearly shows its love of real ales with fresh Woodforde's signage around. They have had the Volt (4.5%) Nelson's Bitter (4.5%) the usual Wherry (3.8%) as well as the seasonal rugger-bugger; Tap And Go an English IPA (4.3%) but it does seem to me that Woodforde's beers

I pulled all the stops out to organise myself a free lift over to **The Dykes End** for a Bar Billiards tournament on the 2nd of March and tackling Dan's beers properly. He had the usual baseline Wherry as well as the combo of a Green Jack Brewery's; Lurcher Stout (4.8%) and Little Green Men1 (4.2%) pale ale and I kept going with two Lurchers to every one Little Green Men1 for the day and reckon I saw the best of it - beautiful. I've never had a bad drop from Dan and the beers are always interesting and the Lurcher goes down as my top 2024



are all softened and maybe even unremarkable? One thing is for sure, tastes have moved on and Wherry is now a very simple beer. It looks like both pubs are going big on ale and we Sohamites will be relatively spoilt in the near future.

The **Maids Head, Wicken** seems to have got its act together again with my last two drinks there being fine and given that they were Sunday afternoons I should hope so as it's one of their busiest periods. The usual Doom Bar or maybe a Wherry are usually on and often a Lacons of any sort. I had the Lacons Fireside again which is a Brown Ale (4.0%) and was superb. How often do you see a three-pump pub trying a Stout, or a Brown, a Porter or a Dark beer of any description? Can we have more please!

Finally, a word for the last pub in South-East Cambridgeshire heading south of Newmarket; **The Red Lion, Kirtling.** Moji, the landlord has a very small pub but still keep two tip-top real ales on. He usually has the Lacons Encore and the other is a Nethergate and I've had the Augustinian; a 4.5% bronze bitter and the Copper Head a 4.0% and he really keeps them well! A lot of pride goes into it for Moji who is an Iranian in his first pub. There are some great pubs South of Newmarket/East of Cambridge and the pick of the bunch would have to be **West Wrattling's The Conker Tree** which has won Cambridge CAMRA's Rural POTY many times.

Anyway, I'm off to North-east Norfolk for a walking drinking holiday and if you would like to name drop a few watering holes twixt Winterton-on-Sea and Cromer; I'm all ears! The email address is at the bottom!

A report on The Ely Ale Trail Saturday 17th February 2024

Blessed with good weather, we weren't sure what numbers we would get on the day. On the Thursday, we had the pleasantly surprising message on the [Facebook](#) page that we were being joined by a trio from the Far East, East Norfolk CAMRA but I thought it sounded fishy! We settled for East Norfolk and 2 early 'scouts' arrived announcing there were 6 behind them for a total of 8!

But first in at midday were Cath from Waterbeach and Bruce Pattern. Numbers accrued and I got taken to the cleaners when Paul's non-arrival was marked off with a text 'I've broken my leg', gobsmacked, we discussed the likely reason but he came in seconds later! I felt like giving him the broken leg for that one! The West End served the usual 4 very well being Doom Bar, Encore, Landlord and Proper Job and I had all 4. I had a long chat with Cath and caught up on 'beach' matters and soon it was time to move on! Paul met 3 new Ely men just as we left but only one continued. His name is..... and hopefully he enjoyed the next 3-4 pubs he travelled with us.



We went to The Albert and the choices were Landlord, GKs Scrum Down and Tribute plus the four I had of; Black Sheep, JHB, Old Brown Mouse, Abbott and all in great shape. The East Norfolk Crew couldn't believe what a great start they'd had! Our chairman was his usual happy self so we decided to charge for The Minster.

It was rammed and as last person there I settled for the Milestone Shine On and the Bass Best Bitter. The Bass was faulty but when others tried it, it was said to be 'OK', the riddle deepened when Bruce came back and said that they had just put a fresh barrel on and yes, Bruce's Bass was indeed fine!

We reduced The Minster to 45-minutes and it was then over to its sister pub; The Hereward. Here they had Ringwood's forty-niner, Milestones Best Bitter, Adnams Broadside, Bass Best Bitter. The beer was all well served. We all whipped out our little CAMRA discount tokens but they weren't having any of it today!

Over the next hour people broke up to eat here or there. I chose a tray of chips in Market St and was then off to the 3At3. I chose just one beer here and made it last as we all sat outside in the cold of February! Some of us had natural lagging backed up with a jacket while Jacob of East Norfolk was protected by nothing more than a lovely great big bushy-beard! It was here we picked up some Ely CAMRA members and some cut the 3At3 out for a longer session in the Drayman's Son which was our next call.

Like every pub bar the West End House – when it was opening time – The Drayman’s was humming when we got there and Bruce was already holding court. By now we were fully integrated with the Norfolk Crew and they told us how mightily impressed they’d been so far with Ely. It’s nice to hear this from outsiders and yes, I guess we are a little blessed! But below these 7 pubs the scene is so much poorer and it’s not obvious why? Kings Arms, The Fountain, The Townhouse; just one ale. The Yard; none, The Lamb Hotel is said to have no natural cask ales, The High Flyer; possibly one or two. That’s a big gap from the minimum of 4 cask ales we’d had at each and every pub (excluding the 3At3 which only serves key keg beer). I had my only pint; a Juice Rocket which was lovely and that was it. I was reigning in after a hard start and I think I got away with it...

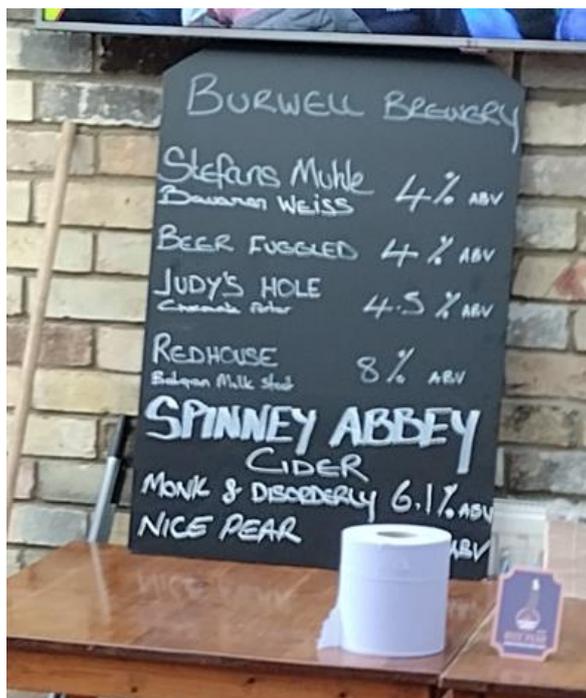


Cheers! The East Norfolk and Ely CAMRA at the 3at3. It was COLD!

Our last port of call was the Cutter Inn. Here we had the Milton beers Pegasus and Sparta as well as Rocket Ales Sidewinder and a 3BM bitter; The two Milton’s were lovely and nobody except myself had had a bad drop all day! Do you think that they knew we were coming? Did the advert give it away!

All in all, a really good day out and perhaps we’ll do it again next year? If someone calls it but the numbers were 5-6 shy of a proper hardcore that you can call upon to book the next social thing. Can you really create anything grander with so few joining in? At the bottom of the newsletter, I’ve reprinted East Norfolk Chairman Mark Lewis’ letter of appreciation back to our branch.

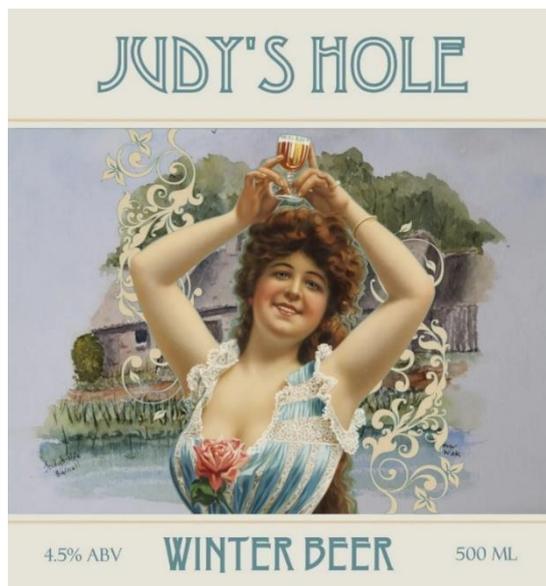
The Fountain, Soham BF. Saturday 24th February



As it’s truly my local this one couldn’t be missed. Two live bands and the Six-Nations on the box as well, the pub was teeming. It has to be said that the Fountain has that real Town pub feel to it nowadays and is similar in some ways to The Minster; they know who you are but aren’t over-familiar with the customers.

The festival beers were all from the Burwell Brewery being a Stefan’s Muhle (Steven’s Mill) a Bavarian Weisse Ale that was in great condition; 4%, no head but fizzed on the tongue, Judy’s Hole (a chocolate porter) at 4.5%, Beer Fuggled at 4.0% and Redhouse a Belgian milk stout at 8.0%. The condition of the Beer Fuggled

wasn’t there but the others were excellent. The Judy’s Hole and the Redhouse gained a lot of support and I know Phil wanted to see what the market is for dark beers. “We had 12 real ales on at my last pub and I want to find out what Soham people like?” said Phil. He wasn’t impressed by my answer; “a fight!”.



.....and those Burwell Names come from....

There’s a little spot in Burwell by the river that flows past the back of the Anchor pub known as Judy’s Hole and this gives the Burwell Brewery the name. We also know that on the corner to Exning, there’s an old surgery that’s now a nursery and the building has always been known as ‘The Red House’.

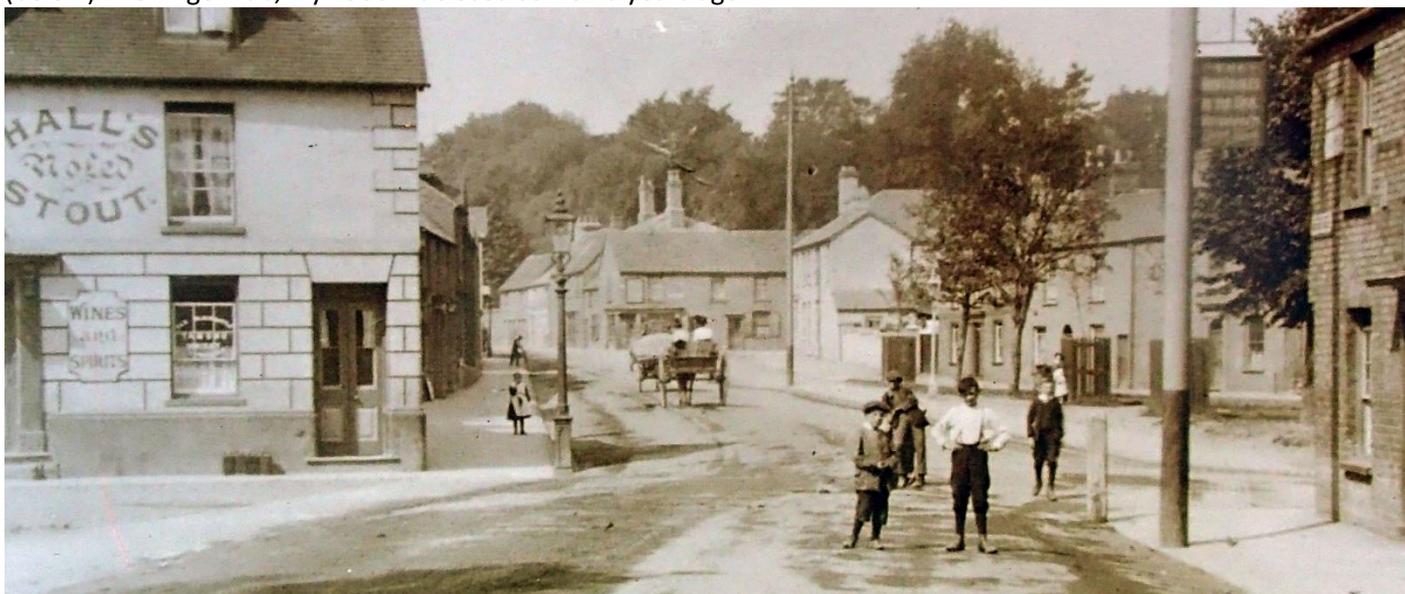
City Pub of The Year (POTY) 2024

A note of the best of the pubs was made as we travelled round, there's no doubt that pubs were doing their best to put on a good show. The problem is getting this list down to the last 3 in order to find a winner and runner-up. A tough ask.....

A Trend in Pubs; 'Events Lead'

It would seem that there's a new trend in pub management nowadays named 'Events Lead'. These are the pubs where the landlord puts on everything they can and leaves no stone unturned. Typical examples of this can be car shows, motor cycle rally's, darts, skittles, quizzes, darts, cribbage, discos, tap takeovers, BBQs, live bands and of course your favourite and mine; The Hatched, Matched and the Despatched.....the list is endless. No one thing turns the corner for these pubs but more of 'everything' and it turns out, half these small clubs ever needed was a little help and encouragement. One theme seems to run through all this and that's a 'hard working and intelligent Landlord/Landlady'.

(below) The Angel Pub, Ely 1900. It closed some 20 years ago.



(below) This family were looking for the Turks Head In Littleport looks like the early 1960s.



(right) is a photo of the Black Bull which was on



Wisbech Road and closed in around Spring 1971. The landlords name born large and clear over the door is one 'Albert Hines' and we ask; "is that old Albert?" aloud! The beer is Hall's Beer of Ely. Upon demolition, murals were found in an upstairs room behind layers and layers of wallpaper. These murals gave reference to the Littleport Riots 160 years before.

AGM Date

Our AGM is set for Tuesday 16th April and will be at The Prince Albert, 7:45pm start.

The following positions will be coming up for renewal.



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; Secretary

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!

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; Membership Officer

Mike has been looking after membership and BF Cider for some time and would like to step down

from both positions. It's the easiest job on the committee, a 30-second statement per month.

Required; Social Media/Website Co-ordinator

East Norfolk CAMRA Branch joined us on our Ale Trail

A letter; from Mike Lewis, Chairman of the Branch.

"Good Morning All!

Firstly, just to say a huge thank you for your welcome to the walkabout on Saturday and for looking after us so well throughout the day, we all really enjoyed our time with you and thank you for staying with us throughout the day, making sure we found our way around the 7 excellent pubs you took us to.

Michelle asked us for some feedback on the pubs, with regards to you selecting your City Pub of The Year and I personally, and I know I speak for everyone here, would have to say that each & every pub had something different to offer & overall the 7 were an excellent assortment of pubs/bars, all of which should at least be considered.

West End House was a cracking start, just a good, honest traditional pub, with plenty of character, excellent facilities including a good courtyard garden, a friendly landlord & a good selection of very good ales.

The Albert was very similar in many ways, a superb range of Ales & excellent facilities including the Function Room & Garden but obviously benefits from the support of Greene King.

The Minster and its sister pub, The Hereward, were both good and the ale offering was great, service in the Hereward was a bit slow but they both had a slight corporate pubco feeling about them lacking a degree of character, but that apart, were still good pubs, and may indeed be the sort of pub CAMRA should be encouraging, attracting a younger clientele.

3 At 3 was very different and certainly caters for those looking for more specialised beers and was very welcoming, even offering blankets!! Something different from the norm.

The Drayman's was superb & made the most of its Taproom status with that stripped back, bare floor boards & stools and bare tables approach and offered an excellent range of well-kept beers straight from the tap as was to be expected.

The Cutter was very smart & clean in presentation, probably appealing more to a younger crowd (no bad thing). Again, a good selection of well-kept beers.

A straw poll on the train amongst the 6 who travelled back together came out with a clear & unanimous favourite - West End House, although this may be something to do with the demographic of the group, albeit that Jacob, the young man (24) who joined us for the day, voted for it.

Overall, an excellent set of pubs & any one would be a worthy winner of your City POTY award.

Again, many thanks to all for making our trip down so enjoyable & if any of you do want to do a return trip, we'd be delighted to see you again & organise a trip around some of the pubs in our area. I know Paul & Michelle said they had a camper van & I believe Konrad mentioned one of our pubs which can offer facilities for this. The train journey was about 1 3/4 hours so it is certainly possible to do in a day. Really good to meet everyone, including your Chair, Tony and particular thanks to a very English Taffy for organising an excellent day out.

Cheers

*Mark Lewis
Chair
East Norfolk Branch."*

Photos this month, 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