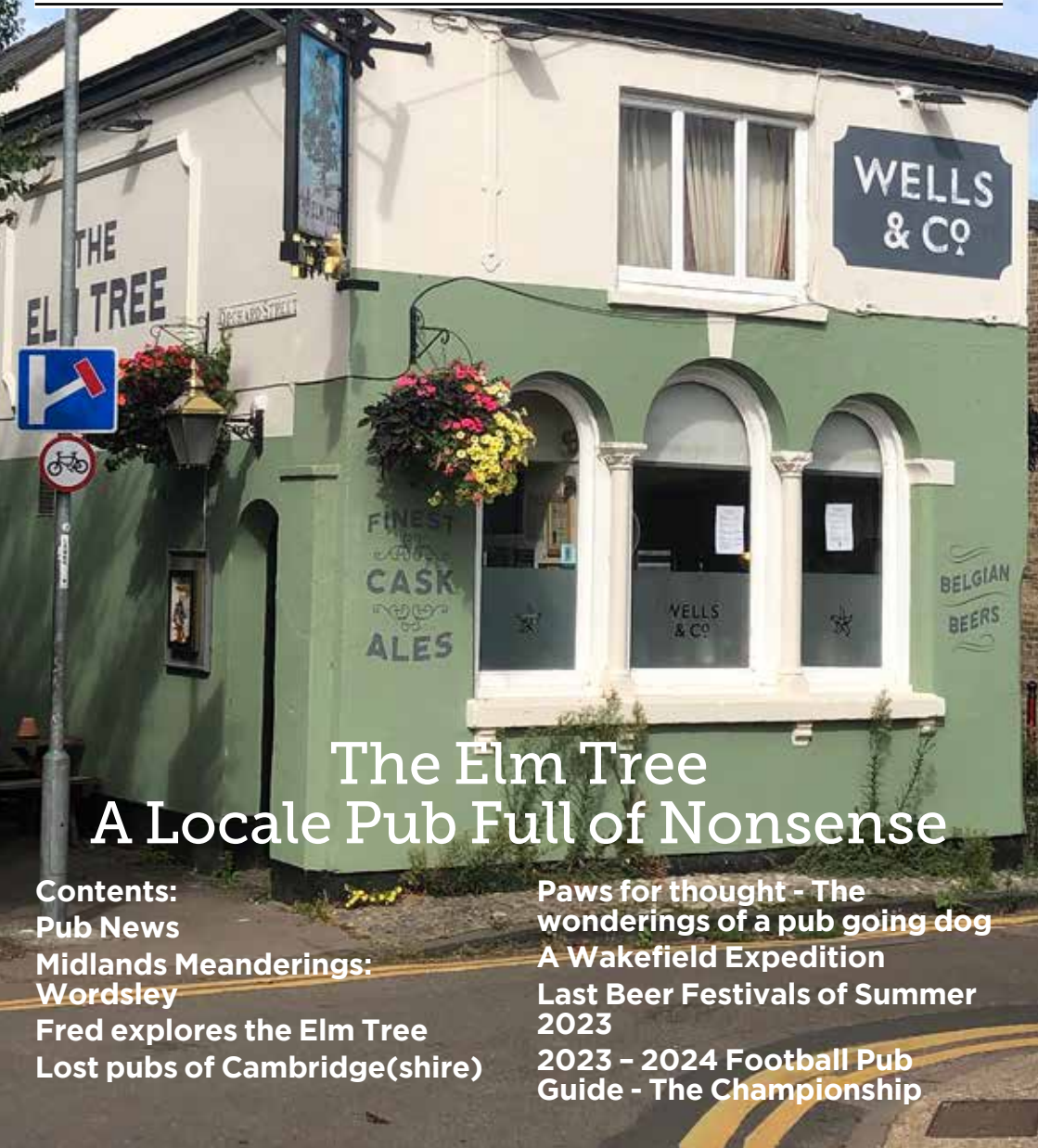


ale



Campaign
for
Real Ale

Cambridge & District Branch Newsletter Issue 405 October 2023



The Elm Tree A Locale Pub Full of Nonsense

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Pub News

It is not often that the loss of a pub is reported by our national media. It is perhaps because of its iconic status that widespread condemnation of the rapid demolition without planning permission following a fire of the Crooked House in South Staffordshire was reported by most major newspapers, and by the BBC. Demolition of Crooked House pub unacceptable - council - BBC News. We are reminded of a similar incident which flattened the Chequers in Pampisford. This historic pub was severely damaged by fire and swiftly demolished in 2021. Then owners Admiral Taverns claimed that they had been instructed by the fire service to demolish the building. This claim has been refuted. Unlike their South Staffordshire colleagues, Cambridgeshire's planning authority appears to have taken little interest in supporting the parish council and their request that the circumstances surrounding the demolition be investigated. The council has formed an action group, which reports to Parish Council meetings, and which is seeking the rebuilding of the pub, though it was noted in their September minutes that "we may now need to review options going forward, including sympathetic redevelopment".

Planning permission for conversion to residential use has been given to the owners of ex-Admiral Taverns pub, the Jolly Millers, Cottenham. Both Cambridge CAMRA and Cottenham Parish Council had objected to the application, but our claim that it would constitute a loss of a community facility was dismissed.

We objected to an application that would see the demolition of all but the facade of The Emperor, Hills Road Cambridge, arguing that the proposal which includes an office block with pub on the ground floor and basement, with no pub garden or living accommodation for the pub tenant, would make the business less attractive. City planners agreed with us, and the application was refused. A recent appeal was turned down by the Planning Inspector.

Branch Diary

Don't forget that all Branch members are very welcome to attend the monthly business meetings, as well as our socials.

Tue 10 Oct 20:00: Open Branch Meeting - Kingston Arms, Kingston Street.

Thu 12 Oct 19:30: Thursday Throng Social - Kingston Arms, Kingston Street.

Tue 14 Nov 20:00: Open Branch Meeting - Geldart, Ainsworth Street.

Sat 18 Nov. Minibus Tour of Rural Pubs East of Cambridge.

See branch website cambridge-camra.org.uk for more details.

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Pub News continued

At the time of writing tenancies are advertised for the Burleigh Arms, Newmarket Road Cambridge (Wells & Co - ongoing costs around £40,000 per annum), the Rose, Stapleford (Wells & Co - first year rent £5,800), the Admiral Vernon, Over (Wells & Co - first year rent £7500), and the Golden Ball, Boxworth, (Wells & Co - rent £68,000).

Everards Brewery is offering tenancies for the Rose and Crown, Histon, and the Tram Depot Dover Street, Cambridge.

The freehold of the Swan House, Fowlmere is advertised by Everard Cole (offers in excess of £475,000 excluding VAT). In recent years the Swan House has traded as an Indian restaurant.

But let's report some better news.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority have set aside £800k for community groups.
<https://wb.camra.org.uk/2023/08/31/boost-for-communities-fighting-to-save-their-pubs>.

The Plunkett Foundation will manage the fund. It doesn't appear to be purely for community groups looking to save their pubs but also includes shops or other community hubs. The C&PCA Market Towns page lists 11 market towns. It's not clear if this is an exhaustive list. Wisbech, Chatteris, Ely, Littleport, Huntingdon, March, Soham, St Ives, St Neots, Ramsey and Whittlesey.
<https://cambridgeshirepeterborough-ca.gov.uk/what-we-deliver/business/investment-in-market-towns/>
When asked, the Plunkett Foundation said that the communities covered are all those in the Authority area except for those in Cambridge or Peterborough.

Congratulations to landlord Neil Kirkland and his daughter Izzy who are celebrating their first year of tenancy in the Hoops, Barton. Regular customers told us that they welcome the transformation into "real pub". The Hoops is wet led - it doesn't serve food. The beer on our visit was in excellent

condition. Greene King Abbot Ale (direct from the cask) and Oakham Citra attracted most praise. We were also impressed by the rare inclusion of a bar billiards table in the lounge bar.

The Three Horseshoes in Comberton has reopened under new licensees. On a recent visit they had Adnam's Southwold Bitter, Timothy Taylor's Landlord and Milton Justinian.

Good news from Milton. The Waggon and Horses re-opened in May. New licensees Rob and Holly have revamped the pub garden and have introduced a new pool table area inside the pub. Sky sports could be in the offing. There are now five handpumps, two of which dispensed Elgoods beers on our visit. Pub improvements are ongoing. When completed the couple plan to have a grand opening.

Staying in Milton, the Lion and Lamb is looking very nice. The new licensees have tidied up the exterior, introducing new hanging baskets and planters. They report that business is good. They held a beer festival in late August.

The new licensees of the Plough and Fleece Horningsea were caught out by the pubs popularity when they ran out of real ale - 5 casks worth on a Friday evening!

We understand that Dan, the licensee of the previously mentioned Burleigh Arms, Cambridge, is moving the Crown and Punchbowl, Horningsea.

Recently announced on their Facebook page, the Red Lion Kirtling is now owned by professional chef, Mr Moji. Mr Moji and his family have moved to Kirtling from London.

We hear good things about the Red Lion, Cherry Hinton. New manager, Casey Mitchell has introduced a welcomed succession of guest ales. Beers from Oakham, Milton and Elgoods have all sold well. The guest ale policy will continue for the foreseeable future.

Mikey Pearson will be taking over The Red Bull, Barton Road Cambridge in October. Mikey will be known to many as he has previously run several pubs in Cambridge, most recently the Salisbury Arms on Tenison Road.

Congratulations to the Portland Arms, Chesterton Road. The pub has won a prestigious NMG award for being the best small music venue in the East of England.

Cider and gin lovers will be pleased to learn that the Swavesey Cider festival organisers are holding a pub in the park cider and gin event in the Swavesey Community Pavilion running 13th and 14th October.

Sticking with Cider, Martin, the manager of our Cider Pub of the Year, the Royal Standard, Mill Road, Cambridge, has asked us to tell you that the pub be opening at 12.00 pm every day of the week.

From the start of October local CAMRA members can nominate the pubs they think should be considered for inclusion in the 2025 Good Beer Guide. This can be done

online gbg.cambridge-camra.org.uk or by email gbg@cambridge-camra.org.uk

On a final note, CAMRA is encouraging its members to nominate their favourite beers as the champion beer of Britain. Taken from the national web site:

Vote for Champion Beer of Britain

The first stage of voting for the CAMRA's next Champion Beer of Britain has officially opened, and CAMRA members are invited to have their say on which beers are the 'cream of the crop' before **1st November 2023**. This initial stage of the competition is exclusive to CAMRA members, who can choose up to five beers across each of the new categories. This will take place alongside a series of rigorous regional heats throughout 2024, culminating in the final judging and announcement at the Trade Day of Great British Beer Festival 2024. All the heats and the final round of judging adhere to a strict blind tasting policy. Vote here: <https://cbob.camra.org.uk/>

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Midlands Meanderings: Wordsley

To continue my exploration of pubs around Stourbridge I consulted my trusty Dudley Borough real ale trail booklet for inspiration (download your own copy here:

old.dudley.camra.org.uk/guides/DRAT2017.pdf)

and noticed a little cluster of three interesting-looking pubs a little to the north, near Kingswinford, specifically in Wordsley. Right, that'll do.



Five minutes on the bus from Stourbridge bus station, and a massive landmark so you can't miss where to get off: the Red House Glass Cone.

First port of call, down a side street, was the **Bird in Hand**, winner of multiple CAMRA awards, including branch and county Pub of the Year for 2022.



Now this is a fine example of a traditional back-street local, with bar and lounge, the former including sport on TV, the latter, where I settled, more comfortably furnished

and decorated with ceramic birds, especially kingfishers; there is also a garden at the rear. It was busy when I dropped in, and had a very friendly 'locals' feel.

Regular beers are Enville Ale, Hobsons Town Crier and Holdens Golden Glow. According to Whatpub three changing guests generally cover the darker end of the beer spectrum, though not today. But that's OK, I'm very partial to Enville Ale (£3.40 a pint, lovely), and here it was in absolutely impeccable form, so of course I just had to stay for a second. Well, I've only got three pubs on my list, there's no huge rush.

But I did have to leave eventually. And so, carrying on northwards along the main road brings you (after some undulation) to the imposing three-storey frontage of the **New Inn** (dating from 1822), a Batham's house since 2008.



As well as its impressive frontage the pub also boasts a fine signboard:

Inside, a large L-shaped bar divides the ground floor into two sections, both comfortably appointed, and despite its size it felt like a nice cosy place to settle in for a bit of supping of some fine ales. Well then, it would be rude not to!



Not every Batham's pub serves their excellent Mild, but this one does, so of course I had to have a pint (£2.60 – yes, really!), and as I was feeling

a little peckish by now, I couldn't resist a cheese, onion and black pudding cob. (Both together came to less than a fiver.) Bostin fettle, you might say. The Mild was as good as I have ever had it, so of course a second pint was called for. I could happily have settled in for more, but I had one more pub on my hit list so I reluctantly tore myself away.

Pub no. 3, the **Queens Head**, is just a little way up the road.



This is a large Black Country Ales pub, once evidently multi-roomed but now mostly opened out, done up in the usual comfortable faux-Edwardian style and with the usual extensive range of real ales supplementing the three regular BCA staples. My usual 'go-to', Pig on the Wall (£3.75), was well past its best unfortunately, but they were happy to replace it with a pint

of their Fireside, a premium bitter which I'm not sure I've had before. It was very pleasant indeed, a proper old-fashioned full-bodied best bitter. I'll have to remember that in future.

And that was that. My relaxed meandering meant that I didn't have time to check out some favourite pubs in Stourbridge proper afterwards, but nevertheless I found three very fine pubs, all of them completely unknown to me until the day before I set out, and enjoyed some excellent beers from three of the Black Country's finest breweries. That'll do, indeed!

Next: the long-awaited (by some) second meander round the outskirts of Shrewsbury.

Steve Linley

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The Elm Tree

The Elm Tree in Orchard Street has recently been declared Cambridge City LocAle Pub of the Year. It is well known for its rich variety of live music on Sunday evenings. And it is most definitely renowned for its great selection of Belgian ales.

I visit on a Tuesday lunchtime. For me, this is already a good start, as I increasingly find a lot of town centre pubs closed at this time, often not opening until 4 or 5pm.

There is a choice of 7 beers on tap and I go for the familiar Timothy Taylor Landlord. At 4.3% this golden pale has a hoppy aroma, almost heathery; it has great balance, just slightly dry. It is proudly served by Ian, with a loose foaming head.



I go for a small table towards the rear, settle down and feel very relaxed. There is always lots to look at in this cosy back street tavern. I have before noted the witches hats clinging to the ceiling, but have never really looked that closely before at much else. Today, I begin to spot several shall we say oddities?



First up is the duck and the elephant. Ian also draws my attention to the llama. I won't

show it in this article – perhaps you should go and find it yourself! There is some poetry in random places affixed to the left side walls. Ian seems unduly proud of some of this, and I discover that some of it is his. The poem on the subject of a colonoscopy again won't be printed here, but I do find another gentler ditty no doubt influenced by avid watchers of TV's *The Big Bang Theory*.

It is time for another pint, and I go for Hopback Summer Lightning at £5.20. I comment on how rarely I see this in pubs and landlady Jess notes that its strength of 5% has something to do with this. It is a fantastic drop, really crisp, full of fresh peppery dryness and even a hint of basil. Jess is just updating the flyer for October's music and it has the usual mix of cigar box blues (1st), Turkish rock (8th), folk (15th), vocalist Anna (22nd) and some kind of Masquerade Party to finish the month on Sunday 29th. There has to be something there for everybody! I comment how there seem to be some pretty bizarre things dotted around the pub and Jess chuckles as she adds that The Elm Tree is just a pub full of nonsense.



What else can I see? There is a witch on a broomstick. Some porcelain ghosts. I see what I think is a gargoyle on the mantelpiece, but I stand corrected. It has no spout for oil, so it is not a gargoyle – it is a grotesque!

An African blowpipe, possibly with poison darts. Above the bar are some outrageous purple "New Rocks". These are basically very large stompy boots, not what you

A Locale Pub Full of Nonsense

would expect to find above a bar of a normal back street boozer.



My favourite discovery is a very tiny fellow indeed. Appearing to be half Lego minifigure/half goodness knows what, it is... just who is he? Another member of staff who is ever present today is Jenny.

Obviously an authority on these things, she insists that this is none other than Speedy Gonzales. Furthermore, she then adds his catchphrase "Andale! Andale! Andale! Arriba!" This literally means "Move it!" As I look around the pub this lunchtime, I note how this motivational outcry from Mexico's cheesiest mouse does NOT seem to rouse the smattering of barflies, myself included.

I have time for one more pint. In line with the pub's Locale title, I choose Roughacre Nighthawker (£5.20) from just over the border not-so-far away Clare (Just over the border in Suffolk - ed). This coffee porter at 4.6% is quite creamy and the coffee is not at all overwhelming. With just a hint of berries, I find this rather delightful. Jess steps in again here to impart interesting facts - this brewery always delivers its ales in plastic casks. Just to prove it, an empty is sourced from round the back, and I pose for a photo.



And it is time to go. A return visit will probably reveal different glimpses of further nonsense.

I like this pub. I like the atmosphere. I like the beer. I like the fact that the people who work here actually care. Too often, I will go to a pub and there will be a different face each time, more interested in their mobile phones than actually serving. Jess, Jenny and Ian don't just work in this pub, they add something. Humour and knowledge certainly. There is a lasting relationship which it is almost impossible to describe here. But it has value.

Hopefully we will all know of pubs, and people like this.

Fred Laband



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Lost pubs of Cambridge(shire)

To regular readers, sorry, I haven't been able to write a column for this issue. But so as not to disappoint all you pub history enthusiasts, here is another guest column from our Pubs Officer, Ali Cook, which he originally wrote for the Branch website a couple of years ago. He has very kindly agreed to let me use an edited version here.

If, in recent years, you passed along New Street at the back of Mackay's on East Road you may have spotted a blue painted building. Perhaps you read the inscription



high up above its door, "Rodney Stores E. Lacon & Co. Ltd. 1903", and wondered about its history. If you haven't seen it, I'm afraid it's now too late: at the start of February 2021 it was demolished.

Rodney Stores, New Street

Lacon's is a familiar name with a long history in East Anglian brewing heritage. But what about the Rodney Stores? Where does that come from? To find out more I turned to my copy of *Cambridge Breweries* by RJ Flood published in 1987. It's an absolute goldmine and a testimony to Bob Flood's many years of research. On page 15 one paragraph deals with the Rodney Brewery.

The Rodney Brewery was at 95 East Road, now occupied by the Cambridge Car and Van Hire Service. It was owned from at least 1881 by Frederick Swann, who was also a lime, sand and gravel merchant. The listing in trade and street directories became H. A. & F. Swann in the late 1880s and Frederick J. Swann by

1891. Brewing ceased late in 1903 and the pubs were sold to E. Lacon & Co. of Great Yarmouth. F. J. Swann moved to the Rhadegund Brewery in James Street at this time but Swann Bros. as lime burners, sand and gravel merchants and general builders merchants remained at the East Road site for many years. Some of the buildings in the yard may originally have been part of the brewery and the brewery tap, although long closed, is still standing in New Street. The other pubs belonging to the brewery, all of which passed to Lacons, are also now closed. They included the "Hare & Hounds", "Brickmakers Arms" and "Tailors Arms", all in Newmarket Road, and the "Dog & Pheasant" in Matthews Street.

Cambridge Breweries, RJ Flood 1987

So, according to Bob, the Rodney Stores was the Taproom of the Rodney Brewery. Cambridge Car and Van Hire Service is now Motor Ace Car Sales and is painted in the same blue as the Rodney Stores in latter days. Perhaps the Swann Bros builders merchants site on East Road may be where Mackays now stands. Apart from the recently demolished Rodney Stores do any of the other buildings referred to in Bob's paragraph still exist? I checked out James Street for signs of the Rhadegund Brewery. Nothing!

I decided to pick the brains of Cambridge & District CAMRA's pub historian, Steve Linley. He didn't disappoint. The Rhadegund Brewery was on the west side of James Street about half way down and had a Tap at No. 6 but the terrace has been rebuilt since. And the pubs? I couldn't find them. Are they all gone? Steve told me that the Dog & Pheasant on St Matthews Street was where the Cherry Tree Centre now stands. The Hare & Hounds stood where the Elizabeth Way roundabout is now. The Brickmakers Arms was on the corner of

River Lane opposite what is now the Corner House. And the Tailors Arms also on Newmarket Road? Steve thinks that Bob may have been mistaken about its location



as he knows of no Tailors Arms on Newmarket Road but there was one on Norfolk Street. It was a Lacon's pub and the building still exists, it's opposite the Blue Moon and its fading painted wall sign is still visible.

[It was originally called the Fat Pig, and might possibly be the subject of a future lost pub article – SL]

Now, here's a second chance to identify and tell me about the next mystery pub:



Please send any reminiscences, gossip or old photos to me at pub-history@cambridge-camra.org.uk – let's flesh out the characters of yesteryear!

Steve Linley



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All for that taste of Taylor's



Paws for thought

My regular readers will know that the main purpose of my column in ALE is to help to promote and advertise dog friendly pubs – especially those that provide good beer!

This of course takes painstaking research and being under 18 I am not generally allowed to go to pubs on my own, so my male human volunteered to accompany me. It is an onerous task, but he undertakes it with good cheer! There are times when his work -he does work- takes up all his time and he is unable to take me to new pubs. I don't then have enough photos to complete a full article. This is one of those occasions, and I only have a few new pubs to report about. Not wanting to let my public down I have delved into my photo archive and added a few nice pictures that I have collected over the years. I hope you enjoy them and the stories behind them.

I'll start with three new pubs.

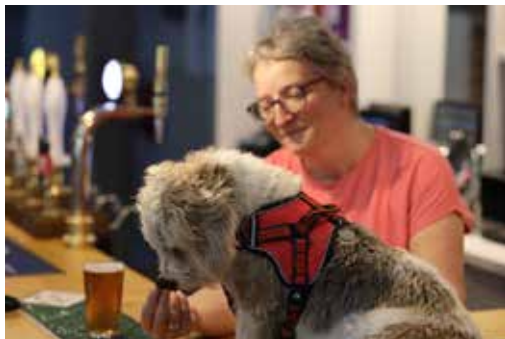


This is a picture of my new friends Jess and Megan. They work in the Rising Sun in Potton.

We stopped here for food during a CAMRA minibus tour. My apologies for being a little blurred, but we were halfway through the tour and my human had had a couple of drinks. The landlord of this pub is a keen Leicester City Football Club supporter. It is very dog friendly – beer and food were reported to be good.

Continuing the tour, we came across a lovely community owned pub called the

Three Tuns in Guilden Morden. I was introduced to landlady whose name is Sarah.



She told me that she had taken over the pub at the beginning of July and was still finding her feet because she had never run a pub before. We got on very well – especially after she had given me a few treats. This pub has a lovely community feel to it. Locals I spoke to said that both the food and the beer are very good.

The Chequers in Orwell is a lovely pub. This lady is named Jasmine - Jas for short.



(If anyone is interested, I am called Glad for short). We snuggled together on this very comfy leather sofa. The Chequers is known for the quality of its food. It is a restaurant, but the front bar is very much a pub, and dogs are very much welcomed. For humans who are inclined to take their canine friend for a short walk, there is a tiny community area which I like to visit just down the road from the pub.

The wonderings of a pub going dog



My final new pub this issue is The Hoops in Barton. Here I am with Landlord Neil and

his daughter Izzy. I know it looks like Neil is punching my nose. Actually, he has hidden a treat and I am trying to sniff it off him. Neil and Izzy are big dog lovers. They have a very boisterous 14-month Alsatian called Kuma. Kuma means bear in Japanese. I spoke to some regular customers who said they like Neil's beer, but they also visit the pub to say hello to Kuma!

The next two pictures are from the



Cambridge Beer festival. There wasn't enough space to put them in ALE 404, but I like them so much I wanted you to see them. I have no idea who this lady is. My male human sneaked a secret snap whilst taking a group picture with all her friends. I like it though.



There is no mistaking this lady. She is my very good friend Hayley. She and her husband Steve have three pubs in Cambridge – the Alex, the Portland Arms, and the Castle. Hayley was celebrating her birthday during beer festival week. I think she had a good time!

This next picture didn't make the cut in ALE 398. My male human opted for a darker, more atmospheric shot. I prefer this one.



It is a photo of Lauren in the Red Lion Histon during an Easter beer festival. I am glad I can show it to you now.

This final shot is of my good friend and landlady of the Maypole, Anastasia.



The Maypole has a heated seating area which is just right for dogs. She and landlord Vincent have commissioned the painting of a large mural depicting various aspects of Cambridge and reflecting their connection to the pub. My male human says it will feature in ALE 406. I'll see you then.

Woof for now.
Gladys Emmanuelle

A Wakefield Expedition

An invite to visit Ossett Brewery and partake in selected Wakefield hostelrys was an opportunity thought to be well worth grasping. A select band of disparate individuals was carefully chosen and quickly welded together into a coherent and tight (very tight) fighting unit.

The belief that all would be plain sailing obviously didn't take into account the necessity of dealing with Rail Network. The online information laid out the logistics and price. Proximity to the station facilitated an opportunity to go and speak (!) to a human in order to double check in an effort to avoid potential mishaps. Alas I was informed "... ah ! the on line information doesn't take into account recent changes..". The outcome being (after 40 minutes) 4 tickets per person (because return tickets with LNER were no longer possible) and £130 additional cost. Only the thought of a White Rat in its heartland sustained morale sufficiently to proceed. 'It'll be alright on the night'

Alighting at Wakefield Westgate meant the



Henry Boons, which sits on the (Henry Boon) Clark brewery site, was the first eagerly anticipated port of call. Evidence of a rich industrial heritage and pubs to match was immediately

apparent when walking from the station.

Obviously different refreshments were sampled but amongst others the Cluster (4.1%) was enthusiastically partaken of with it's accentuated grapefruit palate most prominent and consumed post haste. A

most accommodating landlady Barbara was on hand to serve a follow up Kingston Arms favourite, White Rat (4.0%) which was on equally good form. The Henry Boon set the bar high for the pubs that followed.



A short walk to The Old Print Works, found Ossett beers well represented alongside a couple of Acorn Beers

whose Barnsley Bitter (3.8%), an 'old-school balanced bitter' with a bitter bite at the finish, proved a good choice.



The Hop a much revamped Ossett house provided me with my find for the day. The Yorkshire

Blonde (3.9%). A most quaffable session beer, well balanced with moderate bitterness, was in superb form.



My own personal favourite pub of day was the Wakefield Camra pub of the year The Black Rock. A busy bustling pub with diverse custom at 14.30 in the afternoon conjured

memories of my early drinking days in the

70's...! Accordingly I couldn't avoid ordering Tetleys - originally brewed down the road in Leeds, alas now in Wolverhampton. However as much as it is derided by aficionados, the initial sweetish malt was followed by the dry, bitterish finish well remembered. The equally memorable smooth mouthfeel encouraged further moments of nostalgic thoughts.



En route to Ossett Brewery a final pub visit was to the very recently refurbished (June 2023) and extremely busy Bingley Arms,

providing for the sampling of both Ossett and co-operator Salt Brewery beers. The Salt Jute (4.2%) a sessional modern IPA



whilst quiet refreshing with very moderate bitterness was a little disappointing but given the quality of the so far sampled beers may well be a little harsh. A further Yorkshire Blonde from Ossett again proved a resounding success, confirming earlier thoughts

After visiting such good pubs with excellent beers the visit to Ossett Brewery had much to live up to. An open day celebrating its 25th birthday provided for a very large crowd with live music and various food vans. The normal brewery tour wasn't on offer - some may have been disappointed, some may not have missed another visit to a modern, high-tech production centre as impressive a size as it was but whatever, the

beer was on outstanding form.

The Silver King (4.3%) a classic Ossett beer, crisp, dry, plenty of citrus notes and balanced bitterness. A half of Voodoo (5.3%) a chocolate-orange stout was exactly what it said but with some surprising vanilla notes - smooth and dangerously drinkable. A final Yorkshire Blonde just to be sure was thought to be the end of the day. However.....



..... The Brewers Pride beckoned. The original home of Ossett Brewery continued the theme of the day - the fayre was excellent. None more so than the excellent pork pies (4 varieties) which were vigorously consumed at £1.95 each. Not too sure of the final couple of pints but be assured Ossett was more than happily quaffed before heading back to catch the 20.28 to Cambridge.

Still relatively steady on their feet, our intrepid travellers continued to represent Cambridge to the best of their ability.

Arriving back in Cambridge at 23.07 meant a final nightcap at The Kingston Arms was available - rest assured it was neither Horlicks or Ovaltine...!

A highly successful and enjoyable soirée. The pubs, beer (and company of course) were the highlights of the day but then again that's a fairly well established formula.

Mark Donachy

Last Beer Festivals of Summer 2023

We all know that a Cambridge Summer starts in May, on the first day of the CAMRA Cambridge Beer Festival but when does it end? The late August bank holiday weekend perhaps? I'd rather push it on a week or two into early September. This year the weather seemed to agree with me as, after weeks of average weather, early September was glorious. It was, unless you are in charge of cooling, perfect beer festival weather. Early September saw me checking out three of my favourite village beer festivals all within easy reach of Cambridge.

Toft is a small village that lies just west of the Greenwich Meridian between Comberton and Bourn. It's a 40-minute cycle ride from central Cambridge. Toft lost the last of its at least three pubs around 1990 when the Red Lion became a Chinese restaurant. Late in the 90s Toft Social Club, based in the People's Hall, was founded to help fill the void. One of the many events it runs is a Beer & Cider Festival. What an excellent festival it is too. So much so that the team that runs it received our 2020 Real Ale Champions award.



I cycled out on the Friday afternoon and arrived shortly after it opened. 15 cask

ales, mostly East Anglian, and 4 real ciders, half of them local from Simon's Cider. I could only stay a few hours but had halves of Wensleydale Gamekeeper (4.3%), Burwell Beer Fuggled (4.0%), Tring Squadron Scramble (4.0%) and Nethergate Old Growler (5.0%). All were tasty and in very good nick. Club chairman Martin told me that most were gluten-free,

he himself being intolerant. Although all the beers at the festival were in firkins (9 gallons) he extolled the virtues of pins (4.5 gallons) as they allowed places like the club that can't sell a full firkin over their limited opening (usually just Thursday & Friday evenings) to offer good real ale without having to chuck much of it away. Moving on to ciders, I enjoyed halves of both Simon's Cider, Shelford, and Wilding Perry (both 6.2%). Oh, I must also compliment the paella which was home made by club members. Whilst drinking and eating I also chatted with other customers including a couple from Halifax who were on a cycling holiday and were delighted to have discovered the festival was close to their campsite.



The following day, Saturday, I headed out to Shepreth for the Plough's Beer &

Music Festival It's a 50-minute cycle ride but, as I was going with friends, we used the train – the Plough is a 5 minute walk from Shepreth station. Sadly, industrial action limited our stay as the 16:40 was the last train home. I made the most of the time, managing to taste 9 different beers, whilst enjoying the music in the beer garden. The festival was well set up. 12 casks of ale from small regional breweries were served from an outside stillage equipped with a top class cooling system, and another 4 ales were served from handpumps inside the pub. There were 4 real ciders, 3 from Simon's Cider.

Landlord Nick was supporting the bands from the sound mixing desk and his son Matthew helped to serve the beers. Using the festival programme, I took some notes:

Three Blind Mice, Rabbits on the Perimeter, 4.2% - *Three Blind Mice; say no more!* Roughacre, L'Abbaye Noire, 7.2% - *Wow! Oh! 7.2%. No wonder I feel this way after my second half.* Tring, Moongazing, 4.2% - *Very tasty.* New River, Blind Poet, 4.5% - *Fantastic & smoky.* Bishop Nick, Martyr, 5.0% - *Tasty.* Buntingford, Polar Star, 4.4% - *Decent.* Elgoods, Route 66, 4.4% - *OK.* New River, London Tap, 3.8% - *Decent.* Three Blind Mice, Juice Rocket 4.5% - *Juicy.* I think that my tenth half was the repeat of the Roughacre L'Abbaye Noire. *Too good not to have a second.* The food menu at the festival was provided by Meat Up Cambs. Very tasty it was too. The Plough is currently only opening Friday to Sunday but it's worth a visit even when there isn't a beer festival.



beers from Buntingford, Burwell, Cambridge Brew House, Lord Conrad's, Milton, Papworth,

Three Blind Mice and Wheatsheaf breweries, and ciders from Blue Barrel, Cambridge Cider Company, Cromwell, and Simon's Cider. The cooling system relied on coils to cool the cask ales ensuring that, despite the scorching weather, the beers were served at almost cellar temperature, although, it must be said, all the beers I tried were a little flat. For most of the time the ciders were kept in and served from the pub's cold room and were only brought out when it got busy in the evening. As a result, the ciders were all in excellent condition. The festival also offered a good range of food options.

Ali Cook



The following week I visited Histon Beer Festival at the Red Lion. It's only a

30-minute cycle ride from Cambridge and there's a reasonable bus service too. The festival runs from Monday until Saturday and it goes in my diary as soon as I get the dates. I visited on Tuesday evening and Wednesday afternoon.



The festival is held in a marquee in the pub garden. It is organised by village volunteers and all the profits go to local causes. This year the festival offered a choice of 60 cask ales and 16 real

ciders and perries. Although they did have some from further afield, the majority were from local producers. I was able to try

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2023 – 2024 Football Pub Guide

Several Ales ago, Cambridge CAMRA Cider Officer and dedicated supporter of Watford FC Jerry Ladell produced a pub guide for travelling Premier League football fans. Watford having been relegated to The Championship; Jerry has produced the following list of recommendations. This is part 1. These are very good pubs that are worth a visit even if you aren't a football fan – though they may be a bit crowded on match days.

1. Birmingham City – The Anchor, Digbeth B5 6ET

We have been visiting this pub for many a year and it never changes, great ales, good cider and even some rather lovely German lager on tap. It's a no-frills pub but there is streetside parking to be had very nearby and it is only a 10-15 minute stroll to the ground. There's not much in the way of food but the quality of the beer and the company more than make up for it.

2. Blackburn Rovers – The Drummers Arms BB1 7DT

Untested: Blackburn is a bit of a desert when it comes to decent real ale pubs, especially near the ground. The Drummers has rave reviews on social media but be warned it is a good 30-minute walk from the pub to the ground, so make sure you leave in plenty of time. Although buses to the ground leave from very close by. All tastes appear to be catered for.

3. Bristol City – Bristol Beer Factory BS3 1JP

This is a great pub and very close to the ground. The range of craft beers is vast, and the surroundings are very pleasant. Good match-day food is also available, but it's the beer that is the main appeal of this pub. Side street parking is at a premium, but if you are early enough you should be able to find somewhere back behind the pub.

4. Cardiff City – Crafty Devil's Cellar Bar CF11 9NJ

This is a very small micropub but well worth hunting down. The beers were excellent on our last visit and there's a very cheap Pay-and-Display car park directly behind the pub. It's about a 15-minute walk to the ground from here. The locals were very friendly. No food though, so it will need to be a liquid lunch.

5. Coventry City – Dhillon's Brewery Tap CV6 6AT

This bar is probably the closest you'll find to the ground in this guide. Be aware though, due to its proximity to the ground, no colours should be worn – unless you're a Cov' fan of course! A lot of the beers come from their own brewery, but they do have some mainstream 'pop' available too. Big TV screens show any early kick-offs, and they have a banging DJ who knocks out some good tunes to get you in the mood prior to kick-off. This place is well worth a visit.

6. Huddersfield Town – The Sportsman HD1 5AY

This is a regular haunt of ours. The beer is always good, they have pork pies to kill for and they also have a lovely sun terrace out the back, if you're not visiting in the middle of winter. It gets very busy before games, so if you need to rest your legs, you need to get there early. The pub is very close to the station and a 15-minute walk to the ground. This won our away pub of the season a few years ago.

7. Hull City – The Hop & Vine HU1 3TG

Untested: We had to abort our visit here last season as the pub was closed for the weekend for redecoration but reports from the Facebook group 'Real Ale Football Away Days' page suggest that this is a cracker of a pub. It is a cellar bar not very far from the main railway station. It is a 25-minute walk to the ground though, so be warned. We drank nearby last season and ended up hopping in a cab.

The Championship - Part 1

8. Ipswich Town – Brairbank Brewing Company Taproom IP4 1LB

Untested: This place comes recommended from Ipswich Town supporting friends. Living in East Anglia does have it's benefits when researching the pubs of other regional teams. The brewery is set in an old Lloyds Bank site. The beers on offer are in the main from their own brewery but they do have lager available for the louts! Food is also served but as to what, I am not entirely sure. 20-minute walk to the ground.

9. Leeds United – The Hop LS1 4BR

This was a great find. It's in the railway arches under the main station, be warned though it is a good half an hour walk to Elland Road. Last year when we visited it was persisting down and we got well and truly drenched walking to the ground. The beer and food in here are amazing, so make sure you give yourself plenty of time to sample its wares. As it is so close to the station, why not let the train take the strain?

10. Leicester City – The Blue Boar LE1 5JN

This is a small pub near the city centre which serves fantastic beers and ciders. You can also pick up snacks but there is no hot food that I can recall. If you're driving be careful where you park, I got a parking ticket last time I visited, so be warned. The stilton and onion filled rolls are to die for. But it is the beer that is the main draw. 25-minute walk from the pub to the stadium and 10 minutes from the station.

11. Middlesbrough – The Twisted Lip TS1 2LF

It's a 20-minute walk from the ground but a pub that is well worth searching out. It is in the middle of a backstreet terrace with stairs leading to upstairs rooms. The serving area downstairs is very small and can become very crowded, but the service is remarkably efficient. The range of beers on offer is vast for such a small pub. A popular haunt for quite a few of the Watford regional supporters' groups.

12. Millwall – The Bermondsey BierKeller SE1 9QQ

Drinking in the vicinity of Millwall has so many good options. You have Borough Market and all that has to offer; the Bermondsey Mile – which is a fantastic place to visit with so many different micros to choose from and the pubs around London Bridge station. We tried the BierKeller out last season, and it was a superb find. It was especially appealing to the members of our group who prefer lager to beer, although continental lagers are so much different to the mainstream guff served up in this country. The 'Keller is set beneath the railway, underneath the arches (I nearly broke into song for a minute there), German style food is also available. Be wary though, the beers are pretty strong. You need to hop on a train to get to the football, so best leave yourself at least 45 minutes to get to the ground. (to be continued ...)



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