



JIM'S JAUNT

The Bowdens *by Jim Reay*

Today, Great Bowden & Little Bowden are thought of as suburbs of Market Harborough, but originally the boot was on the other foot. Great Bowden is a very old settlement dating back to Anglo-Saxon times, appearing in The Domesday Book as Buge done and existing many centuries before Harborough which was a separate township within Great Bowden parish as early as 1254, but always independent for civil purposes. Until relatively recently Harborough remained part of the parish of Great Bowden, which is bounded, to the south and east, by the River Welland, the traditional boundary between Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. Little Bowden, being the other side of the Welland, was originally in Northants but had been transferred to Leicestershire by 1891. Four years later the three settlements were amalgamated to create Market Harborough Urban District.

The Bowdens are easily accessible by train or 44 Centrebus. Arriving by train at Market Harborough shortly before 11.30, my first call was to be The Red Lion at Great Bowden and with half an hour to spare before opening time I decided to walk. Turning right out of the station and along Great Bowden Road the ruins of St. Mary in Arden Church were very soon to my right hand side. The nearby blue roadside notice makes very interesting reading. Shortly after passing over the railway bridge and to my left was Countryman Mews, a modern housing development built on the site of The Countryman, a pub of which I have fond memories, but sadly demolished some years ago. On reaching Great Bowden village green I carried on past the Shoulder of Mutton and the red telephone box bearing left into Main Street where The Red Lion was immediately in front of me. The 17th century Red Lion is splendidly conspicuous with its white painted brickwork exterior. Some years ago now, a former landlord with an adventurous taste in masonry paints, painted

the exterior brickwork bright blue, giving rise to the locals christening the establishment The Blue Red Lion. As of June 2013 this hostelry became completely free of tie and was refurbished. The previous restaurant and bar rooms were knocked into one large L-shaped room which has exposed ceiling beams and joists. Behind the pub there is a large garden. Two real ales were on sale, Fullers London Pride and Sharp's Doom Bar.

The Shoulder of Mutton was my next port of call so I retraced my steps the short distance to where this 16th century building overlooks the village green. Another Great Bowden pub with the exterior brickwork painted white, it nestles between a shop and a row of very olde-worlde terraced cottages. The interior consists of two bars, one each side of the front entrance door. The bar to the right extends back to a games room with a pool table, skittle table and a dart board. Beyond that there is a conservatory dining room leading to a well-maintained rear garden. The three available real ales were Black Sheep Best Bitter, Fuller's London Pride and Wadworth 6X.

It was now time to turn my attention to the two pubs in Little Bowden. There's an hourly 44 Centrebus service between the Bowdens but I decided to walk. I could have walked back to the railway station turned right and then first left to Little Bowden but wanted to take the more scenic route. Turning left out of the Shoulder of Mutton and keeping the terraced cottages close to my left hand side I walked straight on down a jitty, past some old peoples' bungalows and school fields to my right, a tennis court to my left, over the brook, through the park and over the railway footbridge. I followed the well-trodden field path keeping the hedgerow close to my right hand side until reaching a yellow way marker post where I bore left up the steep hill; turning round at the top to admire the view whilst catching my breath.

I continued through a hand-gate and along the easy to follow path leading to a jitty between houses. Reaching the road I turned right then first left down Lincoln Court, at the end of which I took the jitty to the right then turned left down Rutland Walk. This walkway crosses over three roads and changes its name to Meadow Close; at the end I turned left then straight on over The Crescent to The Broadway. It was now straight on to Little Bowden along The Broadway, Connaught Road and Clarence Road. At the end of Clarence Road I crossed straight over the busy road into Kettering Road crossing the River Welland past Lidl and, bearing left at the roundabout, The Cherry Tree came into view.

The Cherry Tree dates back to the 17th century and has a cottagey aspect with its whitish painted exterior brick walls sheltering beneath a thatched roof. The interior embraces five individual rooms three of which have a serving area. The external appearance is replicated inside with traditional slate and wooden floors and low beamed ceilings. There are two gardens; the one to the rear is restricted to adults, so an ideal place for smokers; the one to the front is a family garden ideal for

children to play in. Five real ales were on offer; Holden's Golden Glow, Wadworth 6X, Everards Beacon, Tiger and Original,

Oat Hill is across the road from The Cherry Tree and was my last objective. Formerly known as The Greyhound, its present moniker is derived from "Haefera-Beorg", the Saxon name for the tiny village which eventually became Market Harborough, and which translates to Oat Hill in modern language. Built during the 1930's and by far the newest of the Bowden pubs, the aesthetically pleasing exterior is decorated in compatible shades of pastel greenish magnolia, beige and green. The inside consists of two tastefully furnished rooms; a lounge bar amenable for dining or imbibing and a restaurant including a conservatory type area to the rear overlooking a well-established landscaped garden. Sharp's Doom Bar and Timothy Taylor Landlord were the real ales on offer.

Between them the four pubs had nine real ales available, with a pleasant short ramble between Great and Little Bowden. What's not to like?

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The Oat Hill



The Cherry Tree



The Red Lion



Houses where
The Countryman once stood



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