

JIM'S JAUNT

A Stroll through History

by Jim Reay

During my formative years my pub of choice was **The Golden Fleece** at South Croxton. Each Friday and Saturday evening saw lively Ruddles County fuelled sing-songs with Eve on the piano accompanied on clarinet by my very good friend, John "the flute" Haywood. Nostalgia and curiosity seemed good reasons to choose this venue and with a schedule of four pubs in three different villages with moderately long walks between an early start seemed a good idea so I caught the 10:23 Centrebus 100 from St. Margaret's Bus Station arriving outside **The Golden Fleece** just in time for 11:00 opening.



The Golden Fleece

Historically, pubs often associated themselves with the area's predominant trade as a way of gathering custom. To supplement the agricultural economy there was a short-lived framework knitting industry during the first half of the 19th century and "**The Golden Fleece**" clearly recognises the local wool trade. These days, like many villages, South Croxton has largely changed from a farming community into a dormitory settlement of Leicester.

The Golden Fleece was part of The Ruddles estate until it became free of tie in the late



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1970's when the then Landlord, Jim Elliot, purchased the pub shortly before Everards acquired the rest of the Ruddles estate of 24 pubs for the grand sum of £730,000. Subsequently we've seen the well documented appalling demise of Ruddles' Langham - based Brewery which lost its independence, through takeover, in 1986, followed by several more takeovers and eventual closure in 1999. Now extensively extended, making it akin to Dr. Who's Tardis, it is huge inside belying the unchanged appearance of the front elevation. Diners would appear to be the main target clientele with the greater part of the interior reserved for them. Imbibers are, however, welcome in the smaller area adjacent to the bar. To the rear of the pub there is a car park and an extensive floodlit decking area. Available beers were the two regulars; Wells & Young's Bombardier & Black Sheep Best Bitter.

The Black Boy at Hungarton was my next port of call. Turning left downhill from **The Golden Fleece**, after about 150 yards, I arrived at a footpath signpost pointing left up a driveway to a private house. Somewhat hesitantly, I walked up the gravel drive and, just before reaching the house, the footpath route took me through a hand-gate to my right, and diagonally right over the lawn to a yellow way-marker post next to a stile. From this point on, the footpath was easy to follow, well trodden and well directed with way-marker posts. After about two and a half miles through fields and a small wood, I

reached Hungarton and turned right and walked approximately a furlong along the road to the village. **The Black Boy** is unmissable, being one of the first buildings visible to the left on the corner of Main Street.

The pub is rumoured to have got its name when a young black slave escaped from the nearby village of Beeby and sought shelter there. The more probable explanation is the fact that a black boy was part of the coat of arms of the Burnaby family formerly of nearby Baggrave Hall, whose land the inn was built on. Their crest depicts a black boy holding the rose of England in his right hand and at head height above the motto "Pro Rege", Latin for "For the King". Whichever is true, as Mark Twain observed, "Never let the facts get in the way of a good story." The once separate public bar and lounge bar are now one not too large room with fireplaces and exposed ceiling joists managing to maintain a convivial cottagey ambiance. Whilst it

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The Black Boy



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would seem that diners are the target clientele, drinkers are still made welcome. Adjacent to the front car park is a floodlit timber decked area and garden. This pub has no regular beers but does have two or three changing guest beers, on this occasion Sharp's Doom Bar & Grainstore Metatarsal.

Leaving **The Black Boy** and turning right down Main Street, my next destination was Houghton on the Hill. Main Street weaved to the right and then left until the prominent and impressive spired 13th century Church of St John the Baptist came into view. I walked down Church Lane past the church and some white cottages and through a kissing gate into a field. Following the yellow way-marker posts I eventually reached a road at the junction leading to Quenby Hall and walked up the road directly opposite, signposted Ingarsby, until it ended at a T-junction. I carried straight on via the footpath in the field opposite until the former Great Northern Railway embankment (redundant since 1962) came into view. After crossing a stile I took the footpath diagonally left to the road and turned right under the old railway bridge near to where Ingarsby Railway Station once stood. (I feel sure that many older readers will have fond memories of this line which carried holiday specials directly to Skegness from the terminus at Belgrave Road Railway Station). The road I was now on would take me the rest of the way to Houghton on the Hill. I soon came to Ingarsby Old Hall, one of the very few enduring residences remaining in

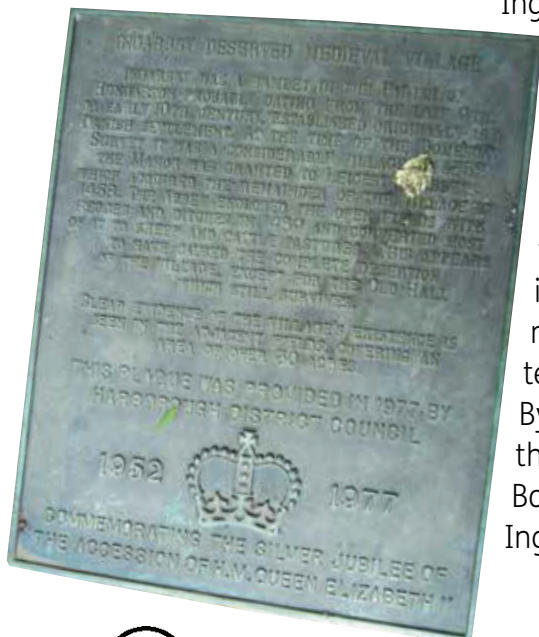
Ingarsby, a tiny hamlet in the parish of Hungarton and probably settled by the Danes in the late ninth or early tenth century. By the time of the Domesday Book (1086) Ingarsby was a



Rose & Crown

considerable village but it had become abandoned by 1469. Reputed to be one of the best preserved deserted medieval villages in England, perceptible undulations in the topography of the grassed fields opposite the Old Hall indicate the vestigial lost village. Viewed from above, on Google Earth, one can clearly discern the grassed over remnants of the well delineated rectangular mounds distinguishing where houses once stood; also perceptible are boundary ditches and the hollow ways where the village streets and lanes once ran. On the grass verge, close to the Old Hall, is an interesting plaque mounted on stone, relating a brief history of Ingarsby. Leaving Ingarsby I continued along the road until reaching the A47 at Houghton on the Hill where **The Rose & Crown** was visible across the main road to my right.

A popular pub name, **The Rose & Crown** appellation emanates from 1485 when the War of the Roses concluded in Leicestershire at the Battle of Bosworth where Henry Tudor of the Lancastrian "Red Rose" dynasty defeated and slain, the last Plantagenet, King Richard III of the York "White Rose" dynasty. Newly crowned Henry VII went on to marry Richard's niece, Elizabeth of York, since when the combined red & white roses beneath a Crown has been a symbol of the English monarchy. The pub consists of a large L-shaped public/lounge bar equally accommodating diners and drinkers. To the left side (viewed from front) is a conservatory dining room and outside to the rear is a large tarmac area furnished with appropriate tables and chairs. Card carrying CAMRA members receive a 20p per pint discount on real ales, on



this visit the two regulars, Marston's Pedigree and St. Austell Tribute, and two guest ales, Sharp's Doom Bar and Thwaites Wainwright.

From The **Rose & Crown** I turned right and right again at the cross roads down Main Street bearing left at the war memorial traffic island then right, past the Co-operative store and very soon **The Old Black Horse** was in view on the left hand side of Main Street.

Despite much painstaking research, I concluded that this pub is called **The Old Black Horse**, simply because it is! This Everards house consists of one large irregular shaped room which appears to have originally been five different small rooms. The area nearest the car park entrance has a quarry tiled floor and is reminiscent of a traditional public bar. Adjacent to this is a cosy snug area with timber panelled walls and exposed ceiling joists, whilst the other three distinct areas are more accommodating to diners. Outside, next to the large car park there is a children's play area behind which is a boules court. Regular real ales available are Everards Beacon and Tiger supplemented by two guest ales, this time Hydes Original Bitter and Holt's Two Hoots.

So there we have it. An enjoyable country walk connecting four village pubs which between them had twelve different beers available. If this sounds good to you then, don your walking boots and follow my footsteps. Gathering that I needed to board a 747 to return to Leicester, and as Boeing Jumbo Jets were conspicuous by their absence, I plumped for a 747 of the Centrebus variety.



The Old Black Horse



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