

JIM'S JAUNT

Glen Parva & Aylestone

by Jim Reay

Glen Parva is a largely residential area that, prior to the Local Government Act of 1894, was included in the Aylestone Ecclesiastical Parish. Since then it has been a civil parish within Blaby Rural District. The original settlement was undoubtedly near Glen Ford on the River Sence and there is strong evidence of the existence of a medieval village though no reference to Glen Parva in the Domesday Book of 1086. Glen Parva (little Glen) is so called to distinguish it from a larger settlement upriver known as Great Glen. In Victorian times Glen Parva was primarily known as the home of the Leicestershire Regiment whose Saffron Road barracks are the current site of H.M. Young Offenders Institution.

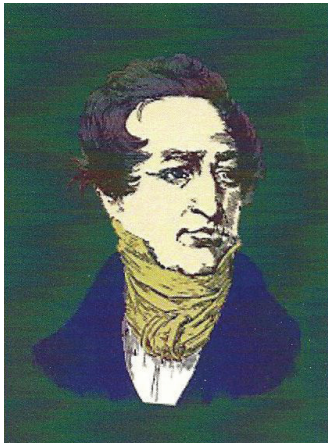
I started at the bus stop adjacent to Northfield Park, Blaby on Arriva routes 84, 84A or 85, entered



County Arms

the park and followed the tarmac path to its end. I turned left into Chapel Street, at the end of which I turned left along Wigston Road and left again down an alleyway signposted Public Footpath To Little Glen Road. After crossing the footbridge over the Sence I followed the path bearing right then right again at the second fork just before reaching the road near to the ford. Turning left along the road Glen Parva Manor was a short distance ahead on my right hand side.

Glen Parva Manor is an impressive grade II listed former manor house dating back to 1452 since when it has been extended to the rear, firstly in 1861 and more recently in the 20th century. Both extensions maintain the aesthetically pleasing appearance of the house's original architecture. Particularly noteworthy are the medieval timber framed construction with brick panel infill, really impressive



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ornamental barge boards to the back roof and side entrance porch, original wrought iron glazing bars dividing the lights into very small panes all crowned with a Swithland slate roof. The interior retains original fireplaces and exposed ceiling beams, trusses and joists. Outside are picnic tables on a paved patio area, a lawned garden and well-equipped children's play area. Marston's Pedigree & Wychwood Hobgoblin were on tap.

From The Manor I crossed straight over Little Glen Road and along Westminster Drive for approximately 100yds before accessing the Grand Union Canal towpath and turning left under Knights Bridge (Bridge 95). On my left just before passing under Leicester Road (Bridge 98) were the dilapidated remains of The County Arms. On the site of an earlier pub called the Union Inn, and closed for more than a decade now, this art-deco building was built in 1938 by Everards and during the war housed an air raid siren in its tower. Once home of the Leicester Jazz Society, during the 1960s & 1970s it was a renowned music venue hosting many famous groups and bands. It is now undergoing extensive remodelling for a new existence as assisted living apartments for the elderly.

Also adjacent to Bridge 98 is the site of the former coal wharf that served Glen Parva and Blaby. An entry in the 1849 Commercial Directory of County of Leicester lists a Mr Thomas King as victualler of the Union Inn and coal dealer. Just under Bridge 98 a statuesque heron (a rare Ardeidae adsimulaticus, incidentally) always seems to be present on the opposite bank on the site of the former boat yard. I continued along the towpath leaving at Whetstone Bridge (Bridge 99) and turned right over the bridge and straight on up the step path leading to Cork Lane. I then turned 1st right into Glenville Avenue then 2nd left into Court Road where Glenhills Sports & Social Club was unmissable to my left.

The austere exterior appearance of this private unaffiliated club belies its smart interior, which consists of one elongated clubroom with a bar at one end, a games area with a pool table and dartboard at the other end and a seating area in-between. The area to the back of the club was formerly used for crown green bowls but has since metamorphosed into a petanque court via a spell as a tennis court. Card-carrying CAMRA members are granted Temporary Visitor Membership for 50p. Available Real Ales were Brains S A, Greene King Morland Old Speckled Hen & Langton Scarecrow.

Retracing my steps to Cork Lane I turned right then 1st left into Needham Avenue at the end of which I joined The Great Central Way which follows the line of the eponymous railway founded in 1899 by Sir Edward Watkin who also founded the original Channel Tunnel Company hoping that his railway



Glen Parva Manor



Glenhills

» continued on pg 26



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would eventually link to France. He was forced to abandon the latter project due to political fears that the tunnel would be used by invaders. The railway closed in 1969, but in the 1980s, the section to the south of Leicester found a new lease of life as a cycleway and footpath, a small part of the National Cycle Network which runs from Dover to Inverness.

I was destined now for Aylestone (Ailstone in the Domesday Book); a separate village until the Leicester Extension Act of 1891. Now very much a suburb of Leicester the conservation area around the 13th century St. Andrew's parish church retains much of the former village character and is referred to as "Old Aylestone" by local residents. Shortly before passing under Soar Valley Way I encountered the first lamppost numbered 172. Eventually I left Great Central Way down the stairs to the left just prior to lamppost 117 onto the bottom end of Marsden Lane. Just to the west of this point is the 15th century packhorse bridge that spans the River Soar and adjacent swampy ground via eleven arches. The bridge is Grade II* listed and was scheduled as a Monument in September of 1987. I turned right under the arched blue brick former railway bridge and bore left into Sanvey Lane and 1st left into Narrow Lane where The Black Horse was immediately to my left.

This traditional Victorian pub within the village conservation area has recently been revamped to minimise door openings but areas are clearly defined and it retains a warm ambiance. The unusual bar servery clearly used to be sash windows; the uppermost sash still remained in situ. Older customers relate that the bottom sash used to be firmly shut at closing time to thwart the temptation to ask for another drink. Out the back there's a skittles long alley room and a large beer garden furnished with oodles of picnic tables. Available Real Ales were: Everards Beacon, Tiger & Original; Purity Pure UBU; Titanic Captain Smith's &

Bath Ales Barnsey.

I turned right out of the Black Horse and then almost immediately left along Sanvey Lane at the end of which The Union Inn was just across Middleton Street, which, in the heyday of the canals was known as Union Street leading, as it does, to The Grand Union Canal.

This two roomed traditional pub is geared to wet trade but, for the peckish, filled cobs are usually available. Inside, the public bar exhibits Leicester City and other football memorabilia and the lounge bar displays pictures of bygone Aylestone. At the back is a patio and lawn furnished with picnic tables; at weekends a bouncy castle is available for children. This inn was a popular venue with founder members of Leicester CAMRA in the 1970's and the available Real Ales were Marston's Pedigree & EPA, Jennings Blazing Saddles & Wychwood Hobgoblin.

Leaving The Union I went through the back car park, along a jitty and crossed into Earl Russell Street almost opposite then left into Church Road and right into Old Church Street. I very soon came to Aylestone Hall & Gardens. The hall's rendered walls give it a rather mundane appearance lifted slightly by the Swithland Slate roof. However, the hall is actually a Grade II* listed building and one of only a few remaining 14th century houses in the whole country. During its time Aylestone Hall has undergone several extensive renovations and it had been assumed that much of the hall's medieval fabric had been destroyed. However, early timber framing, including parts of an aisled hall, were found during investigations and the timbers were dated by dendrochronology to 1339. During the 2nd World War the Civil Defence Department requisitioned the hall for soldiers' billeting. In 1950 Leicester City Council purchased it and, after renovation, the hall and the grounds were opened in 1954 as a public



The Black Horse



The Union Inn

park with a clubhouse for the local bowling club. Further renovations in 2003 created three separate dwellings. Carrying on along Old Church Street it became Disraeli Street at the end of which I cut diagonally right across ALDI's car park to Aylestone Road and then right into Duncan Road and then first left into Curzon Road. On reaching the end terrace house I turned left into the path that runs alongside the Leicestershire County Cricket Ground. At the end of this pathway and to the right The Cricketers is situated on Grace Road. Contrary to popular belief, Grace Road was named after a local property owner and not the legendary cricketer W. G. Grace. The pub consists of a public bar/games room, a lounge bar with family/dining room annex and a function room with balcony upstairs overlooking the cricket ground. Outside the paved patio and lawn are furnished with picnic tables. On this occasion Everards Beacon, Tiger & Equinox were available.

On leaving the Cricketers I turned left downhill for a short distance to the end of Grace Road where there was a bus stop handy to start my journey home. Bus rides, rambles along footpaths, towpaths, the Great Central Way and back streets avoiding main roads encompassing five venues between them having 14 different real ales available pretty well sum up my day. My foremost aim in doing these jaunts (apart from the fact that I positively enjoy it) is to encourage you to frequent, and maybe in some



Aylestone Hall



The Cricketers

cases rediscover, some Real Ale pubs in Leicester CAMRA Branch area. As a bonus you'll burn off some calories at the same time. On average beer contains 180 calories per pint. Walking a mile burns approximately 120 calories so equilibrium is achieved at around 1.5 miles per pint. Plump for imbibitions & perambulation over procrastination; just do it and enjoy.

Cheers,
Jim Reay



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