

JIM'S JAUNT

Bruntingthorpe,
Shearsby & Fleckney
by Jim Reay



The Plough, Bruntingthorpe

Spring is in the air and it's time to put a spring in my step and get out in the sticks for a round of drinks. It's the Leicestershire Round I refer to as all the venues on this jaunt are linked by the Leicestershire Round Footpath, starting at Bruntingthorpe which was recorded in The Domesday Book as Bradinestor (meaning Branting's

Settlement). There was probably an early Anglo Saxon settlement here before the Danes arrived in the ninth century.

Getting to Bruntingthorpe by public transport is an excursion in itself, starting with the 10.27 Arriva 84 from St Margaret's Bus Station alighting in Lutterworth at 11.39 near to the Old Police Station opposite the Jet Garage.

A grade II-listed Victorian building, Lutterworth Old Police Station was England's oldest serving purpose-built police station until deemed surplus

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The Joiners Arms



to requirements, sold and converted into offices. I now needed to catch the 12.10 Murphy's Taxi Bus 661 from the stop adjacent to George Street Car-park. To this aim I crossed over the road into George Street, almost opposite, followed the road around to the left at Morrisons then straight on, over the cross roads, and the bus stop was evident shortly ahead on the right side of the road. I've waited before for Murphy's Taxi Bus 661 and a minibus taxi turned up but on this occasion a saloon car taxi arrived so it's a good job there were only three of us waiting for it, otherwise I don't know how they'd have coped with the situation. The driver dropped me off right outside the front door of The Plough at Bruntingthorpe.

The Plough consists of one large public bar which extends the full width of the front of this traditional village pub. To the rear of the bar is a pool/games room that, in turn, leads to a pretty cottage garden. Wall pictures depict the Vulcan Bomber, which has close associations with the nearby Bruntingthorpe airfield. Unusually for a village pub The Plough relies entirely on wet trade. Available regular real ales are Draught Bass, Theakston Best Bitter, St. Austell Tribute and Greene King Abbot. The guest Ale was Everards Blue Boar.

Turning left out of The Plough I followed Main Street round to the left, past Bruntingthorpe Garage and left again into Church Walk where The Joiners Arms was just ahead to the right side of the road.

The Joiners Arms' earliest years saw this 18th century village pub occupied by the Herbert family for four generations. A probable explanation for the pubs name is that a Benjamin Herbert's occupation was recorded as Joiner & Victualler. A large plaque attached to the wall in the car park suggests that this pub once belong to The Mansfield Brewing Company. Since 2002 this traditional village pub has been transformed into a gastropub with diners as its main target clientele. However, imbibers are

still very welcome with a settle, tables and stools allocated for them in an area adjacent to the bar. Former small rooms are knocked through to create one room still small enough to be convivial. The prevailing cosy ambiance is enhanced by hygienic ceramic floor flags and exposed ceiling joists and beams. The one real ale available was Sharp's Doom Bar.

From the Joiners Arms I retraced my steps back along Church Walk and Main Street before bearing left into Little End, at the bottom of which I followed the signpost directions for The Leicestershire Round. This section of my ramble offered splendid views to the north (my left) looking towards Peatling Magna and Arnesby and in the far distance, beyond Leicester, the Charnwood Forest skyline was defined by the distinctive profile of the two highest hills in Leicestershire. Beacon Hill is the second in height to Bardon Hill, a name derived from "bear den" where, it is said, the last bear in England was killed. The route was well trod and easy to follow, all the way to Shearsby via the yellow way-marker posts. The Domesday Book records Shearsby as Suesbi but by the 1800's it was known as Cherisbye and was notorious for its salt spring located just half a mile south of the village. The Shearsby Bath Hotel was built on the site of the salt spring and for several decades proved a popular resort with people seeking the potential health benefits of the spa. Shearsby Bath ceased operating as a customary public house in 2013 and is now only open to the public wishing to hire the venue for hosting events. Prior to the 18th century the route between Wigston and Husbands Bosworth was via a deeply rutted, unmetalled roadway which passed through several villages along its way, including Shearsby, where many a weary traveller must have stopped to quench his thirst. During the 1760's the small villages were effectively by-passed by a new road which eventually became known as the A50

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but relatively recently renamed the A5199. The Inn in Shearsby became a locals' pub and in 1765 a New Inn was built on the main road, but has since become a farm which still bears the name New Inn Farm. It is believed, based on the verbal submission of an elderly Shearsby resident, that the licence was surrendered in 1910.

On reaching Shearsby I turned right uphill along the road for about 100yds. then left through a handgate onto a public footpath which brought me to a kissing gate at the top end of Fenny Lane, at the bottom of which stood The Chandlers Arms. Constructed of local Shearsby brick its name is derived from the buildings original use as a candle makers business which employed some 30 workers making the tallow candles of that time. The Chandlers Arms is a small village Inn with a big reputation, having won the prestigious Leicester CAMRA Country Pub of the Year award for the last seven consecutive years, and the first pub in CAMRA's Leicester Branch to be accredited to the LocAle scheme. It consists of a public bar, a lounge bar/dining room and out back are picnic tables in a beer garden which, from a high vantage point, overlooks the Village Green. Available real ales were Dow Bridge Acris & Praetorian Porter, Belvoir Beaver, Bradfield Farmers Blonde and Star Brewing Company Lith.

I turned right into Main Street from the Chandlers and in order to avoid the narrow road with no pavements leading out of the village towards the A5199, I turned right again at the telephone box, which is now where the village Defibrillator is sited, then left up a steep bank past some cottages and left again at the top of the bank and soon joined, and turned right onto, the road leading to the A5199. I turned left onto the A5199 and immediately to my left was the aforementioned New Inn Farmhouse and visible ahead to the right was the footpath signpost for The Leicestershire Round. Once again the route was well discernible with yellow way-marker posts. Eventually reaching a road I turned left and almost immediately right onto a sign-posted footpath which soon brought me to another road where I turned left. I was now on the road to Fleckney which from the time it was mentioned in the Domesday Book until the 19th century was a farming community. It owes its present-day size mainly to an influx of populace during the early 19th century to work in the brickmaking industry. Fleckney bricks are to be seen in many of the local cottages and farms and some were even used in the construction of St. Pancras Railway Station. Apart from the bricks themselves, a lasting visible legacy



The Chandlers Arms, shearsby



Golden shield, Fleckney

to this commerce is the village duck-pond which was originally excavated to extract clay to manufacture bricks. The pond is inhabited with a thriving paddling of ducks consisting mainly of mallards, plus a few hybrids and a moorhen or two. Brickmaking ceased towards the end of the 19th century although after 1831 the population started to increase again with the introduction of hosiery manufacture. Framework-knitting was introduced in Fleckney between 1830 and 1840 and by 1844 there were 126 frames in the village. By the late 19th century there were 3 hosiery factories. New housing built after World War 2 saw another population increase but now most village inhabitants commute.

On entering Fleckney it wasn't long before I encountered The Golden Shield standing close to the road on my right hand side. Although it is actually thought to have been built in the 1600's, the first traceable mention of this property is in 1752 revealed in the will of a William Hensman, a yeoman of Fleckney. The pub's first recorded licensee was

William Perkins 1789-1823 although the first time the property was referred to as a public house, known as The Dun Cow, was in an inheritance deed of family arrangements between three sons in 1845 following the death of their father a Mr. M. Moore, the then owner. It was first renamed the Golden Shield in 1979 and in 1990 it reverted to its original name and after several changes between the two names is currently called The Golden Shield. It consists of an L-shaped public bar the rearmost part of which is a snug type annex. The chunky beam, above the entrance to the snug, has a sign attached identifying the area as Amen Corner, so named by local wags as it is furnished with church pews. The other end of the public bar has an inglenook fireplace containing a smaller fireplace, but the overall aesthetic appeal is somewhat spoiled by the inset coal effect electric fire-basket. The leaded light windows in the bar are of the pseudo self-adhesive lead strip variety but nonetheless manifest. The Simpson's Restaurant to the rear of the pub takes its name from the Landlady's surname. Behind the pub, are paved and lawned areas with picnic tables and a petanque piste. Available regular real ales are Greene King IPA & Abbot, Timothy Taylor Landlord and Banks's Bitter. Guest Ales were Ossett Silver King and Fuller's London Pride.

Leaving The Golden Shield I turned right along Main Street soon passing St. Nicholas Parish Church which is a grade II* listed building. It is constructed of cobblestone walls, reputed to be over 3ft. thick in places, with limestone buttresses and dressings. The church has neither tower nor spire but is crowned with a roof of welsh slate and a double bell tower. Carrying on along Main Street, immediately after passing Williams Butchers, I veered a tad left into the jitty and The Old Crown was soon in view straight across the road.

The Old Crown was built about 1798 on the site of an old cottage. The then Landlord bought malt from



The Old Crown, Fleckney

a maltster in Saddington and brewed his own ale on the premises. The pub changed hands several times until 1904 when it was leased to Market Harborough Brewers Eady & Dulley for £100 a year. It was purchased by present owners Everards in 1921. It consists essentially of one large open plan interior with a central bar having two snug type annexes and carpeted restaurant area tucked around the corner to the rear. The slightly bayed front elevation windows have genuine leaded lights emphasising the pubs longevity. Behind the pub are spacious gardens with a paved and partially covered heated patio area and lawn, with picnic tables and play equipment for children. Two beers available here were Everards Tiger and Burton Bridge Bitter

In all, five pubs selling eighteen different real ales all linked by a pleasant ramble along part of The Leicestershire Round. So it's now time for YOU to get your boots on and get out in the sticks for a round of drinks. My journey home began via Arriva 49B which I caught at the bus stop across the road near to the Co-op.

Cheers,

Jim Reay

THE CHANDLERS ARMS

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