

# JIM'S JAUNT

## Foxton, Gumley & Saddington. *by Jim Reay*



*The Langton Inn*

Not for the first time, all of the venues on this jaunt are linked by The Leicestershire Round Footpath, so once again it's out in the sticks for another round of drinks. My jaunt started on a Saturday morning by catching an Arriva X3 leaving St. Margaret's Bus Station at 10.20 and alighting at approximately 11.00 at the bus stop just before the Harborough bypass begins. Close to this bus stop is The Langton Inn, my first port of call. Foxton was to be the first village on my itinerary; however this pub actually lies just outside the civil parish boundary of Foxton. Although some way from the small village of West Langton, this Inn is in fact situated within West Langton civil parish boundary. Part of Whitbread's Table-Table brand of pub/restaurants attached to a Premier Inn, it is part of a relatively modern development, including a McDonalds and a Service Station, sited at the northern end of Market Harborough by-pass. The one large L-shaped room is mainly dedicated to diners and the garden has paved areas furnished with picnic tables. Real Ales available were Sharp's Doom Bar and Marston's Pedigree.

Foxton is believed to have attained its name from the large number of foxes which inhabited the area. It was originally a hill-top settlement, thought to have been founded in Saxon times with a landscape fashioned in the ice-age. The village gradually moved down the valley side as a farming community, working on the open three field system until it was enclosed in 1770. Foxton remained virtually unchanged from Norman times until the end of the 18th century when the canal arrived, bringing improved communication and alternative job opportunities. As a consequence agriculture began to diminish as the villagers' primary occupation and from the latter part of the 1700's and until the middle of the 1800's there were many abodes with stocking frames where

entire families, parents and children, toiled to produce worsted stockings. This period also saw the development of orchards growing the local variety "Foxton Pride". There was also a mushroom ketchup factory in the village at this time, and whilst apple growing and mushroom collection still required agricultural workers, these would have been more seasonal and possibly part time occupations.

I made my way back to the bus stop, crossed over the main road, then anticlockwise around the roundabout to the bottom of Gallow Hill where after a few yards the Leicestershire Round Footpath (LR) was signposted to my right across the fields. The route to Foxton was clearly defined by yellow way-marker posts (YP) but was so well trod they were, for the most-part, superfluous. The path eventually emerged into Swingbridge Street, via a track between two houses, where I turn left past Groom Lodge and The Grange which was once a well-known Leicestershire hunting box. Then, after about 100-yards, the LR turned right onto a footpath which took me to Middle Street where it turned left, then almost immediately right down Dalby's Lane emerging on Main Street directly opposite to The Shoulder of Mutton.

I didn't go into The Shoulder of Mutton as it doesn't open until 5:30pm. However, I have frequented this pub before and can say it is a combination of Chinese restaurant (eat in and take away) and country pub which seems to successfully meet the needs of both diners and imbibers. It was originally a farmhouse, which opened as an inn in 1770. The pub consists of an L-shaped public bar with an adjoining snug plus a dining/function room. Pictures in the bar depict scenes of bygone Foxton whilst displayed on the wall in the snug there is some brewery



*The shoulder of Mutton*



*The Black Horse*

memorabilia in the form of a large framed tin sign advertising the long gone Eady & Dullely Market Harborough Brewery. Nowadays the pub serves two regular beers, Everards Tiger and Greene King IPA. The large lawned front garden is furnished with picnic tables.

I turned left uphill along Main Street for a tad over a furlong and crossed over the humpback bridge where The Black Horse was straight ahead of me. A large imposing structure, constructed in 1821 on the site of earlier public house, it stands at the top of the village with a garden that enjoys a commanding view over Foxton and the surrounding countryside. The pub has two separate bars and a large conservatory dining area. It has two regular beers in the form of Ruddles, Best & County, plus two guest beers sourced from Matthew Clark, on this occasion Wells & Young's Bombardier and Adnams Southwold Bitter.

From The Black Horse, I went back over the hump back bridge and left into North Lane to access the towpath, this stretch of which forms part of the LR heading now towards Foxton Locks. Building work on the locks started in 1810 and was finished four years later. Little changed until the building

of the inclined plane commenced during 1898 and was finished in 1900. While the inclined plane was in operation the locks were allowed to fall into decline to such an extent that in 1908, the then considerable sum of £1,000 was spent bringing the locks back into operation. Before long I was approaching a place known on the waterways as Foxton Junction where the Market Harborough Branch Canal joins the Leicester to Northampton section of the Grand Union. Across the water I could now see the next two licensed premises on my journey.

I crossed over the small swingbridge to The Foxton Locks Inn, which is the larger of the two pubs and essentially a food orientated establishment consisting of one large subdivided room adjoined to an extensive outside covered decked terrace overlooking the waterway and passing boats. The pub also has a function venue in an adjacent detached building known as the Old Boat House. On offer here were Sharp's Doom Bar, Greene King Morland Old Speckled Hen, Caledonian Deuchars IPA and Theakston Old Peculier.

On leaving I turned right and veered right down the path at the side of canal bridge 61 and over the narrow footbridge, at the bottom of the stairway of



*The Foxton Locks Inn*



*Bridge 61*

» continued on pg 26

» from pg 25

locks, to the eponymously named pub. Bridge 61 is the smaller of the two pubs situated at the bottom of the famous flight of ten locks. The two-roomed interior comprises a snug with a serving-hatch bar and a larger room with wide doors that open out onto the waterfront. Brick floors, unplastered white painted uneven brick walls and timber boarded ceiling, along with the waterside view from the windows, all enhance the rustic charm of this little pub. The garden has barbecue facilities and is an ideal spot for watching the boats pass by. Available real ales were Adnams Southwold Bitter and two locally themed beers from the nearby Langton Brewery: Inclined Plane & Bridge 61, which is rebadged Caudle Bitter.

From The Bridge 61 I turned left and over the brick-built Foxton Junction Footbridge 62, better known as Rainbow Bridge because of its unusual shape. Turning left onto the towpath I'd re-joined the LR route which fairly soon came to, and crossed, a wooden footbridge 63 leading to a footpath over the fields to Gumley. The footpath emerged opposite Hillside House on Gumley Main Street where I turned left downhill soon finding The Bell Inn to the right hand side of the road.

In Anglo-Saxon times Gumley was known as Gutmundesleah, meaning Godmund's clearing. The village's first recorded mention was in 749, when, at the instigation of Saint Boniface, King Aethelbald held a synod at Gumley to answer accusations that he had been oppressing churches and monasteries. The outcome was that Aethelbald released the Church from all public burdens except for the three common burdens of building/repairing bridges and fortresses and providing military service. In 772 and 779 King Offa visited Gumley for the Witenagemot of the kings of Mercia. The Witenagemot was a political institution in Anglo-Saxon England which operated from before the 7th century until the 11th century. After the Norman Conquest Gumley was given to the Conqueror's niece, known as Countess Judith. In 1821 the village's population peaked with 281 residents engaged working the land as well as making lace and stockings. Because Gumley has predominantly been surrounded by pasture, the medieval ridge and furrow method of working the land is particularly well preserved and its fields are subject to preservation orders.

The Bluebell, which later became The Bell Inn, was built of locally made bricks in the 19th century at which time there was another pub in Gumley, known as The Hartopp Arms. Although food



*The Bell Inn*

features large at The Bell, it is equally convivial as a pub to have a chat over a pint. Paintings and photographs depicting hunting scenes and characters bear witness to Gumley's location in Fernie Hunt country. The short front entrance corridor leads to a small dining room to the left, whilst to the right is the L-shaped public/lounge bar with exposed stone columns and low ceiling beams. To the back is a pretty terraced cottage garden with a pond. Timothy Taylor Landlord is its regular beer and there are three changing guest beers, on this occasion Greene King IPA, Castle Rock Harvest Pale and Charles Wells Eagle. For the squeezed apple juice aficionados, Westons Old Rosie was available on hand-pump.

On leaving The Bell Inn I turning left uphill, having to walk on the road for much of the way, as a significant number of egocentric village residents seem to be under the impression that Gumley Main Street pavements are for car-parking. At the top of the hill, where the road turned to the left, I carried straight on along a track leading to the parish church, St Helen's, which mostly dates from the 14th century, and is situated on the edge of woodland at the top of the village. Carrying straight on to the left side of the church and veering right where the footpath split into two directions, I fairly soon came to a road where I turned left then almost immediately right continuing along the LR. Once again, the route was easy to follow and clearly defined by YP. Before very long Saddington village was visible ahead in the far distance. Situated at the summit of Smeeton Hill, the highest point on this section of footpath, there is a park bench, the plaque on which reads "Mary Hodgkins 1925-2004 who loved the Leicester Round". This section of footpath offers spectacular

panoramic views taking in such recognisable landmarks as Rockingham Castle, Billesdon Coplow, Gilmorton Windmills and the familiar contours of Charnwood Forest on the horizon. However, the local topography hereabout conceals sight of Saddington Reservoir which didn't come into view for quite some time. This artificial lake was created in the 1790's and is said to be the second oldest reservoir in the country. It was constructed as a catchment basin to maintain water levels to the nearby Grand Union Canal and the section as far as Kings Lock Aylestone, north of which the canal is fed by the River Soar. When the footpath eventually emerged onto Saddington Main Street I turned left and on reaching the junction with Weir Road The Queens Head was just ahead to the left hand side of the road.

In 1066 Saddington belonged to Queen Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor. At her death in 1075 her property passed to William I, who held Saddington at the time of the Domesday Book survey in 1086 and the land remained in the monarch's hands until at least 1200. Saddington has always been mainly an agricultural village with a few people employed in the usual village handicrafts and trades. In the 1840's there were a few framework-knitters in Saddington, and in 1961 outbuildings and stables near Saddington Hall housed a hosiery manufactory.

The Queens Head give a discount of 30p per pint of Real Ale, for card carry CAMRA members. To the front of this pub there is a traditional public bar and adjoining snug, both with convincing faux ceiling timbers to enhance the rural ambience. Offering spectacular views across the valley containing Saddington Reservoir, the large restaurant is set over three floor levels paved with black flags. Amongst half a dozen village craft and tradesmen listed in 1846 was a publican at The Queens Head



*The Queens Head*

and a shopkeeper. The village shop has been gone for some time but in October 2013 this pub opened its own shop in a converted outbuilding with ex-England cricketer Chris Broad doing the official opening. The shop, which was a joint enterprise between the pub's tenants and Everards Brewery, sells a range of foodstuffs, including produce made in the pub's kitchen. To the rear are a large car park, a small patio area and a large lawn with plentiful picnic tables and children's play equipment. Available real ales were Everards Tiger, Courage Best Bitter and Burton Bridge Stairway to Heaven.

Turning right from The Queens Head and then left along Weir Road I walked by the Centrebus 44 bus stop adjacent to Bryars Close, as the bus wasn't due. I headed towards Fleckney forking right along Kibworth Road, then forking left into Fleckney Road. On reaching the first bus stop in Fleckney, adjacent to The Meer, I caught an Arriva 49B to start my journey home. Spectacular views, interesting sights and an invigorating ramble along the Leicestershire Round linking six pubs which, on the day, offered no less than seventeen different real ales.

Cheers,

*Jim Reay*

## THE CHANDLERS ARMS

SHEARSBY  
0116 247 8384

**Country Pub of the Year**  
2009 - 2015

**Exciting NEW Menu from  
New Chef Paul**

**LUNCH WED - SAT 12 - 2**  
**EVENING TUES - SAT 6 - 9**  
**SUNDAY LUNCH SERVED 12 - 3**  
SEE WEBSITE FOR MORE DETAILS

[www.chandlersatshearsby.co.uk](http://www.chandlersatshearsby.co.uk)