

JIM'S JAUNT

Cossington & Rothley

by Jim Reay

My jaunts are mainly undertaken on a Saturday as this is the only day that bus and pub opening times can be coordinated. This, however, is one of the few that can be done on any day and started by boarding a Kinchbus 2 at St. Margaret's Bus Station and alighting in Cossington immediately across the road from The Royal Oak.

The earliest written record of Cossington is in the Domesday Survey of 1086, but almost certainly the village has Saxon origins. In Old Saxon dialect, the suffixes "ing" means "son of" and "tun" (later corrupted as ton) infers "an estate or village", hence a village established by the son of a Saxon Chief named Coss. The manor at Cossington passed through various hands in the medieval period, most notably the Duke of Suffolk until it passed to the Crown following his death and that of his daughter, Lady Jane Grey. It was, however, the Babington family who boasted the longest and most fruitful connection with the village and were responsible for influencing much of village life over the centuries. Thomas Babington bought one of the manors in Cossington in 1549 before acquiring the Manor at Rothley (now Rothley Court) with which the family is perhaps more commonly associated. The large white house directly opposite the pub was once the home of Isobel, Lady Barnett, who had her highest profile as a radio and television personality during the 1950's & 60's. She was briefly brought back into the public eye in 1980, when at the age of 62, she committed suicide by electrocution in her bath, four days after a conviction for shoplifting. Close to where she lived a new road has been named Barnett Close in her memory. Former commercial interest within the village included a shop, bakery, post office, blacksmith and The Anchor Inn which ceased trading in the nineteenth century and became the village school, prior to a more permanent school being built to the north of the village.



The Royal Oak



The Red Lion

Today the only remaining commercial premises operating in the village is The Royal Oak, a traditional village pub which had extraordinary bad luck in 1992 when it twice caught fire within a few months. The first fire caused little damage, whereas the second fire, of unknown cause, ravaged the pub, though the only fatalities were said to be a pair of chipmunks. Following extensive restoration work, it eventually reopened in 1994. Some years ago now, this pub uniquely introduced its Kinchbus offer, whereby senior patrons arriving with a free bus ticket obtained using an older person's bus pass, could have a two course lunch, 12 'til 2 (excluding Sundays) for £4.95. Kinchbus no longer issue tickets but the offer still stands as, if you say you've used your bus pass to get here, they'll take your word for it. The pub consists of a central public bar having a dining area with a garden room annex to the left whilst set back to the right is a snug. Out back are a skittles long alley next to a lawned garden furnished with picnic tables. Available real ales were Everards Beacon, Tiger & Sunchaser, Greene King IPA and Ruddles County. Westons Rosie Pig Cider was also on hand pump. Leaving The Royal Oak I turned left along Main Street then turned right into Platts Lane at the end of which I followed the causeway round to the right towards Rothley. This route fairly soon took me to the bridge

over the River Soar, which marks the boundary between Cossington & Rothley. From the bridge, to my left was Cossington Mill, a former restaurant very popular in the late 20th century. I carried on beneath the A6 Rothley bypass and before long The Red Lion was ahead to the right at the original “pre-bypass” Loughborough Road crossroads.

Rothley is said to be the village with the most cruck cottages in Leicestershire and has been inhabited since Saxon times, evidenced by the ancient Saxon cross in the village churchyard. Even earlier human habitation is suggested by the unearthing, in 2009, of the Rothley Bronze Age Hoard found in a field off The Ridings. Recorded as Rodolei in the Domesday Book, it is listed amongst the lands belonging to William the Conqueror. Its name may have come from Anglo-Saxon Ropleah which translates as Meadow in a Clearing.

The Red Lion was identified as a farmhouse when it was bought in 1650. In 1694 it became a coaching inn and, from that time, was run by the same family for ninety years. It is now essentially a carvery restaurant that also welcomes drinkers. It was often referred to as The Halfway House, being situated, on the old main road, half way between Leicester & Loughborough. Front of house tries to portray a traditional pub ambience by its furnishings, stone fireplace, exposed ceiling beams & joists. Going back past the servery bar leads to an enormous dining area, sub-divided into smaller sectors, where carvery is available every day of the week. Outside are picnic tables on a tarmac area and more picnic tables are on paved and lawned areas next to the large car-park. This pub offers a CAMRA discount of 20p a pint and 10p a half, though on each of the last two times I've visited, the staff were unaware of the offer and had to seek out the landlord to verify the reduction. Available real ales were Greene King IPA & Morland Old Speckled Hen.

From The Red Lion I crossed the Loughborough Road into and along Hallfields Lane. After a while I turned right through a kissing gate along a public footpath sign-posted towards the Church. I crossed the footbridge over Rothley Brook and soon arrived at the parish Church of St Mary the Virgin and St John the Baptist which dates back to the 13th century, though much restored in 1878. As the footpath entered the churchyard, a short distance ahead of me, at a relative bearing of one o'clock, was the scheduled ancient monument known as the Saxon Cross. The uppermost actual cross portion of the monument is missing, leaving a 9 foot high tapered stone shaft more akin to an obelisk than a

cross. With intricate carving on all four faces, there are only two such crosses in the East Midlands and fewer than fifty in England; it was certainly worth having a look at. I turned left at the church's double gates, past April Cottage (c1450) and into Church Street. The Woodman's Stroke was on the left hand corner at the bottom of the street.



The Woodman's Stroke, AKA Woodies, dates from 1714 and is a quintessentially English village pub with its thatched roof and traditional interior of a brickwork fireplace set back in the original inglenook, stone floors, exposed black ceiling beams & joists. To the rear is a paved terrace with cast iron garden furniture beneath enormous heated parasols and beyond this a block paved car park leading to a pétanque piste and picnic tables set in the large lawned garden rolling down to Rothley Brook. When the Hickling family were licensees in the early 1900's the pub doubled as the local Undertakers, the coffins being made at the back of the building and the front room was used as the Chapel of Rest. The Woodies has been run by the Warner family for over two decades and the large amount of rugby, cricket and golf memorabilia on display, reflects their enthusiasm for sport in general. One remarkable wall mounted Rugby souvenir is the Twickenham sign, a trophy liberated from the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames many years ago during a trip to Rugby's H.Q. by a pub regular, who may even still



» continued on pg 26

» from pg 25

frequent the pub (but I couldn't possibly comment on that). The real ales were Draught Bass, Black Sheep Best Bitter and Marston's Pedigree.

Leaving via the back door and rear car park I carried straight on into Anthony Street walking alongside Dutchman's Wall, a substantial structure so called because it was built by Dutch workers brought over in the 19th century to build sea defences on the east coast. Quite what they were doing in Rothley, apart from building a wall, is not known. At the end of Anthony Street I crossed straight over the cross roads into and along Tower Green Street until eventually The Blue Bell Inn came into view straight ahead.

The Blue Bell was first actually registered as a public house in 1921, before which it was a shop run by W. Sharpe & Sons Ltd who traded here as vendors of Ales, Stouts & Liquor. A former Ansell's local which reopened in March 2014 following major refurbishment, entry is via an elevated patio leading to the front bar which is divided into two distinct rooms, one with quarry-tile floors and the other with exposed timber floors both with open fires. Towards the rear is a large restaurant situated in the extended former skittles long alley which has exposed roof timbers and the unusual feature of having an unrestricted view of the kitchen. Available real ales were Sharps Doom Bar, Wicked Hathern Golden Crown Ale and Goff's White Knight.

Leaving The Blue Bell I turned right, continuing along Tower Green Street, bearing right at the green and onto the end of the dead-end road where I turned right again down the public footpath adjacent to Keepers Cottage. The footpath soon took me past Rothley Park Cricket Club's ground and out onto Westfield Lane where I turned left and quickly arrived at Rothley Court Hotel. As I walked down the long driveway and rounded the unhurried bend the magnificent edifice came into view.

Rothley Court Hotel has a continuous recorded history that pre-dates its mention in the Domesday Book, where it is chronicled that the Manor and Soke of Rothley was held by William the Conqueror (Soke was a Danelaw term which translates literally as a safe place), though in even earlier times, a Roman Villa existed on this site. In 1203 The



The Blue Bell Inn

Holy Order of Knights Templar were granted land in Rothley, and subsequently, in 1228 King Henry III granted a Manor House, which is now Rothley Court, to this Christian Order of warriors. Their chapel, adjacent to the Manor House, still stands to this day and its erstwhile name, Rothley Temple, is occasionally used locally. The hotel's coat of arms is that of the aforementioned Babington family, who bought Rothley Temple and its land around 1550 and held them through many generations, until 1845. The motto translates as "Faith to all" which was reputedly said by Thomas Babington to King Henry V, on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt in 1415. In the 18th century, William Wilberforce drafted his Treaty for the Abolition of Slavery whilst staying at the court. The Temple and its grounds were purchased in 1893 by Frederick Merttens, a German émigré who had left Prussia due to the rise of militarism. Whilst the Merttens were in residence they set about developing both the house and the grounds. In 1957, Clive Wormleighton, a prosperous speculative builder and owner of Mallory Park Racing Circuit, purchased the estate and in 1959 he converted the Manor House into a hotel, changed the name to Rothley Court and continued to own the property until 1979. Acquired along with the Old English Inns chain, it is now in Greene King ownership. The interior has some magnificent carved oak doors and panelling, stained glass and fireplaces. Through the restaurant areas, one can gain access to the chapel which is festooned with many Babington memorials. Through the front door and past the reception desk, I found the public bar to my left. It has a stone fireplace set back in an original inglenook and a small cosy snug annex and to the side of the public bar is an attractive patio overlooking a garden running down to Rothley Brook. On offer were Greene King IPA & Abbot, Brains SA and Titanic Plum Porter.

Leaving Rothley Court I walked back towards the village along Westfield Lane bearing left at the



Rothley Saxon Cross

V-junction into Woodgate at the end of which The Royal Oak was to the right across the road.

The Royal Oak is prominently situated at the centre of the village, overlooking Cross Green, and has been part of the Everards estate since 1920. Extensively refurbished in 2005 it is essentially of open plan design whilst still maintaining individual characteristics which would have prevailed before internal walls were removed. On entering the front door a traditional public bar type area is to the right with exposed black stone floors and a dartboard. To the left is an L-shaped area more reminiscent of a lounge bar extending far back into the raised dining area of a former skittles long alley with exposed ceiling timbers. To the side of this is a courtyard and garden. The real ales were Everards Beacon, Tiger & Original.

I turned left from The Royal Oak and left again into North Street where The Royal Anglian was very soon in view downhill to the right hand side of the road.

The Royal Anglian was formerly known as The Old Crown that, following a period of closure, reopened in July 2010 only to close again in September 2010. Early in 2012 it reopened again and was renamed after the Royal Anglian Regiment that recruits from Leicestershire and several other neighbouring counties. The pub's interior encircles a central servery with an L-shaped public bar to the front and left leading clockwise to a games room, to the rear of house, with a pool table, darts board and jukebox. Continuing clockwise leads into the lounge bar situated to the right side of the pub. Exposed black pseudo ceiling joists throughout help create an olde-worlde ambience. A reminder of the pub's past is evident by the sign high on the gable end wall "The Old Crown. The Mansfield Brewery Company", but for the present I really don't know what's happening. I usually do each jaunt two or three times to ensure that, as far as I can, I haven't missed anything. On my first visit here, no real ale was available and I was told it had just sold out



The Royal Anglian

but was available as a rule. I was also told that the pub now traded 12 'til 11 every day, but it was closed mid-afternoon on my second visit and early-afternoon on my third visit. (Before you ask; NO they didn't see me coming).

So there we have it. Six (or maybe seven) pubs, between them having sixteen different real ales available on the day. The bus stop for Arriva 126 or 127, to start my journey home, is directly across the road from the Royal Anglian's front door.

Cheers,

Jim Reay



Rothley Court

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