

# JIM'S JAUNT

Barkby, Queniborough,  
East Goscote  
& Rearsby. *by Jim Reay*

This jaunt commenced on a Saturday morning via a Centrebus 100, departing from St. Margaret's Bus Station at 10.53. Alighting at 11.15, on Queniborough Road in Barkby, I was in good time for 11.30 opening at **The Malt Shovel**, across the road and around the corner to my right.

In all probability, Barkby was occupied by the Viking invaders, although indications suggest that Barkby was a human settlement from well before that time. It's likely that it derived its name from dual origins as it was recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as Barcheberie, taken to mean the village by Birch trees, whereas the word Barki is old Norse meaning farmstead or settlement. Nestled away behind the 14th century Anglican parish church, dedicated to St. Mary, is Barkby Hall, home to the Pochin family since 1604. The Hall itself is almost invisible from the rest of the village which is effectively bisected by the Hall's prevailing parkland. Fortunately for villagers, both segments of Barkby have a public house, whilst sobriety is the prevailing state of affairs for the occupants of the connected pub-less hamlet of Barkby Thorpe. Barkby & Barkby Thorpe Conservation Area encompasses almost the whole of the two settlements.

The Malt Shovel Inn was purchased along with Manor Farm in 1271 by Oxford's Merton College beginning the college's long association with the village. Accordingly it is presumed that part of The Malt Shovel is now 750 years old and the pub is described by the local authority as a Key Unlisted Building, its many internal alterations almost certainly preventing it from being a listed building, especially the removal of features such as the enormous brewing copper. A wall mounted



*Brookside*



*The Malt Shovel*

mash paddle is a small token memento to its earlier brewing era. In the far distant past, this edifice was notorious for a lock-in, but not the sort you'll probably be imagining, for in previous times the restaurant area is reputed to have been the village gaol! Exposed cobble wall construction in the restaurant, along with black ceiling beams and joist throughout all help to enhance the traditional rural ambience. The large beer garden to the rear is well furnished with picnic tables together with a petanque piste. CAMRA members receive in this Thwaites house a 20p discount on pints of real ale. Available on this day were Thwaites Original, Wainwright & Lancaster Bomber, Wychwood Bountiful and Marston's Revisionist West Coast IPA. From The Malt Shovel I crossed diagonally over the car park and took the footpath signposted immediately to my left and turned left again after crossing the footbridge over the Barkby Brook. On reaching the road I carried straight on, keeping the chunky Mountsorrel granite boundary walls of Barkby Hall to my left, and along Beeby Road with the cricket ground to my right, before turning left into Barkby Holt Lane. After about 100 yards I took the public footpath to my right along The Brookside, crossing the brook via the third footbridge to my left and found myself just outside the Marston's pub known as **The Brookside**.

This pub is so tucked away in a secluded part of the village, I recall many years ago, former proprietors placed advertisements in The Leicester Mercury, issuing a challenge for consumers to find it. There is a small traditional public bar, with a darts board, and a slightly larger lounge bar with a dining-room annex. The rear features timber garden furniture on the partially covered paved patio area with a log burner and a lawned area with a hexagonal open-sided summer house with block paved flooring. Real Ales available were Ringwood Fortyniner & Old Thumper, Jennings Bitter and Wychwood Hobgoblin Gold.

From The Brookside I turned left, following the path running parallel with the brook for about 100 yards where I turned left up four concrete steps to access the public footpath leading over the fields to Queniborough. Initially, for a short way, the footpath was up a slight gradient at the top of which, I turned around and could see Leicester's urban housing development of Hamilton encroaching on the distant skyline. The route was well trod, well indicated and more or less a straight line. One small element of confusion arose as the footpath crossed the second metalled lane where the route zigzags by turning right up the lane for about 50yds before turning left over the fields, as signposted by a yellow way-marker post which, when entering the lane, is obscured from view by a small tree. The tower to Syston Anglican Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul was soon discernible to my left, above the roofline of the embryonic housing estate evolving on Syston's eastern flank, all set against the backdrop of the familiar Charnwood Forest skyline. After climbing a three step stile and crossing the third metalled road, known as The Ridgemere, Queniborough village came into view straight ahead across the fields.



*The Horse & Groom, Queniborough*

Conspicuous to the eastern end of the village was the imposing 162ft tall, 13th century spire of St Mary's church which contains 6 bells, 4 of which date back to 1619. Referred to as Cuinburg in the Domesday Book, and for some time identified as Queeniborough, the village name has finally become acknowledged as Queniborough. Over the years many Saxon items, broken tools and jewellery have been unearthed by local farmers. The main street in Queniborough retains the appearance of a country village and has many fine buildings. It is said that in the closing years of the 18th century there were nine ale houses there but only two remain, both of which are former Ind Coope houses and now part of the Punch Taverns group. Strange as it may seem they are next door to one another at the heart of the old part of the village which now largely constitutes The Queniborough Conservation Area. The public footpath entered the village emerging between the gardens of two bungalows at the bottom of Mere Lane, at the top end of which **The Britannia** was just to my left.

The Britannia AKA Stubbies, an appellation the pub adopted during the seventy years, ending during the 1990s, that four generations of the Stubbs family were successive licensees. In order of appearance they were Jack, George, John and, for a relatively short period Clair. Etched into the front door slate threshold, the word STUBBIES is now barely discernable through wear of footfall. It is said that approximately 100 years ago a tame bear named Fanny was kept in the garden of the Britannia Inn and that she regularly escaped and went walking around the village. Refurbished in 2013 the pub consists of a traditional public bar with quarry tiled floor and leather upholstered fixed seating around the walls. A larger lounge bar has exposed ceiling timbers and a larger still restaurant to the rear in what was once the skittle

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*The Britannia*

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alley. This pub usually serves four regular beers; Greene King IPA, Sharp's Doom Bar, Timothy Taylor Landlord and Woodfordes Wherry plus two changing guest beers. However, my visit fortuitously coincided with the pub's beer festival and twenty odd beers were available.

Next door, **The Horse & Groom** was built in 1805. The pub, which was refurbished in 2013, consists of a traditional public bar to the front of house, with exposed wooden floor a pool table and dart board, and to the rear, what appears to have previously been three small rooms is now a lounge/dining room retaining original features such as exposed chunky ceiling beams and joists plus a log burning stove set in a brick fireplace. The pub also has a skittles long-alley which doubles as a function room. Outside are a small lawned garden with picnic tables on flagstones, and two petanque pistes. Sharp's Doom Bar and St Austell Tribute were the real ales.

Turning left out of The Horse & Groom I walked to the crossroads and turned right along Rearsby Road circling clockwise around the traffic island, under the subway and straight on along Melton Road and very soon arrived at East Goscote where I turned left into Chestnut Way and Sim's Pub & Restaurant was very soon across the road to my right.

East Goscote village takes its name from the new hundred created in 1346 by the subdivision into two of the ancient Goscote hundred, thereby forming both East & West Goscote hundreds. East Goscote hundred covered the eastern part of today's Charnwood district, along with the northern part of Harborough district, and extended south-east to meet Rutland. The term hundred is first recorded in the laws of King Edmund I (939-46) as a measure of land and the area served by a hundred court. In the Midlands they often covered an area of about 100 hides. A hide was an old English unit of land measurement originally intended to represent the amount of land sufficient to support a household. The Goscote Hundred is mentioned in the Domesday Book, whereas the East Goscote built environment was unique in being the first new village to be created in Leicestershire since that time. The village is built on the site of a former army supply facility known as Queniborough depot that was decommissioned in 1959 and subsequently bought for housing development by Jelsons Builders. Less well known is the fact that a huge network of large reinforced concrete tunnels lay beneath the whole village where munitions



*sim's, East Goscote*

were fitted with their warheads and new top secret weapon prototypes were put together. There are several entrances to these workshops and tunnels located throughout the village but each have been carefully landscaped to conceal their identity. Very little original information remains and those that know give little away. It is said that a map of the actual tunnel layout did exist in the Library of Wreake Valley Community College, but inexplicably became misplaced.

**Sim's Bar & Restaurant** was built, along with the rest of the surrounding village, opening at that time as the Greek Plough with an appropriately themed interior. It subsequently became known as The Plough, then in 2008 converted to Sim's Bar & Restaurant. It consists of a spacious public bar, with ample room for its two pool tables, and an even larger restaurant bar where authentic Indian cuisine is served. Annexed to the restaurant is a lobby suitable for a quiet drink and Batemans XB was on offer.

Leaving Sim's I retraced my steps the short distance back to Melton Road, turned left, towards Rearsby and, before long after entering the village, a feeling of déjà vu transpired with another Punch Tavern pub called The Horse & Groom ahead of me to the right hand side of the road.

Rearsby village was established in the 9th century by invading Danes and a Viking Kingdom of York penny dating from 895-902 was once found there. The Domesday Book registers the two alternative spellings of Redresbi or Reresbi. A well-known feature, at the heart of the village, is the seven arch stone bridge erected in 1714 to replace a medieval timber bridge. Legend has it that six men built the new bridge in nine days for just over £11. During the 1700s there were quite a few trades in the village

including carpenters, blacksmith, innkeeper/brewer, and a Maltster. One of the chief occupations between 1831 and 1844 was the cottage industry of framework knitting. Supposedly there were seventy knitting frames in the village at that time, but regrettably, all evidence as to the whereabouts of the knitters' cottages has vanished.

**The Horse & Groom** is situated within the Rearsby Conservation Area on the former main Melton Road, prior to the Rearsby by-pass opening in 2004. The ground floor area appears to have previously been three individual rooms now knocked through to form one irregular shaped Public Bar with bare floorboards and exposed ceiling timbers retaining a rural feel. The pub also has a skittles long-alley which doubles as a function room. Most of the 1st floor area is taken up by another function room that was formerly a dining room known as The Haybarn Restaurant. Outside the back are two paved patio areas with picnic tables, some children's play equipment and two petanque pistes. Real Ales available were Sharp's Doom Bar and Castle Rock Harvest Pale.

Turning right out of The Horse & Groom, and still within the conservation area, The Wheel was a short distance ahead, across the road.

**The Wheel** is a centuries-old building that had a former existence as a terrace of cottages but is now a traditional English pub serving traditional Indian cuisine. In March 2007, after many months of speculation as to its future, a 'Save the Wheel' campaign on the Internet saw this pub re-opened following major refurbishment. The central public bar area has a seating area for drinkers to one side and a dining room to the other side. Really chunky exposed original ceiling beams & joists throughout enhance the rural ambiance. Alongside the rear car park is a gravelled patio area with six picnic



*The Wheel, Rearsby*

tables. Available cask ales were Draught Bass and St. Austell Tribute.

So that was it, a really agreeable way to while away a Saturday afternoon. Under normal circumstances, the pubs in this walk would have about twenty different real ales between them, but due to that beer festival at Stubbies, at least twice that many were available. I began my journey back to Leicester via an Arriva 5A which run at 12, 32 & 52 minutes past the hour on a Saturday from the bus stop just up the road from the Wheel.

Cheers,

*Jim Reay*



*The Horse & Groom, Rearsby*

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