

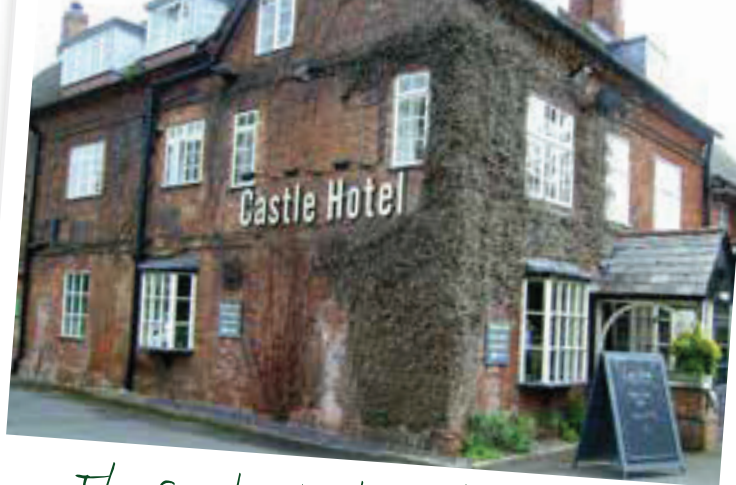
JIM'S JAUNT

Kirby Muxloe & Ratby

by Jim Reay

If you're categorically averse to getting your boots muddy, then this is the jaunt for you, as I didn't venture off of the causeways. It was 10.22 on a Saturday morning when I caught the Arriva 153 leaving Stand SM in St Margaret's Bus Station. I alighted at 10.49 at the second bus stop after passing (to my right), Kirby Muxloe Parish Council Offices & Library and crossed over the road into Main Street, almost opposite, although you wouldn't know it was Main Street as there wasn't a street name sign in sight. I then walked in the direction indicated by a Brown Tourist Sign "To Castle", for about a five minutes to my first destination, The Royal Oak.

Kirby Muxloe is encircled to the north, south and west by open countryside, but its interconnecting link with Leicester Forest East essentially makes it a continuation of Leicester's urban sprawl. Documented in the 1086 Domesday Book as Carbi, the name derived from an earlier Viking leader by the name of Caeri, who established a settlement here in the late ninth or early tenth century. The Old Danish name evolved into Kirby, with variant spellings of the appendage Muxloe being recorded as early as 1582. The first official recorded use of



The Castle Hotel, Kirby Muxloe

the name Kirby Muxloe was documented in the 1703 edition of The Oxford Dictionary of Place Names. The entry states that Muxloe is a family name, though rather bizarrely history records that the Muxloe family lived three miles away, in Desford. The manor was held for some years by the Pakeman family who then sold it to Sir William Hastings in the 15th century. The Hastings family sold their estates in Kirby and Braunstone to Robert Banister in 17th century, the Banisters subsequently selling them to C. Winstanley Esquire, the name source of Braunstone Town's Winstanley pub. The first national census of 1801 identified the village populace as chiefly employed in agriculture, trade, manufacture, handicraft and others. The railway came to Kirby Muxloe in 1848 and its Railway Station opened at Kirby Fields on 1 July 1859. By the end of the nineteenth century passenger traffic had much increased as Kirby Muxloe became an important residential area for Leicester businessmen. Although the station was closed on 7th September 1964 as part of Dr. Beeching's cuts, commuting still remains the villagers' predominant way of life to this day. During the Second World War, Kirby Muxloe was heavily bombed and considered by some to be the most bombed village in England; Shoreham in Kent probably has an equal, if not better, claim to this dubious distinction.

The Royal Oak first became licensed in 1810, at which point it was a cottage type property once trading as The Sheriff before adopting The Royal Oak appellation. By 1970 the time-worn building had succumbed to dilapidation and was superseded with a brand new structure known as The Spanish Blade for eleven years before reverting back to The Royal Oak in 1981. It has been part of the Everards estate since 1901 and prior to 1913 it was the local venue of choice for the Atherstone Hunt meets. The traditional public bar is popular with local anglers, as evidenced by the many depictions of fish displayed on the walls, and apparently all of the trout served in the restaurant is caught and supplied by them. Next to the bar is the restaurant and to the rear of the



The Royal Oak, Kirby Muxloe

pub is the large Acorn Suite function room. Outside there is a paved area with picnic tables either side of the front entrance door whilst to the rear, behind the Acorn Suite, are a paved patio and a lawned garden also furnished with picnic tables. Real Ales available were: Everards Beacon Hill. Ashover Light Rale and Black Country Chain Ale. Hogan's Hopped was the Real Cider.

Turning right out of The Royal Oak I continued along Main Street until I saw a Brown Tourist Sign indicating the route to my right, down Oakcroft Avenue, to Kirby Muxloe Castle.

Kirby Muxloe Castle stands on the site of an earlier 14th century house built by the Pakeman family. Part of the Kirby Muxloe Estate which the Hastings family gained ownership of in 1460, Lord William Hastings demolished the original house and utilised the reclaimed building materials to construct his new castle. Work commenced in 1480 to create a red brick fortified house surrounded by a wide moat but after just three years working on site, Lord Hastings was alleged to have conspired against Richard III and was consequently arrested and summarily executed on 13 June 1483. The castle was left unfinished and it is believed some bricks and stonework from it were once again reused to build the neighbouring farmhouse, which is now the Castle Hotel. One of the earliest brickwork castles erected in England, Kirby utilised over 100,000 bricks fired on site rather than using locally quarried stone. Numerous bricklayers were employed under the direction of leading English brick mason John Cowper. It is thought that the lime mortar favoured in those days, used lime sourced from Barrow-upon-Soar. In 1911, Major Richard Winstanley placed Kirby Muxloe Castle under the guardianship of the Ministry of Works and it is now a Grade I listed building managed by English Heritage.



Kirby Muxloe Sports & Village Club

I retraced my steps back to Main Street and turned right to the nearby Castle Hotel, built in the 1630's as the Castle Farmhouse, which itself replaced an even earlier farmhouse dating back to the middle-ages. The current Grade II listed building appears in the register of listed buildings under its original title of the Castle Farmhouse, which could lead to some confusion, as the somewhat newer property next door trades under the name of Castle Farmhouse B & B. The hotel operates under Greene King's Chef & Brewer brand as part of Spirit Pub Company and its interior has retained many original features with exposed ceiling timbers, Inglenook fireplaces, and numerous nooks and crannies, large and small, in which to dine or imbibe. Of particular interest are two large black slate flagstones, both of which are fluted with a cross set within two concentric circles. Local lore accounts that, pigs to be slaughtered were hung from hooks above the flagstones, and the purpose of the grooves was to disperse the blood. Discarding pigs' blood in this manner sounds an implausible explanation to someone like myself, who likes black pudding. Another school of thought posits that the fluted symbolism is a representation

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of Norse Paganism. Odin, the highest ranking god in Norse mythology had as his symbol a cross in a circle (Odin's Cross). Legend has it that Odin was a foremost candidate for being the original Santa Claus, not surprising as it was alleged he was to be seen, leading the Wild Hunt, streaming across the skies in his chariot pulled by white horses. Behind the Hotel are picnic tables in the large lawned garden, which has the remains of the castle as a backdrop. Card carrying CAMRA members may claim a 10% discount on cask ales, which on this occasion were Greene King IPA, Wells Bombardier Burning Gold and Cottage Boys of 66.

Leaving the Castle Hotel I continued to my right to the end of Main Street where I turned left at the traffic island into Ratby Lane and straight on past the mini roundabout, very soon arriving at the driveway, to my right, leading to Kirby Muxloe Sports & Village Club which is a private non-affiliated Club, accessible to Members and Members guests. New members are very welcome and with the nominal membership fee of only 5 pence, I handed over my shilling and became a member. Originally founded in 1910 as Kirby Muxloe Football Club, it amalgamated with the local cricket club in 1972 to form the present entity with a new clubhouse built entirely through the efforts of the local community. The Main Bar is a large L-shaped room with a well-stocked trophy display cabinet, pool table and darts board, and there is a smaller convivial Back Bar. Extensive outdoor facilities include a football pitch, a floodlit all-weather five-a-side football pitch and a cricket ground which has its own separate pavilion. The original little wooden pavilion had become unusable in 2003 so as a temporary measure it was replaced by a second-hand portakabin. Damp and rotten by 2007 a new pavilion was erected in 2008 through the joint efforts of volunteers from the local community, club members past and present, the England under

19 Cricket Team, and Mike Gatting OBE, former England Captain. all under the auspices of NatWest CricketForce and the England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB). The ECB presented the club with a fantastic Daktronics Digital Scoreboard that was officially opened by Gatting on 12th May 2009. The club serves 2 regular beers; Marston's Burton Bitter & Pedigree.

From the club I continued to my right on the road to Ratby crossing the by now familiar Rothley Brook. This is my sixth successive jaunt to have encountered this water course, being a very long brook which first becomes noticeable as the overflow from Thornton Reservoir and finally becoming a tributary of the River Soar shortly after flowing through Rothley. Not surprising, therefore that it was known historically as The Great Brook although it has also been called Heather Brook. The bridge over Rothley Brook marks the boundary between Kirby Muxloe and Ratby and after crossing it I could discern The Railway pub, a white building just within Ratby's built-up area.

Ratby has a very long history indeed, with evidence of human occupation stretching back many thousands of years. On the western outskirts of the village is an Iron Age encampment known as Bury Camp. Approximately 3000 years ago it was inhabited by the Corieltavi tribe, who at that time, occupied a large part of the East Midlands. The Romans later adapted the camp in around 50 AD, for use as a Roman Legionary fortress. It is thought that the name Ratby was derived from the Celtic "Rath" meaning fort and the Danish "bie" meaning village. Spelt Rotebie in the Domesday Book, the present-day layout of the village has developed somewhat since its early period as a small clustered settlement around the hilltop Parish Church of St. Philip & St. James. Primarily an agricultural settlement, the villagers were mainly employed on the land, but with the coming of the Enclosure Act of 1770 a lot of tenant farmers lost their livelihood. Many sought employment as framework knitters and by the 1830's this was the inhabitants' foremost occupation. The arrival in 1832 of the railway connection further expanded the hosiery trade and also helped the establishment and expansion of other local industries, but these days the majority of residents commute.

The Railway Inn was built adjacent to the Leicester and Swannington Railway (L&S), across the road from Ratby Railway Station, at around the same time that the line opened as one of England's first railways in 1832. The (L&S) has now being closed for half a century and the trackbed is now a cycle route and footpath known as the Glenfield to Ratby Ivanhoe Trail, which incidentally has a Railway Inn at each end. It's possible that both inns were the brainchild of entrepreneur William Sherman as coinciding with the development of the (L&S), he



The Bull's Head, Ratby



The Plough Inn, Ratby

is reputed to have bought up strategically placed locations along the line as sites on which booking offices could be built. The booking offices are said to have being essentially double fronted pubs (like these two) with a ticket office and a bar. This traditional locals' pub has being part of Everards estate since 1903 and consists of a public bar to the front of house and a lounge bar to the rear. The public bar has some interesting pictures, a darts board and a trophy shelf. The Pullman Lounge, as it is known, has railway memorabilia on display. The tarmacadam front yard is furnished with picnic tables. Real Ales available were: Everards Beacon Hill, Tiger & Early Doors.

Turning right from The Railway Inn, I continued straight along Station Road, past Ratby Sports Club (no real ale here), past Desford Lane and into Main Street where I soon saw The Bulls Head ahead to the left side of the road.

The Bulls Head, is a former farmhouse which initially traded simultaneously as a farm and an alehouse prior to becoming an Everards pub in 1902. The premises underwent extensive refurbishment in 2012. On entering the front door there's a snug to the right and a public bar to the left with a raised restaurant area to the rear. Further back is a paved courtyard with timber garden furniture and a skittles long-alley that doubles as a function room. Even further back is a particularly unusual three-tier sun-terrace deck area. The first tier has comfy sofa chairs; the second tier has funky Italian seating and the top tier has traditional decking furniture. Next to the top tier is a lawned garden with picnic tables and to the side of the pub is a paved area, also with picnic tables. Real Ales available were Everards Tiger & Old Original, Derby Dashingly Dark and Beard Silvertip. Real Cider was Weston's Old Rosie.

From The Bulls Head I turned left and immediately left into Burroughs Road to The Plough which was just a short way up the road to the right hand side.

The Plough Inn was also originally a farmhouse and the County records from 1695 show that ale was being brewed here then. Now part of Marston's estate this traditional locals' pub is hidden away off the beaten track. Entering the front door takes one into the public bar, on two levels, with a snug to

one side and a dining room to the other. Projecting forward, with its gable wall abutting the road, is part of the building not open to the public, which, I was told, was once a slaughterhouse and that meat hooks still hang from the beams. Out back, next to the carpark, are a lawned garden with picnic tables and two pétanque pistes. On offer were Marston's Burton Bitter & Pedigree, Jennings Sneck Lifter and Wychwood Hobgoblin Gold.

The two villages have three venues each and between them fifteen different real ales and no muddy boots! To begin my journey home I returned to the timber bus shelter adjacent to the Bulls Head carpark.

Cheers,

Jim Reay



As we went to press we heard that Molly O'Grady's (formerly The Saracen's Head) is to get a makeover. There has been a pub on this site for over seven centuries with the earliest reference made in 1312. Despite being about as far as you can be from the sea, it was once notorious as a recruiting office for the Royal Navy, both officially and unofficially with the help of press gangs who preyed upon unwitting drunkards. This photo is believed to be from the late 19th century.