

# JIM'S JAUNT

## Claybrooke Magna, Ullesthorpe, Ashby Parva & Leire

by Jim Reay

As often is the case, it was a Saturday morning when I did this jaunt, the only day that bus and pub time coordination allowed. I caught the 10.55 Arriva 158 from St Margaret's Bus Station stand SN and alighted on Hinckley's Regent Street stand R4 at 11.50. I crossed the road and turned right to stand R2, just past The Baron of Hinckley, and caught the 12.00 Hinckley-Bus 8 to Claybrooke Magna. It was 12.20 when I alighted at the first stop in the village, just after passing The Pig in Muck.

**Claybrooke Magna** and Claybrooke Parva were listed as one village, Clairboc, in the Domesday Book of 1086. Predating the great survey, the Romans had a notable settlement at nearby High Cross, known then as Vanonae, at the crossroads of two principal Roman Roads, Fosse Way and Watling Street, and considered to be the centre of Roman England. Brooke is an obsolete spelling of brook, so logically the name derives from the fact that the watercourse flows through clayey soil. However, try as I might, I could

find no evidence to support this notion (Or maybe from the French *Clair* (clear brook?) Ed.). During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Main Street through Claybrooke Magna, Claybrooke Parva and Ullesthorpe, formed part of the stagecoach route from London to Anglesey, to connect with passenger ships sailing from Holyhead to Dublin. The eminent civil engineer Thomas Telford was responsible for the design and construction of this major highway, including the Menai Suspension Bridge, in its day the largest suspension bridge in the world. To this day, mileposts survive in each Claybrooke and Ullesthorpe; a reminder that mileposts became compulsory on turnpike roads in 1767, to inform travellers of direction and distances and help coaches keep to schedule. Claybrooke Magna is in essence a hamlet (a village without a church of its own), hence parishioners have to attend services at Claybrooke Parva's St. Peter's Church, as indeed do residents of Ullesthorpe.

**The Pig in Muck** was, until the mid-1990's, known as the Bulls Head. In 2013 the licensee opened The Pig Pub Brewery, to be found in two small outbuilding within the curtilage, and the brewery's beers are served within the pub, as well as farther afield. The ground floor of the pub consists of one large open plan room, partially divided by the chimney breast to an inglenook fireplace, now having the indignity of accommodating an incongruous, in-built electric pseudo wood burning stove. When all of the ground floor dining tables are taken, extra capacity is available via the staircase leading to a large dining room on the first floor. The five real ales available on the day were Sharps Doom Bar, Black Sheep Best Bitter, Pig Brewery Pigs Best bitter, Chinook and Empress Blandings.

On leaving I retraced my steps back past the bus stop and continued along Main Road until turning left into Back Lane, then first right into Roman Close. I followed the L-shaped close round left to its end, where I went straight on down a short jitty, at the end of which I turned right along a footpath before turning left to the bottom end of Bell Street where I joined the Leicestershire Round, signposted Public Footpath to Frolesworth. The easily followed route was well-trodden and directed by Yellow Waymarker Posts (YWP) and before long I crossed a timber bridge, passed between some industrial/farm buildings, and over another timber bridge. Behind the building to my left was Claybrooke Mill, built in 1763 and still in commercial operation to this day. Milling has taken place at this site for over 1000 years, and The Domesday Book records that there was once a wind mill, adjacent to where the watermill now stands. Through the next hand-gate, the Leicestershire Round veers left, but I continued straight on along a Bridle Path, as directed by blue directional arrows, until emerging on, and turning right along Frolesworth Road to Ullesthorpe Court Hotel & Golf Club.



The Pig in Muck, Claybrooke Magna



Right:  
Pig Pub  
Brewery



Ullesthorpe Court Hotel & Golf Club



The Dirty Duck, Ullesthorpe

**Ullesthorpe** has a long history of local human habitation and a large number of flint tools have been found here, signifying occupation here throughout the Prehistoric Period. The casual visitor would probably never be aware that one of Leicestershire's largest ancient earthworks lies just a few hundred yards from the village centre. Roman pottery, roof tiles and coins evidence its Roman settlement. The Roman military defended Britain from rival aggressors, but this protection came to an end when barbarian tribes began attacking other parts of the Roman Empire and Emperor Honorius decided that the Roman legions in Britain were needed elsewhere. Subsequently opportunist invaders from the Continent and Scandinavia occupied these parts and there were several periods of Saxon control, but a major influence on Ullesthorpe was from the Danes. The village name derives from Old Scandinavian and means the outlying farmstead or settlement of a man called Ulfr. As the limit of the Danelaw was approximately the line of Watling Street, several other local villages have names derived from Scandinavia.

**Ullesthorpe Court Hotel & Golf Club** occupies a building which has been recorded as a dwelling house since before 1767. Formerly known as Four Elms Farm, it was extended sometime around 1800 and subsequently renamed Ullesthorpe Court, eventually becoming an hotel in 1990 with an adjoining Leisure Club opened in 1991. The Best Western Group hotel has two bars, both of which are open to the public;

a large public bar & restaurant to the right of the hotel reception foyer and a golf bar, also known as the clubhouse, in a separate building to the rear. The golf course was originally laid out in 1976 and the golf club was founded in 1978. The hotel bar is open from noon until everyone has gone, which could be anytime, early or late,

whilst the clubhouse is open from early morning to dusk every day. The two real ales available on the day were Courage Best Bitter and Green King IPA.

I turned left out of the hotel until arriving at the village where I turned second left into Mill Road, then first right to the end of College Street where The Dirty Duck was situated on the left hand corner.

**The Dirty Duck** is a freehouse, formerly known as The Swan Inn. The pub building has a perceptible ambience of bygone days, enhanced by exposed ceiling joists throughout and uncarpeted quarry-tile floors and pine floorboards (said to be recycled church floorboards). There is a central public bar, to the right of which are the snug like top room, so called because it is up a short staircase, and next to that is the dining room. To the left of the public bar is the fat lady room (a caricature of a fat lady adorns the wall) and a pool room with a single table. Three real ales were available: Greene King Abbot Ale, Timothy Taylor Landlord and Morland Old Speckled Hen.

Turning left from The Dirty Duck, I walked a short distance along Main Street, to The Chequers on the same side of the road. Unmissable, situated behind the pub's car park, is Ullesthorpe Windmill, built in 1800. The five storey tower mill was utilised principally for milling corn until the late 1890s, when a lightning strike set the sails on fire, leading to its closure. Further

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*Ullesthorpe Windmill*



*The Holly Bush, Ashby Parva*



*The Chequers, Ullesthorpe*

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damage occurred in the Second World War when a bomb blast blew out the windows. The mill, now entirely surrounded by houses, was declared a Grade II listed building in 1972.

**The Chequers** is a country inn that was originally a farmhouse during the reign of King George III (1760-1820) and features old oak beams and granite floors throughout. The side entrance foyer leads into what is known as the main bar. To the front of house is the rather bizarrely named back bar, and between the two bars there's a snug with a dart board. To the rear is a restaurant area and a large function room. Adjacent to the main entrance is an outdoor terrace furnished with picnic tables. Part of the Marston's estate, the three real ales available on the day were Pedigree, Wychwood Hobgoblin and Ringwood Boondoggle.

Turning left out of The Chequers, I continued along Main Street and fairly soon crossed a bridge over an abandoned railway line. This was once the Midland Railway Line, linking Leicester and Rugby. The railway station opened in 1840, and proved to be a major turn of fortune for the village. From 1850 onwards, weekly cattle markets were held at Ullesthorpe, which became home of the Midland's largest annual sheep sale. However, in 1961, the line was dismantled between Wigston Junction Triangle and Rugby (remarkably predating the publication of The Beeching Report by two years). As a consequence, the cattle market ceased trading three years later. A bit further on, I encountered an unusual new house named The Roundhouse, seemingly a clone of the village's conspicuous windmill, having the foremost unique feature of a round tower. I soon took a left turn into

Ashby Road and continued out of the village for a while until reaching a YWP to the left side of the road, next to a public footpath signpost for Ashby Parva. I followed this footpath across fields both pastoral and arable, directed by the YWP until encountering a dual directional option. I turned left over a double stile, then veered right over a distinct ridge and furrow field. The route soon merged with a path through St. Peter's Churchyard and onto Main Street where I turned right for the short walk to The Holly Bush.

**Ashby Parva** is essentially a linear settlement along a twisting main street. In the Domesday Book it appears as Parva Assesby, although the appellation is of earlier Saxon and Danish origin. This toponym is compounded of the Saxon word "Aesc", meaning an Ash tree, and the Old Danish word "by", signifying a farmstead or settlement, so a dwelling or village situated under or amongst Ash trees. Almost inevitably, where there's a Parva, one will find a Magna not too far away; Magna and Parva being Latin for large and small. Accordingly, the pub-less village of Ashby Magna is approximately three miles northeast, as the crow flies. There are no less than seventeen parishes in England called Ashby, all of which are to be found in counties that were subject to Danelaw. During the English Civil War, parliamentary troops from Warwickshire garrisons visited Ashby Parva and the surrounding villages in Guthlaxton Hundred, stealing horses and availing themselves of "free quarter, meat, drink and provender".

**The Holly Bush** started its existence as a terrace, which included a butchers shop and four cottages, and a cottage ambience still prevails. When first licensed it was known as The Shoulder of Mutton before adopting its present name. This freehouse consists mainly of two rooms in the form of a public bar with exposed timber flooring, ceiling beams & joists and a lounge bar/dining room also with exposed ceiling timbers and timber matchboard clad walls. To the rear of the bar is an additional small sector resembling a cottage front room, which doubles as additional dining area, or skittles table room. Greene King Abbot, Marston's Pedigree, St. Austell Proper Job and Adnams Ghost Ship were the real ales on offer.

I turned left out of The Holly Bush and retraced my steps back past St. Peter's Church before taking the road right towards Leire. After a while, as the road veered right, there was a YWP and a footpath signpost pointing across the fields to Leire. The footpath ended at the top of Little Lane, at the bottom of which I turned left along Frolesworth Road, then first right into Oak Avenue. At the end of Oak Avenue I walked along a narrow lane leading to Back Lane, where the main entrance to The Crab & Cow was a short distance ahead on the left.

**Leire** (Legre in the Domesday Book) appeared with its current spelling in episcopal records as early as



Crab & Cow, Leire



The Queens Arms, Leire

1227, but its name may derive from Legra, an Old English name for the River Soar, a tributary of which has its source to the south of the village. Just as a matter of interest, Leicester's name is also believed to have derived from the River Soar's former name, spelt Ligora-ceastre in Anglo-Saxon times and Ledecestre by the Normans. Whilst the first element of these toponyms is thought to derive from the earlier name of the River Soar the subsequent element is taken from the Anglo-Saxon word ceaster, used to denote an old Roman fortified town and itself derived from the Latin word castra (fort). Like many places in the county, a change from arable to pastoral farming in the post-medieval period has left some very prominent ridge and furrow local landscapes.

**The Crab & Cow** was formerly known as The White Horse Inn, which advertised in 1926 that it had public rooms capable of holding 150 people. The pub was re-launched with its new name and a major refurbishment in 2015. In fact it dates back to the 18th century and maintains many original features which nicely harmonize with the now predominantly contemporary ambience. Outside the main entrance, adjacent to the car park, is a block paved courtyard with convenient garden furniture. Entering the pub via the main entrance, I found myself in the restaurant area, which consists of three separate interconnected dining areas with uncovered varnished pine floorboards, exposed ceiling beams and joists and unmistakable vestige of an inglenook fireplace with an inset smaller open fireplace with logs for fuel. To the front of house is the public bar, also with exposed ceiling timbers and uncarpeted floors of quarry tiles and flags. The two real ales available on the day were: Timothy Taylor Landlord and Purity Pure UBU.

Leaving The Crab & Cow via the front door, I turned right along yet another Main Street until very soon viewing yet another St. Peter's Church across the road from The Queens Arms. Coincidentally, all of the villages I walked through on this jaunt, have a Main Street/Road and are between them, served by a trio of St. Peters Churches.

**The Queens Arms** building was erected during the 1700s, in a prominent position opposite the parish church. The first mention of The Queens Arms was in an 1840 directory, and in 1912 the pub advertised good stabling and cyclist accommodation. Back in the 1800s, a former landlady, by the name of Jane

Ladkin, was renowned for being a village personality and a very big woman. So big was she in fact, that when she died, her coffin was too large to go through the pub door, so a hole had to be made in the wall. It is said that, rather mysteriously, following this lady's death, her orchard of plum trees all died. There is a public bar to the front of house, with a larger than usual snug annex which has a small brick fire-place set in what was once a much larger inglenook. To the rear is the dining room with French doors leading out onto a sheltered paved patio, a lawned garden and a raised timber decked area all furnished with picnic tables. The four real ales available were Marston's Pedigree, Banks's Amber, Steamin' Billy Bitter and Topsy Fisherman.

Leaving The Queens Arms, I turned right, past St. Peter's Church, to the top of Main Street and then turned right along Frolesworth Road to a bus stop a short distance ahead, but it wasn't the stop I needed. To return to Leicester, I needed to cross the road and wait opposite; although there isn't a discernible bus stop at this place the Arriva X84 buses will stop here, with the last one departing at 17.56. In all, a pleasant ramble through four settlements, between them having seven watering holes serving nineteen different beers.

Cheers,

*Jim Reay*

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