

JIM'S JAUNT

Newtown Linford & Anstey

by Jim Reay

Starting on a Saturday morning at St. Margaret's Bus Station, Bay 7, I boarded the 11.13 Roberts Coaches 120 and alighted in Newtown Linford, directly opposite The Bradgate, at 11.36. As this pub doesn't open until noon, I had time to walk down to the park entrance to see Leicestershire's only surviving police box still used by the local constabulary where PCSOs Fiona Lacey and Tom Lloyd were sporting enough to pose for a photograph, Fiona confessing to being a big Dr. Who fan and delighted to have her very own TARDIS.

Newtown Linford's history is closely entwined with that of Bradgate Park and owes its very existence to the park which was established as a deer park suitable for the chase by the 13th century, providing the gentry with both sport and food. At that time the land was in the ownership of the Ferrers family who decided to re-house tenants living within the park enclosure to a nearby purpose built new town situated at the ford over the River Lin; hence the name Newtown Linford. The Bradgate Estate, including Newtown Linford, was bought by the Grey family in 1445, the villagers remaining their tenants for 480 years when, in 1925, the estate was auctioned off in 227 individual lots by direction of Mrs. K.H.V. Grey. The auction raised the then grand sum of £226,110 for Mrs. Grey, enabling some villagers to buy their own land and houses while others had their homes sold over their heads.

The Bradgate Hotel was sold as an auction lot to Everards for £6,400 and has traded as part of their estate ever since. Behind the 20th century facade is an older village inn, where carriers used to refresh themselves and change their horses. Today described by the local authority as a Key Unlisted Building, it is indeed a dominant building in Main Street. On entering the front door, the public bar was just to my right leading further right to two cosy dining rooms known as the Library and the



Bradgate, Newtown Linford



Leicestershire Constabulary

Snug. Another small intimate dining area, with one table to seat eight, is to the front of house, set in the large bay window. Towards the rear of house is a spacious Restaurant adjacent to which is a homely area called the Drawing Room. Yet another dining room is situated to the left of the front entrance and this in turn leads to a staircase taking one to the Loft Room furnished with one large table able to seat up to twenty people for a meal or conference. Adjacent to the large rear car park is an enclosed lawned garden with picnic tables and children's play equipment. Also outback, on split stages, are decked and block paved terraces with garden furniture. Everards Tiger & Original plus Brunswick Last Orders were the available real ales together with Weston's Rosie's Pig Cider.

My next port of call was The Linford, just short of a furlong to my right on the other side of Main Street.

The Linford is an unaffiliated private members club although a foyer notice clearly states "The Linford welcomes non-members. Visitors are required to sign the visitors' book". Part of village life since 1926 it's hardly surprising that it is referred to locally simply as The Club. Formerly affiliated to

» continued on pg 24

» from pg 22

The Royal British Legion Clubs, its official title is The Newtown Linford Ex-Services Club. The original timber structure had a previous existence as a tea-room, at a farm in the village, before being dismantled and re-erected in its present position. In 1928 a brickwork extension was constructed to the front of the club and now forms the foremost operational region. The front entrance leads into the main bar to the left which is furnished with no less than six leather settees, whilst to the right of the bar is a games room with a pool table, darts board and table football. The wooden hut at the back became a function room that was eventually rebuilt in brick in 1960 and extensively refurbished in 2012. Available real ales were Bass and Titanic Plum Porter.

Turning left out of the club I continued along Main Street and straight on up the causeway to the side of the road known as Sharpley Hill. Plodding up this long steep incline, I was overtaken by two streaks of shocking-pink in the form of male cyclist whizzing uphill, closely followed by a young lady jogger. Maybe if I donned go-faster shocking-pink, I'd soar uphill with more haste? Wisely disregarding this bizarre thought, to my left was a lady of a less vivid hue.

The Grey Lady is unashamedly a restaurant with diners as its target clientele but it does have a small area near the bar, designated for drinkers, with a table, settees, a high table and stools. The business is sometimes referred to as Gibsons Grey Lady, in deference to the Gibson family who have now been proprietors for the best part of 30 years. In the course of conversation with an esteemed long serving retainer of The Grey Lady, I was reliably informed that prior to WWII the premises was an unlicensed establishment known as The Old John Café. On entering the venue via the foyer, I found myself in a not insubstantially sized restaurant



Linford Club



The Grey Lady

subdivided into two main dining areas, on different levels, each with a smaller annexe. Viewed through the french-doors was a rustically paved patio and a pergola, with garden furniture, overlooking an undulating lawned garden, all set in over three acres overlooking a woodland backdrop. Their real ale was Adnams Southwold Bitter.

Continuing up Sharpley Hill, for a relatively short distance, I reached Hunts Hill car park to the right of the road and walked through the car park and a small wooded area before entering Bradgate Park, not far from its highest point, where sits one of Leicestershire's most famous landmarks, the Grade II listed folly known as Old John.

Old John Tower has occupied its commanding hilltop position since been built on the site of a former windmill during the 1780's. Initially the tower was erected as an observation vantage point for the ladies to view a racecourse that can still be defined by large stones encircling the hill. It is said that the archway abutment, which gives the folly its distinctive beer mug profile, was added later in memory of a beer-loving estate retainer known as Old John, who met his untimely demise when a pole in the middle of a celebration bonfire burned through and fell among the revellers celebrating the 6th Earl of Stamford's coming of age. Around the tower's base is a conveniently situated plinth where I sat for a while appreciating the splendid panoramic views whilst catching my breath after the short but steep climb. Lungs re-oxygenated, I was ready to set off for a walk through the park to Anstey.



Bradgate Park was a major lot in the 1925 auction and was initially offered to Leicester Corporation for public use but the money needed to buy the land could not be raised. A successful industrialist and philanthropist, Mr. Charles Bennion, came to the rescue, purchasing the park and placing it into a trust before formally presenting it to the people of Leicestershire for their quiet enjoyment and recreation. It is now Leicestershire's most visited attraction welcoming over half a million visitors a year. With evidence of human occupation going back some 14,000 years, to the Upper Palaeolithic period, there are also suggestions that the area was settled in the Bronze & Iron Ages and has been more or less continuously inhabited ever since.

With my back to the tower door, the way ahead was a labyrinth of well-trodden paths. In the middle distance were three small wooded areas and I headed for the middle one of these. The route away from Old John was initially down a very steep slope, but soon levelled off. Reaching the walled wood, I followed the path leading round to the right keeping close to the wall, until the ruins of Bradgate House came into view; I headed straight towards the ruins taking the path passing through a gap in a high stone wall.

Built in the early 1500's Bradgate House was one of the earliest unfortified mansions in England and one of the first houses of its scale to be built in brick. This once magnificent Tudor house became the birthplace and childhood home of Lady Jane Grey, Queen of England for a mere nine days in 1553, before being overthrown by Mary I.

Nearing the house, my route took me along an unmetalled road and straight on to a bridge over the River Lin. Once over, I followed another unmetalled road for about 100yds to a park bench, placed to the memory of a Robert Smith, and took the path veering to the left of the seat and on to a 6ft high, deer-proof kissing gate set in the high stone park boundary wall. I continued straight on the well-trod footpath over farmland until the path divided into two and I turned right along a path between the back gardens of the 1st & 2nd houses in Anstey. I then turned left along Bradgate Road towards the village centre.

Anstey is thought to have originated as an Angle settlement, although it is known that prior to this, the Romans had a significant presence hereabouts. The Via Devana (now better known by its latter Saxon name of Gartree Road) was a

» continued on pg 26



Packhorse Bridge, Anstey



The Crown, Anstey

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key Roman Road linking Colchester and Chester, its route passed through Anstey. It is thought to have crossed the Rothley Brook at the location of the existing Pack Horse Bridge. This well-known landmark isn't the only ancient bridge in Anstey as situated on Sheepwash Lane, now a bridleway linking Anstey to Beaumont Leys, is the other less well known King William's Bridge. In 1696 King William III planned to visit the Grey family at Bradgate from his base at Belvoir Castle but a reconnaissance of the route found the bridge over Rothley Brook to be too narrow for the royal coach and its escorting entourage so the new wider King William Bridge was built. The Angles named the village Hanstige, meaning a narrow forest track, but by the time of the Domesday Book, the H had been dropped in favour of the name Anstige. After several changes, the spelling eventually became Anstey in the 19th century. The 1760 Enclosure Act had a profound effect on the local landscape as communal open fields passed into the hands of private landowners, removing the villagers' traditional dependency on the land and forcing many to seek alternative employment. An early local industry was framework knitting which so flourished that by 1845 there were no less than 300 villagers working as framework knitters. In due course, small manufacturers emerged, enticing home-based workers to become wage earning

factory employees. This revolutionary development provoked Anstey's Ned Ludd to redress what he perceived to be an unfair state of affairs by sabotaging the factory machines; an example taken up far and wide and instigating the notorious Luddite Riots. The village still supports light industry although nearly all the larger factories have now either been demolished or converted into flats.

Anstey's first pub was The Crown Inn which was quite a way down Bradgate Road on the right.

The Crown Inn is described by the Local Authority as a Key Unlisted Building although clues to its origins are masked by externally rendered walls. Adjoining cruck framed cottages were demolished in 1960 to facilitate extension of this pub and in all probability the rendering was applied at that time. The pub underwent refurbishment in 2014 and is now essentially open plan. An area akin to a public bar is to the front of house, with a rustic ambience enhanced by uncovered wooden floors, exposed ceiling timbers and a small snug to one end. Adjoining and set back to the left is a lounge bar whilst set back to the right is a raised seating area. Outside, there is a beer garden, drinking terrace and a smoking shelter. Available real ales were Bass and Doom Bar.

Carrying on down Bradgate Road, just past Groby Road junction to my right and next door to the Congregational Church, tucked away up a short alleyway was The Staddon Sports & Social Club that reopened in December 2015 following a major refurbishment.

The club's history is closely entwined with that of Boot & Shoe manufacturers, G. H. Palmer Ltd. founded in 1885 with premises in Church Lane. The business prospered and larger premises became necessary, so these were rented on a three-year fixed term tenancy, in the property presently occupied by the Staddon Sports & Social Club. Business continued to prosper, prompting the landlord to seek a threefold rent increase when the tenancy expired. With no alternative premises available, the prudent Mr Palmer took out a mortgage and bought land to build a new factory and workers houses on the corner of Highfield Street and Staddon Road. The club opened in the old factory buildings trading as Palmer's Shoes Social Club but eventually took the name Staddon as a link with the location of Palmers new premises. The small club comprises one ground floor bar whilst the 1st floor has a games room with a darts board, pool and skittles tables plus a function room. The club is soon to introduce a second handpump on the bar to accompany the Charnwood Salvation that was available on the day of my visit.

Turning right out of the club and a short distance



The Old Hare & Hounds



The Sports Bar, Anstey



Staddon, Anstey



Coach & Horses, Anstey

down the road, opposite St. Mary's Parish Church is The Old Hare & Hounds, a former coaching inn situated within Anstey Conservation area and yet another pub described by the Local Authority as a Key Unlisted Building. Purchased by Marston's in 1900, it has been part of their estate ever since, though prior to this it was in the ownership of the Anstey Brewery known as Daniel Pettifer & Sons which dates back to at least 1846. It is a typical village pub of traditional character. Viewed from the front it consists of a snug to the right and a public bar to the left leading back into the former smoke room. At a raised level, behind the two front bars, are two small adjoining lounge areas accessible from both bars and effectively affording a link between them. To the rear is a paved yard furnished with picnic tables. Available real ales were Marston's Burton Ale, Pedigree and Help for Heroes.

On leaving I walked straight ahead downhill to the village centre traffic island where I turned left into Staddon Road. To my left, I soon passed the former Working Men's club which ceased trading in 2009 and is now the Sapori Italian Restaurant & Bar, which has no real ale. Directly opposite the Sapori are homes built on the former site of the aforementioned Palmer Boot & Shoe factory adjacent to my next venue.

The Sports Bar Anstey started trading in 2011 in the refurbished premises formerly occupied by the Anstey Conservative Club, and once run by Bill & Nancy Thorne whose young son Willie learned the basics of snooker on the club's table before becoming the popular, follicly challenged and moustachioed, snooker player and commentator. As its name suggests, the emphasis here is on sport with no less than five large screen televisions showing a varied of live sports in full HD with surround sound. The public bar is to the rear and has two pool tables and a darts board. To the front of house is a comfy lounge bar that, for obvious reasons, is known as the quiet room. The 1st floor table skittles room doubles as a function room with direct egress to a sheltered rooftop smoking terrace

and an uncovered sun terrace. The one available real ale was Bass.

From The Sports Bar I retraced my steps back to the traffic island where The Coach & Horses was directly opposite. Originally built as an hotel, its imposing external presence overlooks the hub of the village. A major interior refurbishment in 1991 involved the removal of some internal walls to create a more up-to-date open-plan environment whilst, at the same time, managing to retain a traditional pub ambience. The premises now consists of a large L-shaped public bar with raised areas at both ends; one end contains a pool table and fixed seating, whilst the other end connects to the lounge bar with its raised area dedicated to darts. Adjacent to the car park entrance is a paved patio with picnic tables and timber planters, all partially sheltered by means of a large retractable awning. This Marston's house had Burton Bitter & Pedigree and Wychwood Hobgoblin available.

The bus stop to begin my journey home was just outside to the left of the pub. Left of the bus stop a recent housing development is named Ned Ludd Close, ensuring the machine-wrecker's name is remembered in perpetuity.

Cheers,

Jim Reay

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