

JIM'S JAUNT

Thornton, Markfield & Field Head

by Jim Reay

Boarding at St Margaret's Bus Station (Stand SJ 5) I caught the 11.57 Arriva 26 destined for Coalville and alighted in Thornton at 12.30 next to The Reservoir pub. With two pubs and one club to visit in Thornton before moving on, and as the club didn't open until 14.00 this gave me ample time for a walk down Reservoir Road, which the bus had just passed, before popping into my first venue. After walking for a furlong I found myself outside Thornton Nurseries (a.k.a. The Fuchsia Centre). Set in the ground in front of the garden centre is a large sheave wheel from the pithead winding tower of Bagworth Colliery. The proprietor of the nurseries told me that he'd rescued the wheel that was just laying around when the colliery closed as it has special significance for him. When his grandfather suffered a broken neck in a mining accident, he was elevated up the mineshaft to the surface by this very wheel and vowed that his grandson would never work down the mines. Just short of a hundred yards further down Reservoir Road is the bridge over the reservoir overflow, the genesis of Rothley Brook. Built in 1854, the reservoir hasn't been used as a source of drinking water since 1982 and in 1997

*The genesis of
Rothley Brook*



*Pit wheel from
Bagworth Colliery*



The Reservoir Inn, Thornton

Severn Trent Water granted public access to the reservoir and surrounding land for recreational purposes. Popular with walkers, anglers and bird watchers, this refuge for a diversity of wildlife was designated as a Local Wildlife Site in 2005.

Thornton is within the civil parish of Bagworth and Thornton, two villages historically linked from at least as far back as the 1086 Domesday Book. Although Thornton itself is unrecorded in the Great Survey, Bagworth is listed as the Manor of Bageworde, which doubtless included Thornton as the two have always been in the same parish. Thornton goes back well over a thousand years with a name generally thought to be of Saxon origin. Thorns still grow in great abundance, hence the "Town of Thorns". Agriculture was the mainstay occupation until the late 19th and early 20th centuries heralded the arrival of coal mines in the area necessitating the building of new houses to accommodate the influx of colliers and their families. Prior to this, almost all of the dwellings in the village were owned by the Countess of Warwick before being sold at a Grand Auction in about 1919. Since then, many privately owned houses have been built, superfluous farmhouses turned into family homes and council houses sold to sitting tenants, as were colliery houses when many pits in the area were finally closed in the 1980's. As with many villages these days, Thornton could be described as a dormitory settlement occupied, for the most part, by commuters.

The Reservoir Inn reopened its doors after a full refurbishment in December 2013 and was evidently so renamed because of the reservoir's proximity. During its existence the pub has undergone several name changes. Originally it featured for over a century in the village as The Bull's Head. Over recent years it was enlarged and the name was changed to The Tipsy Fisherman, probably in homage to anglers frequenting the pub following a good day's sport and then, when Steam'n' Billy acquired the pub, it was renamed The Steam Trumpet commemorating an accident that occurred locally on the Leicester and Swannington Railway in 1833 when, on almost its first run, a steam locomotive named Samson collided with a

horse & cart on a level crossing outside the Stag & Castle Inn (Both the railway line and the pub have long since closed). The engine driver said the accident might have been avoided if he'd been able to attract the attention of the cart driver sooner, a remark that directly led to the invention of the steam engine whistle, or so-called steam trumpet. The pub consists of a front of house public bar with many original features including an old-fashioned kitchen range fuelled by a central open fire between two ovens, a lounge bar to the rear, a restaurant area to one side and two more dining rooms situated in the rear extension. Adjacent to the car park is a partially covered paved patio with picnic tables. Real Ales available were Steamin' Billy Bitter & Skydiver plus Charnwood By George.

Turning left out of The Reservoir Inn I very soon walked past the still unopened Thornton Working Men's Club and continued for a short distance along Main Street to The Bricklayers Arms.

The Bricklayers' Arms has been in existence for many years and has traded as part of Everards estate since 1911. Reputed to have been kept by members of the Dilks family since the early 1600's, the last Dilks landlord was Arthur Dilks, who was born at the pub and retired soon after his 65th birthday in 1982. The pub was so called because besides being licensed victuallers the Dilks family traded as builders. It is understood that their employees were paid, and in all probability some spent, their wages in the pub. There is a central Public Bar with a snug like annex to one side and a Lounge Bar/Restaurant to the other. Floors of oak boards in the Snug and quarry tiles in the Public Bar plus exposed ceiling timbers and a fireplace set back in what appears to have once been an inglenook fireplace all enhance the old rural ambience. To the rear are plenty of picnic tables on a small concrete patio area and a large lawned garden with some



The Bricklayers Arms, Thornton



The Thornton (Thornton & District WMC)

children's play equipment. Patrons can gain access from the garden to a pathway that circumnavigates Thornton Reservoir. Real ales available were Everards Tiger, Sunchaser & Ascalon.

From The Bricklayers' Arms I retraced my steps back to the club.

Thornton & District Working Mens Club is situated in a former farmhouse but is believed to have originally convened at The Stag & Castle public house that existed in The Hollow near to the railway bridge between Thornton and Bagworth. If correct, the club has existed for quite some time as The Stag & Castle doesn't appear in any trade directory after 1896. To attract more customers, the club was refurbished in 2013 and by-named **The Thornton**. At this same

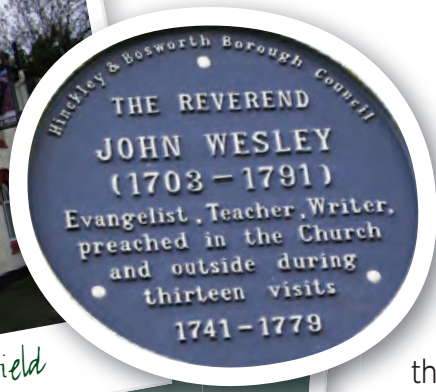
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The Bull's Head, Markfield



The Queen's Head, Markfield

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time, whilst retaining its loyal members, it extended a welcome to non-members and starting trading much like a pub. The premises consists of a small public bar with a pool table room annex and, to the other side of the front door, an enchanting homely snug type room located in the former farmhouse kitchen with genuine ceiling joists and a log burner set within an authentic inglenook fireplace. Towards the rear of the club is a concert room used for regular live entertainment, bingo and projecting live televised sport onto an enormous screen. Out back is an enclosed astroturf garden with picnic tables and children's play equipment. Everards Tiger and Wells Bombardier were on offer.

Leaving the club, I returned to The Bricklayer Arms and turned right across the pub car park and through the gate bearing a sign saying "Access to Reservoir Walk for Patrons only". I followed the sward path down to the reservoir and turned left along the track that circumnavigates Thornton Reservoir. After the track turned right taking the bridge over Thornton Brook, which is one of the two principle feeds into the reservoir, I soon encountered a yellow way-marker post (YWP) indicating the way to my left along The Leicestershire Round. The footpath was straight on, keeping the hedgerow to my left for a short while until reaching a pair of YWP where the route carried on in the same direction but transferring to the other side of the hedgerow. The Leicestershire Round continued more or less in a straight line and was easily followed, courtesy of YWP and well-trodden. It took me through woods, open grassland and over Carr Brook, the other principle feed into the reservoir, until it passed under

a bridge carrying the M1 Motorway. Staying on the lane leading from the M1 and disregarding all footpaths veering off each side I eventually emerged in Forest Road, Markfield, where The Bull's Head was to my immediate left.

Markfield dates back to at least Anglo-Saxon times when the village was known as Mercenfeld, a name still quaintly used for the village's primary school. Mentioned in the Domesday Book as Merchenefeld, the settlement developed as a small hillside village along Main Street and around the Parish Church. During 17th and early 18th centuries, the inhabitants were mainly employed in agricultural work, along with a wide range of tradesmen working within the community. The 19th century heralded a gradual change in the village as it expanded to meet the needs of successive forms of industrial employment, including framework knitting, mining and quarrying. Markfield's Hill Hole Quarry was the source of very old and very hard volcanic rock called Markfieldite but in common with Thornton, Markfield is largely now a commuter village.

The Bull's Head is an early 19th century public house that is now reputedly the oldest enduring pub in the village. It's a traditional wet trade driven two roomed locals' hostelry, which plays regular host to two darts teams, two pool teams and a domino team plus occasional poker nights. This Marston's house consists of a public bar with a pool table and a smaller intimate lounge bar. Locals' lore suggests that in long bygone days a milking parlour occupied what is now the lounge bar whilst a small cottage was situated at the other end of the pub leaving just a very small licensed premise in-between the two. Out the back is a large partially covered tarmac courtyard furnished with picnic tables. Pedigree was the single real ale.

From The Bull's Head, I went straight over the road and walked up Church Drive to Markfield's Parish Church of Saint Michael & All Angels. A blue plaque affixed to a cottage adjacent to the church affirms Markfield's close links with the Methodist movement, verifying that its founder, John Wesley, paid thirteen visits here between the years 1741-1779. He was permitted to preach within the parish church, but when his congregations became too large to be confined on the pews, he took to preaching on the village green immediately outside the church. Carrying straight on from the Village Green I veered slightly right and took the footpath through Hill Hole Quarry Nature Reserve before turning right at the YWP to walk around the edge of the allotments. I turned left when the path emerged on Upland Drive, continued to the end of the road and turned left again for a short distance along Main Street, at the end of which the Queen's Head was just to my left on Ashby Road.





The Fieldhead Hotel



Coach & Horses, Field Head

The Queen's Head is an archetypal village locals' watering hole, another Marston's house reliant solely on wet trade. Entering the front door took me directly into the traditional public bar with its exposed black ceiling timbers and quarry tile floor. To my left was an area, with no servery, more akin to a lounge bar that, in turn, had a snug annex. To the rear was a partially covered and heated block-paved courtyard with picnic tables and a shelter dedicated to smokers' needs. Further picnic tables adorned the large lawned garden that lay beyond. Marston's Burton Bitter & Pedigree were on offer.

Destined now for Fieldhead, I turned right out of The Queen's Head and carried on along Leicester Road until the carriageway veered left towards a large traffic island but I stayed on the causeway which continued straight ahead, crossing Launde Road and straight on for about 150yards to The Coach & Horses.

The Coach & Horses is in the district of Fieldhead, a small settlement adjoining Markfield but actually within the district of, and administered by, Groby Parish Council. This former traditional coaching inn has traded since about 1842 and has been part of Everards estate since 1925. The pub consists of a large central public bar off which is a larger than average snug, with a darts board. Adjoining the public bar is a lounge bar that leads in turn to a sector that is now occupied by a restaurant with two dining rooms adjacent to the kitchen. Prior to conversion into a restaurant this area was the former skittles long alley that for many years previously existed as a small shoe factory. Quarry tile floors and exposed woodworm ravished ceiling beams and joists enhance the old world ambience. The large back garden has a heated smokers' shelter, tarmac and lawn areas furnished with picnic tables and children's play equipment. Available real ales were Everards Beacon, Tiger, Sunchaser and Original plus St.Austell HSD and a Real Cider (Thatcher's Heritage).

From The Coach & Horses I crossed over the dual carriageway via the pelican crossing, taking note of the timber bus shelter to my right from where I was to start my journey home. I turned left towards The Fieldhead Hotel, a short distance ahead.

The Fieldhead Hotel was originally built as a

farmhouse and out buildings in around 1672. Although identified with the settlement of Field Head, paradoxically it isn't actually in Field Head but within the parish boundary of Newtown Linford. During more recent times it has been extensively renovated and extended to become a hotel owned by Green King. In keeping with the original buildings the extended parts are aesthetically constructed of local materials in the form of Mountsorrel granite walls and Swithland slate roofs. The main bar is a very large room off which are half-a-dozen or so small dining rooms situated in the original farmhouse thus oozing with character. A function room, "The Charnwood Suite", is set in what was originally the cowshed and the beer cellar inhabits the former stables. Outside to the left is a paved courtyard with timber garden furniture. Real ales available were Greene King IPA & Field Head (House Beer) and Purity Pure UBU.

Leaving The Fieldhead Hotel I retraced my steps back to the aforementioned timber bus shelter to start my journey home after a really pleasant day out. Connected by a ramble along a section of the Leicester Round, the settlements I'd visited shared seven venues, having between them fifteen different real ales.

Cheers,

Jim Reay

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