

JIM'S JAUNT

Glenfield & Groby

by Jim Reay

Commencing at St. Margaret's Bus Station (Bay 7), this excursion found me boarding the 11.13 Roberts Bus 120 and alighting at the first stop in Gynsill Lane, just after turning right at the first roundabout past County Hall. There are many other buses to Glenfield but only this particular one stops at a convenient spot for a pleasant short stroll through a field to the rear entrance of The Gynsills, my first venue. From the bus stop I crossed the road into Stella Way, almost opposite, then turned immediately right through a timber kissing gate before following the well-trod path straight across a grass field to a squeeze stile in the wooden fence and The Gynsills was just a short distance to my left across the lawn.

The name **Glenfield** is conceivably derived from a literal meaning of "clean open lands" formed by clearing an extensive area of the previously indigenous Royal Hunting Forest. The locality has an exceedingly long continuous history of human habitation. Evidence of Neolithic man has been found hereabouts dating from between 3000 & 2000 BC. Traces have been found of a small Bronze-Age settlement dating to about 800 BC. An archaeological evaluation, undertaken prior to a relatively recent building development, unearthed an assemblage of Romano-British pottery, initial evaluation of which suggested a period of occupation within the 1st & 2nd centuries AD. It is likely that the roots of the contemporary village first developed as a nucleated Saxon settlement, around a church and manor house, although authenticated records are only traceable back to the 8th century AD. The village featured as *Clanefelde* in the Domesday book of 1086, at which time it was an agricultural settlement in the ownership of William the Conqueror. The 19th century enclosure act profoundly transformed the local landscape and the economic and social structure of the village. During the period 1765-95, there were only five domestic knitting frames



The Gynsills, Glenfield



The Glenfield tunnel

within the village, but following the enclosure act framework knitting became a significant livelihood so by 1844 the village accommodated no less than fifty frames. In 1901 permission was obtained for the ancient Glenfield parish to absorb Glenfield Frith to create Glenfields Civil Parish, but the pluralising "s" is seldom used these days. Glenfield now effectively appears to be a conurbation of the City of Leicester and in the 1950s that was suggested as part of boundary changes but the villagers united to resist the proposal and Glenfield remains a village. These days it is probably best known as the home of County Hall (office of Leicestershire County Council) and Glenfield Hospital although the latter is actually situated just within the city limits.

The Gynsills is a typical Fayre & Square pub restaurant, behind which a Premier Inn has been erected as an extension to this former large dwelling. The house was, for many years, home to the Ellis family who were successful farmers prior to branching out into industry and commerce becoming one of the most important Leicestershire families of the 19th and 20th centuries. Their involvement in the extraction industries including lime, slate, coal and granite was greatly facilitated, transport-wise, by combining with family friend, George Stephenson and his son Robert to engineer the Glenfield Tunnel on the Leicester & Swannington

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railway line in 1832. Among its numbers the family included writers, borough and local councillors, and three Members of Parliament. The Ellis's were philanthropists committed to their work in support of social welfare, charities and the temperance movement originating from their strong adherence to Quaker beliefs. Quite ironic that their home is now a licensed premises! Another eminent occupant of The Gynsills was William Keay (President of Leicester Literary and Philosophical society 1927-28). After developing his own civil engineering partnership he broadened his work into architecture gaining Fellowship of the Royal Institution of British Architects. Together with his private practice, Keay was for many years the County Architect for Leicestershire County Council, conducting his municipal business from an office he rented from the Council in the historic medieval Castle House adjacent to Leicester Castle. All of The Gynsills ground floor internal walls have been removed, although with a little imagination, it's clear to see the original room layout from the positioning of support pillars and ceiling beams. A relatively new construction encompassed within the pub has really hefty exposed black roof trusses and purlins providing architectural consistency with the old house. Outside, a paved patio and large lawned garden are furnished with picnic tables. Available real ales were Everards Tiger & Greene King IPA.

I left The Gynsills via the front driveway turning left at the top of the drive, then just before reaching County Hall, turned right down a short paved footpath, then left to and through the subway running beneath the A50 dual carriageway. Emerging from the subway, I turned right, signposted Ratby, then after about 100 yards turned left onto a jitty signposted public footpath. The jitty was sandwiched between back gardens and continued for quite a way before descending three flights of concrete stairs to the trackbed of the world's third ever steam railway. Clearly visible to my left was a portal set in the bricked-up opening of the Leicester & Swannington railway tunnel, once the longest railway tunnel in the world at 1 mile 36 yards. To my right, built on the site of the demolished railway station, was a housing development known as Stephenson Court, in deference to the industrious family of civil engineers. Glenfield Railway Station used to be known locally as the Round House, and was the first station after leaving Leicester West Bridge. Passenger trains ceased to run on this line as early as 1928, however the station wasn't demolished until 1965 and coal and oil traffic



The Railway, Glenfield



The Nags Head, Glenfield

continued until 1966. Beyond Stephenson Court the trackbed is now a cycle route and footpath known as the Glenfield to Ratby Ivanhoe Trail. From the railway cutting, I continued along the footpath very soon emerging into Loxley Road turning right for a short distance, first right into Newquay Drive then almost immediately left down a jitty at the end of which The Railway pub was opposite me across Station Road.

The Railway was, unsurprisingly, in close proximity to the Glenfield Railway Station. Coinciding with the development of the Leicester & Swannington railway line, an entrepreneur named William Sherwin bought up strategically placed locations along the line as sites on which booking offices could be built. These booking offices were essentially double fronted pubs (like this one) with a ticket office to the left and a bar to the right. It's just conceivable that this pub could have originated as one of William Sherwin's booking offices but regrettably, I've found no evidence to confirm or refute this supposition. In 1835 the victualler of The Railway Inn was a John Reid, succeeded by a certain John Grant, recorded as publican in the 1841 census. For much of his working life Grant was a miller in Glenfield although in the early 1820s he was publican at the neighbouring Griffin Inn. The front door on the left leads to a utilitarian contemporarily furnished



The Forge Inn inset: (left) 'Bring Back Jugs' campaign board and the pub's old griffin emblem

public bar, whilst the front door on the right takes one into the lounge bar with a cosy snug type area to the left and an extended dining area with a conservatory to the rear at a lower level. Available real ales were Sharp's Doom Bar, Timothy Taylor Landlord, Marston's Draught Bass, Robinson's Trooper, Black Sheep Special Ale and Greene King Morland Old Speckled Hen.

I turned right out of The Railway, past The Glenfield Social Club, which doesn't sell real ale, and very soon arrived at The Nags Head.

The Nags Head has a Mock Tudor external appearance, but upon much closer inspection, this can be seen to mask an authentic original timber framed construction. In 1896 The Nags Head was purchased by Everards Brewery and has remained part of their estate ever since. The traditional public bar has a rustic ambience enhanced by exposed ceiling beams & joists, bead & butt timber matchboard cladding from floor to dado level and part stone tiled and part timber floors. Two adjoining rooms to the rear form a lounge bar/dining room given an olde-worlde feel with really chunky realistic pseudo ceiling beams. The large lawned back garden is furnished with picnic tables. Card carrying CAMRA members get a 15p per pint discount on real ales which were Everards Beacon, Tiger, & Original plus St. Austell Tribute, together with Scrumpy Wasp Hibernated cider.

Turning right out of The Nags Head, and bearing right at the traffic roundabout, The Forge Inn was soon within view straight ahead.

The Forge Inn is accessed via the rear car park entrance, but in getting there I had to pass the disused front door, above which, etched into the

masonry, there is the image of a griffin, revealing the pub's previous name, The Griffin, purchased by Everards Brewery in 1888. The building's brickwork construction on top of a granite base is suggestive of the re-use of the foundations of an earlier timber framed building. A few years ago now, this pub, along with the landlord's other pub, The Rutland & Derby in Leicester, in order to promote real ale in traditional dimpled glass mugs, launched a "Bring Back Jugs" campaign which saw The Forge rise to fame, featuring on BBC1's East Midlands evening news. Internally, the pub has an open plan milieu with the earliest established part to the front having a public bar ambience with beamed ceilings and uncovered masonry tiled and oak floors whilst to rear is an extended dining area on two raised levels. Outside, paved and timber decked patios feature picnic tables, along with a large pergola and a smokers' shelter. St. Austell Tribute, Young's Winter Warmer, Everards Tiger & Original were available along with Henry Weston's Family Reserve cider.

Leaving The Forge, I turned right into Barrows Lane along an elevated causeway, following the sign-posted public footpath to Groby. This short lane soon bridged Rothley Brook and crossed an intersection with the Ivanhoe Trial. At the end of the lane I followed the footpath through a handgate (not the farmgate) into the fields and straight on, keeping the hedgerow close to my right hand side. Walking through the second field the traffic noise gradually grew louder as I approached the footbridge over the A46 Western Bypass. Immediately over the footbridge I crossed Sacheverell Way and through the kissing gate into Stamford Memorial Park. The footpath

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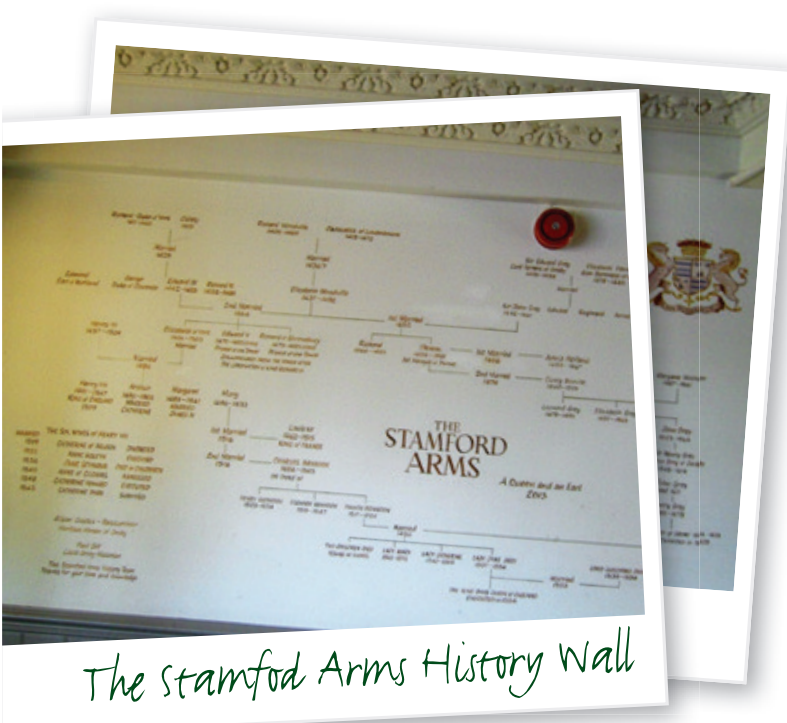
signposted a course circumnavigating the park but I took the much shorter route (relative bearing of 11 o'clock) across the grass, to the furthest point of the field. Emerging between houses on Sycamore Drive, the footpath crossed straight over the road and through a wooden kissing gate into another park with no name displayed. Officially it's Sycamore Drive Amenity Area but, owing to its distinct shape, "Egg-timer Park" would be a more imaginative name. I walked straight on keeping close to the hedgerow on my right then, after passing through the narrow part of the field, I continued in a straight line but now I kept close to the hedgerow on my left-hand side until passing down a short jitty into the top end of Meadow Court Road. I then turned left along another short jitty and continued straight on to the top of Pymm Ley Close, turned right then almost immediately left into Rookery Lane, at the top end of which The Stamford Arms was unmissable to my right hand side.

Groby village, from its earliest beginnings, was sustained by agriculture and mineral extraction of principally local granite and slate. Unable to compete with lighter and cheaper Welsh slate transported in by rail, the last slate quarry closed in 1908. "Grobo" was a Saxon word derived from Proto-Germanic language meaning pit or mine, and the suffix "by" was a Saxon word derived from Old Norse language meaning a farmstead or settlement. Merging the two morphemes to give Groboby its Saxon origins seem clear. Since its first written recording in the Domesday Book, the spelling of the village name has seen

several minor variations with a number of early documents opting for Grooby. Although the correct pronunciation is indeed still Grooby, the second "o" seems to have disappeared with the passage of time. Evidenced by the Roman pottery unearthed hereabouts, it is also reasonable to assume that the Romans had a settlement here.

The estate was held by the Ferrers family until 1445 when it passed to the Grey family who owned it for many centuries. In 1553 Lady Jane Grey reigned for nine days as the Queen of England. Another royal connection with Groby was Elizabeth Woodville who was Queen consort of England as the spouse of King Edward IV from 1464 until his death in 1483. A particularly well-known local landmark (or watermark?) is Groby Pool, reputedly the largest natural expanse of open water in Leicestershire. There is considerable debate as to its origin and whether it was created naturally or artificially. One theory is that it dates back to Roman times as a clay pit for Roman pottery, though, as it didn't get a mention in the Domesday Book, it is rational to assume that it was non-existent in 1086. There is some evidence to suggest its creation by the damming of Slate Brook in the 12th century by the monks of Leicester Abbey and it was certainly established by the date of its earliest recorded reference in 1297. Whatever the truth, research into the lake sediments has confirmed it is not ancient.

The Stamford Arms is a Grade II listed and built as a dwelling house in the late 18th century. The house was the Everard family home until 1921 when it became part of the Everards pub estate. Adaptations to the original red brick house included a couple of adjacent stone cottages that became the pub's skittles long alley. Earlier alterations saw the building extend upwards creating a third storey with dormer windows. Major refurbishment in 2013 saw the skittle alley incorporated into a substantial restaurant extension. The pub's interior is essentially open plan but in essence can still be defined as the three customarily diverse environments one expects in a pub, with public bar and lounge bar elements set in the old house region alongside the aforementioned dining area. Of particular note is the history wall where, with the local history society's help, family trees have been drawn on the wall tracing back the history of Groby and The Stamford Arms. Conspicuously featured are the Grey family who, in succession, inherited the earldom of Stamford (hence the pub's name) and the Grey family coat of arms adorning the pub



The Stamford Arms History Wall