



Murray Bacon

Reflections on the local pubs and some characters who used to frequent them



Jean and Murray

My earliest memories of the “local pubs” are the Ferry in the early 1980s. Although we lived in Balderton we would visit Muskham regularly, particularly on Sunday for lunch, with our two young children.

Anne and Mario were then “mien hosts”. Anne was a lovely lady, although prone to the occasional fiery outburst, especially after a couple of brandies. Mario was a charming Polish man who came to the U.K., possibly as a refugee, during or just after WWII. He was an excellent cook, particularly of bigos, a hearty Polish stew.

I recall my first visit after we moved to Muskham in 1987. Anne asked what I was doing there on a Friday and I explained we had moved to the village. She said “right”, lifted the flaps on the bar and proceeded to march me round everyone in the pub, a bit embarrassing but a great ice-breaker.

Characters I remember from those times include Sid Thurman, who was the church organist. Sadly, as his arthritis took hold, he was somewhat in the “Les Dawson” style. He would cycle to the pub virtually every day from his home in South Muskham, arrive at pretty much the same time each day and sit on his favourite bar chair which became known as “Sid’s

chair” and was not to be occupied when it was close to his arrival time.

Alan Talbot was of course a well-known character, one of three brothers and uncle of builder Martin. He gave the impression of being somewhat curmudgeonly, but deep down was a kindhearted soul and loyal villager. He invariably drank the same amount each night, unless of course someone else paid! In his later years, he was the village handyman and the seat, by the Ferry landing stage is dedicated to him.

After Anne and Mario left, the Ferry had a series of unsuitable tenants and the pub fell into something of a decline. This trend was arrested when John and Judy took over, to be ably followed by Howard and Liz and of course by the current incumbents, Keith and Sarah, who have done so much for the community in the current crisis.

In those early years, pub games were very popular and all three village pubs - the Ferry, Crown and Lord Nelson - had active teams in darts, dominoes and skittles, as did the Crown at Bathley. The skittles matches were on the Ferry Car Park, with full lighting effects.

During the more recent years another character who appeared on the scene was John “The Card” Lewell, a rather loud ‘Alf Garnett’ character from the South of England with little regard for political correctness. I recall him commenting when one of his daughters married he did not believe in mixed marriages which rather puzzled me, until he explained his son-in-law was an Arsenal fan and John was a Spurs fanatic.

Now, Bob Lorimer was a man who I have fond memories of. He was a slightly built man who was caretaker (or should I say site-manager) at the local school for some years and whose wife I had the pleasure of working with at the Nat West Bank, Newark. He was a generous spirited and kind guy who was always happy to help you. I think of him as a real ‘diamond’ geezer, usually with the suffix ‘white’ after it, as in Diamond White. Cheers Bob - we miss you!!

Another local event worthy of mention was Timmy Pollard’s annual darts tournament, a hugely popular event with all four pubs for many years. Tim, brother of auto engineer John, went round all the local pubs, and would collect bets from the regulars and deliver to the Bookies on their behalf. Amazingly, Tim is ‘Teetotal’!!

North Muskham *capturing memories*

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During the quieter, even 'doldrum', years of the Ferry some people migrated down to the "Nelly", the Lord Nelson, an establishment run by Minnie Pratt and her daughter Jean. Minnie had previously kept the Crown with her late husband George. Minnie was diminutive in stature but kept an orderly house and was loved and respected by all her regulars. Lock-ins were not unknown, although Minnie would often whisper that we would have to wait until the "Aliens" had gone before we could have just one more - which often turned into several. Jean, her daughter, was a lovely lady who I gather was much sought after in her youth. She was kind and generous to a fault. She liked the occasional drink or two, after which her flip flops, which she habitually wore, could become a little awkward to walk in. She sadly left us long before her time. Minnie and Jean were followed by Minnie's son George and his wife Pauline, who ran the pub successfully for many years, after which the place underwent several reincarnations, before finally becoming the Ashiana we know today.

One character who I recall from those days was Alan Rodgers, nicknamed "Good boy" by Jean, he would sit at the corner of the bar fag in one hand and pint in the other and often you were never quite sure if either would actually make it to his mouth. How he got home was one of nature's mysteries.

There were a few regular dominoes players including Madge Lambert and George Gregorick, accompanied by Jean and Anne, who took the game very seriously despite only playing for pennies. It was not unknown for Madge to slip a four on the five end and hope no one would notice, not to mention the bottle of scotch under the table used to discreetly top up the lemonade purchased from the bar.

Any recollections of Muskham locals would not be complete without a mention of the Thurston brothers. David, the youngest, often worked behind the bar at the Ferry, affectionately known as "Catweazle". I leave you to guess why. He was a very intelligent young man, an excellent fisherman but sadly did not take care of himself as he should and passed away far too young.

His brother Peter was one of the loveliest guys I ever met. He was an imposing looking man with his safari jacket and beard but the proverbial gentle giant; another sad loss. Last, but by no means least, was Mick. He was not as high profile as his brothers, but 'quietly' well known, especially his unrequited "romance" with Jean at the Nelly. He was well looked after

during his last years by 3 local ladies at home. I gather he referred to them as the 3 witches (a Macbeth reference) but nothing could have been further from the truth.

I can only end by reflecting on many happy times with the locals and hope there are still a few more to come. In any case, I need to finish now because Jean and I have still not completed today's Telegraph Crossword.

Murray Bacon

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