

Not Taken for Granted

Part Six

Our series continues on pubs which seldom get a mention in our news-based magazine but whose consistent excellence deserves recognition.

The *Boot at Dullingham* nearly joined the sad roll call of closed pubs. Back in 2000 owners Greene King declared it not viable (see Pub News!) and applied for consent to convert it into a house. A strong local campaign convinced East Cambs District Council to refuse the application and local couple Kevin and Dianne McDonnell bought the pub, reopening in August 2001. Four years later it was our Branch Pub of the Year and after another four years Kevin and Dianne decided to retire (though they remain regular visitors)

Rob and Lesley, the licensees for the last 18 months, had both known Kevin and Dianne and it was an off the cuff conversation between them at a village barbecue that led to them picking up the baton. Rob, who had lived in the village 14 years, had always fancied running a pub though Lesley confesses she'd never given it a thought. However, her previous job as a Housing Officer equipped her with the skills for dealing with the wide variety of characters you get in a pub. Rob meanwhile continues to run his car body repair business, "relaxing" behind the bar at night. In these days of doom and gloom in the pub trade, it's great to hear that their trade is booming, particularly over the last six months. In fact, when I visited they'd just had their best weekend ever. Their formula for success isn't a complex one – great beer in convivial surroundings. Adnams Bitter is permanent with another Adnams ale usually



alongside. The third pump features a changing guest which could be anything (Cotleigh Golden Seahawk on my visit). Beer sales are so healthy that a fourth pump is in the offing. A couple of beers are normally in the cellar waiting to go on and Rob is happy to serve from these barrels – in fact some customers won't drink anything else! Rob has already run a couple of beer festivals and the next one is in September.

Food is served lunchtime only and is there to accompany your drink – simple good value fare like Ploughman's Lunch, Baked Spuds and Ham, Egg & Chips.

Weekday evenings are usually busy catering for the three darts teams, three crib teams and the petanque outfit who all use the pub. We're in the heart of horse-racing country here so the TV is usually tuned to a race meeting somewhere and there's a bookie on call. A marquee has recently been erected in the garden which has expanded the scope for regular live music. In a nutshell, there's always something going on here.

Rob and Lesley are clearly very customer-focused which is no doubt the secret of their success. The days when you could just open the pub door and the customers would flood in are long gone. An example of their responsiveness is the recent ordering of a brazier so that customers can keep warm (and toast marshmallows) when standing outside.

All more evidence that no pub is unviable if it's in the right hands. Are you listening, Greene King?