Common Ground

# particular news

Issue number two Winter /Spring 2003/4

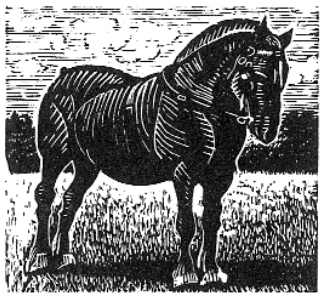
## Horses for Courses

We are alone in the world in having so many indigenous horses in such a small space. The mountains and moorland ponies have evolved separately interacting with their specific habitats over long periods of time, making them able to cope with fullest extremes of weather, to thrive on poorer grasses, and to remain strong and sure footed in hilly and difficult terain. The Exmoor is thought to have been here since the Old Stone Age, the Dartmoor, the New Forest, the Dales and Fells ponies of the north Pennines have ancient roots. But the Cushendale, Devonshire Pack Horse, Goonhilly (Cornwall), Lincolnshire Trotter, Lincolnshire Fen and Longmynd pony are all extinct. We also have big working horses - the Cleveland Bay, the Suffolk Punch, the Shire, the Hackney for driving, and for racing and riding - the English Thoroughbred. Over the centuries farmers and traders have selectively bred varieties of horses, cattle, sheep and pigs to make the best of local conditions and achieve the work of the area and time.

There is growing use of heavy horses in woodland and forestry work, they are more manoeuvrable and damage the ground far less than machinery. The Exmoor (with its hard mouth) is in demand for conservation grazing.

**Suffolk Punch**

This horse almost died out in the 1960s, its job pulling the plough having been taken over by the tractor. By 1989 there were just 75 mares with 40 foals being registered a year and the Rare Breeds Survival



SUFFOLK PUNCH

*Illustration by Colin Kennedy*

Trust still regards the situation as critical. It is immediately recognisable with shortish legs, huge quarters and a big barrel of a body. Close breeding maintains one of seven shades of chestnut with little hair around the fetlocks, a height of 16 - 17 hh and weight up to a tonne. In the 16th century there were horses fitting this description, and all current Suffolks have a common ancestor in Crisp's Horse of Ufford (Orford), a stallion born in 1768. The only stud is based in Hollesley Bay Prison in Suffolk.

**Horse Fairs**

When the fastest way to travel was by horse, and the majority of movement of people and goods as well as much of what happened in fields and battlefields, relied upon horse power. There were millions of horses in England. Needless to say there were also many markets: horse fairs would deal in work horses, carriage horses, fine ponies, 'soldiers', some attracting buyers from far and wide in Europe such as to the great fair at Howden in Lincolnshire.

Seeing the keen eye of a man who knows his horses and the rapid exchange of handshake and cash reminds one of life beyond adverts and credit cards. A few horse fairs persist and they are very particular. Early June sees a transformation in Appleby-in-Westmoreland which hosts our greatest one day gathering of Romanies - lasting at least a week. Appleby Horse Fair persists despite attempted closure in 1965.

Since 1685 (James II charter) every kind of vehicle, from the traditional vardo (Readings, Burtons and Bowtops) to the cut-glass caravan, has camped on Fair Hill. The river Eden becomes the magnet for washing and swimming of horses which are later run, driven or ridden, often at a fair pace, through the town. The sound of fast moving horses and jostling people takes over from mechanical sound. All manner of dealing and socialising, entertaining and fortune telling, bargaining for glass and china, bright buckets, harness and saddles goes on through the day, which ends with trotting races in the meadow. Many ponies, especially black and white, demonstrate their paces. Robust and showy, they are used for drawing sulkies, carts and loads, riding and selling as well as bringing pride to their owners.

Please send us your stories and observations of indigenous horses and horse fairs, cattle, sheep, pigs and dogs across England.

# Beer to-day ... gone tomorrow ... ?

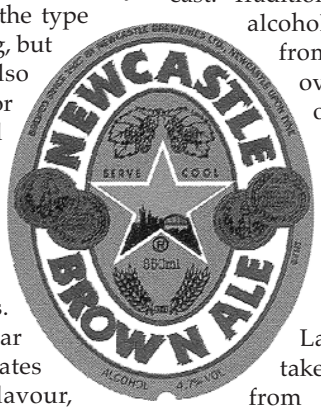

Around 5,000 years ago, somewhere between the towns that we now know as Baghdad and Basra, someone stumbled across the discovery that if you steeped barley in water so the seed germinated and starch turned into sugar, heated it to keep it in that condition, added yeast and left the whole caboodle to ferment for a while, you ended up with a quite palatable drink. Beer in its basic form had arrived. It was probably already well established in England by 500 BC.

The received wisdom has always been that beer and ale are different things, ale being the original malted-barley based beverage glugged from time immemorial, and beer being a Saxon, Norse or Norman development brought about by the introduction of hops into the equation. This actually seems not to have been the case, and the terms "ale" and "beer" were tending pretty much towards synonymity even before the Norman conquest. Hops also seem to have been in use earlier than originally thought. If anything, there was a north/south dialect divide, with “beer” gravitating towards the Northumbrian kingdom and the mid lands, and “ale” sitting firmly in Wessex and the south.

Prior to the nineteenth century, places such as Derby, Dorchester, Windsor, Kingston and Nottingham all produced distinct beers. This diversity may have been down to the type of herb used for flavouring, but water quality was also significant. Ideal water for beer has high calcium and magnesium content, very high sulphate concentration, and low presence of sodium, bicarbonate, potassium and chloride elements. Calcium helps in sugar extraction and sulphates provide a drier flavour, enhancing bitterness. Burton - on - Trent’s water has a very high sulphate count, 638 parts per million, and has long been seen as possessing the best “liquor” - as water is known in the brewing trade - for beer. At its peak in the late 19th century Burton was home to thirty-one brewery companies employing over 8,000 workers and producing more than three million barrels of beer each year. Where water does not have Burton’s natural advantages, brewers regularly "Burtonise" it with chemical supplements.

As time went by beer became big business, but regional brews and the village brewer persisted, with "cuckoo ales" being produced for special celebrations, and buildings such as Maltings and Oasts testament to the process. Many smaller brewers are still closely associated with the place they operate from: Adnams of Southwold, Wadworths of Devizes and Arkells of Swindon. Some have been around for some time. Elgood and Son's of Wisbech have brewed in the same place since 1795 and are still a family concern.


Ronald Atkins in 1997 commented generally that English bitters (a slightly inappropriate 19th century word for beer) tend to be "sharper in the South-East; maltier in the South-West; sweeter in the Midlands, then becoming hoppier as you go north". Brown Ales, one of the oldest of indigenous beers, are particularly associated with the north-east. Traditionally these were a low alcohol mixer drink brewed from brown malt smoked over a fire of hornbeam or oak beech. But though Newcastle Brown has a special place in people's hearts, it is a quite different drink, stronger and not meant for mixing.




Lager drinking began to take its toll on English bitter from the 1960s, and the emergence of large corporate brewery and pub-owning chains lead to the widespread sale of a lesser product. In the early 1970s CAMRA, The Campaign for Real Ale, was established to fight declining standards and limited choice, and it is much to their credit that we once again have a wide array of "micro-breweries", producing up to 15,000 barrels a year of local varieties which are bringing colour and quality back to the village pub and off licence. These small scale operations lend themselves to the production of beers which take advantage of local resources and are aimed often exclusively at local markets. Jennings in Cumbria utilise water from a well near Cockermouth Castle. Abbey Ales in Bath offer popular beers to pubs within a twenty mile radius of the brewery. Hesket Newmarket brewery in Cumbria was saved by villagers, who raised £58,000 to keep it running. Now the 240 locals use "crowns" in payment for beer at the Crown inn, the local pub and centre of fundraising efforts.

Most breweries have a "tap", a nearby pub where its brews are first unleashed, but a number of small concerns have only one outlet. The Shore Hotel on the Isle of Man is the only place you will find the wares of the Old Laxey brewery and The Hawkins Arms in Zelah, Cornwall, is the sole outlet for the Doghouse Brewery of Redruth. There are also “brew pubs”. Some of these have a long and distinguished history. The oldest is reputed to be the Blue Anchor in Helston, Cornwall, with brewing activity traced back to the early 15th century.

In recent years, tax breaks have allowed such small enterprises to compete with the major corporations who hold the monopoly on manufacture, distribution and retail of beers. Unfortunately, 2003 saw the repeal of the statutory "beer orders", which, among other things, enabled tenant landlords of "tied" pubs (ie. leased from a pub company and subject to their conditions of tenancy) to introduce 'guest' beers other than those supplied by the owners. CAMRA fears that this could lever many small producers out of the market. At the moment, though, the number of micro-breweries continues healthily to grow: the 2004 edition of the Good Beer Guide lists thirty-four brand new breweries in England alone.

## TELL US ABOUT ...

**Warehouses**

**Weatherboarding**

**Wind-blown Trees**

**Wind Turbines**

**Wakes Weeks**

**Wharfs**

**Water Towers**

**Wayside Shrines**

**Wrestling**
**Cumberland and Westmoreland style**

Can you tell us anything about these, with experiences and examples?

# W is for ...

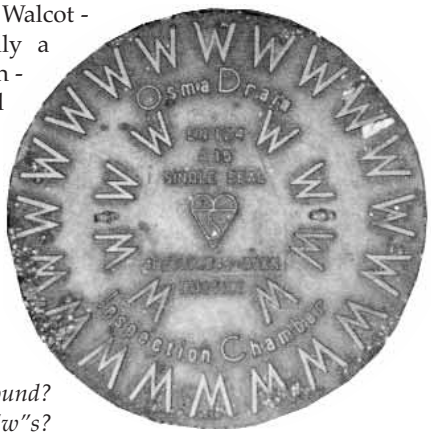
*What?*
*Where?*
*Why?*

*Who?*

### *Wales* ...

The Saxons came to Britain from continental Europe in the mid-5th century. They were originally mercenaries, hired by the native Celts whose government had been weakened by the fall of the Roman empire. Seeing much potential for settlement, the Saxons rebelled and by 600 had driven the Celtic Britons from their lands and established their own kingdoms. The Saxon word for the defeated natives was wealh, wilisc, a people foreign, alien to them. Eventually it came to have a more ominous sense of meaning 'slaves'. Many Celts escaped into the Western regions of Britain which became known to the Saxons as the land of the wilisc, the Welsh: Wales.

Unforgiving Celts such as the cleric Gildas wrote bitterly of the wholesale destruction of the Britons, from the safety of self-imposed exile on the continent. He might have exaggerated the conditions for political effect - do the instances of places called Walcot - the cot (cottage or shelter - especially a shelter for sheep) belonging to the wealh - or Walton and Wales in England suggests that the peoples lived together with some degree of tolerance? Or was it a sign of social stigma? Walford in Herefordshire is another example, as are Wallasey, Walmer and, in Suffolk, Walpole ...




*Where is this to be found?*
*Why so many "w"s?*

## As easy as A B C ...

I is for the **Isle of Avalon** which was a paradise of apple trees, also known as the **Isle of Apples**. In Celtic legend, King Arthur was taken to the **Isle of Avalon** to be healed from his fatal wound. Good knights went there after death to be restored to the mortal world.

It was an apple falling to the ground that inspired Sir Isaac Newton to formulate the Theory of Gravity circa 1665. A descendant of the original tree under which he sat still stands in the grounds of Woolsthorp Manor in Lincolnshire - a National Trust property that celebrates Apple Day.

Jerseyman Jean Poingdestre wrote in his Caesarea of 1682 *'There is hardly a house in the island, except in St Helier, that did not have an orchard of from one to two vergees'.*

Jane Austen the novelist in 1815 wrote to her sister Constance *'Good apple pies are a considerable part of our domestic happiness'.*

Kirghizia - a place that lies amongst the slopes of the Tien Shan or Heavenly Mountains, which forms the boundary between western China & the former Soviet Union. In this remote area shepherds used to tell stories of forests of wild fruit trees & it was in these forests that the domestic apple originated over 1500 years BC. Kirghizia was on the main trade route known as the Silk Road & consequently fruits & horticultural skills spread to Roman gardens & orchards.

*These extracts come from the Apple Alphabet produced by the Jersey Heritage Trust for a recent conference on cider. It shows clearly how words can be used just as effectively as images to create a visually compelling and informative poster. Our thanks to them.*

*See* **www.jerseyheritagetrust.org**

Ask Common Ground for a copy of the free "How to make an ABC" leaflet ...

# Diverse Celebrations - Winter and Spring 2003 / 4

**Tree Dressing Day** Country-wide. Established by Common Ground in 1990 as a countrywide, cross-cultural celebration of the mature trees in our streets, parks and gardens. The first trees to be decorated were three London planes at the junction of Shaftesbury Avenue and High Holborn in Covent Garden with 150 large numbers showing 'Every Tree Counts'. *First Full Weekend in December.*

**Stour Descent canoe race** from Sturminster Newton Mill in Dorset. *First Sunday in December.*

**Thorn Cutting Ceremony**, Glastonbury, Somerset. *Second Wednesday in December.*

**Winter Solstice** - the shortest day. *22nd December.*

**Christmas Eve** - **Tolling the Devil's Knell**, All Saints Parish Church, Dewsbury, W.Yorks; **T'owd 'oss**, Richmond, N.Yorks. *24th December.*

**Christmas Day** - **Christmas Day Race**, London. The Serpentine Swimming Club race in the 'Serp' as they have done since 1864. *25th December.*

**Boxing Day** - **Tar Barrels**, Allendale, Northumberland; **Point-to-Point**, annual race across the open New Forest; **Mummers**: A Mumming play is a ritual drama, probably of Saxon origin, where, in its simplest form, three characters act out the drama. Two heroes - usually including St George (as Prince or King George) - enact a battle in which one is killed, then a doctor resurrects the fallen hero. The actors should be disguised and submerged in their characters for the magic of light overcoming darkness to be effective. Other characters may have come back from the Crusades, such as the Slasher and the Turkish Knight. **Marshfield Mummers**, Marshfield, Gloucs, performed by the Paperboys; **City of Gloucester Mummers**, outside Gloucester Cathedral. *26th December.*

**World Fen Skating Championships**, Cambridgeshire. *January.*

**Twelfth Night - Baddeley Cake**, Drury Lane Theatre, London; **The Lions Part**, Borough Market, Bankside outside Globe Theatre, London; **Haxey Hood Game**, Isle of Axholme, Lincs. *4th January.*

**Plough Monday**. *First Monday after Twelfth Night.* Plough Plays performed throughout Lincolnshire; Molly Dancing occurs in East Anglia (Molly is an Essex word for Morris Dancing).

**Blessing of the Sea**, Margate, Kent - the Greek Orthodox Church organise this ceremony. *Early January.*

**Straw Bear Festival**, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire. *7-11 January.*

**Wassailing**, a custom in cider making districts to exhort the apple trees to fruit well the following season. Cider is poured onto the roots and shots fired through the branches to ward off evil spirits. Warm cider is drunk and toast soaked in cider is placed in the branches 'for the robin'. Wassailing songs are sung. Wassail is from the Anglo-Saxon wes hal, to be in good health. **Bodmin Wassail**, Bodmin, Cornwall. *Old Twelfth Night, 17th January.*

**Rhubarb Festival**, Wakefield. *End of January.*

**Chinese New Year** Year of the Monkey begins. *22 January.*

**Candlemas Day**, *2nd February.* The Feast of Purification of our Lady and the Feast of lights. Snowdrops start to bloom and are brought indoors to 'purify the house', and candles are lit. Snowdrops appear all over the country during February

**Shrove Tuesday, Pancake Day** - *41 days before Easter Sunday:* **Pancake Day Races** at Olney, Bucks, Winster, Derbys, Spitalfields, London. Lichfield, Staffs, has a Shrovetide Fair & Pancake Day Races; **Shrovetide Football** at Atherstone, Warwicks, Ashbourne, Derbys, Chester-le-Street & Sedgefield, Co. Durham; **Lentsherd** at Clovelly, N.Devon; **Cornish Hurling match**, St Columb Major, Cornwall.

**St Valentine's Day** *14 February.* **Fairs** were (are?) held at Kings Lynn & Wymondham, Norfolk.

**Al Hijra**, Islamic New Year. The Muslim calendar, based on the moon, alternates between months of 29 and 30 days. This results in the 354 day year shifting constantly on in a 30 year cycle. Its starting point remembered the flight from Mecca of Mohammed (622 CE). *22 February.*

**St Patrick's Day**. *17 March*

**Kiplingcotes Derby** - possibly the oldest horse race in the world, dating from 1119. *Third Thursday in March.*

**Oranges & Lemons Service**, St Clements Danes, Strand, London. *March.*

**First day of Spring**. *20th March*

**Lady Day**. *25th March:* traditional quarter day for rents and tenancies; Feast of the Annunciation.

For more information on these events, and others throughout the year,
along with contacts and web-links, visit the Calendar Customs pages at
**www.england-in-particular.info**

**Common Ground** campaigns on local distinctiveness and is compiling a book about the rich range of things that make England such a complex place.
The book **England in Particular** is to be published by **Hodder & Stoughton** in 2005.
In the mean time look at the web-site **www.england-in-particular.info** and please:
send us your local stories, legends, recipes, persistent family names, dialect words, customs old, new or reinvented, examples of good old and new buildings and farming practice anything you feel makes the place.

Particular News and www.england-in-particular.info are produced by
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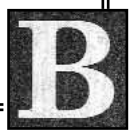
*Common Ground is recognised for playing a unique role in the arts and environmental fields, distinguished by the linking of nature with culture, focussing upon the positive investment people can make in their own localities, championing popular involvement, and by inspiring celebration as a starting point for action to improve the quality of our everyday places. We offer ideas, information and inspiration through publications and projects such as Apple Day, Field Days, Parish Maps, local Flora Britannica, Community Orchards and the campaign for Local Distinctiveness. We are grateful for the support of* **Defra**, *the* **Tedworth Trust**, *the* **Headley Trust**, *the* **Garfield Weston Foundation** *and the* **Lyndhurst Settlement**. Charity no. 326335.



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