

## That Firkin Cat.

No, she wasn't called Firkin so that you could open the front door and for the hell of it, yell at the top of your voice. 'Where's that Firkin Cat'.

She was called Firkin because she had a deep chocolatey sheen, almost but not quite malt-black; that ran right through her coat. That and she was the perfect colour match to a pint of Dogbolter beer from the one and only, Goose and Firkin brewpub at Borough.

Now a Firkin is nine gallons or seventy-two pints and our Firkin though diminutive was certainly a quart in a pint glass with enough energy to fill any barrel.

She used to amuse the kids for hours as they watched her playing with a feline friend from two doors down – taking turns to jump up into the buddleia tree - trying to catch the myriad of flutter-byes that were drawn to its honey scented, deep violet flowers.

Firkin always had a sense of propriety. She'd welcome you home as soon as you turned the corner; prowling along the pavement towards you, as if she had the monopoly on the street's decorum.

She loved to leave presents. The odd flutter-bye but mostly frogs from the bottom of the garden. One summer when we returned from holiday, she was our one cat Typhoid Mary – leaving us with the world's worst flea infestation. We think the dodgy alley cats had gate-crashed and joined her for - parents away - let's play, debauched staycation.

We had to have the whole house sprayed and poor Firkin or Fuzz as she was often called, had to suffer the indignancy of a trip to the vets, where after lots of poking and prodding, moaning and cajoling they changed the brand and upped the dose of her flea treatment.

Stuffy vet still had the audacity to charge me a fortune for the privilege. Even though they definitely promised that the original treatment would be good enough but which clearly hadn't worked.

Firkin was the one common thread for my kids as life moved on. Many things changed. Divorce, a new relationship; with someone allegedly allergic to cats. (Firkin soon sorted that out.). A house-move and the transfer to big school followed, but Fuzz was always there for them. She would jump up onto their laps for a cuddle, lifting her nose high, forcing them to tickle her under the chin, setting off a perfect purr.

As we all grew older so did Firkin. She was spoilt with prawn suppers and all the finery you could throw at the elder states-cat of the family. That all made her last days that much more comfortable. We had a raft of trips to the vets to try and help her through cat leukaemia, but it all was too much and she eventually passed on, to go and play in that great buddleia - flutter-bye forest in the sky.

My greatest surprise? I couldn't help but bawl my eyes out when she passed.

We had firkin cremated and then put her ashes into a pot in which we planted a wonderful Japanese acer tree. Over the years, it outgrew the pot, so we planted it in the garden.

In the autumn when the leaves turn, you can just catch a glimpse of chocolate in the red hues, and as for the flutter-byes....