Black Square Cryptic
by Ucaoimhu

Note that the central square in this birthday cryptic, though it is prominently set off, and its contents may be easily deduced or divined, is not the most significant square in the grid. To determine the most significant square, look for something that appears multiple times throughout the grid, in a symmetric pattern; your degree of success in this search will make the difference.

ACROSS
2. Raised on a ship by Mr. Van Winkle
5. Gold effigy straddles state line with dignity
9. Court as a date
10. Not knowing everything about menace’s origin (hyph.)
11. Reportedly sate Mr. Silvers
12. Improperly placed seven pink objects in writers’ pockets?
13. Wind round with enthusiasm
16. Use a bow with mischievous intent
17. Endlessly better ones to charge Gore, off the cuff
23. Looks at rules about a road
24. Concepts seen in Mount Sinai region and environs
25. Vehicle I will move contains more flavorful alcohol (2 wds.)
30. Opponent of taverns stated facts
32. A gun’s destroyed by a cow
35. Preparing to take off drain cap for invalid beset by foot problem (2 wds.)
37. Small, like a fork?
38. Oxen fell in very strangely, after some thought
39. Romulus’s brother beheaded birds
40. More than one kind of dirt covering messy GIs is revolting
41. Rows of drawers

5. Lager is terrible in African city (7)
6. Almost blow up by mistake (4)
7. University stirs up confusion (5)
8. Fired about one hundred, as permitted (5)
13. Growing up in London, daughter is contemptuous, at first, of a medieval craftsmen’s association (7)
14. Footwear one put into S & L (6)
15. Lacking interest in Old English, recently (2 4)
18. “Men” includes red and black playing pieces (7)
19. A Russian ruler upset one who venerates Haile Selassie (5)
20. Damage or mar plate (5)
21. The odd characters in turn I avoid, as they are unimportant (6)
22. Thousands of dollars in left over drink (6)
26. Paints tag inside urban trains (7)
27. Just kissing a male sunbather? (7)
28. Piety, locally, will hold back a religious functionary (7)
29. Scrabble pieces bearing letters with crossbars, dots, and accent marks (7)
31. Entertaining German-American beer’s active ingredient (6)
33. I lament about Ms. Campbell (5)
34. Remove cordage from rug in confusion (5)
36. After the beginning, hoists amphibians (4)

DOWN
1. Huge oil producer’s good conduct (6)
2. New York University had pile dismantled (7)
3. Turning quiet, one French knight ascended (5 2)
4. Sweet pepper the author fed to a horse (7)