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WHEN ALE WAS FOURPENCE A GALLON

Taverns in the Town

Two articles on bygone taverns have brought a suggestion that I should now give the history of the living as well as of the dead: in other words, the history of the inns and public-houses which are still functioning.

Interesting articles could be written about the King's Arms, the Crown, the Swan, and other old taverns in the town. But a good deal of information has already been given in the *Review*, in surveys of our ever-changing High Street and in articles on the coaching days.

The names of inns and public-houses still in existence occur in many old parish documents and in the Sessions Rolls. Do not jump to wrong conclusions because the Sessions Rolls are mentioned: licensees, like men and women in other walks of life, fell foul of the law from time to time, but usually their appearances before the justices were for business reasons. The licensing system is centuries old.

UNLICENSED ALEHOUSES

Time was when applicants for licences were required to be not only "of honest life" but "well affected to the present Government". Michael Handcock was evidently favourably disposed towards the Commonwealth, for in 1656 he was granted a licence "to keep a tavern at the sign of the Swan in the borough of Berkhamsted."

Duly licensed, Handcock escaped the troubles which befell a Northchurch spinster named Elizabeth Gosson who, in 1630, was summoned for keeping an alehouse without a licence. Elizabeth was perhaps a member of the Gossam, Gossam or Gosson family whose name lives on in Gossoms End. Three other local alehouse keepers were prosecuted for not having licences: Richard Twisdell and Ann Stone (widow) in

1666, and Rebecca Clarke in 1669. So three of the four offenders were women!

The Sessions Rolls of 1753 mention a bar-parlour transaction which led to court proceedings. What a queer story must have been told by James Austin, shoemaker, when he accused John Grove, spoonmaker, of selling him an empty sack for sixpence and a pint of beer at the Crooked Billet in 1753!

FIXING THE PRICE

The landlord of the Crooked Billet may or may not have been irked to find the good name of his tavern mentioned in court. He certainly had less cause for complaint than Richard Mullington, whose premises were broken into by Elizabeth Hale in 1669. The thirsty lady stole six quarts of ale, value 6d.

A penny a quart: that makes strange reading nowadays. But even then beer was price-controlled. Seventeenth century Hertfordshire licensing records show that the price of beer was fixed at not more than fourpence a gallon, and every licensee was bound to provide a "second sort" at half that price for sale to poor neighbours. Alehouse-keepers were prohibited from brewing their own beer and were told to purchase it from brewers at 6s. per barrel for the "best", and 4s. per barrel for small beer.

Three centuries ago, closing time was remarkably early: 9 o'clock from Easter to Michaelmas, and 8 o'clock during the remainder of the year.

"TYPPLE OF DRINKE"

Innkeepers were required to have ready at all times "convenient lodgings and wholesome vittuals for any who should upon honest occasions" repair to them. They might lodge none for whose respectability they could not answer. On the news of a robbery being committed in any particular locality, they were to furnish the constable quickly with the names, apparel and, if possible, the dwelling place "of all such persons as dydd lodge in their houses two dais before and two dais after such robbery was committed."

Licensees were warned against allowing unlawful games to be played on any part of their premises. There was to be no eating or drinking during the time of divine service, and "none might cook or allow to be cooked any meat during the season of Lent" or on any day when meat was prohibited by law. In no circumstances was an innkeeper to allow a household servant to "tarry within his house to th' extente of typple of drinke."

And now for a few facts about our surviving inns and public-houses. The earliest reference to an inn with a name still in use is in a document of Henry VIII's reign: "the signe of the George". It is doubtful, however, if this Tudor inn

was the predecessor of the comparatively modern George in Berkhamsted High Street. A survey of 1607 mentions the Bull, the Queens Arms, and the Swanne, occupied respectively by Henry Moody, Francis Barker and John Biscoe, who paid quit rents of 1s. 4d., 1s. 10d. and 3s. per annum.

The Swan is mentioned in many old parish documents: important meetings were held there, but the legend that the Swan was linked to the Parish Church by a secret tunnel has no foundation! The Crown is said by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments to be of 16th century origin; despite its much altered interior there are original beams in the ceiling.

AT THE KING'S ARMS

The King's Arms was there in Queen Anne's reign and actually bears the Queen's arms, not the King's arms. History has been made here for 200 years. Of the many important meetings held at the King's Arms, none was so curious as a gathering of the local landed gentry to protest against the building of the railway. It was a famous coaching inn, and Louis VIII of France and Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort were visitors while the horses of their coaches were changed. Later, the King's Arms surrendered part of its spacious premises to shops. Victorians went through what is now Mr. Noel Sandall's shop to the tap-room, and the bedrooms above were used by the hotel staff and guests.

The Bell was presumably built soon after the old market house was erected at the top of Water Lane. It had a remarkable escape when the market house was destroyed by fire in 1854. Six years later a combined town hall and market house was built 100 yards west of the old site, and the White Hart followed a year or so later. It was built on Berkhamsted School property. That is why the White Hart bears the School coat of arms.

THE DROVERS' INN

The Lamb is a very old building, but I cannot find references to it in old documents. Similarly, little is known about the Rose and Crown and the Crooked Billet, though the name of the latter always arouses interest. Many different origins have been suggested.

The Goat replaced an earlier building which was a favourite port of call of cattle and sheep drovers, who penned their animals for the night in one of the three closes nearby—hence the name Three Close Lane. In the yard was kept the town's first horse-drawn fire engine and the town's first steam engine. Previously the manual fire engine was kept in the Parish Church!

The Boat, in Raven's Lane, has a typical Victorian facade, but from the towpath we still enjoy the view of a picturesque old farmhouse which, like the half-timbered cottages and the Railway Tavern in Castle Street, had a "sunken" appearance after the canal bridge was made.

The old railway station at the end of Castle Street has gone, but three early

EMERGENCY MEDICINE

Local Arrangements

Arrangements for the emergency supply of medicine now operating in Berkhamsted is as follows:—

CHEMISTS' ROTA

The week-day evening (6—7 p.m.) and Sunday morning (11.30 a.m.—12.30 p.m.) service rota adopted by Berkhamsted chemists for the dispensing of medical prescriptions, is as follows for the current month:—

May 31—June 6: Taylors.
June 7—13: Boots.
June 14—20: Figg.
June 21—27: Dickman.
June 28—July 4: Taylors.

LIBRARY OPENING TIMES

The Berkhamsted Branch of the County Library is open in Prince Edward Street on the following days and times:—

Monday—10 a.m.—1 p.m.; 2 p.m.—7.30 p.m.
Tuesday—10 a.m.—7.30 p.m.
Wednesday—Closed.
Thursday—10 a.m.—1 p.m.; 2 p.m.—7.30 p.m.
Friday—10 a.m.—1 p.m.; 2 p.m.—7.30 p.m.
Saturday—10 a.m.—1 p.m.; 2.30 p.m.—5 p.m.

(Continued from previous column).

"railway" licensed houses survive: the Castle, the Railway Tavern, and the Crystal Palace. The last-named was built in 1854 on the site of two cottages. Originally the whole first floor was taken up by five large windows, and the entire gable was of glass. The name was obviously inspired by the Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, afterwards removed to Sydenham. The front has since been altered, but the name remains.

Several other licensed houses have not been mentioned, and that is because little of historical interest is known about them. But I am always grateful for information.

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