

THE BELL & JORROCKS, FRITTENDEN

This building is grade II listed, the listing being for the group of buildings around the crossroads in Frittenden village centre. It is described in the Kent Historic Buildings Index as being "18c". The building forms a block with Frittenden Stores and Manchester House, described as "e19c".[1]

The earliest documentary evidence for this building is an indenture dated 8 May 1741.[2] The building itself appears to date from the early decades of the eighteenth century.[3] Whether there was another building on the site before this date is unknown. The building block today consists of both the pub and the shop. However, originally the site would have consisted only of the pub and its outbuildings of stables etc. The shop was built about one hundred years later. The 1806 Tithe Map shows the pub on an island site with the road passing in front of the building as today, but with another track passing in front of Forge Cottage and behind the pub, passing through where Hepplewhite stands today.[4]

The indenture of 1741 was between Moses and Mary Lepper and William Serjeant, and John and Lydia Lepper and Thomas Lepper, and finally John Paine. Paine was probably the tenant. Eleven years later, in 1752, John Paine was in dispute with the other parties of the 1741 indenture.[5]

Later that year John Grove (sometimes Growe)[6] appears to have replaced Paine having bought the 'Bleu Bell' from John and Thomas Lepper, both described as carpenters from Frittenden.[7] The property consisted of the stable, outhouses, bankside or orchard and also 'one spot of Ground being the nine pin alley' co-joining the orchard of John Weston.

John Growe, now described as a yeoman of Headcorn, sold the 'Blue Bell' to Thomas Ballard, a gentleman of High Halden in 1769.[8] Richard Baker is described as the occupier in that document. Following the death of Thomas Ballard in 1789 ownership transferred to John Ballard, snr., and John Ballard, jnr., both stable keepers from Middlesex. [9]

Documents of November and December 1803, show that The Bell was sold by the Ballards to Robert Tolhurst of Frittenden, turner. William Southon is shown to be the occupier. [10] By 1806 Tolhurst, who now appears to be living in Biddenden, sells The Bell to James Dodson, brewer of Cranbrook, apparently with a mortgage of £250. William Potter is now described as being in occupation.[11]

By 1811 Dodson is described as brewer, dealer and cheapman and bankrupt. The Bell was sold to James Small, yeoman of Frittenden, who appears to have redeemed the mortgage for £170. Of particular note is the description of the property as 'all that one messuage or tenement now or hertofore called or known by the name or sign of the Bell with the shop stables and outhouses thereunto belonging some time since altered and built by Robert Tolhurst together with the cartside or orchard and all and singular the appurtenances ...'. This appears to indicate the building of the shop and Manchester House during the 3 year ownership of Robert Tolhurst. The document also refers to a Richard Baker as the heir of Robert Tolhurst.[12] Whether this is the same Richard Baker who occupied the Bell in 1769, or a relation, is not known.

In 1818, James Small and Andrew Dungey took a mortgage on The Bell of £250.[13] Small is described as an Innkeeper of Frittenden and Andrew Dungey a ginger bread maker in Cranbrook. Then, in 1821, Small and Dungey sold The Bell to Samuel Shepherd, Gent., of Faversham, for £800.[14]

There followed a long period under the ownership of Samuel Shepherd, one of the Shepherd Neame dynasty. The 1839 Tithe Commutation Schedule indicates that The Bell and premises were in the ownership of Messrs Sheppards (sic) of Faversham and the tenancy of Thomas Busbridge.[15]

Busbridge was still the tenant of 'The Old Bell Inn' at the time of the 1841 Census.[16] Busbridge was aged 50 but no wife is recorded in the Census, although two daughters, aged 8 and 4, and a son, aged 7, are listed. There was a live-in female servant, Lucy Simmons, aged 55.

The following year, 1842, The Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser ran an advert for an auction to be held by Mr Benjamin Hatch on 1 November.[17] The properties were described as 'very valuable freehold and leaseholds' at 'Tenterden, Wittersham, Halden, Woodchurch, Lydd, Old Romney, Frittenden, Biddenden, and Goudhurst, consisting of an excellent Brewery and several Taverns, Alehouses, Land, &c., late the property of Samuel Shepherd, Esq., deceased, and by his will directed to be sold'. Lot 9 was 'The Bell Public house, with Garden, Stable, and Outbuildings, at Frittenden, in the occupation of Mr Busbridge'.

The same newspaper recorded in May 1846 that the new landlord of The Bell was a Mr G Price.[18] The article was about the anniversary of Frittenden Provident Benefit Society, founded in 1839: the celebrations included a dinner at two o'clock, some four hours after the festivities began, for 120 gentlemen and members, provided by Mr Price, probably in what is known as the Bell Field today.

An 1848 Directory of Kent[19] shows George Price not only as 'victualler at the Bell' but also as a shopkeeper.

The 1851 Census shows George Price, aged 31, as grocer and innkeeper.[20] He lived at the Inn with his wife Ann, 31, and son George, aged 8 and described as a scholar. The household was completed by Mary Nye, 21, house servant, and Mary Cox, 18, draper's assistant. Later, Price was to move to Lake House where he farmed about 17 acres in Frittenden and Staplehurst with a rental value of £96.18s[21].

However, by 1861 the Census records James Barton, 48, Innkeeper and Carrier at The Bell Inn.[22] An 1848 Directory notes that James Barten (sic) operated a carrier service between Frittenden and The Ship at Maidstone on Monday and Thursday.[23] The census of 1841 and 1851 recorded Barton as a carrier, operating latterly from Hollenden Cottage close to The Bell. As the local inn was often the meeting/pick up point for a carrier, it would have made sense for Barton to combine the role of Innkeeper and carrier, particularly as The Bell also possessed stables. Barton lived with his wife, Eliza (44), together with a son James, 20, and Harriot, 12. Another daughter, Elisa 24, also lived at The Bell with her husband James Harris, 24, a carpenter.

In 1863, another large brewer appeared on the scene when The Bell Inn was leased for 21 years by Price to Messrs John Brenchley, Edwin and John Stacey of Maidstone.[24] This would appear to be the beginning of the association with Messrs Isherwood Foster & Stacey, brewers of Maidstone. The 1863 document indicates that James Barton continued as tenant at a rental of £40 per annum.

An indication of the perceived permanency of the public house as an institution is given by the placing of a benchmark on the front of The Bell Inn in 1866. This indicates the elevation of the village at 116.96 feet above mean tide at Liverpool. This is recorded as having been authenticated by H.S.Palmer, Captain R.E.[25]

The 1867 Kelly's Directory for Kent records that William Brakefield was at The Bell. He was described as also being a butcher and carrier. [26] This was confirmed by the 1871 Census when Brakefield lived at The Bell with his wife Louisa, 51. However, his household was quite extensive with 5 men, all described as servants, living-in. Thomas Hodges, 41, James Brenchley, 16, and James Gurr, 14, were all described as labourers, and Alfred Gurr, 38, possibly the father of James, was a shepherd. James Morgan, 20, was a butcher's assistant.[27]

By 1874, the Post Office Directory shows a William Kemp at the Bell and in October 1875 Dive Bearsby, snr. took on the tenancy.[28] Kelly's Directory of 1878 shows a Charles Bearsby at the Bell but this is an error.[29]

In 1880 Dive Bearsby, jnr., was born in The Bell. The Census of 1881 confirms Dive Bearsby, 42, as the innkeeper of the Bell Inn. Living with him were his wife Adelaide (44), daughter Alice, 10, and sons Frank, 7, Peto, 3, and Dive, 1. A female general domestic servant, Florence Thomas, was also recorded, as was Thomas Croucher, 42. Perhaps surprisingly, given the nature of the business and the presence of stables behind the Inn, 1881 was the only census where an ostler and inn servant was recorded, Samuel Clapson, 49.

The continued occupation of the Bell by Dive Bearsby, snr., as innkeeper was confirmed by entries in various directories and by the 1891 Census.[30] However, by this date the household shows a distinct division between the household in the Inn and that of the shop. Dive snr., now 57, was accompanied by Alice, now 20, and Dive jnr., now ten and described as a scholar. However, Dive, snr., now appears to have a new wife, Sarah, 45, and a new son, Arthur, aged 2, his first wife, Adelaide having died in April 1885[31]. Percy Shoobridge and his wife Mary are described as Drapers and have their own, apparently separate household in the shop.

The Club Day of Frittenden Provident Society was again reported in the local press in 1894. 'At two o'clock the members dined together in a large marquee erected in a field near the Bell Inn, where an excellent spread was, as usual, prepared in a most satisfactory manner by Host Bearsby'.[32]

Dive Bearsby, snr., remained the innkeeper at the time of the 1901 Census.[33] His household consisted of Sarah, his wife (55), daughter Alice, 30, and four sons; Frank (27), Dive (20) from his first marriage and Arthur (12) and Charles (9) from his second. Only one servant is recorded in the Inn, Helen Murrell (16), described as a general servant. James Ashbee is now operating as a grocer and draper in Manchester House.

At the time of Dive jnr's wedding to Florence Chantler, of Parsonage Farm, in April 1904, Dive snr., by now 63 years of age, is described as "retired inn keeper" and Dive jnr., aged 23, as "Inn Keeper, The Bell Inn, Frittenden".[34]

Dive junior kept up the 'tradition' of multiple occupations of the innkeeper of The Bell. At various times he farmed at Whitsunden and at Street Farm. During WWI he served with the Royal Flying Corps in France.

A comedian who once stayed at the Bell Inn on holiday, took away many jokes about the Frittenden Band Chaps,[35]some true, some fabricated. One long-established yarn concerned a diminutive drummer whose big drum so obscured his vision that he was once found marching along by himself, beating his drum for all its worth, blissfully unaware that the rest of the band had turned down a side street! Another story has it that one of the men, on the auspicious occasion of a visit of the Band to London, was so enthralled by the sights around him, that he lost his mates, but very soon accosted one of London's

policemen who, he thought, would be sure to put him right straightaway, hence his question, "Seen anything of them Frittenden Band chaps?"[36]

The local press reported the 1908 anniversary of the Frittenden Provident Society taking place, the 69th.[37] On this occasion it is reported that members met at the Bell Inn and transacted business at ten o'clock. After a church service and parading the village, at two o'clock a 'capital dinner was provided'. 'About 250 enjoyed the excellent repast provided by Host Bearsby'. The link with the Provident Society was reinforced when, in 1911, the Club House was erected to the rear of The Bell. It became not only the focal point of the Society but much of the social life of the village as a whole.

Dive Bearsby, snr., died 3 August 1920, almost 45 years after entering The Bell. He is buried in St Mary's churchyard along with his first wife Adelaide.[38] The local press reported his death as being that of a 'well known Weald sportsman'.[39]

By 1935, Fremilns had taken over the freehold and in that year a picture of The Bell, decorated for the Silver Jubilee, confirms this.

June 1939 saw the closure of the Frittenden Provident Society and the beginning of a change in the role of The Bell. The Bell and the Club Room had been the location of many village activities and the Club Room had been the centre of the Provident Society. The Bell Inn Slate Club was another 'self-help' club associated with the pub.[40] Many other institutions met at The Bell. The Poor Law records show that the overseers had, over several centuries, met at The Bell.[41] However, the Poor Law had been abolished in 1929, although its impact continued until the creation of the welfare state effectively from 1948. The Vestry had been the main tool of civil administration until the creation of Parish Councils in 1894. Minutes of Vestry meetings often record that the meeting began in the Church but often adjourned to complete business in The Bell.[42] The Club Room had also been the venue for events such as 'Smoking Concerts', one such being advertised in May 1927.[43] Other events included political meetings,[44] the annual meeting of the bowls club,[45] dancing classes[46] and various forms of hunt.[47] Perhaps one of the more unusual uses made of The Bell was as the venue of the Coroners Court.[48]

One continuing use of The Bell and now The Bell & Jorrock's is its use for the annual meeting of the Feoffees of the Idenden Charity. This Charity was founded in 1566 to distribute funds derived from the legacy of Thomas Idenden to 'the use of the Poor Maidens Marriages, to the relief of the poor Householdors within the said Parish of Frittenden & to such Deeds of Charity as shall be thought most needful'.[49]

In 1956 a newspaper article noted that Dive Bearsby, jnr., was still licensee at the Bell, having clocked up 52 years. The directors of Fremilns entertained Dive to lunch at the Royal Star Hotel to note the achievement. The article concluded with the sentiment that he 'remain licensee for The Bell for many years'.[50]

In 1963, the two village pubs were photographed. Both showing themselves as Fremlin pubs. 1964 saw the establishment of the Toucan Club by Bob Coram (the cartoonist better known as Maroc) and others to lobby for draught Guinness to be available in The Bell.[51] This was ultimately successful.

In 1967, Fremilns were taken over by the brewers Whitbread and two years later, in 1969, Dive Bearsby retired as licensee after 65 years and 94 years after his father took over the licence.

At this point plans were made to amalgamate the two pubs in the village. The John Jorrocks, formerly The New Inn, was in the tenancy of Phil Oliver. With the amalgamation of the two pubs, the John Jorrocks was closed and The Bell renamed The Bell & Jorrocks with Phil Oliver as the tenant.[52]

During the Post Office strike of January 1971 The Bell & Jorrocks became the site of the Post Box for a 'private' postal service established in the village. This 'service' distributed local, national and international post during the dispute.[53] Stamps were designed by Bob Coram, 'Maroc'.

Phil Oliver had been 57 by the time he moved into The Bell & Jorrocks and in 1978 the Tenancy was taken over by Les Randall. The Bell and Jorrocks was again the recipient of a significant village artefact when, in 1983, a propeller blade from the Heinkel shot down close to the village in 1940 was hung in the pub, together with a dramatic painting of the event.

In 1986, the tenancy was taken over by Brian and Nikki Holloway. The pub has been in their tenancy since then until April 2006 when Sean and Rosie Croucher took over to continue the provision of beer, food and a social centre to the village of Frittenden into a fourth century.[54]

Phil Betts

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- [1] The Kent Historic Buildings Index, Tunbridge Wells Section, Issue No.1 (February 1999), p.36. See also survey in Appendix I.
- [2] CKS/U442 T30, Indenture dated 8 May 1742.
- [3] See survey in Appendix I
- [4] CKS P152/28/6, Survey of the Parish of Frittenden by J. Grist of Canterbury and associated Memorandum between the parishoners and Occupiers of Land in the parish of Frittenden and the Reverend Henry Hodges, Rector dated 2nd August 1806. The Hepplewhite site was sold in July 1821 - Frittenden Historical Society, Transcript of Deed of Covenant dated 21 July 1821.
- [5] CKS/U442 T30, Indentures dated 1 and 2 December 1752.
- [6] In November 1748, Grove, a widower, had married a widow, Sarah Brissenden, at St Mary's Frittenden - Parish Registers of St Mary's, Frittenden.
- [7] CKS/U442 T30, Indentures dated 1 and 2 December 1752.
- [8] CKS U442 T30, Indenture dated 1769.
- [9] CKS/U442 T30, Will dated 1 September 1789.
- [10] CKS U442 T30, Indentures dated 6 and 7 December 1803.
- [11] CKS U442 T30, Indentures dated 4 April 1806.
- [12] CKS U442 T30, Indentures dated 7 & 8 October 1811.
- [13] CKS U442 T30 1752-1863, Mortgage dated 5 October 1810.
- [14] Frittenden Historical Society, Transcript of Deed of Covenant 21 July 1821.
- [15] CKS P152/27/2.
- [16] CKS P152/1841/11, Enumerators Returns for the Parish of Frittenden Census 1841.
- [17] Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser, Tuesday 18 October 1842.
- [18] Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser, Tuesday 16 May 1846.
- [19] Samuel Bagshaw, History, Gazeteer and Directory of the County of Kent (Sheffield 1848), vol.II, p.653
- [20] CKS P152/1851/27, Enumerators Returns for the Parish of Frittenden 1851.
- [21] Baxter, W.E., The Domesday Book for the County of Kent (1877), p.39. The 1867 Kelly's Directory for Kent records Price as grocer, draper and farmer.

- [22] CKS P152/1861/18-19, Enumerators Returns for the Parish of Frittenden 1861.
- [23] Samuel Bagshaw, History, Gazetteer and Directory of the County of Kent, (Sheffield, 1848), vol. 1, p.76.
- [24] CKS U442 T30, Lease dated 4 April 1863.
- [25] Frittenden Historical Society, Parish Records, 12 June 1866.
- [26] Kelly's Directory of Kent, 1867.
- [27] CKS P152/1871/29-30, Enumerators Returns for the Parish of Frittenden Census 1871.
- [28] Post Office Directory of Kent, 1874.
- [29] This error was confirmed by Nora Bearsby, Dive's grand-daughter.
- [30] Frittenden Historical Society, transcript of Enumerators Returns for the Parish of Frittenden Census 1891.
- [31] Frittenden Historical Society, Here Lies Frittenden (1994), p.95.
- [32] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated May 1894.
- [33] Frittenden Historical Society, transcript of Enumerators Returns for the Parish of Frittenden, 1901
- [34] Parish Registers of St Mary's, Frittenden
- [35] The origin of the Band Chaps may have been as the instrumental church choir which would have been replaced by the church organ, similar to the tale outlined in Thomas Hardy's 'Under the Greenwood Tree', possibly during the rectory of Edward Moore
- [36] Alfred W. Tiffin, The Goudhurst Coronation Book (Tunbridge Wells 1937), p. 757-8.
- [37] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated May 1908.
- [38] Sarah, Dive's second wife is buried separately in the churchyard, Frittenden Historical Society, Here Lies Frittenden (1994), p124.
- [39] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated August 1920.
- [40] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated December 1913. The New Inn also had a 'Slate Club'.
- [41] CKS P152/11/1,2,3, Frittenden Overseers Records.
- [42] CKS P152/8/2, Vestry Records of St Mary's Church Frittenden.
- [43] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated May 1927.
- [44] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cuttings dated June 1894, January 1926, March 1931, February 1932 reporting a meeting of the Conservative Association. FHS newspaper cutting dated May 1927.

- [45] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated January 1930.
- [46] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated January 1914.
- [47] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cuttings dated February 1908 and October 1927.
- [48] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated February 1923.
- [49] CKS P152/25/7 Copy of Will of Thomas Idenden of Hawkhurst, 1566.
- [50] Frittenden Historical Society, undated press cutting.
- [51] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated January 1971.
- [52] It has been reported to me that a third Dive Bearsby was the interim tenant of The Bell between the retirement of Dive Bearsby, jnr., and the amalgamation of The Bell and The John Jorrocks.
- [53] Frittenden Historical Society, Newspaper cutting dated January 1971.
- [54] In May 2000 the a Belgian brewing company, InterBrew, took over Whitbreads and so The Bell & Jorrocks became part of that group.