

The following article was submitted by our Chairman Derek Leach.

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The Good Old Days

Ernest F Stokes

Looking at the Pier District today you would be surprised if you saw it as it was at the beginning of the 20th century and wonder how so much habitation and business could be sited in such a small area. The housewife had everything she needed without going out of the area from the Western Dock Gates to the Lord Warden Hotel.

The menfolk could have half a pint of beer without using the same public house twice and could get drunk on 3 shillings (15pence). Let's take a tour of public houses in that area in 1900, starting at the Western Docks entrance with 3 shillings in our pocket and have half a pint at each stop:-

In Strond Street the Prince Imperial, Ship Inn, Royal Mail, Green Dragon, Swan and Hotel de Paris.

Then, round the corner to Billie Mutton's where you could buy a packet of fags for a penny, or a pennyworth of 'Shag' tobacco. How he could sell it at that price is nobody's business. From there we go and see Mr Minoletti at the Pavilion on Custom House Quay.



The Lord Warden Hotel, about 1907



Seven Star Street

We now cross the railway line to the Shakespeare in Clarence Street, to save going over the same ground twice, and we call at the Fleur-de-Lys in Council House Street. Then we return to the Rose and Crown in Clarence Street and the Cinque Ports. Round the corner is the Silver Dragon in Middle Row followed by in Beach Street: the Railway Bell, Sceptre, Miners Arms, Deal Cutter, The Pier, The Brussels and The Terminus.

Having consumed one gallon plus, we will call on Bert Marbrook. Marbrook Senior was landlord of the Hope Inn in Council House Street, where we will also have a pennyworth of bread and cheese to soak the beer and then on to the Endeavour and The Archcliffe in Bulwark Street. Limekiln Street gives us the Granville Arms, Two Brewers, Exeter Arms, Scotch House and Kent Arms.

On we go to the Lion in Elizabeth Street, the Oak, the William Albert and the Duke of Connaught in Oxenden Street, the Princess Maude, Neptune, Albion and Railway Inn in Hawkesbury Street plus the Three Compasses on Finnis Hill.

Public houses were open twenty-four hours, or near, and it was common to see who could drink a half-pint at each house. I do not remember anyone going the whole thirty-six, only twenty-eight, but that was only a practice run. You could get a pennyworth of gin, or two-pennyworth of rum, or four-pennyworth of brandy. Ale was 3d a pint, beer was 2d and porter a penny.

Wages were around 15 to 18 shillings a week and from the number of public houses in such a small area you will understand the poverty and why the area was called the 'Poor Pier'.

Up to the first few years of the century children would go to the pub to buy liquor, but then a law was passed to compel landlords to seal bottles and jugs became unlawful, so landlords just stuck a piece of gummed paper over the cork, which easily came off. Children were forbidden to go into bars with their parents and restrictions were tightened considerably with the result that many houses provided gardens for children, as evidenced at the Cricketers, Dublin Man Of War, The Donkey and many other houses which were then outside the borough.

Incidentally, the hours of closing were tightened up and you could only get a drink on Sunday outside three miles of the borough. As I lived in the Pier District going through the town to the Plough on the Folkestone Road well over the three miles, but over the hills it much less. So on Sunday mornings Dad would say 'Come on Son, shall we go for a walk over the hills'. When I asked Dad where we were going he would say, 'I must see my old friend Mr Gould at the Plough. Do you think you could walk?' Could I? It meant ginger beer, a large biscuit and broken rock.

Good old days for some, but what of those whose fathers did not say 'Come on Son'.

It's nice to look back on those days, good for some, but much more could be written of the 'Poor Pier' but like everything else it gets old and in the not too distant future nothing will be left.

Oh, and by the way, we did not use all the 3 shillings. Assuming only twenty-eight pints were consumed, that still left 8d so what can we do with that without making gluttons of ourselves? Well let's see a show at the Phoenix for 2d I know I feel just about too full to walk so on the tram for a penny. Well, what about a half-pint at the Swan.

For he's jolly good fellow.

It is mentioned 'a law was passed to compel landlords to seal bottles and jugs', I remember in the 1950's being sent down the Westbury pub to get a jug of beer for my dad, from the bottle and jug off sales bar, I did not realise that I was breaking the law.

Editor



Snargate Street