

Some Dover Inns and Alehouses

Joe Harman

It was always said that in Snargate Street there were as many pubs as days in the year. While confined to barracks just before retirement I browsed through the 1900 edition of *Pikes Directory* for Dover. A rough check gave about 194 for the old Dover Borough. Other directories added more to my list. Then I started on old newspapers, looking for mentions in police reports, inquests and granting of licences. A study of Dover Paving Commissioners' minutes 1788- 1841 provided even more.

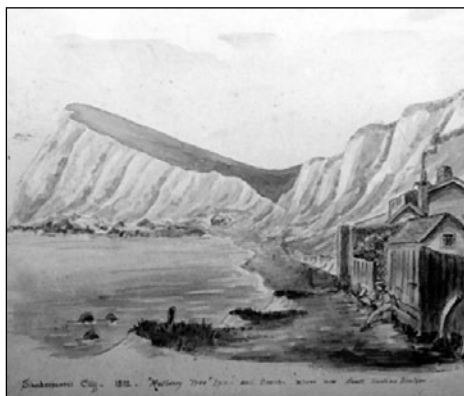
About this time I made contact with Barry Smith who had published a book called *The Way* which gave a history of those public houses still surviving in Dover. He had spent many hours tracing the landlords from various sources, bringing to life many of the old pubs and inns, as well as recording changes of names over the years. My card index had grown to more than 500, but by taking account of changes in names there must have been least 422 different houses during the last 300 years.

In 1545, a list was compiled of 37 inns and public houses in Dover. They were all in Biggin Street, St. James Street and Upwall (Adrian Street) and with no link with present houses. Snargate Street and most of the Pier District is on reclaimed land, with the sea up to the cliffs until about 1600.

The harbour moving from the eastern side of town to the west meant the arrival of inns and taverns around the new harbour, with a possible ratio of one to four other houses! Developments over the years, starting with improvements to the harbour, have taken their toll. A wet dock was constructed in about 1815 and a number of houses on the harbour edge were demolished, including the *Noah's Ark* and the *Britannia*.

The coming of the railway from Folkestone in the 1840s meant the end for a number of houses on the shoreline, including the *Mulberry Tree Inn*.

The opposition line coming through



Mulberry Tree Dover 1812

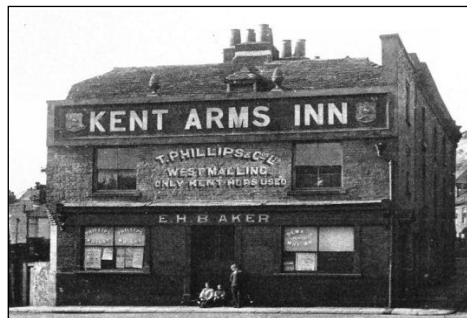


Shipwrights Arms and the Packet Boat Inn Strond St 1858

Canterbury destroyed a lot of old property including a number of inns, among them were the *Packet Boat* and *Shipwright Arms*. A link line cut another swathe through the area and later the road viaduct removed another batch. *The Kent Arms* in Limekiln Street was one of those to go in 1913. Strond Street had a few survivors but these were affected by the 1939-1945 War and the street has now disappeared into the harbour complex.

The Beerhouse Act of 1830 to reduce drinking, meant the opening of many small alehouses until about 1870. The *Bonny Cravat* became known from court proceedings two days after opening in 1840, due to noisy customers at 2am. Going back to newspapers, I found my great-great-grandfather outside the *Bull* at Buckland in 1835, due to a brawl on Buckland Bridge. He was a witness at the inquest. Later I found him in the 1841 census, living very near the *Old Endeavour*.

Some of the census enumerators were very helpful in giving the full title of the hostelry, whilst others, 100 years later, were loath to advertise the house and just listed the inhabitant as a publican. The 1861 census shows the *Liberty Inn* by the Crabble Hill tollgate. I first thought that this might have been an earlier name for *The Gate Inn* whose records start in 1868;



Kent Arms Limekiln Street 1908-13

however, a close inspection of a house on the corner of Dodds Lane revealed the *Liberty Inn* name still painted on the wall.

Inquests were often held in pubs and reported in the local newspapers, providing valuable information to researchers. One such in 1841 gave the address of the deceased as the *Evening Star* in Biggin Street. She had called at the *Royal Exchange*, the *Lifeboat* and *Friend in Need*. When recovered from the sea, she was conveyed to the *Hovelling Boat* - all in the Pier district.

The Queen Street area lost several hostelries when dual carriageway York Street was built in the 1970s, including *The Cause is Altered*, but it is difficult to be sure of its name before it was changed in about 1820. Bavington Jones¹ states that it was the *Black Horse* but this appears to be hearsay. At that time we know there was a pub of that name where the *Eagle* now stands. However, there was a *Blacksmiths Arms* in the street prior to the change and there seems to be some grounds for believing it was the *Carpenters Arms*.

From time to time the question arises as to which is the oldest pub in Dover. The St. James Street area seems to be a likely place with the *White Horse*, next to the church, as a candidate. It seems, from



Cherry Tree 1980's

information to hand, that it started about 1760 as the *City of Edinburgh*. There was a *White Horse* in the Market Square in the 17th Century. The *Dover Tavern* in Bench Street, formerly *The Guildhall Vaults* and earlier still the *Bull* is on an old site and mentioned in 1702. I was really looking for one which kept the same name up to the present day. In a copy of the Kent Gazette of February 1785, I found a notice of a cockfight. This was to be held at the *Cherry Tree Inn* at Buckland, when the gentlemen of Faversham and Ospringe would do battle with the gentlemen of Dover. One can visualise the carriages coming down the turnpike road for this event. Sadly, even the *Cherry Tree* has closed since this was penned.

The oldest survivor in the Pier District appears to be *The Cinque Port Arms*, formerly the *Coach and Horses*, recorded there in 1793 and probably earlier, as the building seems to be older. Next door we find the *Rose and Crown*, dating from 1641. Due to demolition of other property, they seem to be leaning on each other for support in the best traditions. I have also found in St. Mary's Vestry Books information about the charity of Thomas Challice, which in 1613 was to be paid from his house at the sign of the *Horseshoe* in Biggin Street. By 1739 the name had changed to the *Saracen's Head*. This was

sold in 1895 for road widening and the proceeds invested to provide an annuity of 9/-. This house stood at the corner of New Street opposite the *Rose*, which was closed in living memory.

On searching through a copy of the *Dover Chronicle* 1841 I found a song which had its premiere at the Dover Theatre in 1799. This introduced the audience to the landlords and landladies of Dover. It ran to 16 verses, too long to quote now, and was sung to the tune of *The Vicar of Bray*. It was most useful in checking other records.

NB Perhaps the Editor will include the song in the next edition.

1. *Dover, A Perambulation of the Town, Port and Fortress*, John Bavington Jones, 1907.



*Temperance Hotel (formerly Saracen's Head)
Wellington Hotel on right*

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