

A Toast To The Canteen

Barry O'Brien - Dover Tales

There were licensed canteens, effectively a public house for the use of those stationed there, located within the boundaries of many of the military fortifications around Dover including one at Dover Castle which was first recorded in May 1837.

Although intended for the use of those in uniform, these Canteens were still subject to local licensing regulations and the *Dover Express and East Kent News* of Friday 11th September, 1868, notes the following:-

"Canteen" Heights, Hougham, (license transferred) to William Drawmur,

"Canteen" South, From Clements, to William Balfour,

"Canteen" Drop Redoubt, to Thomas Cullen.

As recorded within the pages of the *Dover Express and East Kent Intelligencer* of 28th May 1864, the landlord of the "Canteen" at the Castle Hill Fort, (still in the early days of its construction and later to be re-named Fort Burgoyne), one John Prescott, was called to the County Police Court to give evidence against one William Rowe, a private in the Royal Engineers, stationed at the Fort, who was charged with stealing from the "Castle Hill Canteen," early on the morning of the 21st a till, value 6d. and a quantity of coppers.

Having attested that he was landlord of the "Canteen" at Castle Hill Fort, Mr Prescott gave evidence that "On the night of the 20th inst. about twelve o'clock, he had occasion to go down into the town. On reaching nearly the top of Love Lane, witness met the prisoner and a comrade named Bruce. They were going in the direction of their barracks. When witness returned to the "Canteen" with his assistant, he (witness) locked the door, and they both went to bed. On the following

morning, between six and seven o'clock, the till was missed. He subsequently heard that a box had been found in the fire-box of an engine in use on the fort works, and the till produced was afterwards brought to him by Sergeant Russell, of the Royal Artillery. He saw the till in its place on a shelf on the bar about half-past 11 o'clock on the night of the robbery. When he discovered that the till was gone, he went to see if the windows were fastened, but he found they had been left undone, and that a wooden bar that had been fastened across the inside of the parlour window was broken off. Witness represented the case to the Captain of the Royal Engineers, and he ordered it to be brought before the Magistrates. There was about 5s. worth of coppers in the till when he left it on the previous night. The value of the box was 6d."

From the newspapers report, it would appear that, although the canteen was for the use of the military, neither the licensee, Mr Prescott, nor his assistant were serving men. Indeed, perhaps coincidentally, Guston Churchyard holds many memorials of the Prescott family, who held land in the parish before the time of the Commonwealth, and about that time one of the family was Mayor of Dover. The oldest decipherable stone is in memory of Samuel Prescott, who died in the year 1787. There is another which looks like one of that family, who died in the year 1734, aged sixty-nine years. That person would have been born in the year that Charles II died.

William Hyman, a private in the Royal Engineers, said he had charge of the donkey engine and found the box or till produced.

Frederick Gatton, a corporal in the same regiment, said the prisoner slept in the same

room as he did and, on the morning of 21st, while the men were dressing, a cap containing a quantity of coppers was produced from under prisoner's bed. Prisoner said he had received a great many coppers in change on the previous night. Witness thought the cap contained three or four shillings in coppers.

William Bruce, the man seen in company with the prisoner, said he went part of the way home with prisoner on the night in question. Prisoner left him after getting about one hundred and thirty yards through the turnpike gate at the top of Castle Hill, and near to the "Canteen." He did not see any more of the prisoner. He (witness) was the worse for liquor at the time.

William Forest, a private who slept in the bed next but one to the prisoner's, said that the prisoner showed witness eighteen pence in coppers, saying that he had that day drawn two shillings from the pay-sergeant, and that the coppers he held in his hand was all the money he had left.

John Isaiah Pope, sergeant in the Kent County Constabulary, said he examined the premises at the "Canteen." He found a bar which had been placed across the front parlour window had been forced off and, after making enquiries, he took the prisoner into custody on the present charge. He told the prisoner what he had been charged with, but he made no reply. The prisoner's barrack room is in a direct line with the back of the "Canteen."

Prisoner, having been duly cautioned, said Mr. Prescott had told corporal Lilly that he (prisoner) was at the "Canteen" at six o'clock on the morning of the 21st, when the till was missed.

When called, John Lilly said, "Mr. Prescott told me that he had seen the prisoner,



Castle Hill Toll Gate

between twelve and one o'clock on the morning of the 21st, on the hill at the other side of the "Canteen", not barrack side, and that he missed the money about seven o'clock in the morning.

Prisoner was then committed for trial at St. Augustine's, Canterbury.

From the report we can gather that the canteen was located "about one hundred and thirty yards through the turnpike gate at the top of Castle Hill." By Mr Prescott's testimony, he met Privates Rowe and Bruce "nearly (at) the top of Love Lane" (renamed Connaught Road some twenty years later) "as they were going in the direction of their barracks." Corporal Lilly added, later that this meeting was "on the hill at the other side of the canteen, not barrack side."

The toll gate referred to is believed to have been at the top of Castle Hill, near to the main entrance to the Castle. Accepting that this would have been the approach to Canon's Gate, this confuses with Pte Bruce's suggesting that Pte Rowe "left him after getting about one hundred and thirty yards through the turnpike gate at the top of Castle Hill, and near to the canteen," possibly slightly conservative by some one hundred yards.

Although the landlord of the canteen at Fort Burgoyne in 1864, Mr John Prescott, would appear not to have been a military man, by

June, 1873, a Sergeant McMann, of the 9th Regiment, which became the Norfolk Regiment with the Army reforms of 1881, made application that the canteen at Fort Burgoyne might be transferred to him from Sergeant Blackman of the 38th Regiment, later South Staffordshire Regiment. However, it would appear that Sgt McMann had failed to bring "recommendation from his commanding officer", which caused the Magistrates (to allow) their decision to stand over until the necessary papers could be furnished.

Happily, the *Dover Express and East Kent Intelligencer* of 20th June, 1873, reports that "The canteen business at Fort Burgoyne was transferred from the Sergeant-Major of the 38th Regiment to Sergeant MacMahon (note slightly different spelling) of the 9th, who produced the necessary documents."

The license was again transferred in September 1878 to a G Wood.

Possibly the canteen at Fort Burgoyne closed soon after this latest transfer, but by 1882 the *Dover Express and East Kent Intelligencer* of 3rd March, reported that serving members of the Royal Artillery, newly arrived at Fort Burgoyne, were charged with being on the premises of Mr Otto Dannenburg, landlord of the *Star Inn*, Trevanion Lane/Woolcomber



Trevanion Street

Street, who had himself been summoned for serving intoxicating liquors during prohibited hours.

Sergeant William Smith, Trumpeter John Smith, and Gunner Martin Reeves, all of the Royal Artillery, were summonsed for being upon the premises at the same time. The landlord pleaded "Not Guilty" and the soldiers said, "that they were guilty of being found on the premises, but were ignorant of the laws, as they had only just arrived from India."

In evidence PC Wickham said that he had received information from a Sergeant of the Garrison Military Police who requested that he accompany him to the *Star Inn*.

Mr Dannenburg advised PC Wickham, that there were "only lodgers" in the building although PC Wickham giving evidence continued "I then walked through into the taproom and found the three defendants of the Royal Artillery sitting down with a quart jug and two glasses in front of them, each containing beer. I asked them whether they were lodgers, but they made no reply but drank up their beer and left the premises. Nothing further was said about the defendants being lodgers. The three defendants belong to the Royal Artillery, and are situated at Fort Burgoyne, their battery having come in last Saturday week."

Sergeant Gallagher, of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, acting on Garrison Military Police duty, confirmed PC Wickham's account adding. "We went into the tap-room and found the three defendants there. I examined their passes and found that they were on leave till midnight. They belong to Fort Burgoyne. The landlord said that they were lodgers in the presence of the men, but when I asked them if that were true, they said no. When we first went to the house it was shut, and the door fastened. The defendants left the house and went up Castle Street. If they

had stopped any longer, I should have made them prisoners.”

Mr Dannenberg “said that he would not have got himself into that row for the sake of a pot of beer. He had taken the word of the soldiers that they were going to be lodgers”. He was fined 40s. (£2) and 10s. 6d. (53p) costs, and the other defendants were ordered to pay the costs, 7s. 6d (38p) and were told that the case would not be reckoned as a conviction against them.

Only months after the license for the Fort Burgoyne canteen had been transferred from the Sergeant-Major of the 38th Regiment to Sergeant MacMahon of the 9th in January 1874, a colleague of Sgt MacMahons, Private Thomas James, was charged with having stolen a silver watch, the property of Emma Knighton, who described herself as “a servant at the *Bell and Lion*, Adrian Street”. She also confirmed that “I have been on the register of prostitution for two years. The landlord of the *Bell and Lion* is aware of that.”

Miss Knighton gave witness that at 10.30pm one Saturday evening she “was going to Bulwark Hill with prisoner, who had called me to see a friend of mine on guard there” and that when Pte James asked her the time she took out her watch, “when he snatched it away and ran off with it ... towards the South-Eastern Station”.

The South Eastern Railway's original station was situated on Shakespeare Beach just east of where the current line from Folkestone turns north towards Dover Priory and was known simply as Dover. Originally a terminus, it was renamed Dover Town in December 1861 when the line was continued through to Admiralty Pier. The station now known as Dover Priory was opened in July 1861 as Dover Town (Priory) by the London Chatham and Dover Railway, being renamed Dover Priory two years later in July 1863.

Emma Belsey, also on the register, deposed that she had met Knighton, walking on her own, in Oxenden Street, going towards the hill. She continued that the prisoner approached and spoke to Knighton, asking her what the time was, whereupon “she took out her watch, and he snatched it away and ran off with it. He was not with her before that. I did not go anywhere with prisoner to drink. Prisoner ran down the hill with the watch.”

Agnes Baker, of no fixed residence, deposed that she had met Knighton in Snargate Street, from where they went together towards Archcliffe Fort. “We went first to the *Bell and Lion* Adrian Street. Prisoner was with Knighton when I met her. After we left the *Bell and Lion* we went straight down Snargate Street, and through Limekiln Street, and we went into the *Archcliffe Fort Inn*. We then went up Bulwark Hill. We did not meet any women. We met Belsey at the *Archcliffe Fort Inn*. Prisoner walked up the hill with us, and frequently asked Knighton what the time was. When Knighton took out her watch, prisoner snatched at it and ran away. We were all three together and went down Snargate Street with the policeman.”

“The military policeman on guard at the bottom of Bulwark Hill divided the picquet and dispatched them in different directions but could not see the prisoner. It was about half-past ten.”

The Dover Express and East Kent Intelligencer concluded their report by noting that “a Sergeant who was on duty at Fort Burgoyne said prisoner came there at about three minutes past eleven. He was then quite sober” continuing, “The officer who watched the case said prisoner bore a very good character. Police Constable Corrie said he apprehended prisoner. The watch had not been found. The bench said the prisoner would be discharged on his own recognisance

and, in the meantime, enquiries would be made respecting the watch.

In February, 1902, Arthur John Roberts, licensed victualler, was summoned for keeping open the *Gothic Inn* during prohibited hours, for sale of intoxicating liquor to persons not being bona fide travellers or lodgers.

Mr. Vernon Knocker, who appeared for the prosecution, remarked that although it was not a very strong case the authorities were bound to take action and called PC Roberts, who stated that at midnight on Sunday January 26th, he was passing the Northampton Street entrance to the *Gothic Inn* when he heard a door latch rattle. Finding the door fastened he turned his lamp on to the glass and peered in. By the aid of the light, he distinguished a man standing at the door leading to the Snargate Street bar, whilst two other men and the landlady were crouched

down just behind the door. It was not before he had knocked four times that a woman admitted him. She said she was rather frightened, and did not like to open the door when first requested. The men gave their names as Bdr. Buchanan, RGA, Fort Burgoyne, Edward Harrall, Bench Street, and Philo Harrall, who was stated to be a lodger. Supper was laid in a room at the back of the bar. The landlady said that the men were friends.

For the defence, Mr. Mowl called evidence to prove that it was a perfectly genuine bona fide entertainment to friends. The landlady said that she was naturally frightened on finding the constable knocking at the door.

The Magistrates dismissed the case, but said that they considered the Constable acted properly in reporting the facts.

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