

THE BELL

“Apparently”

The History of the Bell

The Bell was built in the 24th year of Edward I, in 1296. Then, it was a dwelling house connected to the church of St Mary the Virgin. It was made up of a main tenement with a stable, outbuildings, barn and a tract of land. Because of its connection with the church, the house at this early date, was probably inhabited by monks. They may have been the first to brew ale here; when the property was sold many years later, a brew-house was included in the inventory.

However, by the turn of the 14th century, the house had been given up to the parish clerk or sexton of St Mary the Virgin. In 1422, that was Ezekiel Worger. In 1448, William Faythfule was filling the same role, but was also described as a “sexton and coffynn mayker”. He lived here until his death in 1472, and was succeeded by his son Reddyman.

Among the duties of a parish clerk was to administer ale and bread to the poor of the parish. Ale may also even been sold here as it was lawful for anyone to keep an ale-house without licence. However, in 1495 a law was passed empowering justices to issue or refuse permission to sell ale. In the same year, Reddyman Faythfule stood before justices and offered two sureties of his good character to keep an orderly house and at the hearing became Reddyman Faythfule, parish clerk and tippler of this house the “Bell”.

The origin of the sign dates back to the 11th century, when ale houses stood within the precincts of parish churches and however many bells a church contained determined the number given to the title of the house. At this point in time the church of St Mary the Virgin held a single bell.

Reddyman Faythfule kept the “Bell” and continued with his duties as parish clerk until his death in 1511. His son Nigel took over both positions but in 1552, when the “Bell” was re-licenced under the licencing legislation act of that year, Clarence Fayfule was keeper here. In that same year, the “Bell” was purchased by Henry Sawkins, gent of Hawkhurst. At this date, the property consisted of a “messuage or tenement with all its lande theretoe, belonginge known by the name and sygn of the Bell with its brew-house, staybles and gardens, situate and being at Tycehurst in the County of Sussex”.

Henry Sawkins leased the house to Richard Wyndham, an innkeeper of Wadhurst who under the terms of his lease, was directed to pay certain monies from the profits of ale as well as rent and issues. In 1553, because no profits of ale were received, Wyndham’s lease became void and the “Bell” was re-leased to Robert Reynoldes. He kept the house until his death in 1585, when his widow Naomi, a clothier of Ticehurst, was granted the lease.



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She kept it until her own death in 1602 when it passed to her nephew, Thomas Teynoldes. He was a saddler by trade and was almost certain to have conducted his trade from this house, since he is recorded as an innkeeper and saddler throughout his time. He died in 1638 and the “Bell” was leased to Thomas Chilvers, a harness-maker of Lamberhurst.

By 1645, the “Bell” was a registered inn, licensed to lodge travellers at a nightly tariff of 1 penny per bed, which included the use of plate and linen, food. Stabling was extra. The house at this date contained a hall, parlour and tap room with six chambers above.

By 1663, it was kept by Henry Pyper and by 1675 by William Slaney. It was owned at this date by Jeffrey Sawkins, having been passed down through his family. William Slaney was still here in 1718 but died the following year, and was succeeded by his daughter, Susannah. In 1727, whilst still in her hands, the “Bell” was purchased by Alexander Smith, brewer of Lamberhurst. Susannah Slaney carried on here as a tenant for the Lamberhurst Brewery until her death in 1766; she had kept the “Bell” for 49 years.

Between 1766 and 1800, there followed five more tenants of the “Bell”, the last being Richard May, a tallow chandler of Lamberhurst who, during his time here, made and sold candles at the “Bell”. He died in 1823 and the “Bell” was taken over by his widow Ruth. In 1836, she gave it up to Jacob Puttick, a wine and spirit merchant of Lamberhurst who was here until 1852, during which time he supplied not only the “Bell” with wines and spirits but many other inns in the area.

In that year of 1852, the “Bell” was purchased by Edward and Henry Kelsey, brewers and coal merchants of the Culverden Brewery, Tunbridge Wells. They leased it to Peter Barnes who, throughout his time here, advertised the inn as a commercial inn and boarding house. He gave up the lease in 1889 and was succeeded by Daniel Balcombe. He left in 1902 and was succeeded by Frederick R Skerrett and whilst in his hands, the “Bell” became a registered hotel.

In 1904, Thomas Hards took over to be succeeded in 1908 by John William Callow and in 1914 by Albert T Jones. In 1920, the Culverden Brewery was taken over by Philips & Co of West Malling but continued to trade under the name of E & H Kelsey Ltd. Also in that year, William Knight Tourle took over the “Bell”. He was an omnibus proprietor and ran a service between Hawkhurst and Tunbridge Well throughout his time here. He gave up the “Bell” in 1932 to Douglas Percy Hunter and he in 1940 to Cyril Fletcher.



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In that year, Philips of West Malling were taken over by the Flowers Brewery but again, although part of that merger, Kelsey's still traded under their own name and brewed on the premises. In 1946, Harold Hunt took over the “Bell” and stayed until 1950 when he was succeeded by Henry Reeve. He died in 1953, whereupon his widow Elizabeth took over. In June 1955, the last ale was brewed at Kelsey's and in 1961, as part of Flowers Brewery, they were taken over by the Whitbread Brewery. Elizabeth Reeve kept the “Bell” until her death in 1970 when her son-in-law Frederick Tate took over, until his death in 1982 when his widow Pamela took over.

We come up to date. Following Pam's death, Richard and Roz Upton of Stonegate bought The Bell in 2008. A year in planning and a further two years restoring and re-invigorating the building brings us to November 2011, when the doors of The Bell were once again opened to welcome locals and travellers alike.

