

Village Echoes

The building in West Road previously occupied by The Bricklayers Arms is listed, and parts of it date from the 16th century or earlier. In 1851 William Penfold, a bricklayer, lived there with his wife Mary Ann who was the beershop keeper, and it seems likely that William was the first licensee. The 1861 census shows a change in occupancy, with Charles Humphrey as the beerhouse keeper and carrier. The carrier service actually seems to have been the responsibility of two of Charles' sons, initially George and later William, who were two of eleven children born at the pub. Carriers could earn a good but hard living and often included a postal contract. William's wife recalled how he was always to and fro to London and undertook furniture removals as well.

In the 1871 census James Gilbert had replaced Humphrey as "beer retailer", which was his sole occupation. James Gilbert remained at the Bricklayers Arms during both the 1881 and 1891 census, although he described himself firstly as a gardener and then a farmer and it is said that he also dried hops as a sideline. Presumably his wife ran the pub side of things, although during the hop-picking season John Sullivan looked after the pub for him. Eventually the Gilberts moved to the Railway Hotel at Hartley, the station that served Cranbrook. The local paper reported his death in 1911 where he was described as being held in high regard in Goudhurst as a good sportsman, especially cricket. He was one of the best shots competing in county competitions and for a time he was captain of Goudhurst fire brigade.

Gilbert's son-in-law, James Dann, took over the Bricklayers Arms from 1894. It has been claimed that he made such a success of it that Smiths, the brewers, built the George at Lamberhurst for him, but the pub is rather older than that, so perhaps they just renovated it.

By 1901 relief publican, John Sullivan, had taken over the Bricklayers in his own right. When he eventually left, his replacement was there for 10 days but was found to have been of 'unsound character' whereupon they telegraphed John to come back. He stayed another 10 years before being succeeded by Thomas Fuller and the last landlord, Frederick Thomas.

The Bricklayers Arms is only 170 yards from The Vine, and one of the reasons given for the withdrawal of its licence in 1916 was this close proximity. The licensee at the time, John Edward Whittle, was also told that it was because of the very low-pitched roof and that it was a bad situation for roadside trade at the top of a very steep hill. Recently a current member of the Whittle family gave the Local History Society a copy of a postcard attached to which were the remains of a label showing that a customer had been charged a penny deposit against the return of a bottle. The label is printed with the name of the pub and the landlord.



A picture from 1937 shows that a shop front was added when it ceased to be a pub.

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