

Village Echoes

PILLORY CORNER AND THE BORDER LANDS

There is a new focus on this part of Kilndown lately, with the establishment of the Cellar Head Brewing Company and Tap Room based at The Barn, Pillory Corner. This is a little known area being cut off from the rest of the Parish by the A21.

But what is a pillory? It was a form of punishment in Saxon England which secured a standing person by the neck and arms, thus leaving him vulnerable to objects thrown by spectators, whilst stocks fastened an offender by the legs in a seated position. Some examples were abolished as late as 1837. They were established when state prisons were few and far between and left the offender confined and helpless so that the onlookers might add punishment by ribald comments or cruel missiles. They were usually placed in prominent positions such as market places or, in this case, alongside a main road. In the Goudhurst Coronation Book of 1937 a resident of Pillory Cottage (previously Brick Kiln Cottage) recalls seeing 'decaying stumps' opposite Flimwell House Farm.



Flimwell is on the border between Kent and Sussex. Part of the village is in Sussex but a section is in Kent. Although houses have a postal address of Flimwell, they are in the Kilndown part of Goudhurst Parish. The name Flimwell in Old English was *Fliemena-wielle* meaning flee-man's well or fugitive's spring. This indicates that men fleeing from justice would be 'over the border' here and safe from pursuers. The name of nearby Combwell means a spring in the valley, in Old English *cumbwielle*. If nothing else, it's clear that the area had plenty of water sources.

Most of this land was once owned by the Combwell Priory estate. The Hundred Rolls of 1274 granted the Prior of Combwell a bread and ale allowance and the right to have a gallows. This may have been the origin of the pillory site. On 20 November 1537, after its dissolution, the site and possessions of the priory were granted to Thomas Culpeper. However, Thomas had his land forfeited on his execution in 1541 as the lover of Katherine Howard. On 2 April 1542 they were granted to Sir John Gage, of Firle. In the charter setting out the details, possessions included *a house and site and various other buildings plus thirty acres at Le Pillorie*. Sir John didn't retain the estate for long and in 1544 he exchanged it back to Thomas Culpeper.

In 1574 Lord of the Manor of Combwell, Alexander Culpeper of Bedgebury set out a tenancy agreement with William Alanby and Charles Styrray for the main buildings at Combwell with its lands and two farms – The Pillory and Lady at the Oke. The Pillory was sub-tenanted at the time by Richard Baker whilst Robert Baker occupied the house at Lady Oak.

In the Victuallers Recognizances of 1590 Charles Styrray of Goudhurst, a yeoman, gave surety to William Harman and Elias Onglie, also yeomen of the same village. This hints that there might have been an inn on Styrray's land. In 1600 a Quarter Sessions record requires *Richard Baker not to victual*

anymore. This also suggests that the Pillory land may have had an inn at one time. This is wholly feasible given the site on the main London to Hastings road.

In the Combwell Borough Hearth Tax records of 1664 Francis Pierce paid for three hearths at the *old pillory* and eight at the *new pillory*. Much later, a change in occupancy occurs in the 1851 census. This is explained by the fact that sometime in the previous ten years a new house, which was to become Flimwell Grange, was built, replacing the old Pillory farmhouse.

By 1861 brickworks had been established at the Pillory site run by brick maker Robert Jenner who lived at Brick Kiln Cottage. James Moore, a shepherd, headed another household at Pillory. By 1882 the works had gone and the building became Pillory Cottage

The A21 at Flimwell has been the subject of continuing controversy. The first re-construction of the crossroads was in 1931 but the traffic lights didn't appear until 1959 after 15 years of badgering by locals. Even then they were classed as temporary, only becoming permanent in 1971. The dual carriageway was built in 1964 but after numerous accidents, many fatal, has reverted to a single lane. Since then there have been long periods of traffic misery whilst the traffic lights have been reconfigured at least twice.



Flimwell crossroads in 1936

The River Bewl divided the county of Kent from Sussex and was also one of the boundaries of Pillory farmland in the 1800s. As far back as 1946 Bewl Valley was identified as a suitable location for a reservoir. At that time there were often water shortages in the Medway towns and other parts of Northwest Kent. As well as supplying these areas its creation would also control an expansive local area prone to flooding where the tributaries of the Bewl, Teise and Hook converge. In 1962 after particularly severe flooding on the A262, Medway Water Board decided to implement their plans. In June 1973 the River Bewl was dammed destroying 770 acres of pasture and woodland together with sixteen houses although, one, Dunster's Mill House a 15th century building, was moved to safety on higher ground.

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