

Village Echoes

THE GRAPES

On display at a meeting of the History Society in November 1976 was a carved wooded object. It depicted a bunch of grapes and came from the ale house of that name. It used to stand at Four Wents, just inside the Cranbrook parish boundary. It was noted that it had probably been rescued from destruction at Glassenbury, where it had been kept for fifty years or more.

The following meeting in December that year had a speaker who gave a talk and showed several examples of his work as a craftsman. This was a Mr Evernden who at the time was also the Curator of Cranbrook Museum. Older readers may remember that he ran one of those fascinating shops in Stone Street, no longer around, which were usually crammed with every item of hardware you could possibly want, together with many other things that you didn't realise you needed. At the end of the meeting Mr Evernden was given the Grapes sign to place in Cranbrook Museum and there is where it has been ever since.



This information came to light when reading through an old Committee book from the time and called for further investigation. The Curator at the museum at the time, Mr Huxtable was contacted to see if it could be found and meanwhile any documentary evidence was searched for. The sign is surprisingly large, some two and a half to three feet long and on display hanging from the ceiling of the Museum on the third floor. Unfortunately there was no accompanying documentation.

There were numerous ale or beer houses at that time often nothing more than a farmer, or farmer's wife's side line of selling beer from a house window. They were usually unregulated and the quality of beer questionable. The Grapes was run for many years by a Mr James Price, born 1803, but who, it is thought, died in about 1885 having moved to Colliers Green.



James Price erstwhile keeper of the Four Wents Inn or beer-house – The Grapes

However, before the building became The Grapes it was the birthplace of a famous preacher, Rev. William Huntington (1744-1813). Described as ‘by far the most impressive preacher of his age’ he was eccentric, had eloquence, vigour, originality and depth. But that is another story.

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