

# Guineas and Alcohol for All

## Around Aylesbury...

In the 1800's and during the first few years of the 19th Century, at election time, it was customary to bribe Aylesbury voters with guineas and alcohol.

This practice was not frowned upon by the residents of Aylesbury; indeed, it was welcomed and expected, so much so that there was a year when Parliament revoked the election of one individual due to a particularly corrupt poll. However the practice apparently brought a song to some voters lips:

*Oh these were the good old 'lection days  
The good old days of yore  
When every vote brought a ten pound note  
And a barrel of beer to your door  
When golden guineas rained hard and fast  
And Boro's were bought with beer  
When the bowl went round 'til we rolled on the ground  
Cause our heads were giddy and queer*

Much electioneering took place in the vicinity of the alehouses. Most of Aylesbury's old inns were situated around the Market Square and Kingsbury. At one time there were 12 inns and public houses in the Market Square and 6 in Kingsbury. Now there are 3 and 2 respectively.

Of those inns thought to date back to the 15th Century, only the 'Bell' and the 'Kings Head' survive, the casualties being the 'Bulls Head' (demolished 1970), 'Crown' (demolished 1937), and 'George' (demolished 1935). Only the 'Kings Head' remains relatively unchanged.

Of the others, most of which were 18th Century or earlier buildings, including the 'Angel' (demolished 1920), 'Cross Keys' (demolished 1962), 'Eagle' (demolished 1975), 'Royal Oak' (demolished between 1872-1913), the 'White Hart' (demolished 1864) and the 'White Horse' (demolished 1918); nothing is left but photographs.

Some of the pubs, however, are remembered through contemporary songs and text:

*The White Hart said to the Ram one day  
Whilst having a chat with the Bear  
"Who pulled the Bell at the Foresters Arms  
and made the Green Man swear?"  
"I think it was the Red Lion" he said.  
As he gazed at the Rising Sun  
The Saracens and the Eagle knew  
The Black Horse was the guilty one  
The Horses and Jockeys came trotting by  
With the Ploughs and Harrows behind  
The Windmill waved a Dark Lantern round  
The New Inn and the Grapes to find  
The Falcon and the Greyhound  
Clung onto the Bricklayers Arms  
The Nags Head wagged when Gullivers eyes  
Admired Brittainia's charms  
Two Brewers and George went for a walk  
But they did not get very far  
They called in at the Chandos  
And then dropped off at the Star*

*To watch Three Pigeons on the road  
Strutting about that morn  
Mixing with the Hen and Chickens  
Picking up the Barleycorn  
The Kings Head ached from wearing his crown  
The Queen's was heavy as well  
The Prince of Wales lunched at the Rockwood  
And dined at the Bull Hotel  
The County and the Borough  
thought they would like a trip  
They did not want the Railway  
so they engaged the Ship  
Coach and Horses from the Derby Arms took  
them to Victoria docks  
With Compasses and Cross Keys to open any locks  
They also hired Millwrights and a few Oddfellows too  
For they thought it very likely there would  
be repairs to do  
The Plume of Feathers swayed gently  
With the Buckingham Arms wound round  
And the White Swan flew to join the crew  
Of the Hop Pole, - New Zealand bound!*

This song is still performed today, notably by Rod Puddefoot, a local folksinger.

Many of the now demolished pubs were situated around the boundary of 19th Century Aylesbury or on the main highways. Some were pulled down due to road "improvement" schemes. Several pubs were remodelled many times during their lifespan. The 'Crown' was almost completely rebuilt at the end of the 18th Century, with only a small part of the earlier 16th Century construction remaining. The 'George' was re-fronted in 1827 and then demolished in 1933. The 'Old Plough and Harrow' was reconstructed in 1931. The original 'Hen and Chickens' was demolished in the 1960's and rebuilt close by. The 'White Hart' was rebuilt in 1814 only to be demolished in 1864.

One unfortunate Aylesbury girl was a casualty of the trade. On 22nd July 1858 The Times reported that a barmaid at the Bell Inn had died when a lemonade bottle fell on her and the broken glass entered her neck.

### **...and in the Market Square**

As one would expect, the oldest and largest inns were grouped around the market square. Until the 1930's, the square teemed with activity, at one time boasting 16 inns and ale houses. From the 13th Century onward, regular markets were held there, selling everything including ale, ribbons, livestock, chickens, ducks, wool, cereals, pots and pans. It was the central focus for a large part of the Vale. Most of the town's 15th and 16th Century inns faced the square. They would have been hives of activity in those early days, as the ostlers welcomed travellers on horseback and later, from the 17th Century on, in goods-laden coaches.

The square itself was planned to be somewhat larger than it currently is. The buildings in front of the 'Kings Head' and the 'Dark Lantern' are encroachments.

The Square was a place for entertainment, (most of which would be frowned on by today's standards) and for public affirmation of wrongdoing. This could vary from flogging, a period in the stocks or public execution by hanging. Indeed, there was a balcony at the 'Green Man' (now the 'Market Inn') from which the best views of hangings could be obtained, and the 'Kings Head' upstairs front parlour was in great

demand when some poor wretch was being sent to meet his (or her) maker.

An interesting example of the varied fortunes of Aylesbury pubs is the 'White Hart', Market Square, circa 1670-1864. The land where the "Arches" now stand was originally occupied by the 'White Hart'. The 'White Hart' was Richard II's heraldic symbol. It was also at one time a generic term for an inn. The earliest 'White Hart' in Aylesbury, which may well have been built in the 15th Century, was pulled down in 1813 and rebuilt. Parts of Eythorpe House were used in its reconstruction. The original building featured a gateway and enclosed pleasure garden with a bowling green.

The owner of the 'White Hart' was J K Fowler. His grandfather was also a publican and a man of great repute in Amersham. John Fowler took a great interest in his surroundings and was the author of three books relating to events and characters of Aylesbury and district.

The inn was demolished in 1864 to make way for the Corn Exchange. Fowler leased a farm in Weston Turville in 1863 and advertised an extensive range of eggs and poultry for sale. After the 'White Hart' had been demolished he opened the 'New White Hart' in Exchange Street which was run by a Henry Turnham.

In 1797 the 'White Hart' was considered to be one of the two principal inns of Aylesbury and during the first half of the 19th Century, one of the best hostelries outside of London. A further building at the rear was attributed to the Earl of Rochester in the reign of Charles II. At one time the inn featured an old timber gallery surrounding the courtyard. Some decorations were reported to have come from Salden House. The grounds, of some 5 acres, ran down to the Bearbrook, and included the area now taken up by the Civic Centre; the old Cattle Market, a strip of Exchange Street and the timber yard.

In 1864 the 'White Hart' was bought by the Aylesbury Market Company and demolished to make way for the Corn Exchange and Market. This ill-fated venture did not last: the building was acquired by the Urban District Council in 1901 and became the Town Hall and Offices for a while.

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