

BEERHOUSES

I was reading John Ashby's latest work recently, 'A Brief Social History of Brownhill Green, Coventry' (available from John at ashby1937@outlook.com price £7). This volume sheds some light on the workings of beerhouses.

Brownhill Green was an ancient settlement centred on its green which bordered Wall Hill Road between Long Lane and Hawkes Mill Lane. Although Brownhill Green was no more than a straggle of farms and cottages along this green it was still the largest settlement in the Coundon area as the original village of Coundon, at what we now know as Coundon Green, was little more than a hamlet. Coundon Green had its own beerhouse called 'The Nugget'.

Brownhill Green had two beerhouses, but no public houses nor inns. The creation of beerhouses under the 1830 Beerhouse Act appears to have been a boon to the rural population and the two in Brownhill Green will date to 1830 or later. These two beerhouses, which probably both brewed at the time, were at what is now 110 Hawkes Mill Lane and on the corner of Wall Hill Road and Hawkes Mill Lane. Both premises were in Warwickshire until the area became part of Coventry in 1932 and both began with off-licences. Even so, they adopted names, with No 110 Wall Hill Lane becoming the 'Rose' and the property on the corner of Wall Hill Road and Hawkes Mill Lane becoming the 'White Lion'. As they had off-licences there was a temptation to allow the consumption of alcohol in or around the buildings. In 1847 Thomas Beacham, the licensee of the Rose was called before the magistrates for having refused to admit Police Sergeant Baker after he had heard people making a noise inside the pub in the early hours of the morning. By the time Beacham appeared before the magistrates he had already obtained an on-beerhouse licence, which seems to have simply recognised the existing state of affairs!

Then, at some time between 1872 and 1880 the owner, William Barr divided the Rose into two houses, letting one part out to a tenant. He retained the brewhouse but closed any connection between the brewhouse and the rest of the house. Beer was sold at a door opening from the brewhouse into a passage. This kind of arrangement was what gave rise to the pub name 'The Hole In The Wall' elsewhere, something that is familiar to anyone who has visited the Monkey House in Defford, Worcestershire, where cider is dispensed through a stable door.

It was probably at this time that the Rose reverted to being an off-licence and in 1892 Mary Anne Barr, out-door beerhouse keeper, was summoned for allowing beer to be consumed on the highway adjoining her licensed premises. Three men were named, Harry Beacham, William Beacham and William Green. A Beacham had been a previous licensee of the Rose, so it is interesting that they were a local family, still using the beerhouse. Mrs Barr denied that she knew what was going on and when selling the stout asked whether it was for home consumption and was assured it was. Her plea was supported by Ann Minstrell. The bench considered the case was proven and the fact that the defendant had been warned in March of the same year meant they imposed a fine of £1 and costs, saying that she ought to have been more careful. Beer sold at an off-licence was for consumption at home, not on the side of the road, and the consumption of alcohol in public was seen as a problem then much as today. The recent legislation prohibiting the consumption of alcohol in the city centre is another example of legislation being enacted when there were already perfectly adequate laws in existence if only they were enforced!

Both off-beerhouses were leased by Phillips and Marriott's Coventry brewery in 1906, when they were both owned by John Minstrell. The Rose lost its licence soon after, but the White Lion continued and acquired a full on-licence in 1931, after being bought by Atkinson's brewery of Birmingham. It continues to trade today, as a 'Vintage Inn', part of the Mitchell and Butler empire.

Another interesting reference to beer came at the Smithy. John says that 'In the early twentieth century, twice a year, some one hundred gallons of beer were brewed. A mug of beer and bread and cheese were freely given to locals waiting for their horses to be shod.' This should also have been licensed as a beerhouse, since whenever beer changes hands and money changes hands, no matter how remotely from the beer, a licence is required. However, I have been unable to find any reference to the Smithy being a beerhouse, so either I have not yet

found its beerhouse permit, or it was so remote and rural a place in the past that no one could be bothered to enforce this requirement. Whatever the case, it is a good example of how beerhouses and public houses could evolve from people's trades. The two brewings were probably a result of the fact that brewing was not possible in the summer months before the advent of temperature control technology in rural brewhouses.

It appears that, whilst most commentaries concentrate on the effect of the 1830 Beerhouse Act on urban areas, where it is said that in some streets every other house became a beerhouse, the Act also had a marked effect on the countryside. It made it possible to conduct an alcohol outlet where previously there had been no public houses, taverns or inns. Things have come full circle today, now there are so few rural pubs that it is difficult to find somewhere to start and finish a walk in many villages.

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