

IT'S NOT FAREWELL TO THE QUEEN'S ARMS AT COWDEN POUND!

By Terry King

When I penned the main thrust of this article, many months ago, it looked pretty certain that the pub would be closed, but in August it was acquired by locals Jonathan and Min Hancock, to much delight. Jonathan and Min are determined to preserve the unique character of the Queen's Arms, whilst increasing the comfort level sympathetically where needed.

Elsie Maynard, the 3rd generation of the Maynard family to run the pub, was admitted to a nursing home in Speldhurst in November 2013, and most of us thought that signalled the end for this historic drinking house on the outskirts of Edenbridge.

Thanks to Mary McGlew and other regulars Elsie had managed to stay in-situ long enough to celebrate, on 13th January 2013, 100 years of the Maynard's holding the tenancy of The Queen's Arms - quite an achievement in these ever changing times. Sadly, Elsie's failing health had prevented her playing an active role in the day to day running of the pub for some years, and it had become very much a community pub, with Mary at the hub.

According to the CAMRA website (Campaign for Real Ale), The Queen's Arms was built in 1841 by William Longley of Pound House, just around the corner from the pub, and was named in honour of the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment. The first owners were the Culverden Brewery, located opposite St John's Church



Image: 2012.2016 The Queen's Arms, Cowden Pound, 2011

in Tunbridge Wells, where a petrol station now stands. The brewery appears on maps as early as 1740, and became one of the 'grandest and oldest' of local breweries owning well over 100 pubs in and around Tunbridge Wells. The company continued to prosper for many years until it was taken over by J.W. Green and Co. in 1948, subsequently being renamed Flowers Breweries Ltd. In 1961 it was acquired by the giant Whitbread, and sadly the very next year the premises in Tunbridge Wells were closed and demolished. Latterly, the owner of the Queen's Arms was Admiral Taverns.

On a visit to Elsie she eagerly regaled me with the information that in 1913 Henry Long, her grandfather, took on the tenancy of the Queen's Arms having 'cut his teeth'



Image: P2014.2293 Elsie Maynard with Mary McGlew, December 2005.



Image: P2014.2290 Elsie Maynard, c.1950

at The Prince of Wales in Yalding. This followed a spell at The Bricklayer's Arms (also known as the Barking Donkey), just down the road towards Edenbridge, which has for a very long time been a private house. It is still very easy to see where the pub sign had been on the front of the building, even when driving! Elsie told me that her Grandfather asked for a pub 'back this way' as he was unhappy with the vulgar language used in Yalding!

Elsie also told me that many of the original fixtures at The Queen's Arms remained intact, including the clock behind the public bar which Henry Long bought as soon as he arrived at the inn from Tom Smith in Edenbridge (nickname 'Clocking Tom'), and a small bowl for cash rather than a till. In fact the pub has one of the last remaining totally unspoilt public bars that, apart from the paintwork has been virtually untouched since the end of the 19th century. The black mastic around the foot of the bar counter was the position of the spittoon trough that originally ran along it.

Elsie said that Henry Long passed away in 1937. Amazingly on the very same day that three other local publicans died, from The Crown at Cowden, The King and Queen in Edenbridge, and The Wheatsheaf at Marsh Green. All four had fought in the battle of the Somme in the First World War, but not all with the same regiment. Elsie's parents

Annie and Kenneth Maynard stepped into the breach, assisted by Elsie who would have been a lively 16 year old at the time and had been born a sickly baby, amidst heavy winter snow. The local practitioner, Dr Wood, did not give her much hope of living but Annie apparently told the doctor that Elsie had bright eyes and would be OK. Annie was right, and Dr Wood acknowledged this at Elsie's 21st birthday party. Sadly Kenneth died of pneumonia in 1940 as a result of gas inhalation during the First World War, but the business continued to thrive with Elsie playing an even more significant role alongside Annie.



Image: P2014.2292 Elsie Maynard behind the bar at the Queen's Arms, November 2003.

Significant changes were made to the pub in 1953 when:

- The size of the lounge was substantially increased by merging it with a previously private room, and adding a ladies' toilet.
- The gents' toilets were altered to be accessed via the public bar, instead of outside access to an iron pot!

My first acquaintance with The Queen's Arms, or Elsie's as most people know it (or even Annie's as it is still affectionately known by many locals) was in 1982, when I was recommended to the 2nd Tuesday Singing and Music evening by the late



Image: P2014.2289 Annie Maynard, 1949.

Den Giddens. In those days the lounge bar was always packed for the sessions, with the Flowers beer and free sausage rolls as supporting features. Little did I know that I would eventually take over the stewardship of the session after Den's hearing prevented him from carrying on. In addition I sometimes play my concertina at the 3rd Tuesday Music sessions, latterly under the direction of Bob Keeble and now Will Duke. (Standard a bit too high for me, but I am always made very welcome!)

Then there are the monthly Saturday evening do's, run unstintingly since about 1973 by Elsie's Band which attracts top folk performers who are keen to sample the fine acoustics offered by this uncluttered pub, devoid of soft furnishings and fruit machines. In December the band put on their own colourful and humorous Mummers' Play, and over the years have organised special birthday evenings for Elsie,

who in fact shares a birthday with long term band member and initial instigator Dave Watts.

Den Giddens passed on to me the running of the annual Christmas carol night, attended mainly by locals and friends of the pub, which Elsie would sit in on. Also, 'one off' evenings were arranged to celebrate the lives of singing stalwarts such as Bill Dennis and Den Giddens himself. Elsie, always wearing her 1950's apron, used to stay in the background amidst the song and music, but had her favourite performers, such as Martyn Wyndham Read, and curiously George Hamilton IV, the well-known American country singer whose portrait hangs in the public bar. Her best loved song was 'Just a Song at Twilight'. Mary would invariably put on a sumptuous buffet for these special evenings.

But really the folk activity at the pub was no more than the icing on the cake for The Queen's Arms, which would not have survived if it wasn't for the support of the loyal band of regulars who frequent the public bar. Apart from the usual lively chatter, darts and crib the public bar regulars hold special gatherings for the likes of Pancake Night and St George's Day. We 'folkies' have to perform in the less atmospheric, but bigger lounge bar. I do recall one mid-winter's evening when the regular darts players and others failed to make it to the pub due to poor weather, and Jane (Mary's daughter who ran the bar in splendid fashion for many of our sessions and still does) agreed that we could perform in the hallowed public bar!

At one time the pub used to run annual trips to the Chelsea Flower Show to satisfy the many keen gardening customers, and Elsie herself went on several occasions. The Queen's Arms also entered a float regularly in the Edenbridge Bonfire parade.

Incidentally Elsie liked to regale the time she had 32 butlers in the pub from the grand houses around.

CAMRA members often make scheduled visits to Elsie's to sample the Adnams beer in unspoilt surroundings. Also walking groups such as Edenbridge Strollers hold gatherings there, usually around Christmas time. Likewise Morris Sides of various persuasions, such as Ashdown Morris, dance outside and finish off the evening singing and playing music till closing time; generally 10.30pm not 11pm.

The Queen's Arms was never an eating pub apart from bread, cheese and pickles, bottled by Elsie herself. "One year I made 200lbs and sold them all".

Probably the least desirable customer was Crawley man John Haigh, 'The acid bath murderer', who cruelly despatched at least six victims in the 1940s, and liked the pub because 'it was quiet and in a pretty part of the world.' Elsie relayed to me that Annie always thought him suspiciously over-polite. According to Arthur La Bern's *Haigh, The Acid Bath Murderer*, he was undone by various items that refused to dissolve, such as upper and lower dentures made for one of his victims – a Mrs Durand-Deacon; also the handle of a red plastic handbag.

Happily, these days only serial drinkers can be found at the Queen's Arms where local beer Larkins is the regular tippie. Why not pop in for a drink and enjoy the unique setting of this fine hostelry.

References

La Bern, A.J. *Haigh - The Acid-Bath Murderer*, Star, 1974.



Image: P2014.2294 Sign outside the Queen's Arms indicating 'LAGER NOT SOLD HERE'.