

The Crown - Westcott



The Crown is the oldest surviving pub in the village.

We do not know its precise age but based on its original 3 bay timber-framed structure, and carpenters' marks on some of the surviving beams, the Domestic Buildings Research Group are sure that it dates from the 17th Century making it over 300 years old.

The earliest documented record of its existence is just over 200 years ago - in 1800 and it was certainly the largest and undoubtedly the most important of the village inns during the 19th century.

Court Baron We know this because it was where the Lord of the Manor convened his Court Baron. This was the periodic meeting to formally convey property according to the customs of the manor, to organise the use of the common fields and meadows and to deal with 'nuisances' such as defective hedges, the blocking of paths and straying beasts.

In January 1873 after the Clerk to Board of Highways had written to Mr W J Evelyn drawing attention to the state of the pond on Westcott Green he passed the letter to his steward commenting that, "The pond is small; useful for ducks and geese but otherwise I should think useless. As Westcott is not a 'goose common' two questions may be considered at the Court Baron to be held at The Crown on Tuesday 4th February. First, whether the keeping of geese on the common should not be stopped, secondly whether the lord, or if not he, who, is liable for the repair of the pond."

When the Court Baron met on 4th February 1873 it decided that it was desirable to keep the pond. At the same meeting William Rose was appointed pound keeper.

On 17th July 1889 a Court Baron was held at the Crown Inn. About a dozen tenants entered an appearance, and the necessary formalities having been carried out, all

present sat down to an excellent dinner served by host Goose. Mr Warren the Steward presided, Mr Bergerson, the bailiff of the manor, was the vice-chairman. The Chairman proposed the toast of 'The Queen' and 'The Lord of the Manor'.

The most recent reference is on 12 September 1911 when the Court met to consider an application from Dorking Rural District Council *to take a small strip of the waste of the Manor for the improvement of the highway at Wilmott's Corner, and an associated application by the Council and Mr Cory Wright for permission for the latter to enclose a further strip of the waste in exchange for land to be given up by him for like improvement.*

Horses and Stables The Crown was also important because it had a coach house and stabling for ten horses. It was here that travellers would change horses before attempting to take their coaches up the formidable Coast Hill - the gradient of which has been considerably eased in recent times. The stabling also resulted in the landlord establishing a substantial business hiring out horses and traps etc. that continued well into the 20th Century: This is confirmed by an advertisement that referred to the then licensee, Henry W Hunt, as 'Job master (i.e. someone who supplies carriages, horses and drivers for hire) Fly-Proprietor of the Crown Posting and Livery Stables', offering open and closed carriages, horses bought and sold on commission and accommodation for hunters. [I am not sure whether this referred to two or four legged creatures].

Further evidence of this activity is provided in the archives of the Dorking and District Isolation Hospital in Logmore Lane, where it is noted that in 1911 Mr G Beecham of the Crown, Westcott successfully tendered to provide a 'Horse Ambulance'' for use, as and when necessary. He was paid 8/- a journey in the Urban District and 12/- in the Rural District

In an interview in 2002, Reg Ward recalled that, "*In the 1930s the Aldershot Traction Bus Company provided a regular service to and from Dorking but Tommy Beacham at The Crown kept a cab and a pair of horses for special occasions*". Reg remembers hiring these to travel to St Martin's Church for his Aunt's wedding. –

In fact Brakes, Open and Closed Carriages and Wagonettes could be hired and a Brake was used by the football and cricket teams, by the Sunday School on outings, and by the Choral Society.

Court Rescue When Court Rescue, the Westcott Lodge of the Ancient Order of Foresters, was established in 1868 it met at The Crown but five years later the minutes of a Special Meeting held on 22nd October 1873 record that Brother F Molineux proposed, and Brother R Rose seconded, that the Court be removed to the Prince of Wales. This was put to vote and carried by a majority of 27. The minutes also note that 'Mr Goose having been informed of the case wished it to be removed at once'. This move was confirmed at a special meeting for the alteration of rules on 16 February 1874 when it was 'proposed by Br F Molyneux and seconded by Br H B

Potterton that in Rule 2, line 3, the words ‘Crown’ should be struck out and the words ‘Prince of Wales’ inserted.’

Social Events It was at the Crown, [as well as at the Prince of Wales because both had a sizeable Function Room] that club dinners, socials and village meetings were held. We are talking now about the 19th century before the Reading Room was built in 1876, and certainly before The Hut put in an appearance after the First World War. Examples include:

- In August 1897 a Smoking Concert was held for 100 members of the Dorking Cycling Club from Dorking and Westcott.
 - The inaugural meeting of the Westcott Voluntary Fire Brigade took place on 28 January 1899.
 - In 1909 the Milton Lodge Oddfellows held a Smoking Concert at The Crown
-

Village Activities It was also where village events tended to start or finish:

At one time the Village regularly organised a torchlight procession on Guy Fawkes Night and we know (from a report in the Dorking Advertiser) that on 5th November 1908 *a procession was formed at the Crown Inn, and, headed by the Westcott Drum and Fife Band, marched to Westcott House, Bury Hill, back to the vicarage, and through the village, subsequently visiting Hillside, Springfield Cottage, Castle Brays, Rokefield, Mill House, Rookery Farm, Holcombe and other houses of the chief residents.*

In those days, 100 years or so ago, the village was smaller and historic events were celebrated by everybody. In 1900, for example, *the Relief of Mafeking was celebrated in style with a large torchlight procession that paraded from The Green to Bury Hill, via the Crown where several tar barrels were burned, and then back visiting Brooklands, Rookery House and Holcombe Cottage, opposite which the bonfire had been built.*

Inquests It wasn't only on cheerful occasions that the Crown featured in village life.

In August 1901 when Alfred Heaver, the wealthy property developer who lived at Holcombe Cottage, was fatally shot on his way to church by his son in law, the assassin, who subsequently shot himself, was carried on Mr Dixon's cart to one of the outbuildings at the Crown Inn, where he was declared dead by local doctor, Dr Fairbank. The inquest on the body of the deceased man was held at the Crown Inn on the following Tuesday morning.

A few years later, in September 1908, it was claimed at his trial that John Fairbrother had killed his wife by cutting her throat in St John's Road after taken exception to finding her having a drink in the Crown with Mr Dorothy, the local fishmonger.

Misdemeanours A more mundane event was recorded in November 1907 when Maggie Geal, a member of the 'itinerant' class, appeared before the Dorking Bench charged with causing damage to a door at The Crown.

Cricket: Despite there being a pub called The Cricketers in the village, cricket features significantly in the Crown's history.

In the 1870's 'The Surrey Boys' – opening batsmen Henry Jupp and Tom Humphrey - were famous throughout the country. Henry Jupp was a local man who played at Cotmandene for Dorking Cricket Club before he made his name at the Oval. When not playing cricket, he was the landlord of the Crown in Westcott, and this may well explain how his opening partner, Tom Humphreys, a Mitcham man, came to live in Grove Cottages, just over the road.

For many years the Westcott Cricket Club held its Annual Dinner at the Crown

In September 1922 the Westcott Cricket Club were hosts to a Surrey XI, playing at the Kennington Oval Ground Staff. The home side were put in to bat first and allowed 15 players, who scored a total of 92; the Hon C. Guy Cubitt and the Rev F. H. Salzman emerging as top scorers with 16 apiece. A. Sandham was the most successful bowler and when the Oval side batted he lived up to his reputation as a first class opening batsman by scoring an unbeaten 104 in Surrey's winning total of 336. The game was very much enjoyed by over 700 spectators and the two teams sat down to an excellent dinner at the Crown after the game was over.

For several years The Westcott Cricket Club was challenged by a team put up by The Crown, and as quite a number of that team were from Sussex County Cricket Club, the sight of balls sailing over the main road into Broom's cornfield on the opposite side proved very entertaining.

Darts: During the 20th century, darts was one of the most popular pastimes at The Crown and had a membership of 200 in its Darts Club. During the summer the whole Club would have a day out to the coast in a line of five coaches.

Slate Club: A regular feature of pub activity was the Slate Club, whereby people put money aside each week – usually 7d a week i.e. 1d a day – in a common fund for a specific purpose, usually to provide cash to spend at Christmas. The published reports of the Village Slate Clubs indicate the relative popularity of the various village institutions. Insofar as the pubs were concerned, in 1933 the Red Triangle Club had 214 members, The Cabin 133 and The Crown 118 (paying out £1 5s 8d) whilst The Cricketers had 57, The Bricklayers' Arms 42 and the Prince of Wales 41.

In December 1948 the Dorking Advertiser reported the death of Walter. Age 77. He had been a member of the Crown Slate Club for 65 years and Secretary for 55 years – under one landlady and five landlords..

Landlords: There is no definitive record of the owners and licensees of The Crown but from census returns, licensing records and other sources it has been possible to produce some information:

The earliest recorded owner was Thomas Cooper, a Leatherhead brewer who died in 1800. His executors were tasked with disposal of his estate, which included over 50 public houses. The will was contested and the legal challenge resulted in publication of all the various properties which included ‘The Sign of the Crown’ at Westcott which in 1805, was in the charge of John Kennis. A few years later the Tithe Map of Westcott shows that the Crown site extended south to include the Crown Field, almost two acres in all.

From the census returns in the second half of the 19th century we can identify some of the subsequent licensees. In 1841 Thomas Waterer, a somewhat unfortunate name for a Publican, was in charge and was followed by, amongst others, Joseph Rose (1861), William Goose (1871, 1881 and 1891) and Leo Chitty (1901).

Before Leo Chitty took over we know that a Mr Butcher had been granted the license because a valuation was prepared for him in 1896. This provides a detailed list of the contents of the inn at that time.

A further inventory was prepared in July 1901 when the horses, carriages and stock in trade were bought by William Rowland Divall of Westcott Street from Messrs Dawes & Smith. (Dorking Museum R134 CP15/79) for £116 2s 0d. In fact only one horse appears to have been included in this sum; a Bay valued at £17:10s.

A Mr A J Hollis took over on the 10th October 1903 and he was followed by Henry Hunt (1907) and George Beacham, who was shown as the Licensed Victualler in a 1933 Directory.

Bill and Maude Glass moved to Westcott in 1934, with their three sons Andrew aged 10, Robin aged 8½ and John aged 7 years. They stayed 29 years. Their stay will be remembered in particular by the many couples who held their wedding reception at The Crown. One couple recall that the cost for 44 guests came to £11. This included the meal at half-a-crown each, with 5/- for cigarettes and £5 for drinks.

E W Wells was in residence in 1972

Paul Davies arrived in 1981.

Brewers In October 1913 the Dorking Rate Book refers to the Friary Brewery

Guests: For most of its existence the Crown has provided accommodation for travellers. We know, for example that in William Goose’s time there were 3 guest rooms on the ground floor and two on the first floor. In the local Westcott. Telephone

Directory number for 1939 it was actually described as The Crown Hotel, telephone number Westcott 14. Sadly, the Guest Books have long since disappeared but if local gossip is correct one notable visitor was Ingrid Bergman. She was visiting Leslie Howard at his home in Balchin's Lane but it is not clear why she was not invited, or declined, to stay at Stowe Maries. It may be something to do with the popular belief that although Leslie Howard didn't chase women he couldn't always be bothered to run away.

The Crown has been here for at least 200 years. For much of that time it has retained much of its distinctive appearance – although it has been modernised from time to time – including June 1890 when William Jeater, either the 39 year old painter, or more probably his 22 year old nephew, both of whom lived just over the road, scratched his name on a pane of glass.

During the last war, before the air raid siren was installed, a well known character – Mr Bobbie Burns – as leader of the local ARP stood on the steps of the Crown Inn and rang a bell to warn the village of an imminent attack.

Mr R E Glass had The White House built in School Lane

The Poll Book for 1847 includes a reference to John Cooke of The Crown Inn, Westcott

The Lincoln, Rutland & Stamford Mercury reported on 10 January 1824 Mr and Mrs **GOOSE** of Friskney in this county, have lately sustained the melancholy loss of all their three children, in the course of one week, by the complaint called 'the Croup'.

In 1861, the 33 year old William Goose from Friskney, Lincolnshire was employed as a coachman at The Rookery, Westcott. In 1871 he had married and was the landlord at the Crown, a position he retained until the 1890s.

The Crown closed and redeveloped for housing in 2021