

The ‘Red Lion’ , a 14th Century Inn

By Henny Shotter

Although we don’t know anything about the 14th century inn, we know for certain that anyone looking for the “Red Lion” in Lenham before the 18th century would have drawn.....a blank!



We learned by chance that the Red Lion was not always called the “Red Lion’ and some further research in the Kent Archive confirmed this.

The pub was once owned by the Rigden brewery. In 1770 William Rigden, of the Canterbury branch of the brewery, and John Rigden of Faversham made a property deal. It also included the pub in Lenham: *’ And also all that Messuage or Tenement (formerly called or known by the sign of the Swan and some Time since reverted and used as for a Bakehouse but now or lately called or known by the Name or Sign of the Cock or Red Lion) together with the Barn, Stables, ...Yards and Garden thereunto belonging’*

The photo¹ possibly dates back to around WWI. When the Rigden company folded, Fremlins took over some of their pubs including the Red Lion in Lenham.

The building itself goes back to a Hall House, which is revealed in the roof beams in the magnificent upstairs function room



The bar area ,too, shows the timber construction, which gives the pub much old-world charm.

In those times before the railway was built, Lenham was a busy place where carriages, travelling along Lenham Heath Road on their way to and from the ports, stopped to have their horses changed and shod. There were two blacksmiths in the village, one in the High Street and the other in Forge House. The Red Lion was

one of the places in the square where weary travelers could have a drink, a meal and a rest in the 'inn'.

In the beginning ,the beer was possibly provided by a local maltster and brewer, brewed without hops and tasting very malty, like a Porter or Stout. Eventually the pub was owned by the Rigden brewery in Faversham, which had their brewing operation where Tesco is today.

The earliest landlord on record is Richard Bigg, who was there for 16 years between 1828 and 1844. The Red Lion is also traditionally the pub where local clubs and societies gather. In 1848, after the ploughing match in a field belonging to Mr. W Powell (he was a tenant of East Lenham Farm), there was a dinner of the Lenham Agricultural Association at the Red Lion, which was presided over by no less than Baronet Sir Edward Filmer from East Sutton. Some landlords of the Red Lion made a deep impression in Lenham. In particular, Mrs. Tippen, known as “Aunt Doll,” who was running the pub with her husband, is legendary. She is remembered by locals as a forthright woman, who made sure that underage drinkers did not get a drink in her premises. However, her story has still to be written!

The Red Lion owes its existence to the art of brewing beer and still today real ales are served in the pub, which is very popular with local beer and ale connoisseurs.

¹ With thanks to www.dover-kent.com for permission to use the historic photograph of the pub