

BULL HILL

By Henny Shotter



The chicken and egg question:

If you are a relative newcomer to Lenham or Lenham Heath, you might have wondered (as I did) where the name 'Bull Hill' comes from. Some of the 'real' locals might remember the Bull Inn. Did the road get its name from the pub or the pub its name from the road?

The research which we were able to carry out so far indicates that neither is true, and the road and the former inn got their name from....the bulls!

The Tithe map of 1839 shows several fields with the name of 'Bull Field'. You might think that these fields were part of the land belonging to the Bull Inn. This could have been true before 1839, but the Tithe Schedule of 1839 shows these fields being owned by various owners.

Bullies:

Bulls must be kept in their own field away from the cows in their enclosure as they are known to be 'bullies'. They were prized animals, not only for the quality of the herd of cattle but also for bull baiting. Bull baiting was a popular animal blood sport in the 16th and 17th century (Queen Anne was supposedly partial to it) as was bear baiting, a tradition to which another Shepherd Neame pub in Lenham, 'The Dog and Bear', bears witness. In Lenham Heath there are the bull fields, the field in Lenham just behind the pub is named as the Baer Field in the Tithe Map. Such enclosures are also known from London. Bears were more expensive and difficult to come by, so bull baiting was more widespread. However, there was a law in place which stipulated that bulls had to be baited before they were slaughtered. as it was assumed the meat of the animals was more tender after baiting. *'It was believed that meat from a bull which had been baited had a superior flavour, and bull baiting, as a legal requirement prior to slaughter, remained on the Statute Book throughout the eighteenth century, although the law was only periodically enforced.'*¹

Bull baiting often took place where cattle markets were held. So far, we only know of a cattle market in Sandway.

Not far from Bull Hill, the former Bull Inn and the Bull Fields is another field which in the Tithe map of 1839 carries a name connected to the popularity of animal blood sports. There is little doubt that a field with the name 'cockpit' was an enclosure used for cock fighting. So, even if it is guessing work, it doesn't seem too far-fetched to conclude that the name 'The Bull' has a connection to bullbaiting.

Early Records²

The earliest record which we have so far of the Bull Inn is the Tithe Schedule. The then owner was Henry Shepherd (of Shepherd Neame brewery), the landlord was a Thomas

¹ Source: In pursuit of Pleasure: Entertaining Georgian Polite Society, Fairfax House 2016

² Thank you to Tina for the photo, a current resident at the former 'Bull Inn'

Collins. According to the Tithe Schedule, Henry Shepherd also owned the Chequers Inn (in Lenham Square) which the Shepherd Family had bought in 1771. If they bought 'The Bull' at around the same time (we will hopefully find out), then the ale house in Lenham Heath was in operation at the same time as the Lenham Heath Military Camp and of course the history of the Bull Inn (not necessarily the same building) can go back much further.

The mystery of the cannon

The proximity to the George III camp on Camp Field in Lenham Heath would explain why a cannon stood in front of the pub, a fact, which most former visitors to the pub have forgotten. When asked their reaction normally is: 'Yes, now that you mention it, you are right. There was a cannon.' It is very unlikely that the canon came from 6th Guards Tank Brigade workshop which was also in Lenham Heath in WWII as the workshop repaired tanks. The question is: where did the cannon come from and where has it gone?

Life in Lenham Heath in the early 20th century

Some years ago, former Lenham Heath resident Sidney John Tappenden who was then 76 produced a map which gives us a good insight in the farming community of Lenham Heath in the early 20th century. He records many orchards, apple and cherry orchards. He also notes that 'most holdings kept 1 horse, chicken, ducks, geese, Guinea Fowl and a few sheep and a pig'. Among the merchants in Lenham Heath he recalls is George Chapman, a carrier and coal merchant, who 'collected morellas in the evening and took them to Maidstone. They were picked in Peck baskets. Most of the heath had a few trees, even in the hedges.' Other merchants were: Bignaal, the grocer, Fred Chesson for cloths and provisions, Coveney, the butcher, Tappenden the butcher and owner of the slaughterhouse and H. Tappenden, the egg packer and Ernest Chapman who operated a repair shop for steam engines, threshing machines and lorries.

'Cosy' and memorable

Local residents recollect that the Bull Inn was very small inside. It was in those days, together with the Harrow Inn, supposedly the smallest ale house in Lenham and often full when the men, returning from working on the land, took a small detour to the Bull in Lenham Heath.

The Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser from September 10th, 1896 reported that a Samuel Burbridge was charged and convicted for being drunk at the 'Bull Inn'. The punishment was hard: a 5 shilling fine, in addition to 12 shilling 4 pennies cost or 7 days hard labour.

Fortunately, by the 20th century such practices had ceased and those Lenham residents who remember the bell for last orders at the Bull Inn hopefully do this without regret.

For more information about public houses in Kent visit

<http://www.dover-kent.com/2014-villages/1Pubs-Alphabetical-List.html>