

Copy of email to manager of Red Lion, Handcross

From Barry Ray

22nd November 2010

Dear *****,

As we discussed, here follows a summary of various documents which state or, at least, add weight to the premise that the Red Lion was established as a business in about 1550, or even earlier, and not, as the present signage states, 1819.

It is generally accepted that it was a renowned smugglers pub, retailing and dealing in spirits on which no duty had been paid. Such activities had largely disappeared in Sussex by 1819.

It has been recorded often that at one time the buildings in the tiny hamlet of Handcross comprised Chodds, the Red Lion, and about six other houses. Are we to believe that Batchelors Bueldings (sic), situated in the High Street a few yards further north of the newsagents, were constructed some 10 years before the Red Lion? I think not. According to the plaque on the cottages they were built in 1809.

The fire in 1978 ravaged much of the pub interior, as it had been for centuries. One of the rooms was called Nelson's room and was positioned in the centre of the pub, facing the road. It was known by that name, as Lord Nelson visited the pub and used that room whilst making frequent visits to his sister, Mrs Matcham, who lived at nearby Ashfold. Nelson was killed at Trafalgar in 1805.

In the Rev. Dengate's book "Slaugham" of 1929 he concludes that the Red Lion dates back to Tudor times, 1485 to 1603. Furthermore he records a bill for refreshments dated 1796. Please see attachment.

Following the fire in 1978, which I attended as a spectator in the middle of the night, the Evening Argus described the Red Lion as a "400 year old hotel", which again takes the date back to the days of the Tudors. A copy of the front page is attached.

I believe the most convincing document is A History of the County of Sussex - Vol 7 The Rape of Lewes edited by L. F. Salzman in 1940. The relevant paragraph is attached, but the complete section on the Slaugham parish can be found here <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56944&strquery=slaugham>

Written before the 1978 fire, the report states that certain of the panelling is Elizabethan. Elizabeth Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I, reigned from 1558 to 1603. He concludes that the pub dates "probably from 1550, or possibly earlier".

I have read recently an article indicating that there was an earlier Red Lion situated on the present site, but this was pulled down as it was unstable and replaced probably in the 16th century. I cannot now recall where I read this, but I note that Roger Ray, my father, in his book "Around Old Slaughtam" says that the earlier Red Lion was built in the 14th century. Attached is a copy of the relevant section of his book.

Attached is an account of 1801 by Erredge, an historian from Brighton, who mentions that "neat" liquors were served at the Red Lion during a stagecoach journey of 1801.

Historical novels by Georgette Heyer and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle mention both the Red Lion and Handcross by name. A relevant link for "The Talisman Ring" is <http://www.georgette-heyer.com/chron.html> ; the novel being placed in the year 1793.

Click on http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Rodney_Stone/Chapter_VIII to view Sir Arthur's "Rodney Stone". The existence of the Red Lion is acknowledged in the lifetime of Lord Nelson who was killed in 1805.

I wonder how those in charge of such matters at M & B arrived at the date of 1819? I am intrigued to know.

I believe it is important to correct historical inaccuracies as soon as possible so that the year 1819 does not go down into history as an accepted fact.

I am reminded of a promotional piece in a local newspaper when the Royal Oak in Handcross came under new ownership in the 1970s. The new owners stated that a previous landlord of the Royal Oak had been the former British heavyweight boxing champion "Bombardier" Billy Wells. In haste my father had a letter printed in the newspaper the following week stating that the champion had been the landlord of the Red Lion, and not the Royal Oak. He was anxious to correct the inaccuracy in its infancy.

Anyway, I hope the above will be of interest, and will enable you and your colleagues to make an early review of the date on the front of the pub. Please let me know if I can help any further.

With all best wishes for the grand re-opening next week

Kind regards,

Barry