

## Historians' meeting 27 May 2022

### Danny Wells: Cheers! A History of Pubs and Drinking

Although pubs have long since been part of our history, they are now closing at a rate of 37 a month. There are many reasons for this, including drink/drive laws, supermarket sales, health fears, social culture and, of course, Covid.

One of the earliest pubs in our literature is the Tabard Inn in Southwark, from where the Canterbury pilgrims set out for the Cathedral, each relating a tale at the suggestion of the innkeeper. Today's celebrity 'innkeepers' are Annie Walker of the Rovers Return and Peggy Mitchell of the Queen Vic.

There are many names to describe pubs as they all offered a different degree of hospitality, an alehouse being the most basic with bench seating and ale from a barrel in a Spartan living room. A tavern offered more comfort and served wine too.

Coaching inns also provided accommodation and food, with stabling for the horses. Coffee houses were mainly confined to London; in 1654 there were 7000 of them, mainly selling both wine and spirits.

The pub signs were also interesting, the various names often depicted a local trade as in 'The Fleece Inn' or 'The Carpenters Arms'. It was here that a tradesperson could go to find local work.

Ale was fairly easy to brew, as the basic ingredients were corn, water and yeast. Beer, on the other hand, was more complex and also included hops and was first introduced in the 1400s from the continent. The Benedictine monks brewed beer as part of their income from hospitality.

Gin originated in Holland and gave us 'Dutch courage'. By the 18th century, this was causing immense problems, particularly in London when 70,000 inhabitants consumed 1,100,000 gallons with widespread drunkenness. This resulted in the Gin Acts of the 1740s and 50s.

Burton has been involved in brewing since the 11th century with the monks at Burton Abbey. In 1777, William Bass founded his brewery, the main brand being Pale Ale. This was exported to the Baltics and India as IPA. The red triangle was the world's first registered trademark.

Danny Wells, our speaker, made the topic of pubs and drinking very interesting and wide ranging.

Report by Val Price.