

Masons Arms Billinge – History

The original dwelling on the site was known as Plumtree Croft, Chadwick Green, Billinge Chapel End and is listed as a building in 1777. The remains of this building can be seen to the rear of the pub. The Croft was a part of the local weaving industry and was owned by John Rothwell (Innkeeper) of Windle St Helens. It was leased for three thousand years at a peppercorn rent to Henry Fairhurst who had married Sarah Birchall in 1758 and lived in Chadwick Green.

In 1779 Henry and Sarah built two cottages (possibly numbers 436 and 437) and these form the original building of the Masons Arms. The date stone can be seen on the outside of the pub to this day. Henry and Sarah's son John (1761-1845) married Margaret Scarisbrick at St. Aidan's Church in Billinge and lived at Brown Heath but inherited the cottages on the death of Henry. His daughter Margaret married Thomas Rigby in 1825. They had five children: John b.1826, Margaret b.1828, Joseph b. 1831, Mary b.1837 and Robert b. 1839.

The 1838 Tithe Map shows Jeffery Fairhurst as a 'beer retailer' at 437 Chadwick Green although local records indicate that beer was sold here prior to 1815. 'Beerhouses' unlike Public Houses, did not have to be licensed but could only sell ales. In 1855, Jeffery died leaving 437 to his son Francis Crank but by 1871 first Joseph Rigby (second son of Margaret and Thomas Rigby) and then Robert Rigby (third son of Margaret and Thomas Rigby) were listed as Victuallers at the beerhouse at Chadwick Green. Robert Rigby was a Stonemason and married Mary (later known as 'Old Mary') who became the beerhouse keeper at the 'Masons Arms' from 1880 to 1924.

In 1900 the owner, Geoffrey Fairhurst Crank, leased the beerhouse now officially called The Masons Arms to Greenall Whitley & Co of Widarspool, Warrington Lancs in a series of seven year leases with Mary Rigby as Tenant. In 1924 Mary's elder daughter, Margaret Berry (husband Thomas Berry), took over tenancy and became the Licensee at the Mason's Arms. Her younger sister Anne married Joseph Gaskell of The George & Dragon in Main St. Billinge in 1897 and they had a daughter Emma in 1906. Emma married Ernest Smith around 1936.

In 1937, the Masons Arms was purchased by Greenall Whitley & Co. and became a licensed Public House.

In 1940, Moses Heyes applied for a licence to sell "Intoxicating Liquor" following on from Margaret Berry. It's believed that The Mason's well known local nickname, 'Old Mo's', originates from this time. In 1954, Moses applied for a "Full Intoxicating Liquor" licence. The premises were structurally updated and expanded at this time.

In 1961 the tenancy reverted once again to members of the family when Ernest and Emma Smith took over the lease. Their son Vincent and his wife, Barbara, took over the tenancy in 1974 for the next thirty three years. Their son, Ian Smith, in partnership with his wife Gill and her sister Sue and husband, John Ruffell, became the current tenants in 2007.

Clearly the history of The Masons is one of strong family and community links: long may it remain so!