

Tracing your ancestors who worked in pubs

Introduction

The public house has been an important social institution since medieval times. As the authorities have always looked on pubs with some degree of suspicion, regarding them as potential centres for dissension, drunkenness, and disorder, there are documents going back until Tudor times which list publicans. In addition there are other records which can shed light on publicans, the people they employed, and their lives.

The background

The public house as we know it today is really an invention of the 18th century, before then there were alehouses that sold beer brewed on the premises often by women, known as alewives or brewsters. More salubrious were inns, much larger establishments, which might offer food, stabling for horses, and a variety of dining and meeting rooms.

The 18th and 19th centuries saw a massive rebuilding of pubs in reaction to changing tastes and the opening of new establishments to meet new demand in industrial and suburban areas. Meanwhile more and more pubs were being bought by breweries with the object of selling the company's products. At the same time the authorities sought to close pubs as a way of reducing drunkenness, which was endemic among sections of the working classes. In addition increasing restrictions were placed on pubs, particularly with regard to opening and closing hours and the games which might be played there.

Since the Second World War a further revolution has taken place as pubs have had to compete with an increasing range of leisure pursuits. Many started selling food, while others became theme pubs in the hope of attracting young people. Their problems were compounded by immense changes in the brewing industry itself, which first saw rationalisation into a few large companies and then the decision of many breweries to stop brewing altogether.

The people

Over the centuries hundreds of thousands of people have run pubs. Indeed it stills remains an ambition for many a drinker, although few realise how hard the work is. There is no clear rule about who became publicans, alewives or innkeepers, but the following suggestions may help you in your search.

A number of publicans were former sportsmen or servants (such as butlers and footmen) who often saw a pub as a way of providing for their retirement.

Many children followed their parents into running pubs. Girls started as barmaids or working in the kitchen, while boys became potboys or ostlers.

It was extremely common for publicans, particularly in smaller establishments, to work only part-time, combining run a bar with other work. During the day running the pub was left in the hands of his wife and other members of the family.

A number of women also ran pubs, often taking over on the death of their husbands or fathers.

A number of different people were involved with pubs. Your ancestor may have undertaken one or more of these tasks.

The publican, sometimes known as the landlord, licensee, licensed victualler, 'the gaffer', 'gov'nor' or 'mine host'. It is he (sometimes she) who holds the license to run the pub and it is his job to ensure the financial success of the premises. Many licensees are tenants of a brewery, that is they run the pub on an agreement with the brewery which owns it, and pay the brewery an agreed amount every year in rent.

Over the past thirty years or so salaried managers, put in by the company, have begun to run an increasing number of pubs.

Barmaids – female bar staff were often the wives and daughters of publicans, although by the end of the nineteenth century barmaids were being hired in the larger and more popular establishments. Victorian sensibilities ensured that barmaids only worked in the more expensive saloon or lounge bars, where a better class of customer was served. Pay was low and hours long, although it was the custom for accommodation and meals to be included.

Barmen – tended to be young. They were better paid than barmaids, although hours were as long. Most only remained as barmen for a few years, before seeking other work.

Cellarmen – are employed to look after the barrels of beer. They tend to be employed in the larger or busier establishments. Elsewhere the publican or barstaff usually managed the cellars.

Ostlers – were men and boys who looked after the horses in coaching inns. This was important work as dozens of coaches might pass through an inn everyday.

Potmen or potboys – potmen were originally employed to keep pewter drinking mugs clean and shiny.

As glassware replaced pewter during the nineteenth century, these people were increasingly used to collect glass from tables in the bar and to act as a general servant to the pub. They were less well paid than the barstaff.

The records

Licenses

From 1552 onwards, anyone who wanted to sell ale had to apply for a licence at the Quarter Sessions or the Petty Sessions. In addition alehouse keepers had to declare that they would not keep a 'disorderly house' and prohibit games of bowls, dice, football and tennis. These declarations were called recognizances or bonds.

Although the requirements have changed over the years, landlords still have to get a licence, renewed yearly, and which can be revoked if the magistrates, meeting in the annual brewster session, feel that the individual has been running a disorderly pub.

In 1617 the requirement for licences was extended to inns. In addition between 1570 and 1792 licences could be obtained directly from the Crown (from 1757 the Stamp Office) rather than from local magistrates, although few records now survive of these licences.

The system was overhauled in 1828 with a new Alehouses Act that provided a framework for granting licences to sell beer, wine and spirits and for regulating inns.

Records of these licences can generally be found in Quarter and Petty Session records at local record offices.

Quarter sessions were originally meetings of magistrates (JPs) who met together four times a year to dispense justice and discuss the administrative needs of the county, hence the term. Petty sessions were summary meetings of two or more magistrates to deal with less important matters.

You should look out for registers of recognizances and licences granted to licensed victuallers. Few records however survive from the seventeenth century, but an act of 1753 enforced the keeping of such registers, so most counties have some material from the late-eighteenth century. Again the system fell into abeyance, particularly after 1828, but detailed registers have been kept since 1871. The most detailed registers give the name of the licensee, the parish in which he lived, the inn sign (i.e. name of the pub), and the names of occupations of two guarantors who vouched for the applicant's probity. However, you are more likely to find just the name of names of individuals and possibly the parish they came from, with no indication of which pub he ran.

Within the records there may also be correspondence, copies of bonds and notes that might contain other information.

The most useful introduction to these records is Jeremy Gibson and Judith Hunter, *Victuallers' Licences* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1997).

Records of breweries

From the late eighteenth century breweries increasingly bought pubs which would then only sell their beer. These pubs were known as tied houses, those which remained free of any tie were free houses. By the 1980s, about 90% of public houses were tied to one brewery or another.

The recent turbulent changes in the brewing industry can make it difficult to track down which brewery originally owned the pub. If you don't know have this information, it is worth trying to track down an old photograph of it which may include signs indicating who owned it. Local studies libraries (see below).often have large, and well indexed, collections of local photos. If the pub is still trading the locals may be able to help.

Once you have tracked down the right brewery, their records may tell you from whom the pub was bought or when the land it was built on was acquired. Estate records are usually held in alphabetical order by premises, and may include title deeds, mortgages, maps and plans, pub lists and books containing lease and conveyance details, In addition there may also be records of beer sold (known as *barrelage* in the trade) by the pub, although here too the records are arranged by property rather than by the publican

Some breweries keep their own records, but many have been deposited at local record offices. Because of the great changes taking place in the brewing industry at present it is not always clear where the records of the larger brewers are. The Brewery History Society (see below) is keeping an eye on the situation to ensure the brewery archives are maintained by their new owners or transferred to the appropriate archival repository. The National Register of Archives (also see below) should be able to advise you where these records are at present. Another useful source is Lesley Richmond and Alison Turton, *The Brewing Industry: a Guide to the Historical Records* (Manchester University Press, 1990).

A few breweries have published histories, which often describe their pubs. Unfortunately these books can be hard to track down. The best place to start is probably the local history library.

Allied Brewery. The archive that was once held by Allied Breweries has been divided and deposited into local record offices. The PHS has a list of what material was sent to which record office with an introductory article regarding the saving of the archive.

Other record sources

Census

Census returns survive for the period between 1841 and 1911 and are available online at various websites.

As occupations of individuals are described it is fairly easy to pick out publicans. If they ran their pub part-time the other occupation may also be noted, such as 'publican and plumber'. Other members of the household listed in the returns were likely to have been involved with the pub in one way or another. The name of the pub is also usually included, together with its address.

Directories

Directories list all trades people, local notables, and householders. They were most important in the late nineteenth century, although they start in the late eighteenth century. Pubs will be listed and the publican normally named. In addition there may well be adverts for the larger inns, particularly in tourist areas. As directories were published every year or so, it is possible to work out roughly the length of time a person ran a pub and, perhaps, his career moving from pub to pub..

The Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, London EC4 holds the largest national collection of directories – although the Society of Genealogists (See below) also has a sizeable holding. Local libraries and record offices should have some directories for their area.

Also look at website at www.historicaldirectories.org

Land records

Even quite small public houses in rural areas are likely to have a plot of land attached. Descriptions of this land will appear in tithe and enclosure maps and accompanying documents, which are roughly for the period between about 1750 and 1850. Sets of these records are at both the National Archives and at local record offices. Valuation Office returns, between 1911 and 1915, (at the National Archives) describe individual pubs and the land they occupied in both urban and rural areas, although the records are difficult to use. Ordnance survey and fire insurance maps will show pubs and the land they occupied in towns – sets of these maps are normally at local record offices. Local record offices may also have records about the sale of properties.

Land Registry. The Land Registry Act 2002 took effect from 13th October 2003. This means that the Land Registry's records are now 'open to all'. In the past only a solicitor or someone with an interest in a property was allowed to search the Property Register but now for a small fee anyone can. The Land Registry holds records for all properties where there has been a sale/purchase in the past 20 or so years since it was set up. Ownership of properties with no change of ownership in the past 20 +

years can only be established from the title deeds. See www.landregistry.gov.uk and see Find Property. Fees are usually £4.00.

Newspapers

Newspapers are another important – and under used resource – for finding about publicans and the pubs they ran. There may be stories about the departure of long-serving landlords and their staff, activities which took place in local pubs, such as a darts tournament or annual dinners, court cases involving local pubs, and the activities of prominent local publicans perhaps within the Licensed Victuallers Association or in charity work. It is also worth looking out for notices about the sale of inns and advertisements from pubs perhaps telling readers about new facilities they offer.

Local record offices and study libraries are likely to have newspapers for their areas. The biggest collection of newspapers is at the British Newspaper Library, Colindale, London NW9 5HE, with the catalogue now online at www.bl.uk. The Library will be closing in 2012 and the records moving to the British Library outstation at Boston Spa near Leeds.

An increasing number of newspapers are available online, particularly at

newspapers.bl.uk/blcs.

At present the site contains a sample of some 50 digitised newspapers and magazines published between 1800 and 1899, including many local papers. But many more will be added over the coming years.

If you are lucky your local library subscribes so you can use it at home for free. Otherwise you have to pay for access. At the time of writing it costs £6.99 for a day's access or £9.99 for seven days. It's easy to search by name or place. You can do a preliminary search for free which will produce short extracts which contain just enough information to confirm whether the story is about your ancestor or not.

Copies of local newspapers are generally to be found at record offices or at central libraries. Very few are online nor are there many online indexes. They are almost always produced on microfilm which can be quite tiring to use. Rarely are they indexed to any great degree, so you will need to know roughly when the event you are interested took place.

The best guide to newspapers remains Jeremy Gibson, *Local Newspapers 1750-1920* (Federation of Family History Societies, 1989).

The British Newspaper Library also has copies of the various trade papers and journals published for the industry. These journals contain many stories about individual publicans and contain stories about developments and challenges faced by licensees.

Full searchable archives of three great national papers are now available online for a fee. Generally you pay for a day or weeks access to all of the paper's archives:

The [Manchester] Guardian (and Observer) archive.guardian.co.uk

The Times (and Sunday Times) archive.timesonline.co.uk

Daily Mirror/Daily Express www.ukpressonline.co.uk

The Scotsman archive.scotsman.com

The Irish Times www.irishtimes.com/search/archive.html

It is also worth looking out for The Times Digital Archive, which is a rather more primitive version of the current Times online archive, although it includes exactly the same material. A number of local

libraries subscribe to the Archive and if you have a local library ticket you may be able to access this database from home.

Personal papers

Very few publicans have left personal papers behind. If you are lucky, they may include letters or perhaps account books. This material may either have been deposited with the local record office or are, perhaps, still be in the family's possession. The National Register of Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/default.asp) will be able to tell you whether any records survive for your ancestor.

Ratebooks

Rates have long been levied on property, normally of the reasonably well to do. Before the twentieth century separate highway and poor rates were levied but they were normally collected together, and details recorded in rate books, which are normally to be found at local record offices. They list the householder, landlord if appropriate, rate levied, with a brief description of the premises. Pubs will be included, although it can sometimes difficult to identify individual properties. Where they survive (and not all do) they can be found at local record offices

Wills

About 10% of people made wills before 1900 – although publicans are likely to be among this number as they often had property to bequeath. Wills are useful because they list family members and gives impression of wealth and possessions held. Before 1858 wills were administered by a complicated system of ecclesiastical courts. They are found at various record offices depending on how rich the person making the will was. The Prerogative Court of Canterbury however was the largest and most important court. Their records are at the National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline

After 11 January 1858 wills are held by the Principle Probate Registry, First Avenue House, 44-49 High Holborn, London WC1V 6NP. They have easy to use surname indexes arranged by year of death. Copies cost £5 each.

Further reading

Norman Barber, *A Century of British Brewers* (Brewery History Society, 1994). The BHS is also publishing a number of more detailed county guides to breweries, including home-brew pubs. Counties covered so far are South Yorkshire, Leicestershire and Rutland, Northamptonshire and Norfolk.

Simon Fowler, *Researching Brewery and Publican Ancestors* (Family History Partnership, 2010) www.thefamilyhistorypartnership.com/

Paul Jennings, *The Local* (The History Press, 2007)

Peter Clark, *The English Ale House, 1200-1830* (Longman, 1983)

Mark Girouard, *Victorian Pubs* (Studio Vista, 1975)

Peter Haydon, *The English Pub: A History* (Robert Hale, 1994) – the best introduction!

See also entries for alehouses and inns in David Hey (ed), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford UP, 1996) and sections in Andrew Barr, *Drink: A Social History* (Pimlico, 1995). In addition, there are several useful articles in *Family History Monthly*. Issue 34 (JULY 1998) contains an article on Publicans, Helen Osborn looked at 'Brewers and their records' in issue 56 (MAY 2000). Copies cost £3.60 each and can be obtained from *Family History Monthly*, 45 St Mary's Rd, London W5 5RQ (www.familyhistorymonthly.com)

A number of local history societies and individuals have published histories of public houses in their areas, which can often be very hard to track down. The local study librarian or archivist should be able to tell you what exists for their district. Copies should have been deposited with the British Library, although this is rarely the case. The Society of Genealogists (see below) also has a small collection.

We at the Pub History Society have an incomplete bibliography of books relating to pubs, inns and taverns. Please contact us at werringtonhistory@googlemail.com and we will make a search for you.

Useful Websites

The General Register Office has an extensive website with many helpful leaflets. The General Register Office holds birth, adoption, marriage, civil partnership and deaths records, some dating back to 1837.

www.gro.gov.uk

There are several websites that enable you to search the indexes. Some of these will charge for access.

To view the indexes online, visit one of the following websites:

www.freebmd.org.uk

Volunteer project - indexes start from 1837

www.findmypast.co.uk

Birth, marriage and death indexes from 1837

www.familyrelatives.com

Access to a variety of records, including births, marriages, deaths, wills, military records

www.thegenealogist.co.uk

Birth, marriage, death and parish records indexes, as well as Census indexes and transcripts, 1841 – 1901

www.ukbmd.org.uk

Hub for many websites that offer online transcriptions of UK births, marriages, deaths and censuses

www.ancestry.co.uk

Archive of records from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales including the GRO Indexes

There are several sites devoted to pubs of particular counties. The Pub History Society has some links to these sites via their website. www.pubhistorysociety.co.uk

Finding out what's where

Most original documents can be found in one of three places: a county record office, a local studies library or a national repository. Directory enquiries should have their phone numbers. If you have access to the Internet there is a website that lists almost all the collections of records held by local record offices, maintained by the National Register of Archives.

Every county has a county record office: a few cities, such as Southampton or Coventry, also have a city record office as well. These record offices hold material created both by local government, such as rate books, quarter session records or council minutes, and unofficial material donated by individuals, companies or clubs, which may include such things as land and house deeds, account books, and photographs.

It is important to ring before hand to book a seat - as most record offices have very cramped reading areas. They should also be able to give you a rough idea whether they have the records you are interested in.

Local studies libraries are the poor relations of the archive world, mainly because they are neither quite an archive nor really a library but contain elements of both. They are likely to have a comprehensive collection of books about the locality, including street directories. Their greatest asset is often a comprehensively indexed collection of press cuttings from local, and sometimes national, newspapers going back to before the First World War. They may well also have some original documents, such as poor law records or personal papers, but they are usually not the first place to see original material.

It can be difficult to locate local studies libraries, although they are often found in county or town central libraries.

Other useful addresses

British Library

96 Euston Rd, London NW1 2DB. Tel: 020 7412 7000

www.bl.uk/

The British Library is Britain's national library. To get access you have to have a reader's ticket and demonstrate why you need to use the library's collections, although access restrictions have been significantly liberalised in recent years. The library catalogue is available on-line, which includes the vast majority of books published in the British Isles. It is a useful way to check what books were published about pubs in your area.

National Register of Archives

The National Register of Archives comprises copies of listings of collections supplied by local record offices in England and Wales. Its indexes can be searched on-line. The Register is part of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts (HMC) which co-ordinates the work of local archives. They also have catalogues for many records held by local record offices in their welcoming reading room. The web site contains links to most archive web sites as well as addresses which have no web access. The National Archives, Ruskin Ave, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU Tel: 020-8392 5200

National register of archives is at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra

The National Archives. It has records on almost every aspect of English society going back to the Domesday Book of 1086. Of particular interest here are lists of inns and alehouses prepared as possible billets for troops in 1686 and 1756 (series WO 30) and Victuallers' Recognizances (E 180) which were bonds given by victuallers that they would not kill, dress, or eat flesh during Lent, keep gaming houses, suffer unlawful games to be played in their houses, or harbour rogues and vagabonds, etc between 1578 and 1672. There are also many records of legal cases in which publicans were involved. There are particularly fine collections of maps and photographs. Its catalogue is on-line so it is fairly easy to see what there is about your area.

Society of Genealogists

14 Charterhouse Buildings, Goswell Road, London EC1M 7BA Tel: 020-7251 8799

www.sog.org.uk

The Society's Library is a major resource for family and local historians, with much material that may not easily be found elsewhere. A fee is charged to use the Library for non-members, currently £3 per hour or £12 per day.

The Library catalogue is available on-line with a number of entries about pubs and publicans.

Pub History Society, 15 Hawthorn Rd, Peterborough PE1 4PA
www.pubhistorysociety.co.uk

Brewery History Society, Manor Side East, Mill Lane, Byfleet, West Byfleet KT14 7RS
www.breweryhistory.co.uk

A large variety of books on inns and breweries is sold by Paul Travis, BeerInn Print, Long High Top, Heptonstall, Hebden Bridge HX7 7PE. <http://www.beerinnprint.co.uk/>

Get someone else to do the work for you?

Simon Fowler is a very experienced researcher and his website is at www.history-man.co.uk

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