

The King's Head, Broseley



It is well worth a visit to the King's Head, Broseley if only to have a chat with the genial landlord, Clr. Harry Southorn one of the most knowledgeable men in the district. Being Broseley born and bred he has a fund of stories or dominoes match or a celebration of by-gone days and what he doesn't know about the town, its past industries and its inhabitants isn't worth knowing.

The mere mention of the King's Head in Broseley automatically suggests the name of Southorn, which is understandable, for Harry, as he is known to all costumers and friends, has been licensee there for 35 years.

But the converse is not quite the same. The name of Southorn instantly brings to mind, and will always be associated with, one of the oldest Industries in the district, that of clay tobacco pipe making and the manufacture of the world famous "Broseley churchwarden".

Pipes and tobacco

It may not be widely known that clay pipes were made in Broseley as far back as 1565, some years before Sir Walter Raleigh introduced tobacco into this country. It is believed they were used for smoking some kind of herb containing medicinal properties.

The works with which Clr. Southorn is connected were founded by his grandfather, Mr. William Southorn, in 1823 and were originally sited at Legge's Hill, quite close to the King's Head. In those days between 70 and 80 people were employed and something like 500 gross of pipes were fired in a large kiln every week. They were packed and transported by barge from Ironbridge to such places as Worcester, Gloucester and Bristol. Later the works were transferred to the present site at King's Street.

Once a very thriving industry, the trade has dwindled considerably, and the introduction of purchase tax after the war was a serious blow on top of increased "overheads".

Now the manufacture of clay tobacco pipes is on a much reduced scale, but there is still a demand for the small pipes, known as "cutties" and the long stemmed pipes which are chiefly made for Masonic and R.A.O.B. functions throughout the country. The clay is obtained from Devon, for this is considered to be of better quality than local clay with which Broseley pipes were first made.

After the death in 1912 of his father, Mr William Southorn who was also a member of the local council, Clr. Southorn carried on the pipe works with the help of his sister, who died in 1920 since when he has been the sole owner.

Apart from his business connections, Clr. Southorn is a well known sportsman having been a member of the Broseley cricket club for over 50 years and a regular first team player in his younger days. He has also played football for Broseley Albion and Broseley United and was captain of the Victoria Institute billiards team when they were members of the Ironbridge league. He also founded the Broseley darts league.

To-day the Peaceful atmosphere of the King's Head is only disturbed by the excitement aroused by a vital darts and dominoes match, or celebration night such as was held earlier in the year when the darts "A" and "B" teams won the championships of the Broseley league.

But it was not always so peaceful. Some 70 years ago when Mr. James Daniel Smith was licensee he is said to have dealt with an offending customer rather unceremoniously by pushing him up the chimney! Needless to say the licensee was a man of terrific strength which can be judged from the fact that he was some six feet tall and weighed over 20 stone. He was a builder by trade and apart from being the biggest man in Broseley, he will always be remembered for his remarkable feat of walking round the top of a 100 ft. chimney stack he built at Ladywood, Jackfield.



The King's Head is a Wrekin house and is situated in an area which has grown rapidly in the last few years by the development of a large housing estate. To keep abreast of the times structural alterations were carried out by the Brewery Company about 12 months ago, the bar and smoke room being made into one large room which provides additional comfort and better facilities for the customer and easier supervision for the licensee.

MINE HOST