



History of The Old Harkers Arms

In 1864 William Collinson started a large new factory at the canal bridge on City Road, housing 'vast amounts of machinery' and employing 250 hands who turned out 2,000-3,000 pairs of boots a week. William had several partners with Collinson & Gilbert being the most prominent.



In around 1875 the factory was taken over by Alfred Bostock & Co., a Stafford shoe firm, but by 1892 Bostocks had left and the premises were occupied by a rope and twine manufacturer under the name of Mr. Harker who was a canal-boat Chandler. Eventually the business folded and the premises became derelict. In 1985 the building was purchased by Jerry Brunning and Graham Price who created 'The Old Harkers Arms', the fine hostelry selling fresh food, cask ales and fine wines that you see before you today.

At the time Jerry and Graham, running a few pubs in the south, had a hankering to be back in Chester after some years away. They felt that properties were considerably cheaper (at the time) up 'north' and that they could have a bigger impact on the 'hospitality scene' up here.

They heard about the basement of an old warehouse that fronted the canal and came to take a look. Goodness knows what possessed the two of them, because what confronted them was a ghastly dripping-wet cellar with bricked-up windows and a garage at one end, pierced by the bulk of a lift shaft which serviced the floors above. To make it usable they would have to tank the whole area and terminate the lift shaft at the floor above, which would mean heavily re-enforcing the ceiling so there would be no danger of the lift crashing through if its cables broke.

So that was fine then.



Harkers before

Because the site was in a rundown part of town and the space itself needed more than a lick of paint, none of the local banks believed it would work and declined to finance it, which is where it all got a bit ginger. In the end Jerry and Graham managed to persuade 3i PLC, a large venture capitalist, to lend them the £120,000 needed in exchange for an option on 20% of our shares. The deal was done.



The same view today

We used reclaimed materials wherever we could, with a bar-front made out of lovely old mahogany doors, and a bar top made from reclaimed chemistry lab counters, it's what helps to make the pub really look like it has been here forever - in fact soon after we opened, one old boy speaking to Jerry told him sincerely that he used to drink in there as a lad, and he really believed it. Mind you, it's easy to get a bit confused at times, when you're in a pub.

Anyway, the pub went off like a train - we did well, 3i did well, the landlord did well and the customers did well. Poor old banks, eh... and we all continue to enjoy the place. There is no better business than when everyone benefits and even the bankers come for lunch, God bless 'em.