



History of Beaconsfield and the White Horse

Beaconsfield

Beaconsfield is about 22 miles west of London on the A40, once the main road from London to Oxford and around half-way between the two. Located on the north-western corner of the South Bucks District, Beaconsfield is the largest town in South Bucks. With the coming of the railway in 1906 a new commuting community grew to the north of the historic core, which lay around the market square, and although 20th century developments have filled the gap, the terms 'Old Town' and 'New Town' are still used locally to distinguish the historic town from its 20th century counterpart.



Beaconsfield, The Oxford Road, Old Town c1955

Beaconsfield is in the Chiltern Hills, just outside the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is often described as sitting on a dry hill. The underlying geology is chalk and the soil is mainly a gravelly loam. However, with pockets of clay in the area, residents report that soil can vary from one garden to the next. Historically the economy relied on agriculture with a good mix of arable, pasture and woodland in the vicinity. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries the Industrial Revolution had little impact on Beaconsfield with local industries being based on small-scale crafts and the Old Town still has the character of a country town.

Beaconsfield is recorded in property returns of 1185 where it is spelt Bekenesfeld, literally beechen field which would less archaically be read as 'clearing in the beeches'.

In recent years the town has been by-passed by the M40 less than a mile to the south. With its proximity to the capital and Heathrow, good transport links and attractive setting in the Chilterns, Beaconsfield has become increasingly affluent leading to high property values and pressure for new development and property refurbishment. It is celebrated for the first model village in the world and, in education, a direction and technical production institute, the National Film and Television School.



St Marys and All Saints Church in Beaconsfield

The parish church at the crossroads of Old Beaconsfield is dedicated to St Mary, it was rebuilt of flint and bath stone by the Victorians in 1869. The United Reformed Church in Beaconsfield can trace its roots of non-conformist worship in the town back to 1704. 'Old Beaconsfield' has a number of old coaching inns along a wide street of red brick houses and small shops. It was the first coach stopping point on the road between London and Oxford. Most buildings are parallel to the road and come right up to the boundary with no room for front gardens. Irregularities in this building line are evident in some places, notably with our pub which is set further back from the road, explained by this property having been rebuilt following a fire in 1905, when it was then known as the White Horse, as it is today.

The Great Houses

Unlike other towns, Beaconsfield does not have a Manor House. Farmers originally paid their rents at the manor courts of Huntercombe and Burnham Abbey who shared the manorial rights. However, several farms did develop into agricultural estates where the owners took on some of the rights and responsibilities of the lord of the manor, whilst still paying rents to the Huntercombe family or to the Abbess of Burnham. Having gradually acquired more farms and land which they rented out, they then completed their estate by building a large comfortable house for their family. Hall Barn, Wilton Park, Gregories and, more recently, Butler's Court thus became the great houses of Beaconsfield.



Hall Barn, 1898

Notable residents

In the Victorian era the town was the home constituency of Benjamin Disraeli, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom in 1868 and then again from 1874 until 1880 (in fact his home, Hughenden Manor is in the nearby town of High Wycombe). In 1876 he was made the 1st Earl of Beaconsfield by Queen Victoria with whom he was very popular.



It is the burial place of the author G. K. Chesterton, Edmund Burke and the poet Edmund Waller, for whom a tall stone obelisk was erected over the tomb chest in St Mary and All Saints churchyard.

In 1624, Waller's family acquired Wilton Manor and Hall Barn in the town. "The Wallers, who came from Speldhurst, Kent," says the Victoria County history of Buckinghamshire, "were settled at Beaconsfield as early as the 14th century.

Beaconsfield is also the birthplace of Terry Pratchett, author of the Discworld series of fantasy novels. Both Zoe Ball and James Corden hail from here and Enid Blyton and her first husband Hugh Pollock moved here in 1938, buying an eight-bedroomed house set in two and a half acres for £3000. This home was demolished in 1973. Today the area where it used to stand at Penn Road is called Blyton Close and is the only clue to the fact that she lived in Beaconsfield until her death in 1968.



Enid Blyton at her Green Hedges home in Beaconsfield in 1962

Due to its close proximity to Pinewood Studios, Beaconsfield has appeared in one form or another on screen. It features in several scenes in Brief Encounter; the exterior of the Royal Saracens Head Inn can be seen in the James Bond film Thunderball; and the interior shots for the pub in Hot Fuzz were filmed in the Royal Standard pub. More recently it has often been used as a "location" for the TV murder mystery series, Midsomer Murders and the Inspector Morse spinoff Lewis.

Pubs

In the 17th century Beaconsfield was renowned for its inns where travellers could get good accommodation and good hospitality. The town had always a good number of places to take refreshment; in 1577 there were at least 3 inns which offered overnight accommodation, a tavern which sold wines and spirits, as well as 12 alehouses which kept locals and visitors alike supplied with beer. There are still a number of pubs in Beaconsfield although many of the old coaching inns and pubs are now business premises.



White Hart Hotel, Aylesbury End, circa 1934

The White Horse

When we came across the White Horse it was a fish restaurant called Loch Fyne. The community of Beaconsfield were keen for it to be returned to its former name of the White Horse and many had stories from its recent history, but sadly, apart from the fire, we haven't been able to find much more about its more distant history.

The first time it pops up is recorded in the Pigots Directoy that lists Mary Hutcheson as the Land Lady from 1830 up until 1863.

George Hare and family then seem to take over until 1871. In 1888 Charles Gimmett is recorded as residing here until 1911 – we presume the gentleman who rebuilt the pub.

George Lidgley takes the rein from 1911 until Fred Gregory takes over in 1935 and then our records stop.

We haven't been able to unearth more than this, so would love to hear if you know of our pub of old.

Information gained from:

The Beaconsfield & District Historical Society.

The White Horse

70 London End, Oxford Road, Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, HP9 2JD

www.whitehorsebeaconsfield.co.uk