



History of the Barn Owl and Blacknest

If you look up our little village there's not too much said about us; 'Blacknest is a village in Hampshire, England, in the civil parish of Binsted. The village has a golf course (the Blacknest Golf & Country Club), one pub (us) and access to the Alice Holt Forest'. Blacknest Recreation Ground and Allotment Fields were very much at the heart of village life.

One of the most wonderful things about Blacknest is Blacknest Fields' 8 acres that since 2022 have been managed as a nature recovery site by volunteers. It's a beautiful tranquil spot, open to the public, with some rather special wildlife. You can follow their wildlife discoveries on the Blacknest Fields Community Facebook page.

Blacknest is situated near the town of Alton, which has a long history dating back to a Roman settlement called Vindomis. Alton is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as "Aoltone".

The area is noted for its "Jane Austen Country" connections, being close to Chawton where Jane Austen lived from 1809 until her death in 1817.

Our Pub



The Barn Owl dates back to the late 17th century when it was named the Golden Farmer and was a known hunting rendezvous.

The name 'Golden Farmer' comes from a gold-robbing farmer, William Davies (or Davis) who spent years plundering various sections of the country's main south-west turnpike road including this area before being hanged in 1689.

From 1872 until 1913, Blacknest had two pubs: the Jolly Farmer was at the crossroads and The Cricketers was right opposite the Recreation Ground. In 1913, renewal of the Cricketers' license was refused, on the grounds that one pub seemed sufficient for a village of Blacknest's size.

Sadly the pubs in Blacknest share two sad events. We won't dwell on them, but it would be remiss to gloss over them before we move onto happier times.

In September 1894 the Cricketers Inn, as it was then, was the scene of what was reported in the press at that time as "The Binsted Wilful Murder Case." The Inn, which belonged to Farnham United Breweries, was run by Frances and Cyrus Knight, who lived there with their adopted son, William Brewer, aged 15.

It would seem that Cyrus, in a half drunken condition, was playing dominoes in the tap room when Frances called him for his tea. The Times newspaper even gives us the time of day - it was 7.30 p.m. A quarrel broke out at the tea table concerning some milk and Cyrus threw the contents of his cup at Frances, who retaliated by throwing her tea at him. According to William Brewer's statement, later, Cyrus then threw the cup at her and said, "That will be the last cup of tea you shall fling at me." He put on his jacket and walked into the lower room returning with a double-barrelled breech-loading gun, took some cartridges from out of a clock-case and walked out of the kitchen door into the garden, leaving the door ajar. Brewer said he next saw the muzzle of the gun pointing inside the door. It was pointed towards his mother, who was standing washing up the tea things at the time. Two shots rang out and Frances fell dead, hit in the jaw and neck.

On being arrested, he told the inspector that the gun had gone off accidentally. Having heard the evidence, the jury took just 10 minutes to arrive at their verdict - Guilty, but they strongly recommended him to mercy because they thought he had committed the crime in the heat of passion. The Judge, Mr. Justice Grantham, doesn't seem to have heeded their recommendations - he sentenced Cyrus Knight to death by hanging and he was executed on Wednesday, December 12th at Winchester Prison.

The picture shows “The Cricketers” at the time of its conversion into a private house just a few years after the murder and was taken from an account of the incident from www.froyle.com.



Sadly, the Jolly Farmer too had an unhappy incident leading to its demolition.

At 2.40am on Tuesday December 5th 1989, a massive explosion shook the village. It was loud enough to have been heard more than two miles away, and residents woken by the blast became aware that the source of the explosion was The Jolly Farmer.

Very sadly, the pub had been the scene of an arson attack that left the chef Clifford Howes fatally wounded and the Manager with extensive burns. The beautiful tree in our front garden was planted in memorial.

The pub was rebuilt, and 100 days later was reopened, no one has yet been arrested for the terrible incident.



There were lots of happy times too of course and we asked our customer to share some with us;

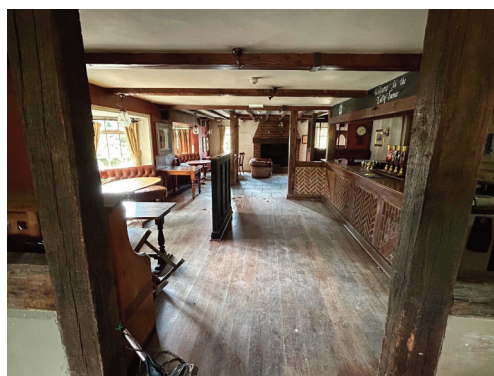
Simon “My grandfather was born in the village in 1927 and after marrying my grandmother in 1948 they had their wedding reception at the pub. They celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary at the pub as well so many happy times.”

Margaret “Ex hubby and I used to frequent the pub most weeks with other friends who lived in Wrecclesham in the 1970’s - some 50 years ago. It was first a small ordinary village ‘cottage type’ pub with mainly men just drinking!

When you opened the door a fun toy spider on a string rose up the door! New owners bought out the pub and modernised and enlarged it. Soon it became popular (think with the opening of nearby Birdworld in the mid 70’s) and a darts team was soon formed, so many couples met there at weekends. In those days the guys drank lager, lager/lime and the girls Babycham or pineapple juice! The darts teams went on to play other pub teams locally. The only food consumed was fish or scampi/chips in the basket.”



Very sadly The Jolly Farmer closed on 2nd January 2024 and stood sad and empty.



Now we have come along and started work on refurbishing in the Summer of 2025, opening just in time for the festive season in November 2025.

We hope to create many more happy times.