



# History of Rake Hall

Rake Hall is found in the village of Little Stanney, on the Wirral Peninsula between Chester and Ellesmere Port. According to the 2011 Census, its population stood at 198 people, not so different from the 1801 Census when 177 residents were recorded. Its long history is first recorded in 1086 in the Domesday Book as Stanei, a fishery leased to Restald from Earl Hugh, a Norman baron.

The parish contains one building recorded in the National Heritage List for England as a designated listed building. This is our pub, Rake Hall, listed at Grade II with its origins as a 17th century country house.

The Bunbury family commissioned the Hall and a long line of them are connected with it:

Sir Henry Bunbury, 3rd Baronet, was a British Tory politician who sat in the English and British House of Commons for 27 years from 1700 to 1727. At the time of the Hanoverian Succession in 1714 he was a Hanoverian Tory, but later offered support to the Jacobites. He was the son of Sir Henry Bunbury, 2nd Baronet, and his wife Mary Eyton, daughter of Sir Kenrick Eyton. In 1687, aged only eleven, he succeeded his father as baronet. He married Susannah Hanmer the only surviving daughter of William Hanmer (the second son of Sir Thomas Hanmer, 2nd Baronet) and had with her four sons and five daughters.

Bunbury was High Sheriff of Cheshire and Commissioner of the Revenue for Ireland until May 1715 when he was found with seditious pamphlets and engaging in Jacobite correspondence and so was swiftly removed from the post.

He was succeeded by his son Sir Charles Bunbury, 4th Baronet (c. 1708 – 10 April 1742) who also became a politician, sitting in the House of Commons from 1733 to 1742. He died unmarried after a long illness aged only 34. He was succeeded in the baronetcy by his younger brother, William.

William's nephew, Henry William Bunbury, born after Sir Charles' death in 1750 was an English caricaturist. His more serious efforts in art were no great success, but his caricatures are famous - good examples being *The Country Club* (1788), *A Barber's Shop* (1803) and *The Long Story* (1782).

Henry William was a popular character and a friend of most of the notabilities of his day, whom he never offended by attempting political satire. His easy circumstances and social position (he was colonel of the West Suffolk Militia and appointed equerry to the Duke of York and Albany in 1787) affording him plenty of leisure time to practice his talents. He would later become the successor to the baronetcy.

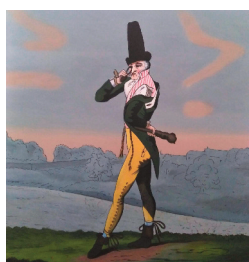


*Famous caricatures by Henry Bunbury.*

The long line of Bunburys are more usually connected with Suffolk, many becoming MPs for the area. Rake Hall appears to have been more of a 'holiday home' for the family. There is a pane of glass fixed in the kitchen dating to 15th December 1724 which depicts the name of the house and is inscribed with the names of the guests present at the time: Sir Charles Bunbury, Sir R. Grosvenor, Sir W. Stanley, Sir Frances Poole, Amos Meredith, Colonel Francis Columbine, Edward Mainwaring, Thomas Glazeor, Scherington Grosvenor, Seimor Cholmondeley, William Poole and Charles Bunbury Jnr.

The name Rake Hall could give us an indication as to the type of gatherings that were held at the house. It was intended, we think, as a bit of a pun in itself – a take on the name ‘Rakehell’ which is an old term for ‘a fashionable or wealthy man of immoral or promiscuous habits’. In a historical context, a rake was a man who was habituated to immoral conduct, particularly womanising. Often, a rake was also prodigal, wasting his fortune on gambling, wine, women and song - incurring lavish debts in the process..... leading us to believe that Rake Hall was a ‘party house’, accustomed, long before we arrived, to fine dining and drinking (thankfully the entertainment is now tamer!).

Hogarth famously depicts such a scene...



The Rakish Cad on our sign comes from a painting by A. Cropp in 1791 of a Rakehell spotted in a pub in Piccadilly.

## Our Pub

This is the earliest image we can find of the pub, at the time still a family home. It is on the front of a postcard with a stamp that dates from 1912 on the reverse.



We were kindly contacted by a customer, Lancelot McCulloch, whose family have a rich history at Rake Hall. He is a descendant of the Dixons who owned and lived here at around the time of this postcode in 1912 to the mid 1970's. He has kindly shared two beautiful family photos with us (pictured at the top of this page).

Herbert Lancelot Dixon, married Kathleen May Carrigan in 1912 in London and then moved to Rake Hall around this time. They had one daughter, Pauline Steele in 1913 and one son, Oliver Colin born 1918. Pauline married the then



famous Tom Burke, the Lancashire Caruso and the reception was at Rake Hall.

“Herberts father was the founder of LS Dixon Group, Lancelot Steele Dixon, a paper company. Kathleen’s mother was Tilly McCulloch, born in Calcutta and my great Aunt. My grandfather Dr McCulloch also married one of the Dixon gals, Gertrude Ellen.”

Another customer, Sarah Scott takes up the story from around the 70's when the estate must have passed over to her family. Her father, John Arthur Devenport, bought the property in the early 70's, renovated it and turned it into a night club which the Davenports ran until 1978. During this time, the family lived upstairs which must have been pretty noisy. They also organised wedding receptions which, judging from the amount of people who were married here and have contacted us, must have taken place over a number of years. It seems that the lawns by the beloved duck pond were a very popular spot to have photographs taken – and many others have told us they ended up in there at some point in their youth! We have also been contacted by those who tell us of paranormal activity at The Hall; ghost children playing upstairs and a ghost farmer spotted in the grounds.

We came across the pub in 2019, but by then it had been stripped of much of its charm, with modern add-ons that certainly did not enhance the building. The pandemic sadly meant that we had to put our plans on hold for a little while, but good things are worth waiting for!

The house has been altered and added to over the years, but there are original features which have been a joy to restore. Most of the windows are casements, with a dormer at the front, and a beautiful oriel window in a canted bay at the rear which now sits within our Private Dining Room.

We have enjoyed breathing life back into the building and reinstating some of its grandeur. We hope it will now be a place of joy (but with somewhat less debauchery!) for many years to come.