Newspaper cuttings relating to the WW2 window from the Royal Hotel, Formby



May 1973

Formby's Royal Hotel served as a time machine on Monday night — turning the clock back to wartime glory.

With draught bass at five pence a pint and uniformed men and women joining in the wartime hits, the nostalgia — like the ale — came flowing back.

Even the teenagers — whose knowledge of World War II stems from novels and the heroic scenes depicted on screen — joined in the gaiety as the good old bad old wartime days were relived at the unveiling of a window.

Lt. Colonel Richard Gaunt unleashed the cover to reveal the unique signature-bearing window which has pride of place in the Royal Hotel lounge.

Mounted in brass, it bears the names of numerous "Old Crocks"—mainly members of the Home Guard who according to Lt. Col. Gaunt, supped their beer in comfort under the watchful eye of Joe Dickinson, then landlord of the Royal.

"The Royal was the first pub the men came across from the old road. They drank mainly at lunchtime and that was the time they signed their names on the window," said Lt. Col. Gaunt.

Pictured (centre) among the regulars, are Mrs. Elizabeth Start, Lt. Col. Gaunt, and Mrs. H. Pritchard, whose husband, an American Serviceman, also signed the window.

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'Historical window should be kept'

A window in Formby's Royal Hotel should definitely be preserved and possibly framed, says Lt.-Col. Richard Gaunt. In fact, if any landlord wants to remove it the Lt.-Col. has requested that he be told.

Of course, it's no ordinary window — it's a memento. On it are inscribed the names of many men, most of whom have now passed away, who helped fight the last war.

Now it's 30 years ago this month since the bombs stopped whistling, the guns ceased chattering and nearly six years of armed conflict in Europe ended.

That for many people meant they could go home, they could sleep soundly in bed at night and they could set about living a peaceful existence.

It meant looking for a job and meeting old friends back at the "local".

Like most pubs in those days the Royal catered almost exclusively for men and, on the left as you enter the front door, was a gentleman's room.

Pleasure

This is where the historic window is, inscribed by those who enjoyed the simple pleasure of a pint and a game of darts together before and during the war.

But, although the heading says "Peace Day Aug. 15 1945," most of the names, according to Lt.-Col. Gaunt, were put on in 1940 or 1941.

The lieutenant - colonel himself, now of Birkey House, Birkey Lane, and a Formby resident since 1929, signed the window in 1943 after returning from the Middle East.

He was a captain in the Royal Engineers at the time and he did his war service in the Middle East, North Africa and most of Europe.

The 30 or so signatures were inscribed to signify the comradeship between those who helped the war effort both at home and abroad—civilians weren't allowed to sign.

Among them are the names of men who served in the British and American Armed Forces, the Home Guard, the Special Constabulary and the Air Raid Service.

The ages of the men concerned covered about a 30-year span — from those in their early twenties to Lt.-Col. Gaunt's father, a special constable inspector, who was in his fifties at the time.

And the lieutenant-colonel had a story to tell about his father.

"One-day," he said, "John Gaunt entered the hostelry and asked for his usual depth charge. There was a stranger in the hotel at the time and on hearing this, he having asked for a whisky and been refused said to the landlord: 'I asked for a scotch and I see now this gentleman here has a large one. How does this happen?'

Regular

"The landlord, Joe Dickinson, said: 'Well, you have to be a regular customer.' Very correctly the stranger asked the landlord: 'How long have you to be a customer before you can receive a large scotch?' And the landlord replied: '30 years.'

"With that the stranger got up and walked out."

And it appears Joe Dickinson was quite a character in the small Formby village at that time. The hotel then stood in an isolated position because most of the surrounding area had not been built-up, and his favourite saying to any new war-time customers was: "If I hadn't been wounded in the First World War, Monty would never have had his job in this one." A sobering thought!

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