

‘Dirty, Drunken Deddington’?



If you saw Neil Skinner’s Facebook pic of the Deddington bottle banks at the end of December, you might have wondered about where ‘Dirty Drunken Deddington’ comes from. It’s part of an old rhyme, quoted in the *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, no less:

*Aynho on the hill
Clifton in the clay
Dirty, drunken Deddington
And Hempton high way*

I’ve no idea of the origins of the rhyme, but it’s interesting to look at what’s behind the moniker. Why were we called that?

Pubs have always been an essential part of English village life and Deddington is no exception. And given we’re on the main road joining Banbury and Oxford, there were also travellers who needed overnight accommodation as well as food and drink, giving rise to coaching inns and lodging houses.

In the 1808 parish map only three inns were identified: Queen’s/King’s Arms at the north end of the Market Place, the Horseshoes in Horsefair and the Crown & Tuns in New Street, all coaching inns. There were also numerous beer and lodging houses.

Mary Vane Turner’s *The Story of Deddington* (1933) listed 15–16 taverns and beer houses, while a leaflet published for the 2000 Millennium Map Group project listed no fewer than 26, past and present! Now we have five, so what happened to some of the others in the intervening years?

The Plough in New Street, with its vaulted cellar, closed in 1927 and was turned into a butcher and poulterer. In the 1940s the roof of the Exhibition (home of the dustman and scavenger) collapsed and the building was demolished, then rebuilt. And since I came to Deddington nearly 50 years ago we’ve the Holcombe and the Russell, joining the others as private houses. Other changes include: the Red Lion was renamed Blacksmiths Forge and back to Red Lion. The King’s Arms became the Deddington Arms after the coat of arms was granted; the Duke of Cumberland’s Head is now more snazzily called the Duke at Clifton; and the Crown & Tuns has morphed into the Pie Pub – very successfully too.

And who can forget landlords Fred and Val in the Unicorn, Fred and Edna in the C&T, Graham & Marie France and their spectacular rows, followed by Rob Huntingdon in the Duke? Characters who made their mark on the pubs – and their customers! The pubs were their fiefdom, they called the shots.

And what of the ‘dirty’ bit of the old rhyme? The Market Place was ‘an ugly piece of rocky ground’ with a highly polluted town pool in the south-east corner, filled in in 1861. And Philcot(e) Street/Goose Green were ‘dens of iniquity’ with prostitution and paupers at that time. Right up to post WWII, Deddington was desperately poor as seen in the government *24 Square Miles* film, far from what estate agents now like to call a ‘most desirable village’.

Back to the bottle bank: the coronavirus may have driven us indoors, but it’s clear we still like a tipple! And after the horrors of Covid, what will be left? Where to put the world to rights

over a sturdy pint or a giggly glass of prosecco? Where to hold Aunt Sally, Quiz Night and the Clifton Book Club? Let's hope you come back strong – we'll be there for you.

There are lot of pics of Deddington's pubs past and present in [the Gallery](#). And for more information on inns and coaching in Deddington, go to

<http://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/buildings/inns.pubsandlodginghouses>

and <http://www.deddingtonhistory.uk/publishedhistories/mvt/7.innsandcoachingdays>

Mary Robinson
robimary@gmail.com