

PUBS AND CLUBS OF EXETER - AS I REMEMBER THEM

My three happy years at St Luke's were 1971-74. I enjoyed my first year as a resident at Killerton but then moved out to share a house in Exmouth in 72-73 with Killertonians Dave Howard and Shaun Noë. In 73-74 after Shaun had graduated Dave and I shared a flat in the village of Thorverton.

With the excellent bars and social programmes both at Killerton and St Luke's itself, many students felt little incentive to spend much time, or more money, at drinking venues in and around the city. Yet I remember several of those venues with some affection...

Whilst I was living at Killerton, I spent many evenings at **The Red Lion** in Broadclyst. John and Pat Abrahams were excellent hosts, and when our conversations revealed that I was something of a singer/guitarist they asked me to 'give them a turn' in the bar one night. This led to a regular spot and even to my representing the pub in a talent competition run by Bass Charrington South West. With technical back-up supplied by pub regular Frank Hunt who owned *Electrosure* in Fore Street Exeter, my progress through the competition rounds took me, and



a large bunch of Broadclyst supporters, to Torbay for the final. Modesty forbids a report of the result, but the rewards included an introduction to Miss Paignton 1972. I have been a fan of Bass beer ever since.

Exeter had a very large number of pubs; today it has a great many more. In St Martin's Lane, alongside the Royal Clarence Hotel was **The Ship**, a heavily oak-beamed hostelry, claiming associations with St Francis Drake. I think the claim is dubious, but no matter; The Ship's dark and ancient interior was conducive to 'dates' in the upstairs dining room.



Prawn cocktails, rump steaks and glasses of red Piat D'Or for two felt like exciting sophistication!

Today The Ship has changed little; the Drake 'quotes' painted at the doorway have been well maintained, but the dark interior seems now less romantic than rather sticky and drab.

If The Ship's claim to historical fame is less than fully secure, **The White Hart** in South Street always had a deeper authentic feel. Bars on either side of a cobbled courtyard made this a serious alehouse with a proper tap room and heavy candles dripping onto deep-boarded tables.

The courtyard statue of some naked goddess contributed to the agreeably bohemian style and the whole ambience ensured that a session at The White Hart was always a long one.



On a recent visit I was delighted to discover virtually no change in the place since the 70's.

After refreshment in The White Hart, we often walked up South Street to the Indian restaurant (name forgotten, now gone). This eatery was a particular favourite of Shaun's. He was well known in the bookmakers alongside, where his visit at the beginning of each term (after receipt of his grant cheque) resulted in triumph or disaster. Endlessly generous in triumph, he did often meet Disaster, after which he seemed to smoke more than he ate. But he was so loved that nobody minded chipping in to cover any shortfall in Shaun's share of the curry house bill. Perhaps because the Indian restaurant was a popular place in the late evenings, there were neatly framed notices along each wall above the tables. All made the same plea: *"Your Meal Is More Enjoyable In A Quiet Atmosphere"*. I can still hear Shaun's beer-fuelled guffawing. Rest in peace, old friend.

If we were feeling perky after the tap room at The White Hart, it was only a short stroll round the corner into Coombe Street to **The Bag O' Nails** club.



Once a Salvation Army mission hall, this chapel-like building was home to rather more base delights than that worthy organisation would have sanctioned. Beyond the throbbing music sounds of the day and the sweaty enjoyment of them on a cramped dance floor, it is testament to the wonder of the place that I really can't remember anything else about it now.

Today the building accommodates music study courses. I wonder if the ghost of Marc Bolan troubles them...

Down at Exeter quayside, nestled next to the old maritime buildings, was **The Prospect Inn**. Here was provided a fine setting for an evening pint, outside overlooking the river. Overlooking, too, **The Quay Club** – which was often the destination after a bracer at The Prospect, especially if sight of the evening's clientele filing into the club opposite had earned murmurs of approval on the Prospect's terrace.

The Quay Club was more up-market than The Bag O' Nails. It wasn't a strip club, but there must have been strip nights because I recall a hilarious evening when we appreciated a performance by a lady of mature years called, I think, Gogie Daniels, who clearly enjoyed her own routine as much as her audience did. It was much more to do with comedy than eroticism.



The Quay Club morphed into Tiffany's. Today it is a diner, looking depressingly like so many that fill this and every other city. Made-over, and stripped of what it was. So thanks, Gogie, for what it was.



During the day at St Luke's we did occasionally venture to pubs near the college. I recall a pleasant lunchtime visit to **The Mount Radford** at the end of College Road. This was not an escape from studies, but was at the invitation of Colin King, stylish member of staff in the Drama Department. MG BGT-driving, electrically-tanned Colin was super-smooth. He ran the small TV studio at St Luke's where some of us put together the weekly *'Luke Alive'* show that was screened for the college community.



We were impressed, as intended, that joining us at The Mount Radford that day was Colin's TV friend Sue Lawley, who was working at BBC South West. Colin was so unlike others members of the academic staff that it fed some optimism that perhaps preparing ourselves for a career in teaching did not mean we were committed to a life devoid of glamour.

It was good to drink with tutors. Unlike our schoolteachers when we were teenagers, these were friends who accepted us on their level. We drank and smoked with them; and we wanted to justify their support and encouragement.

The English Department had several memorable tutors, and at no time were they seen in a better light than at the meetings held at **The Passage House Inn** at Topsham.

This historic pub overlooks the Exe estuary, and in the back room the tutors held literary evenings. The stand-out memory of these occasions is without doubt the storytelling of Donald Cross. It was intriguing to be with a man of middle years who - seriously - believed in fairies. He told his stories standing stock-still, hands by his side, moving only his head as he engaged his audience with his eyes. Having known this man and heard his stories, I often told my own pupils that



they should not be too quick to dismiss the existence of fairies. How can you be sure? When are you old enough to have grown out of this - or any other - belief? I would say now that age makes us less, not more, sure of things.

I thank Donald Cross for his magical tales. I wish I had thanked him then, at Topsham.

It wasn't all about alcohol. A healthy salad or first class tea could be had at **The Ceylon Tea Centre** in Paris Street. This was the sort of place a visiting parent could be taken to. I can't remember actually paying for a cup of tea at any time during the three years. The Ceylon Tea Centre has gone now, as has the adjoining hairdresser's *Colin John*, where we made a video ad for *'Luke Alive'* to advertise student hairdressing rates – and got a free cut for ourselves.

By the time I'd moved to Thorverton, I was playing guitar once a week in **The Dolphin Inn** (now called The Thorverton Inn). A little following grew up, and brother-and-sister managers Mike and Sandy advertised these musical evenings in the *Express & Echo*.



Sight of one of these ads prompted Fred Smith, Head of the English Department at St Luke's, to call me to his office in Rowancroft. He wondered if I was really planning to go into teaching, my training for which the nation was paying. I assured him I was, but said that I felt it important to maintain interests outside the profession too. I didn't realise then how true that would prove to be.

Many other pubs featured in my St Luke's years. A long list includes **The Deer Leap** (now The Bath House) at Exmouth; and, for a drive out towards Dartmoor, the wonderful **Nobody Inn** at Doddiscombsleigh with its famous 250+ whiskies behind the bar. Just finding that place was an achievement which involved looking out for little direction signs tied to roadside hedges along the way. It's easier these days. Easier, but perhaps less exciting.

Sitting outside Costa Coffee in Princesshay this year I found the place all but unrecognisable, and much of the city could be a high street anywhere. Traffic chokes Heavitree Road and crawls past the boarded-up **Honiton Inn** and up Paris Street. Yet here and there old haunts remain. The gull's cry over the Exe is timeless, and after a pint at the **Port Royal** by the riverside walk do I hear Googie's signature music wafting up from the Quay?