

## The History of the Tiger Restaurant – locally known as ‘ The Cockpit’

### Summary

- The building was owned from the late Middle Ages until c.1800 by St George’s College, Windsor – and because there was little pressure for its ‘modernisation’ or replacement, it contrasts with the more modern, largely Georgian, buildings in the same street largely owned by Eton College.
- In 15C formed a valuable corner plot next to Eton market place – a little known feature of medieval Eton – established in 1452 to supply food for those building the college. The market closed circa 1550 with the changes of the Reformation, but the ‘empty market space’ can still be recognised today.
- The Cockpit would have witnessed many historic events, as Eton High Street was the main approach to Windsor Castle from London. Every monarch before 18C. would have passed along it and most famously, it was repaved for the funeral cortege of Jane Seymour, third wife of Henry VIII, who was buried in St George’s College chapel.
- The Tiger Garden has a colourful history of previous occupants including weavers, shoemakers, brewers, bakers, tailors and butchers. The remains of (probably) a butcher’s abattoir, with its ‘knuckle bone floor’ in a rear out-building date to at least the seventeenth century, and possibly the sixteenth.
- The age of the building is unknown for certain: its style is of the fifteenth century, but certain documentary evidence of the present structure does not occur until 1611. It represents, however, the last surviving example of shop-houses with were typical of Eton before the arrival of the College.
- The building’s local name ‘The Cockpit’ was probably adopted soon after World War I, when it was used as an antiques shop and then in 1936 a tearoom<sup>1</sup>.

### The building’s history from source material

The three terraced cottages 47-49 High Street, Eton were built as a single unit – this is evident from their roof line. The documentary sources, however, are not clear when this took place.

The earliest record, which appears to refer to the terrace, is of 1465, when Thomas Jourdelay transferred some Eton messuages (without mentioning the number) to Richard Grove.<sup>2</sup> References to this type, which mention neither neighbours nor common owners, typically imply the existence of two adjoining messuages or cottages, although as the current structure indicates, the plot clearly contains space for three premises (No.s 47-49).

These three boundaries were probably fixed when the town was set out in the early thirteenth century – so unless the site was divided into houses of unequal size (one covering two plots, and one of a single plot) then the suggestion might be that in the fifteenth century only two messuages existed on the site, with the remaining plot being left empty. This would not have been an unusual arrangement – there were ‘garden plots’ (i.e. spaces for potential houses) in central Windsor at this time. Indeed, in 1596 the Cockpit site was described as two houses adjoining a third plot described as ‘a garden’.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See S. Balance, *A Town Called Eton* (London 1892), 131.

<sup>2</sup> Saint George’s College Archive (SGA) XV.17.3

<sup>3</sup> SGA XV.17.16

In fact, there is no explicit reference to the three cottages on the site until 1611, although the sequence of extant leases is incomplete. Based on this evidence, the Cockpit terrace might date to the late sixteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

At some date after 1465 (the earliest deed), before 1521 and probably 1508, the 'Tiger Garden' site came into ownership of St. George's College, Windsor.<sup>5</sup> The deed witnessing this transfer has not survived; however, and hence the date has to be estimated, based on the surviving material. St. George's owned a considerable amount of property in Windsor, mostly inns, but because of local affiliations, it owned little in Eton. The college's only other significant property was a riverside wharf, located on King's Stable Street.<sup>6</sup> It would be wrong to think that Eton College has similar land holdings in Eton to those of St George's College in Windsor. At this date Eton College was not a major landowner – although it was a significant tenant – and a survey of the manor in 1548 makes this point.<sup>7</sup> Eton College increased its local estate in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – well after Tiger Garden was built.

Some of St. George's local estate was purchased in the usual way, but probably the larger part was donated by people in return for the entry of their name(s) on the college's bed roll. This was the means by which people could be included in an annual remembrance mass (known as an obit mass), an exceptionally important provision, probably equivalent to the emphasis on pensions today. At the time it was believed that after death the soul entered purgatory, but that with the aid of prayer and supplication from the living, the soul could be purged of its sins, allowing it to progress to heaven. The gift of land and /or property to a perpetual institution, such as a royal college, was the most effective way to ensure this vital work was carried out after the donor's death. It may have been such a motivation which prompted the Tiger Garden site to be given to St George's College, as after 1452 it became a very valuable property indeed: perhaps one of the most valuable in the High Street, and its gift to the college would have ensured the donor's perpetual remembrance.

It is the 'Tiger Garden' location next to the site of Eton market, newly established in 1452, which is its main claim to fame in terms of local history.<sup>8</sup> Although King Henry VI had founded Eton College in 1440, one of the most pressing problems facing the project was the supply of food for many building workers/pilgrims who came to Eton, which at this date was a small and remote village. The college at first was not a school, but an institution charged to pray for the King's soul year round, and particularly after his death. There was no mere annual obit mass for a person of kingly status and wealth – but a perpetual college with its own ranks of secular priests – and one on the scale of Eton College could only be afforded by the exceptionally rich.

From the start the king richly endowed the college with an array of confiscated monastic property (the so called 'alien properties' endowment). This had come into royal hands because French monastic houses had owned it, and as England was at war with France, the King did not want to support his enemies, even indirectly. But as this land was religious land, it couldn't be taken back to the treasury, it was 'tainted', and therefore the idea of recycling it into a royal college seemed an elegant solution.

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<sup>4</sup> SGA XV.17.11

<sup>5</sup> The lease mentions that eight years are left to run in 1521, and as typically new leases were for 21 years, this suggests an acquisition date of 1508. SGA XV.17.4

<sup>6</sup> SGA XV.17.58

<sup>7</sup> The National Archive (TNA) LR2/188/268-75

<sup>8</sup> *Cal. Ch R* 1427-1516, 117

Eton College, ordered to be constructed when the king was 18, was at first to consist of a modest extension to the existing parish church. This amounted to enlarging the existing quire, to accommodate the college's clerical staff, together with a range of domestic buildings. However, no sooner had this work been completed, than Henry changed his mind, and wanted something larger and more 'kingly'. The existing buildings were pulled down and work started again. The repetition of this process – supervised personally by the king – resulted in the college's design expanding to the almost incredible proportions. For example, its chapel, which by 1447 replaced the former parish church, was planned to be larger than Lincoln Cathedral. In the event, Henry was deposed in 1461 before his plans could be realised, and at his death the college buildings were only partly complete. They were finished, as seen today, by Bishop William Wainflete in c. 1470, although in 1467 the Pope had ordered the college closed. The new king, Edward IV, had decided that the college could fulfil a useful political purpose, and allowed it to survive – but with a much reduced endowment. To replace the missing endowment income the college expanded its school – and the rest is history.

Although we might consider the college buildings – as opposed to the chapel – unexceptional, they represent some of the first brick buildings in the country and are of exceptional architectural and historic interest. Bricks were a new exciting technology in the 15c. and the buildings in Eton were built by brick-makers imported from Flanders by the King. The bricks were fired on site, and the brick earth came from a field in Slough near the modern A4, graphically called in 1490 'le Brickfield'.<sup>9</sup>

From the start, however, workers complained about the poor quality and insufficient quantity of local food supplies and actions had been taken from an early date to address these concerns. Eton had been granted a fair in 1443 together with the valuable right to take fish in the river Thames – a right that belonged to Windsor from 1277, but was transferred to Eton, in exchange for Windsor being represented in Parliament and other benefits.<sup>10</sup> It is to be remembered that fish were a much more important part of the diet in the fifteenth century than they are today, and the grant of fishing rights in the Thames would have been very valuable.

These actions evidently did not fix the problem, however, because by 1453 the workers went on strike, again complaining about insufficient food supplies.<sup>11</sup> It would seem that the problems of bringing food to Eton allowed local people to exploit the building workers, and no doubt this irritation lay behind the worker's complaints. The Eton court rolls of 1450 note the repeated prosecution of locals for selling meat, fish and bread with inaccurate weights and at (illegally) high prices. In addition, Eton High Street (called Eton Street in the fifteenth century) was full of unauthorised taverns – not only selling beer in short measures but also using their premises as illegal brothels.<sup>12</sup> Although today Eton is a genteel place, its ambiance in the mid fifteenth century was much 'wild west'. The authorities threatened prison terms in response to the striking workers in 1453, and at the same time tried to devise other initiatives to fix the food supply problems. But at the base, the difficulty was that east Berkshire was a thinly populated and there was only just enough food for the existing population. Moreover, an agricultural depression in the first quarter of the fifteenth century acted to limit the quantity of 'surplus' food, and there was little which might be supplied readily to Eton.

The somewhat radical solution proposed for these problems was to grant Eton the right to hold a market. The number of markets were controlled by royal license, as they were highly profitable, but their success could be diluted if there were too many, and hence their control. Market grants were usually a privilege reserved for larger towns and rule was that they were

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<sup>9</sup> ECR 10/ 330, 313f

<sup>10</sup> Cal. Ch. R. 1427-1516, 39

<sup>11</sup> Cal. Pat. R. 1452-61, 92

<sup>12</sup> Eton College Records (ECR) 9/33

never granted to a settlement within six miles of an established market. The idea of granting a market to Eton when it was so close to the existing town, and a royal town at that, must have been considered exceptional. We don't know the local reaction to this grant, but as it had the potential to undermine Windsor's economy, it likely caused a lot of ill-feeling. Nonetheless, a market was granted to Eton, and despite the fact that it had no suitable venue at which it could be held. Eton was a settlement set out along a single narrow street, and was never designed to have its own market place. To overcome this difficulty, a further radical solution was implemented: a number of properties in the High Street were pulled down, to create a small, off-set market area. This can be seen today, next to the Tiger Garden restaurant (turn sharp right next to the letter box).

Corner properties next to the market place – such as the Tiger Garden – were always the most valuable in a town because they offered a double aspect from which to display items for sale, to attract customers travelling in two directions. For this reason the 'Tiger Garden' terrace would have been particularly valuable, and may have commanded an exceptional rent after 1452 – explaining its attraction to St George's College. Although another royal college, St George's was not particularly wealthy in the late sixteenth century, having recently spent a fortune building its new royal chapel. The acquisition of a valuable commercial property in Eton would have been a significant gain for the college.

The first people to lease the 'Tiger Garden' cottages from St George's were, as might be expected, artisans: Richard Massant, weaver (1521), Henry Wilson, shoemaker (1538), Edward Harland, tailor (1544), Richard Olyf, baker (1578) and Thomas Dickinson, cook (1599).<sup>13</sup>

The rent for each cottage was initially fixed at 5s (25p) per annum, for a term of typically 21 years, but in 1544 this was increased to 10s (50p), or 20s (£1) for two cottages, probably to reflect the commercial value of the site. The first explicit reference to the cottages' location, next to the market place, comes in 1544, but as the series of deeds is incomplete, this does not imply a date for the market's foundation.<sup>14</sup>

The market was short lived, however, and appears to have closed in the mid sixteenth century – there is no mention of it after c. 1560. This date would connect with the change in national religion, which banned 'superstitious practices', such as the belief in purgatory, and obit masses, which in turn would have drastically reduced the numbers of people travelling to holy shrines such as Eton. With fewer visitors, there was no need for a second local market in Eton, and presumably why it closed: there were insufficient customers. It is notable that when a 'Tiger Garden' lease was renewed in 1562 to one Henry Woolstone, shoemaker, the rent had reverted to 5s per annum, the rent charged fifty years earlier, probably reflecting the cottage's lower commercial value following the market's demise.

As previously mentioned, the arrangement of the Tiger Garden terrace in the mid sixteenth century was of two equal sized cottages with a third space – to the south – unoccupied, and left as a garden. It was probably the availability of this garden space, which attracted John Rayne, butcher, to lease one of the cottages before 1551.<sup>15</sup> The garden may have been useful as a place to keep his stock before slaughter – because as this date the butchers' craft consisted of being both slaughter-man and a retailer of meat. It may have been John Rayne, or possibly another butcher, William Russell who occupied the premises in 1660, and installed the 'knucklebone' floor which survives to the rear of no.48 High Street: this may have been the slaughterhouse.<sup>16</sup> Knuckles were a by-product of (typically) the leather working trade and in the early modern period were used for decorative effect in domestic flooring. The apparent 'industrial application' of knucklebones evident as No 48 is unusual, and may have been

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<sup>13</sup> SGA XV.17.5,6,7,10,23

<sup>14</sup> SGA XV.17.6

<sup>15</sup> SGA XV.17.19

<sup>16</sup> SGA XV.17.36

installed as a type of non-slip floor, the gaps between the 'knuckles' allowing blood to drain away. The extant leases make no reference to tanners occupying the 'Tiger Garden', but this might not be crucial, as light leather working was a common village occupation and the knuckles could easily have come from the trades of neighbours. But in the case of No 48, the known connection to butchers', might suggest the most likely source of the bones. A slaughterhouse of this size could only have been used for smaller animals such as pigs or sheep, rather than cattle, and it was perhaps the availability of sheep bones which led to the installation of the floor. The survival of this type of floor, in this location and for this purpose is rare and deserves to be better known. Its early modern date is not unusual, however.

The knucklebone floor has been a matter of considerable interest and speculation over many years. Most recently it has been thought to be the remains of a medieval cockpit – but this would seem incorrect for two reasons. Cockpits were circular, and the knucklebone floor at no. 48 is rectangular, 11 feet x 5 feet – about the necessary size for a pig or sheep.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there is no raised or sufficient area for spectators near this 'cockpit' – the floor is located in the corner or a back shed – not the sort of space that could accommodate many on-lookers and gamblers. A simple comparison with the preserved cockpit from the museum of Welsh rural life – although a larger-scale example – illustrates that the Tiger Garden's knucklebone floor is unlikely to have been used for cock fighting.

It is unknown who suggested that the 'Tiger Garden' floor was once a cockpit, but it seems not to have been much before 1920. In the 1930s no.47 & 48 were famous tearooms called 'The Cockpit', having inherited the name from an antiques shop, which had previously occupied the premises. This antiques shop is noted in 1922, but not much earlier.<sup>18</sup> In 1890 No.47 was a boot-maker's workshop and No.48 a private house, occupied by a Miss Watkins.<sup>19</sup> In 1846 artisans occupied these premises and there is no reference to the name 'the cockpit'.<sup>20</sup> The cockpit attribution is therefore modern, and the claim that Charles II, with Nell Gwyn, visited it to see cock fights, is almost certainly fictional.

Balance notes – from a design perspective – that the 'Tiger Garden' terrace could have been built in 1420 and as she was a building historian, her opinion should be given weight.<sup>21</sup> However, the techniques of building with timber changed little over many centuries, particularly in rural areas and consequently it is difficult to know from building style alone when the cottages were built. The claim that the terrace was sold by St. George's College in 1420 is false, as the college did not own it until some date after 1465. Equally, the reference to one John Strugnell purchasing the terrace in 1420 cannot be substantiated from St. George's catalogue of deeds.<sup>22</sup> There is no record of John Strugnell's existence – he does not appear in any record, for any purpose. There is also no record of this individual in the Centre for Buckinghamshire Studies – the archive, which covers Eton in the fifteenth century. Without evidence of where this 1420 deed is kept, the claim that the Tiger Garden terrace is of a fifteenth century date has to be considered doubtful.

Rather, the documentary evidence, as already mentioned, would indicate the existing terrace of three cottages dates from c.1611, and that before this date it consisted of just two cottages and a garden.<sup>23</sup> The 1611 deed makes reference to two neighbours for the first time and significantly, notes that the rent was set at 5s per annum, the same rent charged in the early

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<sup>17</sup> See S.Ballance, *A Town Called Eton* (London, 1982), 131

<sup>18</sup> Kelley's Directory 1922

<sup>19</sup> Marshall's Directory 1890

<sup>20</sup> Hunt's Directory 1846

<sup>21</sup> S.Balance, *A Town Called Eton* (London, 1982), 131

<sup>22</sup> A reference to one Richard Strugnell comes in 1715, and in connection with St. Anthony's Hospital in Portsmouth: he was a witness to a deed. SGA XI.F.21. There is no reference to a John Strugnell.

<sup>23</sup> SGA XV.17.11

16C. for the other two cottages. Eton was not a particularly wealthy place in the early modern period, and that rents could remain unchanged for hundreds of years is not unusual. The 1611 deed, however, makes no specific note of the cottage's location on Eton street (modern High Street), which might leave room to doubt that it refers to the 'Tiger Garden' terrace. But as St George's College owned few properties in Eton, it would seem unlikely that, despite the missing detail from the deed, it related to another terrace.

By 1624 No. 48 had been let to a Beer-brewer called John Wicks, and this is the first reference to the existence of an inn called the Adam and Eve on the site. St George's College, as the largest in owner in Windsor – it controlled about 15 such premises in the late sixteenth century – and it would have been wholly within its usual course of business to let the 'Tiger garden' for this use, although No.48 would have been an exceptionally small inn. Nonetheless, it remained in use as the Adam and Eve Inn for over 115 years, as in 1739 it was still in use as an inn, occupied by Francis Spence.<sup>24</sup> The deeds do not mention the inn's name after this date. However, in 1797 the brewer Thomas Moore occupied one cottage, and possibly by this date it was being used as the innkeepers dwelling.<sup>25</sup> The Adam and Eve inn had continued in operation, but from no 51 High Street, which is a larger premises – and this is where it was recorded in 1890. At this date No.49 was being used by T.Hester, as a good grocer's shop and, as previously noted, Miss Watkins lived at No.48 and Marshall's Boot makers at No.47.<sup>26</sup> St George's College seem to have sold the 'Tiger Garden' terrace in the late eighteenth century, since the sequence of deeds comes to an end at this time. Its ownership after this date has not been investigated.

The other points of interest as the 'Tiger Garden' concern the Sun Insurance disc on the front wall. In 1727 the property was owned by Thomas West, and his trustee, a Maidenhead iron monger called Robert Fellows, insured the building for £450 and the contents for £50.<sup>27</sup>

The history of the post box outside the premises is slightly obscure. Balance notes that it is an example of the first iron post box of 1856, but it is not marked on the 1876 Ordinance Survey map of the town, and neither is it shown in an 1890 watercolour of the High Street. But collections were made from it in 1891.<sup>28</sup> Personally, I wouldn't place too much weight on the first Ordinance Survey map – as (a) it depends when the original survey was completed which resulted in the map – for Windsor this was 1830, before the post box could have existed, and (b) post boxes are not always marked on the map. In addition, there are several small errors on the first OS map – Keate's Lane for example, is spelled incorrectly.

### **Finding out more**

The references in this document are to deeds in Eton College library and St George's College archive, based on their summary in the archives' catalogues. To be completely sure that a more accurate history of the building cannot be determined, it would be necessary to read the original documents. These, however, are more likely to be in Latin – at least for those before 1500 – and in a (difficult to read) medieval script. However, this is probably the most important piece of additional work to refine/confirm the history noted above. Ownership of the properties in the 19C and 20C could be mostly determined from the census returns, available on-line.

The knucklebone floor could be researched in more detail: there is some literature on this topic, but examples are rare. I'm sure the county archaeologist would be interested in this example, and might fund some research??

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<sup>24</sup> SGA XV.17.54

<sup>25</sup> SGA XV.17.98

<sup>26</sup> Marshall's Directory 1890

<sup>27</sup> Balance, *Eton* 131

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 122

An exact dating of the buildings could be made from its timbers – dendrochronology – and this would establish when the timber used in building was felled. The knucklebone floor could also be dated with the most advanced type of radio carbon dating to +/- 60 years, but this would have to be completed by experts in the field. Several archaeological consultancies exist, and they could be asked to quote for the work.

There might also be some additional documentary material in the Buckinghamshire Study centre – the county archive for Buckinghamshire – as before 1974 Eton was in that county, rather than Berkshire.

Finally, a review might be carried out on maps and other documentary sources in the National Archive in Kew. The properties could have been included in a will in the eighteenth and nineteenth century – their location near Windsor Bridge would probably indicate that the land has been occupied for a considerable period and other facets of its history might emerge.

Hope the above is of interest/use.

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