

The Crook Log Public House

This public house has an appearance of great age and, standing as it does at the side of the old Dover Road, looks like a typical wayside inn of the days of the stage-coach.

Its age cannot be determined with accuracy but it may well be 250 years old or more. It can be traced back in the Bexley rate books to 1808 probably to 1790, judging by the continuity of the names of owners and occupiers. Earlier than that date, we have the name Crook Log House on a list printed by the New Cross Turnpike Trust in 1738 and this may well mean the inn. Maps published in 1781 and 1769 show a house in the right position. I feel confident that the 1738 reference is to this inn.

The name Crook Log is worth investigation. It first appears in our records in 1654, when Thomas Cawstin, a wheelwright of Welling, bought some pieces of land including "Crook Log or Taylehangers", 2 acres in extent. The same name, "Crook Log or Tailhangers" is found in a Survey of Bexley Manor made in 1681, while in an earlier survey of 1608 the place is called simply "Talehangers". I conjecture that Tailhangers" is derived from an Old English word "hengra", meaning a grassy plot by the side of the road and from a Norman French word referring to cut fire-wood (bois de tail) and that at one time there was a clearing in the woods at the side of the main Dover Road where firewood was stacked ready for transport. Originally the district was thickly wooded and firewood was a valuable product, as can be seen from the fact that in the 17th Century the rent of West Wood was £20 per annum plus ten cartloads of 'talwood' and ten of faggots. (The same element 'tail' can be seen in 'talwood' and 'Taylehangers'.) Between 1608 and 1654 the name Crook Log began to supplant Tailhangers but the place referred to was still the same. Perhaps as the adjacent land was cleared of trees (an area to the west had become arable land called Pattersham by 1608) and when Tailhangers ceased to be used for firewood-stacking (it too was arable in 1608) the old name was replaced by Crook Log, possibly because of a distinctively-shaped piece of timber left by the last cutters of firewood.

We can say very little about the age of the actual building of the inn. All O.S. maps and the Tithe Map of 1839 show a similar outline,

including the extension that stands on the east side of the main block and at an angle to it. One cannot be sure that none of the present buildings have been rebuilt on the site of an earlier one.

It is sometimes said that the old name for the inn was the Fox and Hounds. This is partly correct, for the rate books and valuation lists do refer to it as the Fox and Hounds from 1822 to the early years of the 20th Century, although local directories call it the Crook Log from 1898 onwards. Nevertheless, in the 1808 valuation list the name is the Crook Log Public House and it seems that this is the old name for it. (There is danger of confusion between this inn and a beer shop that stood on the other side of the main road opposite the end of Danson Road; this was apparently sometimes called the Crook Log during the period when the other one was called the Fox and Hounds.)

Charles Harper, in his "The Dover Road", published in 1895, also calls it the "Crook Log". His remarks are worth quoting, though it should be pointed out that he is no more scathing in these comments than he is in what he says on most local places. "The 'Old Crook Log' inn is the only houses here that has a history of more than fifty years' length, and this roadside public- house is remarkable, not so much, perhaps, on account of its age - which is indeed, very considerable - as by reason of the curious bid for custom the landlord makes of holding a free Natural History Exhibition of live birds and animals in his back garden, where monkeys, peacocks, owls, cats, canaries, bats, foxes and others lead wretched lives, stived up in small cages, and create an effluvium whose strength must be smelt to be believed."