

Round And About In The Parish.... [The Crocodile]

The Historical Society was recently contacted by a gentleman living in Newick who had spent his childhood in Danehill and he was curious to know more about the name for the Crocodile pub.

The reason why the Crocodile is so named is obscure and no-one has been able to pinpoint why exactly this name arose. Certainly an uncommon name. Theories regarding smugglers are among the suggestions and there are lots of tales of smuggling in Danehill but nothing can be proven.

This gentleman quoted from a book about pubs which listed the Crocodile and his enquiry to the Society centred on the following description.

"Crocodile. Dane Hill, West Sussex. The sign shows a crocodile wearing a fez, velvet smoking jacket, yellow check trousers, bow tie and spectacles and smoking a pipe"

He then went to to say "The local explanation of the name is that crocodile referred to a large pair of tongs [presumably resembling crocodile jaws] which were used by smugglers in the eighteen century. They hid their contraband in nearby marshland and used the tongs to retrieve it. Sceptics are shown the tongs themselves when they visit the pub." I just wonder where 'this marshland is'.

This gentleman, I think, rather expected the Society to dismiss the idea of a crocodile wearing a fez etc, but we were able to assure him it was true. Here is a fuzzy photo to prove it.

It was no doubt a good wheeze to get customers into the pub, and smuggling tales add to the character, but where did these tongs come from? There are tales of stuffed crocodiles behind the bar [not real of course] but the Crocodile has always been something locals have been proud of. Even today, in the Club@Danehill, there is an old sign behind the bar, depicting a Crocodile, but it is very hard to photograph. Another possibility for the name is that children walk in what is described as 'crocodile style', but who knows?



When Mr Norman May was the landlord the sign simply showed a crocodile. This fuzzy photo (next page), I believe, dates from the 1960's.



Danehillians (is that a real word or have I just made it up?) were naturally proud of their Crocodile and in 1983 local people produced their own pantomime, based on a Golden Crocodile. This was very successful.

My thanks to Sally Alexander and Pete Baker.

Jill Rolfe

