

Round And About In The Parish

We have been hearing, almost non-stop, for a couple of years about Brexit, but in January 1973 following a referendum, Britain entered into what was then known as the European Economic Community.

At the Red Lion, Chelwood Gate, Brian Grove, who with his wife Lorna, had taken over the Red Lion the preceding March, decided to enter into the spirit of that new age and renamed the pub, Le Lion Rouge.



The advertising details from January 1974 proclaimed that you were just as likely to find in there a Frenchman pondering over the mysteries of bitter beer as an English diner sampling one of the 60 wines that the Red Lion had in its den. It had been given a £20,000 face-lift but it still retained the character of the old coaching inn that it once was, long before the Common Market was a twinkle in a statesman's eye.

“But” said Brian “we are in Europe now and must be prepared to cater for overseas visitors”. Apparently it was soon found that with the inn situated on the busy London-Newhaven road, quite a few of the people who came in for a meal were French. Because of this, and to give them a welcome, it was decided that the old Red Lion should share billing with “Le Lion Rouge.” which at this stage was a Watney House.

Mr Gove felt French customers were drawn to the pub because they wanted to visit a really attractive old inn with good food and facilities. Good English food apparently was what the French wanted. Coq au vin was £1.50; Scampi £1.40 with Bourguigonne an established favourite and steak ranged from £1.55 to £1.85. How cheap those prices now seem.

By May 1980 it looks as if the locals had had enough, since Brian Grove had departed to Framfield. The Lion Rouge, was about to be returned to being The Red Lion.

The pub has had a chequered history in respect of its sign; at times the Lion has been white, and in 1987 the Red Lion had a blue striped background, with a phoenix atop the sign.



Paul Llewellyn

Even worse than that, until fairly recently it was a Green Lion. How can anyone designate a majestic lion which is supposed to be red, to turn white, or green.

Fortunately someone with deference to our Red Lion (under Shepherd Neame) had the foresight to restore our heraldic beast to a resplendent Red Lion in proud relief.

With thanks to Pete Baker, Peter Dann, the East Grinstead Courier, and Paul Llewellyn.

Jill Rolfe 740446

