

The Tilden Smith



The Tilden Smith was a pub frequented by fishermen who often had a sing-song in there in the 1950s and 60s.

This reputation was so well established by the late twentieth century, that a backward projection of this fact was made, resulting in the erroneous idea that the composer and folk song collector Ralph Vaughan Williams had collected folk songs in the pub on his visit in 1905. In fact he did not visit pubs in the town at all on the trip, but the idea was so entrenched that a plaque was fixed on the outside wall of the pub for some years, and although this has now been reworded, unfortunately the “legend” still persists!

In fact the pub had had its music licence refused in 1904, when the landlord said that:

“He had held a music licence since 1892 and sought renewal. He had never had any trouble and had a nice music room and ladies were not permitted. The Chief-constable said that on the previous Saturday night there were about fourteen persons in the room and by about nine o'clock only five or six. Sergeant Rayner said that the licence was not much used in the house and there was no music when he visited on the Saturday night. There were other music licenses in the vicinity. Licence refused.”

So it would not have had a music licence when Vaughan Williams visited in January 1905, and the fact that numbers were so low in 1904 doesn't suggest a thriving musical community using it at that point in time.

The Tilden Smith is said to be named after a ship, and had originally stood on the bank of the old Fisher Fleet river until that was filled in to make a new dock in the 1880s. In 1890 Joe Barker took on the licence and kept the pub until 1926 when the Rake family took it on; the landlord in 1955 when a BBC radio programme was recorded there being Steve Rake:

“Drinks were on the BBC and all present made the most of this generosity. Mr Steve Rake, the landlord, had one of the busiest nights of his career dashing to and from through the tobacco-laden atmosphere carrying jugs of beer to meet the demands of a clientele that seemed more thirsty than usual.”

More about this occasion may be found at my blog unsunghistories.info under the title **The self sufficient singers of the Tilden Smith**.

In 1974 the Tilden Smith closed then re-opened under a new name, as The Retreat, which closed for good in 2016.