

Elm Tree Inn – Inquests, Auctions, Tar-barrels and Club-rooms.

The Elm Tree Inn has long been at the heart of life in Embsay, not only geographically, but also in terms of village life.

In the 18th and 19th centuries it was common practice for public houses to be used for a wide range of functions and events. They were not only drinking and eating places, providing accommodation for visitors and passers-by. Before the establishment of village halls and schoolrooms, mainly in the late 19th century, local meetings usually had the choice of either the church vestry or the pub for their venue.

Newspaper reports reveal the nature of some of the many village meetings taking place – at

Embsay the Elm Tree Inn was often used to hold coroners' inquests and property auction sales.

A typical example of property sales is the auction which took place "at the House of Mrs. Hirst, the Sign of the Elm Tree" in April 1816, as advertised in the Leeds Mercury newspaper (6 April, 1816).

Here woodlands on the Embsay Kirk estate were being sold – they were advertised as useful sources of wood for carpenters and coopers, as they contained a mix of oak, ash, sycamore, larches and firs. Unfortunately the newspaper fails to follow up with any information on who purchased the woods, nor does it specify exactly where they were located. But no doubt the refreshments provided by the pub helped to keep the bidding going!

Coroner's Inquests were frequently held in public houses, and the Elm Tree was no exception. For instance, in 1877, villagers crowded into the pub on the very evening of the death of Charles Adams, who worked at Eastby Mill. He had gone home for lunch in Embsay, but on walking back to work during a thunderstorm, he was struck by lightning in front of the old vicarage. (*Lancaster Gazette*, 19 May; Also reported in the *Leeds Mercury*, *Warrington Guardian*, and *Sunderland Daily Echo*.)

The behaviour of Elm Tree Inn's clientele has usually been impeccable throughout its history, as it still is today – only very occasionally do we find reports of unruly customers.

In 1870 the local policeman, P.C. Bland came across two local men brawling outside the Elm Tree at 2.30 in the afternoon (this was long before the licensing laws of the First World War which restricted daytime opening hours). William Townson and William Smith "used very foul language before him" and were consequently hauled before the magistrates the following week and each fined 10s plus costs. (*Lancaster Gazette*, 14 May 1870).

The tables were turned on P.C. Bland the following November, when a young factory worker, Robert Rankin, accused the policeman of assault. The lads of the village had tarred and set alight a barrel outside the Elm Tree Inn on Bonfire Night (5th November). But Bland and two other policemen were on patrol in Embsay and Eastby, expecting the usual "mischief" on Bonfire Night. Rankin, who was watching the event, claimed that P.C. Bland struck him in the face, threatening to handcuff him, but when he cried out to the other boys released him and ordered him to move on, warning him that he would be talking to Rankin's mother about his behaviour. The police claimed that the lighting of the tar barrel had become the occasion for a street riot, the burning barrel being kicked about the street by the lads, especially Rankin, posing a real danger to the surrounding buildings. The Chairman of the Petty Sessions Court at Skipton supported the police case – apparently the lighting of random fires and tar-barrels was commonplace in Embsay at this time of year, and although considered "very dangerous" was also declared to be an offence of "a trifling character." So the young men were simply cautioned, and the police were expected to ensure such incidents didn't take place in the future. (*Lancaster Gazette*, 26 November, 1870).



In 1889 the Elm Tree contained a club room used for meetings of the Oddfellows' and the newly formed Embsay Cricket Club (*Craven Herald, 11 October, 1889*), and in 1949 the club-room played host to the Craven and District Motor and Motor Cycle Club. (*Barnoldswick & Earby Times, 14 January, 1949*)

Happily the Elm Tree Pub is still going strong!

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