

The Pettaugh 'Bull'; was it really bovine?

The 'Pettaugh Bull' pub served the last pint in 1978 when it closed its doors and was sold to be converted into a family home. Public houses continue to close all over the country today as changes in social habits reflect a decline in the popularity of the 'pub' as a predominantly male preserve with customers drinking pints of beer. Most of the public houses which survive today have done so by diversifying into family-orientated restaurant businesses serving meals and a wide variety of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Photographs which were published in the East Anglian Daily Times in the 1950s and which feature the Pettaugh 'Bull' sign depict a bull of the bovine variety, although other photographs simply have the words without any pictorial representation. The question now needs to be asked, 'Is the name of the 'Bull' connected with the animal or has it another meaning?'

The institution of the tavern, ale house, public house, or inn, can be traced back to Roman times. In order to identify a house where ale or wine was available to the weary and thirsty traveller, a long pole with a bush tied around its end was hung outside the house. The bush was associated with the grapevine and the Roman God of Wine, Bacchus. Indeed, pubs now known by the unusual name of 'Bag of Nails' owe this name to a corruption of 'Bacchanalia'. The first law which licensed ale houses, as they were then named, was passed by King Richard II in 1393. This Act required the owner to display a sign outside his ale house. A simple sign was needed as few people were able to read. The inn was the only type of building which was allowed to display this sign at right-angles to the road. The original ale was quite different to the 'real ale', or beer, which we drink today. In Roman times ale was made by adding malted grains to water and allowing yeasts on the grain to convert the sugars in the malt to alcohol. Flavourings such as honey or herbs may have been added. After a few days the mixture was filtered through cloth to give a cloudy alcoholic liquor. Hops were first used in Germany in about the 12th century. Hops imparted the characteristic bitter taste to the ale and also had a preservative effect. The use of hops spread to other parts of Europe and it was the Flemish immigrants to England who introduced hops into English brewing in the 14th century.

The first reference to a public house in Pettaugh was in 1621. The only historical reference to the Pettaugh 'Bull' deriving its name from the sport of bull-baiting is in a series of articles written by the Reverend Barton Shepherd in 1891 which were published in the Ipswich Journal. The source of this derivation is unclear and could be speculative. The 'sport' of bull-baiting was introduced into England in medieval times and was popular in the Elizabethan era and in later centuries. The practice was outlawed in 1835. It seems highly unlikely that bull-baiting would have taken place in a small rural village such as Pettaugh. Cattle were valuable commodities and it is likely that bull-baiting would have only have been affordable by the more wealthy inhabitants of larger towns.

The Oxford Dictionary provides several meanings of the word 'bull', one of which is a papal edict. This is an official papal document and the name 'bull' is derived from the circular metal seal made of lead which authenticated the document and was attached to the document by twine. The seal depicts the heads of the apostles Peter and Paul on one side and the signature of the pope on the other. The word 'bull' comes from the Latin verb '*bullire*', literally 'to boil'. The word became used more generally to denote any official document and the diminutive version, 'bulletin', is still in use

today. An example of a 'Bull' public house which derives its name from the papal edict is in Bury St Edmunds in a street adjacent to the cathedral. The sign of 'The One Bull' depicts the crossed keys, the symbol of St Peter, and is remarkably similar to the Vatican coat of arms.

There were Roman settlements near to Pettaugh and two important Roman roads intersected in Pettaugh. Various Roman artefacts have been found in Pettaugh. The straight road from Crowfield and Coddensham leading into Pettaugh is clearly of Roman origin. It is therefore possible that an inn existed in Pettaugh during that period. The monks from Leiston and Sibton Abbeys were visitors to Pettaugh. The Abbot of Ely owned land in Pettaugh as did the Abbot of Leiston. Abbot's Hall is a large property in Pettaugh and the land of Moat Grove Farm formed part of the land owned by the Bishop of Ely. In view of these ecclesiastical connections it is therefore possible that the name of the Pettaugh 'Bull' is derived from the papal edict.

