

THE BHURTPORE INN

~ A Few Questions Answered ~

WHY THE BHURTPORE?

Bhurtpore (or Bharatpur as it is generally spelt nowadays - there is no one correct spelling as the Indians do not share our alphabet so everything is phonetic) is a city in east Rajasthan, central northern India. It is approximately 30 miles due west of Agra and is close to Fatehpur Sikri (a capital city built in the 1570's by the Moghul emperor Akbar & deserted in 1585! It is now a splendidly preserved gem on the edge of the desert).

Bhurtpore itself is now a rather faded, dusty city of around 200,000 people, best known now for its internationally recognized bird sanctuary in the Rajah's old hunting park. Only the old palaces which now house a rather dusty museum, and the impressive inner walls with their moat remind us of the great Iron Fort as it was known in the 18th and 19th centuries.

In those days it was the stronghold of the Jat Muslims, and had achieved a mystical significance in the early 19th century by repelling a series of attempts by the British to storm it in 1804 (under Lord Lake), and this myth was reinforced by another aborted attack in 1825. Elsewhere in India the British had been all conquering.



Figure 1: The Bhurtpore Gun at Woolwich. Cast in 1677 and captured at Bhurtpore in 1826. The enormous barrel weighs 17.75 tons, is over 15 feet long and has a calibre of over 8 inches. The carriage was made in London in 1828.

THE SIEGE

The outer wall was built of mud, bound by straw and strengthened with vertical tree trunks. It was 8 miles long with 35 towers, and was 60 feet thick in places. Outside the wall was a ditch 55 feet deep and 150 feet wide, which, in time of war, was filled with water from a lake near the town.

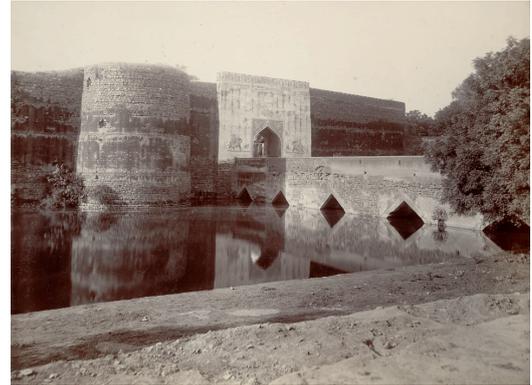


Figure 2: The main gate in the inner walls at Bhurtpore

In 1825 Lord Combermere set sail to take up the post of Commander in Chief, India. A dandified but highly competent cavalry officer, he was one of the finest military minds of the era. Soon after his arrival he started to assemble a force to lay siege to Bhurtpore. Troops were short but he scraped together 8 cavalry and 19 infantry regiments and also 2 companies of Ghurkas (the first time Ghurkas were actively employed in British service). He also found something Lord Lake had never used - a siege train including sixteen 24 pounders, twelve 8 inch howitzers, and 60 mortars.



Figure 3: Combermere was noted for his finery

Rather than attempt to surround the whole town he placed his infantry at the most vulnerable spots with cavalry and horse artillery between. Crucially he managed to catch the Jats unaware and cut them off from the lake, so the ditch was not flooded.

Bombardment started on 23rd December 1825. In European sieges it was normal to concentrate firepower on a stretch of the base of the wall until the wall fell into the ditch. This was not a masonry wall, however. 24 pounder shot went straight through leaving a clean hole and a cloud of dust.

Even when the wall fell, on 4th January, there remained a jagged row of upright tree trunks and a mass of powdered mud in which a man could sink to his waist. Combermere realised that the job was not done and decided to dig 4 mines beneath the wall and pack them with explosives.

The mines were detonated on the 18th January and a bloody battle followed (Combermere had to be restrained from leading the attack himself). Resistance was desperate but the city surrendered that night. Jat casualties were in the region of 14,000 and another 7,000 were taken prisoner. Combermere's casualties numbered 563.

The survivors divided £480,000 in prize money. Combermere's portion was some £60,000, which he richly deserved as his planning must have saved the lives of hundreds of his men, but his banker in Calcutta defrauded him of the lot! Some things never change.

His destruction of the Iron Fort of Bhurtpore quelled a rising tide of unrest in India and a period of calm followed. Today there is little trace of the great mud walls left at Bhurtpore though the inner walls and moat are still impressive, and an enormous captured siege gun can still be seen at Woolwich.

There is also the 57 (Bhurtpore) Battery in the Royal Artillery. This served its first 90 years in the sub-continent and has since served again in India and Burma as well as Egypt, Greece, the Gulf, Cyprus and Bosnia. It was actually formed in 1786 and the title 'Bhurtpore' was awarded in 1936 in commemoration of 150 years of service.

THE PUB

The earliest mention of the pub we have been able to find was in 1778 when it was known as the Queen's Head. This was about the same time as the front part of the pub was built, the oldest part being from around 1720 (the low ceilinged area behind the bar and in the corridor to the back door). Little detail is known.



Figure 4: The pub circa 1890

By the 1800's the name had been changed to the Red Lion and was to become the Bhurtpore Inn in the wake of Lord Combermere's victory. Despite attempts to change the name by a previous occupant in the late 1980's, it has remained so ever since though it may have been spelt Bhurtpoor for some years.



Figure 5: The new look Bhurtpore, circa 1895, with a new front wall and roof.

In 1849 James and Sarah George, with their young son Philip and James' mother Joyce moved from Horseman's Green, near Hanmer on the Welsh border to become tenants of the Combermere estate at the Bhurtpore which in those days was a small-holding as well as a public house. The main source of income would probably have been from the field behind, and land in Newhall Lane (now Whitchurch Road) which remained in the family until 1949. The pub in those days consisted of just the room where we now have our food till, with no bar and beer being brought up from the cellar in jugs.

Entries in 'the book' at the time show that sometimes beer was bought in (usually kilderkins - 18 gallon casks - of Burton ale and beers from Harrison's Brewery of Alkington Road, Whitchurch), but much of the output was brewed in outbuildings which stood behind the pub. We still have a hydrometer in a wooden case, which

THE PRESENT

was used at the time, as well as some willow pattern crockery used for catering, not to mention several items of furniture from this period. Brown's of Nantwich provided spirits at this time.

Joyce died c.1852 and James ran the pub until his death, aged 48, in 1873 when his wife Sarah took over, assisted by her son Philip and his wife Catherine (married 1873). After Sarah's death in 1885 Philip remained as tenant until 1895 when he bought the freehold from the troubled Combermere estate for around £850. The Lord Combermere of Bhurtpore fame had died in 1865 aged 92, and by the 1890's the estate had been losing money for decades and the pub was sold at one of a series of annual sales.

Immediately they set about renovating the property, spending around £200 on work including a new front wall and roof. During this period the pub was described in county records as the best-run pub in the area.



Figure 6: The July beer festival was a highlight of the year, featuring around 130 real ales.

In 1901 an offer of around £2,000 was received from Woolf's Brewery of Crewe and the pub was sold. In 1923 Woolf's were taken over by Allsopp's of Burton on Trent who in turn merged with Ind Coope, part of the giant currently known as Carlsberg UK.

By the late 1980's the pub was facing probable closure and the freehold was sold. The new owner, still tied to Tetley's for beer, extensively modernized and enlarged the pub, which had remained largely untouched since 1901. Things did not go well however and after little more than 2 years the pub was closed and boarded up.

This is how the pub was in late 1991 when Simon George (great great great grandson of Joyce) and his wife Nicky bought the pub, free of brewery tie for the first time in 90 years. The pub had been totally stripped and took much work and time to refit, but finally reopened on 9th April 1992.

The emphasis of the new Bhurtpore is on traditional beers, freshly prepared homemade food and a comfortable village pub atmosphere. We aim to offer an extensive choice of beers by providing a constantly changing range of eleven real ales from small independent 'craft' brewers, with approaching a thousand guest beers a year. These brewers produce a plethora of innovative and traditional beer styles, often to tremendously high standards



Figure 7: The beer garden is popular in summer.

By retaining genuine freedom at the Bhurtpore we are able to sell only products that we feel are worthy of our stamp of approval. Quality is the key, be it a beer, a wine, a soft drink or a steak. We strive to deliver that with a reasonable price tag.

An extensive menu of fresh homemade food is prepared on the premises by our team of chefs and booking is always recommended for tables in our dining room.

OPENING TIMES

Monday & Tuesday

12.00 - 11.30, (Food: 12.00-2.00 ; 5.30-9.00)

Wednesday & Thursday

12.00 - 11.30, (Food: 12.00-2.00 ; 5.30-9.30)

Friday & Saturday

12.00 - 00.00, (Food: 12.00-9.30)

Sunday

12.00 - 11.00, (Food: 12.00-9.00)

The Bhurtpore Inn, Wrenbury Road, Aston, Nantwich, Cheshire,
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