

History of The Grotto Hotel & Tavern/The Alexander Pope Hotel

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Introduction

The *Alexander Pope Hotel* is located at no. 64 Cross Deep on the corner of Pope's Grove and Cross Deep and Holmes Road, opposite Radnor Gardens in Strawberry Hill. It was originally called the *Pope's Grotto Hotel* named after the nearby grotto built by Alexander Pope (1688-1744), a leading English poet of the 18th century, at his nearby villa on the other side of Cross Deep. The hotel was built by the Young and Bainbridge Brewery in 1852 and opened in 1853. Charles Young and Anthony Bainbridge had founded the company in 1831, when they bought the Ram Brewery in Wandsworth. Their partnership was dissolved in 1884 following Bainbridge's death in June 1873. It remains the only public house in Strawberry Hill.

The history of the public house includes the changing fabric of the building, the licensed victuallers and staff who worked there, and the customers who patronised the establishment. The table below lists the licensed victuallers or publicans who were the tenants in, what remains, a Young and Co. hostelry. This report is based on research at Richmond Local Studies Library and searches on Ancestry, Find My Past and British Newspaper Archive. The photographs and plans are from the Young and Co. archive managed by the Wandsworth Heritage Centre.

List of licensed victuallers 1853-1959 (sources in brackets)

1853	Johnathan Turner (Mason's Directory of Richmond)
1861	Robert Collard (Kelly's Directory)
1865-1872	Thomas Bendy (Whibley's Guide 1865-66 and 1871 Census)
1872	Mrs Elizabeth Bendy (Kelly's Directory)
1874	George Shaw Powell (Kelly's Directory)
1877-1881	Edmond Denham Garwood (1881 Census)
1882-1888	Frederick John Thompson (Kelly's Directory)
1890-1894	Mrs Sarah Thompson (Kelly's Guide and 1901 Census)
1894-1897	Frederick Hall
1899	Mrs Elizabeth Hall (Kelly's Directory)
1899-1904	Robert Jay (1901 Census)
1905-1915	Joseph Frank Ewington (1911 Census & Kelly's Directory)
1915-1927	Mrs Florence Amelia Ewington (Kelly's Directory)
1927-1935	Mrs Florence Amelia Steidel
1935-1936	Harold Meade Moane & William George Cornell
1937-1959	John William Henry Ansell (Electoral roll)
1959-1977	Roy and Joyce Booker
2004	Anthony and Kate Lee

1850-1899

In 1853, the first publican or licensed victualler at *The Grotto Hotel & Inn* was John Turner. In the 1851 Census, he was a widower and waiter living in Red Lion Lane, Twickenham. This was probably the same man who, in the 1861 Census, was serving as a butler to Mary Paxton Jervis a 48-year -old widow. He was then 58, so he was born in 1803 in Twickenham.

By the time of the 1861 Census, Robert Collard (1806-1871) from Somerset (aged 55) was the licensed victualler with Eliza Gray (41), the housekeeper, George Williams (64), the ostler, and Peter Baxter (57), the coachman, with his wife, Maria (56).

In the 19th century it was common practice for inquests to be held in public houses and the *Pope's Grotto* was no exception. In December 1868, Dr Diplock, the local coroner, presided over the inquest of Hannah Noble (aged 50), head laundry maid, at Countess Waldegrave's Strawberry Hill residence. According to a fellow servant and witness she was standing near the mantelpiece while making coffee when she fell banging her head on the brickwork. Following the autopsy she was held to have died through concussion of the brain, a verdict endorsed by the jury of 12 after short deliberations (West Middlesex Herald, 2 January 1869). A Royal Commission in the late 1890s found that witnesses at inquests were drinking prior to giving evidence and recommended a ban. This was enacted in the Licensing Act of 1902.

In the 1871 Census the publican was Thomas Bendy (1824-1871) (aged 47) from Wiltshire. He lived at the *Grotto Inn* with his wife, Mary Ashdown (1823-)(48) from Tonbridge Wells. He had previously been the publican of the *Pack Horse & Talbot Inn*, Chiswick. Between 1853 and 1856 he lived in New South Wales in Australia (Ancestry: Bailey Family Tree). His sister, Rebecca Beasley (37), a widow, worked as barmaid. Thomas Alloway (19) was the ostler from Henley on Thames and Joseph Wheman (25) was the potman. In the same year, Thomas Bendy, who was also the treasurer of the Twickenham Philanthropic Society, had a brain haemorrhage and died at the Grotto on 30 June 1871. Mary Bendy ran the *Grotto Inn* before handing over the reins to George Shaw Powell in January 1874.

In 1877, Edmond Denham Garwood (1818-1896) was advertising *The Grotto Hotel & Tavern* as offering a 'bowling green and quoits' (Middlesex Chronicle, 28 July 1877,p.8). He was clearly a gambling man as he took a wager to race his colt Osman Pasha (by Sluggard out of Miss Slow) two miles along the Twickenham-Kingston turnpike in under two minutes and failing by several seconds (Bell's Life in London & Sporting Chronicle, 20 September 1879, p.7). In the 1881 Census, Garwood still lived there with his wife Mary Ann Morgan (1819-1881). His son, Robert John (aged 31), helped Edmond to run the hotel and Sarah Garwood, his daughter, also lived there with her two children, Edmond J (6) and Alice A (5). On 30 November 1881, the Grand Chapter of Middlesex Freemasons held their English Convocation at the hotel (Morning Post, 2 December 1881, p.5). After Mary died in 1881 at the Hotel, Edmond married Sarah Jane Heath (1838-1911). In 1891, he was residing at *The George Hotel*, King Street, Twickenham, where his wife Sarah was the hotel keeper.

In 1882, Frederick Thompson (14 years at the *Carnarvon Castle Hotel* at Hampton Court) and marketed the *Pope's Grotto* as a 'beanfeast room to accommodate 150', the 'finest pull-up in the suburbs', and 'stabling for 20 horses' (Daily Telegraph & Courier, 27 April 1882, p.12). During 1887 weekly meetings of the Twickenham Philanthropic Society were held at the

Grotto Hotel (Richmond Herald, 9 September 1887). In 1888, a young labourer named Wells was charged with wilfully breaking a pane of glass of £2 value. Evidence was provided by Walter White, an ostler at the hotel and Wells was sentenced to two months' imprisonment with hard labour (Middlesex Independent, 9 May 1888, p.3). In May 1889, the Annual General Meeting of the Twickenham Rugby Football Club was held at the Hotel and, in May 1900, Twickenham Association Football Club held their AGM in the same venue.

In 1891, Sarah Thompson (aged 50), a widow, was the London-born, hotel proprietor. Her son, Frederick W Thompson (aged 26) was the manager supporting his mother. Her other children, Sarah (24) and Thomas (17) also lived at the Hotel with a servant, Mary Hodges (24) from Hampshire.

In 1896, landlord Frederick Hall was fined 10s plus costs for possession of an 'unmuzzled dog' (Richmond Herald, 15 August 1896). In October of the same year, he was advertising the availability of a 'handsome newly erected semi-detached room to let for public and private balls, wedding breakfasts, concerts, masonic meetings etc...best draw-up in Twickenham' (Richmond Herald, 24 October 1896, p.2).

1900-1936

In 1901, the publican was Robert Jay (aged 54) who was born in Dorking, Surrey. His wife Elizabeth (47) from Kent lived there with his niece, Ethel Money (20), who worked as a barmaid. There were two servants, Alice Rolf (18) from Wycombe in Bucks and Charles Saunders (24) from Windsor in Berkshire. He had previously been a publican at 3 Thames Street, Windsor in Berkshire. The photograph on the right has a bust on the roof which on closer inspection is Admiral Lord Nelson, the early-nineteenth century naval hero of Trafalgar.



Joseph Frank Ewington was the son of a publican brewer also called Joseph, who had a large family of 11 children. He was experienced in the business (previously he was at the *Pegasus*, Green Lanes in North London) and was probably behind the marketing of the *Pope's Grotto Hotel* evident in the postcard which shows his entrepreneurial side. In 1903, a 'very successful' pigeon shoot was held in the rear of the field at the Pope's Grotto Hotel with a 'fair number' of people being present (Middlesex Independent, 3 January 1903, p.4). In 1903, Twickenham Rugby Football Club held a 'smoking concert' at the *Pope's Grotto Hotel* (The Sportsman, 18 March 1903, p.4). In 1905, Twickenham Rugby Club made the *Pope's Grotto Hotel* their headquarters following their move to the Tower Road ground where they played until the start of World War 1. This was thanks to Joseph Frank Ewington who was obviously a rugby fan and who would also benefit from teams drinking in his pub after the game (Richmond Herald, 2 September 1905). He also played cricket as a batsman for Twickenham Cricket Club. In 1908, Joseph Frank Ewington was also Chairman of the Ealing & Brentford Licensed Victuallers' Society (Richmond Herald, 6 March 1915).

The postcard dating from around 1910 shows the original name '*The Grotto Hotel*' in the stonework above the second storey and the name *Pope's Grotto Hotel* on the sign on the corner at ground-floor level. The bust on the roof is probably that of Alexander Pope. The sign above the lower floor level probably reads J. F. Ewington, the publican. His name is also prominently displayed on the upper floor stonework – on the photograph looking north up Cross Deep towards Twickenham. The warehouse and stabling appears to be on the left of the picture and on the right with the ceiling light may be the banqueting room where the 'beanfeasts' (advertised on the sign) were held. Alternatively this could be the billiards room.



In the 1911 Census, Joseph Frank Ewington (34) was still the licensed victualler. He was from Kennington and he was single. Hettie Marion Johns (37) from Cardiff was the housekeeper and Margaret Flora Nash (15) was the housemaid from Croydon. On 30 September 1914, Joseph married Florence Amelia Smith (1884-1957) but he died shortly afterwards on 24 February 1915. So in 1915, Burgiss Brown became the manager of the *Pope's Grotto Hotel* after four years as manager of the Talbot Picture Theatre (Richmond Herald, 24 July 1915).

Florence took over the role of licensed victualler and she remarried on 26 November 1927 at Holy Trinity Church on Twickenham Green. Her new husband was Karl Anton Steidel (1877-1941) a bank clerk and son of a newspaper editor, Joseph Steidel. They went on to live at 31 Waldegrave Gardens.

The inter-war years saw alterations to the fabric of the building in the photograph from about 1930. The stables have gone to be replaced by an enlarged hotel and the car park (entrance from Cross Deep and Pope's Grove) is marked by pointing fingers. The signage advertising the *Pope's Grotto Hotel* is now consistent. The hotel entrance is marked by a sign above the white door and the Lounge is entered via the wooden door on Pope's Grove. The stone balustrade on the roof has been removed.

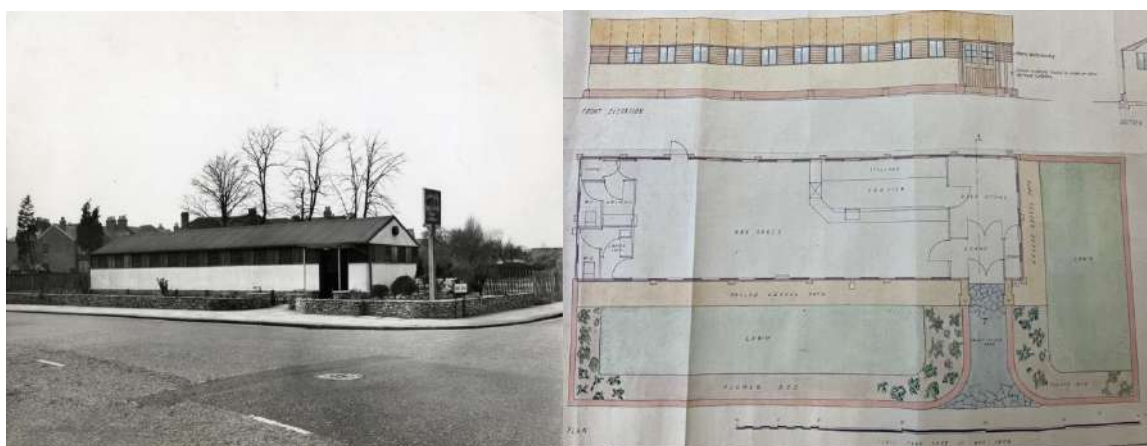


1937-1944

In the 1939 Register, the licensed victualler was John Ansell (1905-) who was married to Phyllis Ruby Page (1907-) and they had three bar assistants: Henry W Ellison (1882-); Nora Strickland (1902-); and Michael O'Halloran (1914). The electoral roll suggests that they were the publicans from 1937. In 1944, Phyllis Ansell was prosecuted for watering down the gin (Middlesex Chronicle, 15 July 1944).

On 19 June 1944, a V1 flying bomb or 'doodlebug' hit the 'Tudor House' at the corner of Cross Deep and Holmes Road killing a mother and her four-month-old son (Paul Barnfield (2001), *When the Bombs Fell*, Paper Number 80, Borough of Twickenham Local History Society). This bomb also destroyed the *Pope's Grotto Hotel*.

A 'temporary hut' was erected in 1951 which lasted until 1959. From 1951 to 1959, John Ansell was still the publican with Lorna King. The plans for the building are shown below along with a photograph of the unappealing structure.



1959-2000

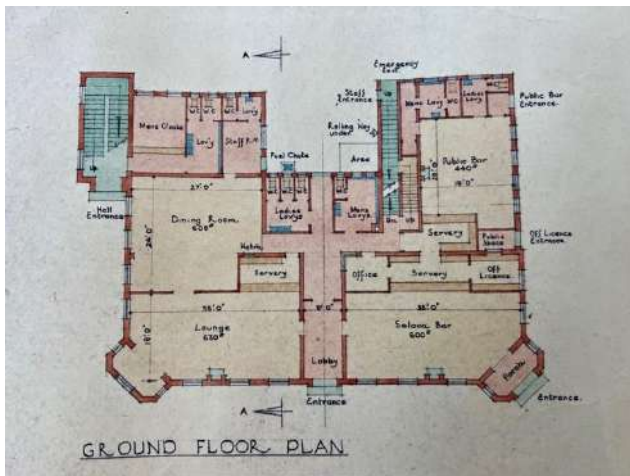
During the late 1950s Young and Co. commissioned architects to produce designs and plans for the rebuilding of a permanent brick-built structure. The successful architectural business was William T. Ingram. The new Pope's Grotto was opened in 1959 by the Mayor



of Richmond-upon-Thames and representatives of Young's brewery. The Ram Brewery mascot, Ramrod, was present at the photoshoot as were the dray horses and cart for which the brewer was renowned. The publican was Roy Booker (1924-2010) who had previously been living in Ealing and working as the manager of Bental's (Ealing) Ltd a celebrated department store on Ealing Broadway. His wife was Joyce Eileen Elves (aka Grzywacz)

(1924-2006). Ann remembers meeting her husband in the Pope's Grotto when she was working for Roy Booker as bar staff in 1970 when the price of a pint was 14p for Young's Ordinary and 15p for Special (oral history from Twickenham and Teddington History Facebook Group). Carolyn recalls going in there for a drink in 1969 and being refused because her boyfriend had long hair and they were both wearing jeans.

The floor plan for the 1959 Pope's Grotto reveals three bars – public, saloon and lounge - and a dining room. On the first floor there was a large (61'x35') assembly room for weddings and functions with a reception area.



During the 1980's Young's adopted a policy of converting pubs into hotels, where appropriate. In 1992, SHRA led by Chair, Ian Davies, opposed plans by Young's to turn the *Pope's Grotto* public house into a 21-bedroom hotel on the grounds that the view of the river needed to be protected for residents (Surrey Comet, 29 May 1992). The brewery claimed that the new hotel was vital to Twickenham's tourist industry. In 1998, the Council gave the go-ahead to Young's for a 32-room hotel (Richmond & Twickenham Times, 19 June 1998). The hotel and attached pub opened in 2000. In 2004, the pub was deemed to be the 'best place to drink Young's beer in England' by Young's annual beer quality competition. The licensees were Anthony and Kate Lee.

In 2009, Anthony Beckles Willson led a campaign by SHRA backed by a petition against the renaming of the Pope's Grotto as 'The Alexander' claiming it was an 'abuse of its historical identity' (Richmond and Twickenham Times 8 May 2009). Following meetings with Willson and Young's Brewery a compromise was reached and it was called 'The Alexander Pope'.