



## History of Godalming and The Refectory

Here is little potted history of our pub and the local area... if you have a spare minute or two and maybe a cup of tea (or is that a G&T?), we think it's well worth a read.

The history of the Refectory is somewhat enigmatic: there are a couple of apparently conflicting stories of its past, but neither seem to tally with physical evidence in the building.

One version has it that the Refectory was an old barn. We do know from an old map that there certainly was a building on the current site of 'the Refectory' in 1842, very probably a farm barn and that building just might have dated back to the 1730's, which would tie in nicely with the building of the 18th century Grade 2 listed dove coat to the rear of the pub. Both, would have been built on the estate of 'Milford House' by order of the owner Thomas Smith a descendant of Queen Elizabeth's favourite servant, Elizabeth Egerton, whom she gifted the land to in 1599.

However, it might very well have been a smaller barn to the rear of the Refectory (which in version two of the story, was actually being renovated at this time).

In the 1930's this 'barn' became home to a herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle, owned by Percy Stovold, a successful cattle breeder who realised the potential of the Surrey land for this breed of cattle. Percy hid the herd in the barn in Milford for two years, away from the eyes of his disapproving father.



In 1938 the herd toured the English shows, winning many of them including the Royal show, to the amazement of Percy's father. The herd has grown over the decades to become the Rosemead herd, which now has over 500 head of cattle - one of the largest and most important herds in the country. The website for the herd tells the story and mentions the connection with the Refectory – [www.aberdeenangus.co.uk](http://www.aberdeenangus.co.uk).

Another version of the history has it that Charles Sneyers, a very successful antiques dealer, rented Milford House and the 8 acres of estate, including the farm buildings in 1932. He went on to buy the freehold from the trustees in 1936.



One of his two sons, Reginald, joined the business and added to his father's large collection, while the other son, Robert, was responsible for the conversion of some outbuildings and their subsequent running as successful tea rooms, called the Refectory.



They used the tea room to show off their stock of antiques, which by now equated to a superb collection of English furniture and clocks, paintings, ceramics, needlework and silver.



We know that the barn conversion was carried out by the Sneyers family, working with direct labour and took some three years to complete. So much of the building that you see today dates back only to 1937, although some of the materials may have been recycled from the original barn.



After the war, Milford House was converted to a hotel which we believe was run by Robert, but it was damaged by fire in 1980 and ceased trading, after which it was converted to apartments. The photograph above was kindly supplied by Mr and Mrs Searle, who were happy to spend a couple of hours mulling over the history of the place.

Reginald eventually bequeathed the Refectory and its contents to the National Trust, the largest bequest of its kind the Trust had ever received. The Trust retained 400 items of furniture, ceramics and clocks, and auctioned the remainder along with the Refectory. The National Trust Southern Region Newsletter (Autumn 1988) states: The Trust has considered various possible uses of the buildings, but has decided that the money which could be made from their sale would be greater value than their use for National Trust purposes.

We assume this is the point at which the Refectory became a pub or restaurant.

To confuse things further, we discussed the provenance of the building with the foreman of the builders doing the renovation, and it is his



firm belief that the building was built at the earliest in the 1950's. He showed us this metal sleeve on the base of one of the main supporting pillars of the building,

which had been hidden behind some panelling on the bar.

His opinion was that this must have been in place when the building was erected, but that such things didn't come into use until the 50's. It's all very puzzling.

Whatever, it is a fascinating and appealing building, with endless beams, stained glass, panels, tiling and stonework to explore. The photograph below shows the galletted mortar between the stone courses to the front of the building. This was a process used in old Sussex houses whereby Grinstead ironstone pebbles were pressed into the limestone mortar to give protection against erosion, although over time, as you can see, the ironstone itself oxidises - surely this pre-dates the 50's?



*We recently received this email from Mrs Julia Mayo...*

After seeing the Refectory featured on Location Location recently, we visited for lunch last Thursday. The reason? Well, I used to work as a Saturday waitress there at the age of 14 in 1958. I can confirm that your 2nd version of the story is true although I remember Mr Percy Stovold as a local farmer living as I did at the time at Hydestile Farmhouse, also featured on the Location, Location programme.

I worked for Robert and Reginald Sneyers and his Mother did all the cooking. She was quite an elderly lady by the standards of those days and she produced large quantities of homemade bread, scones and cakes for the teas.

Teas were either plain at 3 shillings (about 15p) or cream at 3 shillings and sixpence (about 18p). They comprised 2 small slices of homemade bread similar to a semi-sweet German bread, 2 small scones, 2 cakes, a dish of butter curls and one of jam plus thick whipped cream for the cream tea. The cakes were delicious, either a version of today's cup cake, cream sponge (coffee/walnut being a favourite, some things never change!) or fruit cake. All would be very skilfully and liberally decorated. The summer season was very busy so the whole area would be used. In the winter, only the main room was open with the fire lit in the hearth nearest the kitchen. In the depths of the winter the fare was hot buttered toast with or without a poached egg and a more limited range of teas.

As I was working there in the 50's I'm pretty sure it was built before the 2nd World War. However, it may very well have been constructed in the 20th century using some much older materials. There were several noted architects working in south west Surrey at the time and at least one, Harold Faulkner, was keen on using medieval materials.

*Many thanks for this, Julia (if I may).*

*With thanks to Richard Joscelyne for his input.*