



Tudor Park, A Marriott Hotel and Country Club

A stunning history for a stunning hotel

For nearly 20 years the Tudor Park Hotel, Golf & Country Club, a Marriott since 1996, has been a familiar sight beside the main road from London to Folkestone. During this time it has established a reputation for quality and comfort. However, the provision of hospitality and refreshment on this site dates back many years earlier.

Until the First World War most hotels and cafes were located in towns or large villages. As motoring for pleasure began to increase in the 1920's, so demand grew for meals, especially teas, in more open places where parking was easier.

Wayside refreshment houses began to spring up all over the place, and especially along the country's main road, opened by people who saw an opportunity for good business.

One such man was A W Tomlinson. He opened two premises, the Old Barn Tea House at Hildenborough and a property he called Tudor House in Ashford Road near Bearsted - now the Marriott Hotel.

The site he chose for the latter was almost exactly halfway between the capital and the coast; the milestone in the road outside noted London 37 miles, Folkestone 32. The Tudor House opened for business in 1927.

Tomlinson's choice of name for his new roadhouse was appropriate. The property, built from scratch, was in the style of an old Tudor mansion with a black and white façade. He used oak timbers from Oakwood, near Maidstone, and tiles from Hollingbourne and Paddock Wood to give the place an authentic and impressive appearance.

In the 1930's Tomlinson decided that a nice touch for his Tudor roadhouse would be for his car park attendant to wear a suit of armour and carry a sword. The main concern of the Maidstone man employed to do the job was a fear of begin struck by lightning, and the arrival of dark clouds would send him hurrying indoors.

Tomlinson's venture of Bearsted was a success, and by 1938 the business, trading as the Tudor House Restaurant, was well established.

The land on which the Tudor House was built was part of the Milgate Park estate, originally in the parish of Bearsted, but transferred in 1889 to Thurnham.

Milgate is a fine house with parts of it dating back to the 16th century, with later additions. All that is now visible of the late 17th and 18th centuries are the handsome east and west fronts which can be admired from the 6th and 12th greens of the golf course. The grey stone lodge and private drive to the house is a few hundred yards south of the hotel entrance.

Among the many owners of Milgate over the years, one may be mentioned as of particular interest. Walter Fremlin bought Milgate Park in 1902 and lived there until his death in 1925 at the age of 81. Fremlin added to the house and greatly enlarged the estate. He provided his own private gas supply, and set up a system of gas lamps for the use of the family between Bearsted Station and the lodge gates. He also installed a piped water supply for the village. In 1923 Bearsted's church bells were rung to mark his 80th birthday.

It was Walter Fremlin, with his brothers Richard and Frank, who went into partnership with their other brother Ralph Fremlin who had begun brewing in Maidstone in 1861. Fremlin Brothers was a successful enterprise, and they were pioneers in supplying beers, both in bottle and in gallon jars, for the family trade. A private company, Fremlin Brothers Ltd, was founded in 1920 and Walter was on the board.

In 1967 Fremlins became part of the Whitbread Group, and although brewing no longer takes place in Maidstone, the Pale Ale Brewery site in Earl Street continued in use as a distribution depot and offices.

Meanwhile the Tudor House was still in business and expanding. A large ballroom and banqueting hall seating 350 people had been built at the rear of the house, along with other function rooms capable of holding more than 200 people. The restaurant has 90 covers.

In 1978 the Tudor House and some adjoining land had been bought by Vrumso Investments Ltd, headed by hotelier Ferid Hickmet, for £350,000. Under his management the Tudor House became one of Kent's best-known eating-places and nightspots.

This part of the story came to an abrupt end in July 1983 with a devastating fire at the house. More than 60 firemen from all over the country took nearly two hours to bring it under control, but although they managed to save the mock Tudor façade, the restaurant, ballroom and kitchens at the rear were almost completely destroyed.

Following an initial feasibility study and some background research in 1983 and 1984, the site of the Tudor House was purchased by a Bristol based company, Country Club Hotels (CCH), formerly the Ashton Court Leisure Group, in November 1984. CCH was jointly owned by Whitbread and the JT Group, a building firm. Included in the purchase was another 120 acres of Milgate Park, but not the house itself.

In July 1985 a planning application was made to build a 120 bedroom hotel, a golf course and leisure facilities. The application was approved and building work began in July 1986 with a traditional sod cutting ceremony at which Alex Geffert,

Managing Director of Whitbread Hotels and Leisure, and John Pontin, Chairman of CCH were present, along with representatives from Bearsted and Thurnham Parishes.

The new complex was topped out on 30th September 1986 by Norman McIndoe, who had been appointed Managing Director of CCH in March.

In 1988 the new Tudor Park Hotel, Golf and Country Club was finally ready. It had taken nearly 5 years work to bring to fruition and had cost £8.5 million. It was the sixth hotel in the growing CCH chain, and the first of this size to be newly built.

The 18 hole golf course, designed by Donald Steel, one of the country's leading golf architects and author of the Daily Telegraph's Golf Guides, was launched commercially on 8th April. Almost immediately it was over-subscribed with 550 members, and 30 waiting to join. The Leisure Club had 1300 of its intended 1500 members already signed up.

The official opening of Tudor Park took place on 29th April 1988 when Whitbread chairman, Sam Whitbread, launched the new complex with a bang of firing a cannon with the patio.

Sports Minister, Colin Moynihan, a special guest at the opening paid tribute to Whitbread's involvement in sport. Among the guests were representatives from the Borough of Maidstone and the Councils of Bearsted and Thurnham.

Sam Whitbread unveiled a plaque to mark the occasion and this can be seen in the hotel entrance. The first General Manager of the Tudor Park was Tony Snowden.

In 1995 Whitbread signed an agreement to the franchise rights for the Marriott name in Great Britain, and on 26th April the following year Tudor Park was re-branded a Marriott and became the Marriott Tudor Park Hotel & Country Club. The occasion was celebrated with a reception at the hotel for over 200 local guests.

The 10th Anniversary of the opening of the Tudor Park complex was celebrated on 17th April 1998 with a special Tudor Banquet.

In February 2005 Richard Coggings was appointed General Manger of the hotel.

In Late 2007 and through out 2008 the hotel entred into a £4.5 Million renovation of the entire property, everything from the restaurant, bar to the 120 bedrooms were refurbished and transformed this hotel into one of the leading hotels in Kent.