



History of the Royal Foresters and surrounding area

The early history of the Royal Foresters is tied to its location on the London Road, which was a major coaching route between London and the West long before the railway arrived in Ascot in 1856.

The building dates back to the late 19th century, a former coaching inn that has served the local community for over 140 years. The pub provided a vital staging point for horse-drawn coaches, at its peak in the 1820s, such routes saw a coach passing roughly every half an hour during daylight. The first landlord officially recorded in Kelly's Directory was Charles Bates.



Before the 19th-century development, the area was part of the vast Windsor Forest. In the 1700s, it was described as a “bleak and desolate” heathland, infamous for highwaymen who preyed on travelers along the London Road.

The surrounding area changed dramatically with the Windsor Forest Enclosure Act of 1813, which transitioned the land from royal hunting grounds to more structured use, though it remained crown property.

The success of the Ascot Racecourse and the 1856 railway sparked a Victorian building boom. Nearby South Ascot and Sunninghill expanded with residential terraces and shops to support the growing influx of racegoers and railway staff.

In 1891, the pub was a “licensed beer house” owned by the Cirencester Brewery, with a modest annual rateable value of £17.



Ascot High Street in the late 19th century



The name likely stems from the Royal Foresters, a friendly society with roots in the 18th century that provided mutual aid to its members, often meeting in local inns.

Today, the “Royal Foresters” are the dedicated forestry team of the Crown Estate who manage the nearby Windsor Great Park and its historic forests. In the 18th and 19th centuries, “The Royal Foresters” was a Friendly Society, providing aid for workers long before the modern welfare state existed.

Formed as early as the 1720s, these groups provided a form of insurance. Members paid a few pence a week into a “common fund” to provide sick pay and funeral grants for

fellow members in need. Unlike other groups that had “lodges”, the Foresters called their branches “Courts”, named after the ancient law courts that once governed the royal forests. Their ceremonies drew heavily on Masonic ritual and were once secret organisations with private passwords to recognise members. Later in more public times, members often wore decorative sashes and ribbons during their public parades and “fetes”, which were major community events in Victorian times.

They often met in pubs – leading to the many “Foresters Arms’ and “Royal Foresters” found across the UK today.



In 1834, after a dispute over how the group was run, over 300 branches seceded from the original “Royal Foresters” to form the Ancient Order of Foresters, which still exists today as the Foresters Friendly Society.



Our pub is closely linked with Ascot Racecourse which was founded in 1711 by Queen Anne, who spotted an area of open heathland while riding out from Windsor Castle and declared it an “ideal place for horses to gallop at full stretch”. Since then, the racecourse has been a central pillar of British sporting and social culture, with its prestigious Royal Ascot meeting in June becoming the highlight of the summer season (and something we here at the pub look forward to and plan for all year round).

In 1807 King George III introduced the Gold Cup, Ascot’s oldest surviving race and solidified the four-day meetings status as a premier social event. But it wasn’t until George IV in 1825 that the tradition of the monarch arriving in a horse-drawn carriage down the straight mile at the start of each race day was formalised.

Ascot remained exclusively a flat racing venue until 1965, when jump racing (Steeplechase and Hurdle) was introduced using turf from the closed Hurst Park Racecourse and in 2004 the racecourse underwent the single biggest investment in British racing history (£220m) closing for 20 months to build the current state-of-the-art grandstand.

