

Could this be our oldest inn?

by George Henderson

PATRONS at the Malt Shovel in Ruardean are guaranteed at least two glimpses into English history, one of them shared by such notable figures as Winston Churchill, Disraeli and Gladstone.

The pub claims to be the oldest in England, dating from 1110 when Henry I was on the throne. Bologna was the only university in Europe and the Thames in London was as yet innocent of stone bridges.

To call this pub historic is a slight misnomer as it was built before most of our history had ever happened.

Marco Polo

Two centuries were to elapse before the English army was routed by the Scots at Bannockburn and nearly 500 years before Drake sent the Spanish Armada packing, off Plymouth sound.

The American War of Independence was more than 660 years in the future and 140 years would tick by before Marco Polo was even a gleam in his father's eye.

The pub's other claim to historic fame is



its dining room windows which were reclaimed from 10 Downing Street during recent security improvements.

So, when you are tucking into the pub's acclaimed portions of Gratin Dauphinois or venison in red wine, your view of the outside world is framed as it was for some of the greatest statesmen in English history.

It is a truly ancient and venerable establishment and the massive trunk of an oak tree forms the main beam of the dining room, giving the pub a unique character.

Owner and licensee Mark Dew bought the premises four years ago and since then has been restoring the building.

The pub now has 11 bedrooms providing hotel accommodation, a 60-seat restaurant available for private functions and is licensed for weddings.

"We got the windows from 10 Downing Street after they were replaced for bullet and bomb proof units.

"A friend of mine was working there at the time, so we thought it would be an interesting addition," he explained.

Haunted

And of course, like any self-respecting ancient pub, it is suitably haunted.

"They say that someone fell to his death from the roof and various people working up there have reported seeing things," said Mark.

"One chap working there fled, leaving his tools behind and ran all the way back to Drybrook.

"But I'm fairly sceptical myself. I've been here on my own and never really had any problems. I think it could all put down to atmosphere."

■ **RIGHT:** customers can relax with a drink in the pub's patio garden.