



The History Bailey's History

As one of the oldest existing hotels in London, Bailey's Hotel offers an interesting history dating back to 1876. The story of the Hotel includes the remarkable achievement of its original owner, the Right Honourable Sir James Bailey, M.P. (10 October 1840 to 12 October 1910). It is also part of the history of London itself and in particular the Kensington area. It is the story of how the hotel survived the turn of the century, two World Wars, changes in ownership and the threat of demolition. The amazing quality of this history is that the Hotel still today, almost 120 years later, maintains not only its original structure and building, but also much of its profile. The Hotel represents some important local and architectural history and remains today, as when it was built, an integral part of the Kensington area.

In the advertisements that James Bailey released to promote his Hotel, he referred to Kensington as "the healthiest and most fashionable part of London". What this meant in practice was that the Hotel was located in an area where it was likely to attract London's aristocracy and wealthier inhabitants. At the same time as the area would attract these respectable customers, it was also virtually uninhabited by other hotels. The location was also financially intelligent in the respect that it was next door to Gloucester Road underground station, which already in 1876, had trains leaving every five minutes for "all parts of London". The Hotel was also conveniently close to the Royal Albert Hall, Hyde Park, the National History Museum, the Royal Horticultural and Kensington Gardens. The Hotel originally included nine stables, from which "well appointed" private carriages left the Hotel at convenience. The Hotel was built in a time: when there were few hotels in London and the intention was to be "not inferior to Buckingham Palace, Buckingham Gate".

The history of Bailey's Hotel is naturally centred around its original proprietor, James Bailey. He was the son of William Bailey, a farmer in Mattishall, Norfolk. James Bailey left the farming life early for London, but there is evidence that he maintained affection for his native village. Mr Robert Norton, whose father grew up with James Bailey in Mattishall, has drawn attention to a beautiful organ presented as a gift to the local church in Mattishall by James Bailey years later.

It is uncertain why, and under what circumstances, Bailey at the age of twenty moved to London in 1860. However, he is said to have begun his career as a butler in a hotel upon arrival. Sometime later, he is known to have taken the Harrington Hotel, also located in Gloucester Road. He enlarged the premises of this Hotel, something he would later do at Bailey's Hotel as well. It is also uncertain how Bailey financed this endeavour, but it is possible that he borrowed money and made a profit through skilful business.

The very first steps towards the building of the Hotel were in fact not taken by Bailey. But my a Mr H B Alexander, a well known property owner.. It was he who arranged

the building of the Hotel with the developers Charles Aldin Jr and William Aldin. They in turn were also quite well known in the Kensington area. Amongst many other projects, they had developed James Bailey's first hotel, the Harrington Hotel at 25 Gloucester Road. The Aldins were also to build houses and shops which were to surround Bailey's Hotel. The architect of the building is unfortunately unknown, even though the project was certainly one of the greater ones in the area.

The Hotel can actually be said to have begun a new fashion in the architecture of the area. Before the building of Bailey's, the area had called for buildings with fronts of "White Ipswich Suffolk Gault or Beart's patent bricks", according to the "London Survey". This practice was changed with the building of the Hotel, which is built in red brick with white dressings of Bath stone. Subsequently, red brick became an alternative to previous practices. Otherwise, the Hotel is designed in a very characteristic Victorian fashion.

Bailey's was very modern for the time in which it was built. In 1885, the advertisements could boast an "ascending room" (a lift), a "safe room" (a safe) and bathrooms on every floor. These were all very unusual at the time. The Hotel saw many prominent guests already in its early years. Such were the American author F.B. Harte and the Austrian composer Eduard Strauss, who stayed at the Hotel in 1885. Victorian records also indicate a grand ball held at the Hotel, which was attended by British and Dutch Royals.

James Bailey had acquired 4 Harrington Gardens as his private residence conveniently close to the Hotel. Bailey by then also owned the South Kensington Hotel in Queensgate Terrace. In 1877, Bailey extended Bailey's Hotel along Courtfield Road and in 1881. The nine stables had been demolished and replaced by a garden and extensions on the site that is today occupied by the Bombay Brasserie. In 1883, new bedrooms were installed and in 1890 a new elevator and electric lights in all rooms were installed. By then, the Hotel had been enlarged to over 300 rooms and James Bailey himself lived in the Hotel with his wife and their five children. Also resident in the Hotel were approximately thirty-five of the staff members.

A substantial contingent of the Hotel's customers at the time was Americans, who had come either in business or as tourists. The Hotel was very popular among these and the "Survey of London" quotes an American tourist guide published in 1891, which commended the Hotel for its "cosy, homelike atmosphere, which is enhanced by the rich and substantial surroundings". The same guide also praised the wine as well as the fire and sanitary arrangements.

James Bailey began a gradual exit from the Hotel business. He sold both of his hotels to Spiers and Pond Limited in 1894, but remained as Managing Director until 1898. The reason for this change was his growing official career. Bailey served on the boards of Harrods and D H Evans. In 1895, he was elected a Member of Parliament for the Walworth division of Newington and remained so until 1906. He was active as a Kensington vestryman 1878 to 1894, Deputy Lieutenant for Norfolk and a Justice of the Peace in Essex.

A founder member of the Constitutional Club, Bailey was knighted in 1905 and died in 1910 at his home at 58 Rutland Gate, leaving an estate of £245,000.00 gross.

Meanwhile, the Hotel continued in other hands. Previously, the Hotel had been almost alone in the area, but by 1914 there were fourteen hotels in eighteen buildings, all 1 (Cromwell Road and Harrington Gardens. During the First World War, for obvious reasons the growth of hotels was frozen. It seemed to change little during the inter-war years, but the fact was that by 1939 a major part of the area had been bought up with the intention of establishing various hotel projects. The competition was hard, but few other hotels were purpose- built like Bailey's but were instead simply converted houses.

The Second World War and its horrors did not leave the Hotel untouched. On 10 October 1910 a incendiary bomb hit the property, causing a major fire and damage to the building. On 8 March 1941, an H E bomb hit the buildings, causing them further damage. Some of the war damages were not fully repaired until 1952/3, when the damaged fourth and fifth floors were reinstated. The Hotel was closed during part of the war and although no evidence thereof exists, it is believed to have been used as a provisional hospital or shelter of some sort.

There was a fire in the staff quarters in 1945, in which ceilings and floorboards were damaged and the Hotel evacuated, but the structure remained intact. Substantial alterations took place in 1952/3 and new bathrooms were installed in 1954. In 1958 there were again major alterations, including the installation of a new bar. On one occasion the Hotel was under threat of demolition. The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea then declared that it would deeply regret such a scenario, since the Hotel forms an integral part of the area and because of its historical value. The Hotel has seen many changes in management and ownership. It was completely restored in 1988 and was taken over from the Taj Group by Securum Hotel Holdings in 1992 and recently acquired by City Developments Limited (CDL) in July 1994.

After an interesting history including two World Wars, the Hotel still maintains most of its original structure. Inside, the hall is virtually the same with its large marble pillars, grand staircase, stained glass windows and Victorian plasterwork. It is today a four star hotel, thus maintaining its original prestige. The rich historical features of the Hotel are today complemented by all modern conveniences in the rooms, such as colour television with in-house films, direct dial telephones and twenty four hour Room Service. The prices have naturally changed considerably over the years. In the 1890's it was reported by Americans to have been \$1.00 for a single room. This is to compare to £12.00 in the 1970's, £40.00 in 1986 and today's £110.00 (1995). The 1891 description of the Hotel was "cosy, homelike atmosphere which is enhanced by the rich and substantial surroundings". Through its changing history, the Hotel has maintained its excellent location, high standard and nice atmosphere.

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