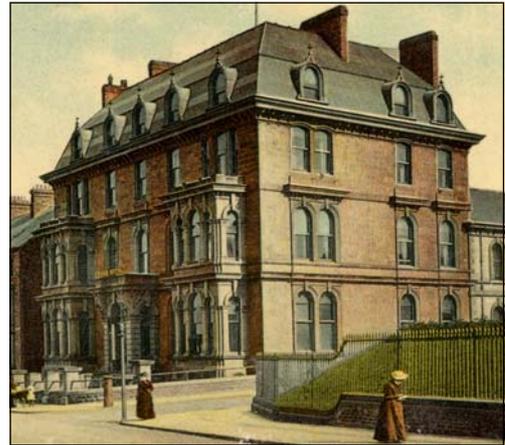


Hotel History

Built in the nineteenth century the prestigious outline of the Grand Hotel has long been an impressive landmark for all those who cruise up the River Tyne. And yet this charismatic building which epitomizes the era of crinoline dresses and “lords of the manor” holds close to its heart many historic events. During its lifetime it has played host to innumerable colourful characters from the world of stage, cinema, politics and sport; it has survived two world wars; the 1930’s depression; a constant changing of ownership and yet still remains proud and majestic, its inner sanctum shrouded in mystery.

Owned by the Duke of Northumberland, and initially built as a summer residence in 1872 for the Duchess, it was converted to a hotel in 1877. Throughout its chequered past the Grand Hotel has always been regarded as one of the more luxurious hotels in the area with one of its main attractions being the opulent sweeping staircase reminiscent of the Victorian period when such grand buildings officiated balls for the aristocracy.

Of all its Managers, of which there have been quite a selection, by far the best known was Thomas Tickle who came to the Grand Hotel in the late 1890’s and on one occasion was responsible for running both the Grand and the Bath Hotel in nearby Tynemouth Village. He was a highly respected manager, the customers liked him and it was obvious he enjoyed his job because he died whilst playing billiards in the hotel with one of the locals.



The Grand Hotel, 1905

The Victorian period helped make Tynemouth popular, with tourists flocking to this small seaside resort, keen to indulge in its delightful climate and explore its natural beauty. Tynemouth was, for a time, a spa town. When in 1912 it was recorded that the death rate in Tynemouth was the lowest in the kingdom as a result of its spa waters, such news was greeted with an influx of visitors.

Businesses and local hotels thrived, this was the publicity they needed to lure people to visit and even the Grand saw fit to advertise in the local press at the time as having “28 bedrooms, bathrooms and liveries, hot and cold water and salt supplies”. The latter two words holding the bait. Never had Tynemouth or the Grand Hotel been so busy.



The Grand Hotel, 1900

Staff employed at the Grand have always taken great pride in their work. Even at a time when the entrance stairs were often scrubbed twice daily and the woodwork polished until shining, working 14 hour shifts, sometimes seven days a week for a mere 4/- a week was not unusual. The work was hard. Frequently staff were so weary after a shift that they fell into bed out of sheer exhaustion, but it was steady employment with a roof over their heads and guaranteed food in their stomachs at a time when many people were barely making a living.

Hotel History

Sadly the first World War took its toll on the Grand, battered and bruised, a mere skeleton of its former self, stripped of all its glory and finesse it was another helpless victim of a needless war. At that time Tynemouth Village was overrun with young recruits billeted at the Barracks whilst their superiors were accommodated in the Grand Hotel. After a heavy day on duty the officers indulged in a heavy night of drinking and playing billiards and so when the war ended and the officers eventually left, the Grand was in such a state of disrepair that it had to be closed down and completely refurbished. As a result the hotel did not re-open to the public until 1922. It took a lot of hard work for the Grand to become re-established and restored to its former glory with large amounts of money spent on re-decorating and repairing the damage the officers had left behind.

There are few hotels in the North East that can admit to having entertained so many celebrities of screen and stage and it became quite a regular occurrence for staff to see familiar faces coming down the staircase for breakfast. Such celebrities and much loved people as Mike and Bernie Winters, Stanley Baker, Margaret Rutherford and Conservative MP for Tynemouth Dame Irene Ward, a much-celebrated visitor to the Grand and noted for her variety of hats she would wear. Irish comedian Dave Allen was a guest as was also Dame Vera Lynn and yet for most people the most famous were comedy duo Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy who would make a point of staying at the Grand Hotel whenever they were appearing at the Theatre Royal in Newcastle. For Stan it was a case of coming home as he had spent an early part of his childhood living in North Shields.



*The Grand Hotel, 1915
In use as an army billet*

By the 1950's the Grand Hotel was beginning to return to its former beauty with extensive restoration work having taken a great deal of time and money on the part of the owners. It was also in the late 1950's the Grand welcomed another new manager, Mr. and Mrs. Bright and their two young daughters from Lagos. Apparently he was quite a distinguished gentleman towering over 6ft tall whilst his wife, of Welsh descendant and somewhat smaller in stature ruled the roost with a firm hand, a compatible pair feared, yet respected. With each new manager came new ideas on how to attract more customers. It was the Bright's innovative idea to open the Troll Bar in the basement of the Hotel and have it decorated by two Newcastle Art College students which at the time was considered very fashionable especially with live music at weekends. And then the Clachan bar was opened initially for the older clientele where they could pop in for a pint and a chat.

Times have changed and although the Grand has gone through many changes itself there are few northern hotels that can proudly announce that in the early sixties they received a glowing entry in the prestigious Egon Ronay's Good Food Guide, an achievement only the cr me de la cr me attain. For many people the hotel still holds cherished memories. Wedding celebrations, anniversaries, reunions, farewells and secret rendezvous, the Grand has entertained them all with such refinement that can be expected from such a gracious hotel. A grand old lady who has gone through good and bad times, the hotel has survived to put Tynemouth well and truly on the map attracting tourists from all over the world keen to be a part of the North East's heritage.