

The Aylesbury Club and the Duck Dinner

The Duck Dinner is held in Aylesbury each year by the Aylesbury Club, which was originally formed in 1810. Its objects then were "good cheer, good humour and good neighbourhood", and its members met each month on the Friday nearest to the full moon during the period from November to April.

The club continued into the 1950's; the Bucks Herald recording in September 1954 that the author Sir Compton Mackenzie proposed the toast at the Bulls Head in Aylesbury. After this time the club seems to have faded away. However in 1973 Maurice Buckingham, the then Mayor of Aylesbury, reconstituted the club with the same laudable objects, and it is now as strong as ever.

The Club's only raison d'être apart from the above objects is to continue the tradition of the annual duck dinner, and the Club and its members hope that all its guests will enjoy tonight's dinner.

The Duckers

Extract from "The Aylesbury Duck" by Alison Ambrose

One feature of duck-breeding in the Aylesbury district was that the breeders and the rearers were normally two distinct groups of people. There were small breeders in the town, but most stock ducks were found on farms in the area around Aylesbury, which ensured that they were kept under healthy conditions, thus producing a higher percentage of fertile eggs. The rearers of ducks in Aylesbury were generally cottagers who lived in the town and bought the eggs from the breeders to raise the ducklings in their small dwellings. In addition, there were a few large breeders and rearers, like the Westons of Aylesbury, who kept extensive duck farms on which they could raise thousands of ducklings in one season. The small duckers, who raised from 400 to 1,000 ducklings in a year, were generally better-class labourers who had saved enough money to start raising ducks while following another occupation. Many of the tasks which duck-raising involved, such as the rearing of the young, feeding and plucking, could be done by the women. Furthermore, duck-rearing was only a seasonal occupation, lasting from late November until August. It is impossible to calculate the exact number of people engaged in the duck industry in Aylesbury and the surrounding area, as census returns and trade directories list men as cobblers, labourers or farmers but do not mention their secondary occupation of duck-raising. Even John Kersley Fowler, who had the Prebendal Farm on the outskirts of Aylesbury and was one of the best known breeders of ducks, is listed in the directories as Wine and Spirit Merchant' and 'Farmer and Grazier', and Kelly's Post Office Directory of 1864 does not list any duck breeders at all.