

Living HISTORY



LEIGHTON-LINSLADE
TOWN COUNCIL

The Changing Face of Our Pubs “Myths, Legends and Ghostly Goings On”



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INTRODUCTION

We celebrate the Living History of our Parish in this publication focusing on local public houses which for many years have served a wide variety of residents and visitors. They continue to underpin much of the social life of the town. In this booklet, you will delight in learning some facts and stories that bring their past to life. Enjoy the read and maybe stop for a rest in a pub of your choosing.

This booklet has been jointly produced by Leighton Buzzard & District Archaeological & Historical Society and Leighton-Linslade Town Council.

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THE UNICORN



The old Unicorn Inn now the Lancer in Lake Street features in the diary of John Salusbury Esq., who was a local magistrate, and lived a few doors away. His diary for the years 1757 to 1759 describes meetings of his club, the Civil Society where the venue for a meeting was chosen by club members in turn and he often gives details of the evenings spent there. He owned the Unicorn and often

"The yard had a range of stables on either side and the gate house also had a stable and a privy"

chose it for meetings. He describes meeting his friend Captain Hutton, who

lived at Heath and Reach, at the Unicorn on September 19th 1757: "In the afternoon Capt. Hutton, Messrs Snabin and Ashwell met me at the Unicorn where we quaffed punch and rumbo til nine of the clock. I spent five shillings and they one shilling apiece". Punch was wine or spirits mixed

with hot water or milk, sugar, lemon and spices; rumbo sounds

like much the same thing based on rum. On another evening in the summer they stayed til past midnight drinking wine and punch and fell into an argument about whether Beau Nash, who helped establish Bath as a fashionable resort, was still alive. "Capt. Hutton and Pyke laid Loddington and I a six shilling bowl of punch that he was now living, we having asserted that he was sometime dead and Stone laid Loddington the same wager of a bottle of wine, which in the course of the debate they doubled and I went halves with Loddington in the last bottle." Sadly for Salusbury, Nash lived until 1762.

In 1727 the inn was described for a fire insurance policy: the house and brewery all brick and tiled were insured for £300, a huge sum at the time. The yard had a range of stables on either side and the gate house also had a stable and a privy. In addition there were wheat barns, bean hovels and a barley barn. Throughout the C19th the Claridge family owned the inn and ran a wagon service to London twice a week. At the beginning of the C20th it was advertising itself the perfect place to stay for cycling tours and for hunting locally.

By the 1980s the old inn had become a night club with Lake Street the scene of late night fighting and drunkenness. It closed and reopened as Shades nightclub and closed again, finally reopening again as The Lancer family pub.



GOLDEN BELL



There cannot be too many pubs formerly owned by a charity for 300 years, but Leighton Buzzard's Golden Bell is one of the few. The charity was set up in the will of William Duncombe on the 26th March 1603. He left the house in Church End and two adjoining cottages in Leighton Buzzard, plus a couple of acres of land in the common fields to 12 trustees to use the profits for the poor of the parish. The legacy was to be shared with Dunstable and four villages-Battlesden, Potsgrove, Ivinghoe and Ivinghoe Aston.

The money was specifically for "the benefit of the deserving and necessitous persons resident in the parish" and was to pay for

"On market days its stable yard was used to parade horses which were for sale"

clothes, linen, bedding, fuel, tools, medical aid in sickness, and for loans in times of loss or destitution. Each parish took it in turn to receive the money, so Leighton's

poor were only relieved from their misery every five years by this charity.

It seems to have been a pub from the start - one of the early tenants was listed as an ale seller. On market days its stable yard was used to parade horses which were for sale. By the C19th the Golden Bell or Bottom Bell as it was known in deference to its older cousin at the top of the High Street, seemed to have been going downhill. It changed landlord every few years and gained something of a bad reputation. By June 1875 the landlord Richard Ginger was up before Francis Bassett Esq the magistrate on a charge of threatening behaviour. Sarah Ann his wife said his threats to her were such "to cause her to go in bodily fear".

Two weeks later he was before the courts again for suffering drunkenness upon his licensed premises, and further charged with having kept his pub open for the sale of intoxicating liquors after closing time, 11pm. Richard Ginger separated from his wife and moved to London, to "make the best of a bad case from a domestic point of view".

The Licence was transferred to his brother Joseph Ginger. Colonel Gilpin remarked that the house had been "for some considerable time notoriously mis-conducted". In 1898 the trustees decided to sell the property including the pub, cottages and the land. The auction was held at the Corn Exchange and the Golden Bell was bought by the Aylesbury Brewery Company.



THE TOP BELL



The Bell Inn can easily lay claim to be the oldest pub in Leighton Buzzard still serving ales to customers. Its name is recorded over 500 years ago when it's great wooden 'sign of an Inn at ye Bell' hung over the market place. It was called simply The Bell for hundreds of years but during the C20th it was known as The Top Bell, the Market Tavern and The Cranky Weasel.

It was originally larger than today, occupying both sides of Bell Alley, and in the Hearth Tax of 1671 it was the second largest building in the town with 11 hearths. Despite the number of rooms visitors shared chambers, a Quarter Sessions court record from 1683 outlines the case against a London pickpocket who admitted stealing money from the breeches pocket of a butcher as they slept together in a chamber at the Bell. Both men would have been in Leighton for the busy market.

In the C17th it was owned by the Wilkes family, who built the Almshouses in North

Street. Later it belonged to the Leighton Buzzard diarist John Salusbury Esq. who lived in Lake Street. When it was sold in 1861 it had a large market room, six bedrooms and boasted stabling for 60 horses; the sale included the adjoining shop, once part of the pub.

In September 1911, disaster struck. At the time it was the Bell Hotel and was owned and run by the wife of Auguste Francois Pouchot of St George's Square London who had separated a few years earlier and lived there with their son. On September 2nd Mrs Pouchot was running a bath when the oil geyser heating the water exploded as she tried to light it. She was severely burned and treated at a jewellers shop by Dr Spencer Pearson, who lived in Lake Street and was the father of the children's author Mary Norton.

"The second largest building in the town with 11 hearths"

The Fire Brigade arrived at the scene and managed to stop the fire spreading to the adjoining shop of Coopers ironmongers and Mr Spiers, a silversmith - benzoline, gunpowder and other combustibles were stored there. A few days later Mrs Pouchot died from her injuries. A local photographer recorded the scene as crowds watched the firemen dousing the flames. Four days later his photograph was on sale as a postcard which was posted out by locals to their friends and family telling of the dramatic event shown in the photo.



THE GLOBE



Before the canal and railway were built through Linslade, the small farm that is now the Globe public house, was surrounded by lush water meadows running down to the river Ouzel. The Swinstead family from Heath and Reach who ran the farm were collar makers, producing bridles and halters for horses from leather probably produced from their cattle, who fed in their pastures along the Ouzel valley.

In May 1800 the Grand Junction Canal was opened through Linslade, cutting the farmlands in half, but a bridge was built over to give them access to the land. The Swinsteds continued to own the farm but in 1823 Joseph Spiers took over the occupancy of the small farmhouse. The passing barges loaded with local sand and fruit, and bringing cheap coal from the midlands must have given him the idea for the pub as by 1830 it got its first licence as a beerhouse.

In the C19th The Globe had just a taproom for serving ale to the bargees and labourers who worked in the fields. Accommodation

for the family consisted of a parlour and kitchen downstairs, with four bedrooms above.

Adjoining the house was a timber boarded and tiled stable with a loft over it. Joseph Spiers was a market gardener, and he turned one of the fields on the other side of the canal into an orchard. The Globe's remoteness from the town, which is one of its main attractions today, was the very reason why three lads from the North End of Leighton Buzzard ended up before the courts. In September 1883 "three young celebrities" - in the language of the day - were convicted of throwing stones at the apple trees in Joshua Spiers orchard. They managed to bring down "about two pecks worth two shillings" before being chased off by the landlord's son James.

The Globe was put up for sale in the late 1880s, several times failing to find a buyer. In the 1891 census it is not named as a

"Three young celebrities were convicted of throwing stones"

public house and 69 year old Joshua Spiers is described only as a market gardener. Tom Lawson, born and bred in Leighton Buzzard, and historian of the town, remembered walking to the Globe with his parents on a summer evening and sitting outside with a lemonade "a great treat in those days". During the last 50 years the pub has expanded into the stable, and the meadows have become a car park and filled with tables for outside summer dining. It is probably more popular now than in all of its 200 year history.



ROEBUCK now The Oliver & Hare



With its windows facing down the High Street and in the centre of the market place the White Horse Inn of the C17th was ideally situated. It stood next to The Peacock, with The Greyhound across the street and the middle row pubs - The Cross Keys, the Boot and the Carriers Arms close by.

However by the next century its fortunes changed. In a fire insurance policy of 1726 it had changed to Ye Roe Buck, and later in the century it had been divided into three dwellings. It had reopened as a pub by 1793 when Edward Walker signed his name to the declaration that he would

"Adverts for servants -'strong girl wanted"

allow no seditious meetings in his house. During the C19th the publicans at the Roebuck, diversified. Auctions were regularly held at the pub and in its yard;

a bone setter held a clinic there every week as did a vet.

Adverts for servants

- 'strong girl wanted' - invited applicants to apply to Mrs Gartside at the Roebuck A bath chair was advertised "to Let; without attendant 9d per hour, with attendant 1s 3d per hour". But perhaps the most curious was an advert in the Leighton Buzzard Observer for 9th July 1889 entitled "Bathing". Mr W.H.Hopkins of the Roebuck Inn "begs to announce that for bathing purposes the Bed of the Ouzel has been Thoroughly Cleansed near the Black Bridge and a building erected for Bathers on the bank thereof. Tickets for the season to be obtained at the above address."

The Roebuck public house closed for business just a few years ago and today the building houses the restaurant of The Oliver & Hare.



THE HARE INN



The Hare Inn at Southcott is a village pub which sits facing the green. It was opened as an ale house in about 1830 and its first landlord Henry Woodman was also the village blacksmith. In August 1864 Robert Eggleton applied for a spirits licence for the beerhouse, despite presenting a petition and stating that his house was over half a mile from other Linslade pubs,

"In February of 1881 the Rothschilds held a deer hunt starting at Southcott"

he was refused. However when it was sold in May 1876 it was described as "that old and well known freehold public house situated in the centre of the village of Southcott [sic] known by the sign of the Hare" with rich grasslands adjoining, and it was bought by Thomas Birdsey and James Tompkin became the landlord.

In February of 1881 the Rothschilds held a deer hunt starting at Southcott, "where

the deer was turned out in a field at the rear of Mr Thomas Birdsey's farm house" - this was a captured deer brought to the hunt and then set free to be chased. The great and the good were all there including the de Rothschilds, the Earl of Ilchester and locals like Frederick Bassett, William King, Henry Pettit and the lawyer David Willis. Luncheon was provided by Mr Birdsey at his house, while on the village green in front of the Hare "the rustics assembled in full force, their numbers augmented by the influx of kindred spirits who swarmed to the attraction of a large barrel of beer and bread and cheese ad libitum" paid for by de Rothschild. The children were not forgotten: "and charming beyond expression to the juvenile population - 300 rolls steeped in treacle".

The pub went through a bad patch in late 1893 when the publican Henry Finch was found "very drunk and staggering about" on his own premises, swearing and striking at customers. Phipps & Co. the Northampton brewers who leased the Hare from Thomas Birdsey promptly gave Finch notice to leave. He was replaced by Jeremiah Francis Scannell who died two years later at 51 and the pub was then run by his widow Kate.

Many of the Southcott farms have been sold and developed for housing but the Rothschild Stud remains in the village and the Hare continues to serve the "rustics".



BLACK LION



When in August 1865 George Andrew applied for a licence for "a refreshment house to be called the Black Lion", he was resurrecting the ghosts of the old Sow and Pigs and the Bullhead, both inns which had been sited on this central part of the High Street. The Sow and Pigs had closed its doors at the end of the C18th having changed its name from the Bullhead, which was named as early at 1676. Both names reflect the front row seat which the pub had for the markets and fairs held in the town's High Street. Five years later Andrew and his new inn were in the Leighton Buzzard Observer at the centre of an assault case.

The trouble at the October 24th Runaway Fair - held every year since 1447 - began when the victim Thomas Linnell from Brickhill was employed to sell a horse at the Fair. During the course of the day, he was threatened and assaulted several times by two men. The whole thing was witnessed by William Stone, who gave

evidence, and by Mrs Scott. Both defendants were found guilty and fined and ordered to pay £1.13s to replace a bottle of oil which was being carried by Linnell.

Many town centre pubs had an all-day licence to stay open on market days and fairs as farmers and their lads would move from pub to pub making deals, buying and selling, and sampling the ale. This led to the

"Many town centre pubs had an all-day licence to stay open on market days"

local joke "Tiddly Tuesday". The licensee of the Greyhound, at the corner of North Street and Hockliffe Street, was charged with allowing illegal gambling in his pub. Evidence was given of games of bagatelle and dominoes, played for money, with allegations of gin being added to the beer to addle the players. When a witness protested to the magistrate that he was not too drunk, the reply "you mean I suppose that neither of you was so drunk but that you could see the spots on the dominoes".

On the death of George Andrews in 1890 the pub was sold by auction at the Corn Exchange in Lake Street. It was described as being "old established and fully licensed situated in the best part of the High Street." It had a large yard entered through a covered gateway, with stabling for 16 horses, a substantial barn and a pump and well of "excellent water" - highly important for the brewing of good ale.



THE WHEATSHEAF



North Square, where today North Street meets Church Street, was once crowded with inns and taverns to serve travellers coming from the north down Watling Street and along Heath Road towards Leighton's busy market and High Street. The Wheatsheaf was one of a row of pubs, next to the Windmill, the Leathern Bottle later known as the Buffalo, and the old Kings Arms. The Square marked the edge of the town until the common fields were enclosed in 1840's. The Ashwell Arms in Ashwell Street carries the name of the Ashwell family who owned much of the land along the road.

During the C19th so many pubs and beerhouses were licensed that the area became known for drunkenness and bad behaviour. The White Lion, a small pub fronting the square, drew this criticism in a letter to the editor of the Leighton Buzzard Observer in 1878: "What has induced the magistrates to grant the White Lion a licence? First the character of the applicant

is not helped by his signature - a cross; I suppose he cannot write. Secondly the suitability

of the premises is so limited that there is no lodging for travellers or soldiers on billet, no stable for a horse, nor yard for carts - in fact no accommodation for an inn, nothing but a 'drink-shop'." The letter went on to lament the size of the pub and pointed out that the square was already well provided for - "crowded with public houses".

Evidence for bad behaviour came before the magistrates in November 1899 when the landlady of the Wheatsheaf was hit round the face. James Linney and Charles Collins two Leighton labourers were up for assaulting both the landlady and her customers. The report in the Leighton Buzzard Observer was headed 'North End Rowdyism'. The trouble started when Collins was in the Wheatsheaf drinking a glass of beer when Linney came

"The report in the Leighton Buzzard Observer was headed Rowdyism in North Square"

in and was refused a beer by Mrs Field as she knew what effect it had upon him". Collins offered his glass to Linney who continued to drink thus provoking a fight aided by Collins.

The landlord William Field appeared and stopped the fight and sent for the police. The court was told that the two men were well known in the North End, going about in gangs. Police Sergeant Panter gave evidence saying that Collins had been drinking and Linney was drunk. Both men were fined with one month's prison if they did not pay.



THE SUN INN



It was a cold January day in 1793 when John Hopkins from the Sun Inn, together with 31 other inn holders and publicans of Leighton Buzzard met at the Town Hall in the market place to discuss the revolution currently raging across France. A few days before their meeting the King of France Louis XVI had been condemned to death: what would happen if the revolution jumped across the English Channel?

The government of the day were already taking measures to curb would-be revolutionaries by banning meetings. Agreeing that they were all "fully sensible of the inestimable blessings of peace, good order and good government" and that they viewed with "detestation... seditious and disaffected persons" intent on rousing

"It was a substantial inn with a gated yard, stabling, a large barn and two cottages"

disorder and corrupting the minds of the people. The publicans declared that

they would not allow any gatherings on their property which might try to subvert or disturb the government of the country.

The Sun Inn had been established at the bottom end of Lake Street for about 100 years at this time; it was a substantial inn with a gated yard, stabling, a large barn and two cottages and traded on the traffic making its way from Dunstable up Lake Street to Leighton's market place. At the back of the pub was the Sun Close, a large grassy field, perhaps used for the cattle, geese, horses and sheep being herded to market. It had other uses though for entertainment and in 1858 Joseph Fearn temporarily lost his licence at the Sun for permitting music and dancing, theatrical performances and for harbouring prostitutes.

However within just a few years the merrymaking at the Sun Close became an established part of the festivities at the annual town feast held in early June. A description from the newly published Leighton Buzzard Observer in 1864 describes the goings on in the meadow at the rear of the Rising Sun, as it was then called: "A gigantic dramatic booth - the Great Model Mammoth Theatre as it was called, but be that as it may, our readers have been told enough to give them an idea of what sort of entertainments were provided at the Leighton Buzzard Club Feasts." A hundred years later the meadow would host the annual hog-roast at carnival time continuing the tradition before the field was eventually built over.



THE SWAN INN



This is one of the less saucy remarks made by visitors to the Swan entered in their visitor book in the early years of the C20th and using the first letter of each line to spell out the name. Others include comments such as: *"The way was long. The day was hot. The machine ran well. Good lunch! What! What!"* The machine here being an early motor car.

The Swan has always been one of Leighton Buzzard's foremost inns right from its early days 400 years ago. Standing at the top of the High Street looking over the Market Place its commanding position has meant that it was always at the centre of town life.

A century later it became the posting house for the town, the post coach carrying the Royal Mail left the Swan every morning for London at 7am. Another post coach also operated between Oxford and Cambridge calling at the Swan for lunch. When the railway came to Linslade the

Swan sent a coach to meet travellers from the train.

John Bushell and his family ran the inn for 70 years from 1805 and his name is still to be seen above the main entrance. During his time the inn was often used as a headquarters during elections and it was from the balcony above the door that Leighton's only Member of Parliament Francis Bassett addressed the 2,000 strong crowd following his victory in the 1872 election.

The following years were the Swan's hey-day. With Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild living in the High Street, royalty, both English and foreign, visited the town bringing with them aristocrats and their entourages. Their purpose was to hunt with the Rothschild Stag Hounds and the Swan stabling and yards were always full.

"Speak of things you know, **W**hen on through life you go **A**nd remember what we've said, **N**othing beats the 'Swan' Bed."

During the Edwardian period the inn was run by Mrs Kitty Towers, the widow of the last owner. It was she who made the Swan such a desirable venue keeping up very high standards throughout the hotel.

In 1908 a party of eight visitors from London and Buckinghamshire left this ditty: "We came here for an outing I'm very pleased to say, We had a ripping luncheon And not too much to pay, We are just a jolly party And we had a jolly time, Well who could help it At the Swan, why it's sublime!"



THE BOOT INN now Ollie Vee's



Old paintings of Leighton Buzzard's market place show a row of ancient timber framed buildings in the middle of the road alongside the market hall. This was Middle Row and three pubs stood next to each other, The Cross Keys, the Boot and the Curriers Arms. It is believed that the Cross Keys building had once been the hall of the Fraternity of Corpus Christi, where in the C15th, local merchants met for their trade meetings and celebration dinners.

The Boot was a small alehouse next door to the larger Cross Keys; it was named after the C13th century Rector of North Marston John Schorne who was believed to have conjured the devil into a boot. He was venerated as a local saint and pilgrimages were made

"three pubs stood next to each other"

to his holy well in the village. A number of local pubs were named in celebration of this - Soulbury still has one.

In the mid C19th Mrs Charlotte Gandy took over the licence following her husband's death and during the 1850's she was brought up before the magistrates for selling beer on Sundays before the official time of opening. In August 1858 her licence was suspended, but regranted a month later. Calamity came to the pub in March 1899 when a disastrous fire broke out at 5.30 in the morning in the adjoining Cross Keys. The local Fire Brigade under Captain Ruggles were on the scene within ten minutes and brought the flames under control. The Cross Keys was completely destroyed, but rebuilt with a date stone - still to be seen on the building - recording the fact. The Boot was very badly damaged and was largely rebuilt, and it is this building we see today now Ollie Vee's.



TACTIC CENTRE



The Changing Face of our Historic Buildings

The timber framed building which sits alongside the road in Hockliffe Street is one of the few still standing which survived the great fire of Leighton Buzzard during the Civil War. It happened in March 1645 and the details we have are sketchy. But the extent of the fire can be guessed at by the huge sum of money the local tradesmen asked Parliament for to help rebuild the town.

We do not even know if any money was forthcoming from the government of the day; the Civil War was still raging in some parts of the country and Oliver Cromwell's puritans were in charge of Westminster and London. The King would be executed four years later.

We do know that the building is a survivor from before 1645 because of the materials

and method used in its construction. English Heritage date it to around 1550, before the first Elizabeth was queen. Leighton's local history and archaeological society (LBDaHS) have been trying to date it more specifically, and perhaps show that it is even earlier than 1500.

What we do know is that it is part of a larger building; the rest of the structure is now Martinis restaurant, but they share one long roof. Efforts are being made to date the woodwork, bricks, wattle and daub and even old thatch under the modern tiles. In Benjamin Bevan's map of the town the owner and occupier is given as George Hart and he is still there in the 1841 census, when he is 75 years old living with three female servants, one of whom, Eliza Merrywethers gives her age as 10! Another of the servants Ann Kilben from Northamptonshire is still there ten years later by which time she has become a 'dame school mistress'. She perhaps taught children their alphabet while they plaited straw for the hat industry in Luton.

Later William Johnson a tailor, born in Leighton Buzzard, lived there with his family. His widow Sarah was still there in 1911 at the age of 91.



THE BALD BUZZARD



Opposite the Tactic Centre is Leighton's newest pub The Bald Buzzard. Taking over the premises of a sweet shop it harks back to the days when pubs sold ale, played simple games and giant television screens did not drown out conversation. It is part of a run of small shops and houses between the yard of the old Roebuck Inn and the enormous Methodist chapel with two adjoining manses on either side which once stood here. Today, one manse remains and houses a veterinary surgery. An earlier chapel at the rear of Hockliffe

Street is now part of a large furniture and electrical store, and its old stone walls can be seen from the car park.

In 1810 the turnpike road running from Aylesbury in Bucks to Hockliffe in Beds was built. It ran down Wing Hill through Linslade, crossed the canal and river bridges and came up through the High Street and into Hockliffe Street. Despite the narrowness of the road it continued on along Hockliffe Road to Eggington and finally Hockliffe.

There it connected with Watling Street and another turnpike to Woburn. The improved

"When pubs sold ale, played simple games and giant television screens did not drown out conversation"

road surface attracted more traffic and visitors to the town encouraging more small

shops to open up along the street as it left the central market area. This continues today with the addition of banks and restaurants, and the Bald Buzzard serving locally made ale.

If you want to know more about pubs visit - The Community Archives at Beds
<https://bedsarchives.bedford.gov.uk/CommunityHistories/LeightonBuzzard/LicensedPremisesInLeightonBuzzard.aspx>

and "The Old Pubs of Leighton Buzzard and Linslade" on sale from the Leighton Buzzard and District Archaeological and Historical Society www.lbdahs.org.uk/

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