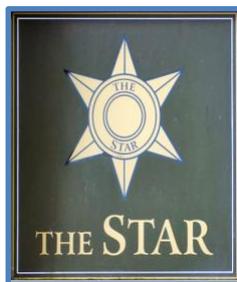


The Star Inn at Watchfield

By Neil B. Maw

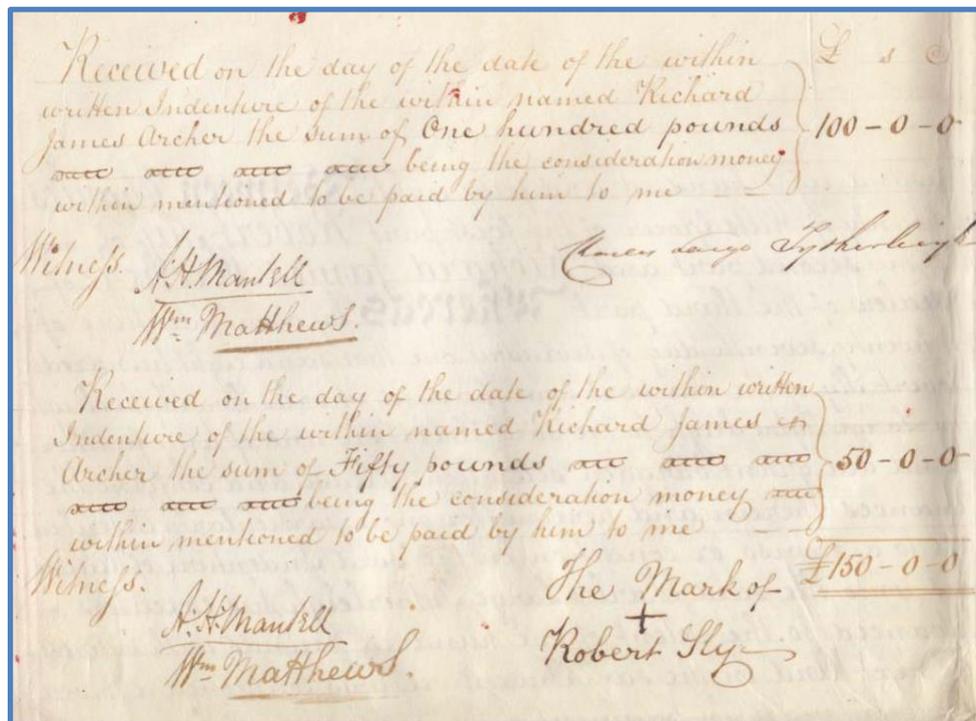


The documents that belong to the Adams family of Oxford Square, Watchfield, are a classic example of how the official Land Registry has had an adverse effect for historical researchers. As soon as a property becomes listed on the official registry, the documents that made up the original deeds become redundant and are often destroyed. Occasionally, we discover deed collections still intact, and the schedule that once made-up the sequence of ownership is revealed. And, moreover, further information about the property is often revealed within the detail. Such is the case with the Adams documents. It was known that a pub once existed in the vicinity and the local name of *Star Lane* provided a good suggestion of its name. But whereas the local inhabitants of a century previous would have known exactly where it was, it takes but a few decades for the information to be forgotten.

The document trail begins with a standard lease and release, (*shown below*) a simple system of recording property sales from the 17th century up to 1845, made on subsequent days. On the 2nd & 3rd days of July 1822, William Perrin sold to Robert Sly, '*All that Cottage and Tenement with the Garden Ground.*' We also are given the information that it was, '*Late in the tenure or occupation of Nathaniel Perrin since deceased.*' The price of the property was £52.10s.0d (10 shillings today would be 50p). A lot of information from 200 years previous. Further information suggests that William Perrin was not living at the property and is described as of, '*Exeter Street in the Parish of Chelsea, (London) Gentleman,*' meaning his is a man of means & does not need to work. He seems to have been of a benevolent nature as the property is further described as, '*now in the tenure or occupation of the Churchwardens and Overseers of the poor of Watchfield or their undertenants.*' It suggests that after the death of Nathaniel, who we assume is his father, William allows the property to be used for the relief of the poor of the village.

Over 20 years later Robert Sly generated more documentation by borrowing £100 from Charles Tytherleigh a Grocer from Highworth. As security he used his property and the description gives the information that he has, 'added to the premises and erected and built thereon a messuage or tenement now used as a Beer House, now in the occupation of Adin Sly and also two cottages now in the occupation of William Monk and Charles Hammond.' It can only be assumed that he borrowed the money to fund the building of the new premises. Two years later he borrowed £150. This time the lender was Richard Archer, a Corn Dealer from Lechlade and the money was secured against the property, the description of which remained the same.

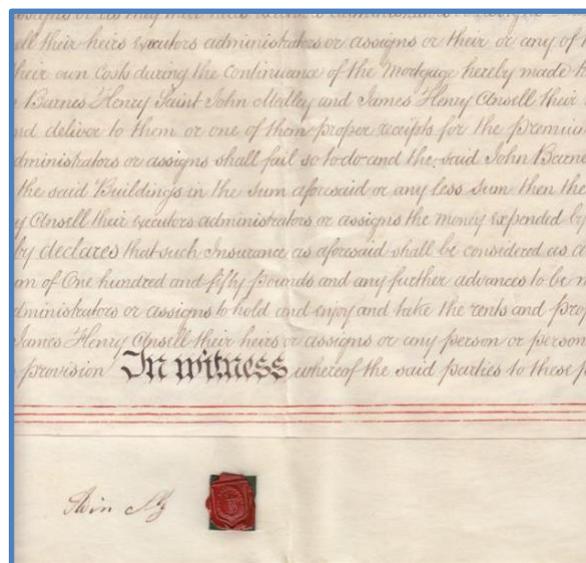
From an Indenture of 1848 it is clear to see that Robert Sly had not learned to read or write. This was quite normal for the period as there was no legislation requiring all children to attend school, but it was on the way.



Robert Sly died on the 7th December 1851 'Intestate,' meaning that he didn't make a Will. It would have taken some time for his son Adin Sly to go through the process of probate to claim his father's estate, but clearly by 1854 that had been done. A two-page indenture dated in that year provided the information that he borrowed £150 and in the description of the property we learn that the name of the Beer House is 'The Star.' Further

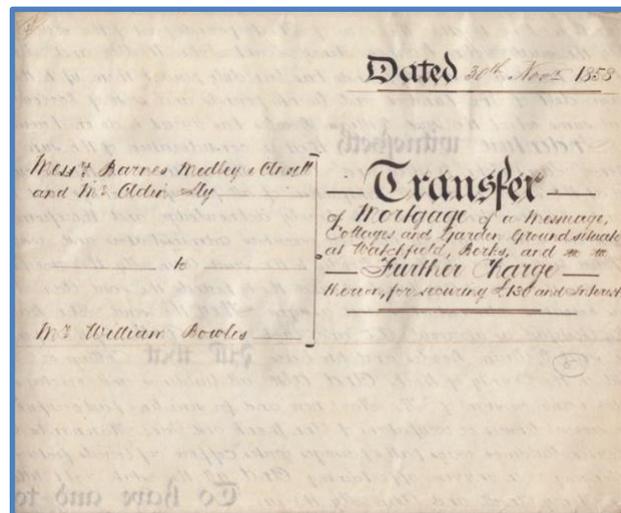
information suggests that the occupiers of the two cottages have also passed away leaving their widows, Ann Monk and Jane Hammond as tenants. And, unlike his father, Adin had learned to read and write.

A newspaper article gave the information that Adin Sly had been fined £2 for selling beer after the permitted time. He was fined £2 with 11 shillings costs (*Berkshire Chronicle* 14th Feb 1857). Three years later he was in court again, but as a Plaintiff. His case was that in the autumn of 1859 he had invited a man called Aaron Pickett to come and play his violin in his dancing booth on the occasion of the village Feast. The event went very well but the terms of payment between them wasn't made clear at the beginning and consequently Adin took the matter to court which he lost. But his next appearance in court was for a more serious matter. In order to obtain a licence for his Beerhouse he was required to obtain the signatures of six qualified inhabitants of the parish. He got five but the sixth, William Lloyd of Watchfield, was forged. When Mr Lloyd found out he notified the police. Adin sly was fined £25 plus costs and he lost the licence for the Star Inn altogether. (*Reading Mercury* 25th October 1862).



In 1858 Adin borrowed more money, this time from local farmer William Bowles. The business of loaning money was common among people who had surplus amounts. There was no regulation and banks were still in their

early stages of development. It was common to agree a deal and make it legal with a signed and witnessed indenture. William Bowles was listed on the Census of 1851 as a farmer of 200 acres and in 1857 he was described as a principal ratepayer, so a man of reasonable wealth.



William Bowles died on the 10th November 1860 and upon the administration of his estate, the security that he held on the property of Adin Sly was transferred to John Wilson of Beckett, Shrivenham, Gent. In the two pages of parchment that together, made up two Indentures, the description of the property has additions, 'a cottage and other buildings recently erected and adjoining thereto, and also all those three cottages near or adjoining,' and that the tenants are John Day, Edward Butler and William Monk Sly. It also adds that there was a Carpenter's Shop, Stable, Brewhouse, Wash House, Timber Yard and Pigsties, in the occupation now of Adin Sly's daughter Jane Sly. The second of the Indentures dated December 1863, completed the transaction by Adin Sly of paying off the money owed to the Bowles' and borrowing £200 from the Reading County Benefit Building Society to be paid back monthly over a period of 20 years.

Dated 26th March 1861

Mess^{rs} Tho^s Bowles and
J. H. Bowles (Administrators with
the Will annexed of M^r W^m Bowles
decd) M^r John Bowles his son
Att^r at law & M^r Adin Sly -

to

M^r John Wilson

Dated 17th December 1863.

(endorsed.)

Transfer of Mortgage

of Messuages Cottages Gardens & Hereditaments
at Watchfield, Berks, and _____
Further Charge thereon for securing
£440 and interest.

} Re Conveyance

} M^r John Wilson
} M^r Adin Sly

This Indenture Made the seventeenth day of December One Thousand
Eight Hundred and sixty three Between
Adin Sly late of Watchfield but now of
Reading in the County of Berks Carpenter and Retainer of Beer of the one part
and John Bligh Member, Leguist and John Linnards Banker both of Reading
Society of the other part Whereas the said Adin Sly is seized of or well entitled
to the Messuages Cottages or Hereditaments Gardens and Hereditaments
hereinafter described with the appurtenances for an estate of inheritance in fee
simple in possession free from all incumbrances

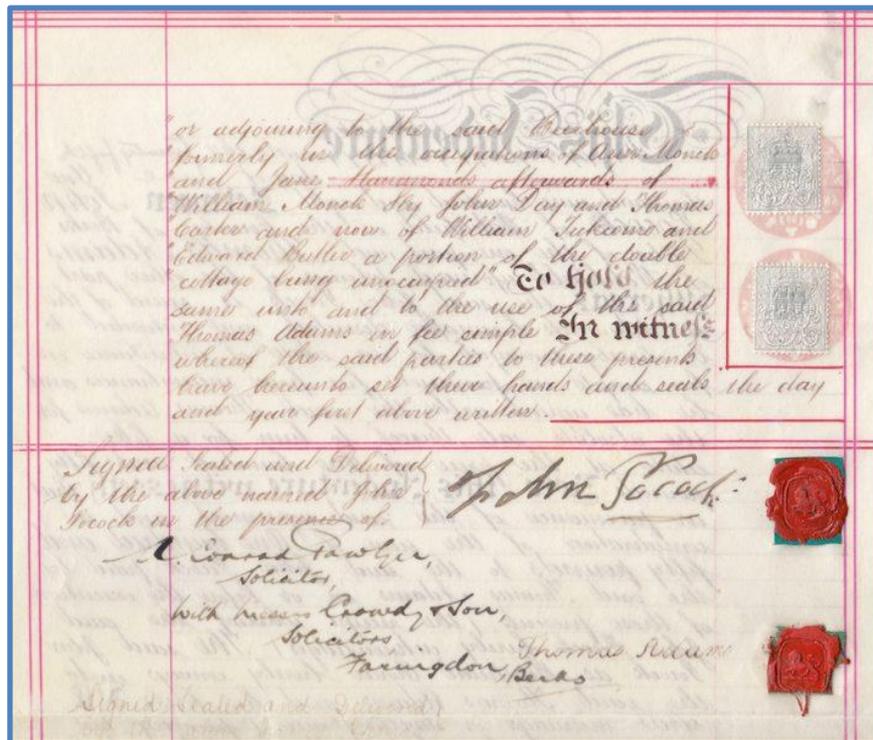
And Whereas the said Adin Sly is a Member of the said Reading
and County Permanent Benefit Building Society and the holder of eight shares therein numbered

It's not certain if the Star Inn was able to continue as a licenced premises after Adin Sly's conviction for forgery in 1862. There were licence applications recorded for the other two pubs in Watchfield but no mention

of the Star, so it's highly likely that it was no longer in use as a pub. Another court case in 1873 confirmed that one of his tenants, George Povey, had not paid his rent and tried to remove property from the premises to prevent Adin Sly from seizing it in lieu of non-payment. It seems to have been troubled times for him and likely contributed to his defaulting on three consecutive payments of his mortgage. This was in breach of his contract and the property was put up for auction at the Barrington Arms Hotel, Shrivenham on 11th September 1873. The purchaser was John Pocock who paid £170.

There is no evidence yet to confirm if John Pocock applied for a licence to sell alcohol and there is no mention of the Star or a beerhouse, other than the Eagle and Royal Oak, in any of the census'. Therefore, it seems very likely that it ceased to be a licensed premises after October 1862. John Pocock owned a lot of property in Watchfield and offered much of it for sale at an auction in 1899. It's not clear if it included the Star building and adjoining cottages, but another auction in 1908 did advertise the property that was withdrawn at the highest bid of £115. The same advertisement did confirm that it was disposed of privately to Thomas Adams. (*Faringdon Adver* 30th May 1908). **Below - Thomas & Mabel Adams.**





In order to buy the property and begin the tenure of the Adams', Thomas Adams already had £50 available but needed to borrow £100. He didn't go down the route of loaning it from a building society as Adin Sly had done, but preferred to borrow from a local source, Edward Percy Crowdy who was described as a 'Gentleman,' and had money to loan out and earn interest. The Crowdys were an old and established family in the area and there is still a legal practice bearing that name today. Thomas Adams was described as a Labourer. The description of the property was a 'dwelling house, formerly two cottages with Shed, Stable, Cowshed & two pigsties, outhouses, gardens, thereto belonging, situate on the Green at Watchfield. And also, all that cottage and garden adjoining and now in the occupation of W. Collier as tenant.'

Five years after purchasing his property, Thomas Adams found himself on the wrong side of the law. In a newspaper article he was described as a 'Dealer.' He had put one of his horses out on the roadside not far from his house, and it had wandered onto the road during grazing, which broke the law. He was fined 2 shillings with 8 pence costs. (*Faringdon Adver* 10th May 1913).

7th September 1928 - it was described by the newspaper as the first outbreak of fire in the village for nearly half a century. (*The reference is to Mr Willis' property in March 1871*). Three cottages were gutted and practically levelled to the ground and were occupied by Mr & Mrs Adams and four children, Mr & Mrs Arthur Tucker and two children and Mr & Mrs Frederick Harrison and two children. The premises of Adams and Harrison had thatched roofs and Tucker slate. The house occupied by the Adams family was formerly used as a bakehouse and previous to that was a public-house (*The Star*). The fire was caused by a spark from a chimney landing on thatch and fanned rapidly by the wind. The whole of the west side of the building that was the pub was gutted and had to be demolished, leaving only the east side to be made habitable.



Above. Before the fire. (Courtesy of Paul Williams)

Below. North Wilts Herald 14th Sept 1928. **Further below.** Courtesy David Adams



As well as being a general dealer, Thomas was a Coal Merchant, and in 1934 he found himself in trouble with the official department of 'Weights & Measures.' His court appearance was headlined in the newspaper as '*Fined for Robbing Himself.*' The charge was that he had not fixed metal labels indicating the correct weight of coal being sold in sacks at Watchfield, and also for failing to carry stamped weights and scales. Upon closer examination it was discovered he had been giving too much coal for the price he was charging! His total fine was £1. He asked for six months to pay

as he had an invalid wife and three children, but the Magistrates only allowed him one month. (*North Wilts Herald* 26th January 1934).

Complications had been created with Thomas' loan for the property purchase when Edward Crowdy died on 3rd June 1912, and the charge on the property transferred to Alfred Withy who subsequently died in 1947, causing a transfer to William Morse. In 1955 William Morse died, but so too did Thomas Adams on the 10th of June - intestate. His wife Mabel applied to the Oxford District Probate Registry and was successful in proving that she was the lawful widow and relict of Thomas and the only person entitled to the estate. It passed to her in Fee Simple - modern Freehold.

Mabel died on the 27th of March 1980 and in her Will she left the property to her children. After some family consultations, her son Frank George Adams and his wife Doreen Beatrice Rosemary Adams became the owners. The documentation was straightforward and used the 1908 Indenture as a basic schedule of deeds. Entry on HM Land Registry is all that is required now and as stated at the beginning of this history, has rendered the document trail that made up deeds such as this one obsolete.



From 1955 until 2009, the part of the building that survived the great fire of 1928, was home to Frank, Doreen (above) and nine children. The Adams family had occupied the property in total for just over a century. During

later building work at the site a vaulted cellar was discovered under what would have been the main building. It was most likely used when it was in operation as a public house for storage of barrels etc.

Frank continued in the footsteps of his father Thomas to start with as a general dealer but followed numerous trades throughout his working life. But that small part of the substantial building that was the Star Inn was a warm home where memories were made for a local family. It was a sad day for son David when it was finally sold, and we are thankful that he preserved the documents that explains two centuries of history in a part of Watchfield.

