



The history of the Bricklayers Arms, Longcote

By Neil B. Maw



The Longcote village water pump and behind it the Bricklayers Arms, circa 1925. Photo courtesy of Paul Williams

The building that was the Bricklayers Arms stands in the centre of the village, just off the Green and the sort of position that one might expect a village pub to occupy. The earliest documentary evidence that we can find so far of a pub in Longcote is from the Manor Court records of Shrivvenham Salop. In 1624 - 1626, there is an entry of an Alehouse being kept by William Weston. However, we have no information as to where it was located or by what sign or name it might have worked under. But it's probably not too far-fetched to suspect that it might have been located in the same central spot as the Bricklayers once was.

'*Letters of George Merryweather 1815 - 1821*,' published by Shrivenham Heritage Society in 2020, also give us another piece of information when he writes, 'Mr Heath of Faringdon, a brewer, the owner of the publick (sic) house at Longcott, is building a new publick house there, which is [estimation] of £400 to £600 cost.' (Letter No 63, Page 184, dated 2nd November 1818). This sentence implied that James Heath already owned a Pub at Longcott and he's building a new one. Is he referring to the Bricklayers? Unfortunately, we have no further evidence at the moment.



The Bricklayers Arms circa 1930, from the book, Longcot, A Village in the Vale, by Guy Richards & Shirley Dalton-Morris, P.77.

The census for Longcott for 1851 provided the information that a John Smith was running a Beerhouse there. It doesn't specify that it's the Bricklayers Arms, but if we look at the following census for 1861, the landlord is John Smith but ten years older and it specifically states that it's the, 'Beer House Bricklayers Arms.' If we apply the same logic backwards and look at the census for 1841, we have a John Smith ten years younger. His wife Mary also matches the ages throughout, and some of the children. There is further evidence in the Reading Mercury newspaper for 5th May 1849, when a John Smith of Longcot, a publican, appeared to a summons for keeping his house open for the sale of beer after 10pm. He was fined £2 with 8shillings and 6pence costs. With the above evidence it would be reasonable to claim that we have documentary evidence that the Bricklayers Arms had been serving local pub goers since 1841. However, the Longcot census for 1841 also listed two men called

Joseph and John Sherry, both labelled as, '*Publicans.*' It's possible that these two men were running the Bricklayers and in between 1841 and 1849, John Smith took it over. That same census also listed a man called Henry Dyer, also a Publican, to whom we cannot ascribe any pub or beerhouse.



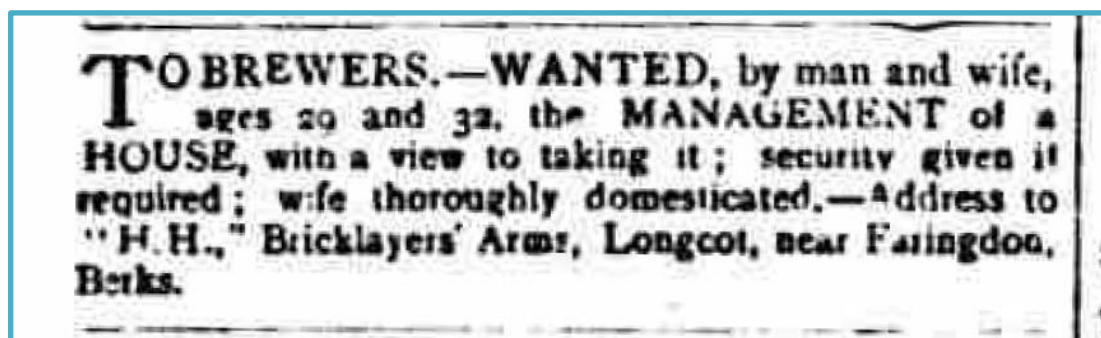
Longcot village stores circa 1905. Photo courtesy of Paul Williams

John Smith was still having brushes with the law a decade later when in 1860 he was again fined for keeping his house open beyond the permitted hours. (*Reading Mercury* 7/7/1860). The census of 1861 showed that he was at that point in time, 57 years of age. There were no government pensions then. His son Albert John is listed as age 19, unmarried and a Shoemaker. The parish records included that Landlord John Smith died at the age of 61. He was buried in St Mary's churchyard, Longcot on 15th November 1865. There would have been little choice other than for son, Albert John, to step in. The 1871 census showed that he had taken over from his father, was married to Anne and had a son, John aged 4. However, it may well have been only a temporary arrangement as by 1878 the licence for the pub was changing hands from Caleb Money to Allen Gylby. (*Reading Mercury* 6/7/1878). Another newspaper advertisement showed that an Albert Smith of Longcot was advising the inhabitants of the neighbourhood that he had taken on the Coal Business at Longcot Canal

Wharf, and he could supply the best Somerset Coals for 18shillings a ton. If it was landlord Albert Smith, then perhaps his heart lay with his coal business rather than the pub.

The census of 1881 listed a large Gylby household, but sadly it was missing the head, Allen Gylby, because he died just before it was carried out. He was buried at local St Mary's on 1st April 1881 aged 58. (b.1823). His widow Maria was listed as the licensee, aged 51 (b.1830), and she was officially granted it shortly after. (Reading Mercury 9/7/1881). She also had three sons and three daughters to help her, ages 8 - 29.

It hasn't been possible to establish when Maria Gylby left the pub but it must have been some time before early 1887. This assumption was brought about by an oddly worded advertisement that appeared in the local newspaper. See below.



An enigmatic advertisement from the Swindon Advertiser dated 19th February 1887

The census for 1891 listed that George Hicks was the landlord of the Bricklayers Arms. He was 60 (b.1831) and married to Sarah who was 63. But his tenure was cut short when he died the following year and was buried in St Mary's churchyard on 24th February. In early April of that year, Sarah was granted the licence (Witney Gazette 9/4/1892).

In 1896 the auction of the Swindon and North Wilts Breweries Estate, comprising the Brewery at Wootton Bassett and 26 public and other licenced houses, took place at the Goddard Arms, Swindon on 29th October. Included in the sale was the Bricklayers Arms

that sold for £800 to Messrs. Bowly, a Brewery who occupied the premises off the High Street at Old Town, Swindon, close to the old Town Hall (Locarno).

The census of 1901 showed that Sarah Hicks was still running the pub at age 76 (b.1825). She died three years later and was buried in the local St Mary's churchyard on 10th July 1904. We know that she continued to be the landlady of the pub until the last, by the notice in the newspaper that transferred the licence to Joseph Punt. (Swindon Advertiser 9/7/1904). However, like most pubs at this time, the Bricklayers went through a period of rapidly changing landlords. Less than a year later a holdover licence was granted to Albert Ayres from Joseph Punt (Swindon Advertiser 14/4/1905). Then only three months later the licence was transferred to George Bradley Lugg (Faringdon Advertiser 8/7/1905). We are not sure who was the landlord at the time, but Dyke, Jackson & Chandler carried out an auction at the pub, the household furniture and effects of the late Henry Thatcher on 21st May 1909, 'at 4 o'clock sharp.' (Faringdon Advertiser 15/5/1909).

The census of 1911 showed that Jasper Packer was the landlord, described curiously as a, 'Beerhouse Kent Collector.' He was age 62 (b.1849) and with him was his wife Eliza, 62, son William, 34 (b.1877), and daughter Ethel, 18 (b.1893). We have information of an Inquest that took place close by at the Schoolroom in Longcot, but it was on the body of a man who died at the Bricklayers Pub in December 1913. Landlord Jasper Packer was called to give evidence on the deceased named as Joseph Lowe a labourer. He had been lodging at the pub for two or three years and the landlord stated that Joseph had recently complained of pains in his chest and breathlessness. He went to bed on Christmas Eve and was found dead the next morning, face down in the tap-room. The jury's verdict was, 'death by natural causes.' (Faringdon Advertiser 3/1/1914).

Examining the Electoral Registers for Longcot showed a long period from 1913 to 1927 where there is no entry for the pub. It's possible that the landlord perhaps did not want the right to vote and didn't register, but it seems unlikely that it wasn't open for business. The list for 1927 showed Alexander Watts as the occupier of the property until he died and was buried in the local St Mary's churchyard on 5th May 1933, aged 73. (b.1860). His wife Emily took over the licence until she died nine years later at Gloucester Street, Faringdon, but was buried in St Mary's churchyard on 10th December 1942, aged 83. (b.1859). It was Louis Victor

Tibballs and his wife Dorothy (nee Geddes) who took over and the Electoral Register of 1945 listed them there. Louis had previously been in the army and in 1924 in Koln, Germany, his daughter was born, Gladys I. Tibballs. Gladys would go on to marry Patrick Crosbie in 1947. Louis died and was buried in St Mary's churchyard, Longcot, on 14th March 1951, aged 63. (b.1888). His wife Dorothy took over the licence until 1954 when she retired and her daughter Gladys took over the licence. It was to be a long family tenure and in an article that was printed in the Reading Evening Post on 30th August 1980, it was reported that, '*A three generation link with the Bricklayers Arms, Longcot, ended last week with the retirement on health grounds of Mrs Gladys Crosbie ... who has held the licence of the pub for 25 years, helped by her two sons and daughter. She took over from her parents in 1954.*' It was very close to this time that the pub closed and became a domestic residence.

The North Wilts Brewery (Bowlys), mentioned above, that was in Old Town, Swindon, closed in October 1945 and included in the list of 41 pubs that it owned, was the Bricklayers Arms at Longcot. The whole company was bought by Simonds of Reading which was amalgamated with Courage in 1960. Presumably the pub was still with Courage at that point. (Home Brewed by David W. Backhouse).

If you have any further information on the pub, please contact us:

info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk



The centre of Longcot village. What was the Bricklayers Arms, centre facing on the far side of The Green. Photo by Neil B. Maw