

The Shepherds Rest

By Neil B. Maw



There can be little doubt that an inn or some type of hostelry must have been located at the site of the Shepherd's Rest public house. The ancient trackway known as *'The Ridgeway'* passes by it in an east/west direction. This preceded the Roman military road known as *'Ermin Street'* that passes by in a north/south direction. We are grateful to Kevin J. Dragulski of New York, USA, for the earliest information on this property. He advised that William Radway was his ancestral uncle, being the son of John and Harriet Radway of Broad Blunsdon. Kevin further provided from a relative that, *'great-great grandfather William Radway sold the Shepherd's Rest at Wanborough and moved with his only surviving son Jethro to Kingsdown in 1868, where they had started a small brickworks. William was a Blacksmith as well as an Innkeeper and provided fresh horses for the mail coaches travelling between Newbury and Gloucester in the early 19th century.'* He refers to a sketch (below) and states that it was drawn by Mr Selby in 1849. *'Opened as an Ale House in 1840 when William Radway was Publican. It may have replaced an older Inn called the Totterdown. It is said that it was the only pub that did not take its place in the Wanborough Great Beer Race, being too far away. The Inn was enlarged in 1857 when Jethro Radway was helping his father, his older brother William having died. The Radways were Blacksmiths in Wanborough going back generations, the earliest recorded as working in the village in 1613.'*



The census of 1841 for Wanborough recorded William Radway at Totter Down, which is the name or locale of the area within the downland in which the pub is located. A decade later at the 1851 census, there was listed at Wanborough Plain a Retailer of Beer by the name of William Radway aged 52. This entry is highly likely to be the Shepherd's Rest. The first written evidence of the pub name comes from an account of a Fox Hunt, whereby a newspaper reported that from Medbourn, '*they passed the Shepherd's Rest on the road leading to Ashdown Park*' (Wilts & Glos Standard 25th Feb 1854). Two years later an application was made by John Bray of the Shepherd's Rest for a new licence (Wilts & Glos Standard 30 Aug 1856). The census of 1861 confirmed that John Bray was the landlord, aged 60 and his wife Margaret aged 46, and the listing also named the pub. The late David Backhouse, a keen researcher of all things public house, stated in one of his publications that the pub was tiny and extended around 1857 when the spirit licence was granted (Home Brewed by David W. Backhouse 1992). This ties up with the information provided by Kevin Dragulski. The photo below is dated to circa 1900. The original pub is likely to have been the doorway in which the lady stands to the left. The mid 19th century extension to the right.



A newspaper report of 1864 provided the information that the landlord was John Turtle. The article was describing a court case, the result of a fight that broke out in the Shepherd's Rest pub. Mrs Rachel Turtle, wife of the landlord was called to give evidence and hence provided that further information (Swindon Advertiser 8th August 1864). For the next five years it is unclear as to who was running the pub. In a court hearing *W.H. Gillett v. Thomas Edwards*, an action taken to recover rent owed, Mr Gillett stated that he held a lease on the Shepherd's Rest and referred to the Trustees who would prove this fact (North Wilts Herald 17th July 1869). He was referring to the Executors of the late James Langford who had recently died and owned the Wanborough Plain estate. A newspaper advertisement gave notice of the sale of the estate at the Bear Inn, Hungerford on 29th June 1869. One of the lots was described as a *'very compact estate situate in the parish of Wanborough comprising about 153 acres.'* Part of the estate included the Shepherd's Rest public house (North Wilts Herald 7th June 1869). A week later a newspaper reported that the estate at Wanborough Plain had been purchased by a Mr George Deacon of Wanborough for £5420. A few months later it was reported that a Mrs Edwards had left the pub and taken the licence with her. William Winchcombe had taken possession of the premises but Mrs Edwards had made no application for a transfer of the licence. The Bench (Magistrates) said they understood that there had been agreement with the outgoing tenant, Mrs Edwards, that she would hand over the licence upon receipt of a certain sum of money for the good-will. They added that they did not wish to interfere with

a civil contract. It was agreed that another application be made (Wilts & Glos Standard 7th May 1870). A week later Mrs Edwards appeared in court and asked that William Winchcombe be granted the licence; he had obviously paid the money (Wilts & Glos Standard 14th May 1870.)

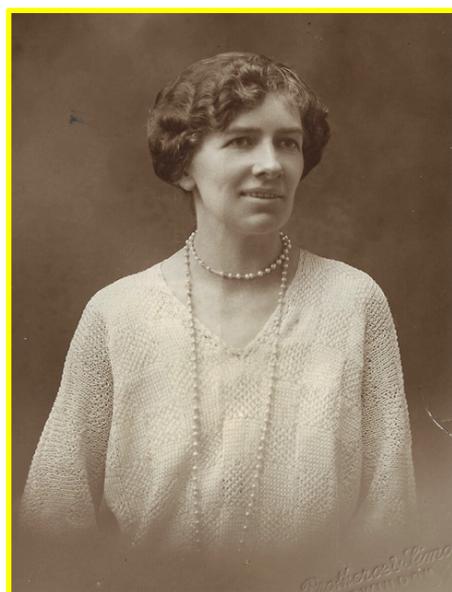


The census of 1871 named the landlord as Walter Winchcomb aged 45 with Sarah his wife aged 28, with three sons, one daughter and a mother-in-law. He stayed there for another eight years when at the end of 1879, the licence was transferred to George Wiltshire (Wilts & Glos Standard 8th Nov 1879). The census of 1881 showed George aged 31, at the pub with his wife Elizabeth aged 29. He was described as a Stone Mason and Inn Keeper. In April of that year the birth of his son was announced as being born at the pub (Swindon Adver 23rd April 1881). However, business could not have been good in both his professions as by the end of 1883 he had gone into voluntary liquidation (Western Gazette 2nd Nov 1883). There then followed changes in quick succession. In early March 1884 an application was made for a hold-over licence to be granted from George Wiltshire to Henry Morris, who was a Carter to Mr Deacon, the owner of the pub. Initially the Bench would not grant it having learned that Henry Morris was hard of hearing. After some discussion, the Bench reluctantly agreed the transfer on the understanding that a *'more eligible tenant be produced next transfer day'* (Swindon Adver 1st March 1884). On that day the licence was transferred from George Wiltshire to Henry Dobson of Barns, Surrey (Wilts & Glos Standard 22nd March 1884). Then early the following year, another change from Dobson to Alfred Bourton (Swindon Adver 24th Jan 1885). Alfred was not there for long as by the end of that year the licence was transferred again to William Henry Norris (Wilts & Glos Standard 21st Nov 1885). William Norris stayed a little longer than his predecessors and transferred his licence to William Pett three years later (Swindon Adver 7th July 1888). The following

year William Pett stood as the Foreman of the Jury at an inquest held in his own pub. A man had been found dead, about 35 years of age, known only as '*Worcester Bill*.' The evidence was heard that he fell in with two other navvies and they slept in a barn on Hinton Hill. The dead man had complained of severe pain and died suddenly. Dr E.F. Streeten was of opinion that he had died of heart disease. He was buried in a '*quiet cemetery*' at Little Hinton (Swindon Adver 4th May 1889).

The turn of the century saw the landlords changing quickly once again. The census of 1901 listed Alice Springford aged 28, as Inn Keeper at the Shepherd's Rest, but curiously, a Walter Pett aged 26 was listed as Assistant Inn Keeper. A court case reported in the newspaper provided the information that at the end of 1902, Frank Kelly was running the pub (Swindon Adver 26th Dec 1902). The following year the licence was temporarily transferred from Frank Kelly to Frederick Dawson, a Fitter of 19 Exmouth St, Swindon (Swindon Adver 9th July 1903).

We are grateful to Terry Clerk who contacted Shrivenham Heritage Society with the information that he had been carrying out family research and that Frederick Dawson was his grandfather. He added that he remembered Louise Dawson who used to play the piano at the Shepherd's Rest Inn, and she related that her father was found dead at the bottom of the Inn's cellar steps and believed to have been drunk at the time. This ties up with the information that Fred Dawson died at the beginning of 1905 and his wife Maria Dawson applied for and was granted the licence (Swindon Adver 24th Feb 1905). The photos below were provided by Terry, first Louise Dawson, and her mother Maria (nee Newell) taken in July 1911.





The census of 1911 showed that Maria Dawson was still the landlady aged 66 and with her was her daughter Louise aged 26 and grandson Frederick aged 4. But she decided to move on and the licence was transferred to William Richard Stone (Swindon Adver 3rd Nov 1911). A court case that was covered in the newspaper confirmed that William Stone was still there in 1912 (Faringdon Adver 30th March 1912).

There is a gap of 13 years in which we have no information on who was running the pub, but more information was provided by the happy event of a marriage in 1925 when Albert Sims, the son of Mr & Mrs Thomas Sims of Wantage, married May Rosier, the eldest daughter Mr & Mrs Ben Rosier, landlord and lady of the Shepherd's Rest. It was a large affair with many guests attending (North Wilts Herald 18th Sept 1925). By 1927 the Wanborough Estate was in the hands of James White who was a very successful businessman and general entrepreneur. But his financial genius failed him, and he found himself on the point of his empire collapsing. He lived at King Edward's Place, at Foxhill, located in the grounds opposite the Shepherd's Rest, and it was there that he committed suicide by poisoning himself on 29th June 1927, aged 50.

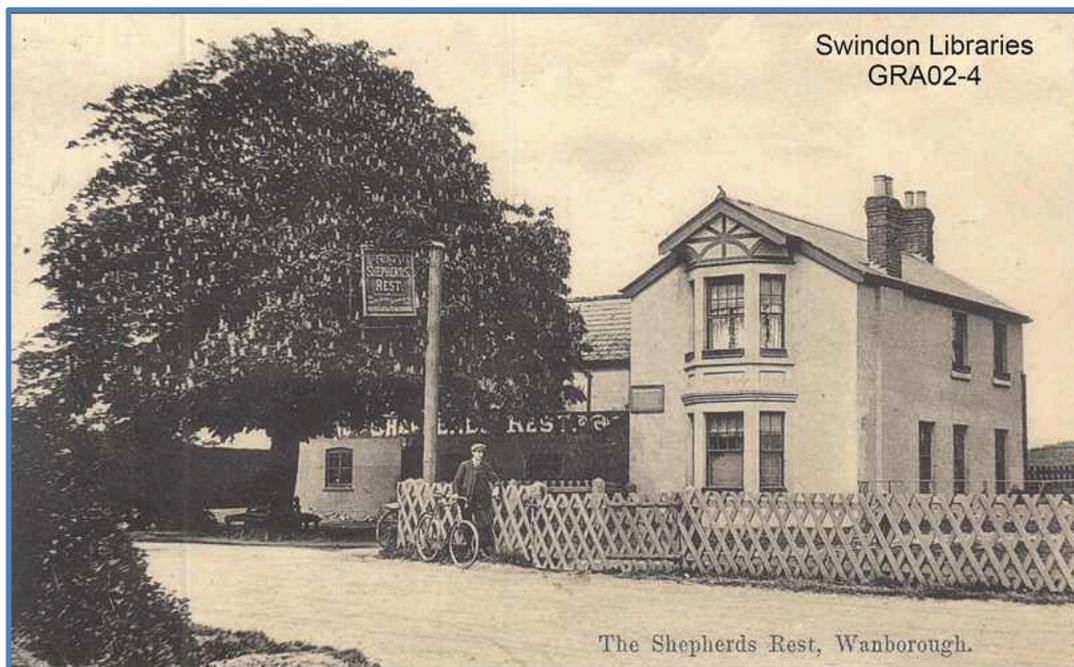


There followed some considerable confusion as the legalities of ownership and resale of the estate took place. In a newspaper article, John Gorman appeared in court charged with selling alcohol at the Shepherd's Rest without a proper licence and fined £10. But in the same article it was stated by John O'Gorman that the pub was a 'Free House' (North Wilts Herald 26th October 1928). The confusion caused the pub to be closed for three months but another newspaper article explained that it would be put into the hands of a firm of Brewers and a manager put in, and consequently the justices renewed the licence (North Wilts Herald 15th February 1929). Later that year an application was made for the transfer of the licence of the Shepherd's Rest Inn from Major Valentine Stevens Bland to Edward Adderley St George Smyth who would become the sub-tenant of Messrs Usher (North Wilts Herald 19th July 1929). Very soon after, a hold-over licence was granted to Leonard Seymour Jones (North Wilts Herald 20th March 1931). He had been the secretary of the previous owner of the pub James White, whose life ended with suicide five years earlier. But tragedy was to happen again when Leonard Seymour Jones went missing. He was eventually found lying dead in a copse nearby to the pub, a rifle laying across his feet (Larne Times 6th Aug 1932). The licence was put in the name of Albert Frederick West soon after the tragedy but transferred soon after to Harry Charles Speight (North Wilts Herald 15th Sept 1933). But just under two year later it was transferred again to Arthur

Smith as Manager (North Wilts Herald 31st May 1935). However, he appeared in a newspaper article within a month of taking up the post for being in debt. (North Wilts Herald 24th May 1935). But he seems to have kept his job as he again appeared in a newspaper article and fined 7shillings for keeping a dog without a licence (North Wilts Herald 9th October 1936). The Register of 1939 gave the information that Walter R. Last was the Manager of Shepherd's Rest, aged 21 with his wife Isabel of the same age.

And that is as far as we can go at present. If you would like to comment on this history of the pub or add more information, please contact us:

info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk



The photo above shows the pub with a new range on an east/west alignment with a gable end and casement windows. The sign on the wall on the gable is likely to be an Ushers sign and it's likely that it was that company who built the new extension around 1930. The photo likely dates to the 1930s or 1940s. The photo below is from the North Wilts Herald of 3rd February 1933.

