



## **The Ship Inn, Wanborough, Swindon**

*A sad case of neglect*

The buildings that were once the Ship Inn have been empty and unused for decades. With no maintenance being carried out, the result could only have been that they fell further into dereliction. One wonders what causes an owner to allow buildings to follow such a destructive course over such a long period of time. As they stand at the moment, it seems inevitable there can be but one conclusion, that of demolition. Therefore, we felt the need to record what we can of it now, before it disappears forever. We will also list what information we have at the moment on the history of the premises so far.



Above and below, the old Ship Inn premises in 2020. Photos by Neil B. Maw



The earliest documentary evidence we have of the pub comes from the newspaper, the Swindon Advertiser & North Wilts Chronicle of 16<sup>th</sup> September 1876. It's an advertisement of the pending sale of the property by James Appleby, *'who is leaving.'* The auction, on the premises, will include, *'the whole of his household furniture and stock-in-trade.'* It also lists many of the items included in the sale. In the same paper for 14<sup>th</sup> October 1876, Henry Appleby of the, *'Ship beerhouse,'* was in court trying to transfer his licence from himself to Thomas Yeates of Stratton. We can only assume that Henry Appleby took over from James Appleby the previous month.

By June 1877 the pub was without a landlord when an advert appeared in the local paper offering it up to let as a, *'good opening for a tradesman.'* The advert was posted by a Mr R. Williams of the Wanborough Brewery (Swindon Advertiser 9/6/1877). We know from this that the Ship Inn was owned by the Wanbrough Brewery and confirmed when the brewery was sold in November 1879. (It was located by the Harrow Inn in Lower Wanborough, which it also owned. The site is now a modern housing estate.) (Swindon Advertiser 3/11/1879). In December 1877, George Carter was in court applying for a new licence. The newspaper reported that the, *'applicant some time ago, was granted a transfer of the licence, and subsequently the previous tenant left the locality without signing the transfer.'* The Bench granted the application. (North Wilts Herald 8/12/1877). But just less than a year later, the licence for the pub was transferred on holdover from George Carter to John Bray. (Swindon Advertiser 23/11/1878).

With the new landlord being John Bray, the Ship Inn was to go through a lengthy period of stability. The census for Wanborough for 1881 show John Bray is still there, aged 30, with his wife Margaret aged 27, and newly born infant John, just a few months old. Five years

later another son was born and was announced in the newspaper. (Swindon Advertiser 9/1/1886). But a not so happy event had been reported in the local newspaper the previous year, when in the summer of 1885, there was what could only be described as a, '*Punch Up,*' outside the Ship Inn. The newspaper article reported the court proceedings, and stated that the group of six men, including landlord John Bray, were, '*stripped and fighting in the centre of a mob of 40 people.*' It seems that John Bray was annoyed with Sidney Smith, a 21-year-old Blacksmith, who frequented an opposition public house and was in the habit of loitering outside his home and annoying his customers. PC Read who was passing the pub, contended that all the men were very drunk, but in his evidence, John Bray claimed he was not and had drunk nothing but milk for days. The magistrates gave John Bray the benefit of the doubt and dismissed the charges against him. The others were fined 10 shillings and 8 shillings costs. (Swindon Advertiser 4/7/1885).



The Crossroads at Upper Wanborough and scene of the, '*Punch Up,*' of 1885. Photo courtesy of Paul Williams

But by 1888 something was very wrong with the Bray's marital harmony. It must have been serious for John Bray to go to the trouble of placing a public notice in the local newspaper stating, '*I, John Bray, Ship Inn, Wanborough, hereby give notice that I will not be answerable for any debts contracted by my wife, Margaret Bray, from this date, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1888.*' (North Wilts Herald 9/11/1888). It is possible that the problem could have been their first-born child John. When we look at the census of 1891, Margaret is not listed as part of the Bray family at the pub, but neither is young John. Living there then, is father John, aged 40 and two sons

Edward G. and Herbert J. What happened to young John; did he go with his mother Margaret?

At an annual Brewster Session of the law courts in Swindon in August 1894, there was a lot going on with regard to the renewal of existing licences and applications for new ones. The big players in this were breweries. One in particular was the Swindon & North Wilts Brewery who we discover owned the Ship at Upper Wanborough. At the licensing session of 1894 it seems that they were prepared to trade the licence of the Ship in return for a new one being granted for the Clinton Arms that they proposed to build in Hythe Road, Swindon. It was rejected and the Ship was saved from closure as a pub. (Glos Journal 25/8/1894). Two years later the brewery itself was up for sale, caused by a legal action of Vaughan and the Swindon & North Wilts Brewery Co Ltd. Up for sale at the Goddard Arms on 29<sup>th</sup> October 1896, was the brewery at Wootton Bassett and 26 pubs. One of those pubs was the Ship Inn which consequently sold for £575 and was purchased by Messrs. Spencer. (Wilts & Glos Standard 31/10/1896). G & T Spencer's Brewery was located in Whitehead's Lane, Bradford-on-Avon, Wilts, and was taken over by Usher's Wiltshire Brewery Ltd in 1913.

The census for 1901 shows that John Bray was still at the Ship Inn, age 50, but he seems to have got married again to Annie who is 38. His son Herbert was still with him, and he had since had a daughter in 1897 named Dorothy A. But two years later he decided to leave the pub after 25 years, and the licence was transferred to Joseph Tom Herring. (Wilts & Glos Standard 24/10/1903). However, this seems to have been a reporting error as the new licensee was John Herring. It seems to be at around this time that the premises became a shop and ceased as a public house. There are no further licence changes reported in the newspapers but there is a report concerning an unmarked cart. John Herring of Upper Wanborough was summoned for driving a cart in Swindon without his name painted on it. (Swindon Adver 14/4/1905). It later became evident that John Herring did not own the cart and the charge was dismissed, but the owner, Richard Payne, was fined. (Swindon Adver 12/5/1905). This incident would suggest that John Herring is no longer a pub landlord. The census for 1911 records a John Herring, aged 66, living in Upper Wanborough, with his wife Jane, aged 65 and three adult children. We also have two photographs. One is showing the premises clearly marked as, '*The Ship*,' dated circa 1905 (see below. Could this have been the cart mentioned above?). The other photo shows the premises as a shop dated to circa 1910 (see below).



Above. The premises as a Pub circa 1905, and below, as a Shop circa 1910.  
Both photos courtesy of Paul Williams



We have nothing further at the moment on this premises, but we continue to look. If you have any documentary or photographic information please contact us at [info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk](mailto:info@shrivenhamheritagesociety.co.uk)

