

## High Wych History – 34 - The Hand and Crown Inn

Within High Wych ecclesiastical parish but also within the civic borders of Sawbridgeworth stands the Hand and Crown. Legend has it that it is the oldest Inn in Hertfordshire. The sign of the hand and crown points to falconry being practiced. Indeed, lands around Sawbridgeworth including Pishiobury and the Manor of Groves were donated by King Henry VIII to his then wife Anne Boleyn and Henry was an avid falconer. That however is as far as it goes and there is no actual documentary proof of this to be found in the archives. Neither Chauncy's three volume history of Hertfordshire of 1720 nor Edward Cussans' similar tomes of 1870 mention the place by name.



Janet Needham      Landlord's Daughter Aged 13      3rd March 1955  
The Hand & Crown.

A Description of a Building

This building I am describing is my home. This house which is an Elizabethan Inn is situated in High Wych, near Sawbridgeworth. It is said that it is four hundred and sixty-five years old but we have no papers stating that this number is correct, and so is one of the oldest if not the oldest in <sup>the whole</sup> of Hertfordshire.

When one approaches from the front of the house it is hard to believe it is really an inn, and appears as though it is an old farm. Long ago, <sup>shortly after</sup> ~~when~~ it was built, Queen Anne came to visit here and stayed in a large room which is generally known as "Queen Anne's Room" or in short "Annie's Room". Shortly before, it had been converted from ~~a~~ farm into a coaching inn.

The surveyor and my father are,

The Hand and Crown as it is today

Janet Needham's essay from 1955

Recently an interesting document came my way: an essay written in 1955 by Janet Needham, the 13 year old daughter of the then landlord Percy Needham. You cannot expect historical accuracy from such writing of course but it did provide a unique insight. Let me quote or rather paraphrase: "In the early seventeen hundreds Queen Anne came to visit the H&C. She stayed in what is now known as 'Queen Anne's Room' or in short 'Annie's Room'. Shortly before this visit, the house had been converted from a farm into a coaching inn. Annie's room has a lovely fire place with the coat of arms, and with a priest-hole beside it. Opposite is the prie-dieu. During the Reformation an altar would have been placed in here, with candles and a cross, for worship."

Two more recent books, a royal commission report on the historical monuments of Hertfordshire from 1911 and Page's Victorian County History for Herts, published one year later confirm the H&C as having been built in the fifteen hundreds. Page even put a nice picture next to its write up.





' (12). THE HAND AND CROWN INN, S. of the village, is a two-storeyed building of late 16th-century date, with some 19th-century additions. The walls are of plastered timber, and the roof is tiled. The upper storey projects, and on the N. front are three gables and a gabled porch. The chimney stack is original and has engaged

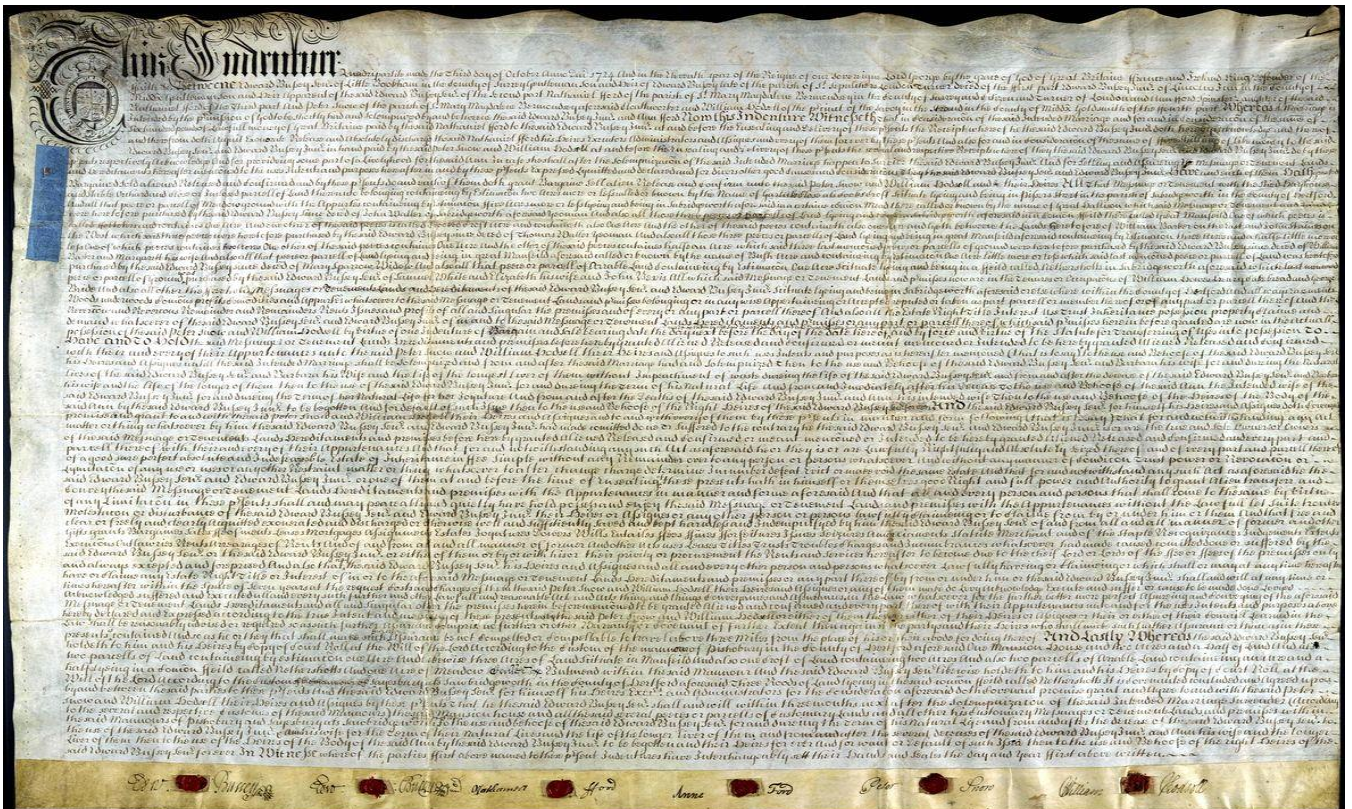
square shafts. On the S. side there is an original window, now blocked; the windows on the N. are modern. Interior: Two four-centred fireplaces, some oak doors and moulded oak panelling remain.

Condition—Fairly good.

1912: An illustration from Page's County History of Hertfordshire

The Royal Commission report of 1911

None of this of course amounts to real and definite proof of the actual age of the Hand and Crown be it the building or the Inn. For that we go to the archives where we find a document dated 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1724. It is a settlement made out on the marriage of Edward Bussey (the younger) and his bride Ann Ford by Edward Bussey of Little Bookham Surrey, father of the groom and Nathaniel Ford, father of the bride. It concerns a house and land referred to as "Garlick's Close" otherwise Cook's Croft on Pissers Street (Pishiobury?) Sawbridgeworth. The property was bought from Messrs Peter Snow and William Hodsell. Ownership from date of the document was held by the respective parents until their deaths when it would pass to the young couple. From that I presume the house and land were a wedding gift from the parents on either side. There is no mention of the premises being used as an Inn. The "Hand and Crown" name only starts being used in the early eighteen hundreds.



The 1724 settlement

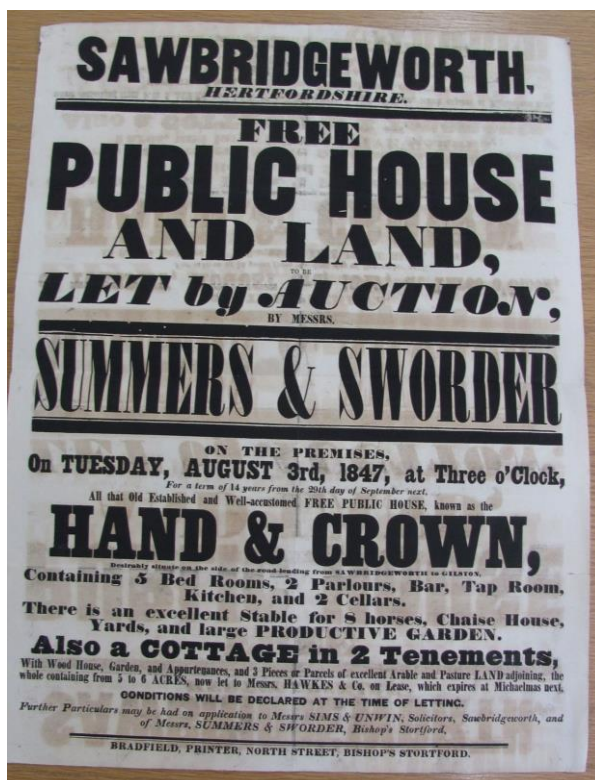


In 1847 the Hand and Crown was sold at auction. In 1861 ownership passed to Messrs Hawkes of Bishops Stortford, a brewery of reknown at the time. Hawkes became Benskins, Benskins became Ind Coope, Ind Coope became Allied Breweries.

Landlords at the H&C in the eighteen hundreds were Nathaniel Harrington, John Palmer, Edward Crisp, Joseph Wybrew, Daniel Cakebread, Robert Christian, George Baldock and William Burridge. In 1905 Edward Charles (Charlie) Nottage took over. That is the point from where we will continue our story in a second article.

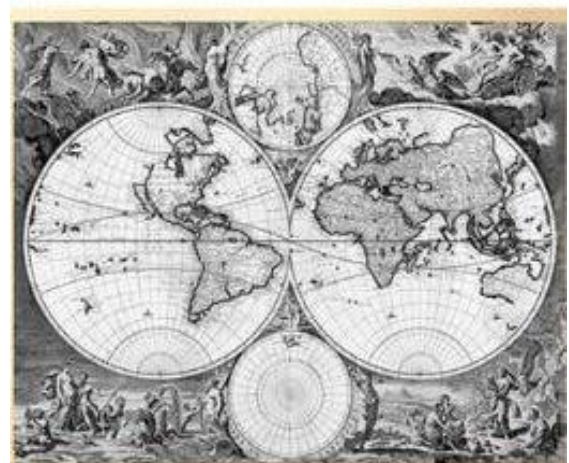
During the tenure of the Needhams at the H&C, the son of the family found some items either in the priest hole or the altar recess. There was a "French Docket", some foreign coins and an "engraving" mentioning "Turlington Balsam of Life" This was a semi medicinal concoction for sale between 1744 and the early 1900s. Turlington bottles were and are collector's items. The paper probably was a booklet or brochure advertising the balsam and published in the 1750s. It was donated "to the Key Glass Factory in Edinburgh Way for their Museum of Glass".

In a way therefore this story is a disappointment: I found no actual tales of Falconers! There is however no reason to think the legend must be untrue. Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn, Queen Anne, Priest Holes it gives a romantic sheen to it all. And who doesn't appreciate romance?



By virtue of the King's patent  
Turlington's Balsam of Life is prepared  
and sold by the patentee, The efficacy  
and virtues of which incomparable  
medicine are exemplified by an account  
of some of the cures perform'd thereby

Robert Turlington



A poster advertising the H&C at auction - The Turlington's balsam paper may have looked like this

On the next page you will see a photograph dating from 1877 given to me by Jenny Scott. Jenny is related to the Hawkes family who owned the brewery of the same name. William Hawkes also lived at Falconers (sometimes spelt Faulkners) just opposite the Hand and Crown which of course served Hawkes beer.



Now let us continue our story and go to 1905, the year when Edward Charles (Charlie) Nottage and his wife Sarah (Sally) took over the Hand and Crown. The Nottages had three daughters, Martha, Bessie and Frankie and a son, Richard Charles who died age 13 in 1913. In the first world war, the three daughters all joined the VAD as explained in an earlier article.

Charlie and Sally managed the Hand and Crown on their own until the mid twenties when they were joined by Bessie, now surnamed Chadwick and Frankie aka Em. Bessie had three children, Richard, Peter and Sally. Frankie did not marry. Bessie's daughter Sally now takes up the story.

"I was born in October 1926 in a backroom of the pub. The midwife who delivered me was "Grannie Springham" then living in one of the pink cottages on the Green. Grannie Springham used to lay people out and also was a midwife. She was about to retire in 1926 but promised my mother to deliver me as her last ever job.

Growing up in a pub had its attractions. With our father absent Granddad was the head of our family. He was strict. Twice on Sunday we went to church. We also needed to be silent during meals as "talking gives you indigestion". Granddad smoked a pipe and kept chickens, turkeys and ducks. One duck was a particular favourite. Joey, we called the bird. When Granddad went to the outside toilet he used to hand Joey his pipe who then kept it in his beak and stood guard outside. Thus the animal was saved from the pot.

Every week the brewers would come with a cart and two beautiful horses. The men wore leather aprons and wheeled the barrels in the yard and from there into the cellar. Once a year there was the hunt with the men all dressed up in their red jackets and the women in black. It was a very impressive sight."

One "regular" who used to visit the Hand and Crown in the late thirties was Tamara Desni, aka Brodsky a German born actress. She was probably best known for appearing with Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier in the historical epic Fire over England. Her husband at the time (she married four times!) was the director Bill Gillett and they lived in the Thatched Cottage (H.W. Lane).





Sally and Charlie



Bessie Chadwick nee Nottage ? Charley Nottage  
Richard Chadwick Peter Chadwick Sally Chadwick ? Sally Nottage. (Landlady 1905-1955)

1929: The Nottages and Chadwicks in front of the Hand and Crown

In the late forties, early fifties cycling clubs started calling at the H&C. The first cyclist to come was a man from Leytonstone who turned up one day and asked for food. The Hand and Crown did not cater at that point. "I don't drink tea" the man said, "I drink cocoa". Mother Bessie served him a jug of cocoa, bread and butter, cake and jam which was all homemade. A week later the man turned up with a friend. More would come, 20, 30 of them. They were served dinner including pudding at half a crown and tea with scones etc at one and threepence. In the minds of many the Hand and Crown is still associated with cyclists sitting outside the pub in the sunshine having a drink and a rest.

Charlie Nottage died in 1940. Sally continued on her own for a while with the assistance of her two daughters, Bessie in the kitchen and Frankie behind the bar. During the second world war seven soldiers were billeted in the Hand and Crown. In 1943 Frankie took over as landlady. She carried on until 1955 when Percy and Jessie Needham took over.

The Needhams had previously been Landlord and Landlady at the John Barleycorn Inn in Threshers Bush near Harlow, for five and a half years. They had two daughters, Janet and Margaret, and a son, Graham. Sadly Graham died in 1993 age 59yrs. Readers may remember the essay from which I quoted that daughter Janet wrote when they had just moved in in 1955. Janet was 13 years old then.

Having installed Percy and Jessie as landlord and landlady, Benskins Brewery set about an extensive refurbishment programme. Jessie proved a worthy successor to Bessie Nottage and extended the catering. Food was now on offer every single day. Cycling clubs continued to use the Hand and Crown as a favoured stopover point. Workers at the Edinburgh Way Industrial estates discovered the attractions of the Sausage sandwiches and other culinary delights. Soon the pub was buzzing at lunchtime. In 1957 Benskins was sold to Ind Coope, but this made little difference to the day to day running of the place.

Annie's room was occasionally used for special celebrations. Mary and Joe Mascall celebrated their golden wedding there in the 1950s. On the below picture you can see quite a lot of locals from Hand Terrace and beyond. The Randalls, the Bardwells and the Searles can all be seen as can a regular John White. Host Percy Needham in all his glory stands on the right, Jessie stands in the middle of the back row.



John Randal, Brian Skingle, Bob Springham, John White, Edie Searle, Albert Searle, Dorothy Bardwell, Gilbert Bardwell, Chris Bullock, Mr Randal, Mrs Randal, Percy Needham



### Mary and Joe Mascall's golden wedding and the 'High Wych Gang" (youth club) late 50s

Annie's room was also used by the High Wych Gang" (youth club) in the late 50s That Club in its various guises was an important feature in the sixties, seventies and even eighties. Led by (uncle) Stan Oakley, the High Wych Gang, performed plays, concerts sketches and pantomimes such as Cinderella. I wrote about these earlier on. Solid friendships and even marriages resulted from Club meetings. Reunions continued for many years and I am told one such meeting is being planned right now.

In December 28<sup>th</sup> 1963 Janet Needham married John Springham. "I got ready over the road at Falconers. Mrs Davies who lived there then kindly let my bridesmaids and I change in her house for more space and privacy! As our wedding car was waiting I met my father with whom I would set off to St. James's Church up the road. We were both rather nervous so decided to have a quick drink for courage I had a brandy and milk and dad had a scotch. Bert Helmer and his wife stayed on to look after the pub whilst we were away at church. Another, more unhappy, situation had also arisen. Just before Christmas and whilst serving in the bar Mum tripped over my father's foot and fractured her skull. She was in Haymeads Hospital, Bishop Stortford. She insisted that the marriage should still take place so after the service a friend drove me, my new husband John and four of our five bridesmaids to Stortford. We entered the ward armed with my bouquet, which I gave Mum, and a bottle of champagne. The patients and nursing staff all clapped and cheered!

Percy Needham passed away in 1967. He had been a very popular landlord. Jessie then continued on her own. She did well but retired in the early seventies. For a short spell she lived at Mulberry Green Harlow, and also at Actons. After that she moved to join her daughter and son-in-law John in Cornwall. She missed her friends though and moved back to a ground floor flat in Ware. She passed away in 1994 aged 84.

Between the seventies and the nineties, when current owners Bill and Jackie White took over, a number of companies owned the Hand and Crown. Forgive me if I cannot mention them all or reconstruct what happened when. Amongst them were Ind Coope, Allied Breweries, Brent Walker, Pub Masters and Punch Taverns. Managers during that time were Ken Marriage, Kevin Green, Peter de Sauvry and Daphne Lampard.

Bill and Jackie started out in 1992, initially as managers but in 2009 they bought the freehold. During that period the H&C also changed from a place for drinking to a gastropub. Over the years a number of VIPs found their way there. Kenny Ball was one as was Rod Stewart and the boys from Blue, one of which lived just down the road. When the Beckhams threw a pre world cup party in 2006, Jenson Button, one of the guests came to the H&C for a bite and a drink.



The Hand and Crown's interior as it is now.

One intriguing aspect of the H&C is the presence of a tunnel starting underneath the present kitchen in easterly direction towards the house named Falconers. What the purpose of the tunnel was is not known. One possibility is the transport of barrels of beer from Falconers to the pub. After all William Hawkes, one of the founding fathers of that brewing dynasty lived at Falconers from the 1850s to the 1880s. They very possibly did brew beer on the premises. Another possibility is tied to the fact that Falconers had (or still has?) an underground water cistern, so the tunnel may have been used to pump water between the two houses.

Nowadays the Hand and Crown is under the management of Andy Wolohan. Bill and Jackie White are in the process of slowing down and do not live locally anymore. The food is still good and appreciated by many.

Thanks go to Sally Elkins (nee Chadwick), Jenny Scott, Janet Springham (nee Needham) Jackie and Phil White, Eric Willison, and Andy Wolohan. Information was also found in Wikipedia and at HALS. Meanwhile the High Wych History Project still needs your personal contributions, memories, stories and photographs as well as your criticism, positive or negative. Get in touch!! Contact me at: [theo@vandebilt.co.uk](mailto:theo@vandebilt.co.uk) or phone me at 01279 725468