

High Wych History – 43 – 45 - The Queens Head Allens Green.

Let us go to Allens Green again and pay a visit to the Queens Head, its one and only hostelry. Since when has the place been there you may ask. Short answer is that I do not know. The earliest evidence of the place's existence is a poster from 1879 advertising a sale at Sworders, the auctioneers of Bishop Stortford. It was referred to as "a free beer house with hoppett, orchard and garden". Along with it 40 acres of arable land are offered up, the "Green Farm", a desirable small farm, two small cottages with gardens as well as some other some other items of real estate. Most importantly the poster tells us that the Queens Head was at that time let to Mr. George Wybrew at a rent of £ 112 per annum. So George Wybrew was the licensee.



The Queens Head as it looks nowadays

At the 1881 census George, his wife Charlotte and their children are still at the Queens Head. George gave his profession as beerseller and farmer of 105 acres, employing three men and two boys. George is still in charge 10 years later. In 1901 though Arthur George Wybrew, a nephew has taken over. Arthur too gives his occupation as beerseller and farmer. The 1910 land tax registry, better known as Lloyd George's Domesday Book, lists McMullens brewery as owners of the Queens Head and George Howe as licensee. Previously, he and his family had been resident at the School House Allens Green. George and his wife had two children Ethel and Arthur George aka George. Earlier on we wrote about George's adventures in WW1.



A picture from the twenties – George Howe Jr. standing in the doorway.

At some point in the twenties George Jr. and his wife Ellen took over both on the farm and as licensees at the Queens Head. George was followed in 1931 by Sam Cutmore and his wife Julia Ann. The Cutmores stayed at the Queens Head until the late forties.

Through all that time though, work at the Queens Head was combined with work on the land. Also through all that time the women were as important if not more important than their husbands as hosts behind the bar.



Left to right: the poster from 1879, George Howe working on the land, Queens Head regulars on a seaside outing in the 1920s.

A frequent visitor during the tenure of the Howes and Cutmores was Joe Brazier (see picture on the right). Joe was born in 1873 at the Bricklayers Arms public house in Hadham Road Bishops Stortford. His father, Robert, was the licensee there then and Joe later succeeded him. By 1910 Joe lived at Warrens farm Allens Green and was well on the way to becoming a VIP and an influential landowner. For 33 years he sat on Bishops Stortford Council and for a while was its chairperson. Also active in the National Farmers Union, he became best known as owner of the Chequers Hotel. Joe Brazier famously had his portrait painted in front of Chequers which was then exhibited at the Royal Academy of Art. He died in February 1948, aged 75, while at the George Hotel.



Leonard John Rix (Len) took over at the Queens Head in January 1949. He had been born in 1908 in Sawbridgeworth, the son of John Rix and Elisabeth Rix nee Brace. In 1933 in High Wych Len married Minnie Evelyn Cutmore. In other words he was a true local. Len and Minnie had two children: John and Jean. Unlike his predecessor licensees however, he did not work in farming. Aged 14 he started work at Diamalt in Sawbridgeworth. During the war he was employed on munitions but returned to Diamalt in 1945 to work there until the mid sixties. So once again it was the woman of the house who was the main host at the Queens Head.



Sam and Julia Ann Cutmore and their daughters

That is not to say that Len did not also work behind the bar. Daughter Jean remembers both parents as warm and kind: "I had a lovely childhood; growing up in a pub was great". Jean also recalls how lying in bed at night she listened to the laughter and the songs coming from downstairs. "Dad had a wonderful voice; Bungay Roger was one of his favourites" For those of you unfamiliar with this traditional Norfolk song: it recalls how Bungay Roger took "the old King's shilling". "Cor blast I said I'll have a bloody good try" the refrain went.

Len Rix was also free of the mistrust often meted out to gipsies and travellers. "There were often people camped on the meadow behind the pub. Dad didn't mind that at all".

Local policeman Jack Oliver was a frequent guest at the time. He came in announcing he wanted to "check the dog licence". Daughter Jean only later realised this was nothing but a code. Jack in fact, asked for and got a pint!



Two pictures from fifties: Notice Len Rix with his arm around his daughter Jean and Lil Springham with, for some reason, a dead duck on her lap.

Yes, life was different then, especially in a small close knit community such as Allens Green. Margaret Jones, Ellen Howe's granddaughter, remembers how she used to walk over to the Queens Head to have a bottle filled up with ale or sometimes exchange an empty for a few pennies which she could then keep for extra pocket money. "I was just tall enough to reach the counter".

In the second world war RAF officers from the nearby airfield were billeted at the Queens Head.

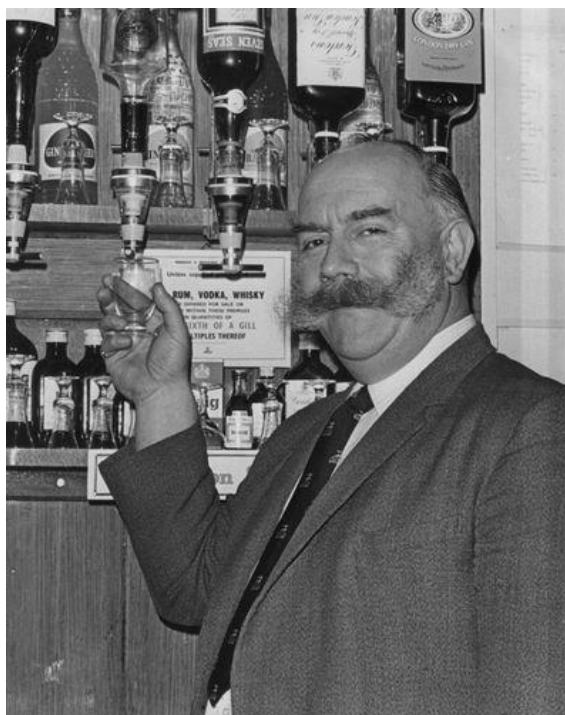
Len Rix was followed by Charles or rather Charlie Richardson and his wife Gertrude also known as Gert. They were there for some three years and were followed by Walter and Barbara Claydon, better known as Wally and Babs. Wally worked at a nursery in the Lea Valley, but it was Babs who actually managed the pub. They stayed some 5 years. Sadly Wally died during that period.

Next in line as QH licensees were George Jackson and his wife Peggy. Their tenure lasted from 1968 until 1975. George was an ex RAF pilot who had served in Burma in WW2 flying Hurricanes. After retiring from the forces he worked in flooring, but his real dream was managing a country pub. That dream came to pass in Allens Green.

George had three other claims to fame. The first one had to do with his RAF background. Somehow somewhere he had laid his hands on a replica Hurricane plane which had been used in the Battle of Britain film. For many years the thing stood in the QH's back garden. George even wanted to rename his pub the Hurricane because of it. McMullen's, the owners / brewers did not agree! After the Jacksons left the Hurricane moved to New Zealand!

George's second claim to fame was his chairmanship of the Handlebar Moustache Club. This organisation, cofounded by Jimmy Edwards, was a social club for those whose face was adorned in that particular manner. On 1st May 1968, on the occasion of the QH's grand reopening 4 members of the handlebar club came down and played a darts match against a team of Allens Green locals. The handlebar club by the way still exists. If you want to know more, check their website <http://www.handlebarclub.co.uk/index.php>

Thirdly and most importantly for us George Jackson was the only landlord of the Queens Head whose main occupation was being a pub landlord.



Mr. Handlebar: George Jackson.



The famous Hurricane.

Graham Jackson, George's son, grew up in the pub. As seems to be the rule for young people in those circumstances, he loved it. "I got to meet lots of interesting people. My friends were very jealous, especially when later I was occasionally allowed to help out.



Opening night 1968: the Handlebar Club at the QH

The QH also served as the local for a number of members of High Wych Cricket Club. One reason for that was that George Jackson often served as umpire. Terry Taylor, one of the cricketers, recalls how during one particularly bad winter Allens Green was snowbound and cut off from the rest of the world. "A busy body local lady later wrote to the local paper complaining how the young villagers had refused to clear any snow until they had drunk the Queen's Head dry! The lady was told, rather rudely if I remember correctly, to mind her own business."

George Jackson was followed by a policeman whose tenure was not a success. Brewers McMullen asked George to come back temporarily which he did for a while but in the end the QH once again stood empty.



From the mid seventies the Queens Head hosted regular gardening competitions. The picture on the left shows the winners of largest pumpkin contest. George Bird (on the right) was the winner. The picture on the right shows how, one year later Mr. Williams rode his decorated wheelbarrow all the way from Blounts Farm.

That period of uncertainty was followed by the ten year tenancy of Bob and Roberta (Betty) Davies. Bob had been in the navy. In true QH tradition it was Betty who managed the pub. The pair had previously managed the Three Horseshoes in West Road Sawbridgeworth.

A frequent visitor to the QH during that time was the sculptor Henry Moore who came down from Perry Green in a chauffeur driven car. Moore took a particular liking to the Davies's donkey Brandy, who was grazing outside the pub; he renamed Charlie and brought it carrots to feed. The donkey even featured in Henry Moore's biography and Bob Davies was given a personally signed copy.

Dr. Gareth Lewis (of central surgery) was another frequent visitor. Some claim (but others dispute) that when the mood took him Dr. Lewis sometimes served behind the bar. Bob and Betty ultimately retired to live in France.



On the left Henry Moore (in the car) gets ready to feed the Queens Head donkey a carrot – On the right some of Moore's sculptures in the Perry Green grounds.

In 1991 McMullens finally sold the QH. to a local builder. The pub became a free house but sadly was not very successful as a business. After some 5 years permission was sought to extend the building and turn it into a private dwelling. The extension was permitted but the change of purpose was disallowed not just once but three times. The Parish Council was opposed to the idea as were many locals. Allens Green did and does not have many communal facilities and to lose the Queens Head was seen by many as a step too far. An article in the Herts and Essex dated 4th November 1999 quoted an unnamed villager: "We have all longed and prayed that it (the QH) would be sold as a pub. We really want our pub back."

Few realised that the resulting stalemate would continue for some seven years. Eventually the owner made a further application to divide the pub into three dwellings and the planning officer recommended that this should be approved. The residents still opposed that application though and every one of the planning committee was called. The application was again refused! In the end the stalemate was only broken thanks to AG resident David Wojcik. David suggested the building be split into two dwellings and a small public house. The village supported this application which was then accepted and the search was on for a suitable owner – licensee.

Step to the fore Cliff Caswell who moved to Allens Green in 1999. Together with his business partner Ian Couchman he ran (and runs) a company specialising in medical alarm systems at Channocks Farm. Loving good ale and being public spirited, they had followed developments with growing interest. In the early 2000s they decided to take the plunge and made an offer for the pub.

A lengthy negotiation ensued but on the date of the queen's golden jubilee in 1902 the Queens Head finally reopened. Cliff and Ian leafletted the village to announce the grand opening night. To their great satisfaction many did indeed attend. Cliff: "What really got me was that people met on that occasion who had hardly ever spoken to each other before. So often nowadays, people live in their little boxes hardly knowing their neighbours. The day after I even noticed young lads playing football; they too had only met first on opening night!"

Twelve years later the Queens Head continues under Cliff's stewardship supported by part time staff. They seemed to have hit the right formula: limited opening hours good beers but also ciders. CAMRA honoured them no less than six times as pub of the year. Let me quote from the whatpub website: "It is well worth seeking out for a constantly changing range of about four beers. Mighty Oak and other East Anglian brewers often feature. At bank holiday weekends and also on the third weekend of every month, a mini-festival is held that utilises gravity stillage bringing up the number of beers to ten or twelve." Above all though, the QH is a great place to meet.

Finally another winter's tale: In 2003 Allens Green was once again snowbound. Cliff Caswell had taken over as landlord by then. Shortly after nine in the morning he got a phone call from one of the locals, Bob Steel, "When are you going to open" he was asked. "As soon as I can get there" Cliff told him. Luckily Cliff lived just round the corner. "It turned out a most wonderful day. Nobody could go anywhere so we decided to just enjoy one another's company" That's community spirit for you! Allens Green may not be a hamlet anymore and people may indeed now live in little boxes. But sometimes they come out of those boxes! Let's hope they will continue to do so and meanwhile continue to enjoy the ale!



2010: the QH once again CAMRA's pub of the year.



2015 The QH's interior.

Sources this time were: Rita Bird, Cliff Caswell, Bob and Betty Davies, Jean Drummond, Ena and George Haughan, Graham Jackson, Margaret Jones, Terry Taylor, Ian Tulloch, Jenny Whelan, David Wojcik, Wikipedia, Ancestry.co.uk and as always county archives aka HALS. The High Wych History Project still needs your personal contributions, memories, stories and photographs as well as your criticism, positive or negative. Contact me at: theo@vandebilt.co.uk or phone me at 01279 725468. You can also check my blog at <http://vandebilt.co.uk/history/>