

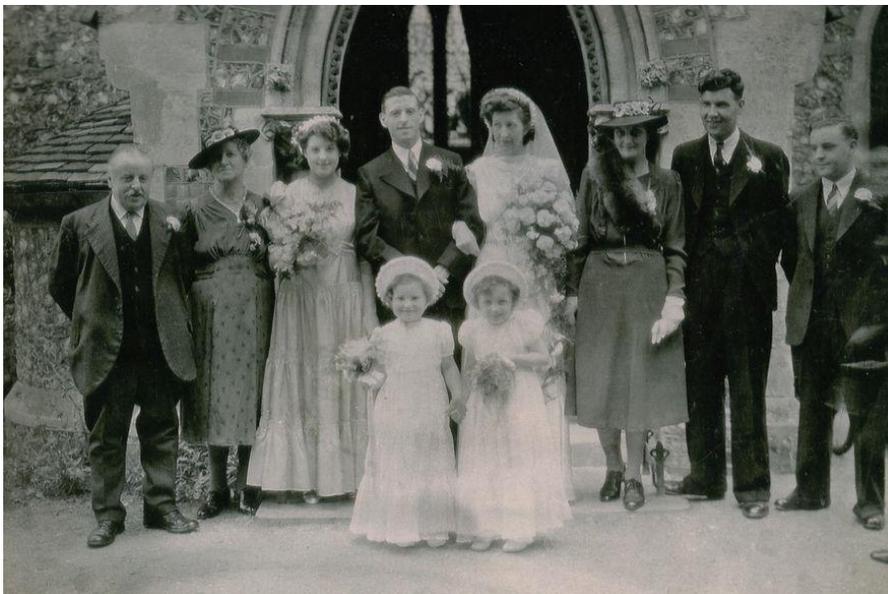
High Wych History – 70 –Tales of the Rising Sun part 2

Rose Elisabeth Oakley took over the Rising Sun's licence on 29 June 1939, an administrative change rather than a practical one. William had been spending more time consuming ale than selling it! Only 10 Weeks later, just after the outbreak of war, the 1939 Register lists Rose as residing at the pub together with sons Tom, a general labourer, and John a 'clothier's shop assistant' and two lodgers Fred and Florence Matthews.

Soon the Rising Sun would become even more crowded. Daughter Iris was asked to return home and help out. Naturally she obliged but understandably she did not like the idea very much. Iris also worked at Holbrooks Engineering for a while. Soon after, even more residents turned up. By 1941 daughter Bertha had married Ted Prior with whom she had a daughter (Elizabeth) and a son (Michael). Bertha moved back home as well Ted Prior had been working at Dyson's the Bishops Stortford outfitters but had now joined the Royal Air Force.

This was of course a big change for the two children. Elizabeth, now no longer with us would often recall how she was carried to the wash house at the back to be bathed in a tin bath. Bertha and the two children lived at the Rising Sun until 1946. The older uncles, Tom and John, were of course very intriguing Tom was bit of a wild one recalls Michael. He hunted, he had a gun! Luckily Ted Prior often visited and took his children out. Rose Oakley meanwhile was liked by all for her kindness and her quick wit. 'We miss that spittoon' regulars complained. 'That's why it was taken away' she answered. Ted Prior later often helped out behind the bar. When a drinker complained to Ted about a fly in his beer, he quipped 'must be good beer then'.

In 1943 Iris married Sid Puncher Sid was born in Springhall Road in 1913. Initially he worked for his father's coal merchants business at Brook Farm, sometimes making his cart available to people who were moving house. Upon his marriage to Iris he moved into the Rising Sun.



Sid and Iris's wedding - Left to right: Sid's dad and mum, Kath Puncher, Sid and Iris, Rose Oakley, Tom Oakley and Reg Puncher. The two little girls are Rosslyn Rout and Elizabeth Prior.

For many years the Rising Sun had three rooms. Upon entering you went to the right to go to the 'taproom' which was where ale was originally served. Most present day customers remember it with a dart board. To the left was the 'parlour' originally Rose Oakley's living room later the bar. Only three types of beer were on offer: Courage Best, Directors and Mild. Guest beers only came much later. At the far end of the parlour was another little room which for a long while was a shop. School children came there to buy crisps or cans of coke through a little hole in the wall. Until 1952 there was no electricity, just gas light. Until the late seventies the only heating came from a paraffin stove. On cold wet winter days the potent smell of that paraffin was mixed with tobacco fumes from the cigarettes smoked by all those people standing there so close together. For a long while there was no ladies toilet



Sid and Iris



Sid and John

When in 1957 on Rose Oakley's death the licence passed to Iris, Sid started spending more and more time at the pub particularly helping out with the heavy work of handling the casks. For many years though he continued doing other jobs. As well as helping with his dad's coal business he gardened at the Manor of Groves and drove a school bus for handicapped children. Strange though it seems, Sid Puncher himself never held the licence. Until their retirement in 1987 the licence was held by Iris. Iris and Sid had two children John and Celia. Their first born, a girl, Sheila, tragically died in early childhood.

By the early 1970s the Rising Sun had become one of only a handful of pubs in East Herts and West Essex still serving real ale and the only one to serve it by gravity dispense. I myself can still remember seeing Sid Puncher bend down for every single pint! People travelled for miles to sample his beautifully kept best bitter. So it was no wonder that CAMRA, the campaign for real ale started its local branch in High Wych Village Hall directly opposite the Rising Sun. Chris Bruton, CAMRA's national chairman at the time came down for the occasion and Sid provided three firkins of ale which all went.

Sid's reputation as a character was well deserved. Steve Prior, who took over in 1987 tells me "Sid in later years never turned the outside lights of the pub on. That would only encourage passing trade from people he didn't know. It was probably more to do with the electric bill as he was renowned for being careful"

Once when the Brewery surveyor was doing an inspection of the premises he asked Sid about the lack of washing facilities as there was no toilet/basin upstairs and just a butler sink by the back door. Sid told him he washed standing at the sink and the draught from the back door dried him off!

Regulars at the Rising Sun included many interesting characters; readers in the know may remember the name Buke! There were even some 'celebs'.such as rugby player Bill Beaumont and actor Brian Wilde from 'last of the summer wine'. Regulars were often treated as family. Barry Bowen remembers forgetfully leaving his dog at the Rising Sun one lunchtime. When he phoned to apologize and enquired how the animal was doing. Sid told him not to worry and pick up his pet in the evening.

Another regular customer often spent far longer than he should over his early evening pints. One day as the man was chatting with Sid, the front door burst open and the man's wife stomped in with dinner and cutlery. She plonked it on the bar by his pint saying "you spend so much time in here you may as well have your dinner here". The customer looked at the plate, then his wife and sheepishly said: "salt and pepper?".

A few years after taking over the pub Steve was replacing one of the floors upstairs and came down for a lunchtime pint. Uncle Sid was in the bar and asked him what he was up to. After hearing the explanation Sid then told him that many years previous he had dropped a half crown in the bedroom and it had gone beneath the floorboards. Steve said he'd keep an eye out. 'Sure enough I later found it exactly where he said it would be. I never did give it back and still have it stashed away somewhere.'



Sid and Iris call it time

GALLONS of beer was swilled on Thursday night at the Rising Sun pub, High Wych, to say cheers to retiring landlord, Sid Puncture.

Sid (75), has worked at the pub since 1957 and become so well known that regulars from as far away as Preston came to share a last farewell drink with their favourite landlord.

Things have changed little from when Sid and his wife Iris (85) took the pub over from Iris's father, Bill Oakley, the pub's landlord since 1929.

The pub still has bare wood floors and beer served straight from the barrel. Locals fondly nickname their local The Rising Damp.

Sid said: "Most people just know it as Sid's. I got a letter from a former regular in Australia, who addressed it to Sid's, High Wych, and it got here!"

"I am very sorry to have to leave. It was a lovely life.

"When we first started, there was no bar or ladies toilet. We just brought the beer straight from the cellar on a tray."

Iris added: "We didn't have lights either, just gas in the cellar and candles in the bar."

Sid and Iris are sad to leave their home and friends after so many years, but following

Iris's severe stroke, the couple separated for a year while Iris's daughter, Celia (40), looked after her mother at her home in Harrogate.

Sid now has a new full-time job looking after Iris in their new council flat, which is specially fitted for disabled people.

Iris said: "It's difficult fitting all our belongings in to just two rooms after we have been used to seven



Retiring landlord of the Rising Sun, High Wych, Iris and Sid Puncture receive a silver salver from a Courage brewery representative. (4338)

rooms at the pub."

Thanks to generous regulars the couple now have a new gas oven and the brewery presented the couple with a silver salver.

The pub will be staying in the family, Iris's nephew, local carpenter, Steve Prior (38), and his wife Jenny have

taken over.

Father of three girls, Sadie (17), Sophie (13) and Claudie (6), Steve promises that the traditional flavour of the pub will remain.

"It's going to be quite a challenge, and I'm really looking forward to it," he said.

In 1985 Iris had a stroke and subsequently spent about a year in Harrogate being looked after by daughter Celia. She returned to High Wych but it soon became clear that something 'had to give'. So Sid decided to retire, new specially fitted living quarters were found in Mansfield and nephew Steve Prior was called upon to take over.

Sid and Iris's farewell in November 1987 must have greatly impressed them. The locals clubbed together to buy the couple a very practical and much appreciated present: a gas oven. Local newspapers, there were still several of those then, reported it all in great detail. Nine months later aged 81 Iris passed away. Sid had 10 years of happy retirement. He attended many events at the Rising Sun. In 1993 his 80th birthday was cause for great celebration. He died five years later in 1998

To be continued