

**HITCHIN
INNS
AND
INCIDENTS**

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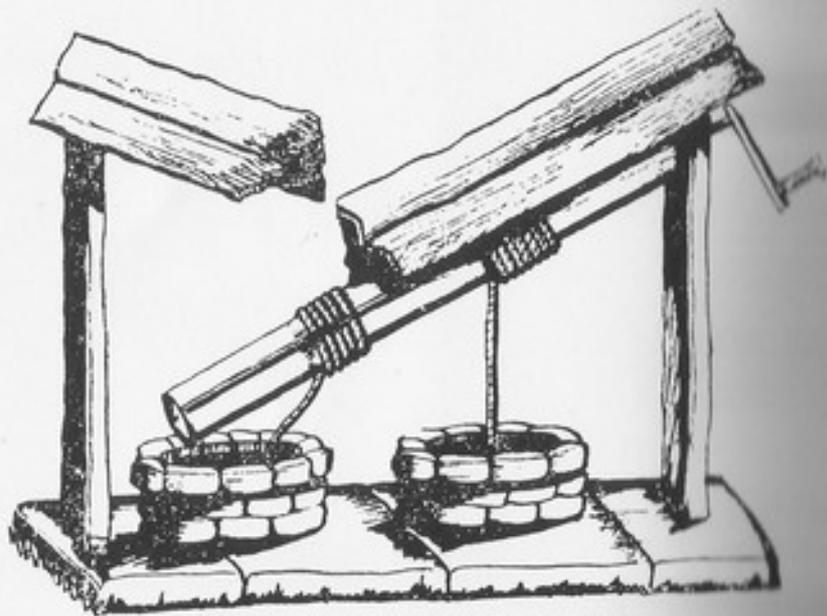
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HITCHIN
INNS
and
INCIDENTS



An account of the
Taverns of Hitchin
past and present

PAT GADD
and
RON PIGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Our long task had drawn to a close. We had probed back in time to the days of old Hitchin and its pubs ~ first lit by candlelight, then by gas or oil, and only later, starting with Mr. Ansell's patriotic illuminations of his butcher's premises at Portmill Lane in 1897, by electricity. Before us was a list of more than 120 names — all were licensed houses, inns, pubs, and lodging houses serving beer, that were known to have existed in Hitchin; some were names very familiar to us all, others that had appeared for a short span of years before becoming extinguished in the mists of time.

Why did this little market town, lost in the folds of North Hertfordshire to such an extent that it had become known for generations as 'Sleepy Hollow' have so many pubs? Of course, there were never as many at any one time as our first total suggests, but there is no doubt that our Victorian forefathers had a great love of beer and ale, and were able to use liquor as an anodyne to lessen the misery of the age. Hitchin was also a market town and its inns were convenient places to strike bargains.

England through the centuries has been well—known for hard drinking. In 1618, at the start of the Puritan influence, it was declared 'The ancient and proper use for inns is for refreshment and lodging for travellers and not for entertaining and harbouring lewd and idle people to waste their time and money in drunken manner'. Many years later, as the movement for Temperance gathered momentum in the 19th century when the Victorians were recoiling from the excesses of Hogarth's gin—sodden England, local brewers like William Lucas, a Hitchin Quaker and diarist, had difficulty equating their work with their consciences. There was an urgent need for reform. Pubs were open all hours and on every day, except for the time of Divine Service. By the early 19th century they had to close from midnight on Saturdays until noon on Sundays. However, the laws governing licencing and opening hours are complex and outside the scope of this account.

Asquith, during his fight for social reform at the turn of the century, strove to push a Bill through Parliament to make it harder to obtain a licence to sell beer. After his oratory, a woman asked if she might have the notes from which he had created his speech. 'Certainly, Madam,' he replied and handed her a slip of paper with the three words 'too many pubs' written on it.

This little story does at least illustrate the historic problem, and in this book we examine how the very English pastime of beer drinking has created an important part of Hitchin's history.

Also, in the pages that follow, we attempt to piece together, for the first time in local history, parts of this fascinating jig—saw of dusty records and legend to give substance to the old names of public houses in Hitchin, either with us still or lost in the myths and memories of another age.

We have made every effort to uncover the fragments of history and to make this account as accurate as possible, although we are always glad to receive any comments from readers which may throw further light on the researches.



Courtyard of 'George' inn, Bucklebury c 1900. (after 01:191)

1. A MUG OF ALE

Brewing has been carried on in England for many centuries. Although Domesday Book mentioned 43 brewers, most people were glad enough to find somebody locally who made

a good, drinkable brew. In the old accounts of Hitchin we read, in a domestic expenditure book of 1708, the words,

‘Paid to Goody Swaine a Winchester of beer: 3/ 6d (171/2p)

(Goody is an archaic form of address, meaning Goodwife). The cost of Mrs. Swaine’s brew can be compared with the charge noted by the Radcliffes of Hitchin Priory for butter a year earlier (1/r.lb for 2%’d), or cloth to make a gown 2/ 8d (13p). Clearly, beer was very important.

Beer was, without doubt, safer to drink in Victorian times than some local water. Of course, it was also much more pleasant. In 1849 (when incidentally it was noted that Hitchin possessed 59 public houses and beer houses), the town had no sewerage system, and accumulations of refuse and filth, together with the waste from the pig—sties and slaughter houses lining the banks of the Hiz, found its way into the river.

Lucas Brewery arranged for pure water to be used for beermaking. There was every reason to expect beer to be reasonably free from germs, as local people knew to their cost, especially after the cholera and typhoid epidemic of 1848, Hitchin people could not

rely on their wells. A report at that time found that 92 houses in the town had polluted wells. The Hitchin pubs continued to thrive amid the misery of it all.

In this story, we have grouped the buildings involved into small areas because to the people who used them, this is how they would have appeared. The term ‘ale’ was usually given to drink made without the additive of hops but the term ‘alehouse’ and ‘beerhouse’ tended to become merged at the lower end of the drinking scale.

Hitchin is essentially a town of ‘locals’. Variations have come about slowly, and have usually been associated with the modern practice of serving lunch—time snacks at the bar, but it may be helpful here to discuss the various types of places where, in past times, drink would be served, because the inns of yesterday had to cater for different needs from today.

Generally speaking the word ‘inn’ is a place offering accommodation to the traveller. Here the law obliged the landlord to provide rooms for the night to people on a -long journey. They could also expect to find a comfortable bed, a good meal, and stabling for their horses. At the large coaching inns a change of horses was held ready for the next stage of their journey.

Hostleries were smaller places which also offered accommodation to the traveller. The Bricklayer’s Arms, for instance, had a poster in the window offering ‘Good accommo- dation to working men and travellers’. When work was hard to find men would walk many miles to look for a job. Of course, there were always vagrants and travelling sales- men needing shelter for the night.

Lower down the scale there were the beer houses where a man could soak away the misery of the hard Victorian age. ‘

Each had their place in the social structure of the times and formed a homogeneous whole. Each place had its own ‘regulars’ who, when they could afford to do so (or when the publican would extend them credit) would be in the bar drinking their favourite tipple. For inside, out of the cold, good fellowship and brave talk made men somehow bigger and more complete. It was ever so in the candle—lit beginning, and still is today.

2. THE LOCAL BREW

Among local Brewers in Hitchin last century were:

William & Joseph Lucas brewers of Sun Street
John Bradley Geard ” ” Bancroft Street (sic)
John Christy maltster of Bancroft Street
Edward Cobb ” ” Bancroft Street
Robert Lawrence ” ” Market Place
William Folbigg ” ” Cock Street
William Chapman Back Street
Henry Crabb & Son (John Crabb)
Mr. Braund ’ of Braunds Alley
Marshall & Pierson of Sun Street

In 1841 John Marshall went bankrupt and the Marshall & Piersons pubs were sold. Lucas tells us that they fetched enormous prices, notwithstanding the growth of teetotalism, -and their bad repair.

Some local Brewers survived to become well known names today:—

McMullen’s of Hertford, was established in 1827.

Pryors the Baldock Brewery’ which sold out to Simpson on the death of John Pryor in 1853. Simpson then ran the Baldock Brewery for a further 100 years until Greene King took over. Their Baldock brewery was demolished in 1967. Other north Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire brewers were:

Fordhams of Ashwell, later Greens of Luton.

Pryor Reid of Hatfield ’

Rayments (founded 1850), amalgamated with Greene King 1928

Henry Timpson of Whitwell

John Hill of Whitwell ‘

Charles Wells, The Bedford Brewery

Greens of Luton

Phillips & Co. of Royston

Wells and Winch of Biggleswade (now Greene King)

J.R. Page & Co. of Ashwell

The great name in brewing locally was W & S Lucas Ltd., whose brewery stood on an impressive site at the corner of Sun Street, roughly where Crown House now stands. The brewery began in 1709 and at first they were in partnership with Isaac Grey. Soon, however, the Lucases took over completely, and their Brewery

building dominated the corner of Sun Street and Bridge Street until it was eventually knocked down to make way for Crown House. By 1900 the site contained a mineral water factory, cooperage, cask and bottle—washing departments, and carpenters' and engineers' shops, as well as all the build» ings necessary for the production and storage of beer. At the back stood the splendid Brewery House, overlooking the Hiz. Late in the 19th century, the firm became a limited company, W. & S. Lucas Ltd. (as can be seen on the various glass and stoneware bottles they produced) and the initials are those of William and Samuel. Some idea of Lucas's prices can be seen from the illustrations.

In Hitchin, Lucas's lorries and drays supplied the Dial (Bridge Street), the King's Arms (Bucklersbury), the Orange Tree (Stevenage Road), the Ship (Walsworth), the Rose & Crown (Market Place), the Railway Hotel in Walsworth Road which the Brewery also built, the Red Lion (Bucklersbury), the Adam & Eve (Bancroft), the Half Moon in Queen Street, and the Seven Stars (Charlton).

3. ABOUT INN SIGNS

Custom which reaches back as far as Pompeii in the past, has dictated that traders should make clear their calling, especially for those who could not read' and write - the vast majority. Something easily remembered was chosen by each calling; so we have the barber-surgeon's coloured pole (which could still be seen in Hitchin until recently), the tailor's shears, the three balls of the pawnbroker (again a common enough sight once in Bucklersbury and Sun Street), and the inn sign with a simple picture usually on the board to make it clear to those who could only understand pictures just what the letter- ing above it meant.

All these signs, with the exception of the pub sign, have gone. The inn sign, though, has prospered and today considerable skill and expense is spent by the brewers on these things which have become decorative ornaments. The oldest sign for a tavern was a bush. The Romans used it to portray the clump of ivy and vine leaves which was to them the symbol of Bacchus, the God of wine. This later became a garland of evergreens that would be affixed to the top of a projecting pole known as an 'ale-stake'.

In very early times the law of the land compelled every publican to display a sign (as early as 1393 a landlord was in trouble for not showing a sign). It could be swung from

a pole or, as in the case of the Angel Vaults of Sun Street, embossed on to ' the facade of the building. Others would be cast in exciting three«dimensional form, as the sign of the Cock in Hitchin High Street. (Incidentally both these old inns had once given their names to the street in which they stood).. Gilding, once again seen at the Cock, caught the sun and added to the sign's advertising qualities. If a publican lost his licence, his sign had to be removed. In Massinger's play 'A new way to pay old debts' of 1633, Tapwell, the inn- keeper, is told:

'For which gross fault I here do damn thy licence Forbidding thee ever to tap or draw;

For instantly I will in mine own person Command the constable to pull down thy sign'.

The photographs that remain of Old Hitchin pubs show that the local brewers were far from adventurous with their signboard painting. Hitchin was, of course, a close commu- nity, and even though the town had so many pubs

to choose from, visitors tended to be regular, coming in for Market Day, sniffing out their own particular favourite with ease. The signs were often just boldly lettered by the late Victorian age, although with the mergers of recent times, the coloured innboard depicting the name of the inn has tended to reappear. The

pub names might also be painted on the glass sides of the inn lanterns as in the old Red Lion in Bucklersbury.

The search for individual names for inns has shown much ingenuity. Sometimes a land-lord might make a play on his name — as, for instance, the Archer at Walsworth. And with the growth of numbers, innkeepers over the years have gone to great lengths in their search for a name that had to be attractive and give at least a suggestion of good cheer that was to be found inside. As Paul Nash once said ‘An inn sign had to be amusing in a come-hither sort of way, with an invitation intimate, humourous, strange or even sinister; but it must not be respectable.’

Perhaps the most common name for a pub in England is the Crown with various combinations (especially with Rose). The next favourite name is Red Lion.

4. COACHING INNS

Most travellers in coaching days would have agreed with Shenstone’s lines,

Who’er has travelled life’s dull road
Where’er its stages may have been
May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome at an inn.

THE ANGEL VAULTS

The Angel, amongst the oldest of Hitchin’s inns, is for-ever associated with King Henry VIII. This wonderful old inn, that had once given its name to the road now known as Sun Street, had until 1956, occupied the prime position of importance where the road narrows. It had strong connections with the church (inns originated from the need to provide shelter for travellers to monasteries, priories and churches). Vestry meetings were held at the inn. It was here that, according to the old account of Hall, King Henry was lucky to escape from a fire ‘without not so much as a shirt upon his kingly back’. This was on 15 October, 1523 and Henry was almost certainly staying at this old inn.

The old Angel went up in flames, but its replacement had soon to reckon on competition from a nearby inn that had appeared, the Sun. For some time the street was called Angel Street, but by the time of the 1620s, the Angel had been replaced as principal inn by its rival, and the street name changed gently into Sun Street.

The Angel’s old beams gradually weakened with age, until by the 1950s it was clear that the building was no longer safe. The Sun had reached its zenith.

THE SUN

The Sun was, at an early stage, able to offer its large pleasant rooms to town officials for the conduct of their affairs, and when from the late Elizabethan age it became customary to forsake the old draughty shed in the Market Place when the Michaelmas Court Leet was being held, it was natural for the upper chamber of the Sun to be used. Gaining the custom of the Manor in this way added to its prestige. An early case tried here was a farmer accused of making a murderous attack upon a woman gleaner in which her head and loins were injured to such an extent that ‘she could not sustain herself, or her children, or go about the business

of her husband'. The broken pitch-fork was displayed in court. All this sort of solid work called for ale, easily brought up to calm the nerves.

During the Civil War, Parliamentary troops were quartered in the Sun, and when the fighting stopped, Commissioners sent in to sequester the Royal Manor of Hitchin sold the Sun to a particular enemy of the King's Samuel Chidley, the scurrilous Leveller and Fifth Monarchist. With the Restoration Mr. Chidley was forgotten and the gutters foamed with ale. A new bowling green was laid down, and in 1770 Trinity College, the landlords, added the great Assembly room. From the front the Sun is a typical Georgian Inn, but the long range of buildings on the right side of the yard suggest that much Elizabethan work survives. Reginald Hine suggested darkly that the cupboard in Room 12 hid a secret but did not hint at what could be found there.

The Sun in the coaching days waxed prosperous — the thirsty coach travellers consumed much liquor. A bill of 1766 shows 11 'Ordinarys' to be worth 16/ 6d (821/2p) and wine to wash it down with cost as much as 9/ - (45p).

One or two nasty deeds happened in or around the Sun over the years. Grave robbers found it a handy place to steel their nerves and in 1772 came the great Sun robbery when three mounted thugs bound and robbed Mr. Marshall, the landlord, * and the guests of the day. They escaped after pausing to hack their initials on the bricks forming the right side of the archway. Nobody has ever got to the bottom of this affair, although Hine was himself robbed by a person who claimed to have the key to the robbery and who demanded money beforehand.

The Sun for years was a stopping place for many coaches, including the Leeds mail coach which set out at 7 p.m. from the famous Bull and Bush in London and took two days to reach Leeds.

In its hey-day, the Sun was virtually self-sufficient. Its pig-styes, lofts and barns bulged with farm stock. It brewed its own beer and fruit for the table came from its orchards. Waggons rumbled in and out of the courtyard from the days of the first coach seen in Hitchin about 1706 until long after the failure of Colonel Somerset's public coach service with a vehicle known as The Peveril of the Peak and later known as The Hironnelle.

An early statement from the Hertfordshire Express of 13 May, 1876 urged local people to try out this 'new' form of travel as a change from boring old steam trains. 'To those of our readers who enjoy an afternoon's outing and our beautiful Hertfordshire scenery' it crooned, 'we cannot do better than advise drive some Saturday afternoon with Col. Somerset on his Hironnelle, from Hitchin to Enfield. This coach, which we 'understand' is put on the road by the Colonel, made its first journey to Hitchin on Saturday-least, leaving Enfield at half-past ten a.m. and arriving at the Sun at half-past one. Punctually" at the time advertised, the coach and a beautiful team of chestnuts were ready to start for the return journey. Col. Somerset took the ribbons and started off to a merry sound of the guard's horn in the presence of a good assemblage of spectators, some of whom, who was also the Postmaster, forcibly recall the old days of the 'Bedford Times' and the days of yore'. The writer then changed his tune, adding 'However pleasant such means may be... when time is of no moment, few would like to return from our speedy rail to the old primitive road'. Here, then, lay the cause of Somerset's brave attempt to run against the race of time - to the practical Victorians, the coach was too slow and too draughty.

Colonel Somerset, according to Hine, had called his coach Peveril of the Peak in some obscure reference to Sir Walter Scott's book, then fashionable. In the contemporary report above, however, the coach is firmly recorded as being the Hironnelle, a much more appropriate name with its reference, in heraldic terms, for a swallow. The coach speed averaged 12 m.p.h. remarkably fast for coach travel. Incidentally, the name

Hirondelle, debased to 'The Iron Devil' has appeared as a pub sign. Even more unlikely, the Peveril name has also been used as a pub sign though not, of course, in Hitchin.

The Sun ran entertainment; Lacy's 'Company of Comedians', performed there last century, proving popular enough to be recorded for history. Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, born at nearby St. Paul's Walden, attended the Sun for dancing lessons.

THE SWAN

The Swan stood on the North side of the Market Place, and was a coaching inn from 1539 until 1884 when it was purchased by its neighbour John Gatward and largely demolished.

In its heyday it was a place of lavish entertainment and regularly showed a 2d gaff. These were popular Victorian melodramas, with 'Maria Marten or The Murder in the Red Barn' being a never failing draw. In 1805 when 'The way to get married' was being shown the stage collapsed and Mrs. Jeeves, one of the players, was killed. Many local tradesmen plied their trade in the Swan yard where they lived. William Beaver could still be found making baskets there in 1878. Other Victorian characters who worked there were Alfred Rogers, coach-builder, and Uriah Holloway a local cooper.

Pomfrets Shoe Shop now stands on the site of the Swan and its yard became The Arcade.

THE COCK

One of the oldest named Inns still serving is the Cock in the High Street (known for several centuries as Cock Street). Little is known of its early history but it is certainly mediaeval. A large part of the Inn was demolished in the early 1930s to build a Woolworth Store (now Boots). The present building is 16th-century, though completely modernized. In the coaching era a milestone outside the Cock told anyone interested that London was 34 miles. The stone remained there until recent times.

The local court was often held at the Cock. Oddly enough the inn stood once in the Parish of Shillington. (This isolated piece of Shillington with another building in the market place, a part of Tewin, were absorbed in the Parish of Hitchin by an Act of 1868 that provided for extinction of such extra parochial buildings).

The Cock too, had craftsmen working in its yard; proved by an old Will of 1752 wherein Michael Samm passed all his tools and his Rights to the barn in Cock yard, to his nephew Thomas Samm.

In the early part of this century the Cock was the local Headquarters of the C.T.C. (Cyclist Touring Club).

THE RED HART

The Red Hart with its timbered attractive carriage-way and yard seems to be the town's oldest surviving Inn. Dating from 1550, it is very picturesque although here again little is known of its early history. The Inn, however, belonged to John Crabb, a brewer of Hitchin, in 1805, passing to Simpsons of Baldock in 1853.

Reginald Hine, the local Historian, tells us of a fight that took place here in 1787. Thomas Marshall a local man hot and flushed from the effort of giving evidence against John Everett went into the Red Hart for a

drink. After a while the door opened and Everett entered. Hine records the complainant's own words, 'He did there and then threaten to do for me and my- character, concluding with horrid oaths, and violently wrenching a stick from me, did fling the same at me, and spit in my face. Also seizing a chair which stood in the bar of the Red Hart inn, he with great violence threw the same at me, which narrowly missed doing me a mischief'

Things are a little quieter now, although in the 1960s came reports of a ghost which appeared in February 1968. It is a natural place for a ghost to linger, as it was said to be the site of the last public hanging in Hitchin. Mrs. Shepherd, a trainee manageress, recalled that she had awoken to a sense of cold one night in her hotel bedroom, and saw the shadowy figure of an elderly man sitting in an ancient armchair only a few yards from her bed. 'I was not afraid' she. said, adding that it added character to the place.

THE RED LION

The story of the vicillations of this ancient inn are told in later chapters.

Kershaw's coach has been recorded as leaving from the Swan on its last journey. However, at one time it set out from the Red Lion every Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 8 a.m. arriving at Smithfield at 2 p.m. The inside fare for the 35 mile journey was 8/- (40p).

5. A PUB CRAWL AROUND THE TOWN

Bridge Street ——— Tilehouse Street area.

A place of uncertain age, but with a tracery at the street windows that has suggested an early history connected with Hitchin Priory, the **Cooper's Arms** may well have benefited from the looting of Priory stone between 1539 and 1546 when anyone with a cart would help themselves. It certainly was not a pub until the 1800s, but today, under McMullen's ownership, its whitewashed walls and colourful inn sign make it one of the most attractive places in Tilehouse Street. It was in the bar of this inn that Frederick Griggs, the great Hitchin etcher, promised to illustrate a novel on 18th-century family life in Tilehouse Street if only Hine would write it. Tragically, Hine was a historian only, but what a novel it could have been! The two friends, who quaffed ale here before the first World War would speak, Reginald Hine tells us in his 'Relics', of matters of sport. Griggs loved cricket, but his greatest pleasure was to edge up to a group of good fellows and get them talking of the past. According to Hine, Griggs could never finish a story (an essential part of a pub evening) because he would always start to laugh at what he knew was coming next. However, the sight of Frederick Griggs in 'stitches' over his own joke was usually enough to make his listeners burst into laughter themselves.

Griggs, who was born in Hitchin opposite the **Cock** (now Olivers Shoe Shop), grew increasingly saddened over the way the town was changing and in the end left it, but it is easy to sit in the Cooper's Arms and imagine the artist's laughter that always bore a tinge of sadness.

John Webb, who was landlord in the 1880s, described himself -on the board as 'beer retailer and fly proprietor', kept very busy on market days, when he ran his horse cab between the station and town.



Steam power for Brewers' drays: *Top* A tiny articulated steam wagon serving the 'Cricketers' in 1905. Note the sacks of coke. In the early days of Hitchin Football Club, players used the pub as a changing room. *Bottom* Lucas's smart new wagon outside their brewery was the occasion for all the workers to be photographed in 1910.





Above: 'Sailor Boy',
Walsworth
Below: 'New Found Out',
a former pub
that was once a
pest house.



The Boot, lower down in Bridge Street, advertised 'Good Stabling' in letters bolder than the name of the public house. Certainly Tilehouse Street and Bridge Street were just as dangerous to the Victorians as now and poor old George Beaver, a surveyor and local diarist, was knocked down near the corner with Bucklersbury by a bicycle ridden by, of all people, the son of Samuel Lucas, another well known diarist. That was in 1898, but four years earlier the stabling provided by these inns came under fire from the Rev. Frank Maguire, curate of Pirton. This gentleman was whizzing down the hill on his tricycle and as the road appeared clear, had put his feet in a jaunty fashion on the machine's rest as it neared the Cooper's Arms. Suddenly, when twenty yards from the stables, a young lad wheeled a fly (a light cart) across the road. All semblance of dignity was lost as the inevitable happened. There was a crash, and both the clergyman and the tricycle described a complete somersault. The bike lost a bell, and the curate lost the enjoyment of taking Easter Sunday services at Pirton Church. His appeal to the public was to demand that people employed at inns and stabling take more care, 'Had it been a carriage passing' he cautioned darkly, 'there would have been a terrible accident!'

A little higher up Tilehouse Street, in those days, we could well have been aware of a small woman, neatly dressed in a clean white pinafore, who was proprietress of the curiously named beerhouse known as the **Swan with two Necks** as she stood in the door-way waiting for custom. Its slightly sinister name has all that could be asked to arouse the curiosity of the passer-by. The name may have originated from a debasement of an heraldic device, its origin arising from the nicks cut into the birds' bills when the ceremony of 'swan upping' takes place on the Thames to denote ownership. The Worshipful Company of Vintners has, as its crest, a swan with two nicks and illiterate sign-painters have translated this as the swan with two necks. But to emphasise the 'neck' angle, the innboard was projected over the street on a graceful, elongated strip of iron-work. It is now derelict.

Opposite, in Paynes Park, stood the Waggon & Horses, which opened as a beer house about 1842 and closed in 1972. Its name was carried along the complete side wall; inside the bar area was strangely small and dark. The door was left open, except in the bleakest of days, presumably to gain light as well as customers. During a drunken scuffle outside this place in Victorian times, a man was accidentally killed by a policeman kneeling on his stomach to restrain him. We can imagine the concern this would cause today.

As this book goes to press the building is still standing and will be demolished, with the old Swan with two Necks opposite, when the Priory by—pass is built.

On now to the very top of Tilehouse Street, near Tilehouse Street Church, where the Highlander awaits. This first appears on record in 1791 when it was transferred from Thomas Caporn of Hitchin to Thomas Winchurch, who was described as a Victualler and a gardner (sic).

Its name may have come from the 'Foreign' drovers who made their way past with cattle. Irish and Scots were also employed every August as harvesters at Ransom's and Hailey's and were noted by the local Hitchin people for their love of drink. In 1827 the pub was acquired by a Henry Crabb, brewer of Hitchin, and finally passed to Whitbreads who decided to close the place down in 1975. This brought a chorus of appeals at the time, especially from those old regulars who could be seen, every lunchtime, being shepherded across the busy road by 'mine host'. But closed it was, and on 2 January, 1975, Dick Irons, its landlord for 17 years, gave a bewhiskered smile as he pulled his last pint.

But that was not to be the end of the Highlander, for it re-opened as a free house less than a year later and is now a very popular public house for the modern 'set'.

Lower down Tilehouse Street was the Three Tuns, a beer house dispensing J.W. Green's Luton Ales. This was another place with ample stabling. The seasonal farm-workers who came to the town from Scotland

and Ireland provided a story here; Reginald Hine 'tells how these people had swarmed into the town to break up the worship at the Tilehouse Street chapel, tossing a sheep's head through the open window to annoy the congregation. This happened to such good effect that when the worshippers heard a coarse voice shout 'There's turnips to follow', they rushed out and chased the perpetrator down the hill. He wisely hid in a cornbin at the Three Tuns until the hunt went by. 'Otherwise', he declared, 'I should have been dipped for a Baptist in the Priory horse pond'.

Only a few yards away in Bridge Street, the Boot was a pub from about 1807, being a gable-fronted building with a heavy overhang, situated near the River Hiz. The name appears to derive from the footwear made famous by the old Duke of Wellington or from a leather bottle. This inn was one of a number locally where troops from outside the area were billeted in case of an invasion by the French in 1803. In 1900 the name was changed to the Royal Oak, named after the famous oak-tree which Charles II used as a hiding—place after the Battle of Worcester in 1651. (Part of the tree was made into a plaque which is now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford).

Bridge Street, low lying near the Hiz, can sometimes flood with a sudden downpour. In Victorian times this happened every time there was heavy rain, the water rushing down Tilehouse Street augmenting the swollen river. To make matters worse, the primitive sewerage pipes ran under the river bed, and leaked badly. In 1908 came a storm which was said to be the worst for 45 years. The Royal Oak was badly affected by the water. Carpets and sacks were piled outside to keep out the rains, and most of the customers were unable to leave for hours. A Mrs. Parker of Starlings Bridge earned her fellow customers' thanks for her stout work keeping the tide back with a broom. Lucas's brewery nearby was also plagued by flooding.

On the corner of Bridge Street, (then known as the Triangle), was the Post Boy, named by the landlord, a retired post boy called James Hide, to mark his old trade. In his youth he used to walk the five miles into Hitchin from Baldock every morning with the mail in all weather. The licence was held by the Hide family from 1830 (James) until the 1880s (Charles).

With its old competitor, the Boot, it has been incorporated into Moore's Bookshop.

A quick dash now, up Hitchin Hill, to the Orange Tree, which is a new building replacing the temporary structure and the original public house knocked down in the 1960s. Bert Tomlin a venerable Hitchin resident was landlord here in the days of the Lucas brewery, Its original supplier. '

Around Bancroft

The Adam & Eve, a tall red—brick building, was established as long ago as 1672 and dispensed Green's Luton Ales. In those days that part of Bancroft was known as Silver Street, and the old Causeway, an embankment protected by iron rails, ran from its door southwards to end opposite the Skynner Almshouses, where the old Regal Cinema now stands.

There exists a record of at least one pint that the inn sold, dated 5 April 1767. Daniel Coulson, who seems to have despised his own weakness, with constant notes of 'wasting 5d for beer' went down to the Adam & Eve that night and spent '1d at adam and eve at hitchin'. Troopers based at this pub were almost certainly more sober, for Bancroft was lined with important Georgian houses, many of which still survive.

Drinkers had to go to the wider area of Bancroft for a good choice of inns (see illustrations). Here the cattle market was held until it was moved to Paynes Park in 1903, and the inns of the **Crown** (dating from 1654 in the days of the Interregnum), the **White Lion**, and the **Trooper's Arms** acted as informal gossip centres and auction houses for dealers settling purchases and sales, and for the drovers ready to beat the cattle

towards the station.

The Trooper was not a relaxing place to linger in during the 1700s because the recruiting sergeants, hunting for their prey, plied idlers sitting in the bar with strong ale. When they were drunk the King's shilling would be pressed into their hands. By the time they had recovered their wits the befuddled locals found it was too late for them to do anything about it. **The Trooper** was demolished in 1899 when W.B. Moss built his grocery shop in the prominent position facing down the wide street.

The Crown in the Hog Market, as it was then known, was the receiving office for the Great Northern Railway, which transported beasts for slaughter in London. This pub, and the White Lion immediately next door, were demolished in 1966, to be replaced by the Crown and Lion and Tesco Supermarket. The Artichoke dating from 1772, at the other end of the Churchyard, occupied the right-hand half of what is now Halseys delicatessen. An amusing incident once occurred near the **Artichoke**, the local lads were enjoying a lively game of Football, in early days just a game played in the streets. The Gosmore team had rescued the ball from the Priory Pond and forced their way across Angel Street (now Sun Street) but play was delayed when the ball went into the door of the pub. The goal was eventually scored in the doorway of St. Mary's Church.

A short way along Brand Street the little **Dog** served beer from 1846 until 1969, its trade being supplemented by people from the nearby Town Hall, who could find time for a pint and still get back for the second half of that evening's performance. Sainsbury's store now covers this site.

Hitchin High Street has always been dominated by the **Cock Inn** (Cock Street being its original name) but there were other, less grand places for an ordinary glass of beer almost opposite. Here stood three pubs in a row, all named after the means of motive power of the age — the **Black Horse**, the **White Horse** (next door) and the **Three Horseshoes**, known affectionately as 'the tips'. Only the **White Horse** boasted a lantern upon which its name was painted. The others relied on high swinging signs to attract their custom.

Ahead lay further public houses, well positioned around the Market Place, once known for the straw plait and where the general market was held until 1939. The market was then moved to St. Mary's Square upon the outbreak of war so that a static water tank could be sited in case of fire. The market never returned to its old site.

The Swan Inn, the **Maidenhead Inn**, and the **Pelican** were grouped in the Market Place. **The Six Bells** was also in the Market Place in 1762. In 1868 it was demolished to make way for the Home and Colonial Stores, and later Shilcocks.

One of the most endearing inns was the **Red Cow**, the high gabled building which is now 'Thresher's Wine Shop'. There is no doubt about how old the **Red Cow** building is for the figures 1676 are carved deeply into the bottom tread of its stairs. The old inn has cellars that reach out, damply, under the pavements and its rooms stretch upwards for three stories. Old prints show that the building had a balcony which afforded a good view of the Market Place during times of celebration, such as Queen Victoria's Jubilees in 1887 and 1897. The room behind the balcony also has a spy-hole (with a shutter) and re-inforcing, a reminder of the times when ladies of the town possibly let their hair down freely and had moments to adjust to things if the town constables appeared. The history of the **Red Cow** has been very difficult to trace and appears to have been related to another inn known as the Red House, in the Market Place. In 1731 records show inns known as the Red Cow and the Red House were the properties of Robert Crofts who left them to his son Richard in 1763. Incidentally, another pub of this name existed in Walsworth in 1730.

The **Rose & Crown** was not always in the Market Place but was certainly established there in 1720. It is now the Market Place's only remaining inn and was indeed fortunate to have escaped demolition when

George W. Spurrs, the adjacent building, was pulled down to make way for the new Market complex.
The Back Street (Queen Street) pubs.

Three inns (the **Lister Hotel**, the **Half Moon** and the **Bricklayer's Arms**) remain in the Queen Street area where, before the demolition of the worst slums of Hitchin started in 1924, a bustling little community worked through their lives surrounded by ale. The clearances of narrow yards and insanitary leaking cottages resulted in the formation of St. Mary's Square, and the gradual demolition of the public houses towards Park Street.

The Queen Street people were a closely knit little community; children from other areas in the town gave the place a wide berth on their way to the British School, and the pubs, in general, provided a basic need for solid drinking rather than a relaxed informal atmosphere and the comfort that was associated with the inns in the centre of the town.

The 13 ale-houses and taverns in the Queen Street area (a thoroughfare once known as Dead Street and later Back Street) before the demolition were:-

King's Head (founded 1853 — 1961)
Robin Hood (1817)
Peahen
Peacock (1844) **White Horse** (1844)
Two Brewers (1792)
Bricklayer's Arms (1864, rebuilt 1922 still as Charles Wells House now Whitbread)
Half Moon (1748)
Shoulder of Mutton (1817)
Bushel and Strike (1898)
Sugar Loaf
Bow and Arrow
Black Lion ——— formerly **Curriers Arms** (1817) perhaps the name of the first landlord, or a debasement of Carriers.

The Robin Hood, the **Curriers Arms (Black Lion)**, the **Two Brewers**, the **Half Moon**, and the **White Horse** were Queen Street inns also used for the messing of troops brought in during the Napoleonic Wars, during the public scare of 1803. 'Beer Money' was provided but attempts were made to keep the troops sober by elaborate regulations — 'No man will be allowed to be drinking at his own or any other Quarters after the Beating of the Tattoo which will be after sunset, and all Alehouse keepers are cautioned not to suffer any of the men to have beer or liquor after that hour on pain of the suppression of their licence'. In lieu of beer money, soldiers could elect to receive an extra penny a day and some, Hine tells us, were kept sober in this way. The majority, we feel sure, helped the landlord out with his beer.

The Bricklayer's Arms, rebuilt just before the 1924 clearances, survived demolition. **The King's Head** was demolished in 1961. **The Half Moon** and **Lister House** are with us still. **The Half Moon** was lucky though in February 1845, during a big fire nearby; sparks carried over to the thatched roof of the stables of the **Half Moon** causing serious damage.

All the other Queen Street public houses were demolished including the **Peacock** where Mr. Chapman the publican, brewed his own very good beer, and 'porter' (an extinct type of stout). The tall wooden barrels outside this public house were a feature in the early years of the century as they awaited filling. Brewing usually took place daily. A small brewer still operating at Henley fills some twenty-four barrels daily; perhaps Chapman's would manage four or five. There was always a trade with those who liked their beer fresh, and the brewers would fill your pot, and charge you half penny less than the two- pence inside,

allowing you to perch on a barrel and enjoy the passing vista of the slums.

We also understand the **Peahen** was still brewing its own beer until its demolition. **The Black Lion** was reputed the best pub in Hitchin.

The landlord of the **Sugar Loaf** for many years was an old gentleman named Dyer who saved his money well enough to buy a row of cottages in Kershaw's Hill. The **Shoulder of Mutton** was a common pub-cum lodging house. Opinions differ on the price of a night's lodging; perhaps you simply bargained your way to a bed. As much as a 1 /- (5p) a night one old man informed us he had paid, and as little as 4d, but most were glad enough to find a traveller a bed. The Shoulder could be a bawdy place; our informant recalled a savage fight one morning between two women who rushed out of the place. 'I had never seen two women fighting before' he chuckled, 'but they certainly had their sleeves rolled up.' They were fighting over a man who had left before the outcome was determined. In May 1924, there was a case of smallpox at **The Shoulder of Mutton**; the contact had moved to Luton before the Health Board could catch up with him.

Much of Hitchin's history was swept away in the slum clearances and those little pubs and beerhouses with their raucous bawdy nightly occupants are now only memories.

Queen Street is certainly a different street from the old days; the insides of its pubs (which were dank small places, with stained wooden forms positioned round a narrow grate in which a fire fitfully burned), have undergone a transformation, and Hitchin now has a modern public house, the **Market Tavern**, to administer to the needs of local shoppers in addition to the older public houses which have survived. The first name to be proposed for the **Market Tavern** was the Lord of Hitchin, a suggestion that caused so much protest that the brewers, Flowers, held a local competition for a more suitable name.

It would be appropriate to end this account of the public houses of Old Queen Street with a ditty composed by Samuel Piper, a butcher who lived at 91/2 Back Street. The beer could not have been too poisonous for he lived to the age of 91!

The **Bricklayer's Arms** you have such charms
The **Robin Hood** with the **Bow and Arrow** stood
The old **White Horse** he kicked the **Lion**,
He made the Peacock fly
He knocked the **Bushel** upside down,
And drank the **Two Brewers** dry
The **King's Head** he was such a glutton,
He took the **Leg of Mutton**,
The **Sugar Loaf** must be broken,
And leave all the pubs open.

6. AN INN, BY ANY OTHER NAME

Our efforts to trace many pubs which changed their name or location has not been without its problems. Sometimes there were public houses of the same name in the town contemporary with each other.

In 1842 there was a beer house in Back Street (Queen Street) called the **Ship** as well as the Ship at Walsworth.

The New Robin Hood at No. 20 Bridge Street became the **Dial** in 1778. The pub next door was known as the **Plough** and eventually the two buildings were joined as the **Plough and Dial** when rebuilt about 1925. This public house survived until the 1950s. In 1961, when the **King's Head** in Queen Street was demolished the licence was transferred to 20 Bridge Street, (see illustrations).

The Bridge Street area knew other changes of name — the **Boot** (which has become part of Moore's bookshop) was renamed the **Royal Oak** with patriotic favour at the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. There had, however, been an earlier public house of that name - records show that the **Royal Oak** in Bancroft was open in 1806 and its proprietor was a William Andrews.

In 1793 there was a pub at Bull Corner called the **Cross Keys**; like the **New Found Out**, on the Stevenage Road, it had been a pest house. **The Wheatsheaf**, at No.3 Tilehouse Street, closed in 1890 for the building to become Hitchin's first telephone exchange. It had been the **Wheatsheaf** from about 1793 and had earlier been known as the **Pelican**. Records Show that there was another **Pelican** in the Market Place in 1748.

The Red Lion in Bucklersbury has been an inn in Hitchin since about 1612, and was at one time owned by the Delme Radcliffes. First located in the Market Place on the site of the Corn Exchange, it probably moved to its present site in 1853 when the Corn Exchange was built. The Red Lion was purchased by McMullens in 1898 and re—built in about 1904. The old garages, coach buildings and other outbuildings in rear of the **Red Lion** were demolished in 1974.

The George in Bucklersbury was another inn which has moved. It was in Cock Street (High Street) in 1793, almost opposite what is now Barclays Bank, when it was known as the **Beehive**.

When I. and T.G. Simpson purchased the Baldock brewery in 1853 the **George** was included in the sale. By 1870 it had moved to Bucklersbury. The building it now occupies was obviously an inn at an earlier date. It is 16th-century, with an open gallery supported on wooden columns. In 1806 there was another George in Bancroft (then known as Bancroft Street).

The Albert in Walsworth Road was once known as the **Early Bird**. The landlord was a retired railway man, and he opened his house Very early in the morning to oblige his railway customers. The inn became the **Prince Albert** during 1840, later becoming just the Albert.

The 'railway' pubs in Walsworth Road have moved with the times. **The Talisman**

was the **Railway Hotel** and, around the corner, the old brewer's name can still be read on the slate roof of the **Nightingale**. This was formerly the **Leicester Railway Inn**, a reminder of the days when the old branch line ran from Hitchin by way of Bedford to Leicester. Opened in 1858, the railway formed, for many years before St. Pancras was built, the only connection with London for the Midland Railway's goods. Interrunning with the Great Northern Trains caused bad feeling. The old branch line survived until 1 January 1962, a snowy day that provided a bleak end to the line.

In more recent times the **Angel's Reply** in Bedford Road was built to replace the **Angel Vaults** of SunStreet which was demolished in 1956.

The Crown & Lion rose from the debris of the **Crown** and the **White Lion** in 1966. **The Fountain** in Ninesprings Way, one of Hitchin's latest pubs and in a convenient position on a modern housing estate, was a replacement for the old **King William IV** which stood in Stevenage Road.

Many of the publicans found that selling beer was not sufficient to pay their way — they often found another job as well as running their pubs while their wives looked after the customers. These Ale wives had a reputation for being tough and very shrewish with cutting tongues that would not stand any nonsense.

George Parker, landlord of the **Woolpack**, found other employment as a furniture remover and timber carter.

Herbert Crawley, in 1878 proprietor of the **Dial** was also a butcher and Daniel Crawley of the **Lion** in Queen Street was also a butcher at that time. George Dennis of the **Red Lion** was a house decorator and gilder. In 1839 John Waller proprietor of the **Duke of Wellington** on Hitchin Hill admitted to being a carpenter, and the host of the **Two Brewers** in Queen Street, in more sinister vein, was a monumental mason !

With so many pubs and beer houses in the town it must have been difficult to eke out a living. Most publicans would hire you a trap or cart, and when the craze for cycling hit England in late Victorian times, there was at least one enterprising landlord who could oblige his customers with a mount.

Good stabling was a well advertised asset — essential in a Market Town, and as important then as parking space is in Hitchin today. In at least one case, the **Wheatsheaf** at 3 Tilehouse Street, the horse had to be led through the bar parlour to the stables as there was no side entry.

APPENDIX:

List of Hitchin's Inns and Public Houses

Below we list Inns and Taverns which have served beer in Hitchin. The dates given are, as far as can be determined, the year -when licence was granted, or-the earliest found reference.

Adam & Eve	1672	49 Bancroft
Albert Inn	1886 (formerly Early Bird)	50 Station Road
Artichoke	1772	Churchyard
Archer	1862	Walsworth
Anchor	1887	Bridge Street
Anchor	1736 (possibly earlier)	Walsworth
Angel Vaults	1450 —1956	Sun Street
Angel's Reply	1967	Bedford Road
Acacias Hotel		Walsworth Road
Bedford Arms	1870 (poss a beer house earlier)	Bedford Road
Beehive	(became George 1870)	High Street
Bell	1644 (St Mary's Street)	Sun Street
Bell	1846	Tilehouse Street
Black Bull	1552 (Triangle)	Park Street
Black Horse	1844 —1958	High Street
Black Horse	1804 (Corner of Blackhorse Lane)	London Road
Black Lion	1880 (Formerly Curriers' Arms)	92 Queen Street
Boot	1807 (became Royal Oak 1900)	Bridge Street
Bow and Arrow		Queen Street
Bricklayer's Arms	1839 —1870	Offley Road
Brickayer's Arms	1708 (rebuilt 1920)	Queen Street
Brittania	1851 (Beerhouse)	Queen Street
Bull	1645	31 Tilehouse Street
Bull's Head	1787	Tilehouse Street
Bushel & Strike	1851	Queen Street
Cock Hotel	15 th Century	High Street
Cooper's Arms	1860 (Building much older)	Tilehouse Street
Crown	1654 —1966	Bancroft
Cricketers	1844 (first site of Firs Hotel)	Bedford Road
Cricketers	(now Victoria)	Ickleford Road
Cross Keys	1793	Bull Corner
Coach and Horses	1806 (possibly Waggon & Horses)	
Crown & Lion	1967	Bancroft
Currier's Arms	1817 (became Black Lion)	Queen Street
Chequer	1724	
Dial	1778 (became Plough & Dial)	20 Bridge Street
Dog	1846 —1972	Brand Street
Dog	1844 (only for a short time)	Queen Street
Duke of Wellington	1828	Hitchin Hill
Early Bird	1820 (became Prince Albert/Albert)	Walsworth Road
Falcon		13 Park Street
Firs Hotel	(first site of the Cricketers)	Bedford Road
Fountain	1960 —Now Closed	Ninesprings Way

George Inn	1793 (formerly Beehive in High St)	Bucklersbury
George	1806	Bancroft
Green Dragon	1590 —1795 (owned by Wilshere)	Address not known
Gloucester Arms	1882	117 Nightingale Road
Half Moon	1748 (Lucas for 100 years)	Queen Street
Highlander	1791	45 Tilehouse Street
Hill View Hotel	1936	20 Bridge Street
Horse and Groom	1855 (possibly Horse & Jockey)	Old Park Road
Horse and Jockey	1846	Old Park Road
Jolly Butchers	1871	Walsworth
Jolly Sailor	1841 (possibly Sailor Boy)	Walsworth
King's Arms	1806	16 Bucklersbury
King's Head	1851 (formerly Plough & Dial)	Bridge Street
King's Head	1807 (demolished 1961, moved)	Queen Street
King's Head	1851	Hitchin Hill
King William IV	1880 (Replaced by The Fountain)	Stevenage Road
Leicester Railway Inn	1850 (Now Nightingale)	59 Nightingale Road
Lion	1865	
Lister House Hotel		
Little White Horse		
Maidenhead Inn		
Market Tavern		
Moorhens		
New Found Out		
New Robin Hood		
Nightingale		
Nightingale		
Old White Horse		
Orange Tree		
Peahen		
Peacock		
Plough & Dial		
Plough		
Post Boy		
Prince Albert		
Pelican		
Queen's Head		
Queen's Arms		
Radcliffe Arms		
Railway Hotel		
Ram		
Red House		
Red Cow		
Red Cow		
Red Hart		
Red Lion		
Robin Hood		
Rose & Crown		
Royal Oak		
Royal Oak		

Rugeley Arms
Sailor Boy
Ship
Ship
Shoulder of Mutton
Sir John Barleycorn
Six Bells
Sugar Loaf
Sun Hotel
Swan Inn
Swan with Two Necks
Tumbledown Dick
Talisman
Three Horse Shoes
Three Moor Hens
Three Tuns
Two Brewers
Trooper
Victoria
Vine
Waggon & Horses
Wellington
Wheatsheaf
White Horse
White Horse
White Lion
White Swan
Windmill
Woolpack
White Hart
Woodman

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Martyn Gadd (Patricia Gadd's son) requested that Hitchin Inn's & Incidents be made available for readers in the digital age. The book was subsequently scanned by Martyn and passed to **Matt Porter** who OCR'd the text and converted to an eBook during January 2014.

Should you find any errors in the text, please contact us at the following website:-

<http://www.mattporter.com/hitchin-inns>

