



News and events

- There will not be a meeting of the Society in August. **Our next talk will be on Wednesday 20 September.** We will send details by email nearer the time.
- **John Benjamin** from the Antiques Roadshow will give a talk about the famous Russian goldsmith **Fabergé** on Friday 15 September at St Helen's Church. Details and tickets (£15 in advance, £20 on the door) from Margaret Pearce 01582 833581 or margaretp3581@gmail.com

Wheathampstead's pubs in the 1930s

Our recent history of the pubs of Wheathampstead* ended in 1914 but sales figures for some of these pubs in 1936/7 have recently come to light. All the pubs in the table below were owned at that time by brewers Benskin's of Watford except for the Bull which was in the hands of J.W. Green of Luton. These figures provide a firm understanding of the hierarchy of the trade at the time. Sorted by barrels sold, the table below shows the Swan at the top of the list, selling most beer for consumption in the pub itself. And that by a long distance when compared with its competitors in the village, especially the Bell & Crown. Sales at the Bull are surprisingly low.

| Beer sales in a selection of Wheathampstead pubs, 1936/7 | | | |
|--|----------------|--------------|------------------|
| Pub | Location | Beer Barrels | Bottled Beer doz |
| Swan | High Street | 226 | 1196 |
| Railway Hotel | High Street | 143 | 991 |
| Park Hotel | Nomansland | 142 | 1275 |
| Walnut Tree | Church Street | 118 | 723 |
| Cherry Tree | Lower Luton Rd | 117 | 654 |
| Bull | High Street | 113 | 1057 |
| Royal Oak | The Folly | 103 | 375 |
| Nelson | Marford | 102 | 409 |
| Elephant & Castle | Amwell | 99 | 470 |
| Tin Pot | Gustard Wood | 93 | 804 |
| Plough | Gustard Wood | 87 | 1334 |
| Cross Keys | Gustard Wood | 84 | 986 |
| Bell & Crown | High Street | 51 | 888 |
| Red Cow | The Hill | 37 | 286 |

The figures for sales of bottled beers, mainly for imbibing at home rather than in the pub, reflect a change in the locus for consumption. This hierarchy is different with the Park Hotel (now the

Wicked Lady) and Plough at the top of the tree, their position perhaps reflecting that, with few people living nearby, they were catering for the needs of cricketers, golfers and picnickers.

Overall, these figures represent a trend that had started in the late 1800s with innovations in bottling technology which drove down costs and improved quality. The move from horse-drawn to motorised drays from the early 1900s further increased efficiencies. As a result, drinkers could sit in the privacy of their own homes rather than in the rather desultory old-fashioned pubs.

The two large Benskin's ledgers containing these figures also include brief details of other pubs in their estate. In some of their pubs in St Albans, the Verulam Arms in Lower Dagnall Street for example, the move to off sales is reflected in the term 'jug and bottle'. Clearly brewers and publicans were prepared to dedicate space to what were profitable sales. However, none of our pubs appears to have offered this separate facility, in the 1930s anyway.

These useful descriptions also tell us much about the businesses the publicans were operating. The smithy at the Swan, identified in 18th century records and leased separately in the early 1900s, was still trading in the 1930s; with abstainers in mind, the Park Hotel had a tea-room set apart from the public bars; the Red Cow, with its poor sales, included space for a grocer's shop.

As all three of these pubs offered outside toilets only, we come to our final point: in St Albans, both Benskin's and Green's had in c.1930 invested substantial sums of money rebuilding pubs such as the Pineapple and the Blacksmith's Arms, or building from scratch like the Rats Castle. The Benskin's ledgers suggest that none of its Wheathampstead establishments had been similarly improved. Can you tell me otherwise?

Jon Mein

* See <https://tinyurl.com/47kxmvxy>