

The Cherry Trees

The Cherry Trees beerhouse was named after its immediate vicinity, shown on the Dury and Andrews map of 1766 as 'Cherry Tree' and on the 1841 Tithe Map as 'Cherry Trees' though with no building at this exact location.

The Cherry Trees stood at the crossroads where Marshalls Heath Lane meets Cherry Tree Lane and the Lower Luton Road so was well placed not only for local residents but also for anyone using Leasey Bridge, the only river crossing for vehicles between Wheathampstead and Batford.

This photograph, looking west at the crossroads in about 1890, shows how the north/south route was just as important as the east/west; Lower Luton Road was, at that time, narrower than Marshalls Heath Lane (on the right). The house at the left end of the terrace was demolished when the road was widened.

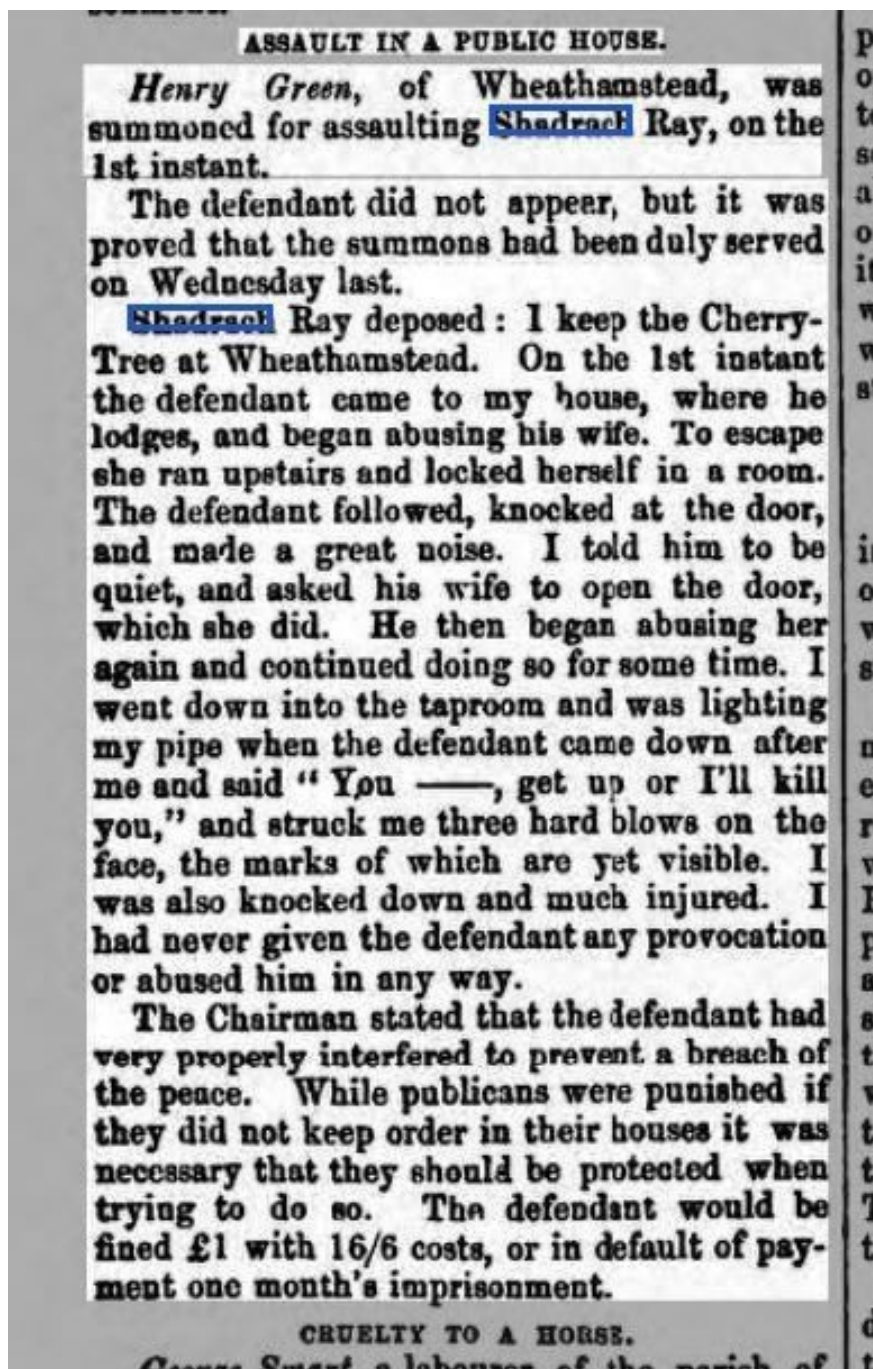


The first documented reference to the Cherry Trees beerhouse appears in the 1861 census when the licensee is listed as James Barker aged 25. He is described as a labourer and beer retailer born in Wheathampstead. He is living there with his wife Eliza (25) (née Thrussell), son James (3), daughter Mary (9 months), Eliza's mother Sarah, brother James and James' wife Matilda. The Thrussells all came from Sandridge, where in 1851 Sarah was a charwoman and Eliza a hat-maker.

While the present-day Cherry Trees restaurant is on the south side of Lower Luton Road, James Barker is listed on the north side. It is possible that his beerhouse was one of the houses in the photograph rather than on the south side but there is no definite evidence either way.

By 1866, The Cherry Trees had changed hands. On 8 December, the Hertfordshire Express and General Advertiser reported the case of one Thomas Purrott who was accused of stealing a box of dominoes, value one shilling, from a beerhouse at Pickford Mills and selling them to Shadrach Ray 'keeper of the Three Cherries beerhouse at Wheathampstead' for sixpence and a pint of beer. The prisoner was remanded for a week.

Ray's next appearance in court was more dramatic, as reported in the Herts Ad dated 13 June 1868.



Born in Bedfordshire in about 1816, every census from 1841 to 1891 lists Shadrach Ray as a labourer. He and his wife Sarah had eight children. Ray's tenure of the Cherry Tree (or perhaps the 'Three Cherries') was brief; by December 1868, the licensee was George Rolt. The Rays had moved to The Folly, where they stayed until the late 1880s when they moved to High Street, Wheathampstead; Shadrach Ray died there in 1894.

Rolt's first appearance in the historical record is from a report in the Herts Ad dated 5 December 1868 about a young man called William Burgoyne who was accused of stealing a 'black coat; value three shillings' belonging to Rolt. Following police evidence that Burgoyne had been caught in possession of the coat, Rolt gave evidence as follows:

Mr. George Rolt said : I keep a beershop at the Folly, in Wheathamstead parish. The coat produced is mine, and it is worth 3s. I last saw it on the 6th Nov., when I pulled it off and gave it to my wife. The prisoner was then lodging at my house. He came on Saturday night, and remained until Monday morning, when he left. I did not see him again until he was in custody. The same Monday I missed my coat and did not find it until I saw it in the hands of Police-sergeant Chapman. I do not wish to press the charge against the prisoner, but hope that you will deal as leniently with him as you can for his father's sake.

The prisoner elected to be tried in that court, and, having been charged with the theft, pleaded guilty.

It was stated that prisoner had not been previously convicted.

In consideration of this being his first offence, the prisoner was sentenced to a month's imprisonment, with hard labour.

It seems likely that the father referred to was William Burgoyne, aged 54, who was a close neighbour of George Rolt at Cherry Trees in 1871.

In November 1870, Rolt appeared in court again, this time as the defendant and accused of selling beer 'out of hours'. He disputed the times cited by PC Thomson and pleaded 'Not guilty' but without success (see next page).

ST. ALBANS.
LIBERTY PETTY SESSIONS.

Saturday, Nov. 5.

Present: G. R. Martin, Esq., in the chair; Rev. W. S. Wade; R. Pryor, Esq.; T. Kinder, Esq.

George Rolt (35), a beerhouse keeper, at Wheathamstead, was summoned for having his house open for the sale of beer at an unlawful hour.

The defendant pleaded not guilty, and was represented by Mr. Blagg.

Police-constable Charles Thomson said that on the afternoon of Sunday, the 23rd October, between two and three o'clock, he went to the window of the defendant's beershop at Wheathamstead, and saw two men—Charles Groom and William Groom—sitting in the house with a pint pot in front of them. He went to the door, and Charles Simpkins, a lodger admitted him. When he entered he saw Chas. Groom take the pint pot from his mouth and wipe his lips. Witness looked into the pot and found it contained a tablespoonful of beer, and froth round the sides. He saw the landlord come in from the back premises and told him he had no business to have those men in the house at that time. He said "What time," and was told it was half-past three. This he denied, and contended that it was only quarter past.

Mr. Blagg said he believed he had a complete answer to the charge, and called

Charles Simpkins, an old man, who said that he had been lodging at the Cherry Tree, the defendant's house, for six or seven months. On Sunday afternoon the 23rd ult., about three o'clock, the door was locked and bolted. When the constable knocked he was at once admitted. At the time the brothers Groom were present, they had visited the house about some measure. No beer was drawn after three o'clock. A pint was drawn for the Grooms at five minutes to three, but it was drunk before the constable's arrival. By William Groom's watch it was a quarter past three when the constable arrived.

William Groom, ploughman at Mrs. House's, Wheathamstead Grove, and Charles Groom, brother of last witness, corroborated.

The defendant was fined 10s. and 20s. costs, or in default one month's imprisonment; allowed a week to pay.

The Charles Groom mentioned in the evidence was licensee of a beerhouse (later named The Royal Oak) at The Folly. He died aged about 53 on 23 September 1875 with his death certificate giving the cause of death as 'softening of the brain from drink'.

The 1871 census describes George Rolt as a 'Beerseller and Blocker' at The Cherry Trees, aged 39, born in Pepperstock and married, though his wife was not at home on census night. A 'blocker' was a worker in the hat trade; Rolt may have been employed at the hat factory at The Folly. Also at home that night were his 14-year-old son John, Eliza James the 24-year-old housekeeper who was also a straw plaiter, her 5-year-old son William and a widowed lodger Charles Simpkins who was 55 and a farm labourer (mentioned in the court case above).

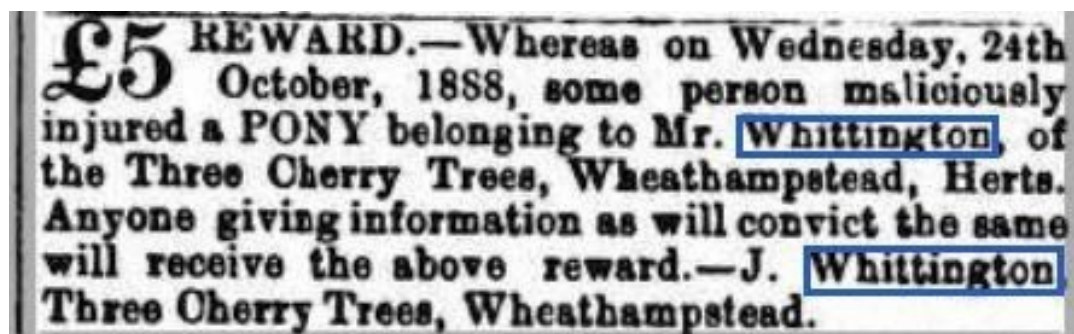
The 1874 directory lists John Brothers as the licensee. He was one of the three children of Abraham Brothers who was landlord of The Royal Exchange in Gustard Wood from the late 1840s until he died in 1865. John was born and had attended school in Wheathampstead and had worked as a platelayer on the railway that opened in Wheathampstead in 1860 but the 1871 census shows him, aged 27, as one of more than 400 patients in the District Metropolitan Asylum in Hampstead. The hospital had opened in the previous year following a campaign led by, among others, Florence Nightingale who argued that workhouses were not suitable for the sick poor. The 1867 Metropolitan Poor Law Act had set up separate infirmaries of which the Hampstead Infirmary was one of the earliest.

The 1881 census confirms that John Brothers, now aged 38, is the licensee and lists the beerhouse under both names, The Traveller's Friend and The Cherry Trees. Also in the house were his wife, Rhoda, aged 33, their eight sons, of whom the oldest was aged 11, and her father George Rowe, a 60-year-old labourer. Rhoda had been living as a lodger in a house in Luton Road while her husband was in hospital.

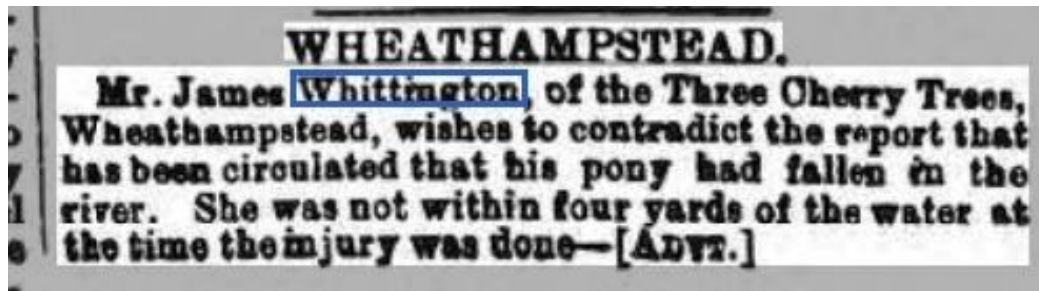
John's poor health may explain why a Protection Order for The Cherry Trees was granted to Elias Harding in June 1881. He was a Foreman Painter who lived at Brogdell Cottage, between Wheathampstead and Gustard Wood. However this did not result in a transfer of the licence; the 1882 directory again lists John Brothers as licensee.

Sometime between 1881 and 1888, he left The Cherry Trees/Traveller's Friend and moved with his family to take over The Ship in High Street, Wheathampstead, where he is shown in the 1891 census though he was by then a widower with eight children. Rhoda had died aged 42 in 1889 having borne 11 sons and one daughter between 1870 and 1886. John's sister Sarah was housekeeper.

In 1888, the licence of The Cherry Trees was held by James Whittington, who placed these intriguing advertisements in the Herts Ad dated 24 November.



£5 REWARD.—Whereas on Wednesday, 24th October, 1888, some person maliciously injured a PONY belonging to Mr. Whittington, of the Three Cherry Trees, Wheathampstead, Herts. Anyone giving information as will convict the same will receive the above reward.—J. Whittington Three Cherry Trees, Wheathampstead.



It would appear that Whittington was not popular with his neighbours. On 13 April 1889, the Herts Ad printed a lengthy report of his being sued for slander by George Adams, a watercress grower from The Folly, who demanded £500 in damages. Adams alleged that Whittington had 'falsely and maliciously spoken and published' that he, Adams, had been selling beer without a licence. Adams' solicitor stated that Whittington had told PC Keating that Adams had been selling beer without a licence. Adams had asked Whittington to withdraw the statement and, when he had not done so, he had issued a writ. There followed some confused and confusing evidence about who had said what to whom, including from 78-year-old Isaac Wheeler who was expected to give evidence about what Whittington had said but who 'failed to hear the questions at first addressed to him' and turned out to be 'very dull of hearing' and whose evidence was not admitted. It is clear from the report that the judge became increasingly irritated by the whole affair. In the end, he decided in effect that there was no case to answer and gave judgment for Whittington, with costs, and relieved the jury of their duties saying that 'he was sorry they had ever been summoned'.

By the time of the 1891 census, when the name 'Traveller's Friend' reappears, Lewis Lines was in residence and described as 'smith and licensed victualler'. Born in Reynolds Wick, Bedfordshire, he was 48 and lived with his wife Lucy (born in Wheathampstead) and five children aged 3 to 19. In October 1894, he successfully applied for an hour's extension 'on the occasion of a cricket club supper' at The Traveller's Friend.

In January 1898 the licence was transferred from Lewis Lines to Thomas Pyrke though the Herts Ad dated 15 January called it The Traveller's Rest. He and his wife Emma had lived for the previous 30 years in London where he worked as a 'traveller in bedding'. He was still at the renamed Cherry Trees in 1901 when the census describes him as aged 64 and born in London, with his wife Emma (58) coming from Bridgnorth in Shropshire.

The 1902 directory shows that the licence had been transferred to Samuel Izzard who was still there in 1911 when the census says that he was then aged 70 and calls him a 'Public house proprietor'. His wife Luisa (65) assisted with the business; they both came from Gustard Wood. The Izzards were a well-established family in Wheathampstead at this time.

In May 1903, an inquest into the death of William Smith of Leasey Bridge Cottages was held at The Cherry Tree (*sic*). The Herts Ad report (19 May 1903) summarises witness statements from his wife Lizzie, employer Frank Dickinson of Leasey Bridge Farm, and farmer George Finch of Leverstock Green. Smith had been collecting three horses from Finch's farm and had fallen from one of them which he had been riding bareback. He did not complain of any pain at first but soon complained of 'great agony' so Finch had driven him home in a trap. Dr Smallwood visited him twice

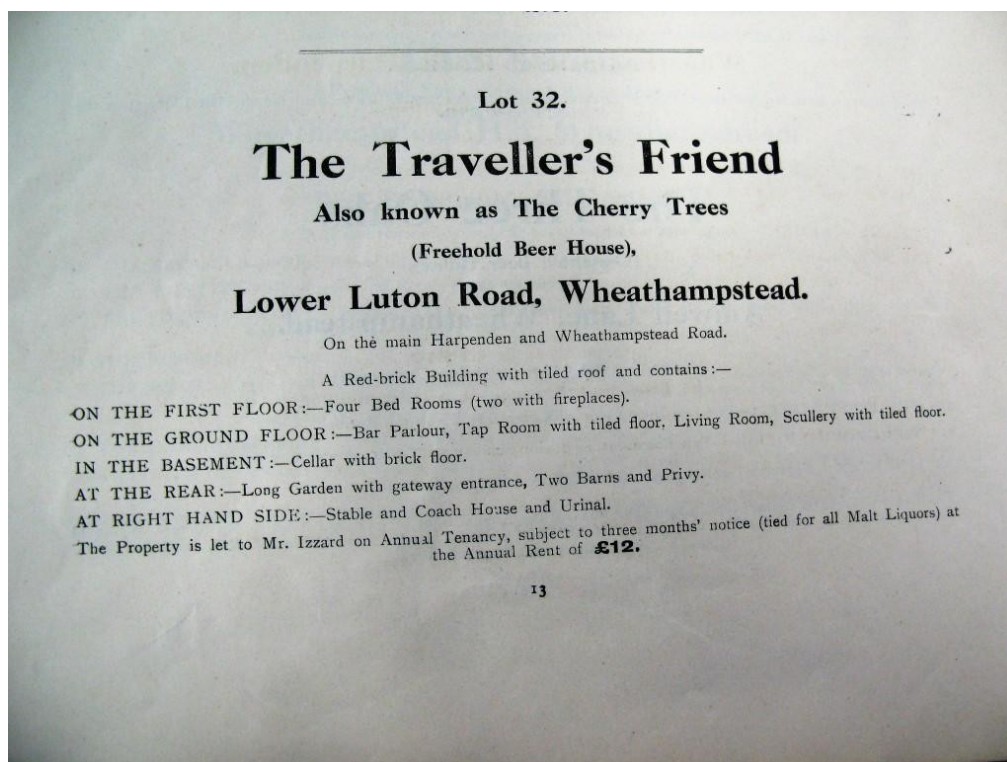
that evening and again in the morning when he said he felt better. However, the pain worsened during the day and he died that evening. Dr Smallwood had found no external signs of injury and thought that death was caused by 'intestinal obstruction which would probably be due to the accident and caused by the fall'. The jury returned their verdict accordingly.

By 1904 the premises were owned by Pryor Reid and the annual value was £24.

The Izzards stayed at The Cherry Trees until at least 1920 by which date it was again called The Traveller's Friend.

Postscript

In 1920, The Traveller's Friend was included as Lot 32 in the sale of the estate of the Hatfield Brewery. It was a substantial property.



The Cherry Trees is now an Indian restaurant.