

The Swan



The Swan in the 19th century

This Grade II listed building dates from about 1500 when it was a late medieval open hall house built as a private dwelling. It is one of Wheathampstead's three most historic inns, the other two being the Bull and the Bell both of which were first recorded in 1617. Inns were the elite of the victualling trade with a legal obligation to offer a bed for the night to the *bona fide* traveller. During a refurbishment at the Swan in October 1981 a 16th-century fireplace was uncovered, together with ancient cupboards, clay pipes, centuries-old bricks, beams and walls made of cow dung, lime and horse hair. Some of the beams are ship's beams, one with a picture of a ship drawn on it.ⁱ

For travellers arriving from St Albans, the Swan would have been the first inn they reached in the village, situated as it is at the junction with the road to Hatfield. It stood almost opposite Town Farm before that was demolished in 1971, and directly opposite the Ship Inn which closed in 1910.

An inventory of 1743 lists 'a maltings, barn, stables, meal lofts, yard, garden, orchard and outhouses, also 12 acres of land scattered in closes and open field strips – another messuage [*dwelling*] and little orchard'. The following year John House of the Grove bought the property and it remained in the ownership of the House family for more than a hundred years. Within living memory a blacksmith worked from a smithy in the Swan yard.

The Poor Rate Assessments for 1833 to 1835 identify Joseph Thorne as licensee of the Swan. The owner was John House. Joseph Thorne died in 1835 and the licence of the 'Swan Commercial House' was transferred to Samuel Smith.ⁱⁱ

He appeared at the St Albans Borough Petty Sessions in February 1840 as the defendant in a case of assault brought by Henry Sibley, maltster and farmer of Wheathampstead. Sibley said that he had been for a drink at the Bell at 4.30 on a Saturday and Smith was in the parlour. Smith had abused him, held his fist in his

face and said he would kick him from one end of the village to the other. After hearing evidence from witnesses, the magistrates fined Smith 2s.6d. with 16s.6d. costs. Smith said 'I will not pay one penny' and the Town Clerk then read out a clause from the relevant Act of Parliament 'that any person found guilty of an assault by two magistrates and refusing to pay the fine and expenses shall be committed to the House of Correction to hard labour for not exceeding three months'. The defendant then angrily threw down a sovereign on the table (Hertford Mercury 7 March 1840).

The 1841 census describes Samuel Smith as 'Publican and farmer' aged 35, living at the Swan with his wife, mother-in-law and two lodgers. The 1841 Tithe Map Index describes the premises as the Swan Inn and a blacksmith's shop and confirms that John Isaac House was the owner and Samuel Smith and others were the occupiers.

On 6 September 1842 a notice appeared in the parish records stating that Samuel Smith intended to apply at the next Annual General Licensing Meeting for a transfer of the licence from himself to Francis Hewson, also a resident of Wheathampstead. The transfer was effected and Hewson took over the Swan. His wife Maria bore their first son, Alfred, two years later followed by Laura in the following year.

The Hertford Mercury (4 May 1844) carried an advertisement for a meeting of the 'Wheathamsted Free Trade Club' to be held on 9 May at 6.30 at The Swan. Mr C.H. Lattimore, the Rev T. Gilbert and other advocates of free trade were expected to address the meeting. This appears to have been a regular event; the Hertford Mercury dated 21 September in the same year carried a long report of another such meeting held at the Swan a few days earlier. About 40 people sat down to a dinner that was served in a large room behind the Swan 'which was tastefully fitted up for the occasion and decorated with dahlias of every hue neatly arranged.' 'Excellent and abundant provision' for the dinner had been made by the host, Mr Hewson.

A gallery was fitted up on one side of the building for the accommodation of the ladies of Wheathamsted, who were anxious to be present at the demonstration. About forty persons sat down to dinner, for which excellent and abundant provision had been made by Mr. Hewson, the host. After dinner many persons came into hear the speeches, and amongst them, a number of agricultural labourers and their wives. The wives of the farmers and tradesmen of the neighbourhood also made their appearance before the meeting had been far advanced, and remained until near the conclusion, being evidently much interested by the proceedings. The numbers present would doubtless have been considerably augmented if the weather had been more favourable. The divine blessing was asked before, and thanks returned after dinner by the Rev. T. Gilbert.

Mr Lattimore and others made speeches and toasts were drunk to the Queen, the Prince of Wales, the Dowager, Prince Albert and the rest of the royal family.

It was at about this time that Mr Lattimore, who owned the Ship pub across the road, renamed it 'The Free Trader'. He was a passionate advocate of free trade and corresponded with William Cobbett.

Thomas Gilbert was minister at the Congregational Church on Brewhouse Hill.

The Swan was the venue for many dinners and parties from an early date. For example, Mr Lattimore chaired the anniversary meeting of the Wheathampstead Lodge of Oddfellows there in June 1846.

Inquests were also held, such as the one in June 1844 into the death of James Mardall of Leasey Bridge Farm who had cut his own throat two days before; the verdict was 'temporary insanity' (Hertford Mercury 15 June 1844). In February 1847, another inquest concerned the death of a 21-year-old man employed by Mr Lattimore who had died suddenly at Mr Sibley's malting. The jury returned a verdict of 'Died by the visitation of God'.

Francis Hewson died late in 1848. His and Maria's third child had been baptised in July of that year. We know that Maria took over the licence because she is named as the landlady in a report in the Hertford Mercury on 4 August 1849 which described how she had had to call PC Beckwith to deal with a fight taking place in the taproom. The Liberty Petty Sessions heard how a man named Thrale had struck the policeman; he was committed for trial at the Quarter Sessions.

Maria married her second husband, Charles Burgess who came from Tewin, in the autumn of 1849 and the licence was transferred to him shortly afterwards. Their first child together, Frederick, was born early in 1851.

The census in that year tells us that Charles and Maria Burgess, their four children (three from Maria's first marriage), three lodgers and two servants, one of whom is a horse keeper, lived at the Swan. In the 1854 Craven's directory, Charles is listed as a 'victualler and licensed to let horses for hire'.ⁱⁱⁱ Supplying food and transport had become important aspects of the business.

The *Essex Standard* dated 8 November 1854 reported the following story.

A STRANGE WAGER

A few days since, John Jackson, alias Dilly, was committed for trial at St Albans for stealing a pair of trousers, the property of Mr Archer, from the Swan Inn Wheathampstead. The trousers were found on the prisoner shortly after they were missed and he admitted having taken them from a line in the Swan yard. The prisoner, who had been only three weeks out of gaol, had made a wager that he would be the first prisoner in the new lock-up at Wheathampstead. He won his wager.

Charles and Maria Burgess carried on the business of catering for large parties. On 3 April 1858, the Members of the Swan Inn Benefit Society held their Annual Meeting. The *Herts Ad* reported that 'at two o'clock upwards of twenty partook of a dinner served up in Burgess's well-known style; and a very pleasant evening was spent.' On 14 July, the Grove Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows celebrated their anniversary at the Swan with 'a very excellent dinner which reflected much credit on the host and hostess'. 'The members parted at a good hour, highly pleased with their friendly meeting.'

A clever capture at the Swan Inn was reported in the *Herts Advertiser* on 19 February 1859 when PC Knight on his nightly rounds called in at the Swan, spotted an unfamiliar face in the taproom and, being the good policeman that he was, became suspicious and made enquiries or, as he called them, 'interrogatories'. He discovered the man to be one Thomas Shaw, labourer from Markyate Street who had 'burglariously' entered a house there and stolen a purse. We get some idea of the layout of rooms in the Swan from his account:

After a few interrogatories, I requested him to walk into the club room; upon entering, I saw him take the purse (produced) out of his pocket and lay it on the table. I said – "Why did you lay it there?" He replied, "the money in it does not belong to me." I then examined the purse and found it contained 12 sovereigns, 13 half-sovereigns, 3s 6d, in silver ...etc.^{iv}

Thomas Shaw confessed and was committed to the Assizes at Hertford.

The 1860s and 1870s were busy times at the Swan. It was the venue for many different types of activity and all sorts of people. There were meetings of the Grove Lodge and dinners for the Oddfellows Friendly Society. Bell-ringers and churchwardens met at the Swan, and auctions of land, property and household effects were frequently held. In May 1860 Mr J. Cumberland held a major auction of 19 lots at the Swan. Lot 10 was the 'dwelling house and Blacksmith's yard, garden and premises adjoining the Swan at the corner of the roads leading to St Albans and Harpenden in the occupation of Mr John Messer'. In August 1871, following the death of Mr John Isaac House, an auction held at the Swan disposed of 31 portions of the House estate. 'The unusually large room at the Swan could scarcely accommodate the large company that assembled,' reported the *Herts Advertiser*.

On Wednesday 25 July 1860, the Independent Order of Oddfellows celebrated their 17th anniversary with a friendly all-day cricket match on Nomansland from 10.00 am till 4.00 pm, a parade and march round the village complete with flag and brass band, and a sumptuous dinner for 60 members at the Swan. After dinner, various songs and recitations were rendered by the company, who spent a most friendly evening, and did not break up until a late hour. The band, which acquitted itself admirably, was quite a novelty for this occasion, and attracted the attendance and admiration of nearly all the village.

When the railway arrived in Wheathampstead in September 1860, Mr Burgess provided a dinner for 60 people, with 'refreshments of every kind on the ground, at moderate charges', with the accompaniment of the St Albans band.

The Swan continued to be the venue for inquests and auctions. For example, the *Hertford Mercury* dated June 16 1860 included this report of an inquest held at the Swan.

FATAL ACCIDENTS AT WHEATHAMSTEAD.—Two inquests were held on Friday the 8th inst., at the Swan Inn, Wheathampstead, on view of the bodies of James East and Henry Burr, aged respectively 23 and 35, of Redbourn, who lost their lives under the following circumstances. It appeared that the deceased men with others were attending ten or twelve railway wagons, on the Luton, Welwyn, and Dunstable Railway, employed in delivering a quantity of compost at Water End Farm. Having deposited their freight the men jumped up into the wagons for the purpose of riding back, East and Burr sitting in separate wagons, on the edge of the hind part, which is about sixteen inches high, with their feet resting inside the wagon. The train being propelled by horse power, the driver upon starting, called out as is usual, "look out," and the wagons being put in motion there was a smart jerk, which threw out East and Burr, who were run over by the following wagons and killed, one having his chest crushed and the other being fatally injured in the abdomen.—Verdict—Accidental Deaths.

The 1861 census confirms that Charles Burgess was still the publican at the Swan and was also farming 33 acres. On census night, in addition to Charles (aged 45), there was his wife Maria (44), their four children, now aged from 17 to 10, three visitors (a married couple also named Burgess and their 2-year-old son), a 14-year-old servant, and two lodgers (a plumber and a bookseller).

'Trouble at the Swan' was a headline in the *Herts Advertiser* of July 1862, when it reported an incident at Wheathampstead. John Tooley and Charles Humphrey were convicted of being drunk and fighting in the street near the Swan Inn on Sunday night 20 July at ten minutes past ten o'clock. Humphrey went home quietly and was fined 6d. with costs, but Tooley 'blackguarded' two policemen and was afterwards in such a state of drunkenness near the Railway Tavern that he had to be dragged to the village lock-up. His fine was 5s. Both men were ordered to pay fines or go to prison for 14 days with hard labour. ^v

The Swan had its share of troublesome customers. For example, William Rainsden (spelled 'Rainsdown' in the *Herts Advertiser* report on 26 September 1868) was charged with being drunk and disorderly in the Swan and refusing to leave when requested by the police. Police sergeant Chapman gave evidence that Mrs Burgess had called him just before midnight to say there were two men in the pub who would not leave. He eventually had to carry Rainsden, who was 'in a state of drunkenness' out of the pub. He found him and Thomas Munt asleep in a ditch at two o'clock next morning. Neither Rainsden nor Munt appeared in court but both were convicted of both offences. Rainsden had three previous convictions and was fined £1. 10s. with 12s. 6d. costs or two months' imprisonment; Munt was fined 10s. with 12s.6d. costs or one month's imprisonment.

William Rainsden was often in trouble with the law. In 1876, he was convicted of stealing a clock from the tap room of the Park Hotel and sentenced to two months' hard labour and in 1878 he was convicted of refusing to leave the Park Hotel when requested to do so and for assaulting the landlord. By that date, he had eleven previous convictions.

Despite these occasional problems, the Swan continued to be a favoured venue. Parties came from London on their annual works outings. In 1870 a party from the Herbert Company (scales manufacturers since 1740) travelled by horse and carriage from Kings Cross to Wheathampstead taking 4½ hours to reach Nomansland. The next year they travelled by train, catching the 9.22am from Kings Cross and returning on the 7.52pm.

Thomas Herbert wrote to Mr Burgess:

'I write this note to inform you we have decided on our annual at your Inn on Saturday July 15th 1871 to consist of Meat, Poultry, Pastry, Dessert after, as agreed to be at table about 1 o'clock. We shall arrive by fast train to Wheathampstead. Number about 22.'

A major auction was held at the Swan in 1870 following the death of Mrs Thrale of Maltings Farm, which stood a short distance down the High Street. The estate was sold in 12 lots, including the '10 quarter malting', numerous farm premises, 14 cottages and 71 acres of land.

The 1871 census tells us that Charles and Maria had five boarders, all stable lads or agricultural labourers, and one servant. Their unmarried daughter Laura was living at home. Charles died on 18 December in that same year and the licence was transferred to his widow Maria. She decided to narrow the range of business activity at the Swan, as shown by this advertisement that appeared in the *Herts Ad* on 13 January 1872.

WHEATHAMSTEAD, HERTS.

MR. J. CUMBERLAND

Will sell by auction, on the premises, at the Swan Inn, Wheathamstead, on WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17TH, 1872, at 1 for 2 o'clock in the afternoon punctually, by order of Mrs. Burgess,

A QUANTITY of FARMING EFFECTS, comprising 3 active Cart Horses, 2 dung carts, 3 sets of cart harness, 2 ploughs, 2 sets of harrows, capital corn drill, by "Davis," iron roll, scuffler, dressing machine, quantity of barn tackle, iron horse drag, set of silver-plated gig harness, a double set of silver-plated harness, &c.; also a small Brewing Plant, and various other effects.

May be viewed on the morning of sale, and catalogues had at the place of sale; and at the auctioneer's offices, Market Hill, Luton.

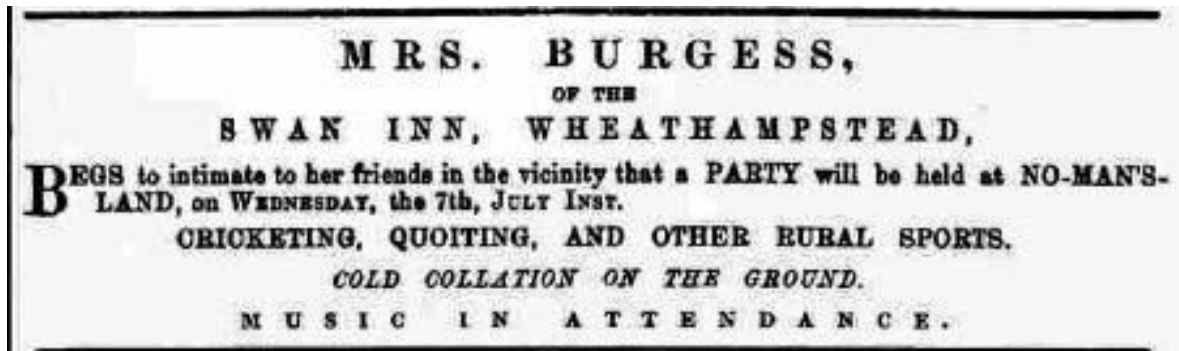
A happier event took place at the Swan in 1873, as reported in the *Herts Advertiser* on 1 March.

WHEATHAMPSTEAD.

MARRIAGE.—The usual quiet of the village of Wheathampstead was on Tuesday disturbed by the wedding festivities of Mr. W. H. Nutting, of St. Alban's, and Miss Laura Huson, daughter of Mrs. Burgess, of the Swan Inn, Wheathampstead. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. O. W. Davys, assisted by the curate; and the bridal party, with the guests to the number of forty, sat down to breakfast at the Swan. The health of the bride and bridegroom, and other appropriate toasts were proposed and responded to, and the St. Alban's Abbey ringers rang out merry peals from the church bells at intervals during the day.

Also in 1873, another major auction was held at the Swan, this time of a number of properties at The Folly, including the Rose & Crown and ten cottages which were sold in four lots; all were freehold (*Herts Advertiser* 8 November).

Two years later, in April 1875, Mrs Burgess put this advertisement in the *Herts Advertiser*.



The advertisement appeared on the same date, indeed on the same page, as a much larger advertisement in which Mrs Dance, the new licensee at the King William on Nomansland, announced the re-launch of that establishment as the Park Hotel, offering a range of delights including cricket, archery and quoits. It would appear that Mrs Burgess did not welcome Mrs Dance's initiative – her advertisement looks like a 'spoiler'.

Mrs Burgess continued to manage the catering side of the business. For example, she successfully applied to the County Petty Sessions to stay open for an extra hour on Wednesday 26 January 1878 for the annual dinner of Marshall's Charity at which the parish officers of Harpenden and Wheathampstead would be present.

In April 1881, aged 63, she was running the business with the help of one servant. She had nine lodgers, several of whom worked with horses: one was a trainer of hunters and race horses, two were ostlers, and one made horse collars. Three were farm labourers; a tailor and a photographer completed the number.

The *Hertford Mercury* dated 22 October 1881 published a long report of a theft at the Swan. Charles Augustus Freemantle, 24, described as a clerk of New York, appeared at St Albans Divisional Court accused of stealing a set of gold studs, a cigar case and a handkerchief from George Jarvis. Both men were lodgers at the Swan. George Jarvis identified the items, which were produced in court, as his and said that he had left them in his room at the Swan. A number of other witnesses gave evidence and the story emerged that Freemantle had tried to sell the items to various people in the village at knock-down prices. Freemantle, 'the strangeness of whose dress and whose pleasantries of manner threw considerable amusement into the case' defended himself. He said he was a travelling comedian only lately he had been rather distressed (laughter in court). He claimed that he had found the articles on the floor, nobody had claimed them, and he 'naturally supposed they belonged to him'. The jury found him guilty, whereupon John Pannell, a warder at St Albans Prison, said that he had known Freemantle (then calling himself William Gadsby) as

an inmate of Ilford Gaol. Freemantle was sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour.

In May 1882, the licence was transferred to Maria Burgess's son Frederick (Herts Ad 13 May). As licensee's wife or as licensee, Maria Hewson/Burgess had been at the Swan for 40 years.

The parish records show that Frederick's first son, Valentine, was baptised on 19 March 1884. His mother Harriet died aged 23 sometime in the first three months of that year so it can be assumed that she died in childbirth.

Frederick married again soon afterwards; his first child with his second wife, Frances, was baptised on 16 January 1886.

The Herts Ad of 10 September 1887 reported that Fred Burgess (named Frank in the newspaper) had appeared at St Albans Divisional Sessions charged with 'keeping his house open in prohibited hours'. The case was 'very amusing'. PC Holmwood had looked into the yard at the Swan at 11.10 pm and seen Mr Burgess, Thomas Skillman, another man and a boy all dressed in women's clothes. He had hidden in the adjoining schoolroom, watched the men go into the pub and saw Burgess going behind the bar. When asked what he would like to drink, the unnamed man had said 'I'll have a drop of gin' in a woman's voice (laughter in court). The boy, who was named Nutting, was wearing girls' clothes and hat. 'Mr Euson, the nephew of the defendant, was dressed in ladies' clothes and Skillman lit a match to see if he had trousers on (roars of laughter).' The case rested on whether Burgess had taken any money for the drinks. Since this was not clear and in any case even PC Holmwood thought the whole affair was a 'lark', the police withdrew the summons. Mr Euson (probably Hewson), who was an assistant master at Hertingfordbury School, may have faced some consequences! Skillman was licensee at the Bricklayers Arms at the time and had been friends with Burgess since they were children. The boy Nutting was Burgess's nephew; his mother later took the licence at the Bricklayers Arms.

Fred Burgess's next appearance in court was in March 1888 when he gave evidence at the St Albans County Court in a dispute about the sale and non-delivery of a quantity of barley. He had overheard a conversation in the Swan in which a deal had been agreed. The court decided that the evidence of the plaintiff Charles Sibley, corn dealer of Gustard Wood, 'was not to be relied upon' and found for the defendant Mr Pearce. The Herts Ad of 31 March reported the case at length under the headline 'An Important Case to Corn Dealers'.

Maria Burgess died in the following year aged 71.

A year later, Laura Nutting (née Hewson), returned to Wheathampstead a widow, her husband having died aged only 34. She took over the licence of the Bricklayers Arms from Thomas Skillman; her link with the Burgesses at the Swan no doubt helped when she applied for the licence.



The Swan in the late 19th century

The 1891 census confirms that Fred Burgess, now aged 40, was at the Swan with his wife Frances, four young children including twins under a year old, two lodgers and a 17-year-old servant.^{vi} However, he gave up the licence later in that year; the Herts Ad dated 8 August 1891 reports that a Protection Order had been granted to Alfred Reeves. By 1901, Fred Burgess had moved with his family to Islington where he was working as a house decorator.

Alfred Reeves stayed at the Swan for barely nine months; the licence was transferred to Charlotte Colman the following May (Herts Ad 7 May 1892). She stayed until at least 1895, when Kelly's Directory lists her as licensee at the 'Swan Public House'.^{vii}

On 6 February 1897, the Herts Ad reported on the inquest of 77-year-old Elizabeth Hale, wife of Joseph Hale, licensee of the Walnut Tree; it was held at the Swan. She had been unwell for two or three years and had died very suddenly. The doctor said she had died of heart disease and 'decay of nature'.

The Swan was sold in November 1897 as part of the estate of the Harpenden Brewery. The sales catalogue described it as follows.

A large old-fashioned painted and tiled House with strip of Garden in front, containing Bar, Tap Room, Kitchen, Pantry, and Scullery, Parlour, Club Room, and Sitting Room on the Ground Floor; lofty cellar in Basement, and on the Upper Floors are five Bed Rooms, large Store Rooms, and two Attics. Small outlet with brick and tiled barn, and a large Stable Yard, containing four Loose Boxes, and two 3-stall Stables with Lofts over, lock-up Coach House, Cart Shed and Harness Room. There are also Paddock and Gardens possessing long frontage to the Main Road.

In the occupation of Mr A. Brown at £10 per annum.

A large Blacksmith's shop, with Shed and Warehouse, forms part of this property but is let off separately to Mr John Smith at £10 per annum.

Copyhold of the Manor of Wheathampstead

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The reference to 'Mr A.Brown' is an error. The licensee was Mrs Agnes Brown; she is listed as licensee of the Swan in Kelly's Directory 1899. She was born in Necton Road, Wheathampstead and had held the licence of the Bricklayers Arms for a short time in the early 1890s.

She carried on the catering side of the business. For example, the first annual works outing of Smiths Printing and Publishing Agency of St Albans was celebrated with a smoking concert at the Swan on 8 September 1899. A programme of piano solos, songs, comic songs, recitations, and a piano and cornet duet made up a 'jovial evening' (Herts Ad 22 September 1900).

The 1901 census states that Agnes' husband George, who came from Cambridgeshire, held the licence; he was also a builder's clerk.

The Wheathampstead Cricket Club held a smoking concert at the Swan on 14 March 1907, presided over by Mr J.Fenwick Owen, the local builder. A 'crowded attendance' enjoyed songs being sung and 'sleight of hand tricks' performed. The season had not been a success 'from the winning point of view' but several new young players had joined the club. The collection on behalf of the Cricket Club was the largest ever taken.



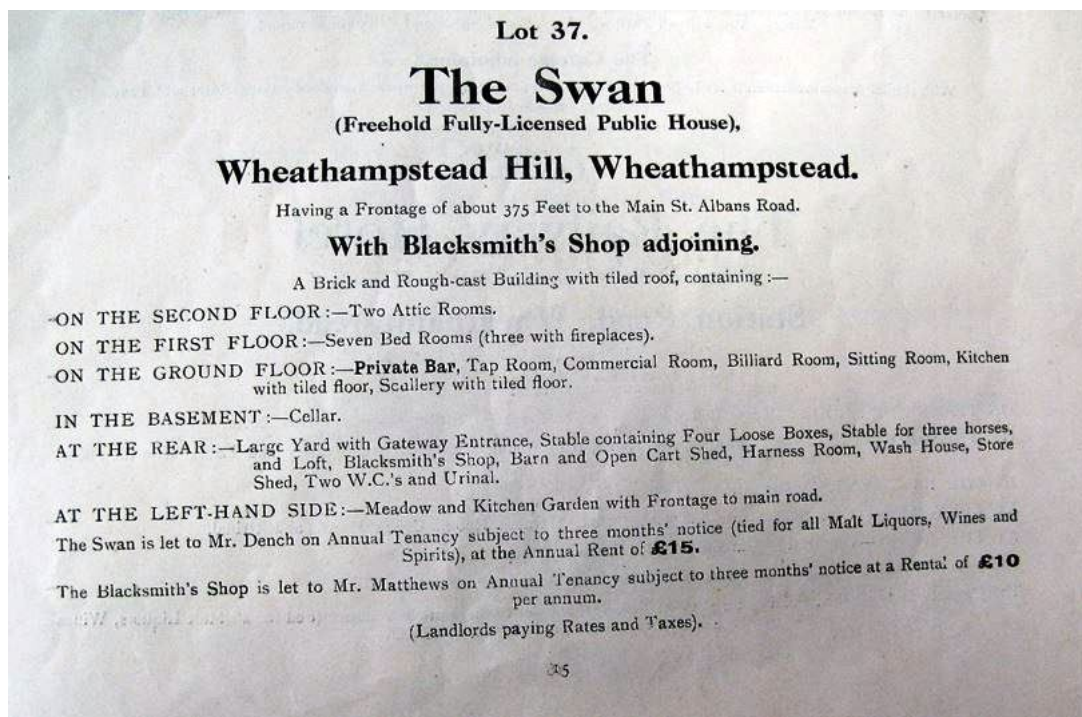
The Swan in about 1900

The 1911 census names 'Agnes Keturah Brown' as holder of the licence of the Swan. George is still a builder's clerk. Their two adult sons are a railway clerk and a travelling glove merchant.

She must have given up the licence soon afterwards; the 1914 Kelly's Directory records a Londoner from Walworth, Alfred Edward Gates (age 42), as landlord. Three years earlier, he was living in Shoreditch and employed as a zinc worker.

Postscript

The Swan changed hands again in 1920 when the Hatfield Brewery estate was sold. The sale catalogue described it thus:



ⁱ Jan Woodhams, <http://www.wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk>.

ⁱⁱ White's Directory, 1837.

ⁱⁱⁱ Craven's Commercial Directory, 1854.

^{iv} *Herts Advertiser*, 19 February 1859.

^v *Herts Advertiser*, 2 August 1862.

^{vi} 1891 census. <https://www.ukcensusonline.com>

^{vii} Kelly's Directory, 1895.