

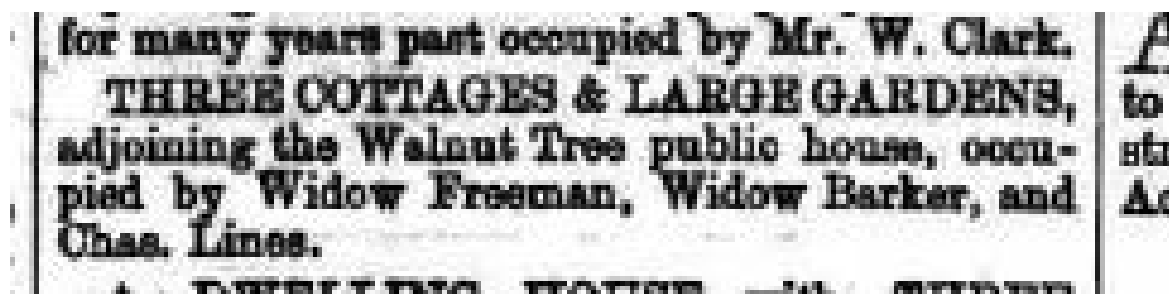
The Walnut Tree



Origins

According to its listing by Historic England, the oldest part of the building that was once The Walnut Tree public house and still stands in what is now Church Street dates from the 17th century. But when did it first become a beerhouse?

The earliest mention of The Walnut Tree by name appears in an advertisement in the Herts Advertiser dated 25 November 1871 when it was included in an auction sale of properties owned by the late John Isaac House.



However, the first mention of a beerhouse in this part of the village is in the 1851 census where Mary A. Dunham is described as a 'beershop keeper' in Bury Green but the beershop is not named. This census does not mention either Brewhouse Hill or Church Street by name so it is reasonable to infer that the name 'Bury Green' covered a wider area than it does today.

It appears to be on the basis of this entry in the 1851 census that Volume V 'The Old Order Changeth' in the series 'Wheathampstead and Harpenden'¹ asserts on page 190 "Mary Dunham (1851) ran a beerhouse in Church Street, which became The Walnut Tree around 1900 and traded until the 1950s" but it cites no supporting evidence.

We have to go back to an earlier date and work forward to establish the link.

¹ The History Publishing Society (1991)

White's 1837 Directory for Wheathampstead lists the following but without giving exact locations:

Ann Denham – Bricklayer
 Ann Denham – Retailer of beer
 James Denham – Retailer of beer (We know that he was licensee at The Ship)

At about the same time, the 1841 Tithe Index includes these entries:

14. Chapel & Yard	George Sutton & Others	P. Parrott
15. House, Cottages etc.	Charles King	Dean of Westminster
16. Cottage & Garden	Charles Lines &	J.I. House
17. Cottage & Gardens	Others	
18. Cottage & Premises	Ann Dunham	Ann Dunham
19. Wheelers Shop, House etc.	Robert Bray &	J.I. House
20. Swan Inn & Black Smith's Shop	Others	" "
	Saml. Smith &	
	Others	
	George Hask &	Wm. Wright

The Tithe Map shows that plots 16 to 19 were on the south side of what is now Brewhouse Hill, running down to The Swan, so we are in the right area.

As shown, Plot 17 was owned by J.I. House and occupied by Charles Lines, whose name appears in the advertisement shown above. Plot 18 was owned and occupied by Ann Dunham. The 1841 census shows that she was aged 70 and lived in Bury Green. Her occupation is given as 'Bricklayer'. This must be the first Ann Denham that appears in the 1837 Directory so there were two Ann Denham/Dunhams.

The 1841 census also has a Mary Anne Dunham (35) living in Bury Green; she has no listed occupation but her father and two brothers are bricklayers. This is the same Mary A. Dunham who appears in the 1851 census as a beershop keeper in Bury Green. The 1850 and 1855 Post Office Directories list her as a beer retailer. However, by 1861, she is living in Kimpton and working as housekeeper for her widowed nephew and his young children.

The 1861 census does not list a beershop in Bury Green but a certain George Odell (34), a labourer, was living there. Just a year later, Kelly's Directory (1862) lists him as a beer retailer.

Kelly's (1869) again lists him as a beer seller in Wheathampstead but does not say where he lived nor name his beershop. The 1871 census shows him only as a bricklayer but he was living in Bury Green in the same house as was occupied by Mary Anne Dunham (or so we can infer from the names of the neighbours). It is possible that the census enumerators for 1861 and for 1871 made an incomplete entry but it seems more likely that, for reasons of his own, George Odell chose not to tell them about his beerselling activities, though he was happy to be included in Kelly's Directory, which was effectively an advertisement.

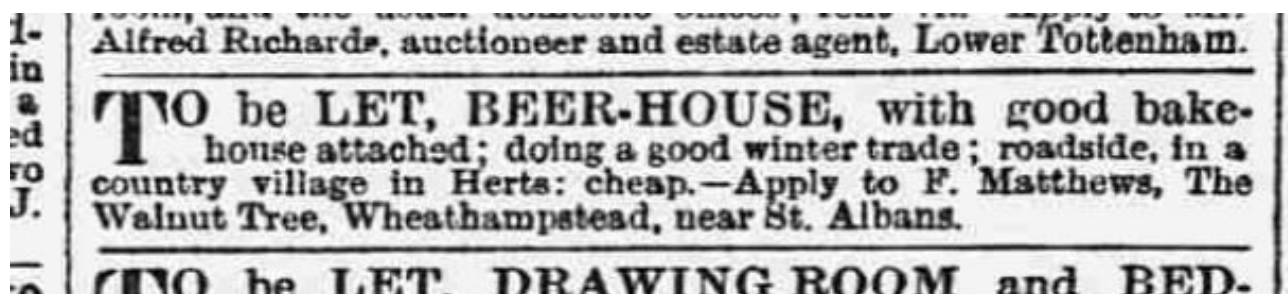
If we combine all this evidence with the fact that Pigot's Directory for 1872 mentions The Walnut Tree by name, it seems reasonable to conclude that the origins of The Walnut Tree go back to at least 1837, the licensees from then to 1871 being Ann Denham/Dunham, Mary Anne Dunham and George Odell.

From 1871 to 1914

We can infer that The Walnut Tree was a relatively respectable establishment in the 1870s from the fact that an inquest was held there in 1876. A 58-year-old lady, Jane Woodward, had been found dead in a stubble field on Friday 11 August. The inquest was held on the following day when she was described as an 'infirm old lady' who was 'in the habit of wandering about'. The jury decided that she had died from natural causes.

The licence changed hands again in the 1870s; Kelly's Directory (1878) lists Thomas Reid as a beer retailer. Although he is described in the 1881 census as a farm labourer, his address is given as 'Berry Green Public House' where he lives with his wife Harriet, a lodger, and a 24-year-old domestic servant. Kelly's 1882 lists him as a beer retailer.

Early in 1882, the licence must have transferred to Frank Matthews because this advertisement appeared in The Standard on 30 September 1882.



The response must have been immediate because on 20 October 1882 the County Petty Sessions made a Protection Order to transfer the licence from Frank Matthews to William Walker. He had been listed in the 1881 census as living in Bury Green with his family but his occupation was given as 'farm labourer'.

The next few years seem to have been relatively quiet but, in the second half of the 1880s, life at The Walnut Tree became more lively. For example, on 21 August 1886, the Herts Advertiser reported that two young men, George Lawrance and Edward Merritt, were summoned for being drunk and disorderly on 8 August. They pleaded not guilty but Police Constable Holmwood gave evidence that on the previous Sunday evening he had heard a disturbance near The Walnut Tree beerhouse and found Merritt drunk, fighting with another person, and using foul language. Lawrance was also there and also drunk. PC Holmwood told Merritt that he should go indoors but instead he walked off down the road with Lawrance, though they both ultimately went home. Ellen Wix (Wicks) gave evidence for the defence, saying that they were not drunk². The Chairman of the Bench said that, in the absence of corroborative evidence, the defendants would be given the benefit of the doubt and they were acquitted. This cannot have pleased Constable Holmwood; George Lawrance was often in court at this time.

² It appears that this was the 32-year-old unmarried daughter of William and Eliza Wicks who lived on The Hill. Mother, daughter and a sister were all straw plaiters.

Then, on 26 August in the same year, 68-year-old John Palmer died sitting in the bar. At the inquest, evidence was given that he had gone to The Walnut Tree at 10 o'clock in the morning with his brother George and two companions, William Wix (Wicks) (father of Ellen) and James Peacock.

The report continues:

'They partook of some beer there. Deceased had a piece of bread and pork in his hand and said "I will eat this before I die". He put a little bit in his mouth, and almost immediately placed his hands on his knees and never spoke afterwards. On going to his assistance, his brother found that he was dead. Dr Speckman, who happened to be in the neighbourhood, was called in, and gave it as his opinion that death resulted from heart disease. The jury returned a verdict accordingly.'

Within a few months, in May 1887, two reports appeared in the Herts Ad describing a theft that had taken place at The Walnut Tree. Harry Vass, a cowman who had been a lodger for about two years and was a nephew of Mrs Lucy Walker, the landlord's wife, was charged at the Magistrates Court with stealing 4s. 5 1/2d. from a drawer in Mrs Walker's bedroom. She gave evidence that she had put a pocket handkerchief full of coppers in the drawer at about half past five but "She went upstairs again about eight o'clock, it was then nearly dark. She went towards the bed and as she did so she saw the carpet move." Frightened, she fetched her son Harry and her husband who searched the room but found no one. However, Harry Walker then found Harry Vass hiding in a cupboard in another room. When asked what he was doing in the cupboard, he replied that he thought he was in bed. They searched him and found a pocket full of coppers and, on checking the drawer, found that some of the coppers were missing, including two "bright" coins that Mrs Walker had noticed earlier. PC Holmwood was called and arrested Vass, who commented "When the drink's in, the wit is out" but PC Holmwood did not think he was drunk. He was remanded for a week and, when he appeared at the Divisional Sessions, pleaded not guilty, adding that "if guilty he did not know it as he was drunk at the time." Vass's solicitor asked the bench to take into account the defendant's previous good character and that he claimed to have been under the influence of drink. Mrs Walker then said that she hoped the bench would "deal very leniently with him as there was not the slightest desire on her part that he should be punished, she simply requiring that he should be taught not to meddle with what did not belong to him." Vass was sentenced to 14 days' imprisonment with hard labour.

Less than a year later, in April 1888, William Walker appeared at the Petty Sessions charged with opening in prohibited hours. The story in the Herts Ad is worth reading in full (on the next page), including Mrs Walker's comment that "They had never been charged with any offence before this, and she believed it was only out of spite."

A PUBLICAN SUMMONED.

William Walker, of The Walnut Tree, Wheathampstead, was summoned for keeping open that house during prohibited hours on March 25th. — Mr. Annealey defended. The defendant's wife appeared. — P.C. Keating said that on the Sunday in question, at five minutes to 12, he went to the house and found a man named Low in the tap room with a pint of beer before him. In reply to witness, Mrs. Walker said the man was a lodger, and Low, in reply to the same question said "You can put me down as a lodger." Witness had since ascertained that the man had been lodging at the *Swan*. When witness served the summons on Walker, he said "I am very sorry, but I had Low there because he had no where else to go." — Cross-examined: The man Low got his living by going about with a begging-letter. Witness did not know that Low formerly lived at the "Walnut Tree." — The defence was that the man came to the house to have dinner, and that he did not pay for any drink. — Mrs. Walker was called, and said that Low had lodged at her house on and off for four years. They had never been charged with any offence before this, and she believed it was only out of spite—(laughter). Witness's husband invited Low to come to the house for dinner, as the man had no means. He came there and had his meals and refreshment, and had no money to pay for anything. — Supt. Hummerstone here proceeded to cross-examine the defendant's wife; but the Clerk (Mr. A. Rowden) pointed out that inasmuch as P.S. Hill had lodged the information, the Supt. had no right to examine, and this was the precise direction of the Home Secretary. — P.S. Hill then put the questions. — Lord Grimthorpe: It is quite clear that Low was not lodging at the house on this day. — The Bench decided that it appeared from the defence that no money was paid by Low, and the summons must be dismissed, but the Bench took favourable notice of the action of the policeman.

Before long, Walker was in trouble again. He appeared at the Divisional Petty Sessions in December 1888 charged with permitting drunkenness and gambling on his premises. He did

not attend the hearing and his wife spoke on his behalf. A witness, named as Harry Bass, labourer, (perhaps the Harry Vass of the previous trial?) said that he had played three or four games of dominoes and drunk four pints of beer with a man named Lawrance (possibly the same Lawrance as appeared in the case reported above) who had paid for the beer. The case was dismissed on the grounds that playing dominoes was not an offence and there was no evidence that money had been passed. The police then withdrew the charge of permitting drunkenness.

While Walker seems to have led a charmed life in the courtroom, it began to catch up with him. At the annual Divisional Licensing Session in August 1889, his licence was renewed but he was cautioned as to the way in which he had conducted his house during the previous year.

It was probably to the relief of the police that by 1890 the Post Office Directory shows that the licence had been taken over by William Munt, a local man aged 34. He had been licensee at the Elephant & Castle in Amwell for the previous five years. He moved into the Walnut Tree with his wife Fanny (38) and three small children, all of whom had been born in Wheathampstead. The 1891 census describes him as a beer retailer living in an unnamed beerhouse in Church Street with his family. By 1895 he was a trustee of the Ancient Order of Foresters, attending their 21st anniversary celebrations and annual dinner at the Bell & Crown in March that year.

By 1897, Joseph Hale held the licence at the Walnut Tree. At the end of January in that year, a coroner's inquest was held at The Swan into the sudden death of his 77-year-old wife. The report in the Herts Ad goes into considerable detail with several witness statements but, having heard evidence that Mrs Hale had been unwell on the previous day, had had breathing difficulties for several years, and had suffered from 'heart disease and decay of nature', the jury returned a verdict that death was 'due to syncope' (low blood pressure).

His wife's death seems to have prompted Hale to give up the licence. In May 1897, a Protection Order was granted at St Albans Divisional Sessions in preparation for transferring the licence to John R. Nash. This appears to be the same John Nash as appears in the 1891 census, aged 66, having a grocery and draper's shop in the High Street next door to the White Hart. However, Nash was a common name in Wheathampstead at this time.

In November of the same year, The Walnut Tree was sold by the owners, the Harpenden Brewery. The sales particulars ³describe it as:

A brick and plaster and tiled House close to the Church and Schools with angle foreground and containing Tap Room, Parlour, Bar, Kitchen, and Scullery; good Cellar in Basement; and four Bed Rooms; Stable and Garden in rear; also a 4-roomed Cottage with Sheds etc. The whole in the occupation of Mr J.R.Nash at £16 per annum. Copyhold of manor of Wheathampstead.

³ HALS document: DE/Hx/E167

In January 1898 Nash appeared as one of several witnesses in the court case of a man accused of stealing three gold sovereigns from a widow in Harpenden. The accused had visited a series of pubs, including The Walnut Tree, unwisely paying for his drinks with sovereigns. He was convicted and sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labour.

At the Poor Rate Assessment in 1899, the Gross Value of the Walnut Tree was first set at £20 and the Rateable Value at £18. Mr Nash appealed and the valuations were reduced to £16 and £14 respectively.

A year later, the licence was transferred to Colin Hornville Gill, a boot maker who came from Portsmouth where his wife Sarah and daughter Ada were born.

Within a few months, the Gills appeared in court when Ada, aged 18, summoned her father for assault. The Herts Ad dated 29 Jan 1901 reported the story in considerable detail and with some amusement (see next two pages).

WHEATHAMPSTEAD.

WRANGLING AT THE WALNUT TREE.—The St. Albans Divisional Justices on Saturday had the unpleasant duty of enquiring into the details of a family squabble which took place at the Walnut Tree beer-house on September 10th, and as a sequel to which the landlord, Colin Gill, was summoned by his daughter, Ada Gill, for assault.—The defendant was represented by Mr. S. M. Robinson, of St. Albans.—The complainant, who appeared in court with her eye very much discoloured, gave particulars of the assault to the Bench, stating that between one and two o'clock on September 10th she was in the shop attached to the beer-house kept by her father when her father and mother "had a few words." A man named Hewson was called into the shop from the taproom, and then her father and mother again "had a few words." Defendant was about to strike her mother, when she got between them, and her father then gave her a blow in the eye and also struck her in the chest. The bruise on her eye was the result of the blow.—Cross-examined by Mr. Robinson: Complainant denied that her mother commenced the "row" by telling her father to turn Hewson out. Her mother took up a jug of water to throw it over her father, but he knocked the jug out of her hand and smashed it. She denied that she swore at her father, neither did she strike him in the face.—The mother of the complainant, Sarah Ann Gill, proved seeing the defendant strike her daughter in the eye and in the chest. The defendant commenced the disturbance and struck her, and she took up a jug of water to throw over him, but he knocked it out of her hand and

and she took up a jug of water to throw over him, but he knocked it out of her hand and smashed it. She admitted that she took three gingerbeer bottles and smashed them on the floor out of revenge—(laughter). The witness added that the witnesses whom the defendant was about to call were paid to do so, with beer and cigars and cigarettes.—Mr. Robinson contended that whatever assault there was, was committed by the daughter, and that if any blow was struck by the defendant, it was struck in self defence.—The defendant, who gave evidence on oath, told his story, which was to the effect that at about five minutes past one o'clock on the day referred to Hewson came into his house and asked for some beer and a pennyworth of pickles. He (defendant) went to draw the beer and fetch the pickles when his wife said, referring to Hewson, "Why don't you turn the — out? He insulted me on Saturday." Defendant thereupon said "If he insulted you I will call him in." Hewson was accordingly called into the shop, and Mrs. Gill then denied that she had accused him of assaulting her. Shortly afterwards she took up a jug of water and tried to throw it at him (defendant), but he pushed the jug away. She then took up three bottles of ginger-beer and threw them at him. Both his wife and daughter used bad language to Hewson. He asked them to leave off, and then they "turped on" him. His daughter had her sleeves turned up, and said she would "give it to him." "My girl can box nearly as good as a man," added the defendant. "I cannot use my right hand, but I put out my left hand and she jumped at me and it caught her on the eye." Continuing, defendant said that his wife went after him with a barrel tilter. He then went out, and she shut him out. Both his wife and daughter then set to smashing up the things in the shop, and did over £14 worth of damage.—George Hewson, who was next

the things in the shop, and did over £14 worth of damage.—George Hewson, who was next called for the defence, said when he went to the Walnut Tree for some beer and pickles the defendant asked him what he meant by insulting his wife. Witness went into the shop to speak to Mrs. Gill, asking her in what way he had insulted her, and she replied "I never said any such thing." She also said to her husband "Turn that man out." Mr. Gill said "He will go out when I'm ready." Mrs. Gill then threw a jug of water and three ginger beer bottles at him. Witness went into the taproom, and Mrs. Gill followed and gave him a "spank" on the side of the face. He "shoved" her off with his hand. The landlord came into the room and told his wife and daughter to "clear out," when his daughter deliberately struck him twice in the eye. His wife and daughter were knocking him about for two or three minutes. — George Bangs and Francis Hannell also called by the defendant, gave evidence in corroboration of Hewson's statement. — The magistrates having retired for a short time, decided that there were faults on both sides. They thought that the defendant ought not to have used the small amount of violence that he did, for it had been sufficient to make a very ugly mark upon his daughter's eye. There had evidently been a great deal of provocation, and the case would therefore be dismissed.—A charge of assault preferred against George Hewson by Mrs. Sarah Gill was withdrawn.

The George Hewson who gave evidence was very probably related to the Hewson family, members of which were at various times licensees of The Swan, The Railway Hotel and The Bricklayers Arms.

In 1904, the County Licensing Committee listed The Walnut Tree as having a 'beer on' licence and owned by Glover & Son, by then part of the Hatfield and Harpenden Brewery Ltd.

The Gills must have moved on soon afterwards as the following advertisement appeared in the Herts Ad on 3 April 1905; it shows that Frederick Lodge was licensee.

PRYOR, REID & Co., LTD., BREWERS, HATFIELD, HERTS.—Price List: Beer in casks—P. A. (Indian Pale Ale), 6s. 9d. per pin; A. N. (Light Sparkling Ale), 4s. 6d.; Double Stout, 6s. 9d.; Porter, 4s. 6d. Beer in bottle—P. A., 3s. 6d. per doz. (pints); Extra Stout, 2s. 6d. Mineral Waters, in stoppered bottles, 1s. per doz. Agent:]

**FREDERICK LODGE,
Grocer, &c.,
The "Walnut Tree" Inn,
Wheathampstead.**

Grocery and Provisions at lowest possible prices. Bacon, 6d., 7d., 8d., 9d.; Cheese, 6d., 7d.; Pure Butter, 1s., 1s. 2d.; Finest Fresh Butter, 1s. 3d. per lb.—[ADVT].

Frederick Lodge died, aged 48, early in 1908 leaving £185 19s. to his widow Sarah. Kelly's Directory for later that year lists her as 'grocer and beer retailer.' However, by 1911 she had given up the licence and was working as a housekeeper at a lodging house in Salisbury Road, Harpenden.

The licensee was now Thomas Boyle, aged 57, who ran the beerhouse and grocer's shop with his wife Fanny. They had two adult children living at home: Caroline (29) who had been partially paralysed from birth, and William (28), who was a self-employed watch and clock repairer. Thomas Boyle was an Irishman born in Cork who came to England at about the age of 20. He married Fanny in St Albans in 1881 and worked as a self-employed carriage trimmer (coach), living in St Albans until they moved to take over The Walnut Tree. Kelly's Directory for 1910 and 1912 confirm that he was still the licensee.

Postscript

The Walnut Tree was sold by the Hatfield Brewery in 1920. The auction catalogue described it as follows (see next page).

It remained open as a pub until the 1960s.

Lot 38.

The Walnut Tree

(Freehold Beer House),

Church Street, Wheathampstead.

A Brick Building with tiled roof, and contains :

ON THE FIRST FLOOR:—Five Bed Rooms (two with fireplaces) and Box Room.

ON THE GROUND FLOOR:—**Bar Room**, Tap Room, Grocer's Shop, Living Room with tiled floor, Store Room, Kitchen with tiled floor, Larder.

IN THE BASEMENT:—Cellar with brick floor.

AT THE REAR:—Yard and Garden, Wood Shed, Two Privies.

AT LEFT HAND SIDE:—Wood Shed.

There is a good Pull-in in front of House.

The Property is let to Mr. Broomfield, on Annual Tenancy, subject to three months' notice (tied for all Malt Liquors), at the annual Rent of **£16.**