

## The White Hart/the Hart



**This late 19th century photo shows, from the left, the Bull, the wheelwright's shop, the policeman's house, and then the White Hart.**

The White Hart no longer exists. Tesco Express occupies the site where it used to be, next to Jessamine Cottage. The picture above shows a view of the High Street at the end of the 19th century when the sign for the White Hart still hung over the door.

Evidence about the early history of the White Hart is patchy but the 1851 census shows William Harris selling beer at the White Hart while also working as a journeyman miller. Kelly's directory for 1838, thirteen years earlier, lists him as a beer retailer in Wheathampstead but his pub is not named. The 1841 census describes him as a journeyman miller living with his family in the Mill House but does not mention beer selling. On the other hand, the 1841 Poor Rate Assessment lists Henry Harris (sic) as having a beershop at The Mill House. There is no mention of a Henry Harris in Wheathampstead in any census so it seems likely that William was at the White Hart throughout this period.

Born in Welwyn, William Harris was 46 years old in 1851, a widower with four children. His eldest daughter Jemima (19) was the housekeeper and he had two young sons, William aged 14 and another who is not named aged 12. Another daughter, Mary was 10 and still at school. Unusually, there is no trace of William (senior) or Jemima in the next census (1861) but William (junior) was living in Park Street, married and working as a miller.

William Harris is not listed in Kelly's directory for 1854 but there is an entry for William Chennells at an unnamed beerhouse. However, he is identified as landlord of the White Hart in a press report in 1860 about the alleged theft of his 'shepherd dog' so we can infer that he was at the White Hart in 1854. The case was dismissed (Hertford Mercury 25 February 1860). It is reasonable to assume that he took over from William Harris in 1852 or 1853.

Dogs made another appearance at the White Hart at this time. On 30th July 1859 the Herts Advertiser reported an amusing incident at the White Hart beerhouse:

### **A False Alarm at Wheathamstead**

'The Sunday morning last great excitement was caused by the report of the landlord of the White Hart beerhouse hearing an extraordinary roaring noise. He said it resembled the noise of a roaring bull, but much louder, and might be heard at four miles distance. It was about 2 o'clock in the morning. The police-constable was made aware of what had occurred and, as most policemen are, anxious to allay the excitement. On Monday night nothing occurred. Tuesday night passed quietly off up to half-past 2 o'clock, when the roaring noise commenced. The attention of the policeman and others being attracted thereto, they started in the direction of the noise, when Lo! they found a neighbour's little house dog giving a tremendous howling – his master having shut him out all night. This incident has caused much laughter in the village and vicinity.'

The following year, the White Hart was the venue for a less amusing story involving stolen goods and a trial at St Albans Borough Petty Sessions. It was reported verbatim and in some detail in the Herts Advertiser of 30 June 1860.

### **Charge of Stealing a Clock**

James Simpson charged with stealing a clock, property of Mr William Johnson of the Goat Public House, St Albans. Mrs Elizabeth Johnson said he was charged with cleaning it. Her husband had bought it for 7s 6d. Prisoner lodged at the Marlborough P.H. at Holywell, kept by my husband's father.

*Mr John Burgoine of Wheathamstead said:* I was at the White Hart public house at Wheathamstead, between four and five o'clock on Wednesday afternoon last. The prisoner was there. He said he had got a clock to sell, and placed it on the table, to show it. He asked 4s for it. I gave him 4s for it, and he went to my house, to put it up for me. When he put it up, it would not go. He said he would come the next day, to finish it. The clock produced is the same. I gave the clock to P.C. Knight, on Saturday morning last. Prisoner told me, when I bought it at the White Hart, that he had 'swapped' it for another. I am quite sure the prisoner is the man.

*PC Knight said:* I am a police constable stationed at Wheathamstead. I apprehended the prisoner in the parish of Wheathamstead on some other charges on Saturday morning last. There was a warrant out for his apprehension. After he had been in custody some little time, I received information about his having offered a china-faced clock for sale; and from some enquiries I made at St Alban's, I charged the prisoner with having taken away a clock, belonging to the prosecutor. He told me he had done so, and had sold it to a man who lived next door to a public house on the Luton Road. On Saturday morning I went to the house of John Burgoine where I received the clock now produced. It has been in my possession ever since. On Tuesday morning last, I shewed the clock to Mrs Johnson who identified it. The

prisoner said he had great troubles on his mind, on account of his wife, which had driven him to drinking, or he should not have committed the acts with which he was charged, and he should plead guilty.

*Mr Superintendent Pike said:* On Saturday last, the prisoner was brought to the police station. I told him he was charged with taking a clock from Johnson's. He said the agreement with Mrs Johnson was that he should take the clock and exchange it for a better one. The prisoner, who declined saying anything, was committed for trial at St Albans Liberty Quarter Sessions, on Thursday next.

The 1861 census confirms that the 'Hart Beerhouse' is occupied by William Chennells (34) as a retailer of beer living with his wife Mary (39). They have two lodgers one of whom, William Rudd, had been licensee of the Two Brewers in the 1840s.

Another incident involving the Hart beerhouse was reported in the Herts Ad on 4 October 1862. This time it was the scene of a medical emergency. James Nash, known to his friends as 'Old Bags', had fallen over a stile, broken his leg and had to crawl from a desolate spot to a nearby farmhouse where he was conveyed by cart back to his lodgings at the Hart beerhouse in Wheathampstead.

### **Accident befalling an inmate at the Hart beerhouse**

#### **Wheathampstead**

**ACCIDENT**—On Monday last, a poor man, better known under the soubriquet of 'Old Bags', but whose real name is James Nash, was walking home to his native village, and while in the act of getting over a stile near some furze, he all at once fell and broke his right leg, and being in a desolate spot, he was obliged to crawl along the road for some distance, until he reached a neighbouring farmhouse, (that being the nearest focus for help). He was picked up and placed in a cart belonging to the farmer, and thus conveyed away to his lodgings at the 'Hart' beerhouse, where he received every attention from the inmates. Mr Crisp, surgeon, was applied to, who reduced the fracture, and he was afterwards removed and placed under the skilful treatment of Mr Hutchinson, surgeon to the infirmary of the St Albans Union Workhouse. We have since heard that the sufferer is progressing on as well as can be expected.

From 1867 the reputation of the White Hart started going downhill. That summer, on 22 June, Chennells appeared before the Liberty Petty Sessions charged with serving beer out of hours on a Sunday morning. His wife appeared on his behalf. PC Hill said that he had found two men in the pub at 11.15 in the morning with three pint pots standing on the table. Mrs Chennells had claimed that the men were lodgers (which he knew they were not) and that 'the beer must have stood there all night'. Later, she said that the two men had come in without her knowledge. She told the court that her husband had kept the pub for 14 years without complaint, which the police

confirmed. Chennells was fined 10s. with 14s. costs (Watford Observer 29 June 1867).

In September 1868, an incident of drunken behaviour at the Hart involving John Palmer of Wheathamstead was brought before the Liberty Petty Sessions. The report in the Herts Ad demonstrates that both Mr Chennells and the magistrates did their best to 'go easy' on Palmer (Herts Ad 5 September 1868).

**A DISORDERLY BACCHANALIAN.**

An old man, named *John Palmer*, belonging to Wheathamstead, was charged with being drunk and disorderly in the beer house of William Chennells, on the 22nd Aug., and refusing to leave when requested by the landlord.

Application was made to the magistrates that they would allow the case to be settled out of court, but they refused to comply with the request.

The defendant pleaded Guilty.

Mr. Chennells stated that he was the landlord of the White Hart, at Wheathamstead. The defendant, when he got drunk, became very abusive. On the 22nd Aug., he was asked to leave, but refused to do so. Complainant did not wish to press the charge, but simply desired that the defendant would keep out of his house. He had been warned some time ago to stay away, and had accordingly not been in the house for eight months prior to the day in question. When drunk he was always very quarrelsome.

The defendant, at the request of the Bench, promised to do his best to keep sober in future, and not enter the complainant's house again.

The Chairman then dismissed him with an admonition, on his paying 10/6, the costs.

The money was immediately paid.

Three months later, on 5 December, Chennells was again fined for selling beer out of hours on a Sunday morning. This time he had to pay the steeper fine of £2 for a second offence (Hertford Mercury 5 December 1868). In September 1869 his application for a licence at the Great Berkhamsted Licensing Sessions was refused on account of there not being a 'good report of the house' (Hemel Hempstead Gazette 11 September 1869).

An advertisement in the Herts Advertiser on 11 November 1871 showed that Mr Rumball, auctioneer from St Albans, would be auctioning 100 lots of furniture and effects at the White Hart. This suggests that Mr Chennells was moving on.

It appears that the White Hart was closed for a year or two because an advertisement in the Herts Ad on 16 August 1873 gave advance notice that Daniel Winch intended to apply for a 'beer on' licence at the Dacorum Annual General Licensing meeting. The premises are not named but later evidence shows that it was the White Hart.

Daniel Winch came from Stevenage but his wife and children were born in Wheathampstead. The 1871 census shows him aged 55, a farm labourer, living with his wife Charlotte, daughter Mary Ann, two sons, a grandson and a lodger. Charlotte and Mary were both grocers. They lived in the High Street just north of the river, next door to the bakery whose building still stands at that location.

We have found no evidence about the success or otherwise of his application. However, he appears in Kelly's directories for 1874, 1878 and 1882 as a beer retailer though without naming the premises.



**The White Hart is the second building on the left**

The Herts Ad for 7 October 1882 reported at length that Winch had applied to the County Petty Sessions for a renewal of his 'off' licence at the White Hart, so he must have been there at this date. The application was opposed by the St Albans Licensed Victuallers Association on the grounds of there 'being already ample accommodation in the neighbourhood ... Eight yards from the applicant's house there were licensed premises and the village was altogether more than adequately supplied in this particular'. Winch's solicitor produced a 'memorial' signed by the rector, churchwardens, overseers and principal tradesmen of the village certifying that 'Mr Winch had conducted his business in a most satisfactory manner and to the benefit and convenience of the public'. It was the first house in Wheathampstead to be issued with an 'off' licence though it had previously had a full licence which had been taken away before Mr Winch 'came into occupation of the premises six or

seven years ago' (ie about 1875). The application for an 'off' licence was granted. It seems likely that Mrs Winch's grocery business had also moved to the White Hart.

There is then a gap in the evidence until 1890 when the Post Office Directory advertised Miss Ellen Dawes as a beer retailer at the White Hart. This is confirmed the following year in the census return which lists her as 'publican' at the White Hart, aged 37. She was also running a grocery business there with her widowed mother Ann, aged 66. Her brother William (39) lived with them working as an agricultural labourer, also her sister Sarah (25). There were two other grocers' shops in the High Street, one of them next door to the White Hart.

The trade directories from 1890 to 1902 all list Ellen Dawes as a beer retailer but there is some uncertainty about this. The 1901 census lists her mother Ann Dawes living at the right location and described as a grocer, with Ellen described as a seamstress. There is no mention of beer retailing or of the White Hart. The White Hart is not included in the list of licensed premises produced by the County Licensing Committee in 1904. It seems likely that the 1902 directory is out of date and that Ellen gave up the licence sometime in the 1890s. We do not know if she gave up the licence voluntarily or if it was terminated by the authorities, though the absence of evidence suggests that the former is more likely.

The last item of evidence that we have about the White Hart is from the Herts Ad dated 10 November 1906 which reported that the freehold of the 'property in High Street Wheathampstead lately known as the White Hart' had been sold by Pryor Reid to Mr Samuel Odell for £500 in an auction at the Bull. The advertisement for the auction described the building as constructed of brick, plaster and tiled, with shop, sitting room, kitchen, scullery etc; and four upstairs bedrooms. The large yard was approached via a gateway and there was a large range of outbuildings.