

The Bricklayers Arms: 1830 to 1914

The Bricklayers Arms was located in Wheathampstead High Street, in the building that is now known as Latchford House and is privately occupied.



Over the years, the name alternated between 'The Bricklayers Arms' and 'The Boot'.

The Poor Rate Assessments (PRA) for 1835-1841 show that the Boot was open in the mid-1830s. In the 1835 PRA, James Arnold was tenant and James Field was owner, with a PRA value of £8.00. This advertisement from the Herts Ad. in 1836 shows that the Boot was a relatively large establishment at that time.

A COPYHOLD BEER SHOP, situate at WHEATHAMSTED, within six miles of HATFIELD; containing front Parlor, large Tap Room, Bar Parlor or Sitting Room, (divided into two) Wash-house, three Bed Rooms and good under-ground Cellar; Wood Barn, Garden and Skittle Ground.

In the occupation of JAMES ARNOLD, at the low annual Rent of £10. 0s. 0d.

These Premises are Copyhold of the Manor of the Rectory of Wheathamsted, subject to a Quit Rent of 1s. 4d. and the customary Fine at will.

In 1837, the PRA lists Pryor Reid, the brewery company, as owner with James Arnold still the tenant.

The 1841 census lists John Browning (55) as a beerseller living with his wife Elizabeth (50) in approximately the right location in the High Street but the census does not have the necessary detail. The 1841 PRA, however, confirms that John Browning was tenant of the Boot, with a PRA value of £10.00 (in comparison, the Bull was valued at £24.00).

The earliest census that includes definite information about this beerhouse shows that, in 1851, it was known as the Boot. The licensee, Thomas Thrale, aged 25, was also a baker and lived there with his wife Eliza (24) and children Sarah (2) and Thomas (one month).

They had a lodger, James Peacock, aged 26, who was an agricultural labourer. Eliza's maiden name when she married Thomas in 1848 was Peacock; James was her brother¹.

The 1861 census lists the licensee of the Boot as William Howard (28) who was also a tailor. This is confirmed in Kelly's Directory for 1862. He lived with his wife Eliza (25) and daughter Ellen (7 months), plus a lodger George Walker (32) who worked as a groom.

The 1871 census shows Rebecca Ward, a widow aged 39, as a 'Beer House Keeper' in what is at this date called the Bricklayers Arms. She and her son John (17), an unemployed locksmith, came originally from Nottinghamshire though her other three children, Rebecca (14), Fred (12) and Tom (10) were born in Hertfordshire. In 1861, she had been living with her husband John, a railway labourer, in East Barnet. The 1871 household included grandmother Mary Parkinson (87), also from Nottingham, and two boarders, George Tompkins (46, coal labourer) and George Dawes, who was a widowed 28-year-old engine fitter. Both these occupations are likely to have been linked to the arrival of the railway in Wheathampstead eleven years earlier.

Kelly's Directories for 1874, 1878 and 1882 all list Rebecca Ward as a beer retailer in Wheathampstead. It is reasonable to assume that she was selling from the Bricklayers Arms, particularly since this is confirmed in the 1881 census though the beerhouse had by then reverted to its earlier name of the Boot. Now aged 50, Rebecca Ward lived there with her son Thomas (19) who was a groom, a lodger George Hollingsworth (50), a sawyer, and another lodger, George Tompkins (50) who worked as a labourer.

The Herts Advertiser dated 11 March 1882 reported that at the County Petty Sessions

'James² Ward, who said he was 21 years of age, appeared before the Bench, asking for a protection order in his favour to keep on the Bricklayers Arms. His mother, the landlady, had just died, and he was the sole surviving relative. The Clerk advised Ward to take out the letters of administration during the ensuing week, and renew his application to the Bench. Perhaps the excise officers would not take steps against him in the meantime. Ward promised to act upon the advice given.'

According to a report in the Herts Advertiser of 13 May 1882, the County Petty Sessions transferred the licence from Rebecca Ward to John McCulloch. Fifteen months later (Herts Ad 25 August 1883), the licence was transferred to Thomas Aldridge. It must have been transferred again because the Herts Advertiser dated 23 April 1887 reported that Pryor Reid had applied for a Protection Order for one Thomas Skillman. He was the son of Thomas Skillman who is shown in the censuses for 1871, 1881 and 1891 as a butcher in Redbourn. A later report in the Herts Ad states that he had been friends with Fred Burgess, licensee at the Swan, since they were children. He did not stay long; Kelly's Directory for 1890 shows that Mrs Laura Nutting was now in charge. By that time, Thomas Skillman was working as a butcher in Luton.

¹ Source: Thrale, R. (1973) *A New Thraliana* Privately published. The Thrales have been an important family in Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire since at least the 14th century. The Bradford Observer dated 27 May 1882 lists Thomas Thrale, baker, as having liquidated his business 'by arrangement'.

² This must be Thomas from the 1881 census.

The 1891 census shows that the beerhouse is again called the Bricklayers Arms and that Laura Nutting (widow aged 44) is the licensee. The only other resident on census night was her 9-year-old son William Edward, who was at school. Laura Nutting (née Hewson) was a daughter by her first marriage of Maria Burgess, wife of Charles Burgess, licensee at the Swan, and later licensee in her own right. Laura had lived at the *Swan* until she married William Henry Nutting, a confectioner in St Albans, in 1873.



William Nutting had died aged only 34 in 1884 so Laura had returned to Wheathampstead to take over the Bricklayers Arms, her application for the licence no doubt being endorsed by her half-brother Fred Burgess, currently licensee at the Swan.

We have two photographs of the High Street taken at about this time. Neither is dated.



Looking south

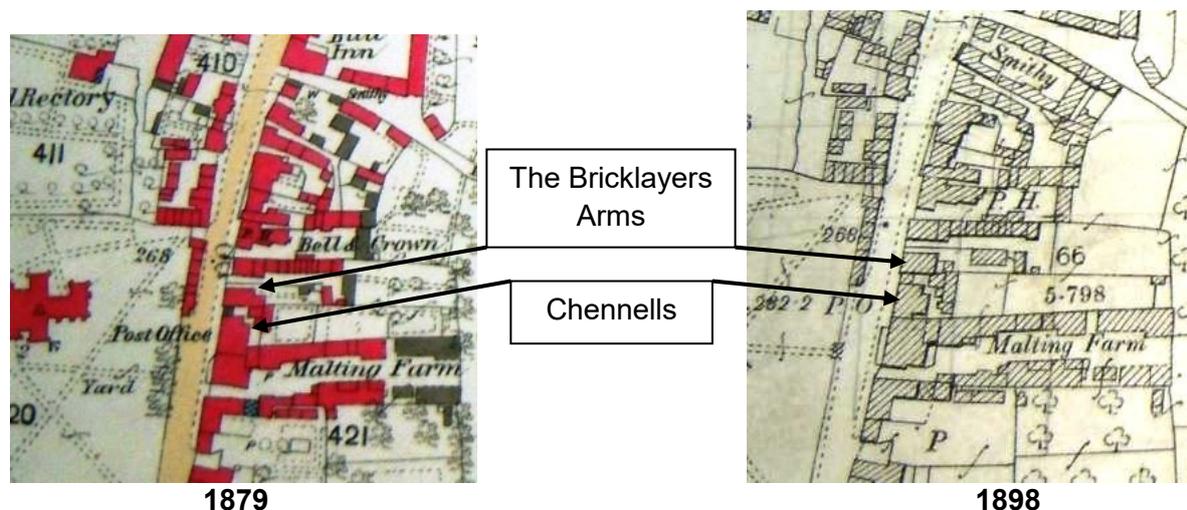


Looking north

The first of these, 'Looking south', appears to be the older, judging from the condition of the street. It shows the lych gate that was erected in 1887 so must be later than that. The gentleman on the left is standing on the step of what we know was the Bricklayers Arms at that time; he has something of the air of a proprietor though it is equally possible that the lady in the doorway is Laura Nutting. However, there is no visible beerhouse sign. This could be because it is out of shot or because the photograph was taken before the sign in the second photo was put up.

The second photo, 'Looking north', shows Chennells shop and Post Office on the right, which we know from the census was next door to the Bricklayers Arms. The next frontage is clearly that of what is now Latchford House and has a sign hanging on a bracket. Frustratingly, the lettering on the sign is blurred but the last word is definitely 'Arms'. No other beerhouse in the High Street included this word so it is reasonable to assume that the long word above 'Arms' is 'Bricklayers' and that the beerhouse was open when this photograph was taken.

The Ordnance Survey maps of the time help to clarify the situation.



The Herts Ad dated 6 February 1892 reported that 'A Protection Order was granted to Agnes Brown³ to carry on the Bricklayers Arms, Wheathampstead, *vice* Mrs Nutting⁴'.

Sometime between 1892 and 1901, the licence was taken over by Thomas Yardley, who appears aged 64 in the 1901 census as publican of the Bricklayers Arms and the only member of the household. Born in Woolwich, the census for 1881 lists him as an 'Army pensioner' married to Leah and for 1891 as 'Apparator St Luke's Church'⁵ in Heywood, Lancs. He does not appear in the 1911 census.

By 1902, the beerhouse had changed hands again; Kelly's 1902 Directory shows Amos Smart as licensee. He came from Harpenden where the 1891 census shows him living with his wife Clara in Lower Cravells Road and working as a hay binder. From 1897 to 1900 he was licensee at the Rose & Crown at The Folly, then in 1901 they were living at Batford where he was again working as a hay binder. They had a visitor, John Malin aged 7, staying with them on census night. Ten years later, he was described in the census as their nephew.

The Bricklayers Arms was still open in 1904 when the minutes of the County Licensing Committee show that it was owned by Pryor Reid for the sale of beer.

In 1908, the Licensing Committee met on 8 May. Among other business, it considered the question of whether to renew the licence of the Bricklayers Arms. It took the following evidence on oath.

Felix Turner, Superintendent of Police of the St Albans Division stated: That there were seven other Licensed Houses within a radius of a quarter of a mile viz Bell and Crown, fully licensed 23 yards, the Bull, fully licensed, 97 yards, the Ship, beerhouse 106 yards, the White Swan, fully licensed 124 yards, the Red Lion beerhouse, 234 yards, the Walnut Tree, beerhouse 247 yards, Railway Hotel, fully licensed 325 yards. There is suitable accommodation for three horses. The licensee carries on the business of a straw and hay dealer and the house has been well conducted. It is badly situated for police supervision on account of the number of exits and there is a low wall separating a row of cottages from the licensed premises. The licensed premises contain tap-room, bar and three bedrooms. The rateable value of the

³ The 1891 census includes Agnes Brown, aged 28, living in Necton Road with her husband George, a builder's clerk, and two young children. It seems likely that this is the same Agnes Brown. She and her husband took the licence of The Swan in the late 1890s.

⁴ A woman called Laura Nutting was married in the Pancras district of London in 1893. This is the only Laura Nutting listed in the Marriage records in Ancestry so it is reasonable to assume that this is the same Laura Nutting and explains (a) why she gave up The Bricklayers Arms and (b) why she does not appear by this name in the 1901 census.

⁵ The revised edition of The Imperial Dictionary of The English Language, published by Blackie and Son in the 1880s, defines 'apparator' (or rather 'apparitor') as 'A messenger or officer who serves the process of a spiritual court; the lowest ecclesiastical officer.'

licensed premises is assessed at £19.10s 0d. The population of the parish is 2,405 and the number of licensed houses 25.

In view of this evidence, the Committee decided that the premises were not 'necessary for the requirements of the neighbourhood'. It was also noted that 'the persons interested in the above Licence do not press for the renewal of the same'.

The following report appeared in the Herts Ad dated July 11 1908.

THE BRICKLAYERS', WHEATHAMPSTEAD

Another house which the St Albans County Divisional Magistrates referred to the County Committee was the Bricklayers' Arms at Wheathampstead, an ante-1869 beerhouse, belonging to Messrs Pryor, Reid and Co. Ltd., Hatfield, the licensee being Mr Amos Smart.

Mr. A. Clarke appeared to support the Petty Sessional Magistrates' recommendation, that the closing of the house was not opposed.

Superintendent Turner informed the magistrates that the house was one of eight in a quarter-mile radius. It was badly situated for police supervision on account of the number of exits. The licensee also carried on the business of hay and straw dealer, and he (the Supt.) thought he relied more upon that than the trade of the house.

The Magistrates decided not to renew the licence.

The Bricklayers Arms therefore closed; it is not listed in Kelly's 1908 Directory.

The question of compensation then arose. The Committee's minutes for 10 October 1908 show that the valuer, Mr W. Hurst Flint, advised settlements of £105.0s.0d. to Amos Smart and £190.0s.0d. to Pryor Reid. However, the compensation authority later refused to make this payment.

Postscript

Kelly's 1909 directory shows that Amos Smart had returned to the Rose & Crown at The Folly. The 1911 census lists him (now aged 34) as a 'Licence Publican' at the Rose & Crown and living with his wife Sarah, who helped in the business, and their 17-year-old nephew John Mayling, a straw hat machinist. A straw hat factory was open at The Folly at this time so it is possible that John worked there. There is no record of Amos and Clara having any children so perhaps they effectively adopted young John, who had been their visitor in 1901.

The 1911 census also shows that the former Bricklayers Arms was occupied by David William Simmons (31) who had a fishmonger's shop and lived on the premises with his wife and five children.

The origin of the modern name 'Latchford House' and the neighbouring 'Latchford Mews' is explained by this census, which lists the three properties as Mrs Chennells' shop and Post Office, Mr Simmons' shop, and a shop occupied by hairdresser Charles Latchford, aged 46. He lived with his wife Laura (54) and their sons Charles Percival Latchford (20), an apprentice hairdresser, and Thomas (17) who was a Law Clerk. Charles junior, known as Percy, had a barber's shop in the 1930s in what is now the WI shop on the other side of Latchford Mews.