



News and events

Some talks, lectures and webinars available online

- The St Albans History Society (SAHAAS), better known as the 'Arc & Arc' www.stalbanshistory.org/events/category/events
- The Hertfordshire Association for Local History www.halh.org.uk/symposium.html
- The Institute for Historical Research www.history.ac.uk/search-events
- The National Archives www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Notes and queries

Private brewing in the 1700s

If there has been a silver lining to lockdown it has been the decision by the likes of the National Archives to make some of their material available for free via the internet (see above for URL). I've whiled away too many hours over the last few months looking at local wills from the 17th and 18th centuries but struck gold with the wills of the House and Sibley families and what they tell us about local inns and how beer was produced in the parish of Wheathampstead at that time.

We already knew these families owned two small inns – perhaps just alehouses – in the High Street and these documents confirm this. In his will signed in 1780, Isaac House left *The Swan* to a son, also called Isaac. Mary Sibley inherited *The Bell* in 1765 from her late husband, Francis, with the proviso that their son, Henry, was to have the freehold when she died. Both inns remained in family hands until the later 1800s, *The Bell* being sold by the Sibleys in 1890.

What is particularly interesting about the wills is that they tell us that both families brewed their own beer. Isaac House bequeathed brewing utensils at two of his farms, Bamville and Grove, to his sons; Francis Sibley left his to his wife. This information plugs a gap in our knowledge of how beer was produced in this area. As shown in the Society's book *The Pubs of Wheathampstead*, about half of all beer produced around 1800 was for private consumption rather than retail. The tax regime of the day made it cheaper for larger consumers, such as farmers and the gentry, to

brew their own rather than buy in supplies from common brewers.



Bamville Farm¹

Weaker so-called 'small beer' was typically for the servants and farm workers with stronger brews being kept for the family. As our book shows, we knew of brewhouses at Lamer and Mackerye End but we had failed to find evidence of brewing on farms. We have now, and we can expect to find more examples by further close reading of local wills.

More surprising was the reference in Sibley's will to hop production. He left to his wife 'all that [*his*] freehold arable field of land and hop garden adjoining called or known by the name of Oxcroft Close'. These enclosures were probably near to Oxcroft Common at the top of Rose Lane. Finding evidence of hop-growing in Hertfordshire at this time is rare; cultivation during the 1700s was becoming increasingly localised to Surrey and particularly Kent.

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