

## The Cricketers

The Cricketers was located at the northern end of the row of houses and cottages on the track that runs alongside the Common (now the golf course) in Gustard Wood. It will be remembered as an active pub by many local residents but appears to have been a comparative latecomer to the beerhouses of Gustard Wood, though it may have existed as an unnamed beerhouse before 1878 when it is first named in newspapers. It is definitely the case that cricket was being played on Gustard Wood Common before that date, for example in September 1876 when the Herts Ad. reported that 'A very interesting game of cricket was played at Gustard Wood'.



The Cricketers in about 1900

The first record that we have of The Cricketers by name is in the report of an inquest in the Bedfordshire Herald dated 20 September 1878. An old man, Thomas Cotton, had been found unconscious in the small hours of the morning in Luton and had died that evening. In reconstructing his last hours, the coroner took evidence from three residents of Gustard Wood, including William Welch, named as licensee of The Cricketers, who said that the deceased had left the house at about 10 pm having drunk two pints of beer – he appeared to be sober. The next witness, James Archer (licensee of The Tin Pot at this time), said that he had met Thomas Cotton at The Cricketers and had left with him just after 10 pm. He had offered Cotton a bed for the night but he had said he would 'make shift till he got to Luton'. Archer said that Cotton was sober when he left him. The last witness, the landlord of The Windmill in Luton, said that he had found Cotton very drunk in the road at 2 o'clock in the morning. He called the police. Constables Clark and King thought that Cotton was very drunk and conveyed him to his home in a wheelbarrow. A doctor examined him and found injuries to his head and his knees. Guided by the coroner, the jury brought in a verdict that the cause of death was 'want of proper food, combined with exposure to the cold'.

This report of a court case had appeared in the Herts Ad six years earlier, on 4 May 1872.

**SETTLING ACCOUNTS POGNACIOUSLY.**  
*William Welch* (28), of Wheathampstead, was charged with assaulting George Boon, at Gustard Wood, on the 29th ult.  
 Mr. Annesley appeared for the defendant, who denied the charge.  
 Complainant stated, in effect, that on Saturday, 20th ult., about half-past four o'clock, he went into a public-house kept by a man named John Archer, at Gustard Wood. Mrs. Welch, the defendant's wife, came and spoke to him about payment for some beer for which he owed her, and because he could not pay her some words ensued. During the altercation the woman spat in his face and pulled his hair. Shortly afterwards the defendant came in, and, without any remark, struck him in the mouth. Defendant also kicked him in the side, took hold of his hair and drew him outside of the door. He struck and kicked him several times, and in consequence of the injuries inflicted upon him witness had been obliged to receive medical attention from Dr. West.

Witnesses gave evidence that Boon was very drunk and had struck Mrs Welch. A person in the house sent for Mr Welch 'who came and told the complainant to fight him and not his wife'. The magistrates dismissed the case, the Chairman remarking that the defendant had no right to take the law into his own hands but had a remedy in court for any assault upon his wife. The Bench, however, hoped that this would be a warning to him.

We can infer from this report that William Welch, or possibly his wife, was licensee of a beerhouse in Gustard Wood and that Boon owed that beerhouse some money. It is not named but it is reasonable to infer that it was The Cricketers. The incident took place in another beerhouse that is not named.

William Welch's background is typical of many beersellers at this time. Born in Codicote in 1843, he was one of seven children of James, an agricultural labourer, and Ann. In 1871, just a year before his court appearance, he was living in Gustard Wood and working as a farm labourer. Interestingly, he lived next door to one James Archer, labourer and beer seller. This is probably James Archer, licensee of The Tin Pot, which could mean that Welch opened his own beerhouse by the simple means of paying his fee of two guineas for a licence to the local Excise Office.

The 1878 directory lists William Welch as a beer retailer in Gustard Wood, which supports the inference made above. The beerhouse is not named.

The 1881 census shows that William Welch, aged 37, was living in Gustard Wood and working as a beerseller and gardener. The household was made up of his wife Amelia, their 10-year-old son, and three lodgers, all of whom were labourers.

In 1889, the licence for The Cricketers was transferred from William Welch to Joseph Hale, a 68-year-old man who came from Harpenden. The 1891 census shows him as a publican in Gustard Wood, living with his wife Eliza.

We know that by 1894 the licence had been transferred to Charles Carter because there is a report in the Herts Ad of 10 November that he, identified as licensee of The Cricketers, and his wife had been 'brutally assaulted' by William Wheeler, who owed him three shillings. Wheeler was convicted and sentenced to a month's hard labour.

Less than a year later, in August 1895, Carter was himself charged with assaulting Charles Wicks who, it was alleged, owed him a shilling for beer bought at the pub. A long report of the case in the Herts Ad. concludes with Carter being convicted and fined £3 with costs.

Charles Carter's background appears to tell the story of a 'poor boy made good'. He first appears in the 1861 census, aged 2, as the sixth of seven children of George, an agricultural labourer, and Mary Carter. Their home is very near to the house that later became The Cricketers, and may even have been the same one.

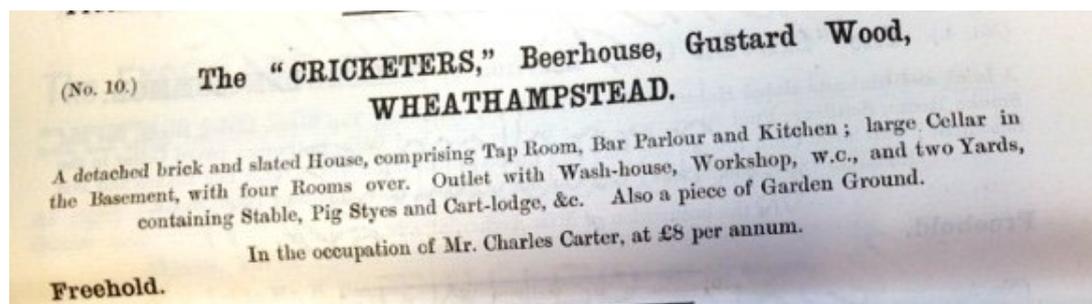
In 1871, Mary Carter is widowed and working as a charwoman. Charles, now aged 12, is working as an agricultural labourer as is his 20-year-old brother William. The other children have left home but the house is shared with a second household, made up of Emma Hawkins, a 29-year-old widow, and her two daughters aged 8 and 4. The Carters appear not to have moved house since 1861.

At the age of 22, in 1881, Charles is living in Orchard Street, St Albans, and working as a groom. He is married to Elizabeth and they have two daughters aged under two years.

In the same year, Mary Carter has left Gustard Wood and is working as a nurse, living with a family in a household at the southern end of what is now Lamer Lane; the household includes a 9-day-old baby, which may explain why they have a live-in nurse.

By 1891, Charles and Elizabeth are back in Gustard Wood with their three children; he is working as an agricultural labourer. They are living in, or very near, the house where Charles was born. As shown above, he had taken the licence of The Cricketers by 1894.

The freehold of The Cricketers was sold at auction by the Harpenden Brewery in 1897.



The 1898 directory confirms that Charles Carter was still licensee, as does the 1899 Valuation and the 1901 census, which says that, though his address is The Cricketers, his occupation is carpenter – the common situation of a beerhouse keeper having two sources of income. The household comprises Charles, his wife Elizabeth, daughter Mary (20), son Frederick (aged 18 and working as a gardener), and three boarders, (William Tyler, gardener aged 57, William Cornwell, draper's assistant aged 38, and Walter Buckingham, bricklayer's labourer aged 39).

The Post Office directories of 1902, 1906 and 1908 list Charles Carter as licensee of The Cricketers. The minutes of the County Licensing Committee in 1904 show that Glover & Sons were the owners; they probably bought it at the auction in 1897. The 1911 census describes Carter, aged 51, as a carpenter and publican living at The Cricketers with his wife Elizabeth (53), son Frederick (now 28 and still working as a gardener) and two boarders, Alfred Shadbolt (32), a gravel digger, and William Tyler (now 66 and still a gardener). It is most likely that the two gardeners were working at Wright's nursery just across the main road, opposite the Cross Keys.

The 1914 Post Office Directory shows that Charles Carter was still licensee. The Bedfordshire Advertiser and Luton Times dated 20 August 1915 reported that a works outing to Gustard Wood concluded with tea at The Cricketers 'where Mr Carter proved an admirable host'. He was only in his mid-fifties at this time so he could have been at The Cricketers for many more years. Either he or a namesake was a Wheathampstead parish councillor in 1906.

Elizabeth Carter died in 1929 and Charles in 1932. They are buried at St Helen's.



The Cricketers in about 1910. The name 'Charles Carter' appears over the door.