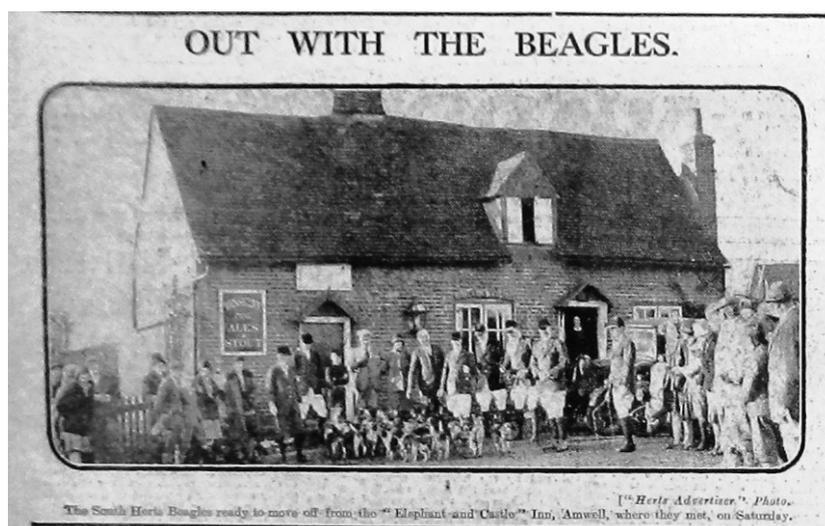


Elephant & Castle



We have been unable to find an early photograph of the Elephant & Castle. This is taken from a 1929 edition of the Herts Advertiser.

The Elephant & Castle stands in Amwell (formerly Hamwell), an interesting micro-community on the south-western edge of Wheathampstead, bordering Nomansland Common. The building has a timber frame dating from the early 18th century and its chimney stacks may be from the 16th century.

The history of the Elephant & Castle in our period reflects the story of the rural economy from 1840 to 1920. The earlier landlords, mostly labourers or carpenters with straw-plaiting wives and daughters, were either locally born or from another Hertfordshire village. By the end of the period, Londoners have taken on the business.

The earliest known landowner

The 1841 tithe map shows that Richard Oakley, landowner and farmer aged 39 of Lawrence End in the parish of Kimpton, is owner of the land and property later known as the Elephant & Castle. His tenant there in June that year is John Stredder. The 1851 census informs us that Mr Oakley (born in Wheathampstead in 1802) is a 'Gentleman' with a household consisting of a housekeeper, housemaid, kitchen maid and butler. Newspaper accounts tell us that he regularly attended the annual Hitchin Fat Stock Christmas Meat Shows selling finest quality down sheep and fat polled cattle. He was also interested in acquiring land in conjunction with John Isaac House, well-known local brewer. They were "respectively interested under the provisions of "The Acts for the Inclosure, Exchange and Improvement of Lands" and purchased four cottages with gardens at Amwell and a piece of orchard in 1867.

On 6 June 1841, John Stredder, a carpenter and beer retailer aged 60, is living with his wife Hannah, three daughters and another woman, all straw plaiters. Stredder remains there until 1854 by which time he has reached the age of 74, continuing as carpenter and beershop keeper, but now with only two daughters. His landlord has changed however as we can tell from the auction held at the Bell Inn, St Albans on

30 July 1853 when freehold and copyhold estates were put up for sale by order of the proprietor. Two small farms are mentioned, also “a beer shop with large orchard”, which must be what is later known as the Elephant & Castle, and four cottages at or near to Nomansland. The new owner is not named.

In October 1860, William Dickinson, the new beershop keeper, is fined 10s. with 13s. costs for selling beer with defective measures. He doesn't last long at the Elephant as, by the time of the next census six months later, Isaac Spring has taken over. Born in the village of Hexton (west of Hitchin) and aged 60, he is listed as labourer and beershop keeper at the Elephant & Castle. His wife Caroline, aged 51, and daughter Mary, aged 8, live with him.

Isaac dies in 1867 and the 1871 census shows his widow Caroline, aged 59, at the beershop combining the job of publican with that of straw plaiting. A local girl, she was born in Gustard Wood and lives with her 19-year old dressmaker daughter Frances. Ten years later, on 3 April 1881, Caroline is 69 and a widow but she continues as beerhouse keeper and is still living with daughter Fanny, now aged 29. She dies early in 1882 leaving a personal estate of £95; Fanny takes over the Elephant & Castle (*Herts Ad* 13 May 1882).

By 29 March 1885, Fanny has married and passed on the tenancy to her husband William Munt, who is listed as 'Publican'. Their baby daughter, Susanna Mary, is baptised in the same year.

We learn from the *Herts Advertiser* that the District Coroner held an inquest at the Elephant & Castle public house on 17 November 1888 into the sudden death of Jane Brownsell who had died suddenly of suffocation after choking on some fatty meat. Her airways obstructed by her meal, she died within two minutes.

The *Herts Advertiser* reports a further bout of trouble at the Elephant on 12 September 1889, when a customer, one William Evans, draws a knife on Frederick Dunham, the landlord of the cottage from which he is about to be evicted, and is summoned for assault. The incident is reported in some detail. (See next page)

ASSAULT ON A LANDLORD. — ATTEMPTED USE OF
THE KNIFE.

William Evans, was summoned for having assaulted Frederick Dunham, at Wheathampstead, on the 12th inst.—The Complainant said he was a carpenter, at Wheathampstead. He went into the **Elephant and Castle** beerhouse about eight o'clock. The defendant who was standing in the taproom, was under notice to quit his cottage, of which witness was the landlord. He challenged him to go outside, and said "Do you know Home Rule?" to which witness replied that he did not. The defendant went to his basket and produced a long knife, remarking "I will show you what Home Rule is inside if you won't come outside." He tried to stab witness with the knife. They were about a yard and a half apart at the time. Two men stood up in defence of witness. The defendant was turned out of the house, and shortly afterwards while witness was going for the police, he saw the defendant again, but as it was dark and he thought the defendant might have the knife again, he ran away.—Defendant denied that he had done anything worse than threaten the complainant that he would "drop him on the nose with his fist," for having served a notice to quit on him.—Charles Taylor and William Munt having given evidence, the Defendant addressed the Bench and gave a total denial to the charge. He was very flippant and noisy, and was frequently called to order by the Bench.—The defendant was convicted of a common assault, and as this was his first offence, he was fined £1, including costs, with the alternative of fourteen days' imprisonment.

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An opportunistic theft occurs at the Elephant & Castle on 21 November 1889; Edward Rainsden was committed at the St Albans Quarter Sessions court for stealing eight shillings from a box in an upstairs bedroom. The *Herts Advertiser* reported the incident in detail. Fannie Munt, who 'kept' the beer house at the time, went out leaving the building by the back door at 2.30pm thinking Edward had left by the front door. But he returned in her absence and, climbing a ladder at the back of the building, gained access to the bedroom. Fannie's husband William, returning at 3.00pm, found the front door locked and was unable to get in. He could hear suspicious noises upstairs, so he too climbed the ladder to see what was going on and discovered Edward Rainsden escaping down the stairs. He challenged him. "What are you doing here, you scamp?" Unable to climb through the window to follow him, William jumped down from the ladder into the orchard and gave chase for about 200 yards until his prey took flight across Mr Lattimore's fields and William

Munt could not catch him. However, the next day he 'apprehended' him at the Nelson beerhouse at Marford, when Rainsden admitted to the theft. PC Keating reported that the ladder had been stolen from Mr Ransome's farm. Police Superintendent Hummerstone added that nothing was known of Edward Rainsden except that he had just left the army. One month's imprisonment with hard labour was the punishment meted out (Herts Ad, Nov 30th 1889).¹

William Munt and his family had left the Elephant & Castle by 1890; in that year, he was licensee at the Walnut Tree. We have found no evidence of who took over the licence at the Elephant & Castle in 1890 but Kelly's Directory 1895 lists George Bracey as a beer retailer in Amwell; this was definitely the Elephant & Castle.

In the 1891 census, George had been listed as a labourer living with his wife and baby daughter in one of the Hamwell farm cottages. However, he died aged only 39 in 1895 and his widow, Mary Ann Bracey, was granted a Protection Order in favour of Amos Gale in December that year. Amos was still at the Elephant two years later when, on 29 November 1897, the Harpenden Brewery put the property up for sale describing it as:

"A brick and tiled house containing tap room, parlour, cellar and scullery, and two rooms over. Also a cottage adjoining let off by tenant; yard in front with stable, shed and WC, and garden and orchard (about two acres) in the rear; freehold in occupation of Mr Amos Gale, at a rent of £8 per annum".

In 1901 Amos Gales is listed in the census as beerhouse keeper, aged 46, originally from Dunton in Bedfordshire. His wife Mary Ann is the same age and they have seven children, six of them being boys ranging in age from baby Bert at four months to Harry, aged 22 working as a coachman. Ernest aged 15 is a bricklayer's labourer and the three younger boys range in age from 7 to 10 years of age. Clara, their only daughter, is 13 years old in 1901.

Directories for 1906 and 1908 show George Merriman is in charge at the pub. No more is known of where he came from or what became of him.

By 1911 a cabinet maker from Hoxton, Edward Albert Dyer (35), has taken on the business, living there with his wife, Alice Frederica, and mother-in-law, Mary Ruhl a 75-year-old widow, both from Bethnal Green.

At the start of the First World War John Reeves is selling beer at the Elephant and by the end of the war, a Mr Barnett is licensee there on a £10 a year tenancy from the Hatfield Brewery. In 1920, the brewery auctions off its 107 mostly freehold licensed houses. The brochure shows us that the building was of red brick with a tiled roof containing three bedrooms on the first floor, a tap room, parlour, kitchen,

¹ The evidence is not conclusive but a 46-year-old Edward Rainsden was an inmate at Pentonville Prison in the 1901 census. There is no evidence that he was related to the Rainsdens of Sandridge or to the family who kept the Three Oaks for many years, though this is not unlikely.

lumber room and scullery on the ground floor and a cellar. In addition, at the back were a large paddock, a corrugated iron stable, a privy and a urinal, all of which show that the Elephant & Castle was quite a substantial property.

An interesting sales statistic appears in Hatfield Brewery's 1920 sales brochure. During the three years up to September 1914 the Elephant & Castle sold a mere 54 barrels of beer. After the war it was a different story; in just six months up to November 1919, they sold 88 barrels.

The Elephant & Castle is still going strong today.