

## The First & Last

The First & Last was one of seven beerhouses at Gustard Wood and the only one of which there is no trace today. Its location, and much of its history, has to be inferred from limited evidence.

The first reference we have that definitely names both The First & Last and its licensee is from the Hemel Hempstead Gazette dated 11 September 1869, when John Thompson was granted a renewal of the licence at Dacorum Licensing Sessions despite the fact that he had been fined in the past.

It is likely that the fine referred to was one imposed at St Albans Liberty Petty Sessions on 31 October 1868. The Herts Advertiser dated 7 November reported that John Thomson (*sic*) was charged with having his house open for the sale of beer at 20 minutes to five o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday 25th October. The beerhouse in question is not named but, given the name of the licensee, it must have been The First & Last. Thomson disputed the charge, claiming that, while the door was open at five minutes to five, his daughter had left it open when she returned from church at that time; there was no question of his selling any beer. The chairman decided that a plea of 'Not guilty' should be entered and the evidence was heard. Police Constable Hill said that he had been to the house at four o'clock in response to a report of a fight. Looking through the window, he saw a man with a pint pot in front of him, though he could not be sure what was in the pot. He also found, in a shed, the two men who had been fighting; they were 'in a state of drunkenness'. He left the house but returned 40 minutes later to find the house open and five men in the tap room; the table was wet and there was a glass of beer standing on it. Constable Hill added that he was 'very much blackguarded' by the men. Thomson claimed that the five men had come from another beerhouse; he had refused to let them in but, when he had left the door open for his daughter, they had come in anyway.

The case was reported at some length in the Herts Ad and it is not surprising, given the evidence, that Thomson was convicted. He was fined £1 and 12s. 6d. costs with the alternative of 21 days imprisonment with hard labour. He paid the fine.

Born in Codicote, Thompson had lived in Gustard Wood for at least 20 years before these events. In 1851, aged 20, he was living with his parents and working as an agricultural labourer. By 1861, he was still an agricultural labourer but was married to Sarah, a straw plaiter. They had two daughters, aged six and three. Unusually for this time, the six-year-old is listed in the census as attending school.

A trade directory for 1870 lists Thompson as a beer retailer in Gustard Wood without naming his beerhouse but he had already been in trouble again, summonsed to the St Albans Liberty Petty Sessions late in 1869. The account of this hearing (shown below from the Herts Ad dated 1 January 1870), confirms that Thompson was inclined to put up a defence, however feeble.

**SHORT MEASURES.**

*John Thomson, publican, Wheathamstead, was summoned for having four quart jugs deficient in capacity.*

*Inspector Chapman tested the jugs in court, and proved that nearly all were about three-fourths of a gill short. He also remarked that as publicans had their stamped measures at hand they could test their jugs whenever they thought proper.*

*Defendant remarked that many of his customers merely asked for a jug of beer, not for a quart.*

*The Chairman held that he was bound to give them all they paid for.*

*Defendant thought the other publicans ought to have been visited by the inspector as well as himself.*

*Muled 5s. for each measure, £1 ; and 10s. costs. Paid.*

Inspector Chapman had been busy in Gustard Wood; the same edition of the Herts Ad reports his giving evidence that the local grocer, John Bangs, had been using 'unjust weights'. Chapman found two correct weights, for half a pound and a quarter of a pound, 'on one side' in the shop, while the two weights that were being used were light by one dram and half a dram respectively. He had also found a set of scales on the shop counter that weighed 'four drams against the purchaser'. Bangs was fined a total of £2.11s.6d. in fines and costs.

The 1871 census, taken on the 2 April, shows that Thompson was living with his wife and four children (they now have two young sons) and working as a labourer and beer seller. The beerhouse is not named but the order of entries in the census record suggests that it was located a few doors down from The Tin Pot and so in the right location for The First & Last.

Within three weeks of the census, Thompson was in trouble again. The Herts Ad of 29 April reports that he was summoned to the St Albans Liberty Petty Sessions to answer a charge of selling beer at about 25 minutes to five o'clock on Good Friday, which was out of hours. Police Constable Thompson stated that, at about 4.35 pm, he had seen eight or nine young men entering The First & Last and four or five coming out, and had found several more inside with beer on the table. On this occasion, Thompson's wife appeared on his behalf. In defence, she claimed that their clock had stopped in the morning so they did not know the time. The young men in question had been playing cricket on the common and had run to the house to ask for water, which she gave them. Several others then came up and asked

for beer; she served them because she thought it was past five o'clock. Predictably, the magistrates did not believe this account and, after Inspector Chapman referred to the conviction in 1868 described above, Thompson was fined £1 5s. with 12s. 6d. costs and a fortnight's imprisonment in default. He was given a week to pay.

This may have been the last straw for Kimpton Brewery who owned the house because, on 5 August 1871, the Herts Ad ran an advertisement stating that The First & Last was to be let; it was a 'good house' with a 'low rent'.

The final record that we have of The First & Last is from the Herts Ad dated 15 September 1877. At the annual licensing sessions held at County Petty Sessions, an application was made on behalf of John Hearl to remove the licence of The First & Last and transfer it to The Whip at Kinsbourne Green. In response to a question from the Chair, Hearl's solicitor, Mr Annesley, confirmed that The First & Last had been bought by Mr Baxendale, 'who demolished it'. The application was allowed.

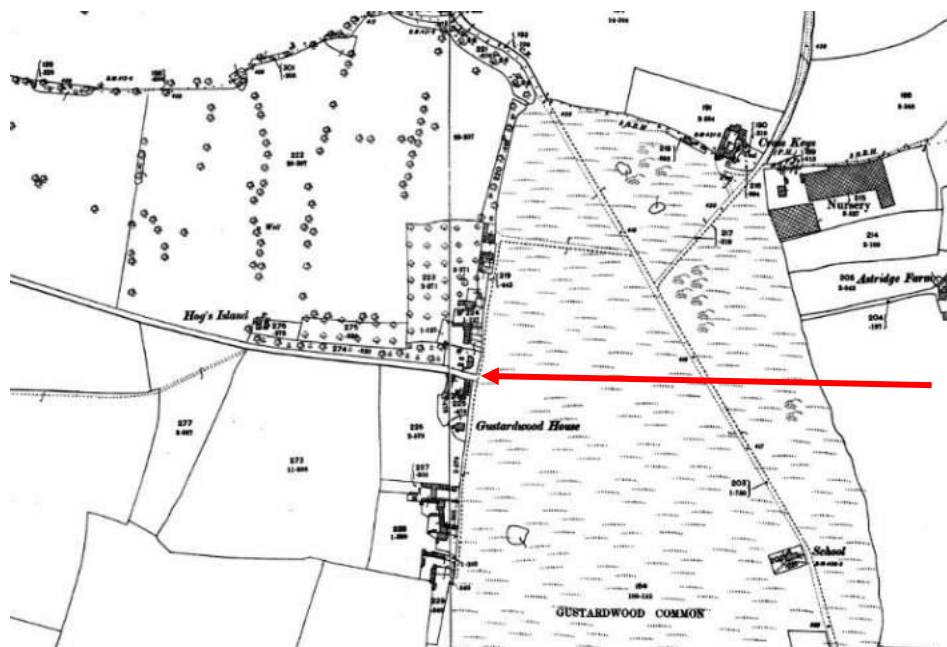
The background to this report is that, in April 1874, Richard Birley Baxendale, owner of Blackmore End, a large manor house in Kimpton whose estate reached as far south as Gustard Wood, applied to the Kimpton Parish Vestry for permission to close the road from Gustard Wood to Marshalls Heath, build a new road further south, and close or divert several public footpaths. Essentially, he wanted to move the public further from his front door. This map, from the early 19th century, shows the location of Blackmore End (*sic*) and the original road layout.



The application was successful; formal notices appeared in the local press in August to the effect that an application would be made to the Hertford Quarter Sessions. This too was

successful. The old road was closed and a new one built; it was named The Slype and was in effect the Blackmore End bypass<sup>1</sup>.

This map shows The Slype and helps to confirm the location of The First & Last.



**The start of The Slype**

To compare this with the previous map, note the location of Hogs Island.

The 1878 directory lists John Thompson as a beer retailer in Gustard Wood but this cannot have been at The First & Last. The last record that we have of the Thompson family is from the 1881 census; they were living at Down Green, he working as a farm labourer and his wife as a straw plaiter.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Birley Baxendale died in 1878. Blackmore End was demolished in 1931.