

The Red Cow

The Red Cow was one of the earliest licensed houses in Wheathampstead. The Yeoman map of 1758, commissioned by the Abbey of Westminster to show the extent of their Bury Farm estate, shows it at the top of Wheathampstead Hill in a prime position to attract passing trade on the road from St Albans to Kimpton. It is now a private house but the bracket from which the inn sign hung is still in place.



There is no way of knowing whether the alehouse was named after the field behind it or vice versa.

The Mumford map of Westminster's holdings in 1799 shows a 'public house' at this location.



An early photograph of the Red Cow

The Red Cow is not mentioned in any of the Poor Rate Assessments in the 1830s; the next record we have is the PRA of 1841. It is therefore possible that the Red Cow was not licensed for some years between 1799 and 1841. The PRA described the Red Cow as a beerhouse with a rateable value of £15, the licensee being William Peacock and the owner John Dorrington. The tithe award of the same year confirms these details though the census describes Peacock as an agricultural labourer aged 40, living with his wife Mary (36), daughter Eliza (13) and son James who is 16 and also an agricultural labourer. Eliza married Thomas Thrale, a local baker, in 1848. He was licensee of The Boot in the High Street in 1851.

In the 1840s, alehouses were required to be closed ‘during the hours of divine service’ and in 1842 Peacock was summoned at the Liberty Petty Sessions for selling beer at 12.30 pm on Sunday 28 August. Both he and a witness said that, while there was a pot of beer on the table, none had been drunk. The case was dismissed.

Charles Gray took over the licence from William Peacock in about 1844 and in 1847 he was fined 10s. plus costs for drawing beer before 1.00 pm on a Sunday (Hertford Mercury 24 April). He remained as licensee for the rest of the century, as is confirmed by every directory during this period.

In the 1851 census, he is described as a brewer’s labourer and beershop keeper aged 32. He and his wife Ann (29) have five children under 10 years old; their 10-year-old niece and a lodger, 26-year-old shepherd John Kemp, make up the household. This census says that Charles Gray was born in Gosmore but later censuses mention Preston and St Ippollitts as his birthplace. These are all villages south of Hitchin. Ann Gray was born in Preston.

His next appearance in court was as a witness in a case where four men were accused of setting fire to two wheat stacks belonging to Charles Lattimore of Place Farm. In two hearings at the County Petty Sessions in March 1851, reported at length in the Hertford Mercury on 5 April, four men appeared before the magistrates; two of them, James Norris and William Grey (*sic*), had already confessed. The story emerged that they had drunk a quart of beer at The King William (now The Wicked Lady) on Nomansland, then three quarts at The Red Cow, where Charles Gray (who stated very firmly at the start of his evidence that he was not related to William Grey) had given them some ‘lucifers’, then a pint at ‘Thrale’s beer house’ (The Boot in Wheathampstead High Street). From there, Norris confessed that they had walked up to Place Farm, set fire to the stacks, climbed through the hedge into East Meads, gone out into Codicote Road and then back to Place Farm where they had ‘helped to extinguish the fire’. Mr Lattimore’s evidence, which was read to the court, included ‘that he saw Grey and Norris at the fire, assisting to extinguish it, that they were much intoxicated and broke the ranks and that the engine-master requested that they might be taken into custody’. Norris admitted the charge, saying that ‘they were drunk and he didn’t know what put the thing into their head. They bore no malice to Mr Lattimore and it must have been the devil that prompted them’. Two of the four were discharged and Norris and Grey were committed for trial at the Assizes. They were held in Hertford Gaol.

A report in the Hertford Mercury dated 19 July 1851 makes grim reading. Norris and Gray (as spelled in this report) found themselves in front of the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Campbell. Charles Lattimore and others gave their evidence again and, since Norris and Gray had already pleaded guilty and their written statements were available to the court, they were convicted. The press report continues:

The Lord CHIEF JUSTICE having summed up the evidence, remarking that there was no room left for doubt as to the prisoners' guilt, and that drunkenness was no extenuation,

The Jury immediately returned a verdict of Guilty.

In answer to questions from the Court, the policeman from Wheathampstead described the prisoners as lazy, drunken men.

Mr. PARSELL handed to the Court a note from the master of Gray, in which he gave him a good character.

The Lord CHIEF JUSTICE remarked, that the master could not have known the facts deposed to by the policeman, or he must have been a very loose master, to have been satisfied with such a man. In passing sentence, his Lordship said, the prisoners had been convicted on the clearest evidence of a most serious offence. Unhappily, offences of this sort were becoming very prevalent, not only in this and the adjoining counties, but in many other counties in England. The learned counsel had said, with great truth, that nobody could ascertain or fathom the motive that influenced the minds of the prisoners when they committed this act. Nobody could understand the motive of any man who was so void of sense, as to suppose that by consuming another man's grain, he would do any good to himself. It was in vain to expect to reform the prisoners; and he feared that the example which must be made of them would almost fail to deter others, who, in the malice of their disposition, or the heedlessness of their drunkenness, might be disposed to commit such offences. But an example must be made of them, and therefore the sentence of the Court was that they be severally transported for ten years.

The sentence was severe, even for that time. Norris and Gray were doubly unlucky. First, Lord Campbell chose to make an example of them. Second, they were sentenced just two years before the Penal Servitude Act of 1853 started the process whereby the sentence of transportation was abolished by 1868.

Life carried on at the Red Cow. This story from the Herts Guardian dated 16 June 1855 reports two events that took place there on the same day (see next page).

WHEATHAMSTEAD.—On Saturday the 2nd inst., an inquest was held at the Red Cow, before R. G. Lowe Esq., coroner, on the body of Thos. Thrale, aged 4 years, son of Thomas Thrale, formerly baker in this place and now of London. The child became suddenly ill, and the grandmother of the child sent for Mr. Crisp, surgeon, who attended, and on his arrival pronounced the little sufferer in a dying state. Mr. Crisp was of opinion that the deceased died from hydrocephalus. Verdict was given accordingly.

On Saturday the 2nd inst. a dinner to commemorate the formation of a new society, was held at the Red Cow Inn, to be called the Red Cow Benefit Society. Mr. Crisp presided on the occasion and was unanimously elected surgeon to its members. The rules and orders for promoting this new society were carefully read and approved of. The dinner was got up in good style by the host and hostess and gave universal satisfaction. The day and evening passed away in social harmony.

As described above, the child's father, Thomas Thrale, had been licensee of The Boot (later the Bricklayers Arms) in the High Street in 1851, where he was also running a bakery, though he was living in London in 1855. Young Thomas must have been staying with his maternal grandparents, William and Mary Peacock, in Wheathampstead.

The sad story of Thomas's death seems not to have deterred the members of the new Benefit Society from celebrating its formation; Mr Crisp had a busy day.

Benefit (or 'Friendly') societies, in one form or another, go back some hundreds of years but in the nineteenth century were typically formed by groups of people, often based locally, as a form of insurance against hardship, particularly sickness (hence perhaps the election of Mr Crisp) and unemployment. Members would make regular payments to the Society and could apply for financial help when they needed it. The creation of the welfare state in the twentieth century made these societies less important but many large financial institutions today, particularly some insurance companies, have their origins in benefit societies.

The 1861 census shows Charles Gray at the Red Cow beerhouse with the occupation of drayman. He and his wife Ann have six children of whom the oldest, also named Charles, is 16. They have a servant, Emma Joiner (19), also born in Preston, and two lodgers both of whom are labourers.

In June 1865, he was fined 5s. and 9s. 6d. costs for 'having his house open' at 11.00 o'clock at night. He pleaded guilty, saying that he had kept his house open at Whitsuntide for 21 years on the day of a club feast, which was the annual holiday of the village. 'He was very sorry if he had done wrong as he had never had a complaint made against him before' – this was not quite true...see above.

By 1871, all six offspring are still unmarried and living at home and another daughter, Minnie, has been born. There are no servants and no lodgers. Charles is described as 'Brewer at brewhouse and Publican'.

Ten years later, the 1881 census describes him as a brewer's labourer and beerhouse keeper. Two unmarried adult children are living at home. Son Edward is a 32-year-old bricklayer and daughter Minnie is 16 and a 'sewer'. They have a 22-year-old visitor, John Westwood, a carpenter. He is probably the elder brother of William George Westwood who married Minnie in 1895 (see below).

An inquest at the Red Cow in 1884 heard the sad story of the death of eleven-week old Harriett Bangs. In an unusually long account, the Herts Ad dated 19 July reported that the coroner's jury had heard the mother, Mary Ann Bangs, state that she was a single woman with two other children and living with Joseph Arnold, father of the dead child. Harriett had seemed in good health on the Saturday evening and she had fed her at about three o'clock in the morning. When she woke at about 8.30, she found the baby lying on her back 'in the place where I had laid it which was on the outside of the bed, Arnold having laid on the other side'. She was cold and there was a purple spot on her forehead. Joseph Arnold called a neighbour, Maria Bracey, who gave evidence that she lived 'next door...

but two to Arnold's cottage. On Sunday morning, about eight o'clock, I was sitting at breakfast, when Arnold opened the door and said, "Maria, my child is dead." He seemed very much put out. I went to the cottage and upstairs. The mother was just putting on her clothes. She was, like the man, very much put out about the child. It was lying outside the bed. I moved it as it laid there. Something like blood came from the mouth and nose. The child seemed stiff. The mother is very kind to all her children and the father seemed fond of them. I did not notice any mark on the forehead.—Dr. Blake deposed: I saw the child this afternoon. It was well nourished and of a fair average size. From the evidence the cause of death appears most probably to have been suffocation.—The Jury returned a verdict to the effect that death was caused by accidental suffocation.

Mary Ann Bangs came from Gustard Wood where, three years earlier and aged 26, she was living with her parents and three siblings. Joseph Arnold was their lodger, also aged 26. The household was completed by three-year-old Frederic Bangs, the eldest child of Mary Ann and Joseph.

They married in 1885 but an inquest into the death of Mary Ann Arnold, held at The Red Cow and reported in the Herts Ad on 24 March 1885, found that 'death was caused by syncope due to hemorrhage previous and subsequent to accouchement.' She had died in childbirth.

In the 1891 census, Charles Gray has taken up a new second occupation, being described as a baker and beer retailer. The bakery was behind the main building. Edward and Minnie are still living at home though Edward is now a labourer and Minnie is a dressmaker.

Minnie Gray, then aged 30, married William George Westwood (32) in 1895. Her elder sister, Mary Ann Gray (born 1851), had married William's elder brother James (also born 1851) in 1871. James was licensee of the Two Brewers from about 1874 until his death in 1906.



William and Minnie Westwood's wedding day in 1895

Ann Gray is third from right in the back row so it is likely that Charles Gray is third from left. William and Minnie are in the middle of the front row with Minnie's sister Nell second from right. It seems likely that James and Mary Ann Westwood are also in the photograph.

Charles Gray died early in 1901 aged 82 and his widow Ann had taken over the licence by the time of the census on 31 March. Minnie, now 36, was at the Red Cow on census night helping her mother run the business, together with her children Doris, aged 3, and William (junior), aged 1. The 1901 census shows William (senior) lodging at an address in Stoke Newington and working as a 'cart minder' in Billingsgate fish market. We can surmise that, when Charles died, Minnie returned home to help her mother while William stayed on temporarily in London.

Also at the Red Cow on census night were Ann's widowed daughter Ellen, now aged 41, and Nellie Westwood, aged 21, who was William (senior)'s niece. She died, still with the surname Westwood, in 1969 at the age of 89.

The Westwoods were, and still are, an extended family in this part of Hertfordshire. William was born in Welwyn in 1863 where his parents, Thomas (a whitesmith working in tin and pewter) and Sarah, kept the Steam Engine beerhouse. In his teens, he lived for a while in Wheathampstead with his elder brother James, a blacksmith who kept the Two Brewers. In 1891, aged 28, William was living with his mother, brother John and her two grandchildren, Tom and Nellie, in Hornsey and working as a milkman. Sarah died in 1908.

By 1902 the licence had been transferred to William Westwood (senior), who had returned from his job in London and held the licence until at least 1920 and possibly until he died in 1928. The licence had therefore been held by the same family from at least 1844 to 1920.



The Red Cow in about 1903

The man standing by the door is William Westwood. In the doorway, the old lady is Ann Gray, the woman holding a baby is Minnie Westwood, the baby is Gladys Westwood and the child is Doris Westwood. Gladys married Wilfred Euinton and died in 2001 at the age of 98.

Note that the Red Cow has been sold to Pryor Reid; this sale caused some disagreement in the family.

(With thanks to Barry Euinton, grandson of Minnie and William, for identifying the people in the two Westwood photographs.)

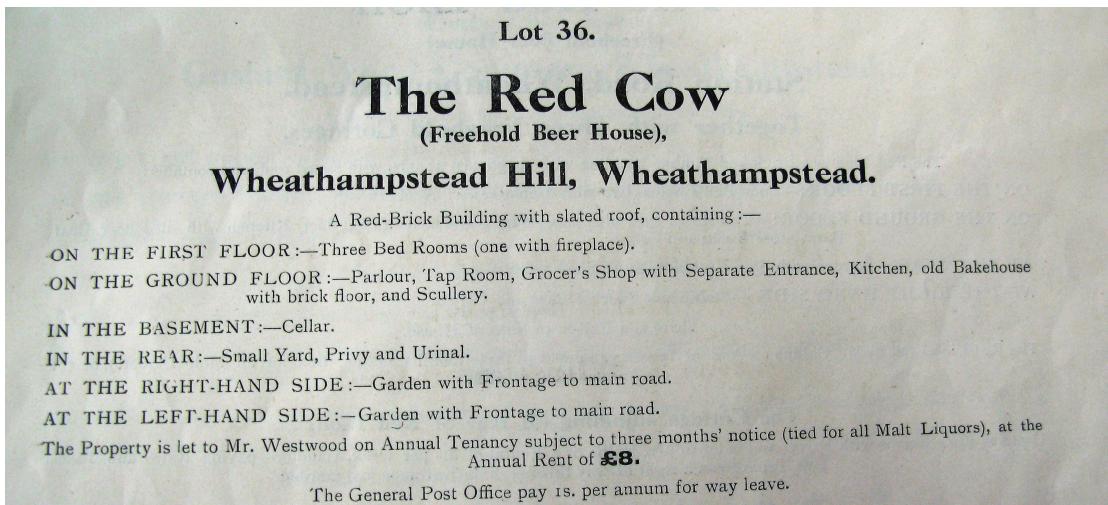
The Licensing Committee in 1904 determined the annual duty payable on the Red Cow for the purpose of the publican's licence to be £22.

The 1911 census shows William (48) and Minnie (46) living at the Red Cow with Doris (13) and William (11) who are at school, plus Bernard (5) and Gladys (8). Gladys, who married Wilfred Euington, died in 2001 aged 98.

John Westwood died in 1919 and is buried with his wife Amy at St Helen's. Minnie Westwood died in 1944 at the age of 79. Bernard Westwood died in 1975 and is buried at St Helen's with his wife Lily.

Postscript

The Red Cow was sold as Lot 36 when the Hatfield Brewery estate was auctioned in 1920. This extract from the auction catalogue mentions an 'old bakehouse' and a grocer's shop. This is the only record of the shop that we have found to date.



Red Cow Field

As noted above (page 1), Red Cow Field was owned in 1758 by the Abbey of Westminster. The 1841 Tithe Map calls this field 'Great Red Cow Field' (plot 834), confirms that it was owned by Westminster and states that the tenant is J.Mardall. He was the farmer at Bury Farm. The Tithe Map calls the field on the other side of the road 'Red Cow Field' (plot 844), occupied by John Dorrington and owned by J.I. House.

The arrival of the railway in Wheathampstead in 1860 transformed the local economy, including making the whole area more attractive as a place to live and work. Red Cow Field was a prime candidate for development and an advertisement appeared in the Herts Ad on 29 July 1871 stating that 'Red Cow Field on Wheathampstead Hill will be divided into Building and Accommodation Blocks.' It was part of the estate of the late J.I.House so was probably the field on the other side of the road from the Red Cow.

Eight years later, *The Bedfordshire Herald* dated 20 June 1879 contained this advertisement (see next page).

WHEATHAMPSTEAD, HERTS.

On Hertford, Luton, and Dunstable Branch of the Great Northern Railway.

IMPORTANT SALE OF FREEHOLD AND COPYHOLD ESTATES, FOR OCCUPATION OR INVESTMENT.

Mr. CUMBERLAND

Has been favoured with instructions from the representative of the late Mrs. Mardall, to Sell by Auction, at the Swan Inn, Wheathampstead, Herts., on FRIDAY, June 27th, 1879, at 5 for 6 o'clock in the evening punctually, the following Valuable Properties, in 6 Lots, viz.:—

One of the lots was described as follows:

On the top of Wheathampstead hill, a Valuable ENCLOSURE of FREEHOLD ARABLE LAND, known as Red Cow Field, and containing 7A. 2R. 32P. It commands extensive and varied views over Brocket Hall Park, Lamer Park, No Man's Land, &c., and is a most eligible site for a good residence or for a public Institution.

It is situated mid-way between the Wheathampstead station and No Man's Land, about three-quarters of a mile from each; and four miles from the City of St. Albans. It has a long frontage to the high road. It is now in the occupation (with part of the premises let) of Mrs. Lattimore, a yearly tenant.

Given the name link between J.Mardall, tenant of the field called 'Great Red Cow Field' behind the Red Cow in 1841, and 'the late Mrs Mardall' in this advertisement, this is probably the same field despite losing the 'Great' before its name.

Two weeks later, on 4 July, the Luton Times and Advertiser reported that the sale had been a great success, with the room at the Swan, where it was held, 'overflowing'. Red Cow Field had fetched £770, compared with £638 when it had last changed hands in 1810.

The development of the area continued apace. By 1897, it was 'Red Cow Meadow Estate'.

Sales by Auction.

On the Great Northern Railway, within easy distance of London.

**RED COW MEADOW ESTATE,
WHEATHAMPSTEAD.**

M^{R.} TOM W. TOMLINSON is instructed to offer for sale by private treaty, the first portion of this exceptionally well-placed

FREEHOLD BUILDING LAND

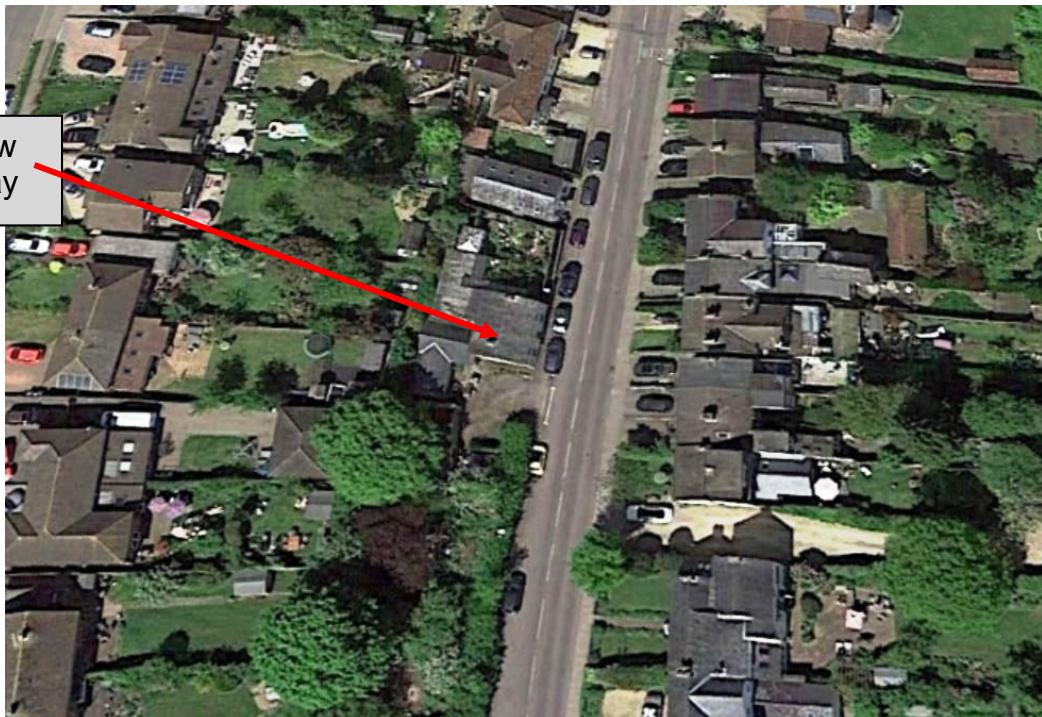
in plots with frontages to the High Road.

The land occupies a very pleasing position, and it is well adapted for the erection of a superior class of cottages, for which there is a special demand.

Further particulars can be obtained of

MR. TOM W. TOMLINSON,
AUCTIONEER, HOUSE AND LAND AGENT,
GROSVENOR ROAD, ST. ALBANS.

This aerial view makes a stark comparison with the 1758 map with which this account opened.



© Google Earth 2018

© Wheathampstead History Society