

## Royal Exchange

The Royal Exchange stood on the eastern side of the road in Lower Gustard Wood. It is now a private house standing back from and a little above the road.



The earliest reference to The Royal Exchange by name is in White's 1837 directory, which names Thomas Turner as licensee. Turner is also listed in the 1834 Poor Rate Assessment as licensee of an unnamed beerhouse in Gustard Wood, which suggests that he opened it in response to the Beerhouse Act of 1830 which made it possible to obtain a licence to sell beer on the premises by paying two guineas a year to the Excise. The beerhouse was valued at £6 per year, reduced to £5 a year later. Charles Lattimore is listed as the owner, as he was in the 1837 Poor Rate Assessment, which raised the value to £10.

The 1841 census tells us more about Thomas Turner. Aged 40, he is described as a miller living with his wife Esther (40), and four children aged under 13. Like most beerhouse licensees, he had a second source of income.

In 1851, the census shows that the licensee of the Royal Exchange was now Abraham Brothers, aged 57, who combined selling beer with his trade as a boot and shoe maker. Born in Holwell, Bedfordshire, he was married to Elizabeth, aged 50 and a native of Wheathampstead. Three of their four children (Diana (15), Sarah (13) and Abraham (11)) were straw plaiters, while 8-year-old John was at school.

In addition to two directory listings in the 1850s, the next we hear of the Royal Exchange is a report in the Herts Ad of 9 April 1859 when an inquest was held there into the death of John Bygrave, who was listed in the 1841 census as a next-door neighbour aged 60 working as a blacksmith. He must have been about 78 when he died. In evidence, his daughter said that he had been taken ill at about 11 o'clock on the previous Saturday night and had died within an hour. He had been suffering from a rupture for a long period and, on this occasion, was in great pain and said it was his 'old complaint'. She had called Dr. West who gave evidence that Mr Bygrave 'had an enormous rupture, which must have caused him great pain, and

obliged him to wear a truss'. It is fair to assume that the rupture was brought on by his heavy work as a blacksmith. The jury returned a verdict of natural death.

The 1861 census confirms that Abraham Brothers, retailer of beer and shoe maker, was still licensee, now living with his wife, daughter Sarah (both still working as plaiters), and sons Abraham, who is a lath render, and John, agricultural labourer.

Abraham Brothers (senior) died in 1865 and by 1871 the licence had been transferred to his widow Elizabeth, who was also taking in laundry, helped by her unmarried daughter Sarah, now aged 38. There was also a boarder, Frederick Perfect, a carpenter. He was a widower from Norwich, aged 34.

Elizabeth died in 1876 and the licence was taken over by Abraham Brothers (junior) who appeared at the County Petty Sessions on 10 April 1881 as complainant in a case of wilful damage being done by two men from Welwyn. Brothers gave evidence that they had come to The Royal Exchange at 8.30 one evening and asked for beer. He refused to serve them because they had assaulted him. They then threw objects at the shutters and door, tried to set light to the neighbouring barn, and broke five windows and some tiles and slates. A witness supported his evidence and the two men were convicted and sentenced to two months' hard labour.



By 1881, the household had grown substantially. As well as Abraham Brothers and his wife Sarah (described as a needlewoman, aged 46), there was their daughter Elizabeth, aged 15 and working as a teacher (presumably a pupil-teacher), daughter Ellen (11 years old and at school), son Henry (aged 9 and at school), Abraham's sister Sarah (still working as a laundress) and two lodgers, one a widower and one married, both of whom were joiners.

Abraham Brothers died suddenly in 1883 at the age of 43. The inquest, which was held at the Royal Exchange, heard that he had been sitting in the bar early one evening, apparently in good health and chatting about the races, hurdle-making and the work he was going to do on the next day when his head had dropped suddenly and he died within five minutes. His brother John gave evidence that Abraham had complained on more than one occasion of pain in his chest and said that his heart was 'going like a pair of bird-clackers'. Dr Blake said

that he had probably died of heart disease. The jury agreed and brought in a verdict of death by natural causes.

The National Probate Calendar shows that Abraham Brothers, victualler, did not leave a will and that his personal estate, valued at £19, was passed to Sarah, his widow. The licence was transferred to her at the next County Petty Sessions.

The 1891 census shows that, by this time, George Spicksley (usually spelled Spikesley) was licensee of the Royal Exchange but it also shows what had become of the Brothers family. Sarah, daughter of Abraham (senior) was living at the Ship in Wheathampstead and working as housekeeper for her brother John, who was by then a widower with seven sons and one daughter. Ten years before, he had been licensee at the Cherry Trees (Travellers' Friend) in Lower Luton Road, living with his wife Rhoda, their eight sons and her father. Rhoda had died in 1889, aged 42, having borne 12 children in 16 years.

George Spikesley was born in Wheathampstead and had lived next-door-but-one to The Royal Exchange before he took over the licence. The 1890 directory states that he is a beer retailer, while the 1891 census says he is a 47-year-old general labourer – yet another example of a licensee having two sources of income. He lived with his wife Sarah and a lodger, Alfred Dollin aged 36. Dollin was born in a cottage on Ballslough Hill in Kimpton and had previously lodged at William Welch's beerhouse, the Cricketers, before moving to the Royal Exchange.

George Spikesley seems to have kept out of trouble with the magistrates. The only report of a court appearance was in the Herts Ad of 14 August 1897 when a charge of selling beer out of hours was dismissed for lack of evidence.

His surname is spelled 'Spikley' in the 1901 census which shows that he and his wife had four lodgers, one of whom was a carpenter. The other three were labourers, including William Groom and the faithful Alfred Dollin.

George Spikesley died in 1906 (his name is spelled 'Spickley' in the register) and his widow Sarah took over the licence, which she held until at least 1914. The 1911 census lists her as the publican with three boarders, including William Groom and the still-loyal Alfred Dollin, now aged 55.

The Royal Exchange was sold at auction in 1920 as part of the Hatfield Brewery estate.

