

## The Ship

Long since demolished, the Ship beerhouse used to stand opposite the Swan on the corner of the High Street at its junction with Marford Road (formerly Hatfield Lane). Town Farm was on the opposite corner.



The Ship in about 1900. The smaller sign on the post says 'Teas provided'.

The Dunham family were long-standing licensees at this beerhouse, chiefly as bricklayers who sold beer as a sideline. James Dunham is recorded as beer retailer at the Ship from 1837 to 1870, a total of 33 years. The Dunhams were local people and the family had been bricklayers for generations. Churchwardens' accounts for 1808, 1814, 1815 and 1816 are full of invoices for lime, hair, bricks and hods of mortar used by John Dunham in repairs to the main fabric of the church and the churchyard wall.<sup>i</sup> He also built the wall that runs beside the mill bypass in Mill Walk. The 1830 change in the licensing laws facilitated the opening of beershops in a government attempt to wean the population off spirits and onto beer, seen as the healthier beverage, giving James the opportunity to dispense beer as well as lay bricks.

The Ship was owned by Charles Higby Lattimore (1806 –1889), a local farmer, first at Bride Hall, then at Place Farm. He was well known for his strong views on the rights of tenant farmers and campaigned nationally for free trade as well as advising Cobden on the repeal of the Corn Laws.<sup>ii</sup> For a time the Ship Inn was known as the Free Trader, reflecting its owner's liberal views.

In the 1851 census James Dunham, aged 62, is listed as 'Bricklayer and beerseller' though a hand-written amendment to the record suggests that his wife Rebecca (61) may be the actual licensee. Women played a significant role in the history of pubs, allowing the man of the house to pursue his perhaps more profitable trade. There are four lodgers.

In 1861, James and Rebecca are still there, with James shown as the licensee; both are 72 years of age. Their son William (45) also a bricklayer, and grandson Frederick

John Dunham (11) are also living at the Ship, with a 16-year-old servant Sophia Franklin who came from Sandridge. Members of the Franklin family held the licence of the King William and the Three Oaks at various times – perhaps another example of how beerselling ran in families.

Another member of the Dunham family, Thomas, opened the Locomotive beerhouse a few hundred yards up the road in 1861, the year after the railway opened in Wheathampstead.

By 1871 William Dunham, now aged 52, has taken over as landlord at the Ship and is living there with his wife Ruth, daughter Sophia (11) and Ruth's mother Sarah Wright who came from Bedford. Three lodgers complete the household.

William died aged 61 early in 1877. The Herts Ad dated 2 June reported that the licence had been transferred to his wife, named as Mary Ann Sophia Dunham. There is some confusion here – William's wife was called Ruth and was by now his widow. It is possible that 'Mary Ann Sophia Dunham' was William's daughter Sophia but she would have been only 17 or 18 years old at the time. In any case, the transfer was temporary. In the following week's edition, the Herts Ad reported that the licence had been transferred from 'William Duncan deceased' to 'James Duncan'. This is another example of inaccurate reporting; 'Duncan' should be 'Dunham'. We do not know where James Dunham came from but the 1871 census shows a James Dunham aged 58 working as a builder in Hatfield. His sons are both bricklayers and their neighbour Henry Dunham is a master carpenter. James and William are of similar age so may have been brothers or cousins.

In 1881, Frederick Dunham, who was James and Rebecca's grandson and now aged 31, is licensee living with his wife Ellen, five daughters and two sons. The eldest child is just nine years old.

In February 1888 John Brothers is described as the landlord of the Ship when he gives evidence in a case about a Boxing Day brawl that had started outside the Ship and continued all the way up the hill towards the Park Hotel on Nomansland. The headline in the Herts Advertiser was:

**THE MOONLIGHT AFFRAY AT WHEATHAMPSTEAD:  
PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THE POLICE-CONSTABLE.<sup>iii</sup>**

It must have been a notorious and rather sensational trial. The courtroom was packed and there were several witnesses all out to have revenge on the village constable who had been doing his job a little too enthusiastically, allegedly beating up the drunken men involved. The *Herts Advertiser* records the trial in detail with witness's jokes about heads that cracked like coconuts, and it being a 'right Boxing Day'. We gain a fascinating picture of the trouble caused by visitors from Luton coming by train to Wheathampstead for a night's drinking on the night after Christmas 1887.

Herbert Dillingham, a 65-year-old straw hat stiffener from Luton, brought the prosecution against the village policeman, Edward John Holmwood. He gave evidence that he and two friends, Gore and Spacy, had been drinking at the Bull until 10.00pm so they were all 'a bit merry' when they passed the Ship Inn hoping for more drink. When Brothers refused, one of them used 'a vulgar expression' swearing at Brothers who was standing outside his pub. Brothers took umbrage and laid into him. PC Holmwood, passing in plain clothes at the time and therefore unrecognised as the parish constable, leapt into the fray. He was alleged to have 'bashed his prosecutor [*ie Dillingham*] to the ground' as he tried to rescue Brothers from the *melée*. Being somewhat over-zealous in performing his duty, however, PC Holmwood went on hitting and bashing one or other of the three culprits all the way up The Hill. By the time they got to the top about twelve men were involved in the fight and injuries were plentiful. Holmwood had used his staff to hit one man on the jaw and Dillingham was 'bashed down about four times altogether'. It had been a violent affray and the injured men wanted revenge against Holmwood. Jesse and George Chennells from Town Farm and several other witnesses gave evidence of what they had seen.

The first part of the hearing was followed by PC Holmwood's counter-summons against Dillingham in which he gave his rather different version of events. He maintained that he had seen Dillingham and friends leaving the Bull, where they had been refused any more drink, and had followed them up the street where he saw Brothers in the gutter being held down by Dillingham and another man. He had 'rolled them off' Brothers and the three men had started up The Hill. Brothers asked him to take their names as he wanted to prosecute them for assault so he followed them to the top of The Hill where there was a fight involving a dozen men. He was held down by some of the men while the fight continued but he 'used his staff' to free himself and followed the men towards the Park Hotel, successfully catching all three. After more witness evidence and some cross-examination, the Bench retired to consider their verdict (see next page).

This was the case on the cross-summons, and the Bench retired for consultation. On their return, the Chairman said: We have given our best attention to the two cases, and after a long consideration, the magistrates feel that the evidence in regard to the bashing of Dillingham's head on the ground by the policeman near Brothers' house is so very cogent—there having been at least four trustworthy witnesses in support of the fact—that it is impossible to disregard the facts so spoken to, and they must consider the charge proved. The Bench are not considering the allegation of using the truncheon on the hill. When a policeman is set upon, he has a right to use his truncheon; and although Holmwood acted with some energy, yet he acted in self-defence according to the evidence, and the Bench do not consider there is anything wrong in that respect. But the "bashing" of a man's head against the ground three or four times is serious. It may be thought the Bench are reversing, to some extent, their decision on the former occasion; but there has been new evidence to-day, and the effect of that further evidence has been to induce the Bench to come to the conclusion that the case has been proved against the policeman. The policeman has only erred in excess of zeal; and the Bench do not, therefore, propose to visit it very harshly on him; but to mark their sense of the matter, they fine him 20s., including costs. The cross-summons is dismissed.

(There was much applause in court upon hearing the decision).

PC Holmwood kept his job and was assured that the case would not affect his prospects of promotion. His superintendent reported that he was a good policeman, had a very good character, and was a teetotaler.

The 1890 Kelly's directory lists John Brothers aged 48 as beerseller and gardener at the Ship. He had been landlord at the Cherry Trees until the late 1880s, living with his wife Rhoda and their eight children. His father Abraham was for many years landlord at the Royal Exchange in Lower Gustard Wood, followed by his son (John's brother) also named Abraham. Beer selling was clearly a family trade.

The 1891 census shows John Brothers as a widower at the Ship aged 48. Rhoda had died aged 42 in 1889 having borne four more children, making a total of eleven sons and one daughter between 1870 and 1886. The biblical names of many of the sons (John, James, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Mark and Matthew) suggest that John, at least, was a devout man. Also living at the Ship in 1891 were his daughter Elizabeth, sister Sarah who was his housekeeper, and a lodger, James Peacock (66).

John Brothers remarried in 1892 and was still at the Ship in 1895, but died in January 1897; the licence was transferred to his widow Rosa (Herts Ad 27 February). He left effects of £144.

She did not keep it for long. It was transferred to John Dewar in June 1897 and by 1898 was held by George Garland. He came from Somerset – another example of an incomer taking the licence of a village pub in the late 19th century. He had been working as a footman at Elstree High School in 1891. The 1901 census confirms that he was still at the Ship. The 1904 minutes of the County Licensing Committee show that G.F. Lattimore is the freehold owner and Pryor Reid are lessees.

By 1906, James Edward Couldry is licensee at the Ship. He is listed in the 1881, 1891 and 1901 censuses as making and selling umbrellas, sunshades and whips in Welwyn; when he moved to the Ship he brought the business with him.

Established 1870. **Buy of the Maker.**  
**J. E. COULDRY & SON,**  
 ALL KINDS OF WHIPS. Carriage & Pair Horse from 7/6  
 Gig Whips from 4/6. Extra Knotted Silver-Mounted  
 from One Guinea. West End Style.  
 Gents own Sticks Dressed and Made into Whips, Hunting  
 Crops, &c. Umbrellas and Sunshades Made, Re-covered  
 and Repaired. Ladies' Re-covering from 2/6, Gent's  
 from 3/6 upwards.  
 A Good Serviceable Gent's Umbrella with Cherry Handle from 6/6  
 kept in Stock, also Ladies. Pattern Books kept to choose from.  
 All Goods made at  
**THE SHIP, HIGH ST., WHEATHAMPSTEAD.**  
 Ladies' waited on on receipt of Postcard.

Following the Balfour Act 1904, the County Licensing Committee was empowered to close pubs that were deemed surplus to the requirements of the community, i.e. they were redundant. The Ship was one of three pubs in the centre of Wheathampstead that were closed between 1906 and 1910.

At its meeting in May 1910, the Committee considered the non-renewal of the licence for the Ship. Attention was drawn to the over-provision of licensed premises in the village centre, there being six others within 440 yards. The Committee decided not to renew the licence and awarded compensation of £50 to James Couldry, £50 to Mr Lattimore the freeholder, and £25 to Pryor Reid the lessee. Couldry did not object to the non-renewal.

The 1911 census shows that James Couldry and his wife had returned to Welwyn taking the business with them.

---

<sup>i</sup> CP109/8/1 Churchwarden's vouchers

<sup>ii</sup> See [wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk](http://www.wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk) for research on Lattimore.

<http://www.wheathampsteadheritage.org.uk/uploadedfiles/History%20Society/Documents/CH%20Lattimore%20biography%20V6.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> *Herts Advertiser*, 4th February 1888, p. 7.