

The Tin Pot



Despite being one of the oldest licensed houses in Wheathampstead, let alone Gustard Wood, we have comparatively little evidence of the history of the Tin Pot. Situated towards the northern end of the row of houses that runs north from the junction with The Slype, the building, which was originally a medieval hall house, is Grade II listed and described by Historic England as dating from the late 15th or early 16th century.

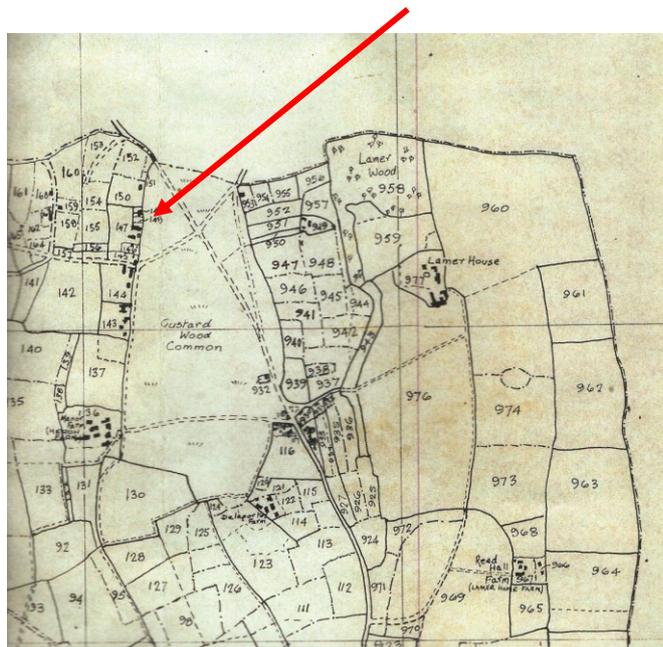
The earliest record we have is from the Hertfordshire Session Rolls (1665) – the story is retold by Felicity Hebditch in 'No Room at the Inn' (*Hertfordshire's Past* Autumn 1992). Nicholas Brooks, a fishmonger from Southwark, had been turned away when he asked for a bed for the night at 'Thomas Wethered's' and then at The Bull in Wheathampstead, where Roger Austin was landlord, on 2 January 1665. He had travelled on to 'Robert Parker's' at the Tin Pott house in Wheathamsteede where he had both lodging and good entertainment for himself and horses and was well used'. He complained that Wethered and Austin had failed to meet their obligations as innkeepers to offer a bed to a *bona fide* traveller and asked that they should be 'bound over to answer the same'.

The billeting record of 1756 states that the house was kept by William Carter with stabling for two horses. He died in January 1782.

For at least the next 150 years, there is a substantial gap in the evidence, made more difficult by the fact that the trade directories and the census often describe a householder as 'beer seller' or 'beer retailer' without naming the pub in question. Similarly, the Poor Rate Assessments in the 1830s, while naming the licensees, do not always name their beerhouses or even their localities.

For example, the 1837 trade directory names a William Carter as a beer retailer at unnamed premises in Gustard Wood; it is tempting to think that he is a descendant of the 1756 William

Carter and had the licence for the Tin Pot. However, there were many men with the surname Carter living in Gustard Wood at this time so this can only be conjecture.



A close inspection of the 1840 tithe map and index suggests that the Tin Pot was on plot 149 of the map, which is described in the index as 'House and premises', owned by Ed. Williams and occupied by John House.

The roads and tracks shown in dotted lines are later additions to the map; they were not there in 1841.

The 1851 census shows a beer seller, Charles Howard (28), living with his wife Jane and three small children at approximately the right location. Similarly, the 1861 census lists William Blain (28), beer retailer, in the same row of houses in Gustard Wood. Neither of these men can be linked to any of the other local beerhouses but it is still not possible to place them with any certainty at The Tin Pot.

Only in the mid-1860s do we begin to be able to pin down the name of the licensee. James Archer, who was at The Woodman until the mid-1860s and moved to a different beerhouse in about 1865. He was definitely at The Tin Pot in 1881 and it is reasonable to infer that he moved there from The Woodman in 1865 with his second wife, Harriet.

James Archer had had some trouble with the authorities while he was at The Woodman and this continued at The Tin Pot. For example, the Hertford Mercury of 5 May 1866 reported that he had been charged at Hitchin Petty Sessions with stealing two trusses of hay. He pleaded guilty, saying that his co-defendant William Dellaway had "induced him to steal the hay". The prosecution case was withdrawn when the defendants agreed to pay the costs. Dellaway is also identified as a beerhouse keeper but there is no trace of him by that name in the censuses for 1861 or 1871.

Later in 1866, the Herts Ad reported that Archer had been fined 15 shillings with costs for keeping his house open after 10.00 pm but, again, the house is not named.

The year 1869 was particularly busy for James Archer in the courtroom. In February, he gave evidence that a gun involved in a case about poaching did indeed belong to one of the defendants and that it had been left at his beerhouse for a few days "last cherry time".

Next, there is this report in the Herts Ad in June of the same year about a “disorderly bacchanalia” at his beerhouse.

QUON SU.
A DISORDERLY BACCHANALIAN.
William Swallow, of Wheathamstead, was charged with being drunk and riotous, on the 14th instant.
The defendant admitted that he had had a drop too much, but could not say that he had been riotous, as his head was very weak.
Police-constable Webb: On Monday, the 14th inst., about half-past ten in the evening, I was on duty at Gustard Wood, and going along the public thoroughfare, when, about twenty yards from a beer-shop kept by a man named James Archer, I heard a great noise. I went up, and heard defendant making use of most disgusting language. He said that he did not care for me and would kick me, and turned away. He refused to leave, and said that he would stop as long as he liked. He was very drunk, and fell down by the roadside. I told a man to take him away, and he did his best to do so. Defendant repeated his disgraceful language, and swore what he would do to me, so I did not go near him. He threatened to kick me, and was ultimately taken off across the common, making a great noise all the way.
The Chairman told the defendant that it was a most disgraceful thing for a man of his age to be brought up on such a charge.
Defendant admitted that he had gone too far, and did not know what he was doing. His head had been very weak.
The Chairman said that would be a most disgraceful acknowledgment for a young man, but still more so for a man of his age.
Defendant was fined 14s., including costs, or in default a fortnight's imprisonment.

The Swallow family appear in several court cases around this time.

In October 1869, an inquest was held at “James Archer’s beer house” into the death of 7-year-old George Boon who had died “without having the attendance of a medical gentleman”. The child had been suffering from whooping cough and worms and had been ill for several days. His father had left for work at 7.00 o’clock on the Wednesday morning and

George Boon senior, father of the little boy, appears in the 1861 census as a labourer living, aged 25, with a housekeeper, Lydia Humphrey aged 21. We can assume that ‘housekeeper’ is a euphemism since the 1871 census shows them as a married couple with two young children, George (junior) having died two years before. By 1881, they had had six more children, five of whom were still living at home in 1891. In the meantime, George (senior) had appeared in court more than once, including in August 1869 charged with assaulting Mrs Crawley, wife of the licensee of The Woodman. In May 1872, he charged William Welch, licensee of The Cricketers, with assault. The court heard that Boon had been ‘very drunk’, had struck Mrs Welch, and that Welch had defended her. Welch was acquitted.

the child had been found dead at 7.00 o'clock that evening. 'Its very emaciated appearance was accounted for, according to Dr Spackman, by the whooping cough and worms, and the death very probably by suffocation during a fit of whooping cough.' Mrs Boon stated that 'she would have got a doctor but she had no one to send for a medical man, the distance from Gustard Wood to St Albans being so great.' The jury returned a verdict of death from natural causes.

The 1870 trade directory confirms that James Archer was a beer retailer in Gustard Wood, as does the 1871 census, which shows him as a labourer and beer seller living with his wife Harriet, two infant sons, Jim and Thomas, and two lodgers, but the pub is still not named. One of the lodgers is described as a 30-year-old traveller showman. There were regular fairs on Gustard Wood Common at this time so he may have been performing at one of these.

Harriet Archer, James' second wife, died in 1874.

The trade directories for 1874 to 1878 continue to list James Archer as a beer retailer in Gustard Wood but the 1881 census is the first time that the Tin Pot is named, listing James Archer, beer seller and dealer, as the occupant. He is a widower and lives with his younger son Thomas, aged 10, Maria Webb, 59-year-old housekeeper, and her 18-year-old daughter Sarah, who is a hat sewer.

The 1891 census shows that Archer is still publican at the Tin Pot. The census return lists Maria Webb again but this time as a visitor. There is also a 40-year-old lodger, William Carter, who is a gravel-digger.

James Archer gave up the licence soon afterwards, as shown by the 1895 directory that lists Charles Pond as licensee. He was soon in trouble; the Herts Ad of 23 July 1898 reported that he had been summoned for being drunk and disorderly outside his own beer house. PC Medgwick gave evidence that Pond was very drunk, had been using "very bad language" and had threatened to "knock his teeth down his throat". However, three witnesses stated that Pond was not drunk and the Chairman decided that, since the evidence was so conflicting, he would give the defendant the benefit of the doubt; the case was dismissed.

"When I was there, I had a visit from a Tom Archer, a son of the licensee in the 1890s, and he told us some amusing stories about those days – about a sow that got in and drank from the beer barrels and lay there snoring. A sheep that came in and got wedged under the table that was laid for tea, and everything slid off onto the floor."

Source: Tales from Old Wheathampstead and Gustard Wood: letters from Bert Russell to Amy Coburn. (Wheathampstead Local History Group 2001)

"A man named Charlie Pond was licensee at The Tin Pot around 1900 and I am told of a cherry tree there in his days that had 120 dozen pounds gathered from it in one year. They were Black Crones. They were sold at two shillings and sixpence per dozen pounds and so paid the rent of The Tin Pot for one year. And £15 per annum was still the rent when I was the tenant." "The place was bought by Benskins from Pryor Reids of Hatfield in the 1920s as were other pubs in the district."

(ibid.)

This court case may have triggered Charles Pond's departure from the Tin Pot; the licence was transferred to George Henry Rose in December 1898. He too moved on quickly; the 1901 census shows Elizabeth J. Beckwith (27) as innkeeper of the Tin Pot, living with her infant daughter Kimberley. She is described as 'wife' though her husband is not listed in the census return; he was on active service in South Africa.

Elizabeth Beckwith appeared in court later in 1901, as reported in the Herts Ad of 5 October. She was the plaintiff when George Hill, who was both her lodger and her brother-in-law, was summoned for doing wilful damage to a lock and chain at the Tin Pot. She accused him of breaking into the beer cellar which she kept locked. The defendant claimed that he had some property in the cellar and the Chairman decided that, since this gave him a *bona fide* claim, he had broken the lock in order to get at his property. He had therefore not committed a criminal offence and the case was dismissed.

Gunner Albert Beckwith returned from the front in April 1902 but died soon afterwards. His funeral was reported in the Herts Ad.

FUNERAL OF GUNNER BECKWITH. — On Thursday afternoon in last week the funeral of Gunner Albert Victor Beckwith, of the Royal Horse Artillery, took place at Wheathampstead. More than ordinary interest was taken in the event, as it had been rumoured that it was to be a military funeral, and consequently a large concourse of people assembled. The deceased had been to South Africa and had survived the hardships of campaigning there, but was taken ill on his return home and died shortly after landing, not, however, before he had seen his wife and the little child born during his absence. The ceremony took place at 3.40 p.m. Twelve representatives of the 1st Beds proceeded the cortege from Gustard Wood, where the deceased had previously resided. Inside the Lych gate there followed the mourners to the Church, outside the western door of which they formed into line, being under the command of Lieutenant Blake, of Welwyn. The service was taken by the Rev. H. T. Harvard-Jones, M.A., curate of Wheathampstead, in the absence of Canon Davys. After the service was ended the Volunteers, on the command of their Lieutenant, fired three volleys over the grave, and many a handkerchief wiped away a tear that could not be restrained. The scene was sad and impressive. School children were there as well as old and young from all parts of the parish not simply out of curiosity, but out of deep sympathy for the deceased as an earnest of that respect which is due to one who has served his country.

Mrs Beckwith is listed as licensee of The Tin Pot in the 1902 trade directory but had left by the time of the 1911 census. This does not identify The Tin Pot by name but three beerhouses are listed in this part of Gustard Wood; two of these are The Cross Keys and The Cricketers so it is reasonable to assume that the third is The Tin Pot. This being so, the licensee was Alfred Gates (39), who came from Walworth, London. His wife Martha Ann Gates (44), born in Salisbury, was "assisting with the business" and there was a 20-year-old pot boy, Patrick Lacey, who came from Bishopsgate.

The minutes of the 1904 Licensing Committee show that, at that time, the owner was Mr G.F. Lattimore and that Pryor Reid held the lease.

Postscript

Mr Lattimore died on 10 March 1918 and is buried in the family grave in St Helen's churchyard. The freehold of The Tin Pot was sold at auction later in 1918, the footnote on this handbill suggesting that it was being sold following the death of Mr Lattimore and that the lessee was still Pryor Reid. It was a substantial property with land attached.

LOT 17.

A Valuable Freehold Beerhouse

KNOWN AS

"The Tin Pot,"

SITUATE ON

The West Side of Gustard Wood Common, In the Parish of Wheathampstead.

The House, which is Brick and Timber Built and Tiled, contains:—

ON THE GROUND FLOOR—Entrance Passage, with small Bar; Sitting Room, with old chimney corner; Tap Room, with open range and fixed seats; Parlour, with register stove; Kitchen, with portable range; Scullery, with sink and copper; and capital Cellar, with concrete floor and loft over.

ON THE FIRST FLOOR, which is approached by two staircases, are Three Bedrooms, one with fireplace.

THE OUTBUILDINGS COMPRISE—Small Lean-to Greenhouse, timber and thatched Shed, timber and slated Stable, and timber and corrugated iron Earth Closet.

There is a small Back Yard and a Kitchen Garden at the side of the house, and in the rear are Two Enclosures of Meadow and Orchard Land.

The total area of the Property is about

3 Acres 1 Rood 17 Poles.

Water is obtained from a Well on the premises.

This Lot is let to Messrs. Pryor Reid & Co., Ltd., yearly tenants, holding on under a lease which expired on the 25th of March, 1917, at the low rent of

£25 0s. 0d. PER ANNUM,

THE TENANTS PAYING RATES.

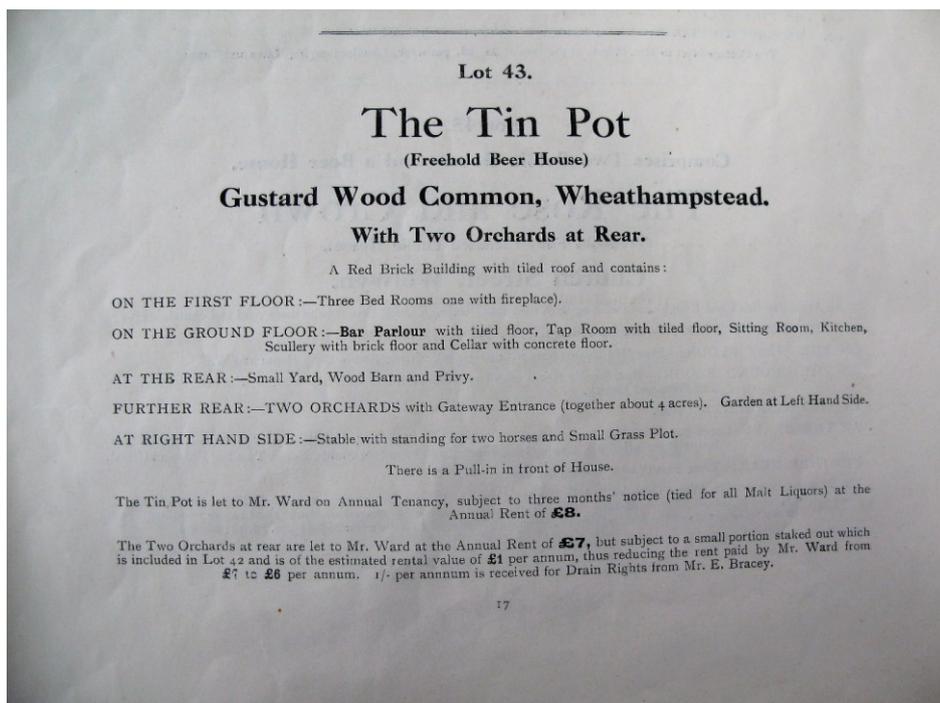
N.B.—The following Fixtures are the property of the present Sub-Tenant:—Partition next Bedroom, forming lobby; Shelves in Cellar; Hen House; Open Shed, with corrugated iron roof; Pair of Doors to Coach House; and a Pair of Doors covered with wire netting from yard to paddock.

This Lot has the important frontage of about 188ft. to the Common.

Permission was given by the late Mr. Lattimore to Messrs. Pryor Reid & Co., Ltd., to sink a dumb well on this property to take the drainage from their house, "The Cricketers," and they will pay to the purchaser of this Lot 10s. per Annum for such right of drainage.

Note the last three lines. The two pubs were almost next door to each other.

There is no record of the buyer but The Tin Pot featured again in the auction of the Hatfield Brewery estate in 1920, when a Mr Ward was licensee (see next page).



The 1937 Post Office Directory shows that the licensee was Herbert Edward Russell. This is Bert Russell who is the subject of *Tales from Old Wheathampstead and Gustard Wood: letters from Bert Russell to Amy Coburn* (Wheathampstead Local History Group 2001), which is quoted above. Bert Russell was born in Gustard Wood in 1900 and lived there all his life. Having worked as a farm labourer at Turners Hall Farm, he took over The Tin Pot in his mid-thirties. His aunt Lucy Straw (née Russell) was licensee of The Plough, as were her husband and, before him, her father.

The Tin Pot stayed open as a public house well into the 21st century, operating as a bed and breakfast establishment in its later years. It is now a private house.