

The Woodman

The Woodman was one of the row of houses and cottages at Gustard Wood that runs south from the junction with The Slype towards Herons Farm, opposite the golf course. It is now a private house that has retained the name.

The first record we have of The Woodman is in the Poor Rate Assessment of 1836 which lists it as a beerhouse owned by Edward Bruton with John Irons as licensee. This is confirmed in William White's General and Commercial Directory dated 1837.

The Parish Record for 15 July 1837 shows that John Irons held a licence for selling beer, ale and porter on the premises. The Record states that William Bruton, yeoman, is going to apply at the annual General Licensing Meeting at Dacorum Petty Sessions in September for a licence to sell 'exciseable liquors' at the Woodman and to keep it as an "inn, alehouse or victualling house". Edward Bruton owns the freehold and Joseph Kingsley of the Kimpton Brewery is lessee from Edward Bruton. There is no record of the outcome of this application but we can infer from later evidence that it had limited success insofar as the Woodman remained a beerhouse with an "on" licence though it later took in lodgers.

The 1837 Poor Rate Assessment shows that William Bruton was licensee of The Woodman and that Joseph Kingsley still held the lease.

John Irons was the son of George Irons, publican at the Unicorn, a small alehouse next to the former Black Lion at the western end of Fishpool Street, from about 1797 until 1819. John was the first publican at the Jolly Sailor on Sandridge Road, St Albans, when it opened in 1827 but had gone from there by 1836, an insolvent debtor. He appears to have taken over the tenancy of The Woodman almost immediately but to have left by 1837; the 1841 census shows him aged 35 living, a bachelor, in Sandridge. He took over the licence of The Queens Head in Sandridge in the early 1840s; the 1851 census lists him as licensee and victualler there, living with his wife Elizabeth. They were still there in 1861 but in 1863 they were at The Rose & Crown in St Michael's Street, St Albans. John died aged 74 in 1879 when his widow Elizabeth took over the licence. She died in 1888 and the Irons family continued at the Rose & Crown until 1927.



The 1841 Tithe Map and index do not identify The Woodman by name but the house is still there and can be identified as plot 143 on the map.

The Index shows that plot 143 was occupied by 'Ed.Bruton and Others' and owned by 'Ed.Bruton Jnr'.

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

© Wheathampstead History Society

The 1841 Poor Rate Assessment lists William Parsons as licensee, with Edward Bruton as owner. The 1841 census includes a 28-year-old William Parsons living with his wife and child in Gustard Wood but he is described as an agricultural labourer and it is not possible to confirm whether this is the same William Parsons.

There is then no mention of The Woodman in any of the usual sources until 1858 when a report in the Herts Ad dated 24 December names John Archer as licensee in a story about a 'serious affray' involving three poachers and two gamekeepers in Prior's Wood, Ayot St Lawrence, in the middle of the night of 16/17 December. The gamekeepers heard the sound of a gun being fired and found three poachers, including notorious poachers Mark Wood and William Edmonds. There was a fight which ended with one of the gamekeepers, John Munro, being 'severely cut about the head' and the three poachers escaping. Police from Kimpton and Wheathampstead were called and they and the gamekeepers went to The Woodman, 'kept by John Archer', at 4.00 in the morning where they found Wood and Edmonds in bed, one of them in particular 'showing severe marks of injuries recently received'. Their clothes and a gun showed 'by their sanguinary appearance' evidence of a fight and the 'back place, where they had just washed themselves looked something like a slaughter house from the clotted blood lying about'. They were arrested, taken to the lock-up in Wheathampstead and later transferred to St. Albans. Munro collapsed from his injuries, 'his cap being full of clotted blood and his clothes completely saturated with that crimson fluid'. The prisoners were remanded until Munro would be sufficiently recovered to attend the court hearing. Later, Thomas Rolph, alias Snowy Rolph, was apprehended on suspicion of being concerned in the affray.

Tracing the history of The Woodman at this period is difficult. While we know that John Archer was licensee in 1858, a report in the Herts Ad dated 26 February 1859 shows that James Archer had been charged with selling beer at The Woodman in prohibited hours.

James Archer, who keeps the 'Woodman' beer-shop at Gustard Wood, was summoned to answer an information laid against him by Inspector Hawkes, from Stevenage, for keeping his house open before half-past 12 o'clock, on Sunday, the 13th instant, for the sale of beer.

The Inspector and Police-constable Hunt, proved going to the defendant's house at 25 minutes past 11 o'clock, on the morning of last Sunday week and finding three men sitting in the tap room with a pot of beer fresh drawn placed under the bench out of sight.

Defendant said in answer to the charge, that he had two lodgers, one of whom was ill, and the brother had come to see and relieve him. He put the beer under the bench out of sight as he thought the Inspector and Policeman (who were in plain clothes) were beggars and would want him to draw some more.

Inspector English, upon being asked, said there was no previous complaint against the house, further than that the two prisoners who committed the violent outrage

on the keepers of the Hon. Mr. Cavendish, some short time since, were found in bed there after the affray.

Fined 10s, and 17s 6d costs. – Paid.

This page from the 1861 census, however, confuses the picture. It shows that John Archer (aged 45) was a beer retailer in Gustard Wood in that year, living two doors along from the household of agricultural labourer James Archer (aged 32), his wife Hannah (32) and their five children.

25

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

[Page 13]

Parish (or Ecclesiastical) of	City or Municipal Borough of	Municipal Ward of	Parliamentary Borough of	Town of	Hamlet or Tything, &c., of	Ecclesiastical District of			
Wheatthamstead									
No. of Houses	Road, Street, &c., and No. or Name of House	SECTIONS	Name and Surname of each Person	Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of	Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Wages Here	Wages Elsewhere
						Male	Female		
62	Gustard Wood	1	John Bigg	Head	Mar	46	Beer & Wine Merchant	2s	2s
			Mrs. F.	Wife		35	Do	2s	2s
			William F.	Son		16	Do	2s	2s
			Emily F.	Daughter		14	Do	2s	2s
			Elizabeth F.	Daughter		9	Do	2s	2s
			Thomas F.	Son		1	Do	2s	2s
63			James Wright	Servant	Mar	32	Labourer	2s	2s
64	Beer Shop	1	John Archer	Head	Mar	45	Beer & Wine Retailer	2s	2s
			Lina F.	Wife		51	Do	2s	2s
			Ann F.	Son		14	Do	2s	2s
			Elizabeth F.	Daughter		9	Do	2s	2s
			Thomas F.	Son		5	Do	2s	2s
65			James Woods	Head	Mar	45	Labourer & Beer Retailer	2s	2s
			Ann F.	Wife		55	Do	2s	2s
			Caroline F.	Daughter		12	Do	2s	2s
66	High Island	1	James Archer	Head	Mar	32	Labourer	2s	2s
			Hannah F.	Wife		32	Do	2s	2s
			Ann F.	Son		13	Do	2s	2s
			Joseph F.	Son		11	Do	2s	2s
			Henry F.	Son		8	Do	2s	2s
			David F.	Son		4	Do	2s	2s
			George F.	Son		1	Do	2s	2s
5	Total of Houses...	4				Total of Males and Females...		23	10

2ag—Sheet D. 7-0

On the other hand, the trade directories for 1859 to 1864 list James Archer as licensee of The Woodman.

If this is not confusing enough, the 1861 census includes another James Archer, aged 41, living in a different part of Gustard Wood with his wife (who is also called Hannah and is aged 40), their daughter and a lodger.

The next press report that names The Woodman is in the Hertford Mercury dated 7 March 1863 when a suspected poacher, John Latchford, is arrested there. He later appeared at the Crown Court accused of striking a gamekeeper, Vincent Munroe, on Lord Dacre's estate. Two witnesses gave him an alibi and he was acquitted. Bearing in mind the story summarised above, it would appear that gamekeeper Munroe had a hard job and that The Woodman was a favoured beerhouse for local poachers.

James Archer seems to have attracted trouble. The Herts Ad of 30 January 1864 reported that "James Archer, beershop keeper" was charged with unlawful possession of a sack, the property of Mr Dorrington of Bride Hall. There were two hearings about this apparently trivial offence and the case was dismissed. Mr Dorrington said that he had never heard anything against the defendant before.

In August 1864 the Herts Ad reported a case of assault at 'James Archer's beershop', though the premises were not named. Ellen Swallow of Gustard Wood was charged with an assault on Emma Crawley, of the same place, on the 19th inst. She had called her names, pulled her hair, spanked her face and torn her bonnet to pieces. The defendant's sister, Louisa Wood, said that the complainant had called the defendant very improper names and stooped to pick up stones, when defendant had just brushed her face with her hand. The Bench considered the assault proved. It was a disgraceful affair; the language used being very improper. The defendant would have to pay a fine and costs amounting to £1 4s. or go to prison for fourteen days. A fortnight would be allowed for payment. The defendant, who had been to prison for assault before, said she would go to prison again. "She suffered innocently before and would do so again".

Hannah Archer died in December 1863. James married again on 26 August 1864, this time to Harriet Tate. It appears that, not long after this event, he gave up The Woodman and moved a short distance up the road to The Tin Pot, a larger and older establishment. He was definitely selling beer in Gustard Wood from 1869 onwards, though it is not until 1881 that the census definitely links him with the Tin Pot.

Evidence to suggest that James Archer had left The Woodman by 1865 appears in the Surrey County Herald of 24 June 1865 which reported that one Samuel Crawley was fined 12s. 6d. with 17s. 6d. costs at the St Albans Liberty Petty Sessions for keeping his house open on a Sunday. He paid the fine. While The Woodman is not named in this report, later evidence clearly places Crawley at The Woodman.

Samuel Crawley came from Kimpton but had been living in Gustard Wood with his wife and six children and working as an agricultural labourer since at least 1861. He and his family were at The Woodman for barely five years but they were eventful years. As well as the Swallow/Crawley assault in 1864 described above, where the complainant was Samuel's daughter, Samuel himself was convicted at the Liberty Petty Sessions in July 1867 of selling beer in prohibited hours, as reported in the Luton and Dunstable Herald dated 10 August. Bearing in mind his previous conviction in 1865, he was fined 40s. with 12s. 6d. costs (see next page).

LIBERTY PETTY SESSIONS,
 Saturday Aug. 3rd.

Present—H. H. Toulmin, Esq., [in the chair];
 G. R. Marten, Esq.; W. H. Smith, Esq.

SELLING BEER IN THE PROHIBITED HOURS.

Samuel Crawley, of Gustard Wood, who did not appear, was charged with keeping his house open for the sale of beer during prohibited hours on Saturday night, the 27th of July.

Police-constable Charles Hill proved the service of the summons on the defendant. On Saturday night the 27th of July, I received several complaints about the defendant's beer-house. I went to Gustard Wood to his house, "The Woodman," at five minutes to eleven, and was standing at the back of his house, and heard men talking in the house, and saw a light in the cellar. I saw Crawley draw a quart of beer: I was looking through the cellar window. He drew a pot of beer: I went to the back door, and while I was going in, some one came and let the man out of the door. The defendant's daughter tried to stop the door to prevent my going in. I got in before she closed the door, and she ran and concealed the quart of beer under her dress.

The defendant was convicted, and having had a previous conviction in 1865, he was fined 40s. and 12s. 6d. costs; or one calendar month's imprisonment in default.

In its account of the same case, the Herts Guardian reported the police stating that the 'house is very badly conducted'.

Late in 1868, Samuel Crawley was in trouble again. The Herts Ad of 5 December reported that he had been convicted at the Liberty Petty Sessions of refusing to admit the police to his beerhouse. He had been fined twice before and on this occasion was fined £2 with 12s. costs. The case was also reported in the Watford Observer and the Hertford Mercury, which suggests that The Woodman was becoming notorious.

Three weeks later, the Luton Times reported that Samuel's daughter Elizabeth had been fined 15s. for stealing 16 turnips. Next, in August 1869 the Herts Ad printed this report of a court case where a certain George Boone was accused of assaulting Mrs Crawley at The Woodman (see next page).

ALLEGED RIOTING.

George Boone, of Wheathamstead, was charged with being drunk and riotous in a public thoroughfare, on the 23rd July.

The defendant did not put in an appearance.

Police-constable Webb having proved the service of the summon, said: On Friday, the 23rd inst., between ten and eleven p.m., I was on duty at Gustard Wood, going round to the public houses and beershops. I was within 80 yards of the Woodman, when I heard a great disturbance, and saw an assemblage of between fifty and sixty people. On going up, I was told that the defendant had knocked down a Mrs. Crawley in the road. I went into the tap room of the beerhouse, where I saw her leaning on a table. She looked white, but on being questioned, she stated that she did not think defendant had hurt her. I saw defendant outside, and told him to come with me, but he refused. I told him I would report the matter to the inspector, and, after swearing a little, he went away. He was drunk, but not incapable. He lodges at the public house, but I do not think he got the drink there. He was knocking the people about, and had knocked Mrs. Crawley down.

Mr. McGeachey: How do you know that?

Witness: The people told me so.

Mr. Adey: Do you know that you are sworn to tell what you know of your own knowledge, not what you are told?

Witness: Well, that's what I stated.

Mr. Adey: No, you have not; you have stated what you were told. You ought not to say anything except of what you know yourself.

The Chairman: Well, you can only swear that he was drunk?

Witness: Yes.

The case was dismissed.

George Boone (or Boon) was a native of Wheathamstead, aged 33, living in Gustard Wood with his wife Lydia and two small sons and working as an agricultural labourer. They lived next-door-but-one to the Swallow family, the mother of which had assaulted Emma Crawley five years earlier. Boon made several court appearances at around this time.

Samuel Crawley appears to have lost his licence in 1869. The Hemel Hempstead Gazette dated 11 September 1869 reports that William Welch had applied for a licence for The Woodman at the Great Berkhamstead Licensing Sessions but had been refused on account of the establishment's poor record. Welch was not disappointed for long; by 1872 he was licensee of The Cricketers, just a few yards up the road. He was no saint himself; we know that he was at The Cricketers in that year from the account of a court case where he was accused, though acquitted, of an assault on George Boone, who owed him money for beer. These were exciting times in Gustard Wood!

The 1871 census shows that Samuel Crawley, now working as an agricultural labourer and aged 52, was living on Wheathampstead Hill with his wife, six children, and granddaughter. His son Samuel, then aged 23, died in 1927 and is buried in St Helen's churchyard.



The last record we have of The Woodman is from the Herts Ad dated 17 August 1878 which contained a notice to the Overseers of the Poor in the parish of Wheathampstead and the Superintendent of Police of the same parish to the effect that one Walter Sills intended to apply to the General Annual Licensing Committee for St Albans for permission to transfer the licence of The Black Horse in Redbourn to a 'House and Premises formerly known as The Woodman beerhouse'. The notice states that the premises are '...now in the occupation of Mrs Sarah Wright...' and are owned by Miss Sarah Bruton.

We do not know whether the application was successful but it seems unlikely since the 1881 census lists Sarah Wright as a widow aged 64, living alone in Gustard Wood and working as a straw plaiter.

The Woodman is not included in the 1898 Poor Rate Assessment nor in the minutes of the 1904 County Licensing Committee. It appears that it never reopened.