

The Nelson

The beerhouse first known as the Melbourne Arms, then briefly as the Horse & Jockey, and finally as the Nelson, stood on the corner of Marford Road (originally Hatfield Lane) and Sheepcote Lane. The 1726 Sandridge parish map shows two buildings at this location but there is no evidence of their function.



We do not have an early photograph of The Nelson but it is the white building in the background. Note the small size of what is now the Marford Road as it disappears into the distance.

The work of a sawyer is thirsty work and August is a thirsty month, so it is not surprising that Marford-born Samuel Gray, a sawyer, took advantage of the new Beerhouse Act of 1830 which made it possible for anyone to open a beer shop on payment of two guineas to the Excise; he applied in August 1836 for an off-licence to sell 'beer, ale and porter' from his home. The business must have been a success because in the following year he applied for a full licence to sell 'exciseable liquors' on the premises (ie an 'on' licence) and to keep the premises as an 'inn, alehouse or victualling house'. The owner of the building was Joseph Kingsley, a Kimpton gentleman and brewer. The name of the beerhouse at this time was the Melbourne Arms. The original of the 1837 application is at HALS (see Appendix).

The 1841 census shows Samuel Gray as a beer retailer in 'Marford Hamlet' living with his wife Mary and four children aged under eight years.

He appeared before the justices in 1847 when the *Hertford Mercury* reported an action brought against him (described as 'a sawyer who recently kept a beerhouse at Wheathampstead') at the County Court by Joseph Kingsley 'brewer of Kimpton' for £20 owed to him for beer. Gray was ordered to pay the debt at the rate of £1 per month.

He appears to have paid the debt because the census return for 1851 lists him as a sawyer and beerhouse keeper at the Melbourne Arms (named for Lord Melbourne of Broomfield Hall) and supporting a wife, Mary Ann, and three sons. The eldest (13) is working as an agricultural labourer, the other two, aged ten and six, were still at school. The two daughters, Martha and Mary, were eight and two years old respectively. A nephew, seven-year-old George Clark, was also living with the family – a household of eight.

In May 1858 the *Herts Advertiser* reported an accident when one Jesse Wood fell off a cart laden with lambs, belonging to his master. He was taken to the Melbourne Arms and the doctor was called.

“He by some means fell off the driving chair ‘ere he reached Marford, on his way to London, and the wheel passed over the thickest part of his thigh and other parts of his body. He was picked up totally insensible and carefully conveyed to the Melbourne Arms. Mr Crisp, surgeon, was immediately sent for; and on his arrival, he found that fortunately, no bones were broken although the muscles were much contused and it was a miracle that the man was not killed on the spot.”

By 1861 Samuel is aged 59 and living with his wife (aged 50) two sons, two daughters and two lodgers at the Melbourne Arms. He is described as a sawyer and retailer of beer. His eldest son James lives down Sheepcote Lane. Aged 25, a hay dealer and sawyer (ie no longer an agricultural labourer) he is married with three children.

Marford in the 1860s

Next door to the Melbourne Arms is the Marford School where unmarried Edward Edwards (aged 47 and born in Baldock) is the school master; the average number of pupils is listed as ‘26 or 27’. Other neighbours were Daniel Brown, age 40, a shepherd, with a wife, two children and two visitors; George Woodward, widower aged 57, agricultural labourer living with his daughter Ann aged 17 and son George (13) a shepherd boy. At Marford Cottage, George Floyd, aged 54, was a brewer’s man, living with his wife and two daughters, Mary, aged 21 (a dressmaker) and Ann aged 14 (a bonnet sewer).

Other occupations in the neighbourhood at this time were a journeyman wheelwright, a straw plait worker, a Brazilian hat maker, and a ‘chairwoman’ (presumably charwoman).

There is a record of the death of a Samuel Gray in 1862, registered in Hertford, but we cannot be certain that this is ‘our’ Samuel Gray. However, he must have died sometime in the 1860s because his widow Mary Ann married again in summer 1871, registered in St Albans. Perhaps she gave up the pub because of her forthcoming marriage.

By 1871 there was a new licensee – Mary Ann Curl, who was also a straw plaiter. The pub has been renamed the Horse & Jockey. She came from Sundon where she is listed in the 1841, 1851 and 1861 censuses as a straw plaiter married to Daniel, an agricultural labourer. There is no evidence of how and why she became licensee at the Horse & Jockey and we have found no record of her husband's whereabouts in 1871. The 1881 census shows the couple living together at Ridge where he is a shepherd and she a 'shepherd's wife' and described as deaf. Why and for how long she ran the pub at Marford is a mystery.

From 1875 to 1890, James Johnson, originally from London but an experienced local beerhouse keeper having previously kept the Railway Hotel and (briefly) the King William, manages affairs at the Horse & Jockey. In his first year he appears in court (named as Joseph Johnson) accused of selling intoxicating liquors at the Horse & Jockey on a Sunday morning. Two men, Palmer and McCulloch, are charged with being on the premises at the same time. Johnson's solicitor argues successfully that Palmer had walked from Kimpton, a distance of more than three miles, and therefore qualified as a traveller to whom beer could legally be served. In addition, he said, Johnson had held pub licences for more than 15 years and this was the only complaint ever laid against him. The magistrates acquitted Palmer but found Johnson and McCulloch guilty and fined them £1.10s. and £1 respectively.

The following year (1876) an inquest was held at the Horse & Jockey into the death of 15-year-old Thomas Vigus who had been working on the construction of the new Congregational chapel on Brewhouse Hill.

WHEATHAMPSTEAD.

FATAL ACCIDENT.—Mr. Brabant held an inquest at the Horse and Jockey, Marford, on Wednesday, on the body of Thomas Vigus, 15 years of age. The deceased, who was in the service of Mr. Norris, builder, Hertford, the contractor for the erection of the new chapel at Wheathampstead, was engaged in carting some stone sills, when, through want of attention to his duties, the cart was drawn on to the bank at the side of the road and overturned. Deceased was knocked down and almost instantly killed, the front of the cart, which was burdened with a load of some 30 cwt., having fallen across his chest. A verdict of "Accidental death" was returned.

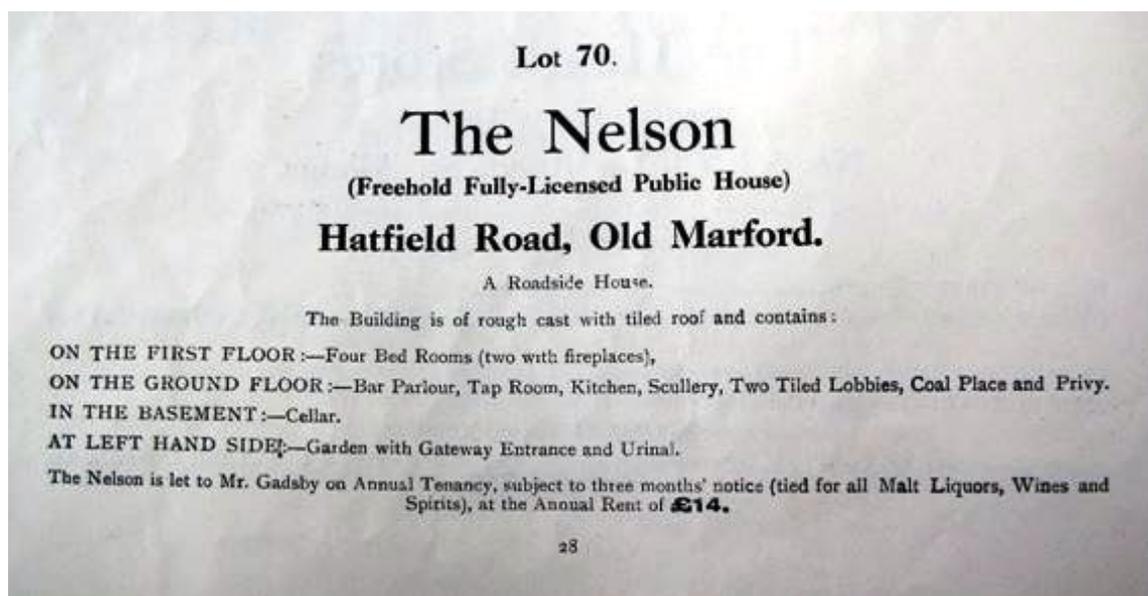
The 1881 census lists James Johnson at the Horse & Jockey. He is a widower aged 67, his wife Hannah having died in 1879. He is still working as a boot and shoe maker and lives with his two children, Harriet (17) and Samuel (15). In 1888, at the age of 74, he applied for a wine and spirit licence for consumption on the premises, it being a house on crossroads in a "new neighbourhood". A petition signed by 91 people, including the Countess of Cavan, must have opposed this application as it was refused, the argument being that there was no necessity for a new licence for a community of only 40 houses. However, the licence was granted the following year on the dubious grounds that Johnson had held the pub for the last 20 years and that the nearest licensed premises, the Swan, was one mile away, while the next was three miles away – possibly a reference to the King William. A certificate of good character signed by Mr Robins of Delaport, some other licensees, and the Superintendent of Police supported the application.

Johnson died at his pub in 1890 leaving his daughter Harriet (aged 27) in charge with a bequest of £38. The 1891 census confirms that Harriet is the publican of what is again known as the Nelson, living there with her sister Elizabeth. Just over a year later, the pub is put up for sale by its owners, the Kimpton Brewery, as an 'exceedingly desirable fully licensed brick and tiled public house – £12 rent p.a.; copyhold, manor of Wheathampstead'.¹ It is bought by Pryor Reid.

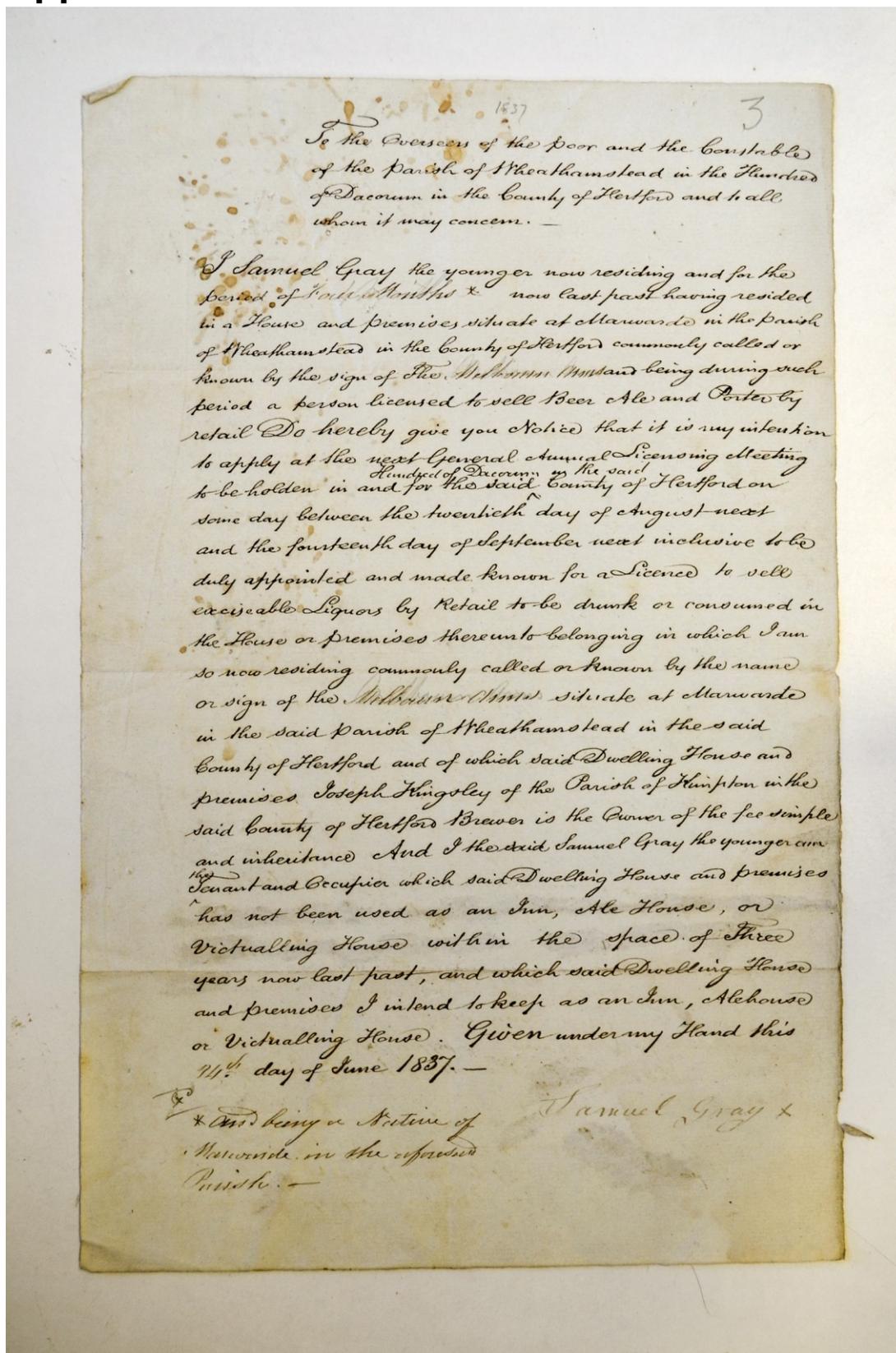
Later in 1892, Harriet Johnson gave up the licence, a Protection Order being granted to John Wyatt. From then until 1914 the Nelson Inn changed hands frequently: John Wyatt, Edward Griffiths, Henry James Brixley, Eliza Harrison, Richard Upton, George Carter, James Housego, John Grainger, Robert Wilson and David Gadsby all held the licence, most of them for less than two years.

Postscript

Along with 106 other pubs, the Nelson was sold when the Hatfield Brewery estate was broken up in 1920. The sales catalogue described it as:



Appendix



¹ Sales particulars for Kimpton Brewery DE/L/5124-1