

From Hetfelle to Hatfield - over 1000 years of history

HATFIELD LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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BUTLER'S: THE STORY OF A HOUSE IN FORE STREET

No. 11 Fore Street is one of Hatfield's oldest buildings. A property has stood there for about 500 years. The family of Jackie Palmer, its former resident, commissioned a history of the house which they all refer to as Butler's.

It is quite probable that the original was a 2 storey construction; timber framed and built upon a foundation of a few courses of brickwork. The walls may have been wattle & daub or brick infill. It may well have had a thatched roof too. Tradesmen's workshops and inns were also built close by at around this time to serve the regular royal visitors and their entourages visiting the Bishop's palace at the top of the hill.

But when Princess Elizabeth became queen she had to move from Hatfield and the royal visits became much fewer. The village then fell into decline for about 50 years until the rise of stagecoaches helped re-establish the prosperity of the area as Hatfield was a convenient stop-over point on the busy 20 mile route to and from London; this being a day's journey.



Butler's as it is today

By the end of the 1600s Front Street (as it was known then) was thriving with many more businesses having set up here. Among them was a plumber and glazer named Martyn Lewer who moved into Butler's with his new wife, Alice, in around 1704. Typically, there would have been a showroom at the front of the house, perhaps displaying a range of his leaded lights windows and lead pipework. A workshop would have been in the back yard and family living accommodation upstairs.

In 1731 Martyn died and his son, Tite, continued the family business at Butler's and lived there with his wife and children until his sudden death aged 42 in 1746, perhaps as a result of working with lead – being a highly toxic substance. His son, William, then carried on the business there and eventually sold the property to a Thomas Parrot in c1774.

It was from this time that Butler's was converted into a butcher's shop with a small abattoir at the back to replace the former lead workshop.

Thomas Parrot had competition, though, from three other nearby butchers – including one directly opposite. He would have cut up carcasses upon a heavy wooden bench or tree stump and, in the interests of hygiene, he would display the quality of his meat by

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Chairman: **Mrs Chris Martindale**



hanging joints on a row of hooks outside the shop. Though the building is now a home, butcher's hooks can still be seen there.

In 1780 the property was then sold to another butcher, Edmund Simkins who also farmed livestock at Stanborough Farm, and this enabled him to supply meat to other local butchers. He and wife Mary raised their five children at Butler's but upon his death in 1805 their son, James, took over the house and business. He made a great success of it; employing staff and opening another shop in Potters Bar. He never married but, upon his death aged 62 in 1847, provision was made for his two children by Elizabeth Brooks, his mistress. But just two weeks later, their daughter Mary Ann married his nephew, James Webb. The newly weds were cousins!

In around 1857 James and Mary moved to Astwick Manor Farm and James' younger brother Alfred Webb moved into Butler's.

Subsequent Webb's took over the butchery business there but by the late 1880s local competition coupled with a downturn in trade caused the bankruptcy of James Simkins Webb who found himself £2,071 in debt. Fortunately, though, the family retained Butler's.

Increasing use of the railway from 1851 may have contributed to the decline of passing trade in Hatfield, but the newly bankrupted James was soon to find some gainful employment as a railway clerk! He was still working as one when he died in 1909. For a short while the premises were let to a Mr. Horne before becoming vacant again until 1913 when it was let to St. Albans butchers and brothers Frederick and Thomas Butler – from whose name the house became known as T. Butler & Son.

In 1921 the property was bought by the Butlers, thus ending a 140 year association with the Simkins / Webb families.

Patrick Butler was the last butcher to operate at the premises.

In October 1971 he sold it for £12,000 to a Peter Fowler of WGC who then sold it just three years later for £40,000 to a Douglas Austin of Hatfield Broad Oak.

And in 1975 Michael and Jacqueline Palmer purchased it.

Butler's has remained in their family ever since.

With acknowledgement to research by Fiona Rule



James Simkin Webb
1821 - 1879

Tenuous Connection To Downs Farm

By Terry Pankhurst

Reading the story of Downs Farm in the last edition Newsletter brought to mind a very, no extremely, tenuous connection I have with the farm. As a family historian of some 40 years I have for much of that time been intrigued by a distant relative, Winfield Pankhurst. The name Winfield is so rare I just wonder where it came from. I first met Winfield in the 1841 census for Hatfield living in Chantry Green in Pepper Hall. Hall brings to mind a stately home but this is none of the sort. It seems it was a 16th Century Hall House with living quarters above the stable cum cow shed, not at all what I had hoped for. The building, such as it was, was demolished at the start of the New Town development in the 1950's.

Winfield's story took me most of the 40 years to finally put together. She started her life badly with an illegitimate child, Henry John Pankhurst when she was just 19. Bad enough then but she went on to have a further illegitimate child, Fanny Elizabeth, 3 years later in 1853. To make matters worse she went on to have two more illegitimate children, one in

1854 and the other in 1856. By now she was starting to look like the local goodtime girl.

I had lost Winfield in the 1851 census. This detail eluded me for some 30 years. At some point Winfield met up with John Service whose family was then farming Downs Farm. I bet you wondered where the connection was.

I have never been able to find a marriage for Winfield and John Service although they lived as man and wife for the rest of their lives. Possibly to avoid scandal they moved to Hampstead. Winfield went on to have 9 more children with John, sadly only 5 of her children survived to adulthood.

There are several intriguing aspects to her life. I could track her through all the census years until her death in 1897 except the illusive 1851 census. When I finally found her in 1851, it posed more questions than answers. Her name had been spelt wrong which was why she was so hard to find. It was Winifred born Hatfield 1830. As there was no other Pankhurst families in Hatfield in 1830, it could only be her.

What was most surprising is where she was living. She had not raised her status in those years; she was still below stairs as a house maid, but what a house! She was a maid in the home of Charles Bowyer Adderly, Member of Parliament and titled Lord Norton, his home was in Westminster.

How does a 20 year old working class girl from Hatfield with a child she had left with her parents get a position in a Westminster House as servant in the home of a government minister and peer of the realm? The question I'm sure will never be answered. I could certainly speculate and devise a scenario to fit the situation but that would enter the realms of story writing. What is certain is that only a year after the census was taken Winfield was pregnant with her second child, Fanny Elizabeth Pankhurst. Who was likely to be the father is another impossible question.

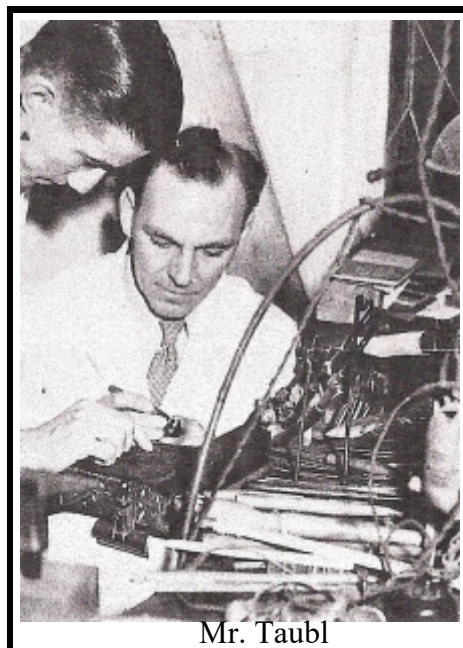
Although their home was in Hampstead John is buried at St Marks, Colney Heath in a family plot, sadly no sign of Winfield. My story won't be complete until I finally find her burial place.

RING FOR THE PRINCESS.. 'SIMPLE'

Say the two men who made it

That was the heading for an article in the Evening Standard dated 15th July 1947. It refers to the then Princess Elizabeth's engagement ring. George Taubl, who lived in Heathcote Avenue, Hatfield, was the foreman of the manufacturing section of Antrobus Jewellers in London. He made the platinum ring itself. It was then set with 11 diamonds - a central three carat stone with small diamonds set around it.

The article describes how Prince Philip's mother, Princess Alice of Greece, came into the shop with a ring which he gathered was made for her during the occupation of Greece. She wanted the stones extracted and, together with one or two other small stones, remounted in a ring of modern setting. Together with Mr Antrobus she drew a sketch of the design for the ring. She didn't say that her visit was anything to do with the Royal engagement, but was very pleased when she viewed the ring.



Mr. Taubl

Thanks to Pat Mills for sending in the article.

MILL GREEN

By Brian Lawrence

It was encouraging to read in the December 2017 issue of the Newsletter of the prospect of the re-opening of the Green Man. As mentioned, it had been a focal point in the hamlet for over 150 years and has become a rather sad sight since its closure a few years ago. For much of its life it was one of two hostelrys in Mill Green along with its near neighbour, the Crooked Billet, providing a valuable meeting point for the local community as well as refreshment for travellers. In fact, the origins of the Crooked Billet can be traced back even further to 1773 but its licence was transferred to the new Comet Hotel in 1936 and the building was demolished soon after.

This photograph of the Crooked Billet shows that it was a somewhat larger building than the Green Man and figures suggest that it actually served a wider range of drinks. Statistics provided when the Hatfield Brewery was sold to Benskin's in 1920 show that both businesses were thriving concerns at the end of World War 1. The earlier article mentioned that, at the time of the sale, the Green Man sold 110 barrels of beer and the Crooked Billet 108 barrels. In fact, these were average annual sales during the three years up to the outbreak of war in September 1914 but it is relevant to add that the Crooked Billet also



The Crooked Billet pre 1920 at Mill Green

sold an average of 69 gallons of wines and spirits whilst no wines and spirits are recorded for the Green Man, suggesting that it was solely a beer house whereas the Crooked Billet may have been regarded as more "up market" offering a wide choice to its customers. Sales figures for the 6 months up to the end of November 1919 were quoted as 76 barrels of beer for the Green Man and 66 barrels of beer plus 21½ gallons of wines and spirits at the Crooked Billet. This indicates that beer sales were on the increase in the immediate post war period even if wine and spirit sales had fallen. We can only speculate how much the sales were affected by the returning troops and the celebrations that took place in the summer of 1919, following the signing of the Peace Treaty. It would also be interesting to examine the trend of sales throughout the 1920s as the locals adjusted to the taste of the Watford brew offered by Benskin's compared with the local brew from Pryor Reid that they had been weaned on. In recent years, several different reasons have been offered as to why it was the Crooked Billet's that was sacrificed for the sake of the new Comet Hotel. The decision may have been influenced by an unfulfilled plan to widen the Hertford Road at Mill Green plus the fact that the Green Man's licence covered only beer sales which was inadequate for a hotel whose clientele would expect a range of drinks more in keeping with their high-flying life style. It has also been stated that Benskin's had previously considered transferring the licence of the White Lion in Newtown to the Comet but then decided to modernise the White Lion, influenced by the fact that Newtown was developing at that time and thus had greater potential. There is little doubt that commercial considerations were uppermost in the minds of the brewers and the loyal residents of Mill Green simply had to swallow it.

***Editor's note:**

A planning application for refurbishment of the Green Man was submitted in March 2018.