



Bluntisham Pubs 1800 - Present Day

Looking back through numerous archives we can find fourteen locations in the village that operated as pubs. Today, there is only one of these original fourteen left open. The following pages document the history of some of those pubs, the landlords, families and goings on. We can't eavesdrop on the gossip of the time, nor ask questions about the interiors or the beer that they served. But, we hope, that we have captured a sense of the place and the people that ran the pubs.

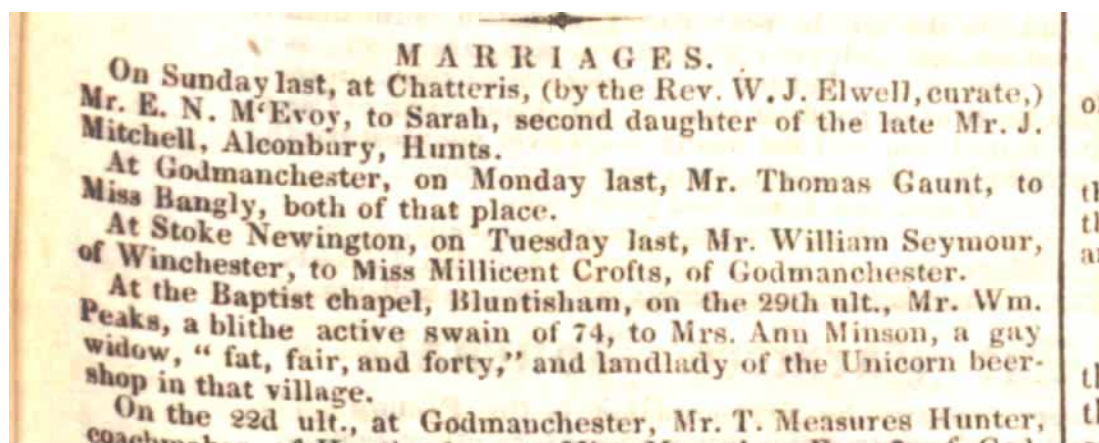
Why so many?

During the 19th century, there were different types of establishments that could serve beer. Inns were places where you could get a meal, a drink and a bed for the night. Taverns were places where you could get a meal and a drink, but no bed. These were the first licensed premises. However many private individuals served beer in their own houses. The beer was home brewed and was a safer alternative to the drinking water of the time. Primarily brewed for personal use, with the spare being sold to the folks who popped round. Farmers were often brewers, the reason being that the beer formed part of the salary of the people working on the land. Many of the beer houses in the village doubled up as a farms; The Horse and Groom and the Saracens Head being examples. Brewed for the labourers consumption and as part of their pay. A "small beer" was a beer with a low alcohol content and was much safer to drink than water. In cities and towns, gin was also distilled and sold in the same way. Before 1830 these premises were all unlicensed.

In 1830 the "Beer Act" was introduced. This act created Beer Houses and licensed them to sell only beer and cider. The main aim of the Beer Act was to reduce the consumption of gin. It controlled the strength of the beer that was brewed, generated revenue and created a rule system. Beer houses could range from a few rooms in a private house or to more substantial buildings built for the purpose.

So, the beer that you brewed and sold on the quiet, was now legitimate with a license. The good folks of Bluntisham climbed onboard and public houses started to appear in the village.

There are two that appear in the earliest records that didn't endure, The Red Bull and The Unicorn. The latter was located somewhere in Wood End and was licensed in 1841, when Ann Minson is listed as a beer house keeper in the census. The newspaper archives show that she married in 1842, and probably retired as a beer house keeper and settled down with her husband.





In the late 1800's many of Bluntisham's beer houses were purchased by local breweries. There were breweries in Huntingdon, St Ives, Fenstanton and Needingworth; all of which had tied houses in the village. The larger scale production in breweries meant that they were able to brew in greater volumes and keep up with the demand. From 1841 through to 1900 there were between 12 and 15 beer houses in operation in the village:

The first world war had a dramatic affect on the number of pubs in the village. In the 1903 Kellys Directory there were 9 pubs still operating, in 1914 directory 6 were listed and by 1936 there were only 4 left. In 1914 the Government passed the Defence of the Realm act. This was emergency legislation granting the government greater control to support the war effort. This act impacted public houses. It shortened opening hours, prohibited the buying of rounds, increased the amount of tax on each pint and even diluted the strength of the beer on sale. After the war the landscape for pubs and in particular rural pubs changed. Social habits had changed, the controls in the Defence of the Realm act weren't all fully repealed, opening hours remained shorter and beer became more expensive. This clearly impacted the pubs in Bluntisham, as by the 1939 Register there were only 3 left operating. Today we only have one left, which is the White Swan. We hope that you enjoy these stories of the pubs and some of the goings on in them.

Roger Jerham and Philippa Hope

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Bluntisham Public Houses

