

The Lost Pubs of Fishpool Street

Part One

by Stuart Macer

During the early weeks of lockdown in 2020 I began to reflect on the long history of Fishpool Street and the lives of the residents throughout the centuries. I had moved into number 84 in June 1985 and immediately struck up a close friendship with my neighbour Wilf Grant, a tenant of number 82 from 1934 until 2004 when he died at the grand old age of 94 years.

Wilf was a great raconteur and a living history book and he told me about the 12 pubs of Fishpool Street. I decided to research these pubs as a project for my grandchildren far away in Sydney and San Francisco.

My initial focus was at the St Michael's end of the street, which used to be known as Salipath, from the old English for willow trees which proliferated on the banks of the River Ver many centuries ago.

I started with *The Black Lion* at numbers 198-196 and *The Blue Anchor* at number 145, which have both closed during my time in the street. To my surprise I immediately found *The Unicorn* at number 194, with its etched glass door panel bearing the name 'Unicorn'.

I thought about the people that lived and worked in these old buildings and census records provided an insight.

The 1891 census revealed George Slaughter and his wife Louise living at *The Black Lion*. George was recorded as a licensed victualler. They had a general servant, Annie Hedges, who was just 16 years old. Also in the property were John Harding, Harry Cordell and Sarah Cotting, all listed as boarders. John and Harry were both agricultural labourers and Sarah was a charwoman and widow.

By the 1901 census things had drastically changed at *The Black Lion*. Joseph Hockley was recorded as a publican living with his wife Edith and their two children. They had a domestic servant, Annie Brown, age 18. In addition, there were also 36 lodgers (both men and women) occupying numbers 198 and 196. The predominant occupations were agricultural labourer, bricklaying labourer and pedlar. In addition, there was a shoemaker, a needlewoman and some hawkers. All in all, they were a rowdy group of fellows. *The Black Lion* sadly closed its doors in 2012 after the owner gained planning permission in 2011 to convert the building into three properties, despite strong opposition from the St Albans Civic Society and the Fishpool Street Residents Association.



The Black Lion

Next door at *The Unicorn*, the 1891 census revealed John Chapman and his wife Emily. John was recorded as a gardener and publican and his son James a page boy. There was also a domestic servant and housemaid, with three lodgers listed as two farm labourers and one groom. By the 1901 census, Arthur Belham had taken over the business and was recorded as a public house keeper.



The Unicorn

Across the street is *The Blue Anchor*. In the 1891 census John Caddington and his wife Elizabeth were residents. John was recorded as a brewer's labourer and publican. They had four daughters, Fanny, Minnie, and Ellen, all listed as straw-hat machinists, and Jane C Caddington listed as a dressmaker. The hat-making industry will feature regularly as we progress up the street. *The Blue Anchor* closed its doors in 2014.



The Blue Anchor

Next, I discovered *The Blockers Arms* at number 150. Madeleine Sansom, a long-term resident of number 124, had pointed me in its direction having noticed some lettering by the front door. Close inspection revealed the name 'Benskins', the old Watford brewery.

The pub name refers to the hat-making industry. The 1871 census reveals William Marsh resident with his wife and three children. Mr Marsh's occupation is recorded as a blocker. Straw hats were constructed using a wooden block as a template. Later, the 1901 census lists Ernest William Javeleau as a beer retailer and his daughter Beatrice as a straw-hat maker. By the time of the 1911 census Ernest is now recorded as a bricklayer.



The Blockers Arms

Gerald Sanctuary published a delightfully concise book entitled 'Fishpool Street-St Albans' in 1984. Gerald lists the inns and beerhouses of Fishpool Street. *The Angel Inn* was one of the largest and most important in St Albans. In 1756 it is recorded as having 15 beds and stabling for 59 horses. Now known as The Manor Garden House, number 135, *The Angel Inn* was much larger than it is today as old prints reveal. I decided to photograph the building on the 75th Anniversary of Victory in Europe Day as the front door was delightfully adorned with union flags.



The Angel Inn

Moving up the street I next photographed *The Cock and Flowerpot* at number 120. The alleyway at the side of this elegant building is of course 'Cock Alley'. However, some early records show it as 'Cop Alley'. This name refers to a former cottage in Mount Pleasant named 'Coppydhall' and once belonged to William Grindcobbe, one of the leaders of the Peasants Revolt of 1381. Incidentally, my old neighbour always referred to it as 'Cop Alley', in his Hertfordshire brogue.



The Cock and Flowerpot

The Royal Oak Inn is at number 58 and still has the support for the pub sign in place. The 1901 census lists Harold J A Jones as licensed victualler. The previously mentioned Ernest William Javeleau later became the landlord and died at number 58 in December 1921. Probate records reveal his entire estate was £192 17s 4d. *The Royal Oak* closed its doors in 1962.



The Royal Oak Inn

I contacted Sarah and Adrian Smith who lived at 41/43 Fishpool Street until quite recently as they are good friends, and there was anecdotal evidence of number 41 being a former pub. They thought the name was possibly *The Queen* and, sure enough, this turned out to be the case. The 1866 census lists Joseph Jeffs as a beer retailer and by 1871 he is listed as a publican.

The 1901 census has John Darby as a licensed victualler and jeweller and his son, John E Darby, as a straw hat blocker. John's sister Louisa is listed as a straw-hat finisher. Six other children lived at number 41, together with Florence Lewis, a general servant. Sarah and Adrian told me that the bar in number 41 extended into number 43. Sarah very kindly forwarded a 19th century photograph for my archive.



The Queen



The Queen in the late 19th Century

A little further up the street I next photographed *The Crow Inn* at number 15. The Crow had a history of young lodgers in the late 1980s and hosted many fine parties. I had the pleasure of attending one of these parties that started in *The Lower Red Lion* and ended in The Crow in the early hours!

The 1891 census has James Wright, age 55, listed as blacksmith and publican. The blacksmith's workshop can be seen to this day. His wife, Sarah Wright, age 58, is also listed, together with their daughter Elizabeth, age 27, listed as a straw-hat maker. They also had two sons, Edward J Wright, age 25, and Frederic J Wright, age 21, a whitesmith. By 1901 Sarah Wright has taken over the business and is listed as a licensed victualler and widow. Eliza Wright, her sister-in-law, age 82, is also resident and they have a 19-year-old boarder, Walter C Hardig.



The Crow Inn

The Crow Inn, *The Blockers Arms* and *The Unicorn* were all owned by Benskins of Watford. In 1914, under pressure from parliament and the temperance lobby, Benskins decided to close all three pubs in return for the payment of compensation. A total of 11 pubs were closed in St Albans in the same year with the approach of the World War One. Police records reveal that in 1901 there was one pub for every 165 people in the city of St Albans.

Across the road from *The Crow Inn* is, of course, *The Lower Red Lion*, the only surviving pub in Fishpool Street. The 1891 census lists Mary Ann Goodchild, age 50, as licensed victualler and widow, together with her son John Thomas Goodchild, age 18, butcher, and his younger brother, William Conley Goodchild, age 11. The Goodchild family originated from Waltham in Essex. The 1901 census lists Robert G Manning, age 36, from Clerkenwell, London, as the landlord, together with his wife, Mary L Manning, age 28, from Basingstoke, Hants.



The Lower Red Lion

Gerald Sanctuary's book also led me to *The Rule and Compasses* pub at number 2. This pub closed its doors in 1906 and in the following year it was occupied by a bootmaker.

The 1901 census listed William A Stokes as a licensed victualler and coachman, with Eliza Stokes and their five children. Also, in the house at that time was a boarder, Rose Peacock, a boot machinist. I assume Miss Peacock was instrumental in number 2 becoming a boot-making workshop. Number 4 Fishpool Street was once part of the pub and in 1907 it became a shop.



The Rule and Compasses

Sadly, my research has so far not revealed the location of *The Crane* and *The Mermaid*.

There were once four 'Red Lions' in close proximity to our surviving *Lower Red Lion*, including the *Great Red Lion*, later called the *Upper Red Lion*, on the corner of High Street and Market Cross (now Zizzi's restaurant); the *Rampant Red Lion* on Holywell Hill, which was lost in the mid-1760s, and the *Little Red Lion* on High Street, which opened in about 1790 and closed in 1910.

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The website pubwiki.co.uk

Gerald Sanctuary's publication of 1984, *Fishpool Street-St Albans*.