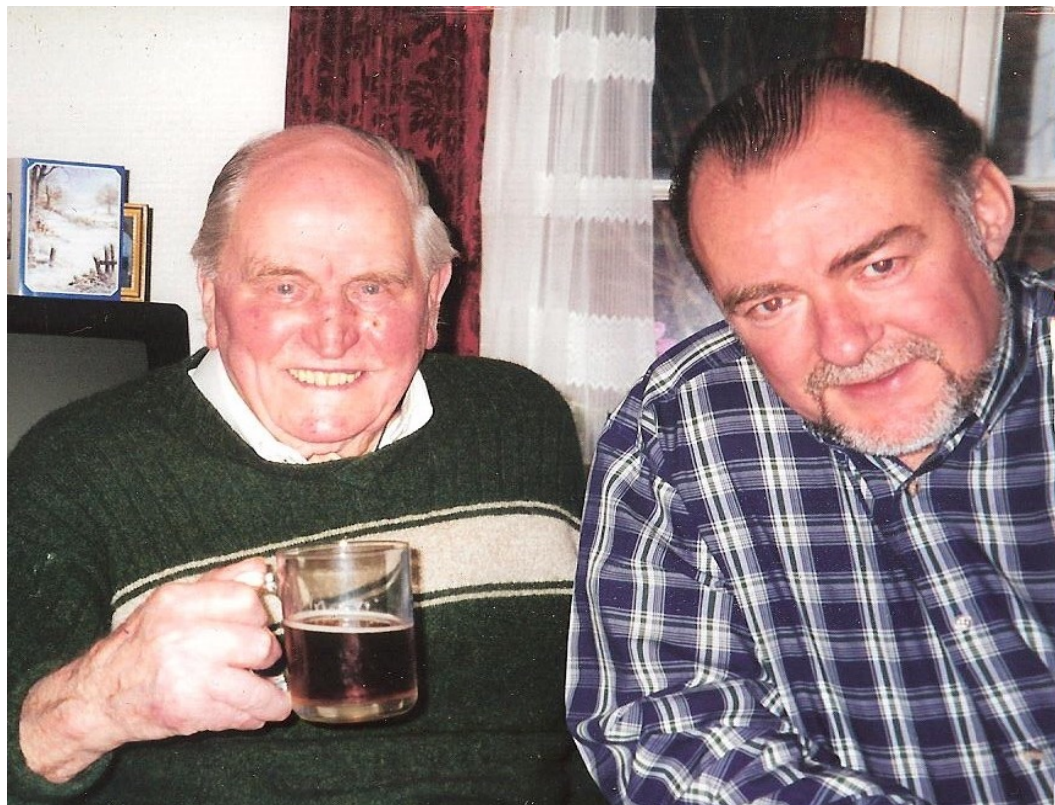


The Lost Pubs of St Albans – Part Two

by Stuart Macer

Following the publication of my 'Lost Pubs of Fishpool Street' article in the FSRA's Summer Newsletter 2020, I had a very positive reaction from residents. I have therefore decided to write this follow-up article with new information on *The Crow Inn* and *The Lower Red Lion* together with some very detailed information from Jon Mein and Alan W Smith, both members of the St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society, known colloquially as the Arc & Arc.

In my original article I mentioned my neighbour Wilf Grant who lived at number 82 for seventy years. Here he is in 1998 sharing a beer with me.



Wilf loved to chat over a beer and there were often several people to be found at his house at weekends to be greeted by his call of "want a drink?".

The Crow Inn at 15 Fishpool Street was closed by Benskins of Watford in 1914. Census entries for 1891 are most interesting. They reveal the following:

- James Wright, age 55, blacksmith and publican.
- Sarah Wright, age 58, wife.
- Elizabeth Wright, age 27, daughter and straw hat machinist.
- Edward J Wright, age 25, son and clerk.
- Frederick J Wright, age 21, whitesmith.

The trade of whitesmith was not known to me on first reading. A whitesmith is a metalworker who does finishing work on iron and steel, such as filing, lathing, burnishing or polishing. The term also refers to a person who works with "white" or light-coloured metals, and is sometimes used as a synonym for tinsmith.

Whitesmithing developed as a speciality of blacksmithing in the 1700s, when extra time was given to filing and polishing certain products. With the industrial revolution, in the same way as blacksmiths became specialised as farriers making horseshoes, so many whitesmiths became lorimers making spurs, stirrups, bridle bits and buckles.

The Crow Inn was originally built in the 16th century. During the 17th century the building was extended at the rear, housing a Blacksmith's workshop, operating as such until the early 20th century.

In the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century *The Crow Inn* was run by the aforementioned Wright family for around 45 years, where James Wright was not only the licensee of the inn but also made a living as a blacksmith. At this time doorways existed between number 11, 13 and 15 Fishpool Street. No doubt James and Frederick Wright had a very busy trade from all the horse traffic from Watling Street and the north of England.

During the time when the building operated as an inn, the carriageway with the black gates gave access for the stagecoaches to the inn-yard at the rear where there was stabling and the blacksmith's workshop.

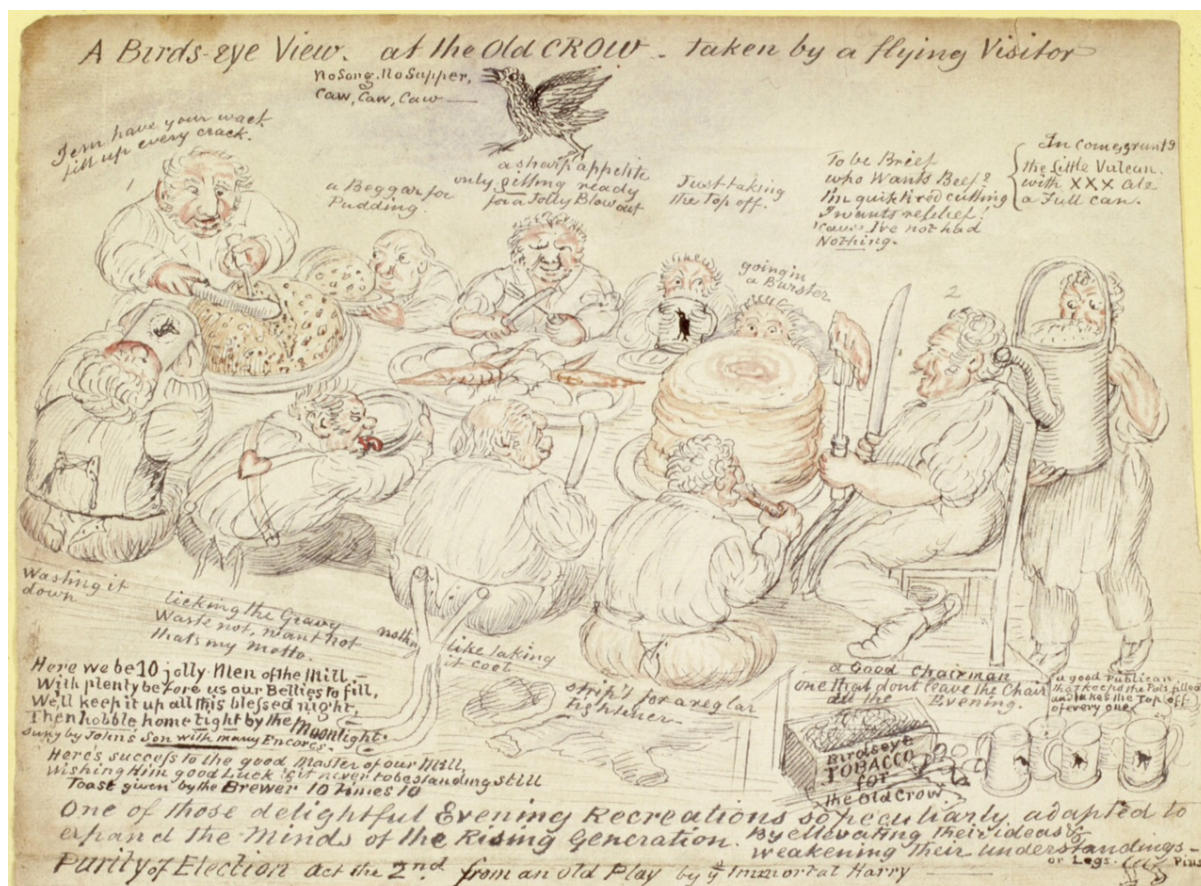
By the 1901 census circumstances had changed at *The Crow Inn*:

- Sarah Wright, now age 68, is listed as a widow and licensed victualler.
- Eliza Wright, age 82, is listed as sister-in-law originally from Colney Street.
- Walter C Hardig, age 19, is listed as boarder originally from Hemel Hempstead.

Gerald Sanctuary in his 1984 book 'Fishpool Street-St.Albans' mentions Sarah Wright. "An old photograph shows Mrs Wright, a widow of the previous landlord, standing outside. She makes a formidable figure. Her husband was not only the licensee of the inn, but also made a living as a blacksmith". With the help of Alan W Smith I believe this must be the photograph:



St Albans Museum has an excellent cartoon by J H Buckingham of a dinner at the Old Crow Inn being given by T D Bowman a leading councillor and mayor in 1853 for the "Men of the Mill". Sarah Keeling, the curator of the museum, has very kindly forwarded this image:



Bowman is shown on the left, cutting the pudding, while at the opposite end of the table butting the beef is George Edwards, miller at St Michael's (Kingsbury) Mill, also a councillor.

The census details of the Lower Red Lion across the road at number 36 show the movement of people into St Albans in the latter part of the 19th century and early 20th century:

The 1891 census reveals Mary Ann Goodchild, age 50, from Waltham, Essex, as licensed victualler. She has two sons living with her: John James Goodchild, age 18, a butcher, and Wm Colney Goodchild, age 11.

By the 1901 census the Lower Red Lion is run by the Manning family:

Robert G Manning, age 36, from Clerkenwell, London, is listed as the publican. His wife, Mary L Manning, originally from Basingstoke, Hants, is also listed. Alan W Smith very kindly sent me this delightful image:



This is the full image, part of which appeared in my original article, featuring *The Queen Pub* further down the street at 41/43. Notice the name of Adey and Whites above the entrance to the Lower Red. This was a large brewery in Chequer Street and operated where the Maltings Shopping Centre now stands.



Sandy Walkington very kindly forwarded my original article to Jon Mein who in turn sent the article to Alan W Smith, both members of SAHAAS. Jon and Alan both sent me a link to the V&A archive, which revealed this photograph taken in 1905:



The photographer, George Scamell, has listed our street as "Fishpond Street". The building immediately next to number 8 "Holmshurst", was a pub called *The Black Boy* and Jon Mein states that it was open in the later 1600s. Jon also told me towards the end of its life this building was involved in hat-making.

The sweet shop building was formerly *The Swan* pub. Alan W Smith informed me that it was occupied by known victuallers between 1730 and 1758, but could also have been a pub either side of those dates.

I was unable to find any details of *The Crane* and *The Mermaid* in my original research. *The Mermaid* still remains a mystery, but Alan and Jon revealed some information on *The Crane*. It is best to quote directly from Alan: "*The Crane* and *The Three Cranes* were, I think, different establishments. *The Crane*, previously called *The Maudlyn*, is mentioned in several documents from the 16th century and *The Three Cranes* in a will of 1667. I have not been able to determine the location of *The Crane* but my best guess for *The Three Cranes* is somewhere between numbers 40-70 Fishpool Street (or thereabouts)."

Jon Mein also revealed the following: "*The Rose and Crown* was certainly open in 1756 probably 1730s-1760s and the precise location is uncertain but likely to be

either number 24 or number 26. *The Saracens Head* open 1830s to 1878: interesting early history as part of small brewery / maltings complex and well described on an 1870s plan in the SAHAAS library collection. Buildings demolished in the late-Victorian period; probably number 70 or thereabouts."

Alan mentions *The Crown* and he quotes old wording: *The Crown* was "known by the name or sign of the Crown" in an indentures dated 1722, which would indicate that it was an alehouse at the time of the sale. However, in the next indenture dated 1788 it was referred to as "formerly called or known by the name or sign of the Crown but now for many years past used as a private house". Jon Mein thinks this pub could have been at number 54.

Finally, Alan also came up with the following names, but he has no location or been able to determine whether or not they were actual pubs:

- *Bear* (1650 and 1690)
- *Blue Boar* and also known as both *The Boar* and *Blew Boar* (1700)
- *Eagle and Child / The Three Horse Shoes* (1681)
- *Popys Hede* (1498)

My lockdown project has revealed a wealth of history and my sincere thanks to Sandy Walkington, Jon Mein and Alan W Smith.