

The George

Saint George is the patron saint of horses and horsemen. The George Inn was in existence by the 1570's and so, in those days, would have mainly served travellers on horseback, packmen and pedlars.

The GEORGE INN is one of the oldest buildings in Wheatley – there was probably a medieval guest house on the site. It was a typical plan with the archway providing access to the rear so that travellers could be attended to away from the street. The bedrooms were on the first floor and approached via an open gallery from an outside staircase. The exterior seems to have been painted red and the interior was well decorated, the walls being repainted from time to time and a variety of patterns were used.

As with all the inns on the north side of the High Street, the yard extended to a back street, now called Church Road.

Records held in the Bodleian Library show that Thomas House or Howse, the innkeeper, died of typhus here on 24th July 1577 'in the chamber above the kitchen'.

Alice Lynley in evidence given during a dispute over his will in 1583 tells us that she went

"to Oxforde markett to sell chickens and. returning home at 2 of the clocke in the afternone went to her neighbours Thomas House, then lying sick, to visite him, and stayed with him in his chambre over the kitchen wheare he then laye sicke."

Jane House "a pore maiden and destitute of money habilitie or friends" did not benefit from her father's will. The Cobbett family inherited it.

In 1612/13 John Cobbett and his wife Joan and Richard Price and his wife, lived at The George. For nearly the next one hundred and fifty years, it belonged to the Price family although it would seem they were not always the occupiers.

Like the motor way service stations of today, the inns of Wheatley had a guaranteed clientele being on a coach route, but there must have been a lot of competition between them to attract the most trade. By the mid eighteenth century, it is apparent that The George was not on a par with the King & Queen and the White Hart as they were paying twice the rates.

In 1766 Jackson's Oxford Journal advertised racing on Wheatley Common. The entries of horses had to be entered at The George on 19th May.

In 1784 Jackson's Journal advertised the George Inn, occupied by Bartholomew Price, for sale. "Persons owing money to settle within one month or be sued".

Two years later an auction was advertised by J Holiday of The Crown but it was not bought until 1788 by Eustace May.

It was in 1789 that the road via Headington was upgraded and the former route declined. This meant that fewer travellers came along the High Street.

Benjamin Huggins was the last known landlord from 1789-1796. Like most innkeepers of the time, he had another occupation as a carpenter. By 1822 The George is not listed in the Victuallers Recognizances.

About 1830, it was converted into three tenements and remained so until 1959 when it was acquired by the late Capt. Geoffrey Young and converted to two homes. In 1980, it was restored back to its Tudor form, the rear gallery being rebuilt and its wall paintings and huge fireplaces uncovered.

In 1970 when the present owners set about alterations, so many features were discovered that gave clues as to The George's past. The careful restoration was recognised by the Oxford Preservation Trust in 1984 as the plaque beneath the archway records.

Mr and Mrs Geoffrey Young - of an ancient coaching inn at Wheatley.¹

The panel said: "This restoration is very impressive ...The reopening of the coaching arch, now fitted with fine wrought- iron gates, had greatly enhanced the appearance of this busy street. Less public features, such as the restoration of the gallery overlooking the garden, and the careful replacement of interior fittings, complete a remarkable work of preservation of an ancient building."

Oxford Times, Friday October 5th 1984.

¹ The George does not meet the definition of a coaching inn associated with the public coach trade which had horse change-over stops every 10-13 miles. These had to have stabling for at least 50 horses, with the one between Stokenchurch and Oxford being at Tetsworth which had stabling for 97 horses (talk by Julian Hunt 25 February 2019). There had been stabling and accommodation at The George, but not on this scale. So, Wheatley was not a public horse change-over stop and The George was probably therefore an Inn for the private coaching trade known to have existed back to the early 16th century.