

Crown Hotel

The Crown Hotel was in business and popular for the people living at the lower end of the Village. It was very exciting when the Fair Ground Showmen brought the Switchbacks and other Sideshows on the scene causing much excitement. Doctor Barnes who lived opposite The Crown, smoking his favourite cigar, would gather several children round him and pay for their rides after he had had a late Dinner.

Another event was the Cattle, Pig and Sheep Market held once a month in the Crown yard on a Tuesday.

I can recall on special occasions when the then Prince of Wales used to visit the Crown Hotel and bring the College Beagles, which were owned by a few College Students, and have a day's hunting across the fields at Waterperry and other Villages returning at teatime, putting the Beagle Dogs back in the van and taking them back to their kennels, enjoying their visit and the hospitality of Mr William Tombs who was Landlord at that time.

Another interesting item about the Crown, it had history of the coaching days where they used to change horses at the stables in the yard below. Under the archway facing the road, there are four pulleys in the roof which were used to pull up heavy trunks on to the top of the coach.

History is the overlap of memories. Richard Dumbelow of Wheatley, born in 1477 during the Wars of the Roses, lived for over a century, well into the reign of Elizabeth Tudor; as he died, Sybell Pangbourne was born in Holton in 1583 and lived to well over a hundred, until 1699. Some villagers greeting the new millennium go back to a childhood spent with adults who were children during the Crimean War and before. A village divided between 'toffs' and poachers (driven by necessity) is still remembered; the making of the London Road 'cutting' in 1926, through the Lower Lye Field of Ambrose Farm, is for some a personal memory. The Crown Taphouse in Church Road and The Crown itself, the old mailcoach Stage and Posting Office, were working pubs within present lifetimes. At least one friendship survives from Flanagan's Fair held regularly in the Crown Tap Yard. Villagers still remember Office Lane (connecting Church Road and London Road opposite the Crown Tap) named after its rent office for the monthly village livestock market. At least one villager remembers the four tenant families in the partitioned Manor House being given land in 1926 for homes on the new London Road 'cutting' to ease their exit and the purchase of the house. The countryside was no idyll—there was poverty, disease, violence, feuding and much petty crime. When the national media called the village 'a heroin capital' in 1998, it needed putting into a longer perspective!

John Fox