

The Cherry Tree (formerly The Railway/Railway House)

By Chris Brickwood, with additional information from Dick Bosley and Sharron Jenkinson, Steventon History Society, 2023

“The Cherry Tree dates back at least 150 years but could undoubtedly be a lot older.” Wadworth

“The main building dates back to (the) 18th Century.” Wadworth

The building may well be 18th Century, but has it been a pub since then? Being on the turnpike there were undoubtedly businesses in Steventon from before the arrival of the railway, but while Steventon had good transport links - on the main road south from Oxford and Abingdon and close to the Wilts & Berks canal – it was, according to escaped American slave Harriet Jacobs who spent a few months in Steventon in 1845, “a small town, said to be the poorest in the county” (pop. 948 in 1841).

When Pigot & Co.’s National Commercial Directory covered Berkshire in 1830 Steventon was not considered to be a ‘principal village’ and was not listed: ‘Abingdon &c’ included Culham, Sutton Courtenay and Marcham but not Steventon (we can see from this that e.g. the Nag’s Head, then “in Culham”, and the Fish and the Swan in Sutton Courtenay were already in existence, alongside another forty seven taverns and public houses in the Abingdon area).

The first large-scale map record we’ve found clearly showing the building that became the pub is the ‘Map of Steventon’ dated 10th June 1839 held in the Oxfordshire History Centre – not digitally unfortunately - with the accompanying valuation survey in the Berkshire Record Office. This shows the buildings, gardens, and fields extant at the time.

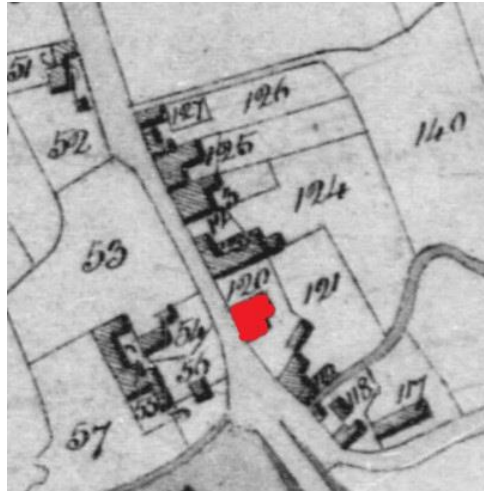
The survey shows that the building – described as a house and premises - together with an orchard, nearby plots called Smiths Close and Hill Ground, plus Butlers Ham which is a plot off the Hanney Road on the other side of the Wilts & Berks canal, are owned by one Edward Johnson and occupied by **William Holloway**. (The range of stables and barn next door are in different ownership). It appears that the building was not an inn at the time, as the nearby Fox Inn is clearly described as such in the survey: the description ‘house and premises’ however suggests that a business was operating here. This information is confirmed in the 1842 tithe map.

The imminent arrival of the Great Western Railway got Steventon noticed: William Robson’s Directory of Berkshire 1840 states that “*it is contemplated (it) will be a station on the GWR which will be opened to this place in the course of the present year*”. The Directory lists Benjamin Belcher at the Kings Arms (now a private home), William Howse at the Fox (also postmaster), Hannah Bosley as a beer retailer, and **William Holloway as ‘baker, shopkeeper and beer retailer’**. The 1830 Beerhouse Act allowed any ratepayer to sell beer and cider by retail in England on his own premises without a justices’ license, needing only to pay two guineas to the local excise. The 1834 Second Beerhouse Act tightened up the qualifications required of beer sellers and created a distinction between beerhouses with off- and on-licenses. The 1840 Beerhouse Act raised beerhouse rating qualifications and introduced the principle of varying statutory closing hours with population density. Proof was required that the applicant for a license was the ‘real resident-holder or occupier of the dwelling house for which the application was being sought’.

In June 1840 there was great excitement when Brunel and his directors arrived to open the Great Western Railway as far as Steventon, which - until 1844, and the opening of the Didcot to Oxford (Grandpont) branch – became the station for Abingdon and Oxford. For those few years, passengers for these towns had to alight at Steventon to get a horse-drawn coach for the rest of the way. A hotel – known as the Steventon Hotel or Steventon House – was opened for a few years in one of the fine buildings adjacent to the station.

In the 1841 Census, having presumably realised the opportunities offered by the arrival of the railway, **William Holloway is now described as Publican**. Born c. 1796 in North Leigh in Oxfordshire, he has nine children all born in Steventon: Benjamin 20, William 16, Martha 15, Richard 13, James 12, Elizabeth 10, Ann 9, George 5, and Mary 2 (ages are in some cases best guesses based on poor reproduction of the census). Sadly his wife had seemingly died while giving birth to Mary, or shortly after: a Jane Holloway is recorded as having died in Abingdon District in Q4 of 1839, and a Martha Holloway in Q2 1840. While the census is poorly reproduced it looks as though William may have had a 15-year-old domestic servant Emma Slade to help, and possibly some other staff including a clerk and a male servant.

The 1842 Pigot’s Directory remarks that “*Steventon...has been called out of comparative obscurity into prominent notice from being a station on the line of the Great Western Railway*”. Steventon taverns are now included under ‘Abingdon &c’ and **we can see that William Holloway is running what was then listed as the Railway inn**. Benjamin Belcher was at the Kings Arms, James Howse at the Fox, and James Greenaway & Hannah Bosley listed as beer retailers - the former was later running the North Star. (By 1861 there appears to have been another pub next door to the North Star, named in the 1871 census as the Grey Hound/Greyhound, possibly in the residence that is now called Tudor House; this pub had disappeared by the 1881 census. In the second half of the twentieth century there was another pub: The Timsbury/Steventon Inn, opposite The Fox, now a pair of private homes).



The building, highlighted in red, is shown on the 1842 Tithe map, which repeats the ownership and occupation listed in the 1839 valuation.

Snare's Berkshire Almanac 1844 shows that Holloway is running The Railway, while by the 1847 Kelly's Post Office Directory the Railway is now called the Railway House. Holloway continues to run it until at least 1848, but the 1851 Census shows that he has left, and that William Prince (from Abingdon, already 68) has taken over as Victualler.

William Holloway has fallen on hard times and is now an agricultural labourer, recorded as on Stinchings Farm, accompanied by only two of his children. At least three sons have followed in his earlier footsteps and become bakers: Benjamin is at the Kings Arms in Mapledurham, William junior is lodging at the Kings Arms in Steventon, while James is now an inmate at Oxford County Pauper Lunatic Asylum in Littlemore – which was a new facility opened in August 1846, the first provision for pauper lunatics in Oxfordshire, with much of Berkshire – including Abingdon - joining in August 1847. Elizabeth and George are still living with William senior as a waistcoat maker (one of at least ten so employed, alongside two frock makers) and at school respectively: William remains a labourer for the rest of his life, dying in Steventon in 1876, with George living with him - as another labourer - until the end. After William's death, George eventually becomes a domestic gardener.

Another (master) baker, John Stevens – also possibly at Stinchings Farm in 1851 – seems to have briefly taken over from Prince at the Railway House in 1852, but by the 1854 Billing's Directory William Prince is back as victualler at Railway House. The Post Office Directory for 1854 confuses the story by stating that William Prince is said to be at 'Halfway House'. We wondered at first whether this could be a pre-railway name for the Railway House, suggesting that it was halfway between Birmingham and Southampton (a claim later made by the Kings Arms), or whether it was a mistake? We lean towards the latter: perhaps a handwritten *Railway* misread as *Halfway*?



The earliest large-scale OS map of Steventon is Berkshire Sheet XV six-inch to the mile (1:10,560) map (LEFT), surveyed by Captains Ferrier and Archer of the Royal Engineers in 1875-7, contoured by Captain Kirke in 1880, and published on 31st May 1883. This clearly shows the Railway House.

This was during the period that John Burridge was the landlord. It's unclear how many of the buildings made up the Railway House at the time, so only the main building - on the east side of what may then have been called Highway Lane or Station Road, now the High Street - is marked in red. It appears to have some kind of ornamental garden or orchard behind it, perhaps the orchard listed in the 1839 survey.

The smithy, Pound Farm, the Methodist Chapel and the station are on the west side of the road; the original iron foundry and the Fox Inn are also on the east side.

Partial list of licensees at The Railway/Railway House 1844-1939 (Directories not found for missing years)

1842-1848: William Holloway

1851: William Prince

1852: John Stevens

1854: William Prince

1861-1877: John Burr ridge

1880: J Harris

1881-1887: Charles Harris

1891: Hannah Harris

1895-1903: Thomas Stimpson (recorded erroneously as Simpson in Berkshire Constabulary Licence Register for Railway House)

1903-1905: John George Brown

1905-1909: Henry Carter

1909-1911: William Joliffe

1912-1915: William Moore

1915: Charles Chier

1915: William Henry Biggar(s)

1916: Alfred W Duval

1917: Evelyn Duval

1918-1920: Alfred W Duval

1921-1927: Thomas Summersby

1927-31: John Dorey Allwood

1932: M Allwood

1935-1939: Rendall George Patrick Lapworth



Extract from the Ordnance Survey Berkshire Sheet XV.1 25-inch to the mile map, revised 1898, published 1899 (LEFT).

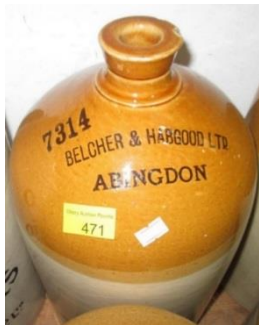
The pub itself is shown in red, with the ownership of the range of buildings between it and the Fox still unclear. The garden or orchard is no longer shown. (Robert Langford's Timsbury Villa and Terrace has been built opposite the Fox and Railway House. The iron foundry is still on the east side of the High Street, but the Vulcan Iron Works has appeared south of Pugsden Lane.)

This was during Thomas Stimpson's tenure at the Railway House, while it was owned by Faringdon and Abingdon brewers Belcher & Habgood: he committed suicide in August 1903 after being fired for being drunk and abusive to customers. Charles Belcher stated at the inquest that Stimpson was tenant at the Railway House since 1895. He went on "we gave the deceased notice to leave chiefly because of incivility to his customers and our staff. We gave him notice 2 years ago, but withdrew that on his promising amendment". Reported in the Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette, 21st August 1903



Photograph of the Railway House when owned by Belcher & Habgood, c. 1900: from a postcard

Belcher & Habgood had been brewing in Faringdon but in 1894 acquired the Tower Steam Brewery in Ock Street, Abingdon. Production was transferred to Abingdon by 1898. B&H also owned the Queens Hotel in Abingdon Market Place and the Nag's Head. In 1928 B&H sold out to Morlands but the name continued, and the company was only wound up in 1944.



Belcher & Habgood

(LIMITED),
 FARINGDON & ABINGDON,
 BREWERS,
 AND
 WINE AND SPIRIT MERCHANTS.

BOTTLED BEERS AND STOUT

Now in Splendid Condition, at the following Prices:—

	Imperial Pints	Per Doz.—s. d.
LIGHT FAMILY ALE	2 6	3 6
PALE ALE	3 6	4 0
EXTRA STOUT, specially recommended for Invalids	4 0	

Price List of Beers—8d, 10d, 1/-, 1/2, 1/6 per Gall.

A SPECIALITY,

L F A

NOTED FAMILY ALE, 1s. PER GALLON.

In 4, 9, 18, 36 GALLON CASKS.

BELCHER & HABGOOD (Limited).

Advert above from 1902

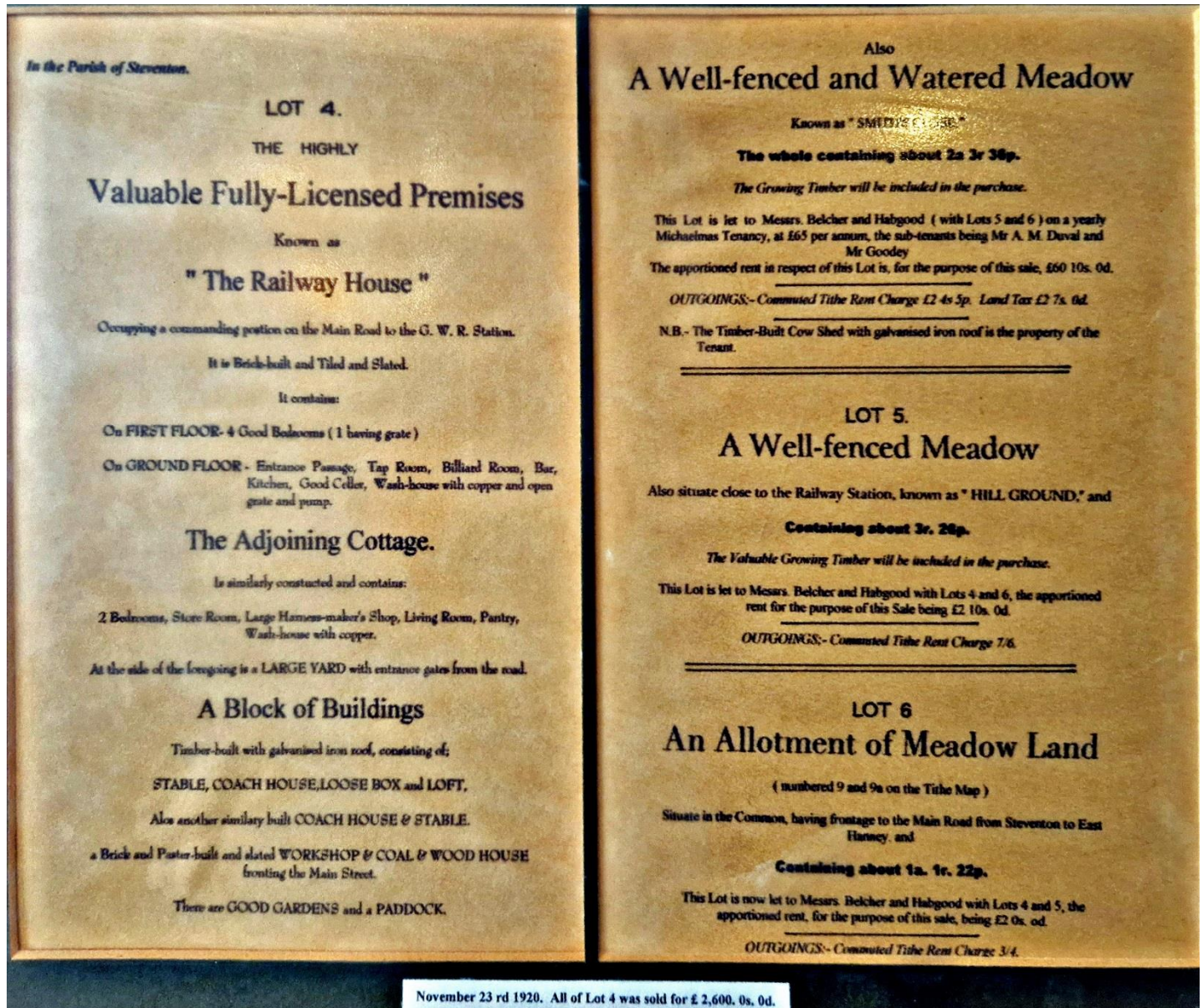


Extract from the Ordnance Survey
 Berkshire Sheet XV.1 25 inch to the
 mile map, Revised 1910, Published
 1912 (LEFT).

(The original iron foundry has moved across
 to the west side of the High Street to form
 the heart of the Steventon Iron Works. The
 Vulcan Works south of Pugsden Lane was put
 up for sale in 1911.)

There is a framed auction notice in the pub dated November 1920 which finally gives some clarity to the buildings and land that Belcher & Habgood owned at the time: there's the pub itself; a two-bedroom cottage; a yard; a block containing two stables, two coach houses, a loose box and a loft, a workshop and coal & wood store; gardens; and a paddock. There are also three parcels of land.

The cottage is said to contain a 'large harness-makers shop': the Goodey family – through Thomas (1823-1906) and sons George (born c. 1848) and Alfred (born c. 1855) - had been involved in harness-making in Steventon since at least the 1840s and George Goodey is recorded as having a harness shop on the High Street until at least 1924.



In the Parish of Steventon.

LOT 4.
THE HIGHLY
Valuable Fully-Licensed Premises
Known as
" The Railway House "
Occupying a commanding position on the Main Road to the G. W. R. Station.
It is Brick-built and Tiled and Slated.
It contains:
On **FIRST FLOOR**- 4 Good Bedrooms (1 having grate)
On **GROUND FLOOR** - Entrance Passage, Tap Room, Billiard Room, Bar, Kitchen, Good Cellar, Wash-house with copper and open grate and pump.
The Adjoining Cottage.
Is similarly constructed and contains:
2 Bedrooms, Store Room, Large Harness-maker's Shop, Living Room, Pantry, Wash-house with copper.
At the side of the foregoing is a **LARGE YARD** with entrance gates from the road.
A Block of Buildings
Timber-built with galvanised iron roof, consisting of:
STABLE, COACH HOUSE, LOOSE BOX and LOFT.
Also another similarly built **COACH HOUSE & STABLE.**
a Brick and Plaster-built and slated **WORKSHOP & COAL & WOOD HOUSE** fronting the Main Street.
There are **GOOD GARDENS** and a **PADDOCK.**

Also
A Well-fenced and Watered Meadow
Known as " **SMITH'S CLOSE** "
The whole containing about 2a 3r 36p.
The Growing Timber will be included in the purchase.
This Lot is let to Messrs. Belcher and Habgood (with Lots 5 and 6) on a yearly Michaelmas Tenancy, at £65 per annum, the sub-tenants being Mr A. M. Duval and Mr Goodey
The apportioned rent in respect of this Lot is, for the purpose of this sale, £60 10s. 0d.
OUTGOINGS:- Commuted Tithe Rent Charge £2 4s 5p. Land Tax £2 7s. 0d.
N.B.- The Timber-Built Cow Shed with galvanised iron roof is the property of the Tenant.

LOT 5.
A Well-fenced Meadow
Also situate close to the Railway Station, known as " **HILL GROUND,**" and
Containing about 3r. 28p.
The Valuable Growing Timber will be included in the purchase.
This Lot is let to Messrs. Belcher and Habgood with Lots 4 and 6, the apportioned rent for the purpose of this Sale being £2 10s. 0d.
OUTGOINGS:- Commuted Tithe Rent Charge 7/6.

LOT 6
An Allotment of Meadow Land
(numbered 9 and 9a on the Tithe Map)
Situate in the Common, having frontage to the Main Road from Steventon to East Hanney, and
Containing about 1a. 1r. 22p.
This Lot is now let to Messrs. Belcher and Habgood with Lots 4 and 5, the apportioned rent, for the purpose of this sale, being £2 0s. 0d.
OUTGOINGS:- Commuted Tithe Rent Charge 3/4.

November 23 rd 1920. All of Lot 4 was sold for £ 2,600. 0s. 0d.

Picture of notice displayed in the pub from Bianca Huish-Wells

The first piece of meadow, 'Smith's Close', ran along the north side of Pugsden Lane and now contains Denton's fenced storage area and several houses: the notice mentions sub-tenants Alfred Duval, Landlord at the Railway House at the time, and 'Mr Goodey' who was almost certainly George Goodey mentioned above. There was a timber-built cow shed with a galvanised iron roof on the meadow. The area given on the notice is nearly 3 acres.

The second meadow, 'Hill Ground', ran up the west side of Steventon Hill from the railway going south: there are now three houses on this piece. The area given on the notice is a little under an acre.

The third, 'allotment of meadow land', was somewhere along Hanney Road: possibly the 'Butlers Ham' occupied by Holloway – along with Smith's Close and Hill Ground – from the 1840s.

The framed notice says that the pub, the buildings, and the land was sold for £2,600 – this was potentially the sale to Wells' Wallingford Brewery who were themselves sold to Ushers later in the 1920s.

The photograph below is annotated "Railway House, Steventon: Club Concert, 11th July 1922". It appears to have been taken by Abingdon photographer Frank Warland Andrew who had a studio at 1 Stert Street, Abingdon. Photo from Audrey Keeler.



An interesting feature is the Japanese flag hung between two union flags, suggesting that perhaps the 'club' involved may have been an Anglo-Japanese society, or supporting the Anglo-Japanese Alliance (a diplomatic agreement between Britain and Japan which ran from 1902 to 1923, improving Britain's international position and consolidating Japan's position in north-east Asia at a time of increasing rivalry with Russia). Whatever the actual event, this was clearly quite a big affair with a stage and a range of seating packed into the Railway House tea garden.

(Note: Several guests staying at the pub in recent years have reported seeing a mysterious woman dressed in white standing next to the bed in room 7. Could this be the figure standing in the upstairs window in this 1922 picture?)

Below: for comparison, rear of the Cherry Tree in June 2023 (chairs tipped in this way because of potential rain!)



The Railway House in a postcard from the 1920s or 1930s, advertising the Tea Gardens and a Car Park.

The pub is showing the name of Wells - for Edward Wells, founder of the Wallingford Brewery in 1720. The brewery and 77 pubs, including the Railway House, were acquired from the Wallingford Brewery by Ushers around 1928.

The buildings between the Station House and the Fox have gone and there is a three-pump petrol station in place.



Left: A Wallingford Brewery ginger beer bottle

(As far as the petrol station goes: this may be connected with one or other of the motor engineers/garage proprietors active in Steventon by the 1930s. The more likely person is Alf Evans who, after living near the school and then in Drayton – but with premises in ‘Station Road’, one of the three names used at different times for what is now the High Street – lived in Timsbury Villa, opposite the Fox. The other possibility is Monty Rednap but it’s believed that his garage was where the Co-op is now).

The fact that there were two garages in Steventon in the 1930s shows the importance of the road: from 1922 until the 1970s this was the A34!)

It’s unclear whether Rendall Lapworth continued to be licensee at the Railway House in the early war years: the next entry in the Berkshire Constabulary list is Effie Lapworth in 1943, followed by William Walker in June 1948, and Frank Goodeve Cowley in August 1949. It was in late 1949 that Henry Arnold, security officer at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE) in Harwell, and MI5 interrogator William James ‘Jim’ Skardon (initially using the name ‘Mr Seddon’) started investigating German born physicist Klaus Fuchs – then at the AERE – in which the Railway House had a small part!

THE SPY WHO ATE HERE: The mysterious story of master spy, Klaus Fuchs, and his connection to Steventon by Sharron Jenkinson, Steventon History Society

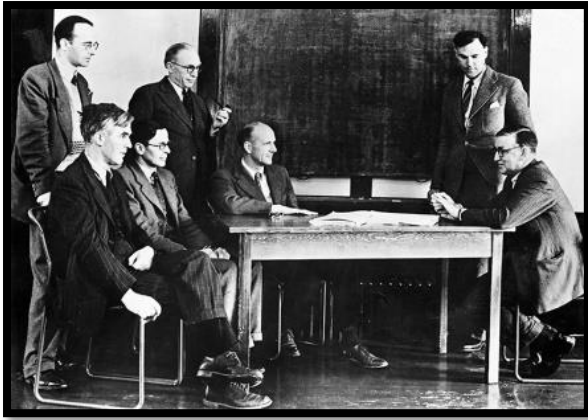
Klaus Fuchs was the atomic spy credited with one of the greatest acts of treachery in British history. His espionage, from 1941 when he was working on the Manhattan Project in the USA, to his confession in 1950, resulted in Russians building their own atomic bomb.

Fuchs was an anti-Nazi German refugee who studied at Bristol. He worked with Rudolf Peierls, initially at the UK Ministry of Aircraft Production, his speciality being refining uranium for the development of an atomic bomb.

In 1944, they both joined the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos, New Mexico. It is believed that Stalin knew about the Trinity Test (the first nuclear detonation) before President Truman did! Whilst still at Los Alamos, Fuchs started work on Hydrogen Bomb. After the war ended, he was reassigned to the UK Atomic Energy Project in Harwell.



Klaus Fuchs



Klaus Fuchs (far left) in 1948 with colleagues at the UK atomic-energy laboratory in Harwell.

By 1949, he had passed on enough intelligence to the Russians to enable them to have a detailed understanding of British and American progress on nuclear weaponry.

Fuchs was finally identified in the summer of 1949 following FBI work on decoding messages. MI5 started systematic surveillance. MI5 shared their concerns with the Director at Harwell, Sir John Cockcroft, and with Henry Arnold who was in charge of security. The MI5 interrogator, Jim Skardon, interviewed Fuchs at Harwell three times in December 1949 and January 1950 but found no conclusive evidence of his treachery. Meanwhile, Cockcroft was asked by the Home Office to seek ways of removing Fuchs from Harwell without a confession.

Throughout January, Fuchs's behaviour became more erratic as he gradually became aware of the danger he was in. On 23rd January, he asked his friend, the security officer Henry Arnold for a "long quiet talk". Arnold was briefed by MI5 not to reveal to Fuchs that he knew anything about the investigation. **Fuchs and Arnold went to The Railway House Hotel in Steventon (now The Cherry Tree).** Arnold later told MI5 that Fuchs appeared "under mental stress" and that he "might now be ready to make a confession."

The following day, Skardon and Fuchs met again at Fuchs' home. Fuchs poured out his life history. After two hours, Skardon told Fuchs that he should, "... unburden his mind and clear his conscience by telling me the whole story." Fuchs replied, "I will never be persuaded by you to talk." By now it was one o'clock and they decided to break for lunch. This time Fuchs suggested the very smart The Queen's Hotel on the Market Place in Abingdon. Over lunch, Fuchs told Skardon that he was ready to talk, and they hurried back to Harwell. Fuchs realised that there was compelling evidence of his espionage and so his lengthy confession began. Even so, he was not immediately arrested. Skardon asked Fuchs to make a full official statement and, on January 27th, they met at The War Office. Fuchs was hopeful that he would be allowed to continue with his work at Harwell but he was tried and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment and stripped of his British nationality. He was released from prison in 1959 and returned to East Germany where he continued to work in atomic research. He died in 1988.

MI5 dossiers show that without that lunch with Arnold in Steventon and the further lunch confession with Skardon, there would have been insufficient evidence to prosecute Fuchs. This very civilised approach to extracting a confession was certainly effective!

Skardon later obtained a confession from Anthony Blunt, the Cambridge spy.

Fuchs admitted to Skardon that he had been engaged in espionage from 'mid 1942 until about a year ago'. The latest research by Oxford Professor Frank Close – outlined in his book 'Trinity: The Treachery and Pursuit of the Most Dangerous Spy in History', Allen Lane, 2019 – suggests that Fuchs had in fact been passing information to the Soviets since at least summer 1941. Since the above was written, Christopher Nolan's 3-hour epic 2023 film 'Oppenheimer' covered the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos and shows Fuchs' – played by Christopher Denham - presence there: unfortunately Steventon and the Railway House were not mentioned!



Since the above was written, Christopher Nolan's 3-hour epic 2023 film 'Oppenheimer' covered the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos and shows Fuchs played by Christopher Denham (pictured left) working there: unfortunately neither Steventon nor the Railway House were mentioned!

The A34 was of course of increasing importance through the 1950s-1970s – clearly part of the reason why the Railway House, the Fox, the Timsbury/Steventon Inn and the Kings Arms were all in business. By the mid-1950s Ushers styled the pub as The Railway House Hotel, the filling station was branded Esso, and there was a small shop opposite.



Usher's Wiltshire Brewery was founded in Trowbridge in 1824 by Thomas Usher. In the twentieth century they grew by acquisition, including Wells' Wallingford Brewery, but started struggling in the '50s by which time they had some 900 public houses in an area running from the Thames Valley to Devon.

In 1959 they entered a 'reciprocal trading agreement' with Watney Mann, supposedly for 10 years, but were in fact taken over in 1960. Watneys resurrected the Ushers name in the west of the country through the 1980s, and there was a management buyout in 1992 which lasted until the company folded in 2000.

Of course, somewhere along the line the Railway House became the Cherry Tree – presumably at some point after the closure of the station in 1964.

Licenses at the Railway House/Cherry Tree 1952-1975 (from the Berkshire Constabulary Licence Register)

- 1952: Richard Maurice George Lloyd
- 1953: James Samuel Smith
- 1954: Norman Barnabas Purdue
- 1956: William Charles Penney
- 1959: Victor Cue
- 1961: William Charles Thornycraft
- 1963: Lesley Cocollis
- 1969: Alain Berry Johnson
- 1971: Betty Pauline Henderson
- 1973-1975: Charles Ivan Spackman et al

How long the Cherry Tree remained an Ushers/Watney pub is not currently clear: it became a free house at some point and was so described in the 1983 CAMRA Pub Guide. While the Brewery History Society says that "the Cherry Tree (formerly Railway Inn), Steventon, Oxfordshire bought by Wadworth 2004", Charles Bartholomew – Director and past Chairman at Wadworth – has advised that they bought the Cherry Tree in 1988 from a Mr Macdonald-Chamberlayne, with Finance Director Danny Webber giving a completion date of March 1989.

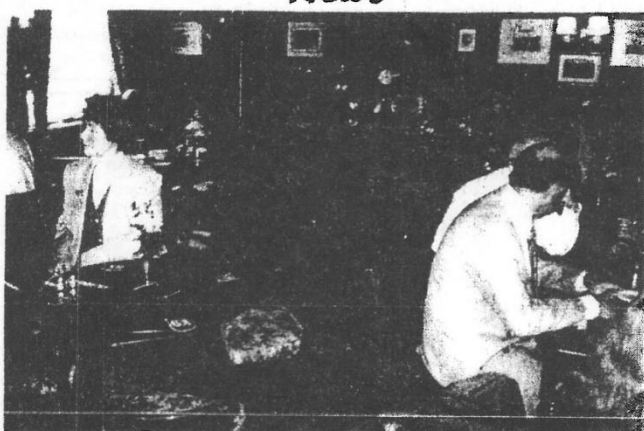
The landlords at the pub and the events that they have organised have made the Cherry Tree a core part of the community:

"Mid 1970's 2 regulars were met by a new landlord (thinking they had stolen a table umbrella the evening before) with the words 'I'm not serving your sort' When asked why the landlord replied that he didn't need a reason. One of the potential customers picked up a soda syphon and soaked landlord head-to-foot. 'Well you've got a bloody reason now!' he said...on the way out."

"A 1983 CAMRA Pub Guide, noting that Morlands, Brakespear and Wadworth ales were available, described the pub thus – 'A comfortable and busy free-house, popular with young; note the unusual (but dangerous) automatic snuff-taking machine'."

"For most of the 1990s the pub was run by John and Karin Chester who would organize a Christmas dinner for any of their customers who had no family to go to. One of these was a beach party with the floor being covered in sand and invited guests attending wearing swimming costumes, or similar! Frostbite was avoided and the floor cleaned."

JUNE
The Cherry Tree
News



THE CHERRY TREE CAMRA for over two years now as "A Comfortable, inviting roadside ta-

vern of character, offering an inventive menu of high quality, home made food". It is rendered in pink plaster with black beams.

The pub has been run for the past three and a half years by John and Karin Chester who have been in the Pub and Hotel trade since 1983. John is a MBII. Since the couple took over, The Cherry Tree has grown more and more popular for both the food and drink.

There are different real ales to sample each week. The regular Wadworth beers are 6X, IPA, Farmers Glory and the new Summer Sault. Currently, there are also Breakspear and Tahgle Foot.

Karin is in charge of the food and the meals are all freshly prepared and offer excellent value for money. There are always Daily Specials whilst a glance at the regular menu reveals such culinary delights as 6X Pie, Moroccan Lamb Tagine and Seafood Pancakes. Those wanting something lighter may opt for The Cherry Tree "Sand Wedges" but be warned – they are a substantial meal in themselves and are served with roast potatoes. To round off, you must try Karin's famous Sticky Toffee Pudding.

There are regular Theme and Promotion Evenings including Fish on Fridays. A No Smoking Room is available for those wishing to enjoy their food or drink cigarette free. Small functions can be catered for.

Karin sums up the success of The Cherry Tree as being because of listening to what people want and it is very much a customer orientated pub where everyone is assured of a friendly welcome.

The Cherry Tree is situated close to The Milton Interchange on the main A34 road. It is open between 11.30am and 2.30pm and from 6.0pm to 11pm.

Further information can be obtained from (01235) 831222.

"Copy of a news item in a local paper for 'CAMRA's pick of the pubs in Oxon'"

**From 'Steventon News'
June 1996**

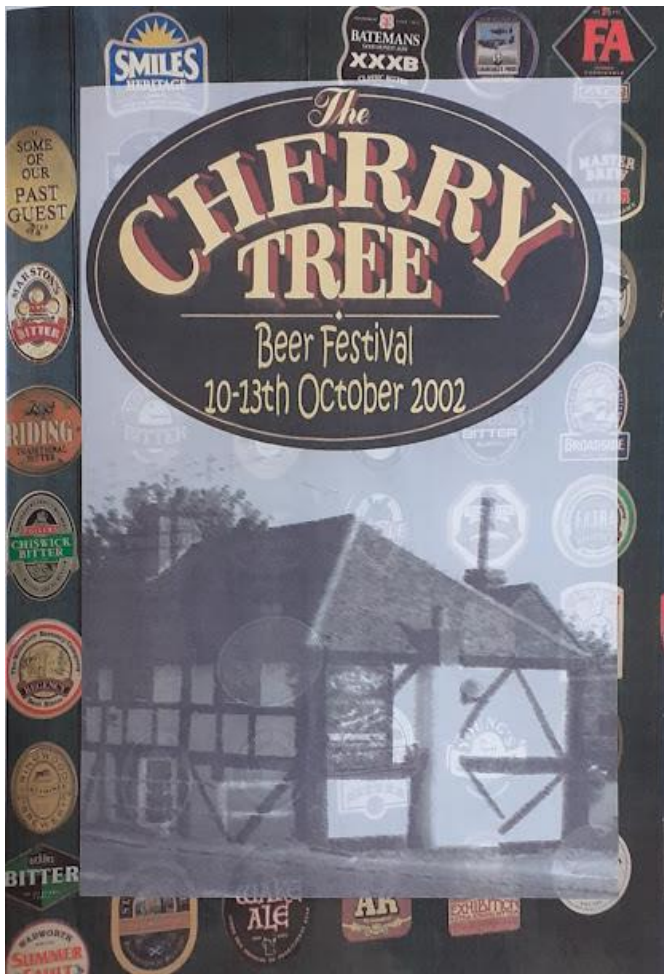
THIS MONTHS QUIZ NIGHT
MONDAY 3rd JUNE
8.00 PM

RIPE CHERRY CLUB
10% DISCOUNT OFF
MEALS FOR THE OVER
60's

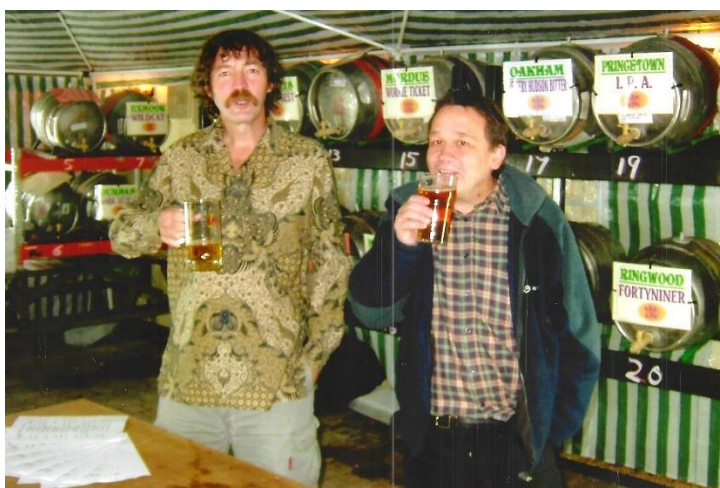
PLUS MEALS 1/2
PRICE SATURDAY
LUNCH, NOON to 2.00pm
NO MEMBERS
FEEES
Just call in and join!

There were several reports of indoor fireworks at the Cherry Tree: it's said that a local farmer who was used to sitting by the fire in the winter was known, if thwarted, to on occasion throw a shotgun cartridge into the fire. On exploding this resulted in a quick evacuation of the fireside area, enabling the farmer to assume his customary position.

"In 1999 Jez and Mandy Hill were sent to the pub for a two-week trial as part of their Wadworth's training process. Owing to their success, and their popularity with locals, they didn't actually leave until March 2006. Part of this was due to their ideal pub dog – Razor a very large German Shepherd who met all customers with a wagging tail but was very reluctant to let them leave! Jez and Mandy also started regular music nights and bi-annual beer festivals. When Jez was involved in a motorbike accident shortly before one beer festival the customers joined together to erect the festival stillage, rack the barrels, serve throughout the event and dismantle everything afterwards. Much to Wadworth's' area managers amazement the till over the entire weekend was 37p over!"



Photos believed to be from the 2004 beer festival.



My LOCAL

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



A good local isn't just bricks and mortar – it's people, too. Dick Bosley says thank you to everyone who made it possible...



FOR those old enough to remember it, or sad enough to watch daytime television, the theme tune to Cheers includes the line "you want to go where everyone knows your name". As a rule of thumb for a local, that seems good enough for me.

The Cherry Tree in Soventon is a large village pub in the middle of the Vale of the White Horse, Oxfordshire. Previously known as the Railway Inn, the change of name was forced on us by the dreaded Dr Beeching. There are two bars and a non-smoking dining room where families can reap the benefit of a good beer while keeping an eye on the local characters.

The Cherry Tree has been awarded the local pub of the year a couple of times and is a place where you can be sure of a very warm welcome, excellent home-made meals and, of course, an extremely well-kept pint of either Wadworth's or a guest ale. Over the last few years there has been a wide range of guests, some of which have only lasted a session or two, and the recently-awarded Cask Marque plaque means that you can be sure of their quality.

But that's enough details. Let's take a look at what really matters – the people who make it all happen, with apologies to anyone important that I've forgotten.

Jez Hill. The manager. Described by the Good Beer Guide as "welcoming", although this may be disputed by the customer who was told: "this is a beer festival – I don't serve *****g lager!"

A real artiste where ale is concerned, Jez has a couple of hundred of his collection of beer bottles on display in the pub, together with other beer

memorabilia and some other, more bizarre, pieces of local interest.

Mandy Hill. The manageress. A perfect foil for Jez – ie she does all the work. Among her many duties are starting (and finishing) the dancing at the monthly Blues nights. She once asked me why I hadn't brought my dog into the pub before. He doesn't know how to behave, I replied. That doesn't stop you, she said. Claims the best thing you can have in bed is a fish-finger sandwich.

Jules. Barmaid extraordinaire but doesn't do fluffy. Frightens those who don't know her... and terrifies those who do. Rules the pub with a rod of iron and knows almost as much as Jez about keeping good beer.

Matt. Another unusual member of staff. Many people think that the only wasted space in the pub is between his ears.

Rachel. A fluffy red-head. We forgive her for being Welsh.

Steve. Wouldn't say boo to you even if you were a goose.

Razor. Probably the most important member of staff. A very impressive-looking German Shepherd specially trained to attack only people who dare to leave the pub.

Making his marquee – Jez Hill, right, getting his Cask Marque accreditation from Wadworth's Ian Skipper

FJ. Landlord of another local pub. Seems to prefer the Cherry Tree.

Gary, Mark, Bimbo, Jim and other builders and lagerboys too numerous to mention.

Linda, who likes to think she keeps Dooley under the thumb.

Kit, a genial thatcher who doesn't bounce.

Andrew & Edmund. A pair of medievalists often to be found in the pub at lunchtime. Also largely responsible for Soventon hosting "the best value music festival in England". They can also do damn fine Monty Python impersonations.

Jim'll fix it – as long as it's a motorbike. Makes up the Domino Triumvirate with Ernie and Nunkie.

Nunkie. Domino player who keeps the village clean and tidy. Tells good stories and doesn't let the facts spoil them.

Pat. Avoid this man on a Thursday or he will sell you meat raffle tickets in aid of local wrinkles.

Richard & Peter (or is that Statler and Waldorf?). A couple of early evening drinkers and keen members of the pub's fantasy cricket league who will always give an off the wall view of current affairs and sport.

Mitch. Probably the best player in the Cherry Tree squash ladder. Or is that?

Andy? We all await the clash of these Titans.

Andrew. One of the pub's fuzziest drinkers, but he does appreciate good ale whether or not it is to his style.

John. Occasional barman at the biannual beer festivals, rugby fan, and part-time bodybuilder – although I doubt he has planning permission for that body.

Gary & Jo. Another keen rugby fan and supplier of Chinese food. I'm afraid I cannot think of anything to say about Jo that she won't find libellous. Scarer than Jules?

Neil. Bookie. Will give odds on anything from England winning the world cup – any world cup will do – to Jez selling all his beer at a beer festival.

Lesley. Lovely person, recorder player, world class sailor and Maudy's regular squash partner.

Ken. Someone once said of Ken: "I don't know what planet he's from but it must be a very laid back one". Also around is his brother Phil, playing the strong silent type.

Dill. Absolutely tireless and would happily walk to the Cherry Tree 10 times a day – a shame he's a dog really. Mixed parentage means he has the personality of a Jack Russell, the stamina of a collie – and the brain power of an amoeba.

Simon. Helpful legal eagle. Also enjoys dominoes.

Russell. Unfortunately, doesn't like real ale – or it doesn't like him. Makes up for it by consuming malt whisky and playing the squeeze-box at the monthly folk nights.

Oh, and I call in occasionally too.

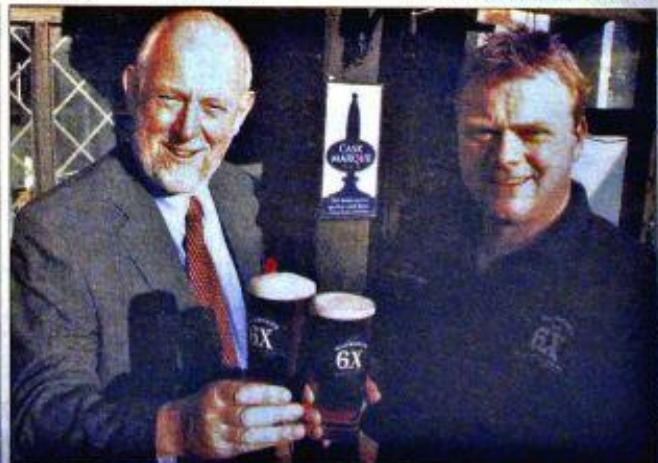
[Note to Editor from Makepeace & Hush, libel lawyers to the contrary: on no account publish a word of the above.]

It's a people thing

Many people think that the only wasted space in the pub is between his ears.

● My Local is a regular feature that can only be supplied by CAMRA members themselves. So if you love your local and feel it deserves a bit of publicity, chain yourself to your PC or just put pen to paper and send 1,000 words and a good selection of colour pictures (35mm transparencies or high-resolution jpg, tif, eps) by post to HQ or by email to ted.bruning@camra.org.uk NOW! Just think how much happiness your local landlord and landlady have given you over the years. Now you can return the favour!

6X scandal





Above: The Cherry Tree during The Great Flood of 2007

THE CHERRY TREE 2
BEER FESTIVAL
4th, 5th, 6th September 2009

25+ Real Cask Ales
8 Scrumpy Ciders
Hog Roast
Barbecue

Featuring "Meet The Brewer"
 Your chance to learn about and sample some great Wadworth real ales! With loads of goodies & beer to buy and takeaway!

Performing Live
Triple A
DukeBox
Robin On The Fiddle
plus MORE ACTS TBC

Session Times
 Friday 11.30am - 11.00pm
 Saturday 12noon - 11.00pm
 Sunday 12noon - 10.30pm

Please Turn Over For The Full Line Up Over The Weekend...

the cherry tree 33 high street steventon oxfordshire ox13 6rz
 01235 831222 cherrytree@wadworth.co.uk

the weekend line up...

FRIDAY 4th
 3 BARS - 20 REAL ALES - 8 SCRUMPYS 12noon-11pm
 BBQ from 12noon-10pm LIGHT SNACK MENU 12noon-4pm
 TRIPLE A playing 60's & 70's 8pm-11pm

SATURDAY 5th
 3 BARS - 20 REAL ALES - 8 SCRUMPYS 12noon-11pm
 BBQ from 12noon-10pm LIGHT SNACK MENU 12noon-4pm
 HOCROAST from 6pm
 "MEET THE BREWER" with Adrian Wood (Wadworth) from 2pm
 Band TBC 8pm-11pm

SUNDAY 6th
 3 BARS SERVING WHATS LEFT!
 BBQ from 12noon-9pm
 SAUSAGE MIX 'N' MASH from 12noon-3pm
 DUKE BOX playing upbeat party music from 5 decades 3pm-6pm
 ROBIN ON THE FIDDLE playing great folk & classical 8pm-10.30pm

There was a long running threat to close, demolish and replace the nearby railway bridge - the only way in and out of the southern end of the village (apart for the unmade track alongside the south side of the railway) - for up to 10 months to make electrification of the line easier. Both residents and local businesses were appalled:

From the Oxfordshire Guardian, 25th May 2017:

“Jason Kibble, manager of the Cherry Tree Pub for 11 months, said he fears a significant loss of trade and that he will have to cut staff hours. He said: “We’d have to completely change things here because it will have a massive impact. There isn’t any way to pull customers in if they can’t get here. We are going to be quiet. There’s no way we will be as busy as we are normally so hours will have to be cut because we have to make savings.”

Mr Kibble said relying on villagers for 10 months means the pub would miss its targets set by owners Wadworth brewery.”

(Thankfully this threat was eventually lifted in April 2020 after tests throughout 2019 - when Network Rail finally accepted what the parish council had been telling them all along: electrification could be achieved without demolishing the bridge!)

From the Oxford Mail, 31st March 2018:

“A TRADITIONAL 18th century village pub has welcomed new owners who are aiming to bring it back to the ‘heart of the community.’ Experienced licensees Richard and Niki Clarke have become the new managers of the Cherry Tree in Steventon, near Didcot. The distinctive pink pub in High Street is owned by brewer Wadworth and features low ceilings, oak beams, and three open fireplaces.



Mr Clarke said: “We are really looking forward to welcoming back customers old and new and putting this place at the centre of the village. “It’s a beautiful building with open fires in the winter, a great courtyard for the summer and the place deserves to be a real pub serving the people around it.”

The Clarkes plan to launch a new menu and hold beer tasting events so locals and businesses can see what is on offer. Regional development manager for Wadworth, Toby Bartholomew, said: “It’s great to have Richard and Nicki join us”.



The Cherry Tree in pre-Covid pink



The patio behind the Cherry Tree was screened off from the car park in mid-2018.

In March 2020 the Cherry Tree, along with the other pubs in the village, had to close because of the Covid pandemic.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

In line with the latest Government guidelines, we are sorry to let you know that our pub will close as of midnight tonight 20/03/20 until further notice.

If you are planning on visiting tonight, please check with us for our exact closure time and check our website for measures we are taking to ensure our teams and guests remain safe.

We hope we will be able to re-open again soon and get back to being the hub of our community.

We'd like to thank you for your support.

Please keep an eye on this page to keep up to date.

If you need to contact us please send us a private message.

From our family to yours, please stay safe and we'll see you soon.

Whilst we're shut, "The Henry" (our virtual pub) is open and ready for the pleasure of your company. Please come and join us at www.facebook.com/groups/thehenry where our team is busy brewing up ideas to keep us all entertained.

WADWORTH

From the Oxford Mail, 7th July 2020:

"Villagers are also worried The Cherry Tree pub could close.....The pub is closed due to the pandemic but has made the announcement that it will not be open in the 'foreseeable future'The Cherry Tree pub, which is owned by Wadworth, wrote on its Facebook page and said: "Following our post yesterday about delaying our opening beyond July 4, please note for our pub, Wadworth have no plans to open this pub for the foreseeable future. We ask for your patience and support - and we will update on our plans in due course."

The Cherry Tree finally reopened In August 2021, changing from being a Wadworth managed pub to a tenanted pub under a new tenant, Adam Cogan, serving food from 2nd September. The Fox and the North Star had reopened in 2020. However, the Cherry Tree briefly closed again in early July 2022 – the tenant had only taken a lease for a year...

Email from Lloyd Stephens, Operations Director (Tenanted) at Wadworth, 13th July 2022:

Adam Cogan, Business Partner (tenant), is due to leave the pub next week, Monday 18th July 2022.

Cherry Tree Facebook page:

The Cherry Tree, Steventon

Thursday 21st July 2022

REOPENING UPDATE:

We are pleased to announce that we will be opening our doors TOMORROW! We will open from 12pm for lunch onwards, dinner service will start at 6pm. Please call us if you would like to book a table. We look forward to welcoming you



In July 2022 Bianca Huish-Wells took on the tenancy of the pub.

"I was delighted to have the chance to take on a traditional village local pub bursting with character and oldy-worldly charm, which the Cherry Tree has in abundance" She said, "There can be no greater joy than getting to know all the villagers and working on reviving the old favourite local pub by pouring your love and dedication into what you do every day. It is the most heart-warming experience to hear people say that the Cherry Tree is back and better than ever!" Her aim is to provide great quality classic pub food, an excellent selection of drinks, home-from-home B&B rooms, all at a fair price. She also wishes to bring back Live Music events to the village and really make the Pub thrive!