



The Pub in Stockcross

There isn't one. Not one real, living, welcoming place as we once enjoyed. The last to close, ***The Rising Sun***, is a sad, decaying reminder of "*The Good Old Days*".

The Pub, the Boozer, the Local, hostelry, inn, gin palace, call it what you will, serves a multitude of functions: a place to meet friends and neighbours or business contacts, catch up on the local news, gossip, chat up the barmaid or generally flirt, set the world to rights, hope for a chance encounter, "get wasted", sometimes have a meal, take a break during a journey or simply to go and enjoy a drink somewhere warm and welcoming, just for the sheer delight of it.

Back in the '70s Stockcross offered all of this. Maybe even in Roman times *The Ermin Street Guard* would take a break here as they trudged between Silchester and Cirencester. I can find no record of that but certainly the Stockcross & Surroundings History Association's (**SASHA**) census transcripts record that in 1841 we had ***The Nag's Head***, ***The King's Head*** and ***The New Inn***. Meanwhile down in Marsh Benham, though no pub was listed, Henry Wernham and Harriott Palmer were recorded as publicans, but living at separate, unspecified addresses.

In 1851 the census makes no mention of any pub in either Stockcross or Marsh Benham apart from recording Thomas Snook (previously at ***The New Inn***) as a publican living in Nalderhill, and Lucy Wernham, now Henry's widow, on parish relief, with eight children! What happened around Stockcross in 1851 to cause our pubs to temporarily disappear?

Thankfully ten years later ***The Nag's Head*** had reappeared and also a "Beer House" in Marsh Benham. ***Sportsman's Hall*** is also listed, for the first time. In his *Stockcross Story* Rev Nigel Sands states that in 1869 the vicar of the day lamented that there were no fewer than eight public houses in his parish, including a ***Craven Arms*** in Marsh Benham. However, ***Sportsman's Hall*** is not mentioned in the 1871 census or in 1891 but reappears in 1881. It disappears again in the 1911 census and certainly has not been a pub in the last 50 years but, still standing on the right as

we enter Stockcross from Newbury, we can see evidence of its previous incarnation in the marks on the wall of one of the “*Widows’ Corner*” cottages where the pub sign was once displayed. If invited, one can also see the stream running through its cool cellar which must have kept the beer in magnificent condition.

Rev Sands also mentions a ***Nag’s Head*** on the A4 in 1887 adjacent to the old Sutton Estate offices (now Benham Chase). He states that that pub ceased trading by 1890.

In 1875, in order to reduce the incidence of drunkenness amongst residents frequenting village pubs the then Sir Richard Sutton provided ***The Workman’s Club*** to enable members to “*drink moderate amounts*” in what is now the Billiards Club room at The Sutton Hall

In 1911 ***The Nag’s Head*** was still listed. In 1957 it was renamed ***The Lord Lyon***, to commemorate Sir Richard Sutton’s horse of that name winning the 1866 Derby. By 1911 we also now had ***The Cricketers*** and ***The Rising Sun*** (publican Stuart Dennison). There is also mention of a publican, one Harriott Elms, but no pub name.

Since the Second World War Stockcross has been blessed, and, some might say, cursed, with many landlords in “***The Lordy***”, “***The Riser***” and ***The Cricketers*** variously displaying a spectacular variety of talents, each in their own way. We have our memories. The highly successful sometimes moved on to greener pastures, or simply retired, while others, thankfully, just left.

But times changed and one by one the pubs closed. First ***The Cricketers***, sold to Vockins to build five houses in 1987. Then there were two. In 2015 ***The Lord Lyon*** closed and was converted into nine flats but happily retaining the external character of the building, apart from the loss of the left ear of “The Nag’s Head” over the door! Sad as we were to see the closure of ***The Lord Lyon*** many believed that with no competition the only pub left standing could not fail. How wrong we were!

In 2017 ***The Rising Sun*** closed its doors. In 2018 we managed to have it listed as an Asset of Community Value preventing a change of use at least until 2023 though the tenancy, which I believe West Berks Brewery still holds, does not expire until a few years later. Meanwhile it stands and rots, remaining an eyesore and sad reminder.

The reasons for the demise of pubs are legion: from changes in social habits and driving laws, pressure on housing and hence property value, to the general ineptitude of some landlords and their inability to adapt; it has not simply been a case of “*use it or lose it*”.

So now there is no pub within easy, safe walking distance of the centre of Stockcross. In spite of the nationwide demise of pubs there must be an opportunity for an enterprising publican in Stockcross, not just being dependent on “the locals”. We have considerable passing trade. The village shop and post office appears to be thriving, offering groceries, gifts and fresh coffee and home-prepared snacks. Many travel quite a distance for the easy parking at the post office door. Stockcross Recreation Ground attracts visitors from well outside the village to park and walk, often with dogs, to use the children’s play area, to picnic in the summer and of course at weekends to use the football pitches, it being a “Home Ground” for the members of AFC Newbury. But most importantly, we still have a vibrant and varied village community centered largely on the Sutton Hall. The Hall Committee has put considerable effort into trying to restore a semblance of a social hub. Following closure of ***The Rising Sun*** and building on the success of ***The Inn on The Glebe*** during Stockfests the committee took the initiative to provide an occasional ***Pop-Inn Bar*** in The Sutton Hall. Originally it was conceived as a regular, hopefully monthly, Friday night affair to enable villagers to come together for a drink, chat and maybe a bite to eat at the end of the week. But the effort involved for the committee with even an extended group of helpers, “*The FROTHERS*”, has proved to be unsustainable on a regular basis. However, when they are held, they prove very popular and proof, if any is needed, that we really do need a pub!

There is one other possibility I can think of; but then I always was a dreamer; without dreams how would we ever achieve anything? Whatever the solution, there is no doubt it would require considerable effort and investment.

Do we care enough?

Cllr Keith Phillips

This is but a brief overview of work in progress. I am collating more detailed information on the pubs of Stockcross and am aware there is a considerable amount in the SASHA records but if anyone would like to share their memories or other information with me, or correct any of the above, I will be delighted to hear from you: keithstockcross@hotmail.co.uk; 01488 608 249.

THE RISING SUN



Then



Today