

About the village pubs and inns of the past

Early records from the 17th century give tantalising evidence of several alehouses in the village. Alehouse keepers, who brewed ale for sale on their own premises, were licenced each year by the Justices of the Peace and had to pay a surety. For example, in 1692, the licensed alehouse keepers in King's Cliffe were: Maria Palmer, Johan Mason, Alice Prior, Richard Coe, Milord Percival, Henricus Ffoster, Thomas Bottomly, Eliza Rowell and Gulus Ashly. Unfortunately, the records do not tell us where their alehouses were.

In other documents, there are occasional references to pub names that are not mentioned in later records: names like 'The Angel', 'The Star' and 'The Crown'. It may be that these are earlier names of some of the public houses listed in **Kelly's Directory of 1847** – the earliest trade directory we have with details for King's Cliffe. It lists the following pubs and inns in the village and their publicans at that time:

In Park Street:

The Red Lion Inn (now no.41A) kept by John Bailey;
and the Wheat Sheaf Inn (now no.56) where John Cunnington was the publican.

In West Street:

The Cross Keys Inn was kept by Robert Holmes. This was the most important of the village inns, operating under that name since at least 1732. It was described as a 'Commercial Inn, also Excise & Post Office', the post being delivered there from Wansford on the Great North Road from London. For at least 200 years The Cross Keys Inn was also where the Manor Courts were held. *[More about Manor Courts on our searchable archive.]*

William Hill kept the Turners Arms (no 15): he was listed not just a beer retailer, but also a woodturner and a draper. His woodturning workshop was in outbuildings behind the pub.

At the Maltsters' Arms, (no.16 at the corner with Forest Approach), the publican was William Cunnington, another member of the Cunnington family of maltster/brewers.

The Windmill Inn was kept by Henry Porter in buildings which are now the doctors' surgery. Close by, behind what is now Kingscliffe House, was the tower windmill and maltings built in 1818 by William Cunnington senior, farmer, maltster and brewer. In 1927, the King's Cliffe Branch of the British Legion formed a Club and, in 1928 acquired the former Windmill Inn premises to be their Clubhouse until 1967.

The Wheel Inn was kept by another John Cunnington who had his brew-house near the top of Eagle Lane, opposite the pub. The Wheel Inn was the base for one of the village's friendly societies, founded in 1807 as the 'King's Cliffe Friendly and United Society' but popularly called 'The Wheel Inn Club'. *[See their parading banner in our Heritage Centre and find more about friendly societies on our searchable archive.]*

There was another beer house in West Street not listed in Kelly's in 1847. It was called The Travellers Rest (no.90), kept by beer retailer William Payne, also a carpenter.

In Bridge Street:

The Golden Ball Inn (no.2) was kept by John Stanyon. In the 1850s it became the base for The Amicable Friendly Society founded in 1772, originally based at the Cross Keys Inn.

Fifty years later, the 1901 Census records ten public-houses, with the addition of the Eagle Tavern, the tap-house for the brewery in Eagle Lane. The public houses provided much of the social life of the men of the village. Those with suitably large rooms, were also able

to accommodate the annual suppers and dinners of village organisations, for example the Volunteer Fire Brigade and the Cricket Club which were a regular feature of village life before the First World War.

You can track the changes of publicans over the years up to 1954 by looking at later trade directories, or our census transcripts from 1841 to 1911 which can be found on our searchable archive.

Today, The Cross Keys Inn is the only pub in the village. All the others have closed over the years and been converted into houses. Licensing arrangements for all the pubs in the village were regularly reviewed by the Justices of the Peace, taking advice from the local Police regarding conduct of the pub, and looking also at the number and closeness of public houses serving the village population overall. This process led to the closure of both the Travellers Rest and Maltsters Arms in 1925, when the JPs decided not to renew their licences. Later pub closures were commercial decisions taken by the breweries who owned them. The Wheel Inn closed in 1964. The Golden Ball was the next to be delicensed and sold in 1971. The Turners Arms was closed and sold in 1974. The last publican there was Mrs Ethel Martin, aged 92 – the oldest publican in the country. The Wheatsheaf closed in 1977, and The Red Lion in 1981.

For more, go to our Gallery and watch the slide show 'Old Pubs and Inns'.