

Pubs in Chinnor

Of Chinnor's many original pubs, only 3 now survive in the village, together with a couple in the outlying hamlets.

At around the turn of the 20th century, there were 12 or more pubs in the village itself and another 4 in the outlying hamlets. A good number will have dated back centuries and all were created out of the simple necessity to provide a meeting place and refreshment, with a couple offering accommodation to travellers. The earlier pubs in the village were mostly simple affairs, often a converted room of a private house – hence the terms “public bar” and “public house” – and generally were frequented only by men. As the years progressed, many (but not all!) created a “snug” or “saloon” bar to cater for women and for those who wanted a quieter, more private area. By the 1980s this trend had, however, reversed and many pubs amalgamated their saloon and public bars to create what is now the norm of a single, large bar.

Only 30 - 40 years ago, asking for food in a pub often drew derision from the landlord and the “regulars”..

Almost all the 19th and 20th century pubs in Chinnor were located around the village square with at least one pub on each of the corners. . Before the amalgamation of breweries and the move to mass produced beer in the mid – late 20th century, there were numerous local breweries and most were small. Brews like Morrells, Morlands, Benskins, Aylesbury Brewery Co (ABC) and Welches were some of the local names. Pub and brewery reputations varied and the quality of the beer sold varied widely depending on the brew, how it travelled and how it was kept. As is the case now, taste in beer was very personal and everything was much more price sensitive than it is now! It was common for pub patronage to change, at least temporarily, because one brewery increased its prices by 1d (old penny) or less, ahead of other breweries

In the High Street, the Nelson or Royal Nelson, was located near the top, opposite the current car park. Halfway down on the east side, was the Chairmakers Arms on the site of what is now a private house – also called Chairmakers. This is thought to have been a pub oriented towards the “bodgers” who brought turned chair legs made in the woods into the chair maker who operated on the site; this pub disappeared around 1900. At the bottom of the High Street on the corner with Lower Icknield Way, is the Red Lion which is one of the 3 survivors.

The Red Lion



Immediately opposite the Red Lion and on the east side of the Chinnor Indian Restaurant was the Unicorn although this disappeared in the late 1800s. About 50 – 100 yards west along Lower Road and on the north side was the Royal Oak. This survived until relatively recently but has now been converted to private housing.

At the corner of Lower Road and Station Road was the Bird in Hand: this is now offices. Halfway up Station Road on the west side was the Black Boy, now a somewhat politically incorrect name but a common pub name until the last century. This is now an antiques centre.

At the corner of Station Road, Oakley Road and Church Road (this was known as the School Corner) is another of the survivors,

The Crown



The now derelict Kings Head is located about 100 yards further up Station Road, is said to have been amongst the older pubs in the village. Possibly in view of its position set back from the road, the Kings Head was nicknamed locally as the Hole in the Wall and it is reputed that King Charles I (or one of his close followers) may actually have stayed there in the 17th century.

The Wheatsheaf



The last of the survivors is the Wheatsheaf which is technically in Oakley, about 1/2 mile along Oakley Road, although there is now little separation between Chinnor and the old hamlet of Oakley.

Outside the village and above Wainhill (but technically in the parish of Bledlow) was the Leather Bottle (this was its old name although I have heard it referred to as the Leathern Bottle). This old pub sat on the south side of the Upper Ickneld Way (Ridgway) and, I believe, closed around 1925. It was clearly an inn for drovers and travellers on the Ickneld Way and, most likely, was unable to survive the changes in lifestyle and transport that occurred around this time.

On the opposite side of the B4009 way down the road in Henton is the Peacock Country Inn. This used to be the Eagle and was reincarnated as the Jubilee to celebrate one of the Queen Elizabeth jubilees, then more recently as the Peacock. It is now a hotel and restaurant as well as a pub.

In Spriggs Alley (sometimes called Spriggs Holly) on the hill above Crowell and accessed by very narrow country roads, is the Charles Napier. Originally, this was a small village beer house but is now a Michelin starred restaurant with a wide reputation. In fact, over a century, Spriggs Alley has morphed from a tiny and very poor agricultural hamlet in the Chinnor Parish into a very desirable, albeit remote, place to live.

Along Red Lane (continuation of Chinnor Hill towards Bledlow Ridge), and on the north side just before the Bucks boundary, is the Pheasant. This was a pub till the late 19th century and, together with Pheasant Cottage next door, is now a private house.

The Inn at Emmington, at the Sydenham turn on the Thame road (B4445), used to be part of Chinnor Parish but is now more associated with Sydenham. It used to be called the Plough and Harrow before being reinvented as a hotel and restaurant in the late 20th century.

Some may dispute whether it can actually be called a pub in the traditional sense but the Chinnor Sports and Social Club, now located in the Playing Field Pavilion, was inaugurated in the 1970s and has become part of the village's pub scene.

Maurice Pullen - 2021