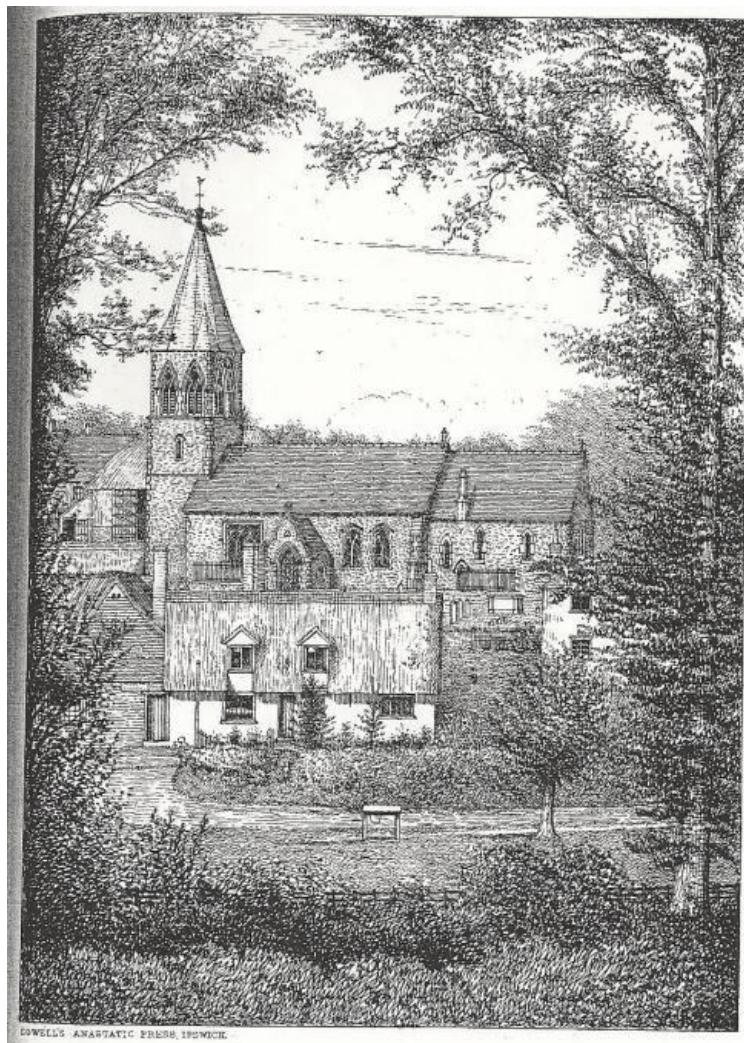


## **History of the Pub in Wicken Bonhunt by Recorder Debbie Lowe**

The earliest image which shows the village pub was commissioned by the Rector John Hanson Sperling in the late 1850s and published in 1862. Sperling describes the image as an etching 'from the pen of Mr George Trufitt, Architect of Bloomsbury Square, London'. The earliest photographic records date from the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, and there are several photographs of the public house throughout the mid to late 20th century. What is perhaps most surprising, is that after so many years, the building retains many of the same features.



**Image Published in 1862 showing the close relationship between Public house, church and the manor house of Wicken Hall.**

The earliest section of the building dates to the 16th century and is a single storey with attics under a thatched roof with gabled dormer windows. Other sections are 18th and 19th century additions.

The image above is interesting for many reasons, however most important to the history of the pub is the close relationship with the church and the manor house of Wicken Hall, and, the location of the village water well. The image shows clearly the two sections of the building; the earlier 16th<sup>h</sup> century thatched section on the right, and, the 19th century section of the building on the left.

Historical records show that the building was in use as a public house from 1772. There are, however, earlier records which are noteworthy. A Terrier dated 1510 shows that a 'brewhouse' was included in the property of the church of St Margaret. Could it be coincidental that the early part of the building corresponds with church ownership of a brewhouse?

Throughout medieval times, the brewing of ale, or unhopped beer was a largely homemakers activity. During the 14th and 15th centuries, beer making gradually changed from a family-oriented activity to an artisan one, with pubs and monasteries brewing their own beer for mass consumption. Hops were first planted in England in 1428. By 1524, hops were condemned as an adulteration by Henry VIII, and an injunction against their use was issued. However, in 1536, Edward VI (Henry's successor) commended hopped beer as 'notable, healthy, and temperate.'

In the 17th century, the building was said to be the village forge. On 16 June 1624 Stephen Grigman 'black smithe of Wicken' married Marie Nightingale, both servants to Mrs Yeardley at Wicken Hall. Some believe that the two sections of the building served as both blacksmiths forge and pub to passing travellers. The well, blacksmiths forge, pub and church were central meeting places in village life.

Pub records called 'Victuallers Reports' were kept in Uttlesford from 1769, although there is no mention of a pub in Wicken Bonhunt until 1772 when David Stockley was licensee of the Three Horse Shoes. The licensee was kept in check as two villagers, usually local farmers or churchmen stood as 'Sureties' – probably seeing that the beer was not watered down or sold in short measures. Henry Smith and L. P. King as sureties in the first years the pub was registered, overseeing the proper running of the establishment.

The central village water well was positioned outside the pub, on the opposite side of the road. This was the main source of water to the village. By 1860, only two residences; Brick House and Rectory House (Wicken House) had private water supplied. Beer was often regarded as safer to drink and was often served at meals including breakfast. The parish registers of St. Margaret's church throughout the 18th and 19th centuries regularly record the loss of several children in one family to water borne diseases. The Gayler family lost four children under the age of two in less than two years. Three of their infant children: Sarah, 1yr 11

months; Emma, 3yr 10 months, and Mary, 8 months died in January and February 1869 probably due to typhoid fever.

During the 19th century the pub served generations of thirsty farm workers. There were five farms operating and a mixture of arable and livestock production. The 1842 'Tithe Award' shows that Joseph Martin of Brick House owned the public house; quite a departure from Mr Martin's profession as a lawyer.



**Early photograph of the 'Three Horse Shoes'**

During the early 20th century the pub was run by Ralph Bunting whose family owned Howlands Farm, or rather, as it was known then 'Brick House Farm'. The name of the pub was changed about this time to the 'Coach and Horses'. The prominent pub sign outside depicted an ornate carriage pulled by a pair of fine horses. The faces of the coach driver and his passengers were painted to depict village characters that frequented the bar.



**C.1940. Dairy herds from Wicken Hall Farm and Lower Farm were regularly moved around the village to new grazing sites.**

The 1960s saw a lot of change in the village and new houses and bungalows were erected. Until then, only the big houses had motor cars, and the population was largely agricultural. During the 1960's the old way of life began to change as more people owned their own cars and could commute to London by train from the railway station at Newport.

Amongst the newcomers were two up and coming graphic artists: Gil Potter and Ted Lewis who made the daily commute by train to their Soho offices. Their style of artwork is instantly recognisable in the Beatles album 'Yellow Submarine' recorded in 1966-68 and released in 1969. As Gil and Ted became more successful, and, as Ted turned his attention to writing, the pair more often worked from home, Gil at Clarkes Cottage opposite the pub, and Ted at Erme Cottage. The goings on between the pub and the two cottages has become part of village legend.

After lighting a fire in the hearth, Ted would begin writing at 9.00 am every day. By 11.00 am, he would have run out of cigarettes, and, being neighbourly, he would stop in to visit Gil on his way to the pub for a supply of cigarettes. The pair would then depart to the pub where they would stay until closing time when they would leave with a bottle of whiskey. The house-parties Gil and Ted hosted were decadent, and it is rumoured that one of the Beatles mingled with locals at one of the Clarkes Cottage bashes. Gil and Ted were part of the London swinging sixties set; however, they also loved their rural retreat in Wicken and made great friends of the pub regulars. Birthdays and celebrations at the

pub usually brought a new piece of caricature artwork which went on the pub wall.



**Gil Potter birthday card by Ted Lewis.**

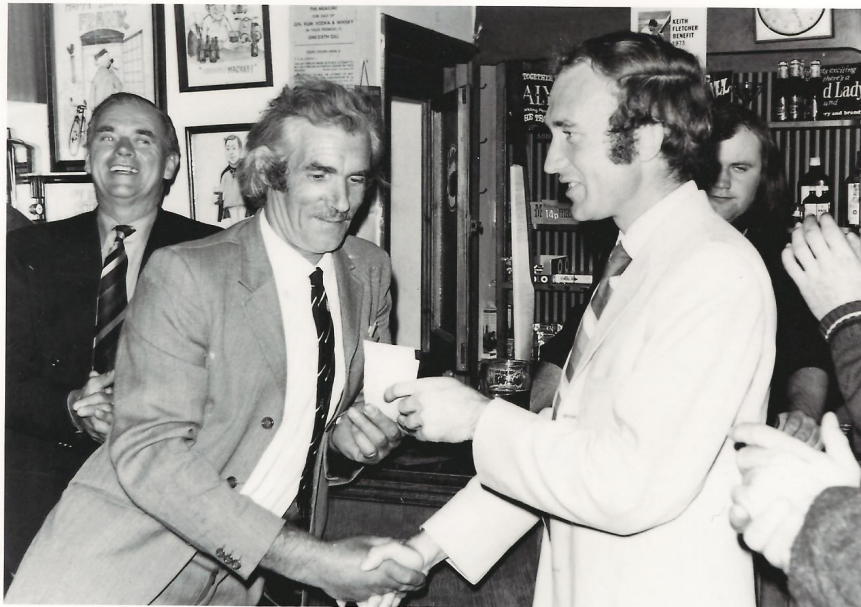
Thatched properties with fireplaces were at most risk from fire. A small spark could fly up the chimney and settle on the dry thatch setting the whole lot to burn quickly. A 1960s photograph shows the Newport Fire Brigade pulling down lighted thatch to save the building.





**Newport Fire Brigade removing burning thatch from the roof in the 1960s.**

The 1970s were also vibrant times with customers from local villages and often a lively crowd from educational courses at Wicken House. There were two separate bars at this time, the saloon or lounge bar on the right and a public bar, or tap room on the left. Off sales were available through a small window near the kitchen.



**The photograph above was taken in 1973 and shows several of Gil Potter's caricature drawings on the wall of the public bar. Ian Kennedy is serving behind the bar and Keith Fletcher is presenting Frank Monk with a cheque as the prize for a cricket benefit fundraiser.**

An interesting discovery was made in the 1970s or 1980s by builders who uncovered a blocked up hole behind the fireplace in the bar. The hole contained several pairs of small wooden shoes (clogs) which were hidden away. Such shoes were considered to be a talisman which brought the building good luck and kept away evil spirits. For many years the little wooden shoes were kept in a glass case in the bar. The shoes were still there in 1999; however, sadly they went missing sometime after.

The pub has witnessed many changes over the years. Like many village pubs in the past twenty years it faced difficult times and even remained shut for two years from 2010-2012. Fortunately, great improvements have been made over the last two years and the new owners Sergio and Ananta Manini re-opened the premises in 2012 as the 'Ananta' Thai restaurant and bar. The re-opening has been a great success brings customers from a wide area to sample the delicious and authentic Thai food menu.