

## Eighteen Months in the Life of the White Hart May 1930 – October 1931

A series of letters held by Wiltshire County Record Office, relate to Ushers Wiltshire Breweries and the tenants of the White Hart Atworth from 29<sup>th</sup> September 1928 to 26<sup>th</sup> October 1931. They provide an interesting insight into the working conditions experienced by the three licensees of the White Hart at the time.

The earliest letter is from Mr. Albert Edward Sheppard, who was on record as being the proprietor of the White Hart, Atworth in 1927. He was keen to keep up the maintenance of the property in his care and also ambitious to make money from his tenancy. His letters show great frustration. On 28<sup>th</sup> September 1928 he wrote that whenever there was heavy rain, water came in through his roof onto the stairs and a bucket had to be put in place to catch it. In the bar, a new grate was required as the old one was so badly broken that stones had to be lain in it to prevent coals from falling through. He stated that over a long period he had been promised that something was going to be done but to date nothing had received attention. In the mean time several other items now needed repairing and he requested Ushers Brewery to please send someone to look into the situation.

Ushers brewery replied to Mr Sheppard the following day to confirm that his letter had been received.

A visit must have eventually taken place however because on the 10<sup>th</sup> October, Ushers wrote to a Mr Seaward, who seems to have been employed for property maintenance. A letter was also forwarded to Mr. Sheppard, in reply to his additional request for permission to turn the coach house into a slaughterhouse.

Mr. Seaward was told that the lead gutter running through the centre of the roof was in need of repair, and that a new grate was required in the bar as the old one was badly broken. Also the sash cords and locks in the bar needed overhauling. Some of the coping stones had fallen off the garden wall and also the corner of the wall needed attention. It certainly appears that many items in need of repair had been allowed to accumulate by the brewery.

The letter to Mr. Sheppard, dated 10<sup>th</sup> October 1928 turned down Mr. Sheppard's application for permission to convert the coach house into a slaughterhouse. The director of Ushers felt that it would be extremely detrimental to a licensed house to have a slaughterhouse on the premises.

Mr. Sheppard remained the licensee of the White Hart for a further 18 months before the unfortunate man suffered a burglary. He wrote to Ushers on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> April 1930 in great distress, reporting that the premises had been broken into between Saturday evening and Sunday morning, and about £40 had been stolen. Police had found empty cash boxes in a field some distance away, but the cash had been taken. The tone of the letter implied that the unlucky Mr. Sheppard was expected to reimburse Ushers out of his

own pocket. He requested that a representative from Ushers should call on him as a matter of urgency, as £40 was all he “was worth.”

It appears that his worst fears were realised and Mr Sheppard must have handed over his life savings in compensation to the brewery, as within a month of the burglary taking place, Mr Sheppard handed in his notice to quit the premises on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1930. He gave 3 months’ notice but requested that he should be relieved just as soon as a suitable tenant was found. He evidently felt so disgruntled that he wanted to vacate the White Hart as early as possible. The last sentence showed the lack of support he felt he received from his landlords, with the comment, “The cellar door needs immediate attention as it has rusted completely off its hinges.”

On 7<sup>th</sup> May 1930, Mr. William Henry Hall of the ‘Butcher’s Arms’, Calne, received an urgent letter from Ushers Wiltshire Brewery. It requested that he should reply by return of post, in order to be sent a permit to view ‘The White Hart,’ Atworth. The letter set out a persuasive argument as to why Mr. Hall should be tempted away from the thriving public house that he was running in Calne, in order to take over the less profitable ‘White Hart,’ which was in desperate need of a licensee.

The letter stated that whereas the ‘Butcher’s Arms’ had taken £907.7.0 in a year, the ‘White Hart had taken only £657, which meant that the landlord’s rent would only be £20 instead of the £24 he paid at present. The licence for ‘The White Hart’ was £12.10.0 as opposed to the rent of £13.6.8 payable for the ‘Butchers Arms’. There was also a considerable difference in the rates - £11.10.0 for the White Hart’ but £26 for the Butchers’ Arms. Therefore, Mr. Hall was told, by moving to ‘The White Hart’ he would be saving himself £19 per annum and possibly get back 9/- pension on the trade. A further temptation was the promise of a nice garden which would provide all the vegetables he would need, and make a big improvement on his present situation.

Mr. Hall’s letter contrasted greatly with the letter received by Mr. Sheppard from Ushers Brewery the following day. It was apparent that Mr Sheppard had tried very hard to expand his business and make it a profitable concern. Not only was he interested in opening a slaughterhouse on the premises, but he already received regular rent from a lodger. He was told to arrange for formal written notice to be given to Mr. George Walker (the occupier of the upper storey of ‘The White Hart.’) The notice was to state that the brewery insisted that Mr Sheppard should give vacant possession on the whole of the premises when leaving. Proceedings would be taken if Mr. Walker failed to vacate the premises within a week.

Mr. Hall must have been impressed by his visit to ‘The White Hart’ and also the promises made in the letter from Ushers Brewery, because he duly accepted the tenancy. Interestingly, having accepted the offer, his next letter from the brewery had a slightly different tone from the first. In correspondence dated 19<sup>th</sup> May 1930, Ushers Brewery wrote that the police would not allow Mr. Hall to continue letting people occupy rooms in the ‘Butchers Arms’ in the way he was doing at the time. Mr. Hall was to make every

effort to repossess those rooms. The brief sentence at the end of the letter – almost as an afterthought, added, “Thank you for accepting the tenancy of ‘The White Hart’.”

Just over a year later, on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1931, Mr Hall had to write to Ushers’ district manager that he intended to give up the running of the White Hart before the winter set in. He said that both he and his wife had suffered indifferent health since a seaside holiday had been taken and he had been given medical advice to return to the sea as soon as possible.

The position of licensee at the White Hart had not been a successful one for Mr. Hall. There had been a significant decrease in sales during in his year in office. The sale of cask beer dropped from £354.10.0 to £159.18.0. - a decrease of £194.12.0. Sale of bottled beer went down from £162.17.2.to £98.10.5 - a decrease of £64.6.9. Wines and spirits went down from £96.14.8 to £42.10.0. In this case there was a decrease of £42.1.0.

On 29<sup>th</sup> July 1931 Mr Hall wrote to Mr. Collett, one of the brewery officials, requesting the return of a £10 deposit that was owing to him. He wrote that his wife was in hospital in Bath and unable to make the long journey to the sea at that time, but that he would hand over the tenancy as soon as circumstances permitted.

Subsequently the district manager wrote to a Mr. Bryan, who was offered an interview at the offices of Ushers Brewery Ltd. at 11.32 on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> July 1931.

On the same day a hand written note was written in pencil to Mr Collett. He was informed that Mr and Mrs M. J. Bryan, of Long Lane, Purley, Reading, would be viewing the White Hart on Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> July. Train times from Reading would need to be consulted. Mr. Bryan had been informed that he would be expected to pay £10 in rent, and that the total for rent, rates and licence would be £35 per annum. The last sentence read – “He is no beauty but I should think it a case of getting anyone who will take it.”

Mr Hall was informed that a prospective licensee would be visiting, and Mr Bryan arrived on Friday afternoon. He had been sent a telegram from Ushers requesting that he caught the 10.13 train from Reading, which would arrive in Trowbridge at 11.32.

The visit was not a success, because on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1931 Mr Bryan turned down the offer of tenancy of the White Hart, saying that his wife had “concerns for their children” if they accepted. His letter crossed in the post with a letter from Ushers explaining that Mr Hall was not in a position to vacate the white Hart at that moment in time, but that a Mr Jenkins would see Mr Bryan in the near future with reference to a different house which was probably to become vacant.

In a letter dated 6<sup>th</sup> August 1931, an army pensioner named Mr. Sims, a single man who lived with his sister in Bath Road Atworth, applied for the post of manager at the White Hart. He said he was willing to accept a medium wage and that his sister would assist with the running of the premises. He offered to give full time to the

business. He added that he would be grateful for consideration if there was a vacancy anywhere else in the district, but Mr. Sims received a curt reply advising him that the house had already been let.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1931 Mr. Hall sent Ushers correspondence, which referred to bills he had paid for the firm, as well as hospital and doctor's expenses in respect of his wife's incapacitating illness. Once again he requested the return of the £10 deposit which he had paid into the firm.

On 24<sup>th</sup> August Mr Hall was informed that the valuation and handing over of the White Hart would take place on 31<sup>st</sup> August. Mr. Collett would call on Mr Hall to take him to court for the handing over of the licence. As Mrs Hall's poor health was the reason for Mr. Hall giving up the tenancy and as she needed constant care and was unable to assist in the move, he requested that the move should take place on the Tuesday rather than the Friday as he would be unable to manage the court visit as well as the move on the same day. Ushers suggested that Mr Hall should arrange with Mr Edwards that he stayed with Mr Edwards on the Friday night following the court hearing.

A further letter was sent from Ushers to Superintendent Townsend, of the police station in Trowbridge, sending three original references in favour of Mr. Edwards of Ivy Cottage, Corsham who was applying for a protection order in respect of the White Hart for 31<sup>st</sup> August.

On 31<sup>st</sup> August the change of tenancy at the White Hart was completed from Mr. W.H.Hall to Thomas Hugh Edwards.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> September, a copy of the tenancy agreement was sent to Mr Edwards, with a request for 2/- stamp duty.

On 5<sup>th</sup> October a receipt of £50 deposit was sent out to Mr Edwards.

On 26<sup>th</sup> October 1931 there seems to have been some confusion over the payment of rates for the White Hart. The demand note was sent to Ushers Wiltshire Brewery Ltd who promptly passed it on to Mr T. H. Edwards explaining that the note for rates had been sent to them in error.

Mr Edwards died at the White Hart at the age of 66. He was buried on November 7<sup>th</sup> 1938.