



STEEPLE ASTON VILLAGE ARCHIVE TRUST

A Pub with a Past – the Red Lion and the Chequers

The Red Lion has been in business at the corner of South Side and Water Lane for over 180 years, making it the oldest pub in the village apart from Hopcroft's Holt. But when it opened, another pub, the Chequers, had only recently closed. SAVA had long suspected that the Red Lion was simply the Chequers under a new name, but had no way of telling until Neil Protheroe, a former landlord of the Red Lion, kindly donated a bundle of old deeds relating to the building we know as the Red Lion – referred to from here on as “the building”. The oldest part is probably the section furthest from South Side – it has lower ceilings than the rest, and stands close to the separate building which was once a bakehouse (another former landlord, Colin Mead, remembers clearing out the remains of its brick oven).

The building was held on a 999-year lease from Jacob Marten Watson, one of the main farmers in the village. The earliest deeds simply describe it as a “cottage”, without saying how it was used, but from 1765 onwards several of its tenants were also named in the licensing records as licensees of the Chequers. In the early 1750s it was occupied by William Stanley, but Stanley lost his wife in January 1755, and in June that year the lease was bought by his son-in-law, William Buller Robinson, a tailor from Deddington. He is almost certainly the same person as “William Buller”, who was recorded as licensee of the Chequers in 1765. That same year, Robinson had a blazing row with John Paine, the ebullient landlord of the Flour de Luce Inn (almost certainly on Paines Hill? - see SAL article in August 2010), and was forced to make a public apology in *Jackson's Oxford Journal* for defaming him. The details are not known, but it was probably soon after this that Robinson took his family back to Deddington, while Paine snapped up the lease of the building, installing John Burgess (recorded from 1768) as the licensee of the Chequers. Paine later ran into financial problems, and in 1777 his lease was taken over by the butcher William Wall. Wall kept Burgess on as landlord until 1782, but by 1786 the licence for the Chequers had been transferred to Sam Claridge.

In 1800 William Stevens, member of a widespread local family of carpenters and builders, became the licensee, and in 1801 Wall sold Stevens the lease of the building. Although the name Chequers still doesn't appear in the deeds, the owner was now for the first time also the licensee – Stevens described himself as a “victualler”. After he died in 1805, the Chequers continued in the hands of his wife Catherine (née Hoare) and later her second husband John Fletcher, who were married in 1812. But William had left no will, and technically the old building still belonged to his estate. The issue was still unresolved when Catherine herself died in 1824. In 1826 & 1827 their eldest son, John Stevens, a schoolmaster in Middleton Stoney, obtained administration of the estate, bought out his brothers and sisters, settled matters with John Fletcher (who had paid off Stevens' mortgage in 1818), and in November 1830 sold the building to a local horse-dealer, Job Durran.

It was sometime in 1830 that the Chequers was relaunched as the Red Lion, with a baker, Edward Hall, named as its first licensee. As recently as January that year, John Fletcher had described himself as a “baker and publican” – suggesting there was little or no break in continuity between the two pubs.

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