

Mine host at the Red Lion c1910



Our picture shows George David Fortnam (1876-1944), who was landlord of the Red Lion just before World War I. It comes courtesy of his grandson John F Weller, of Keeston, Pembrokeshire. Also pictured are George's wife Annie, and their children Doris, George, Muriel and Winifred (in descending order of age). Sadly, little Winnie died of meningitis in January 1911, aged 3, so this photo must have been taken about a year or so earlier - probably in the winter of 1909/10, as the roses (?) near them seem to have no foliage. Another daughter, Violet Annie, was born in early 1911.

The carefully-posed family photo almost certainly shows them on the terrace outside the Red Lion, but the pub's windows have been much altered since then and there are no other obvious clues. George had taken over the Red Lion in 1909 from William Longhurst, who had been the licensee since 1903. Fortnam came from Lower Heyford, where his father (another George) was a carpenter. The younger George followed in his father's footsteps - in the 1911 Census he described himself as "Carpenter + Joiner + Publican".

The same Census shows that by 1911 William and Elizabeth Longhurst were running a pub in Hampshire - the King's Head at Wickham, near Fareham. But in 1914 the First World War broke out and turned everything upside down. Fortnam enlisted with the Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, and Hall's Oxford Brewery, the owners of the Red Lion at the time, somehow persuaded Longhurst to return. Exactly how this came about is a mystery. As far as SAVA can tell, Longhurst remained here throughout the War, but died in December 1918, just a month after the Armistice. It's not yet clear where the rest of the Fortnam family were living during the war years.

George Fortnam survived the War, but does not seem to have returned to these parts. A printed letterhead shows that he entered the construction business. He was trading (apparently in Reading) under the name "Geo. D. Fortnam & Co., Builders and Decorators, Workshops 8, Hope Street". The services offered included "Antique and Modern Furniture Repaired", so George had evidently fallen back on his skills as a carpenter and joiner.

Geoffrey Lane