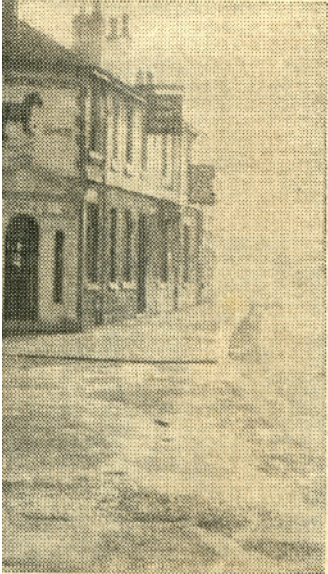


CLOSING AFTER 250 YEARS

By-pass ends long story of historic coaching inn



FOR 250 years or so weary travellers on the Great North Road have found refuge from the strains of their journeys at the Bay Horse Inn, Bramham. But not, in this breathalyser age, and with the village by-passed, the inn has drifted into a backwater and it has been decided to close it.

An application by the police for the licence to be made redundant was granted by Wetherby magistrates on Thursday last week and it will close after a hearing at a compensation court. The owners are Bentley's Yorkshire Breweries.

In the village square close by the old A1, the inn was probably an important coaching stop. And when the horseless carriage took over from the stagecoach, the inn was soon adapted for a 20th century role.

In his report to the magistrates, Chief Inspector Ronald Williams, described how the once popular inn had deteriorated.

"It is in a very poor condition generally and the interior is in an appalling state. The lounge is poorly decorated and furnished and the rest of the rooms on the ground floor are damp, dark and gloomy with paper peeling off the walls.

"The entire premises have long been neglected. The living quarters are always full of smoke from a cracked fire place and the cold is intense throughout," he said.

NO HARDSHIP

Trade only ran to about 1½ barrels of beer and fewer than three bottles of spirits a week. If it was closed no hardship would be caused because there were three other public houses in the immediate vicinity and another at the top of the village, as well as an off-licence.

The manager of the brewery and departmental director, Mr. G. F. Roberts, said in court that it was a very gloomy public

house and improvements would cost between £9,000 and £10,000 with little chance of financial return now that the village had been by-passed.

Evidence that it was an important coaching inn was discovered by Mr. Basil Carr, of Wetherby, whose wife was licensee of the inn some years ago.

Adjacent to the main building were some stables which were demolished about a year ago. Mr. Carr discovered that the buildings were probably an almshouse at one time but during the coaching era could have provided stabling for as many as 30 horses. Set into the wall of the building was a plaque depicting a man (a monk or a priest) carrying a sheaf of wheat and a flask of wine.

In the wall of the main building is another plaque dated 1700 and with the letters R-I-P on it.

A 'REGULAR'S' MEMORIES

Born and bred in the village, 68-year-old Mr. Arthur Robinson, of Lyndon Avenue, can remember going into the Bay Horse when he was only about five or six. "We were out walking with my grandfather and brother and he took us in. That was the first public house I had ever been in.

"I didn't have anything to drink, of course, although there were no restrictions in those days like there are today," he chuckled. "Beer was pulled from a pump by a man with a big beard. He was a retired farmer called Thomas Robinson and the pub stayed in his family for many years.

When Thomas Robinson died the business was taken over by his widow and when she died Thomas Robinson Jr., her son, took over. It was about 1930 before the Robinson family moved out and a man named Atkinson, fro the White Swan at Wighill, became licensee. Between then and the early 1960s,

the pub was run by William Skeels and since then there have been three other licensees. Looking back over the years, Mr. Robinson, who is still a regular at the Bay Horse, recalled that at one time there was a butcher's shop adjoining the premises and both the inn and the shop were run by the same man, Benjamin Dacre.

"TANNER HOP"

"Just after the 1914-18 war weekly dances were run in a ballroom on the first floor," went on Mr. Robinson. "We called it the tanner hop because it was sixpence to get in. You thought you were well away in those days when you went out and had a glass or two of beer, a packet of Robins and then into the dance."

In the early days, he said, beer was delivered by a horse-drawn dray. The drayman loaded up at Knottingley (it was then owned by Carter's Brewery of Knottingley) and delivered at Bramham and as far as Boroughbridge on one round trip which took as long as three or four days. "There was a lot of commotion in the village once when the dray ran away with the horses on Bowcliffe Hill and the whole lot went through a stone wall at the bottom. It seems that the driver fell asleep and forgot to brake," said Mr. Robinson.

The present licensee, Mr. Kenneth Rainford, who has been at Bramham for about 14 months, is all set to move with his wife and five-year-old son to a public house near Halifax.

Speaking about the conditions, Mr. Rainford said: "It is very bad upstairs. Some of the rooms are black damp and we have never been in one room the whole time we have been here. Two of the bedrooms are just unusable.

"We use two of the bedrooms which are all right, and I think our sitting room was once the ballroom, but the place has been altered over the years and I can't be certain."

The inn has never really been considered a "local" as it catered mainly for through traffic. When the village was by-passed a few years ago trade began to slide. The inn's life-blood, the travelling public was now speeding past knowing Bramham only as another name on another signpost.



MRS. K. RAINFORD, wife of the licensee, serves Mr. Arthur Robinson, who can recall the inn's better days.

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The old Bay Horse.

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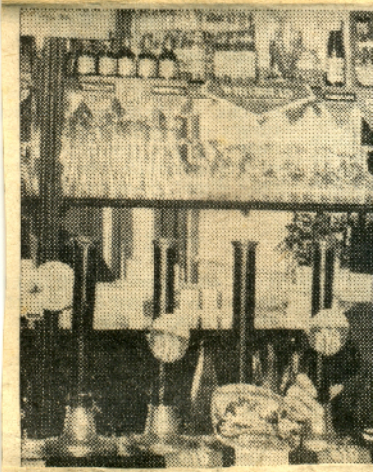
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