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**2-3 HIGH STREET, HIGH WYCOMBE  
HP11 2AZ  
(formerly The Wheatsheaf)**



*1944 photograph reproduced courtesy of Historic England*

**A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY**

**Researched & written for the Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust  
Limited**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This history has been researched and written on behalf of the Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust. The official objects of the Trust are “to preserve for the benefit of the people of Buckinghamshire and of the nation at large, the English historical, architectural and constructional heritage, which may exist in and around Buckinghamshire in the form of buildings or ancient monuments”.

In 2017 the Trust took a long lease of 2-3 High Street, High Wycombe, a Grade II listed building, from Wycombe District Council. The building consists of a cellar, two ground floor shops and two upper floors. With only one of the shops (number 3) occupied, most of the building had been standing empty for some time, was in need of repair and deemed to be “at risk”. The Trust is now investigating the structure and history of the building with a view to formulating a conservation plan, carrying out repairs and conservation works and ultimately securing its long-term, sustainable future.

This history is intended to inform the Trust’s investigations and is based solely on documentary research. It is a “work-in-progress”. Some evidence has still to be verified by finding reliable sources and there are further sources which have yet to be properly researched (outlined later in this report). The history will also inform any heritage statements or impact assessments prepared in connection with applications for consent for works.

The building is in a prominent position on High Wycombe’s High Street and its condition and future are naturally of concern to local people; the High Wycombe Society highlighted this in a recent Newsletter (see on). The Trust is keen to engage public interest in this project and intends to publish the building’s history and information about the ongoing project online.

The numbering of the building appears inconsistent but the address now is settled as numbers 2 and 3 High Street. However, since the building was, for at least two centuries, the Wheatsheaf public house then for ease of reference it will be called “The Wheatsheaf”.

But first, how far has the history of the Wheatsheaf been investigated already?

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## **EXISTING STUDIES**

The appearance of the Wheatsheaf, with its jettied timber frame, is particularly distinctive. It is the only building in Wycombe's High Street that wears its timber-frame on the side facing the street. Indeed an abiding puzzle about the building is why it was not "Georgianised" when the other ancient timber-framed buildings in the High Street were being refronted in brick. There is surprisingly little written about a building which is so obviously very old. There are mentions of the Wheatsheaf in various histories of the town.

In his 1848 history of Wycombe, Henry Kingston writes (p.100): "The Wheatsheaf public house, the architecture of which bespeaks a very remote origin, must be also an object of interest to the curious in street antiquities. Its overhanging gable and projecting upper stories, supported by massive oaken timber, bespeak an existence of many centuries."

Parker in 1878 is even less forthcoming describing the Wheatsheaf as one of three pubs which "bespeak their own antiquity" (page 31).

The Victoria County History carries a brief description including it in its list of ancient inns - "on the north side of the High Street is the old Wheatsheaf Inn, now a shop, a three-storied brick and timber house of about 1600, partly refaced."

Pevsner writes: "the C16 No. 3 (three-storeyed, timber-framed, jettied) gives a clue as to what the street looked like before the C18."

This theme is also found in Wycombe District Council's conservation area appraisal (High Wycombe Conservation Area – The Town Centre – Area Study 1 Parish church, Old Core and High Street). A photograph on page 15 has the caption "The only original three storeyed timber framed jettied building remaining on the High Street. This gives an indication of what the buildings would have looked like before the 18<sup>th</sup> century remodelling." On page 11 "No.3 is the only medieval building in the High Street that retains its jettied frontage. It too was once a pub, The Wheatsheaf. The three storied timber framed building has each of its upper floors overhanging. The windows on the first floor are modern as is the shop front. The building is unique in this location, and forms part of an important architectural grouping in the Church Square area."

Some "potted histories" can be found in newspaper articles. The *South Bucks Free Press* of 10<sup>th</sup> February 1882 ran a local history piece on inn signs and described the Wheatsheaf as "perhaps the oldest house in the High Street," with the premises adjoining (now no. 4, Vintner House) forming the entrance to the old Antelope Inn.

"Topical Notes" was a series which appeared in the *Bucks Herald* in the early 1900s. The impending surrender of the Wheatsheaf's licence prompted the following in "Topical Notes" of 28<sup>th</sup> February 1903: The Wheatsheaf "is situated on the north side of the Highstreet, and is one of the most picturesque in outward appearance among the oldest houses in the town. Its architecture and peculiar construction bespeak its remote origin, and although some few years ago it was "done up", and interiorly modernised, its overhanging gable and projecting upper storeys, supported by massive, uneven oaken timbers testify to an existence extending over a period of time which must be reckoned by centuries. The Wheatsheaf was a sign adopted by bakers as well

as by innkeepers, and this old inn, when the stage coaches used to run through the town, was a recognised night-house, where might always be obtained accommodation for man, if little or none for beast. It was one of the early coffee-houses, and much patronised by the wits and gossips of the place, and, if it could speak, it could relate some very queer and funny stories of those jovial, homely times before the iron horse invaded the quiet valley and revolutionised everything, night-houses included. And now, having served its purpose and its generation, it will soon cease to appear in its public character.” This is not the only reference to past uses as a night-house or coffee-house but so far it has not been possible to find verifiable evidence for either use.

After the Wheatsheaf was damaged by fire in July 1903 the “Topical Notes” columnist described the event (see on) adding that “the building presents a melancholy picture, very different from the animated appearance it was accustomed to wear in the good old coaching days, when its portals were open for the accommodation of people who travelled by night coaches, or when the wits and gallants of the town met there to exchange jokes and hear the news retailed by travellers.” (*Bucks Herald*, 4 July 1903). The night-house use was again mentioned in a “Topical Notes” column about the former inns of High Wycombe (*Bucks Herald*, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1906).

However the most revealing of the “Topical Notes” series found so far was when the columnist had the opportunity to get inside the Wheatsheaf after the fire and whilst it was being converted into a shop (*Bucks Herald*, 21 November 1903). He writes: “It is a very old house, roughly but substantially constructed, and contains a number of massive oak beams. There are several of these ancient buildings in the centre of the town, and they all have similar peculiarities. For instance, they are all mixed up with each other in -to a stranger- the most bewildering fashion, the rooms in one house running above and below the apartments of the next. The cellar of the Wheat Sheaf ran beneath one house, and a room on the first floor over a portion of another. The beams, too, bear evident traces of having been used previous to finding their way into their present position. There is a tradition that the timber came from the Parish Church when it was rebuilt. It is impossible to determine if that were the case, but it might have been so. When the steep-pitched roofs were removed in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there were, no doubt, a great many beams taken down that could not be re-used in the construction of the flat roofs then erected. The woodwork thus discarded may have been portioned out among the houses then being built near the Church.”

The Wheatsheaf was included in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) inventory of 1912. This describes the fabric of the building only: “House, No.2, formerly the Wheatsheaf Inn, now a shop, is of three storeys, built late in the 16<sup>th</sup> or early in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, of brick and timber. The hipped roof is covered with tiles, In front the upper storeys project, but only the third storey is of the original material the others have been re-faced. Interior: - The original timbers of the floors and roof are visible. Condition – Good substantially, but some of the old woodwork has been charred by fire.” The Commission’s notes will be referred to later in the Chronology section.

Listing came surprisingly late with The Wheatsheaf being listed Grade II on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1973. The address is given as 3 High Street and the brief description reads: “C16, altered C19. Timber framework, hipped tiled roof. Modern shop and 1<sup>st</sup> floor windows. Timber framework exposed to 2<sup>nd</sup> floor with whitewashed brick nogging,

sliding 4 light casement with glazing bars. Nos 1 to 3 (consec) form a group with Church of All Saints, Churchyard Gates, no.2, The Antelope Public House, No 5 and No 6 Church Square.” Unfortunately the Historic England online register has the map incorrectly showing the listing on the adjoining building, number 4, Vintner House. (This mistake has presumably led to the *British Listed Buildings* website showing the Google streetview photo of that adjoining building).

Concern over the condition of the Wheatsheaf prompted the High Wycombe Society to carry out some research into its history, resulting in an article in the Society’s newsletter of Summer 2016 “500-year-old High Street Gem at Risk”. Conservation Architect in the Society’s Planning Group, Anthony Mealing, thought the building dated back to somewhere in the period 1490-1530. The coffee-house theme reappears here since, amongst other sources, this article seems to draw on Mike Brown’s *ABC: A Brewers’ Compendium* where, at page 101 he writes: “The Wheatsheaf appears to have dated back to 1700 when it was the Coffee House of Henry Franklyn.”

The development of the Wheatsheaf needs to be seen within the context of its historical setting, which is briefly outlined in the next section.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

High Wycombe is an ancient settlement blessed with a fortunate location in the valley of the Wye halfway between London and Oxford. Chepping Wycombe, the former name for High Wycombe, signifies the importance of the market in the town's historical development. The town was a borough before the 13<sup>th</sup> century, making its own laws, holding quarter sessions and regulating the market. The original market place covered a large area west of the parish church. The High Street was probably laid out in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with burgage plots stretching north as far as Castle Street and southwards down to the river (Ashford, p.26). As buildings encroached upon the market place to form what is now the triangle of White Hart Street, Church Street and Queens Square the market moved eastwards into the High Street and the area south of the church. A new covered market house was built on the site of the present Guildhall at the west end of High Street and opposite Church Square in about 1604. The present Church Square was the hogmarket or shambles, rebuilt in 1622 (Ashford, p.128).

Inns and hostelries along the High Street catered for the needs of travellers. By 1577 there had already been three inns and 16 alehouses in the town (Justices' certificates per Wulcko) catering for the needs of travellers and visitors to the market.

During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the affluence of the town, the largest and wealthiest in the county, was reflected in new buildings. The present Guildhall, designed by Henry Keene, dates from 1757 and Robert Adam's Little Market House from 1761. Other buildings in the High Street (except the Wheatsheaf!) were either refronted or newly built in the Georgian style. The painter William Hannan captured the elegance of the wide High Street lined by inns and handsome houses in 1772 (see on).

The High Street remained a "good address" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ashford points out that it was only on market days that the High Street was a place of buying and selling since shops were still where the old market place had been, Queens Square and White Hart Street. Apart from the market there were hiring fairs and cattle fairs in the High Street, all of which attracted visitors requiring food and drink. The corn market had historically been the mainstay of the town's economy but the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the growth of High Wycombe as "chair town", later "furniture town", with consequent population growth and the extension of the borough boundaries. By the end of the century there were just too many drinking establishments and the Wheatsheaf was one of the public houses which surrendered its licence.

The character of the High Street was changing. There were still inns and pubs but the smart houses were being turned into shops, banks and offices. The hiring and cattle fairs ceased. High Wycombe lost many of its historic buildings after World War II. The main London-Oxford road (A40) which had, in the past, brought so much prosperity, carried traffic which choked the town centre. Buildings were demolished to make way for new roads and shopping centres were built on the western side of town. The development of the Eden Centre has accelerated the shift of businesses away from the High Street.

The location of the Wheatsheaf, near the parish church, on the High Street, close to the historic civic centre and markets, meant it was always at the heart of the town and ideally placed to benefit from the commercial opportunities afforded by such a position. We do not (and may never) know the original function of the building but it comes as no surprise that it was a public house for many years, and then a shop. Now, as the character of its location changes again, it faces the challenge of adapting to a new future.

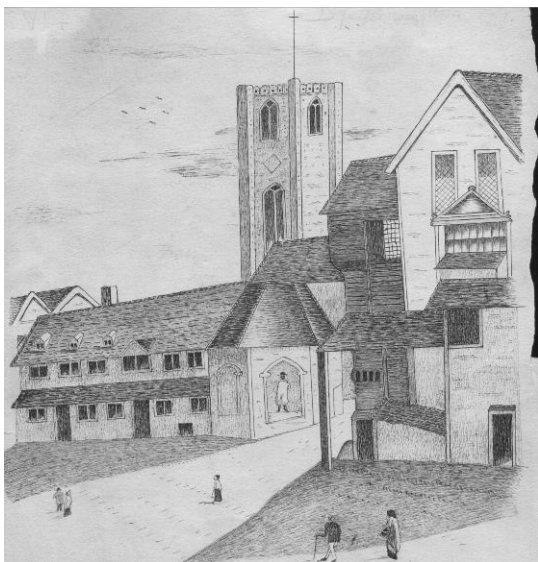
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## **CHRONOLOGY**

### **Early pictures**

Pictures and photographs of the Wheatsheaf on its own are rare. Where it does appear it is usually off to the side of a picture of the Little Market House, or glimpsed as part of a view of the High Steet.

There is a stylised drawing of the west end of the High Street marked “Wycombe 1604”.



*Reproduced courtesy of Sharing Wycombe's Old Photographs (SWOP) ref. RHW46092.*

This shows the old market house in the Shambles (now Church Square). The tall, jettied building immediately to its right appears to be made of timber and may be on the site of the present number 1 High Street which rounds the corner into Church Square. So the building to the right of that MAY be the Wheatsheaf. If so it is quite different from today's structure. The roof has a gable end-on to the street, two oblong windows on the upper floor partly in the attic, and below that a window with a

gable which might be an attempt to draw an oriel window, and then the lower floor projects out into the street. This part looks like it might be a shop built onto the front of a house.

There is a pencil drawing said to be of about 1720 which looks much the same but includes the Guildhall on the left, built c.1604.



*Reproduced courtesy of SWOP ref. RHW:29013.*

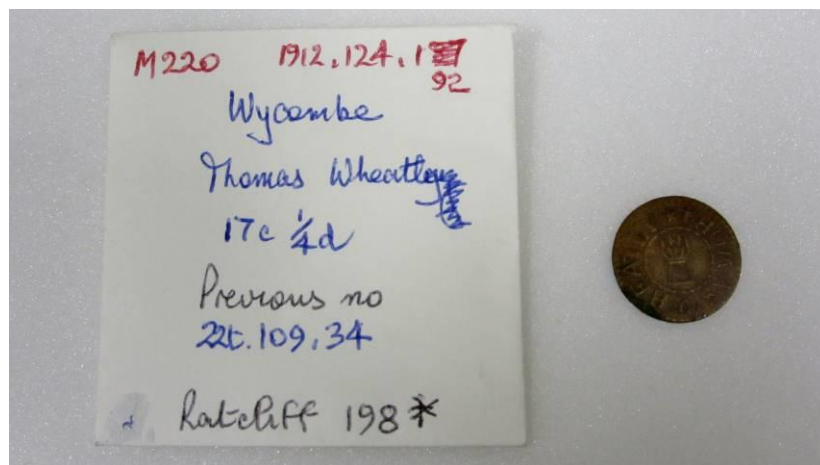
These drawings must be an attempt to represent these buildings at some time between about 1604 when the former Guildhall was built and the 1750s when it was replaced by the present structure and the church tower was embellished. How accurate they were we shall never know.

Research for this report has only found reliable evidence of the ownership/occupation of the Wheatsheaf back to the later 18<sup>th</sup> century. However the County Museum has objects which indicate that there was an establishment in High Wycombe called the Wheatsheaf in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



### **Seventeenth century trade tokens**

The County Museum has 17<sup>th</sup> century trade tokens bearing a wheatsheaf design. Seven were issued by Thomas Butterfeild of Wickham (sic), four worth a half-penny and the other three a farthing. Another two, worth a farthing each, were issued by Thomas Wheatly of High Wickham. None of the tokens was dated. The Museum currently holds only five of the Butterfeild but both of the Wheatly tokens.



*One each of the Butterfield and Wheatley tokens photographed by the author at the County Museum and reproduced with kind permission of the Museum*

Manton and Hollis's 1933 list of the county's 17<sup>th</sup> century trade tokens includes Butterfeild & Wheatly tokens together with the results of their research into the issuers. The Butterfeild entries are on pages 98-100 with a note to entry number 201 as follows:

"The tokener was evidently proprietor of the Wheatsheaf Inn, a sixteenth-century house, which still stands as No. 2, High Street. The family were extensive holders of land which ran into Penn and Wooburn parishes. Thomas was rated separately for land in 1669." They continue by showing entries of Butterfeild or Butterfield marriages in the parish registers of Hughenden and Wooburn between 1606 and 1684 adding: "Other records of a succession of Thomases are to be found in the registers of Hitcham (1589), Stoke Poges (1601) and Wycombe (1706 and 1721)."

The Thomas Wheatly token is listed on their page 105 but with no other information apart from a reference to the note above.

William Crouch first wrote about these trade tokens in *Records of Bucks* for 1912 and George Berry gave an update in *Records of Bucks* for 1967 having drawn on more extensive sources than Manton & Hollis. He helpfully includes a note on the origin and use of trade tokens which arose because of the lack of small change and regal coinage during the Civil War. Tokens were issued by municipalities, traders and inns. He says an estimated 20,000 tokens were issued between 1648 and 1672, when Royal farthings and halfpennies were minted again. Twenty two traders in High Wycombe issued tokens and Berry was able to trace the occupations of 14 of them. He adds (p.151): “It is significant that a third were innkeepers, whose trade was symbolised in the sign of the inn boldly presented on the obverse of the token” and in his list he includes “Thomas Butterfield (sic) of the Wheatsheaf” with 2 High Street as the site (p.152).

Unfortunately Thomas Wheatley (sic) appears in his list of issuers “occupations not known”.

Berry gives details of some of the issuers with Thomas Butterfield on page 154, referring to two tokens, one a half-penny at the Ashmolean Museum and one a farthing at the British Museum, thus:

“Thomas Butterfield was innkeeper at the Wheatsheaf, 2 High Street. The Butterfield family possessed land in Wycombe, Penn and Wooburn. Thomas was rated separately for land in 1669. In a subsidy roll of 1673 he was assessed at 8/-; his Certificate of Residence shows him dwelling in Wycombe Forrens.” He continues by describing the Wheatsheaf building and concludes: “Old men of Wycombe recall the building, when it was still functioning as an inn.” There is a photograph (Plate VII (b)) of the Wheatsheaf, presumably contemporary with the article (1967) showing Peter B. Harris at number 2 and Bernatone Hearing Centre at number 3, as well as a photograph of one of the tokens (Plate IX).

As for Thomas Wheatley, at page 159 he says no reference has been found except that he was elected burgess in 1691.

Neither the Manton & Hollis or Berry articles are referenced but Berry does give a list of his original sources which included wills, parish registers, hearth tax returns and the 1667 lay subsidy returns.

Berry confidently pointed out (p.153) “I am sure that further research will reveal yet more information”. Indeed Berry and Peter Morley published a revised list of Buckinghamshire 17<sup>th</sup> century tokens in 1973 (*British Numismatic Journal* vol.48). The new list has just three Thomas Butterfield tokens (catalogued as numbers 211-213) and based on the style, especially of the borders, they are said to be early, i.e. between 1648-c.1664. They list Thomas Butterfield as “Innkeeper (The Wheatsheaf)” but give no further biographical details for either him or Thomas Wheatley.

The conclusion that the Butterfield tokens were linked with our Wheatsheaf has been followed in Taylor’s booklet on tokens as well as by the Buckinghamshire County Council in its report on High Wycombe as part of its ‘Historic Towns Project’ (page 63). However it is interesting to note that neither Manton & Hollis nor Berry specifically link any particular Thomas Butterfield with the building. Berry in particular gives much more detail where he has managed to link other token issuers with certain buildings.

Could it be that they have found records of Butterfields in the neighbourhood holding property and assumed that the wheatsheaf emblem on the tokens relates to our Wheatsheaf? Pub names are notoriously changeable and, as Manton & Hollis point out, a wheatsheaf can be the sign of a baker.

Research for this report has found no record of a Wheatley for that period in the parish registers or wills. Wills have been found for some Thomas Butterfields, yeomen of Wooburn. In fact a probate inventory of Thomas Butterfield junior of Wooburn from 1662 was transcribed in Reed (pp.11-13). The will of another Thomas Butterfield, who was buried in Wycombe parish church in 1671, has been found (PROB 11/335). Since he was a yeoman of the borough he may be a more likely candidate for ownership of the Wheatsheaf. His executor was his brother, Sampson, a lace-buyer and Thomas left a supply of bone lace in his will. In none of the wills seen so far is there any indication of ownership or occupation of the Wheatsheaf or any connection with the occupation of victualler.

Ashford's Appendix I is a list of newcomers to the borough in the 17<sup>th</sup> century who had to provide sureties in case they became a burden under the Poor Law. This includes a Geo. Butterfield and his wife in 1639, with surety Thos. Butterfield, a cook of Iver. A deed of 1675-6 catalogued at the Centre for Bucks Studies (CBS) (D-XI492/2) mentions a George Butterfield who occupied the Bull in Easton Street, so at least that shows a Butterfield connected with the victualling trade. A George Butterfield was the father of the Thomas who died in 1671 mentioned above. In 1694 a Thomas Butterfield, gent, was a juror at Chepping Wycombe (Calendar to Sessions Records vol.11, p.15).

Crouch says that Buckinghamshire tokens were issued between 1651 and 1671. At present the academic consensus is that the trade tokens indicate that a Thomas Butterfield either owned or ran the Wheatsheaf at some point between 1651 and about 1664. But there appears to be no citation of a source linking a particular Thomas Butterfield with the property.

There are more Butterfield references in the National Archives catalogue which need to be researched as well as all Berry's sources. There may be other sources for both Butterfield and Wheatley, especially bearing in mind that not all resources at the CBS have been catalogued.

### **The Wheatsheaf as a coffee house?**

The next early reference needing to be examined is that by Brown mentioned earlier, viz. that the Wheatsheaf was the coffee house of Henry Franklyn in 1700. Despite direct enquiries of Mike Brown it has not been possible to track down the source for this, except that it should be somewhere at the CBS. Of course there were also the references to a coffee house in the "Topical Notes" pieces which lend weight to the idea.

As a result of a Privy Council initiative in 1622 there was a reduction in the number of alehouses. Within Chepping Wycombe borough the 20 or 21 alehouses were reduced to only seven (*Records of Bucks* vol. 7, 305-6). Might this have encouraged the establishment of a coffee house in the town? Coffee houses were by no means confined to London or intellectual centres such as Oxford.

Cowan (p.165) writes: “Coffee housing allowed a claim to gentility that the other victualling trades lacked...John Macky recorded his surprise upon visiting the town of Shrewsbury and discovering there ‘the most coffee-houses round it that ever I saw in any town: but when you come into them, they are but alehouses, only they think that the name of coffee-house gives a better air.” According to Cowan the pay from the trade itself was meagre so that coffee-house keepers may have carried on other business activities. So might the Wheatsheaf have been a coffee-house in name only whilst really being an alehouse?

As for Franklyn, a Henry Franklyn does appear in a poll book for 1700-2 as a voter, therefore freeholder, of Chepping Wycombe and also as a juror, along with a Thomas Butterfield, as mentioned above, in 1694. However there does seem to have been another Henry Franklyn in Marlow. A John Franklin and family feature in Ashford’s list of newcomers to the borough in 1629. One of their sureties was Jacob Franklin of Wycombe, maltman, so a possible link to the victualling trade. There are several Franklin (spelt variously) entries in the parish registers including a burial of a Henry Frankly of the parish, not the borough, on 10<sup>th</sup> January 1702. However parish registers were suspended during the commotion of the Civil Wars so many events will have gone unnoted in the registers in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to the Calendar to Sessions records vol. 11 a Henry Franklyn was a churchwarden at Chepping Wycombe on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1701 and took an oath of adjuration in 1702. No will has been found for a Henry Franklin who might fit our coffee-house keeper.

That there was a coffee house in Wycombe has recently been confirmed during the recent cataloguing by Martin Deacon of a deed within the Bucks Archaeological Society collection at the CBS dated 14<sup>th</sup> January 1695 (D-BAS/22/379/34). I am grateful to Chris Low of the CBS for email information about this deed which relates to “ a cottage formerly in the occupation of Robert Watson in Chepping Wycombe near the hogmarkett between messuage of Dorothy Kidder one side and messuage called the coffeehouse on the other, with all shops belonging formerly in the occupation of Robert Watson, John Chalfont and Thomas Spurlong and of soe much of the shop & of the Closett rooffe & building over the same as is within the pile or frame of the said messuage which said part is now laid to & used with the said messuage called the Coffeehouse.” Might this be the Wheatsheaf, which was near the hogmarket (now Church Square) and which does have a complex arrangement of flying freeholds? Presumably Robert Watson had died or just moved out at the time of this deed.

The High Wycombe parish register shows the burial of a Robert Watson of the borough on 9<sup>th</sup> May 1703 but no will has been found. A Robert Watson was an issuer of trade tokens included in the 1967 Berry’s article (p.152) under ‘occupation not known’ but in the revised Berry and Morley list of 1973 there is more information about his token , which is catalogued as number 232. The token carries the date 1666 and a saracen’s head. They give Watson’s occupation as coffee house proprietor, followed by a question mark. Robert Taylor has a drawing of the token, and when giving the occupation omits the question mark! Also Taylor mentions marriage entries for Robert Watson, first in 1661 to Mary Joanes and secondly in 1670 to Elizabeth Big. The register shows a daughter, Elizabeth, was baptised at Wycombe in 1671.

Clearly further research is required to substantiate the coffee-house use.

### **The Squire family**

The earliest reliable record found so far of the ownership and occupation of the Wheatsheaf is the will of Sarah Squire, spinster of the borough of Chepping Wycombe. Sarah was buried in the parish church there on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1777. She had made her will on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1775 and probate was granted on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1777 to her sisters Mary and Ann Squire. Sarah left to her sisters “all that my messuage or tenement with the appurtenances wherein William Creed late dwelt and wherein James [left blank] now dwelleth called or known by the name or sign of the Wheatsheaf situate on the north side of the Highstreet in Chepping Wycombe...”

It is possible to make a partial Squire family tree from the evidence of wills and the parish registers. Sarah, Mary and Ann were the daughters of Daniel Squire and his wife Sarah. Their father Daniel was a brewer living in the borough. He and Sarah senior seem to have had at least eight children. Ann and Jane died before Daniel made his will in 1731, leaving Martha, Sarah junior, Phillis, Mary, another Ann and Daniel. Daniel senior's will (D/A/We/69/61) does not mention any real property. He was buried on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1732 leaving various legacies to his children with the residue to his widow, who obtained probate on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1733. He directed that she was to be helped by his brother Stephen, who was a carpenter of Amersham. Daniel's parents were called William and possibly Mary but no information has been found about them.

Daniel's widow Sarah was buried on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1765. By this time Martha and Phillis had died so just Sarah junior, Mary, Ann and Daniel were left, all of whom seem never to have married.

Sarah senior had made her will on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1763. To her three daughters, Sarah, Mary and Ann she left “All that my freehold messuage or tenement garden and premises thereunto belonging situate and being in the High Street of Chepping Wycombe aforesaid by me lately purchased of Mr William Eldridge” equally for their lives and then to her only son Daniel. She also left to her daughters “so much of my household furniture as shall be fitting and necessary to furnish them a small house”. This perhaps implies that Sarah had not been living with her daughters. We can't tell if she was living in the house she had bought from Eldridge – perhaps it was an investment. There is a 1730 lease at the CBS (CH/1/T/24) of a house in Easton Street next to that of Widow Squire. Sarah was not a widow until 1731 so perhaps this was Daniel senior's mother.

In any event the house bought from Eldridge does not sound like the Wheatsheaf. This William Eldridge was probably the son of Ambrose Eldridge, a lawyer who came from Great Milton in Oxfordshire but evidently owned several properties in Wycombe (PROB 11/697) and is mentioned as a gentleman in a 1722 poll book for Chepping Wycombe (Ancestry). The First Ledger Book (no.393) records him being admitted as Attorney of the Borough in 1702 and he takes an attorney's oath in 1733 (no.460). Ambrose was buried in Wycombe church in 1739. Two of his brothers-in-law were the executors of his will and after their deaths Ambrose's son William obtained probate of his will in April 1763. This would tally with Sarah Squire senior buying a house from him shortly afterwards. There are references to both William and Lydia Eldridge as owners of Wycombe properties in the CBS catalogue.

So in 1777 the freehold in the Wheatsheaf belonged to Mary and Ann Squire. We don't know the name of the occupier, possibly someone with the first name James.

## HIGH STREET, HIGH WYCOMBE, IN 1772



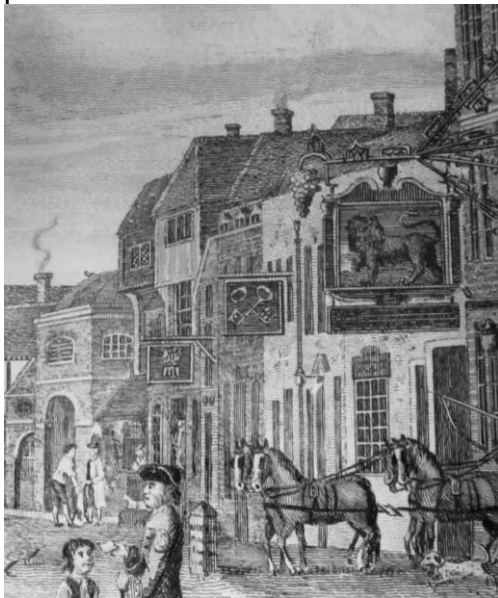
**Key to the view, with a description of some of the personages represented in the Engraving, of a Part of the High Street of High Wycombe, in the County of Bucks.**

**C**VIL JOHN is leading out Squire Welles's horse.—Kitty Tucker, Mr. Grange's house-keeper, relieving a beggar.—Miss Finlow, who lived next to Squire Welles, walking with a gentleman (unknown) and Mr. Daniel Squire, afterwards an Alderman.—Mr. Medwin, at the Three Tuns, with a soldier.—Persons at the Maidenhead Inn, unknown.—A carriage issuing from the Lane.—A man unknown.—Mr. Joseph Stevens, one of the Society of Friends.—Mr. Clarke and Mr. Flower, both of the Bucks Militia, walking in the Market House.—Joe Meener's Goughhead Stall.—Mr. Henry House, with his foot on a stone, talking to his uncle, Almont, in his shop.—Men, unknown, in White Hart Street.—Sally Willis speaking to a person, who bows.—Miss Gibbons and Mr. Parry on horseback.—Mrs. Heading at her chamber window.—Miss Shrimpton with a lady and gentleman unknown.—Mr. Cockburn (who has killed a porter), and a man unknown.—Mrs. Cockburn leaning over the Hatch.—Daniel Parry, the Greer, and a boy listening to him.—A carriage driving from the Red Lion Inn.—Mr. Henry House, while the Artist was at work, quitted his position and walked down the Town, joined by Major Creed in a leopd hat.—Tom Walker, the butcher, at his door, and his daughter, Parry, at the parlour window.—Mr. Smithson conversing with Squire Scotter, of Chesham, and with Captain Osborne, of Fawley.—Mr. Hutchinson, of the Antelope, speaking to a post-boy.—The maid-servant at the window, with her broom.

**C**VIL JOHN, after leaving Mr. Welles's service, married, and sold mutton pies.—Miss Finlow lived next to Mr. Welles, towards London, and was afterwards married to Captain Osborne.—Captain Clarke and Mr. Pinner were in the Bucks Militia.—Mr. Henry House, a duntler in White Hart Street.—Miss Willis lived at the Falcon, Miss Gibbons near Bibbys Lane, Mr. Parry on Castle Hill.—Miss Shrimpton, afterwards Mrs. Thing.—Mrs. Cockburn, formerly Mrs. Lovelady, a mutton maker at the Churchyard Gate.—Major Creed, so called from having been a Sergeant in the Militia, kept the 'Wheatsheaf'.—Mr. Smithson, the Presbyterian Minister.—Mr. Scotter and Captain Osborne, in the Militia.

Reproduction of William Hannan's painting of the High Street in 1772 courtesy of Wycombe Museum

Daniel Squire and William Creed both feature in Hannan's painting above. The Wheatsheaf sign can just be seen near the far end on the right-hand side just before the Little Market House. A black and white engraving is held at the County Museum and a detail which gives a closer view of the Wheatsheaf is reproduced below (courtesy of the County Museum). Hannan worked on paintings at West Wycombe park and lived in High Wycombe so he was familiar with the characters shown here. The legend to the painting is reproduced on the next page, again with the permission of the County Museum. Hannan must have died shortly after; he was buried in the parish church.



The signs are of The Grapes, Red Lion, Cross Keys and the Wheatsheaf. But the Wheatsheaf sign appears to be attached to the front wall of a re-fronted building east of the building which looks like the Wheatsheaf, i.e. the one with the jettied timber-framed second floor. A man stands in what may be the door of the Wheatsheaf. According to the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* Hannan was a good draughtsman so we should be able to take the picture as an accurate representation of the High Street at that time.

KEY TO THE VIEW, with a description of some of the personages represented in the engraving of a part of the High Street of High Wycombe, in the County of Bucks, inscribed by permission to the Right Honourable Lord Le Despenser, by the executors of William Hannan deceased, and published according to Act of Parliament, by John Howe, bookseller, High Wycombe, Bucks, November 30<sup>th</sup> 1772.

### WYCOMBE IN 1772

Civil John is leading out Squire WELLES'S horse. KITTY TUCKER, Mr. Grange's house-keeper relieving a beggar. Miss FINLOW, who lived next to Squire WELLES, walking with a gentleman (unknown), and MR. DANIEL SQUIRES, afterwards an Alderman. Mr. MEDWIN at the Three Tuns, with a soldier. Persons at the Maidenhead Inn, unknown. A carriage issuing from the Lane. A man unknown. MR. JOSEPH STEEVENS, one of the Society of Friends. Mr CLERKE and MR. FLOWER walking in the Market House, both of the Bucks Militia. JOE MESSER'S ginger bread stall. MR. HENRY HOUSE, with his foot on a stone, talking to his uncle ALLNUTT in his shop. Men unknown in White Hart Street. SALLY WILLIS speaking to a person who bows. Miss GIBBONS and MR. PARRY on horseback. MRS HEADING at her chamber window. MISS SHRIMPTON with a lady and gentleman unknown. MR. COCKBURN (who has killed a porker) and a man unknown. MRS. COCKBURN leaning over the Hatch. DANIEL PEARCE the Crier, and a boy listening to him. A carriage driving from the Red Lion Inn. MR. HENRY HOUSE, while the Artist was at work, quitted his position and walked down the Town, joined by MAJOR CREED in a laced hat. TOM WALKER, the butcher, at his door, and his daughter PATTY at the parlour window. MR. SMITHSON, conversing with SQUIRE SCOTTER of Chesham, and CAPTAIN OSBORNE, of Fawley. MR. HUTCHINGSON, of the Antelope speaking to a post-boy. The maid servant at the window with her broom.

CIVIL JOHN after leaving MR. WELLES'S service, married, and sold mutton pies. MISS FINLOW lived next to MR. WELLES towards London, and was afterwards married to CAPTAIN OSBORNE. CAPTAIN CLARKE and MR. FLOWER were in the Bucks Militia. MR HENRY HOUSE, a distiller in White Hart Street. MISS WILLIS lived at the Falcon. MISS GIBBONS near Bibbys Lane. MR PARRY on Castle Hill. MISS SHRIMPTON afterwards MRS. THING. MRS COCKBURN formerly MRS. LOVEDAY, a mantua maker at the Churchyard Gate. MAJOR CREED, so called from having been a Sergeant in the Militia, kept the Wheatsheaf. MR SMITHSON, the Presbyterian Minister. MR SCOTTER and CAPTAIN OSBORNE in the Militia.



The parish register shows that the previous tenant, William Creed, 'innholder' was buried at Wycombe on 20<sup>th</sup> June 1772. This would have been shortly after he was depicted in the William Hannan picture of the High Street. The legend to the picture says he was called Major Creed because he had been a sergeant in the Militia.

Mary Squire died in 1784. By her will made in 1779 she left her half share in the Wheatsheaf, "now in the occupation of Joseph Rowls" to Ann Squire for ever (PROB 11/1117). Ann Squire was the sole executrix and Mary also left to Ann The Swan public house in Lower Marsh and the residue of her estate. Money was to be invested for the benefit of Ann and Daniel during their lives and then to the children of Thomas Rose of Chepping Wycombe, surgeon, and his wife Honor.

So Ann was left as sole owner of the Wheatsheaf from 1784. The parish register shows a Joseph Roll was buried on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1784. The land tax records for the borough are somewhat patchy but Ann Squires (sic) was taxed for a property occupied by Stephen Young valued at £6 with tax assessed at £1 4s from 1788 to 1796. Stephen Young appeared in the 1794 directory as a victualler at the Wheatsheaf. Interestingly from 1797 to 1799 the land tax entries show a value of only £5 with tax assessed of £1. What had happened for the value to be reduced? Other properties do not appear to have been similarly affected. This may indicate changes to the Wheatsheaf building in 1796.

Ann's brother Daniel died in 1794 at the age of 72. He had, presumably, taken over his father's brewery business, since by his will, made in 1792, he left his house and brewery in the High Street and several pubs to his sister Ann for life (PROB 11/1243). In 1784 the brewery had been let to Andrews (sic) Edward Biddle. After Ann's death these properties were to be sold with the proceeds divided between the seven children of Thomas and Honor Rose. Probate was granted to Ann Squire, John Lawrence, Isaac King and A.E. Biddle.

In his will Daniel describes himself as a gentleman and he was evidently of some consequence in the town. He had been elected a town burgess in 1767, an alderman in 1788 and he served as Mayor for 1790-1 (3<sup>rd</sup> ledger book). In 1757 one Thomas Barnes was sent to prison for assaulting him with intent to stab but unfortunately the newspaper report does not tell us why Daniel had been attacked (*Oxford Journal* 26 March 1757).

So Ann, at the age of 68, was left with a substantial investment portfolio of public houses as well as Biddle's brewery. Ann died in 1799 leaving The Wheatsheaf "now in the tenure of Stephen Young" and The Swan to her executors on trust to sell and divide the proceeds between the Rose children. One of Thomas and Honor Rose's daughters, Sarah, had married the brewer Andrews Edward Biddle on 8<sup>th</sup> September 1792. Ann and Daniel Squire were among the witnesses. Clearly the Squires were close to the Rose family but whether they were related or just friends is not clear.

Stephen Young is listed as a victualler in the Posse Comitatus of 1798 and John Young, perhaps his brother, as a maltster. (Stephen was a witness at John's wedding). According to Brown, Stephen and John Young were involved with the Wheatsheaf in 1792 (p.103) but how he does not say. John's malting was in White Hart Street. Stephen married Elizabeth Young in Beaconsfield in 1780. The Wycombe parish register shows a burial of Stephen Young on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1807.



It seems that the executors of Ann Squire's will put the Wheatsheaf up for sale since the *Oxford Journal* of 3<sup>rd</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> May 1800 carried an advertisement for a sale by auction at the Swan Inn in High Wycombe of the freehold in "An old established PUBLIC HOUSE, the sign of the *Wheat Sheaf*, situate near the Market Place, in the Borough of High Wycombe, lett on Lease to Mr. BIDDLE, Brewer, for an unexpired Term of nine Years from Michaelmas next." Unfortunately no report could be found of the outcome of the auction.

### **Biddle and Wheeler**

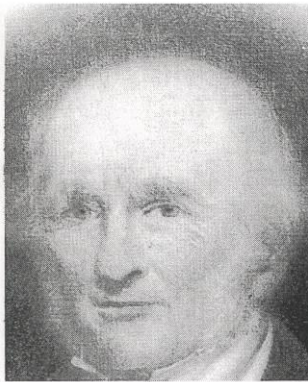
The brewer A.E. Biddle who had leased the High Street Brewery and several pubs from Daniel Squire also had other pubs with Thomas Biddle, perhaps his father. In 1794 A.E. Biddle went into partnership with one of the other Squire executors, Isaac King, and they acquired the properties of Samuel Wells brewery based in Bull Lane. Like Squire before him Biddle was a leading local politician serving as mayor for 1796-7 (3<sup>rd</sup> Ledger book). King sold his share to Robert Wheeler who then formed a partnership with Biddle in 1808. (Brown pp.99-100). Brown lists the pubs which were transferred from Biddle & King to Wheeler in 1811 but they did not include the Wheatsheaf (p.100).

A.E. Biddle died in 1827 aged 73. His will recites the details of his partnership with Robert Wheeler. Brown writes (p.100) "Wheeler paid at least £4,000 to Biddle's family to buy out their share. A further transfer included the following". He then gives a list of six pubs including "Wheatsheaf, Wycombe - £650".

This transfer has not been found but it seems likely that Biddle had bought the freehold of the Wheatsheaf, which he already held under a short lease, in 1800 when it was put up for auction.

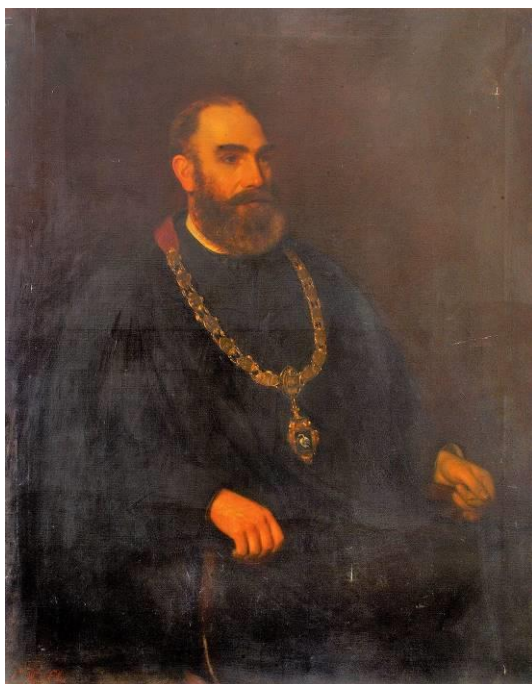
Like Richard Lucas, the other large brewer in Wycombe, Robert Wheeler originated from Westminster and from a Quaker family (Dixon,p.9). In partnering with Biddle in the year of his arrival in the town, 1808, he wasted no time in establishing himself as one of the major brewers and leading businessmen in the town.

The Beer Act of 1830 was intended to reduce the number of licensed premises. In fact it helped promote the rise of the common brewer (men like Wheeler) and increased the number of tied houses. Dixon charted the growth of the Wheeler's business by the number of pub acquisitions, which peaked in the 1850s, both by purchase and lease (p.11) Robert's political rise was somewhat meteoric with his first mayoralty in 1812-13. He was to serve as mayor for a further eight terms, dying in office in 1853. Ashford describes his achievements. Presumably he did not remain a Quaker since he contributed generously to Methodist funds and chaired meetings of the Methodist Missionary Society. Despite fast becoming the biggest brewer in Wycombe and owning or controlling a large proportion of the public houses in the district "yet no man was more at home in the atmosphere of a Methodist tea-party... England missed a politician in Robert Wheeler" (p.284). He was an active member of the Vestry, Paving Commission and British School Committee, member of the local turnpike trust, president of the Literary Institute as well as a banker, founding and managing the Wycombe Savings Bank. His tombstone, which can hardly be missed whilst walking through the churchyard, carries the succinct epitaph "an eminently valuable inhabitant of this town since 1808".



*Picture of Robert Wheeler taken from 'Yesterday's Town – Wycombe p.29 and his gravestone over the family vault close to the south porch of High Wycombe parish church*

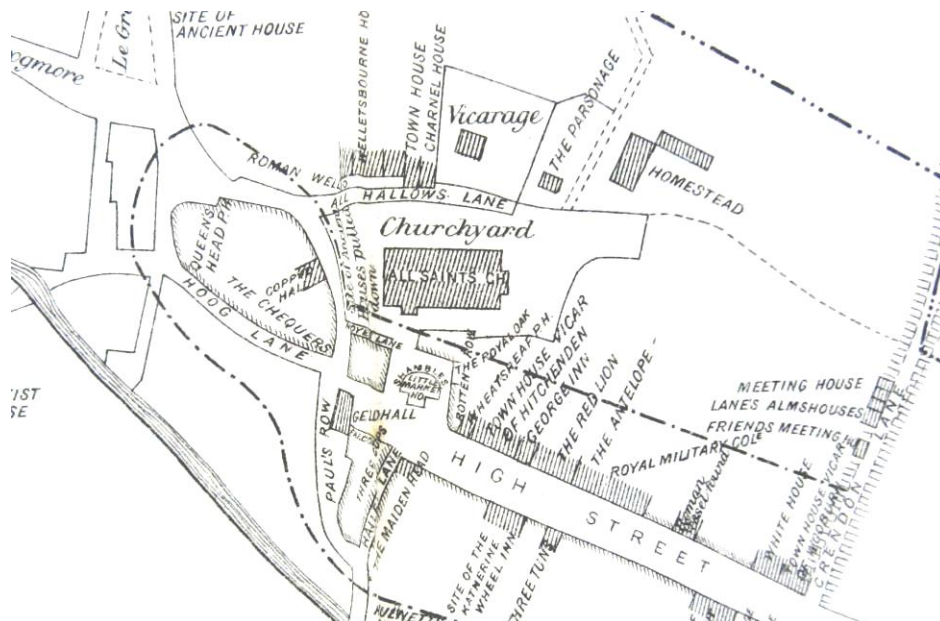
The Wheeler's brewery traded under various partnership names as different family members joined the business. Robert's sons, Robert and Thomas, traded as Robert & Thomas Wheeler, brewers and bankers in Easton Street. Robert junior's son, George, joined the business in 1864 and carried on in a new partnership with Thomas and Thomas's son, Francis, after Robert junior died. Thomas Wheeler had followed in his father's political footsteps too since he was mayor six times. Below is a portrait of Thomas wearing his chain of office. The original is at Wycombe Museum and is reproduced here with their kind permission.



In 1898 Wheeler's Wycombe Breweries was formed by a merger with Leadbetter and Bird, a business which had started as the Frogmoor brewery. The new company had two breweries, 148 freehold and long leasehold pubs/beerhouses and 36 short term leaseholds (Brown p.102). The Frogmoor brewery closed after the merger and brewing was focussed on Wheeler's Easton Street brewery (demolished in the 1930s to make way for shops and the post office at the corner with Queen Victoria Road). Leadbetter & Bird continued to trade as wine merchants from 4 High Street, next door to the Wheatsheaf. Unfortunately Wheelers business records were destroyed by enemy action in the 1940s so any information about the Wheatsheaf in them has been lost.

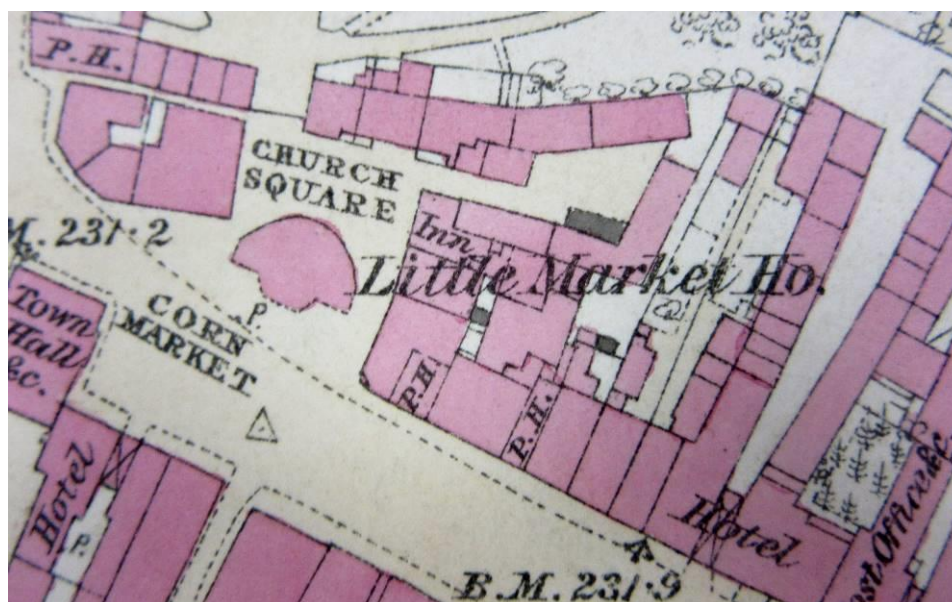
### Early maps

No maps earlier than the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been found. In his 1878 history of the town John Parker included a map, not to scale, which does name the Wheatsheaf. Part is reproduced below.



Parker's map shows the Wheatsheaf P.H. between Rotten Row on the east side of Church Square and the town house of the Vicar of Hitchenden (Hughenden).

The Tithe Map of 1849 shows the Wheatsheaf plot (assessment no.26) hemmed in on either side and with a house in Church Square (assessment no. 24) apparently wrapping around the back of the Wheatsheaf, leaving no independent access at the rear. This 'land-locked' situation is confirmed by the first edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch scale map of c.1876. The Wheatsheaf is marked P.H. and number 1 High Street continues around the corner into Church Square and wraps around the back of the Wheatsheaf. Leadbetter's wine store is the large building on the east side of the Wheatsheaf and the P.H. beyond that must be the Cross-Keys.



Part of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey 25-inch map photographed at the CBS.

### **19<sup>th</sup> century landlords of the Wheatsheaf**

The freehold of the Wheatsheaf remained with Wheelers until sold in 1903 but there were many different occupants of the building throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their names can be traced through trade directories, the ten-yearly censuses and newspapers.

The first landlord of the Wheatsheaf to appear in the directories after Stephen Young is William Swindon (or Swinden) between 1823 and 1832. In January 1829 one William Ponsoby was gaoled for three months for stealing a silver spoon, value five shillings, from William Swinden, who “keeps the Wheatsheaf Public House.” (Justices’ case book QS/JC/12). William died in 1836 (parish register) and the directories show the next landlord was George Swinden, probably his son. On the night of the 1841 census George (aged 39) was living at the Wheatsheaf with his wife Mary Ann, son George (4) and a tailor who was probably a lodger.

High Wycombe had no shortage of larger pubs and inns in which to hold meetings and special functions. So it was perhaps unusual for the Wheatsheaf to hold an inquest such as the one there in 1846 on Henry Abbott who died from hydrophobia (rabies) after being bitten by a cocker-dog. The jury returned a verdict of “Died from hydrophobia, occasioned by the bite of a dog.” (*Leamington Spa Courier* 22 Aug 1846).

George Swinden was no longer the publican in 1847 when the new landlord, Thomas Reeves featured in a court case reported in the *Bucks Herald* of 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1847. This report is interesting since it gives us some slight clue as to the building itself. Thomas is giving evidence against Parslow who “came to my house and had a pint of beer...He then had another pint of beer, and went upstairs with it as he said he wanted to see Langstone’s cart go by. Langstone shortly afterwards came, and went up stairs. I saw Langstone come down again, but did not see Parslow. He got out of the room by the skylight. He did not go out by the front door of my house.” Under cross examination he says: “I will not swear that he could not go out at my front door without my seeing him, but my reason for saying that he got out at the skylight, was owing to it being unfastened and slipped down, which had never occurred before since I have been there.” This seems to imply that an upstairs room was part of the pub for customers’ use and not private living accommodation. But where was the skylight and where would Parslow have landed if he had escaped through it?

Thomas Reeves may well have been the longest serving landlord of the Wheatsheaf since the last directory entry found for him is in 1865. The Tithe map and apportionment of 1849 shows him as occupier and Robert Wheeler & Son as freeholders. The extent of the property is given as one-and-a-half perches. The 1851 census shows that Reeves was born in High Wycombe and he was living with his wife, a female servant and three lodgers, an illustration, as mentioned earlier, of publicans supplementing their income by taking in lodgers.

There was a rather intriguing report in the *Bucks Herald* of 1<sup>st</sup> December 1860. At a town council meeting the mayor mentioned he had received several complaints about the “great nuisance of the urinals at the Wheatsheaf, and under the Little Market House. The best remedy appeared to be to put a modern urinal on the southern front of the Little Market-house, between the lamp and the pump.” Apparently Councillor T. Wheeler (hardly a disinterested party) thought the repairing committee should make a report on the subject at the next council.



Apart from raising the question as to exactly where the Wheatsheaf urinals were this presents a rather earthy picture of the town at the time, bearing in mind the proposed solution was to put urinals on the side of the market house facing the High Street!

When the census was taken on the night of 7<sup>th</sup> April 1861 the Reeves family had plenty of company. The militia was in town and men were billeted in various hostelries. There were 14 privates staying with Thomas and Charlotte Reeves, but no servant as in 1851. Perhaps she had to move out to accommodate the soldiers.

The last directory entry for Thomas Reeves is in 1865 when the *South Bucks Almanack* said the streets had just been numbered. The Wheatsheaf was number 2 High Street. Thomas Reeves died in 1867 aged just 57.

His direct successor may have been James Moore who features as landlord in another court case (*Bucks Herald* 19 Mar 1870). In his evidence he refers to a taproom and a parlour and shutting up the 'house' at midnight on Christmas Eve. Another witness was Arthur Moody, a French polisher who was lodging at the Wheatsheaf.

Moody had moved out by the time of the 1871 census, but plenty of other people had moved in with James Moore (aged 30), his wife Sarah and two young sons. There were four male boarders (i.e. they were paying for meals as well as lodgings), four male lodgers and a young couple lodging with their baby son.

James Moore may have been replaced shortly afterwards by Matthias Oliver. On 1<sup>st</sup> March 1873 the licence was transferred from Oliver to George Greetham (*Bucks Herald* 8 Mar 1873). The 1875 directory lists George Greetham at the Wheatsheaf "said to be the oldest specimen of house architecture in the borough." The Wheatsheaf may not have been a particularly unusual pub in being the resort of petty criminals but George Greetham was another landlord called to give evidence in a criminal trial. In this case a pickpocket had stolen a purse during the fete. Greetham obviously smelt a rat when the miscreant paid for his beer with a bent 6d! He must have staged a search and found the stolen purse under the pan in the closet. At least this indicates that the Wheatsheaf had an indoor lavatory. Incidentally the thief was given four months hard labour (*Bucks Herald* 6 Sept 1873).

Greetham himself was the victim when William Smith was gaoled for a month for stealing Greetham's side-spring boots (*Bucks Herald* 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 1876).

Greetham left to take over the licence of The Bull and the Wheatsheaf licence was transferred to Charles Lane in July 1877 (*Bucks Herald* 21 July 1877). Lane evidently did not take in lodgers since he and his wife Lucy were the only occupants of the Wheatsheaf on 1881 census night. Charles Lane was still the publican in 1883 (Directory) but had moved out by 1885 when John Newton is listed in the Butler directory. Wulcko's notes also show Newton at the Wheatsheaf in 1877.

By 1891 the census shows another change of landlord and plenty of lodgers in residence. Samuel Haydon from Harrow-on-the-Hill and his wife, Eliza, a lacemaker from Bledlow Ridge, had nine male lodgers to supplement their income from the pub and lacemaking. Another court case indicates that Eliza may have been running, or at least, serving in the pub (*South Bucks Standard* 18<sup>th</sup> November 1892).

As witness she said that “the prisoner came into her bar parlour.” The accused was evidently hawking stolen cigars around the pubs in the town but Mrs Haydon saw through him (as did George Greetham at The Bull).

The Wheatsheaf licence was transferred to Ernest Waltham in 1895 (*South Bucks Standard*, 22 Feb 1895). The Waltham’s tenure was short-lived since they moved to a pub in Farnham Royal the following year. Ernest was licensee in name only since his mother, Harriet, had managed the Wheatsheaf, her husband being too ill to work (*South Bucks Standard* 12 Feb 1897).

### **The new ‘bar-front’**

It was during the Waltham’s time that there were significant, and controversial, alterations to the building. At the town council’s General Purposes & Health Committee meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1895 there was discussion about plans which had been approved by the Public Works Committee. The possibilities for a conflict of interest appeared rife. The plans had been drawn up by local architect Thomas Thurlow, whose father happened to be an Alderman, and of course the client/owner was Alderman Wheeler whilst Alderman Hunt was, apparently, the contractor who ended up doing the work. The arguments centred on whether the Works Committee had the power to approve plans or whether they had to be approved by the Council. However, reading the report in the *South Bucks Standard* of 22<sup>nd</sup> March it is hard to avoid the conclusion that some political scores were being settled!

According to the newspaper reports and photographs it seems the main changes were a repositioning of the front door from the left of the frontage to the centre, with a bay window to be inserted either side of the door. The steps up to the existing front door and the front railings would be removed. The principal objection was to the insertion of bay windows which would project onto the pavement in the High Street, even though they would not project further than the existing railings. The Councillors voted to reject the plans.

Architect Thomas Thurlow then wrote to the *South Bucks Standard* – his letter of complaint and explanation appeared in the edition of 29<sup>th</sup> March. The edition of 5<sup>th</sup> April recorded the meeting of the full Council when the matter was discussed again at length. After some plain speaking about whether plans should be approved by full Council another letter from Thurlow was considered in which he said that Wheeler & Co were offering, ‘at some expense’, to alter the initial plans so as to set the windows further back. The revised plan was passed around. The Council’s Surveyor, thought the new plan an improvement. The existing fence which protruded 14 inches and the step 1 foot 7 inches would be removed and the only projection would be the circular windows projecting at most six inches. The arguments continued with one councillor saying the windows would project by about five inches, ‘no further than the water pipe’.

It was pointed out that Wheelers could have just proceeded with their original scheme. Whatever the outcome, which is not clear from the newspaper reports, Wheelers clearly did alter the building as evidenced by ‘before and after’ photographs (see below). The plans evidently also included windows into the cellar below each of the new bay windows.



*Photograph (with detail) reproduced courtesy of SWOP, ref. RHW32001*

This photograph was taken in November 1884. The main subject is Leadbetters (now 4 High Street, Vintner House) bedecked with flags and the Wheatsheaf is to its left.

There are railings in front of the cellar window. The door is to the left with steps up to it. The whole of the front looks like brick apart from the first floor oriel which may be rendered. The timber frame is visible on the second floor but the whole front looks like it has been painted. The signs to the left of the oriel read Lloyd News and Daily Chronicle so perhaps newspapers were on sale here. There are vertical sashes to the windows on the ground and first floor and a horizontal sliding sash to the upper floor. The Wheatsheaf sign hangs from the base of the upper jetty with a picture of a wheatsheaf and "Wheelers Entire" (one of their brews) written underneath.





*An earlier photograph with a better view of the Wheatsheaf door, and steps and the Lloyds News sign. Reproduced courtesy of SWOP ref. MHW: 08614*



*1902 postcard showing the Wheatsheaf - far right - after the alterations to the front. The upper floors do not look altered except that the timbers have been painted black so the building has a more fashionable black and white 'Tudor' look. Apparently Wheelers did not invest in a new pub sign.*



Why the alterations were done is not known. Might it have been part of a plan to take the Wheatsheaf upmarket? The *South Bucks Standard* of 6<sup>th</sup> December 1895 reported in some detail the landlord's birthday feast to which all customers were invited. "The supper was of the usual order, good roast beef, mutton, and vegetables, the table being prettily garnished with fruit, creams, pies, tarts, flowers and plants in great variety." After the supper and toasts the company were entertained by songs from several men including Messrs Waltham and former landlord Greetham. The health of the landlord was drunk with "heartly cheers for the hostess, family, the cooks and waiters, with a chorus of lusty shouts for Jack, the manager, whose genial nature and love of good Scotch has made him a general favourite with all customers. At the close of the evening the talented Hostess delighted her guests with a charming song, and then thanked them all for the orderly way they had behaved." Apparently the Walthams were employing a manager to run the pub for them.

There is another report of a New Year's smoking concert and supper with entertainment by the Wycombe Waits Band. The landlord promised there "should be many more such pleasant evenings during the winter season" (*South Bucks Standard* 3 Jan 1896).

However such pleasant evenings were not to continue under the Walthams' watch since there was a holdover of the licence from Ernest Waltham to W. Henry Barnes in June 1896 (*South Bucks Standard* 12 Feb 1896). Mr Barnes got a glowing review from the Oakley Ramblers Cycling Club when they stopped for a meal at the 'Wheatsheaf Hotel' whilst en route to Oxford (*Kilburn Times* 23 April 1897).

Mr Barnes evidently moved on since the 1899 directory shows Charles William Johnson as the landlord. A new century brought yet another change. William H Pilgram had been installed by the time of the 1901 census. He and his wife Harriett were both from London and living at the Wheatsheaf on their own.

On 17<sup>th</sup> June 1901 the Imperial Yeomanry of Bucks returned from the war in South Africa to a grand reception. The buildings of the town were festooned as described in some detail by the *South Bucks Standard* of 21<sup>st</sup> June. The Wheatsheaf was no exception: "...Mr Pilgram, of the 'Wheatsheaf', had adorned the artistic front of the inn with coloured bosses, and a large number of flaglets..."

### **The end of an era**

But The Wheatsheaf's days as a public house were numbered. The Licensing Act of 1902 was the latest attempt to deal with the scourge of drunkenness and many pubs were to close. The *Bucks Herald* of 14<sup>th</sup> February 1903 reported that the licences of six alehouses and six beerhouses in the town were to be surrendered. The Wheatsheaf would cease to be a pub from 29<sup>th</sup> September 1903. However, before the axe could fall fate intervened and on the morning of 1<sup>st</sup> July 1903 the building was badly damaged by fire.

The High Wycombe Volunteer Fire Brigade attended the scene. This is the report in their Minutes Book:

"July 1 1903. A fire broke out at the 'Wheatsheaf' public house in the High Street, High Wycombe. Called at 4.55am – found the whole place in a blaze, took off part of the roof to give access to the water. Brought hose truck and Steamer and worked till 6.45am. The outbreak appeared to have begun in the cellar – from a cause unknown,

and ran up the stairs, the flames being fed by paraffin from a stove upstairs, but a good 'stop' was made. Insured in County Fire Office. Fire loss, £565 buildings, £340 contents."

Although fires were common-place in a town full of furniture factories stuffed with wood and flammable chemicals the blaze at such a venerable, timber-framed building was something of a 'cause celebre' reaching the newspapers as far away as Cambridge. Strangely the Fire Brigade had not mentioned whether any people were harmed but the newsmen were only too glad to fill in the details (some conflicting). Fortunately only the landlord, David French, a widower, and his son Alfred were in the building that night. A policeman on patrol had raised the alarm and roused Deputy Captain Miles of the fire brigade who, luckily, lived only next door at number 1. The constable threw stones at the window to wake Mr French, who got Alfred out of bed and put him next to the second floor window. French was unable to get down the stairs because of the smoke and got out of the window overlooking the street. Some water damage was done to the adjoining properties (*Bucks Herald* 4<sup>th</sup> July 1903).



After the fire in July 1903. Reproduced courtesy of SWOP ref. RH46124

The Wheatsheaf was put up for sale soon afterwards. The *South Bucks Standard* of 24<sup>th</sup> July carried notice of the auction sale to be held on 28<sup>th</sup> August at the Red Lion. The description reads:

“The very ancient and picturesque half-timbered BUILDING known as the “WHEATSHEAF” INN, HIGH WYCOMBE, and now No. 2 HIGH STREET, having a frontage of 16 feet 9 inches, and containing in the Basement, Cellarage extending under the premises of No. 1 High Street, and with rolling way from Church Square; on the Ground floor, Double-fronted and recently restored Public House or Shop Front, with Bar, Taproom, and Appurtenances; on the First floor, Sitting Room, Kitchen, etc; and on the Second floor, Five Bedrooms and Store Room; two Bedrooms at the back on the second floor being over the premises occupied by Messrs. Butler in Church Square.”

It continues:


“This property has been the site of an important and well-known Inn or Hostelry for several centuries. It is an extremely quaint and interesting specimen of architecture. On the first floor it has an Oriel extending over the street, with projecting gable above, and it is admirably adapted for any business purposes requiring an exceptionally valuable site in the very centre of the town. The adjoining owners are Lord Carrington, Messrs. Wheeler, and Messrs. Leadbetter. The house has been recently the subject of a fire, and the premises will be sold with possession, the license to be surrendered as from Michaelmas next.”

There was strong bidding at the auction even though everything remained unaltered since the fire. The auctioneer pointed out that the property was of peculiar formation, being intermixed with three properties adjoining, viz., those of Mr G.T. Miles, Mr W.H. Butler and Messrs. Leadbetter. (Miles was at 1 High Street, Leadbetter at no. 4 (then called 3) and Butler was in Church Square). The Wheatsheaf was eventually knocked down to Mr T. Thurlow for £865. (*South Bucks Standard* 4<sup>th</sup> Sep 1903). When reporting the sale the *Bucks Herald* (5<sup>th</sup> Sep) pointed out that the location was a good one for business “although somewhat inconvenient owing to lack of access at the rear.”

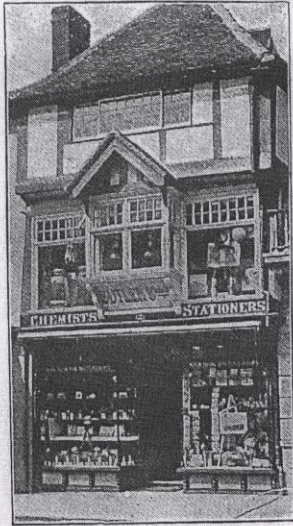
### **From public house to shop**

Since the purchaser was William Butler, the chemist who owned one of those “intermixed” buildings in Church Square behind the Wheatsheaf, perhaps the lack of rear access was not too troubling. The Wheatsheaf was duly delicensed in October and Butler’s plans for a new shop front were approved in November (*South Bucks Standard* 20 Nov 1903). His architect had amended the plans to alter the line of the shop front to meet the requirements of the Council’s Surveyor and the bye-laws. The architect is not named but it was probably Thomas Thurlow who had bid for the property at auction and knew the building well from his previous scheme carried out for Wheelers. Bearing in mind the extent of the likely fire-damage considerable alterations must have been involved besides a new shop-front.

Butler’s new shop was soon up and running and appeared in the 1905 Freer’s directory as Butler Bros. Chemists. In the 1907 directory it was a chemists and stationers styled ‘The Old Wheatsheaf Pharmacy’.

**BUTLER BROS.,** 

**"Old Wheatsheaf Pharmacy,"**  
**2, HIGH STREET, HIGH WYCOMBE.**  
**Chemists, Booksellers, Stationers, etc.**  
**AERATED WATERS IN SYPHONS,**  
LONDON MADE FROM DISTILLED WATER.

<p>PRESCRIPTIONS CAREFULLY DISPENSED.</p> <p>PURE DRUGS AND CHEMICALS.</p> <p>STORE PRICES FOR CASH.</p> <p>EVERY REQUISITE FOR AMATEUR PHOTOGRAPHERS</p> <p>DARK ROOM FOR THEIR USE.</p> <p>SURGICAL BANDAGES. ELASTIC STOCKINGS. ENEMAS, &amp;c.</p> <p>TOILET, NURSERY, AND KITCHEN REQUISITES.</p>		<p>BOOKS, BIBLES, PRAYER AND HYMN BOOKS.</p> <p>LARGE STOCK OF LEATHER GOODS DESKS, &amp; WORK BOXES.</p> <p>PRESENTS TO SUIT ALL. STATIONERY.</p> <p>ACCOUNT BOOKS PICTURE POSTCARDS AND ALBUMS.</p> <p>OIL &amp; WATER COLOURS.</p> <p>CANVASES &amp; ALL ART MATERIALS.</p> <p>DIE STAMPING. COPPER PLATE PRINTING.</p> <p>BOOK-BINDING, &amp;c.</p>
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**THE WYCOMBE LEMON ESSENCE.**  
 $4\frac{1}{2}$  Bottle makes 40 Tumblers nice Lemonade.

**Up-to-date Dark Room, lighted by Electricity.**  
**Free use to Customers.**

**Large and convenient Showroom for Fancy Goods.**  
**Novelties in all Departments.**

Visitors or New Residents are respectfully invited to call, or  
enquiries by post will be immediately attended to.

*Advertisement from 'The Homeland Handbooks – High Wycombe And its Surroundings 1907'  
reproduced courtesy of Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society.*

1907 must have been an eventful year for the owner, William Harsant Butler, who was prosecuted by the Board of Trade for passing off machine-made paper as handmade. In a town long famous for its paper-making industry surely a risky undertaking if true, but it was not and the case was dropped (*South Bucks Standard* 21 June 1907).

As mentioned earlier in the Existing Studies section the RCHME, now Historic England, inspected the Wheatsheaf. The investigator visited on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1910 and made the following notes:

"1. Name and situation of monument: no. 2 High Street formerly the Wheatsheaf Inn (N side of street.

2. General appearance: a. No. of storeys: 3 with attic & cellar below

b. Building materials: timber framed (brick filling 3<sup>rd</sup> storey)

c. Roofs: tiled

3. Historical development: A 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> cent. house now used as a chemists' shop.





The description reads:

“Top floor: Attic Warehouse. First floor: Show Room: Back portion of these two floors overlap No. 1 High St: Dark room: Double fronted shop. Cellar under No.1 High St with steps leading down from Church Square.  
17 ft frontage. 1p.20yds.

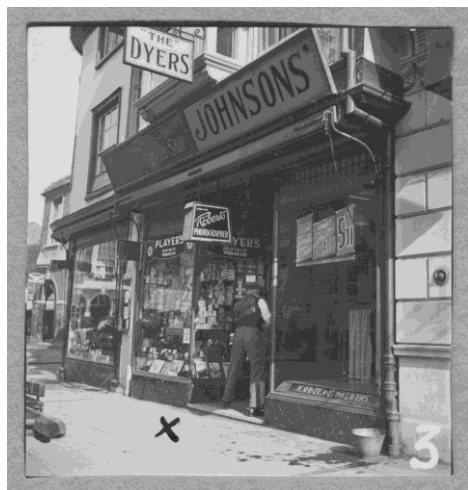
The whole property was given a gross value of £800. Considering that Butler had paid £865 at auction for the fire-damaged building and must have had considerable outlay on the alterations it seems that he hardly got a bargain!

Nobody was living in the Wheatsheaf now it was a shop. The 1911 census had no entry, listing it as a warehouse, not a dwelling.

William Harsant Butler, who lived at 22 Priory Road, died in February 1929. His daughter, Gwendoline Butler, who was unmarried, obtained probate of his will (per Ancestry). Butlers chemists appeared in the 1922 directory but whether William continued trading at the Wheatsheaf until his death is not known. Certainly by 1930 there had been major changes.

### **From one into three**

The council's 1930 rate book shows Miss Butler as the owner with number 2 described as a house, shop and premises occupied by H.J. Cox and C. Roberts and number 2A as a lock-up shop occupied by Johnson Bros. (Dyers) Ltd. Cox, a tobacconist, was in the ground floor shop to the left of the door. Cyril Roberts used the upper floors as a photographic studio with access from the central door and Johnsons were dry-cleaners and dyers.



*Photo taken in c.1930 reproduced courtesy of SWOP ref. RHW:35118*

There is no continuous run of rate books but by 1941 the tobacconist's shop was run by Mr F.J. File. In 1944 the building was photographed by Historic England (see cover of this report) which shows the various names; 'Fred J. File' in the window with 'The Olde Wheatsheaf Tobacco Shop' on the fascia board, 'Johnsons the Dyers' in the window at 2A with the fascia 'Johnsons' and a hanging sign above the shop window. 'Roberts Photographer' had really gone to town with hanging signs in the doorway and above the central first floor window, a sign board on the side of the projecting second floor and lettering down the side next to number 1, as well as a show-case left of the tobacconist's shop window, apparently on the wall of number 1 next door.

Whilst rateable values increased the rate books continue to show the same ownership and occupation up to 1953, the last available at the CBS.

On 26<sup>th</sup> June 1953 Cyril Roberts photographers, evidently not content with his existing signage, got consent for a double-sided projecting neon box sign. The application said there had been 28-years use as a photographers. In 1960 Roberts got a further five-year consent for a replacement box sign.

Miss Butler was not to die until 1962 at the age of 70 but she had evidently decided to sell the freehold since, in 1954, there was an application for a change of use to offices, made by a prospective purchaser. The application was withdrawn when the property was sold elsewhere but the purchaser was not named.

On a photograph of the 1960s (number High Wycombe 711 on the Bucks County Council website) the right-hand shop with the name Eric Wakefield on the fascia can just be seen. He ran a ticket agency and a local resident recalls buying tickets there (verbal comm.).

Another photograph in the 1967 *Records of Bucks* article about trade tokens shows more changes. The tobacconist was now Peter B. Harris and the right-hand shop (now officially number 3) was no longer Johnsons but Bernatone Hearing Centre. In 1971 Bernatone Industries Limited got consent to install a new shop front with brush finish anodised aluminium window frames. The existing marble stall riser was to remain as was the existing lobby step. The owners were then Cubes Limited of 4 Chiswell Street, London. A new headboard and signage were also approved.

The High Wycombe Conservation Area had been designated in 1970 and the Wheatsheaf was listed in 1973; tighter restrictions resulted. Reed Employment moved into number 3 in 1980 when change of use to employment agency was granted but their application for an illuminated fascia sign and a projecting box sign were refused. They were deemed detrimental to the appearance of the listed building and the street-scene.

By February 1983 number 3 was vacant. The Council refused consent for a car-hire booking office, whilst noting that “because this is such a small unit we have conceded to a quasi-office use here already.” However they did allow a change of use to retail shop and in May 1983 Sidney Mallett took over the lease of number 3 where he sold costume jewellery. The planning report gave the area as 159 square feet and the frontage was 5ft 6in. Peter Harris, the tobacconist at number 2 and Cyril Roberts photographer upstairs were still in the building.

The tobacconist use at number 2 must have ended before 1990. On 7<sup>th</sup> March 1990 the council sent a letter to solicitors confirming that no change of use would be required for a sandwich shop but it is not known if this was ever implemented. However in October the freeholders, Provident Mutual Developments Limited, obtained listed building consent to make an opening between the rear of the front kiosk and rear room, remove the modern staircase and insert a new one to the basement and make an opening in the masonry wall in the basement. The conservation officer commented that the opening was needed since there was currently no communication between the front and rear room, adding that although it involved removing a timber stud this was acceptable in listed building terms. The removal of one vertical timber would be a minimal disturbance to the medieval timber and wattle and daub. The planning records include drawings of the historic studs but, as with all the planning records on microfiche, the reproduction quality is not good.

The only other entries on the planning register are two building regulation approvals for internal structural alterations in 1991 for the tenant of number 2, Temptations. These, apparently, cannot be accessed for copyright reasons.

Martin Andrew's book, *High Wycombe a History and Celebration*, has his 2005 photograph of The Wheatsheaf showing Temptations at number 2, Rings and Things at number 3 and the upper floors vacant with an agent's Under Offer board (page 32).

The full chain of freehold ownership has not been discovered. The freehold title is registered (BM147730) and it has not been possible to examine any pre-registration deeds which may still exist. Wycombe District Council bought the freehold from a Jersey company, Leto Limited, on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2017 with the Bucks Historic Buildings Trust taking a 125 year lease. Leto appear to have bought the Wheatsheaf and other property on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1989, simultaneously selling The Wheatsheaf to Provident Mutual Developments whilst retaining 5 Church Square, the former Butlers chemists.

The various flying freeholds have necessitated the grant and reservation of many rights for and over the Wheatsheaf. The registered title refers to several plans which deserve special attention, especially since they may give some clue as to alterations which have been made where the building flies over or under its neighbours. The hemmed in character of the Wheatsheaf must have meant servicing and access was needed from elsewhere. For example the 1910 Royal Commission report shows that there was still access to the cellar from Church Square, now lost. This intermingling of properties, which are now separately occupied, suggests that they were once part of a larger whole. Any study of the Wheatsheaf should include those adjoining buildings.



## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

- Trace the source of Brown's reference to Mr Franklyn's coffee house
- Trace the transfer of the Wheatsheaf from Biddle to Wheeler
- Investigate earlier sources such as Borough Records and early taxation records
- Investigate local library sources, including the Green collection
- Follow up National Archives sources including chancery pleadings
- Investigate more family history sources for owners and occupiers
- Ascertain if any of the BAS collection at the CBS, currently being catalogued, relate to the Wheatsheaf
- Investigate the history of neighbouring properties
- Liaise with local groups and historians, especially the High Wycombe Society
- Publicise history to engage local interest, including through the press and social media
- Investigate the theory that reused timbers may have come from the church, or elsewhere
- Interpret evidence from the fabric of the building in the light of historical findings.

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Historic England

Buckinghamshire County Museum

Wycombe Museum

Mike Brown, Archivist Brewery History Society

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