

A HISTORY OF

THE WHITE HART

at

OVERTON, HAMPSHIRE



Compiled by

RICHARD WALDRAM

with illustrations supplied by

Richard Oram, Tony Morris and Edward Roberts.

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ORIGINS

In 1205, Peter des Roches was appointed Bishop of Winchester. It was said of him that he knew more about finance than the scriptures.¹ He set about increasing the revenues of the bishopric by establishing seven new market towns across Hampshire. Overton was one of them and the bishopric owned the entire parish.

The Anglo Saxon village was centred around St Mary's Church, north of the River Test. The new town was built south of the river including the main highway between London and Exeter and a new, wide north/south street for markets and fairs joining up with the road between Winchester and Newbury.² The prime sites were thus at the cross roads.

In 1442, a document written in Latin refers to a 'hospitium' (inn) called the Hart

*'between the way to Andover in the south and the Bishop's mill to the north.'*¹

The Bishop's mill was Town Mill which was mentioned in the Domesday Book. This establishes exactly where 'The Hart' was then and still is now.



The name is of some interest. Richard II (1377-1399) decreed that every inn should have a sign outside. His armorial symbols include a pair of white stags or harts so canny innkeepers chose the white hart as their inn sign.

So there has been an inn called the Hart on this site for at least 570 years and probably much longer.

The new town prospered and so did the Bishop as he doubled the revenues of the bishopric during his term of office.

In 1516, Bishop Foxe wished to endow a new liberal college in Oxford which he named 'Corpus Christi'. He gave many lands and properties in Overton and elsewhere, including the Hart, to endow the College in 1521. College records show all the names of the tenants and the fines (rents) they paid. The first tenant under College ownership was William Fletcher in 1525.¹

REBUILDING

Edward Roberts, an architectural historian, made a brief survey in 1995.¹ He believes The Hart was rebuilt in the first half of the 16th century, probably just after Corpus Christi acquired it.³ He particularly noted the fine stone fireplace in the front room with its Tudor rose motif. The nearest stone quarries are over thirty miles away and

to transport stone by horse and cart was very expensive in those days. The use of stone is evidence of a high quality building and a wealthy owner. Edward also noted the fine queen post roof.



Photograph: Tony Morris

The Tudor rose emblem is of some importance. It was adopted by Henry VII after his accession to the throne in 1485 and was not generally used before then. It tells us this is not the 'hospitium' of 1442 and that it must have been rebuilt.

In Edward's opinion, the west wing facing the Kingsclere Road is all of the same date. The decorative details of the east wing facing London Road suggested a later date of about 1650. Edward made a rough sketch of what the Hart probably looked like then with exposed timber framing and a gable facing the main road.



Detail of a beam in the dining room.

Because Edward's visit was brief, his conclusions were tentative: there may be a great deal more we could learn from a full survey.

College records confirm that Richard Ely (gent) leased the White Hart and a 'mansion' later called Overton House between 1607 and 1626. Richard Ely lived at 'Overton House' and he leased a great deal more land around the village as well.

Langdon shows a building in the middle of the road at the lower end of Winchester Street. This must have been Overton's Market House where the bishop's agent collected rents for market stalls and fairs and settled disputes. It was recorded in 1798 that 'the Market House is entirely taken away'.⁴

WHITE HART COINS

In 1670, the Hart was issuing half-penny coins.



The outer inscription reads 'HART INN * OVERTON* 1670. The central inscription is 'HIS HALF PENNY 'J.P.J.' It is not known who J.P.J. was but the wording is typical.



On the reverse one can just make out an image of a stag and the inscription reads

WHITE HART* OVERTON

The coin belongs to Richard Oram. Photographs by Tony Morris

The background to this is that during the civil wars, the Royal Mint in London was in the hands of the Parliamentarians. King Charles responded by setting up mints in

provincial centres but no new small coins were made. This led to problems paying labourers' wages and buying a loaf of bread. Entrepreneurs all over the country, often button makers, started to mint their own coins which were exchangeable for the real thing. They were not suppressed until 1688.⁵

THE COACHING INN

In medieval times, upkeep of main roads was the responsibility of parishes which meant they were in a terrible state. People travelled on foot, on horseback or by horse drawn wagons which did well to achieve two miles an hour even in summer.

Early in the 18th century came the idea of setting up Turnpike Trusts by Act of Parliament. The trusts could borrow money to make repairs and charge tolls from road users to pay the interest. The London-Exeter road was 'turnpiked' in 1754 and mail coaches replaced a horse and rider in 1784. There was space for four passengers inside and more alongside the driver. At the rear a guard deterred highwaymen with a blunderbuss and two pistols. As the roads improved, private coach traffic steadily increased. Coaches now ran through the night and could achieve speeds of 10 miles an hour.⁶



This re-enactment in 1989 shows a stage coach leaving the White Hart for Whitchurch in celebration of Lord Denning's 90th birthday.

Photograph by Richard Oram

This was all good for business at the White Hart which was extensively refurbished in 1770. The proprietor, William Woodward, wrote to the College about the money he had spent.¹

'Where lath and plaster was at the Inn, I have had brickworks put in, floors new laid, parlours painted, every chamber painted, the tyling all stripped and new rafters all over put in...making it the most commodious of any Inn on the roade.... I have spent nigh on ninety pounds.

£90 in today's money would be about £10,600.⁷ He does not mention windows but it was presumably part of the work to put in trendy Georgian balanced sash windows. At this time, anything 'medieval' was very unfashionable and the ancient timber frames were concealed beneath plaster on the outside. This is how we see it today.

However, the White Hart now faced direct competition from The New Inn which was built on the opposite corner of the cross roads with ten bedrooms.⁸ It was soon nicknamed the 'Poyntz Arms' after an eccentric hunting gentleman from Newbury who often stayed there.⁹

A description of the village in 1798 records,⁴

'There are two good inns, the New Inn and the White Hart; the principal is the first where much good business is done every day. Here is also the post office.

The mail coach from London to Exeter every day arrives at four in the morning and returns from Exeter to London every night at half past ten.

The Mercury stage coach, from the Swan with Two Necks, Lad Lane (London) arrives every day at one o'clock and returns at four in the morning. The Taunton coach, arrives every Monday Wednesday and Friday, at one o'clock and returns at three in the morning Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Cook's Salisbury coach arrives every night at nine o'clock and returns from London every morning at three.

Steadman's Salisbury coach, to the Bell and Crown, Holborn passes through at nine in the morning and returns at half past twelve.'

In addition there were regular waggons carrying passengers and freight from Exeter, Taunton and Frome on their way to and from London.

With every arrival there was a bustle of activity at all hours of the day and night with horses to be changed, food to be got and thirst to be quenched all in the space of about twenty minutes.

In all there were seventy scheduled coaches and waggons arriving every week needing 280 rested horses. On top of that there were hired and private coaches, the lighter phaetons and post-chaises, all needing horses as well.

The New Inn had stables with stalls for only four post-horses⁸ whereas the White Hart had twenty on site and forty more in the town 'let out to coach proprietors and waggon masters' (see below). It is clear that the White Hart had retained the most lucrative side of the trade. Any traveller needing rested horses would have been directed there.

In the early evening of 5th November, 1805, one such traveller arrived in Overton and he needed horses in a great hurry.

He was Lt. John Lapenotiere carrying the news of the Battle of Trafalgar and the death of Lord Nelson from Falmouth to the Admiralty in London.



From the National Maritime Museum

The victory was on 21st October but because of bad weather it took fourteen days for the schooner 'Pickle' to reach Falmouth with the news. Her captain, Lapenotiere, travelled by fast coach chaise, stopping only to make 21 changes of horse. He covered the 271 miles in 37 hours and for 23 of those hours he was travelling in the dark. He averaged just over 7 miles per hour including stops. The same journey by mail coach typically took 75 hours.¹⁰ The 16th change was at Overton and it cost him one pound thirteen shillings, about double the normal rate⁶.

The message he carried was brief,

'Sir, we have won a great victory but we have lost Lord Nelson!'

The event is commemorated on a plaque near the Community Centre.



THE TRAFALGAR WAY



OVERTON - 16TH POST-HORSE CHANGE

On Monday 21st October 1805 the Royal Navy decisively defeated a combined French and Spanish fleet off Cape Trafalgar on the south west coast of Spain. This victory permanently removed the threat of invasion of England by the armies of Napoleon Bonaparte.

The first official dispatches with the momentous news of the victory, and the death in action of Vice Admiral Lord Nelson, were carried to England on board H. M. Schooner PICKLE by her captain, Lieutenant John Richards Lapenotiere.

Lapenotiere landed at Falmouth on Monday 4th November 1805 and set out "express by post-chaise" for London, following what is now The Trafalgar Way. He took some 37 hours to cover the 271 mile journey, changing horses 21 times. The 16th such change was made at Overton in the early evening of 5th November at a cost of one pound thirteen shillings.

On 18th November 1830 there was serious rioting outside the White Hart at the crossroads. The Times reporter wrote

'On Thursday, the town of Overton was the scene of great tumult and alarm. Early in the morning, several hundred labourers assembled and paraded the streets demanding from the affrighted inhabitants money or food saying that they had been starving with their wives and families for long enough on potatoes and bread; that their sufferings were past all endurance and if they could not get more wages for their labour they would take what they could get without working at all.

Neighbouring farmers, their masters, came into the town and used every endeavour to pacify them... by promises that their wages would be raised and their wants relieved. This appeal prompted them to disperse but not before they had extracted from shopkeepers and the inhabitants money and food.

On Friday, a large multitude again assembled and assumed a more menacing attitude being armed, some with large clubs, others with flails and hard staves. They declared they were not satisfied with the arrangements proposed the day before and were determined to have justice.'

The upshot was that by happy chance a negotiator appeared who was trusted both by the farmers and the men and he got them a 33% pay rise. A few hours later they had disappeared and there was no bloodshed.

Similar riots happened all over southern England. Ricks were burned and agricultural machinery was smashed. In Hampshire, three of the ringleaders were hanged and over 100 were transported to penal colonies in Australia.³ The rise in wages did not last.

In 1836, the Lease of the White Hart came up for sale.

To Coach Proprietors, Builders & Others

Free and well accustomed commercial inn and Public House on the High Western Road at the entrance of the town of Overton

To be **SOLD** by **AUCTION**, by Mr Paice, on the premises at 4 o'clock on Monday the 25th day of July, 1836, by order of the executors of the late Mr W. Taplin, all those capital business premises, long known as the **WHITE HART INN, Overton** with extensive Yard, Outlet & Stabling.

The House contains two good front parlours, back sitting room, well arranged bar, tap-room, kitchen with oven and pump, scullery, good wine, beer and spirit cellars, seven bedrooms (four for double beds), servant's room and all requisite and convenient offices.

There are also excellent stables for nearly sixty horses, stabling for forty now being let out to coach and waggon masters; a large yard with a pump for the use of the stables; productive garden bounded at the extremity by a fine trout stream.

To any person embarking in the Public Line, this property affords a desirable and rare opportunity, being so eligibly situate by the side of the Great Western Road and at the London entrance of the Town of Overton, affording every facility for commodious trading to any extent, or for the establishment of a brewery, there being no obligation or tie whatever for supply by any Brewer, Spirit Merchant or other person.

The Property is held by lease under Corpus Christi College, Oxford at small annual money and corn rents for 20 years from 21st March 1833, customarily renewable every 7 years.

Winchester Chronicle, July 23rd 1836

THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY

The London to Southampton line through Basingstoke and Micheldever opened in 1840. A year later, the enterprising Mr Bradshaw published his 'Travelling Charts or Iron Road Books for Perusal on the Journey'¹¹ containing short accounts of places within ten miles of a station. Of Overton, he had this to say,

‘Overton, an old dilapidated borough, so worn out that it...has lost its Charter and Market and is chiefly and almost only attractive to the fisherman for the trout of the little stream which are extolled.’⁷

Nothing to delay the traveller here. The construction of the London to Exeter railway passing through Overton was no doubt good for business at both inns, but once it opened in 1854, coach traffic rapidly withered away. The whole village was in decline and between 1851 and 1891 the population fell because fewer agricultural workers were needed as machines replaced them and their wages were falling again.¹²

By 1860 the New Inn had gone out of business and was demolished to make way for Overton’s National School, now the Community Centre.⁹ Corpus Christi also sold off all its properties in Overton. The White Hart was the last to go on 6th March, 1882.

LOT 7.

“WHITE HART” HOTEL & PREMISES

Situate in the High Street,
And containing Oa. 1r. 30p. No. 7 on Plan.

These Large, Free, and fully Licensed Premises, known as the “White Hart” Hotel, are held by Messrs. Hawkins, Brewers, of Newbury, on a yearly agreement, in the occupation of Mrs. A. Hunt, and are well situated in the entrance to the Town, on the Main Road from Andover to Basingstoke, and on the Road leading from the Station to the Town. The House contains covered Entrance, Smoking Room, Bar, Bar Parlour, Kitchen, Tap Room, &c. and Large Room used as the Magistrates’ Court Room, seven Bed Rooms, two Attics, and Sitting Room on the First Floor.

The Yard is commodious and Stabling is afforded for 15 horses, Saddle Room, Chaise House, Piggeries, &c. together with productive Garden extending to the River Test. The whole of these Premises have lately been put in thorough repair. As a place of business and an investment this is an opportunity seldom offered to the public.

This Hotel has been held by the present Tenant’s Family for a considerable number of years and is the principal one in the Town.

Rent, £40 Os. Od. per annum.
Outgoings—Land Tax, £1 10s. Od.

Hampshire Archives 83A02/8

The buyers were Messrs Barrett at £1,175 for Farnham Breweries. ¹

The stabling offered was down to fifteen horses showing that passing trade was much reduced. The White Hart now had to survive as a village inn attracting as many visitors as it could to fill its bedrooms.

THE VILLAGE INN



Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com from the White Hart.

This is the earliest known image of the White Hart, taken about 1890 showing women standing in the old doorway where coaches once entered the courtyard. It was still in the hands of Farnham United Breweries Ltd, later a subsidiary of Courage Ales. The inn sign is missing.

In July, 1906, the White Hart placed this advert in the third edition of Overton's own newspaper, the 'Overton Outlook'. Unfortunately, it was also the last.



Contributed by Richard Oram



Photograph: Tony Morris contributed by Irene Tungate.

This photograph was taken at about the same time. From medieval times an annual sheep fair had been held in July in Winchester Street. By the 19th century, tens of thousands of animals were changing hands. This became inconvenient and the fair was moved to Fair Close which allowed a street fair to be held at the same time.

A fairground stage has been erected next to the White Hart for the occasion.

OVERTON SHEEP AND LAMB FAIR,
TO BE HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, JULY 18th, 1906.
A PUBLIC LUNCHEON
Will be served on the Ground at 12.30 precisely by Mr. C. Hunt, White Hart Hotel, Overton.
Tickets, 2/6 each.
Chair to be taken at Luncheon by Sir Wm. PORTAL, Bart., D.L., J.P.,
Supported by Capt. WALTER FABER, M.P. for West Hants, CLAVELL SALTER, Esq., M.P. for North
Hants, A. T. JERVOISE, Esq., M.F.H., Sir ANTHONY COPE, Bart., and other Gentlemen.
The PRIZES will be distributed immediately after the Luncheon.
Head Coops to be taken on or before Saturday, the 14th day of July
W. SPRENT, Hon. Sec. Prize Committee.

Contributed by Richard Oram

The White Hart always provided the 'public luncheon' before the prize giving.

The sheep fair finally ceased in the nineteen thirties but the street fair was revived for the millennium in 2000 and was such a success that it has been repeated every four years since then. There are no sheep any more but the event attracts thousands of visitors.



Photograph: Richard Oram

This view was probably taken about 1910 and shows that the great coach doors have been removed and arch glazed in. A new inn sign has appeared.



Wedding party at the White Hart, 1921

Photograph: Richard Oram



Photograph: Tony Morris, contributed by Humphrey Chatt.

All the old photographs give the impression of a tired backwater with a few men standing around with nothing much to do. But in 1922, Portals built their new paper mill by the station and the population started to grow.

In 1931, the landlord of the White Hart was placing 'Touring' advertisements in the Times.

JANE AUSTEN COUNTRY

WHITE HART HOTEL, OVERTON, HANTS for
cuisine, comfort & economy
Two miles from Steventon.
Overton 37

He was trying to attract a new kind of customer - the motorist. By then, cars were affordable and with the help of a one-inch Ordnance Survey map, people from the cities could explore the countryside. It was also a time when villages were seen romantically, not as poor, rural backwaters, but as the very heart of 'England's green and pleasant land', valued for their history. The village church, the village green and the village pub had become places worth exploring. Overton continued to grow as living in a village started to be an attractive idea.

The old stables at the back of the White Hart courtyard were demolished to provide parking spaces and a petrol station was opened right next door.



Overton carnival procession passing the White Hart in 1936

Photograph: Tony Morris, www.overtonpictures.com



Having lost its charter as a town, Overton was once again a village without the right to elect a mayor. In the 1930's, residents made up for that deficiency by electing a mock mayor and aldermen once a year. At the 'assizes' parishioners were hauled before them accused of various crimes such as missing a penalty at football or borrowing a ladder and failing to return it. They were invariably found guilty and the fines were paid in beer. The White Hart always laid on a sumptuous venison supper to round off the evening.¹³ The last 'assizes' were held in 1939 but the tradition was revived one last time for the Festival of Britain in 1951.

The 'Mayor' and 'Aldermen' being transported to Town Meadow, 1951.

Photograph: Richard Oram.

Before the war it was not the 'done thing' for respectable women to be seen in public houses except for family occasions. The war changed all that and the White Hart was host to Land Girls and Bank of England staff, mostly female, who were billeted in and around Overton for the duration of the war, some of whom tasted beer there for the first time. They were joined by large numbers of British and American servicemen and it was all good for business at the White Hart.¹⁴

Since the war, Overton has continued to thrive and is once again the bustling place it was in the old coaching days, 'where much good business is done every day' just as the bishops intended 800 years ago.

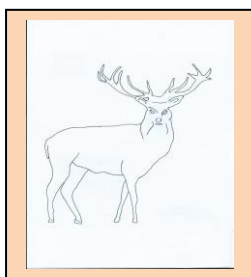


In 1980, The White Hart' was being run by Ken and Joan Williams who had great plans for modernisation with a cheese and wine bar, function room and a TV lounge. ¹⁵ Sadly, none of it happened. A new roof was put on in 1998 but the White Hart, through lack of investment, gradually declined and eventually closed for business in August 2011.

Photograph: Tony Morris www.overtonpictures.com

THE INN SIGN

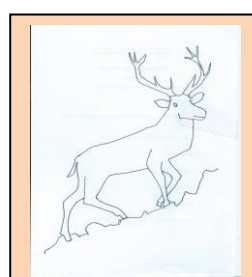
Since 1900, the old grainy photographs show that there have been at least five signs with the hart in different poses.



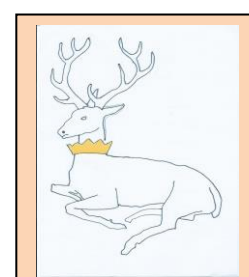
1910



1920's



1936



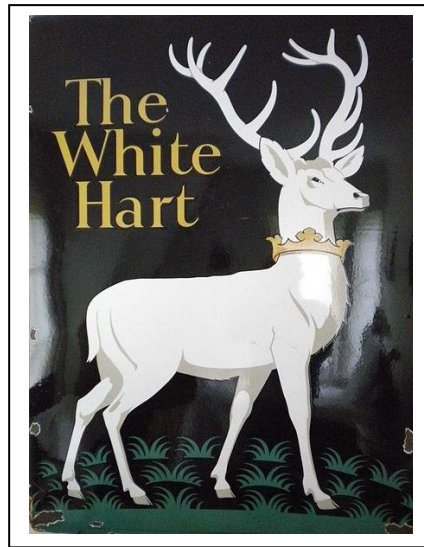
1954



The last was the least impressive and the noble heraldic and royal stag looked more like a dejected sheep with plastic antlers on its head. It was still hanging in 1988 but it was hit by a passing truck and was found in the garage in 2006. Since then there has been no sign.

Photograph: Tony Morris

The sign ought to look more like this.



‘The Hart’ at Overton deserves better.

It is now a sad sight, standing deserted and neglected right at the heart of a growing, thriving village in a prosperous area. The White Hart deserves to be valued for its history but, more importantly, it deserves someone with vision to secure its future.

Richard Waldram

30th November 2013

I am very grateful to Tony Morris who reviewed my draft and made very valuable suggestions which I have incorporated.

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