

## The Pub with No Beer – The Story of the Shepherd’s Hut

Ewelme News, Feb-Mar 2008

Tat Attwood, the present landlord of the Shepherds Hut has asked for any information on the history of the pub, as he recently found a brick in an upstairs chimney engraved with the date 1840. Whether this indicates the year it was built or refurbished is uncertain, but there is no building shown on our oldest map of 1767.

Most of the Archive information came from interviews with the late Amy Reeves. In August 1923, when she was just 5 years, old her teetotal father; Joe Strevens, moved his family from the Hastings area and took over the premises as an Ale House from Mr and Mrs Leather. The Strevens believed the name came from the time when the building was a private house with an orchard. Apparently, the shepherds would over-night their flocks there, en route to the market at Wallingford. In 1923 the Hut was very dirty and basic with oil lamps, earth water closets, and a stable for two horses on the right hand side and a coach house for grooms on the left. (George Keen, who ran the bakery next door, used to keep his horses in the stables).



Joe Strevens with his children outside the Shepherds Hut.

Initially, as there was no licence, Joe would walk to The Lamb nearby and buy enough beer in enamel jugs to last the evening. Gradually the Hut evolved into a ‘proper’ pub and beer was delivered from Diamall Brown & Sons of Queens Street, Reading. Finally, the wine and spirit licence was transferred from The Lamb, when it was demolished in 1942.

In 1930 The Hut charged 4d for a pint of beer, twenty Players cigarettes cost 11½d and Woodbines were 5d for ten. As a versatile village ‘house’ the Club room has been a tailors shop, a fish and chip shop and a tea room! In the men-only Public Bar dominoes, darts and shove-halfpenny were played. However, the dart board was obviously taken over by ladies

on some occasions, as Amy's father complained of having to empty the earth closets more frequently during Ladies Darts Matches. (Proper sewage disposal was not connected until 1960)? [1957 was the year it was put into the village – R Baker]. The Hut served Speciality Watercress Teas to parties brought in by Smiths Coaches and there were annual suppers of ham boiled in the copper with the broad beans and potatoes cooked in the liquid in sacks. The obligatory sing-song always followed.

Amy remembered the Ewelme Football team generally tended to use the Hut and the Ewelme cricketers used The Greyhound. However, the cricketers must have used the Hut at times, as after 1959 Amy was the Captain of the Ladies Cricket Team. She recounts the raucous visits of the students of St Edmond's Hall cricket team (The Teddy's) from Oxford who used to come and play Ewelme CC on the pitch then located on Prospect Farm's field. Afterwards they would repair to the Shepherds Hut and (apparently) members had to drink 8 pints of beer to qualify for the 'Teddy's Tie' – which was red and with a teddy bear motif. One student would ask Amy's father to unlock the piano so he could play – he was Dudley Moore, a gifted pianist, who became a famous actor /comedian. In their high spirits the boys would climb up onto the roof, but things went too far when they 'liberated' two stone lions set atop gateposts at the Berrick farm owned by Bill Edwards – fortunately they were returned.

At certain periods the Hut was regarded by locals as 'an old mans pub'. Indeed, the late Harry Keene's father, who had lost an arm in the Great War and thereafter had the job of herding the cows from the Common to the pond, had a favourite chair to the side of the fire. He eventually wore two indents in the wooden floor where his heels rested!

However, during the last War there was a dramatic change of clientele, the Hut being a handy hostelry for the lively young airmen and women of RAF Benson. One WAAF called Blossom used to drink pints in the bar. She became Mrs Max Bygraves. Being close to the airfield also had its disadvantages. A Wellington bomber, attempting to land, was fatally 'bounced' by a sneak enemy raider and the resulting explosion blew out the Hut's windows.

In 1923 Ewelme men folk could also enjoy a pint of ale at The Lamb, The Greyhound, and The London Road Inn. It would have been unthinkable in such halcyon days to consider that the 'pub with no beer' would be the only surviving 'local' 85 years later.

**Ewelme Village Archive**