

Fransham Pubs - a little bit of history and a plea for information.

Like most villages in Norfolk, Fransham was blessed with its fair share of Public Houses. The Norfolk Public Houses website, an excellent source of information for those interested in the social history of our county, names no less than six pubs in Great Fransham and three in Little Fransham - although these totals may represent a smaller number of hostelrys whose names have changed over the years.

In Great Fransham the 'Fox & Hounds' and the 'Pineapple' (aka the Pine or Pine Inn) were on, or close to, Station Road. The 'Lord Nelson' stood on the main road, close to the parish boundary with Wendling and the 'Chequers' stood on the Beeston Road. A 'White Horse' is also shown in 18th century licence registers but this was probably an earlier name for the 'Lord Nelson'. As far as I am aware, a 1795 licence register referring to the 'Three Horse (Shoes?)' is the only reference to an otherwise unknown Great Fransham establishment.

There are more mysteries in Little Fransham. The history of the 'Crown' in Crown Lane is quite well documented but what of our only surviving Fransham pub* the 'Canary & Linnet'?

Allegedly originally intended to be called the 'Romany Rye' (somewhat ahead of the Wetherspoons in Dereham) the current name was selected as a reference to the football teams of the two cities it lies equidistant between. The licence for the 'Canary' was transferred from the Great Fransham 'Chequers' in the early fifties and there are rumours (somewhat vague) that the building was once used as an undertaker's premises and rather more substantial stories that it was a Blacksmith's. Certainly the 1882 Ordnance Survey map shows a 'Smithy' located on the site adjacent to the pub (west side) that was redeveloped from a derelict cafe /clubhouse to a dwelling house in the 1990's. Various censuses show a number of Blacksmiths on the main road or Turnpike in Little Fransham. In 1901 there were three households next to each other each headed by a Blacksmith or Blacksmith / Wheelwright. The location of these three households can be estimated by their census entries being close to the Old Hall and the Post Office and Grocer's shop but where exactly were they all? The families in question are the Mace family (James W H Mace, cousin of the more famous 'Jem' Mace of Beeston was here before he ended up at Gressenhall Workhouse), the Burton family (whose numbers included such delightful Christian names as Christmas and Freeman) and the Baldwin family. There are local descendants of at least one of these families close by and perhaps local knowledge of "who lived where" - perhaps there are even photographs of the Canary & Linnet site before it became a licensed premises?

An unsolved mystery (as far as I know!) is the location of a Little Fransham pub called the 'Buck'. This is referenced on the Norfolk Public Houses website together with newspaper reports indicating its existence to at least 1817. In 1814 it was sold, together with a blacksmith's shop and 14 acres of land - a sizeable chunk of real estate. Whilst we know that the 'Canary' received its licence from the 'Chequers' in the 1950's, is it possible that this site (perhaps the present building?) was the location of an earlier licensed premises known as the 'Buck'? With all the thirsty Blacksmiths about and with its central location in Little Fransham it seems a little odd to me that there was not a pub in this part of the Franshams prior to the 1950's.

Does anybody out there know anything on this subject? If they do, I would love to hear from them.

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* the building that was once the 'Lord Nelson' is still a licensed premises and restaurant.