

## THE FALGATE/FOLDGATE PUBLIC HOUSE WHITWELL COMMON

The following information was kindly given by Mrs. Joan Egmore who, with her husband, Norman ran The Foldgate from 1956-1969, when it ceased to be a public house and was bought as a private residence. Norman's father ran the pub from 1941 when he took over from the Haggertys, another Reepham family. At the time of writing it is owned by Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Viall. Unbeknown to them until this research began, the name Samuel Viall is listed in the 1845 directory as landlord. The 1876 directory lists Mrs. Hannah Viall. . Mr and Mrs Andrew Viall are currently researching their family history to see if a connection exists. From her knowledge as a qualified Landscape Archaeologist, and careful inspections, Kate Nightingale considers the building to be of pre-Tudor date.

The Book of Recognizances for the Eynesford Hundred lists the Falgate in 1789 under a Thomas Kingaby. White's 1830 directory lists a John West as victualler and shopkeeper, Falgate, but that directory does not include the Falgate under its inns and public houses list. The terms public house, inn and tavern were juxtaposed in the 19th century directories. An ale house had no license for spirits. Brewers and beer house owners were listed separately. Due to its history of beer making it is not surprising that Reepham has been associated with such a large number of drinking places.

The Falgate is listed in White's 1845 directory run by Samuel Viall who is also listed as a shopkeeper in the Whitwell area. It continues to be listed in directories up to 1929. Mrs. Egmore recalls a visit from an aged man who lived there as a boy in the last quarter of the 19th century when it was an ale house. She and her husband Norman and 9-year old son Roy moved to the pub in 1956 when her father-in-law retired from it. In those days when pub tenancies were not always profitable concerns, it was customary for the woman to run the pub while the husband continued his full-time employment. Norman Egmore was a farm tractor driver on Mill Farm Gt. Witchingham and helped in the pub in the evenings. Bullards were the owners followed by

Watney Mann. The annual rent was £10.00. Moneys were collected monthly on which occasions Joan put out a special tablecloth to serve her visitor for whom she holds the highest regard. She speaks very well of Mr. Bullard "always ready for a chat". Joan has kept all the record books. .

Living accommodation was limited as the ground floor was used mainly for drinking. They lived in the kitchen and bathed in the shed, drawing water for bathing and washing clothes from a well. An indoor pump was installed during the Egmore's tenancy. Joan remembers filling in the water pit herself with spare materials dug up by the waterboard. There was electricity but no sewerage facilities. They had 2 small and one large bedrooms. Joan cycled to Reepham for her purchases, banking and collecting her licences, such as the New Years Eve extension to 12.30am from the courthouse (the present Vet's surgery). The "cellar" a ground floor room to the right of the entrance sold beer from kegs kept on stools. There were no optics for serving spirits, small measures were used. One bottle of spirits was bought per month. With the exception of crisps, no food was served but Joan began to sell chocolate. Customers would eat their own sandwiches over a drink and a game of cards. Children were allowed if parents brought their own beer. They could play on the grass outside. Opening hours were weekdays 10.30am-2.30 and 6-10pm (winter), 6-10.30pm (summer) 12-2 and 7-10pm Sundays. Business was brisk, mainly local people, with many from Sparham and some from Reepham. Saturdays and Sundays saw 20/30 customers. Any passing trade was usually at lunch times. Friday was particularly busy when an additional room was also used. There were then more houses in the immediate vicinity. Weekends would see people coming from Norwich and farther afield touring the area. The public room had a worn brick floor which had to be washed daily. A wooden bench surrounded it. Games such as shove half penny, throwing pennies (heavy pennies of the late 18th century. Joan has a small collection of these pennies, one clearly dated 1797) and twister, a game involving throwing a dice up to the ceiling were played along with cards and

darts. Singing just for fun with no payment involved was very popular. Outside was a cycle track where teams competed.

No trouble resulted from heavy drinking. Falling off bicycles and tripping over things was all taken in good part. Joan recalls an occasion when a particularly tipsy individual couldn't get home so he slept on some sacks of soot until 5am when he had to go milking. Fortunately hangovers seemed to be non-existent then, less strong beer or hardier folk? Very few spirits were sold but bottles of beer were popular. The price of beer those 30/40 years ago was 6d. For a youth just starting work one shilling and sixpence would purchase a drink, packet of Woodbines with some left over. Monthly book-keeping was recorded and customs and excise officers signed the book every 2/3 months. The introduction of VAT during Joan's tenancy meant the tax man calling during the first 3 months. Although Joan had an accountant to assist, her memories of this tax are not happy ones.

In 1969 when the King of Hearts at Lenwade, now "Maxims", needed new tenants Watney Mann asked the Egmores to run it and the Foldgate was closed down, mainly due to the difficulties of procuring water. Another 13 years of pub life followed for the Egmores during which time the rent increased from £4.00 monthly to £1000 per annum, with half of all moneys going to the Brewers. Times had greatly changed.

