



The Queens Head – Bull Head Street

The Queen's Head Inn, Bull Head Street, Wigston Magna

According to the 'Wigston Spa Lane Conservation Area Appraisal 2006', an establishment bearing the Queen's Head name had been operating from this location since 1846. A Post Office Directory of Leicestershire of 1855 has an entry for The Queen's Head, Wigston Magna, licensee W. Vann, and the 1851 census has an entry for a William Vann, Licensed Victualler, of Bull Head Street, so it could be assumed that they were one and the same.

*My grandparents, **Harry and Harriet Hart**, ran the pub from around 1935 (possibly a little earlier) to 1950.*

I was born in a nursing home in Clarendon Park Road, Leicester, in April 1942, and the Queen's Head was my first home. I was christened De'ann Elizabeth Hart at All Saints church in Wigston. My parents, Grace and Douglas Hart, were married in 1940 and had been living and working in Coventry – my Dad worked in engineering and was a volunteer fireman during the war. Mr Hitler obviously took exception to this, as he dropped a bomb on their new house, and they went back to live for a while with Doug's parents, Harry and Harriet Hart, at the Queen's Head. As I recall, at the back of the building were two stable blocks, one of which was still standing when we visited in April 2000. Harry had his butchery and pie-making business in this block (I should mention that the pies were legendary, being individually hand-raised and nothing like the commercially produced efforts we get today) and the other block, demolished by the time of our visit, was used for toilets, storage and dog kennel. The cellar, the exact location of which I can't remember, had metal rails for rolling down the huge wooden beer casks that used to be delivered from the Northampton Brewery Company (possibly by dray, but I'm not sure). Because the barrels were wooden the noise they made sounded like thunder, so I was never afraid during a thunder storm – I just thought there had been an extra delivery! I do remember the fusty, beery smell and the dank chill that rose up whenever the trap door was opened. Also at the back there was car park and a grassed area with tables and benches for the use of customers, and then a private garden for family use. Beyond that was a walled kitchen garden, and I often used to sit with Grandma under the pea sticks, eating raw peas. As can be seen from the April 2000 photographs, the stable block attached to the house had changed very little, but in place of the other block there was now a pathway leading to blocks of flats which appeared to have been built on the private garden.

Bull Head Street was just a country lane in the 1930's and 40's, but is now a dual carriage-way. Friends of the Harts, Lily Brown, with daughter Doreen (known as "Red" on account of her lovely hair, see Photograph 8) and another who I think might have been called Sheila or Shirley, lived in a cottage further up the road, where the Williams family (Grace's sister Pip) stayed for a while just after the war. In our family album there is photograph of my cousin Peter and me standing on a haystack somewhere in Wigston - he has memories of hundreds of frogs, I remember a litter of warm brown puppies. Although the area has changed beyond recognition, it looked as though the cottage was still there in 2000. There is also a photograph in the album of Tommy Bull, a friend of Doug's, whose parents also lived in Bull Head Street. Sadly, he was killed in action at the age of 19 – see separate details. Mum was expecting me at the time, and he was going to be a godparent.



GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

There was a racecourse not far away [*Leicester Racecourse*] and I remember seeing the famous jockey, Gordon Richards, (later Sir Gordon) galloping down the grassy bit outside of the course where we were sitting, beating his horse and swearing his head off – not a pretty sight.

Other memories are rather dim – the clink of ivory dominoes in the tap room, clouds of cigarette smoke, heavy round wooden tables with wrought-iron pedestal legs; black leather seats stuffed with horsehair that scratched my legs; Vimto (which I wasn't allowed), Smiths' Crisps with the blue twist of salt; the children's room at the back (a closed-in veranda); a very dark and spidery outside toilet; the dark wood staircase that used to terrify me – such a long way down, it made me dizzy standing at the top, I imagined that I was floating down; the huge bathroom with the toilet on the pedestal (which I fell down on one occasion), and the large green canvas sheet suspended from the ceiling to catch falling plaster. There was a large kitchen, but I have no memory of the living areas.

I do remember riding round the car park on my tricycle, and one day losing a pretty silver bracelet, which rolled down the drain. (The parents were not best pleased!) There was a shop, I think on the corner over the road, which sold ice creams in rice paper. Other memories are of a cat (whose name escapes me), darling Dusky the spaniel, dying in the stable; brown Dusky, his successor – totally unlovable Labrador cross, who was so fat that Grandpa would drive to Leicester Market, and make him run home behind the car. The car, of course, a 1936 sit-up-and-beg Ford 8, which kept going right up to 1958. Grandpa sometimes used to take me with him to the market, and buy me a big whirly ice-cream and other goodies to keep me quiet while he went about his business.

My parents had moved back to Coventry by 1944, and then to South Wigston in 1946 (see separate memories of South Wigston) so most of these memories are from return visits when I was a small child. Grandpa retired from the pub around 1950, and later went to help out at the Coach and Horses at Lubenham. He and Grandma finally retired to live with Grandma's sister in Market Harborough, where Grandpa died in 1958. Grandma died in 1968.

A quick drive past the Queen's Head in July 2003 revealed it to be closed and shuttered, with a 'To Let' sign on it; it has since burnt down, been demolished, and a block of flats built on the site.

Ann Brimfield (née Hart)

Isle of Man

November 2013

See photographs below:



GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

1. My Dad, Douglas Hart, standing outside the Queen's Head around 1936 – he would be about 15 at the time.



2. The Queen's Head 2000. Razor wire on top of the toilet block. The proprietor came out as we were taking photographs, and although we explained why we were there, he made it obvious that we would not be welcome to go inside the pub, so all we had was a quick glimpse through a window



3. The back of the pub, 2000. The brick extension and entrance on the left of the picture, also covered in razor wire, has replaced the closed in veranda, which was used as a children's room. The right-hand side of the white painted stable block with the two large doors used to house the butchery and pie-making areas.





GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

4.& 5.

My Dad, left, and Harriet with Dusky Mark 1, in the garden, Queen's Head, possibly late 1930's – early 1940's.



6. Although the dog (Dusky) is lovely, this photograph has been included to show how little the back of the building had altered between the late 1930's and 2000. (See photograph 3)



7. Below, left, Harry and Harriet Hart, Queen's Head, 1945

8. Below, right, Grace & Doug with daughter De'ann, with Doreen Brown (right), around 1946





GREATER WIGSTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Name and Contact Detail of Person Supplying The Information

Text of information found

end

Name and Contact Detail of Person Supplying The Information

Text of information found

end