

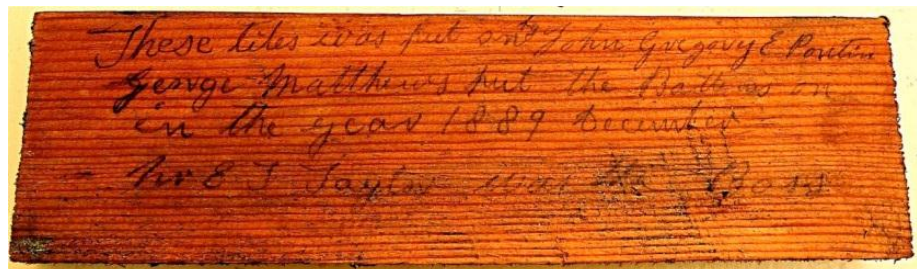
## A History of the Star, East Ilsley



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About a year ago the Society was made aware of the existence of a painting of East Ilsley, depicting the Star Inn in the snow, by a prominent Victorian artist, Henry John Yeend King. The painting was in a sale in New York with a catalogue estimate of \$10,000 to \$15,000. The Society would dearly love to own such an aesthetically pleasing and valuable historical document, but the price was clearly beyond our means. We contacted Bonhams, the auctioneers and found that the painting had not sold and would probably appear in a future sale with a revised estimate. They kindly supplied us with a high resolution image with permission to use it for exhibition purposes, provided that it was used with a visible copyright attribution.

This painting, together with the recent renovations to the Star, one of the oldest buildings in East Ilsley, provided us with the subject of this year's exhibition, and plans duly got under way. It was thought that as well as showing photographs and documents connected with the Star, it would be interesting to try to recreate the appearance of the building in former times. Using photographs taken during renovation it was possible to work out, to some extent, the original half-timbered appearance of the building. At some time later the walls were covered with a rendering which concealed these timbers, and it was in this condition when the painting was made about 1885. We know that the hanging tiles were applied in December 1889, due to the following note left behind by the workmen underneath the tiles. (thank you to Dave Gardhouse for photographing this)



Drawings can be informative, but a reconstruction in three-dimensions gives a better impression. Therefore, I decided to make two scale models, one of the building when first built, the other of the building at about the time of the painting around 1885. Working to a scale of 1:78 or 4mm to the foot, many enjoyable hours were spent recreating the models of this historic building. We concluded that the building started as the section on the north-west corner, and that quite early on it was extended southwards. The extension eastwards was built later but the exact date has not been established. There was once a well outside the original building which was now inside the new extension which may have served as the pub's brewhouse.



During renovation, showing exposed timbers



First model

The first model is shown as having a tiled roof but it is quite possible that it was thatched. The pattern of wooden beams was revealed during the recent renovation, and this gave a good idea of the appearance of the north side. Because the other sides of the building have been extensively changed in the intervening centuries, the other three sides of the model had to be speculative. One can assume that the pattern of beams was similar on the south side but can only guess where the original doorways and windows were.



Second model

The second model is more ambitious, and the aim here was to replicate the appearance in three dimensions, of the building around the time of Yeend King's painting.



## The History of The Star

The first evidence of the existence of the Star comes in a survey of inns in Berkshire in 1577, where it is described as a 'Typler', and the landlord, one Thomas Greye. It is not known how long it had been in existence before that date. The pub would have served mainly the sheep drovers and others who gathered for the regular sheep fairs. It would not have provided accommodation.

The next documentary evidence comes in the will of Samuel Stanmore made in 1769. It is not known how long Samuel Stanmore senior had been landlord of the Star when he died but he left everything to his wife, Elizabeth, who unfortunately died soon after him without making a will herself. At the time of her death Elizabeth Stanmore was '*possessed of a leasehold consisting of two messuages or tenements, a malthouse, and twenty four acres and a half of land.*' We know this because a complete and detailed inventory for the premises was made, running to ten pages, listing the contents of each room, cellar and out building. [*A transcript of this inventory is printed in full in 'Time Gentlemen please' by Sue Burnay*] This fascinating document shows that one cellar held sixteen casks, the other, '*Thirty two casks... two gallons of gin, two bottles of brandy... nine bottles of rum, three stone bottles and a tobacco jar, sixty five barrels,  $\frac{3}{4}$  and six gallons of strong beer and thirty four gallons to the barrel, two thousand two hundred and forty one gallons at a barrel and a half of ale being forty two gallons.*'

The only known image of the Star, before the advent of photography, is to be found in a panoramic painting of the village in 1839. Not much can be deduced from this except that the eastward extension was in place by that time.

We have managed to collect a number of photographs of the Star from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. One particularly fine example of 1895 (right) shows the pub, on the right, completely surrounded by sheep pens



In a Sale catalogue of 1919 The Star was described as '*A freehold old-established fully licensed Inn, a brick built and tiled gabled dwelling house with bar, taproom, parlour smoking room, club room, kitchen with well, larder and 7 bedrooms.*'

In a survey of local pubs from 1965 the pub was described as follows: '*The Star*' at the top of High Street is probably the oldest of the lot, presumed to be about four hundred years old. It belongs to an Oxford brewery. They offer no night service (Bed and Breakfast), but their luncheons are well known. Harwell members often discuss their problems there over a good lunch. Villagers often take their visitors for a good meal in the cosy dining room. Saturdays no hot meals are served, but cold food is offered instead. They enjoy good local trade and entertain a lot of young people. A café is attached to the Inn and serves mainly tea, coffee and snacks to passing traffic'.

It was passing traffic which was a concern for residents of this part of the High Street at this time. The decline of the sheep fairs saw the advent of the motor car, and The Star at one time

sold petrol, but was not self-service. Your car would drive over a rubber cable, which would ring a bell inside the pub. Eventually someone would come out and serve you.

Before the building of the by-pass, motor transport, in the shape of large lorries, became the curse of people living on the High Street, and tenants were afraid to use their front rooms.

Constant accidents, including two which partly demolished the Lamb and the Wheatsheaf, within a week in 1964, finally drove the landlord of the Star away. The Newbury Weekly News reported that *'One man who can stand the strain no longer is Mr. Cyril Beckley, licensee of The Star on the other side of the road. He leaves East Ilsley today for the comparative quiet of a pub in the small Devonshire village of Starcross.*

*"During my time here I have seen 100 yards of wall and now The Lamb demolished," said Mr Beckley. "There have been 40 accidents in my 11 years as licensee, and Sunday's was the worst of the lot."*

Now that the old bowling alley has been converted to a private dwelling, and houses have been built in part of the large garden and on the former forecourt and car park, the old pub itself, has finally been converted into two dwellings. Where it was safe to do so, much of the original fabric of the building has been preserved, beneath the restoration.