
FEATURE ARTICLE

A Berkshire Ballad Upon Another Fair Maid Of The Inn

By Sarah Spink

I regularly search the website www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk for recently digitised old newspapers, especially for references to East Ilsley, and recently, came across a ballad about a Miss Brown who worked at the Swan Inn in the village. It was printed in the *Oxford University and City Herald* of 11th April, 1818.

The facsimile of the ballad, which appears at the end of this article, has been provided courtesy of www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk Image copyright the British Library Board. All rights reserved. The direct link to the image on the website is

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000990/18180411/017/0004>

The original fair maid of the Inn that the introductory verse refers to was also from Berkshire. John Mogg kept the Rose Inn at Wokingham in the early 1700s. It was frequented by Alexander Pope, John Gay, Jonathan Swift and Dr Arbuthnot. One night in 1726, while trapped at the inn by a storm, fuelled by food and wine, the men wrote a ballad about one of the landlord's daughters, Molly. However, it is believed that there was some confusion over the daughter's identity, as it was her sister, Sally, who was the more attractive and more likely the subject of their attentions.

For more information please refer to:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ballad_of_Molly_Mogg

I have not been able to discover who wrote the ballad that refers to Miss Brown of the Swan Inn at East Ilsley or when it was written, although it was clearly sometime before April 1818.

So, who could Miss Brown have been?

Abraham and Mary Brown (née Pummill) of Farnborough, Berkshire had three daughters; Hannah, born circa 1783 in Brightwalton, Elizabeth circa 1785, also in Brightwalton, and finally Mary born circa 1788 in Farnborough. There were also three brothers, John, Abraham and Thomas. Of the three girls it is known that two had links to East Ilsley.

We know for certain from Dr. Sue Burnay's research into history of the inns of East Ilsley that James Mackrell was landlord of the Swan Inn between 1802 and 1805 and that he went bankrupt in the summer of 1805. An auction of his estate was held on 14th Aug 1805. Who immediately took over the running of the inn from him is not

known but certainly meetings and auctions were being held there in the few years afterwards.

George Green Baker was the next positively identified landlord. It is believed that he married Elizabeth Brown, on 18th December 1806 at St Andrew, Holborn, London. The couple must have then moved to the village as their daughter Martha was born here on the 2nd October 1807. Mary Anne followed on the 29th May 1809 and Elizabeth on 8th November 1810. Their son George was baptised on Christmas Day 1813 at East Ilsley and by then George Snr. was described as an innkeeper. Finally, daughter Emma was born and baptised here in 1817.

The Brown sisters' father had died in April 1815, their mother in 1823 and finally in 1826, Elizabeth's husband George died on 23rd August at the relatively young age of 46 years. What he died of or how long he had been ill is unknown but his children were still young ranging in age between 9 and 19 years.

The ballad itself refers to "Miss Brown", but the newspaper has added a footnote saying "This Ballad was written some time ago. The young lady it commemorates, we understand, is lately married."

This is where the questions arise. Elizabeth Brown had married George in 1806, twelve years before the ballad was published in April 1818. However, she obviously worked at the Swan Inn alongside her husband. Both her sisters, though, married in March 1818.

Hannah married Richard Deacon, a farmer, at Chieveley, Berkshire on 5th March 1818. She could hardly be referred to as a "young lady", for she was about 35 years old!

Mary married Daniel Burden, a widower and baker from Abingdon, at East Ilsley on 13th March 1818. She was about 30 years of age. As the ballad was written "some time" before April 1818 it is plausible that Mary was "The Maid of the Inn at East Ilsley". Elizabeth may have needed help when she was heavily pregnant or looking after the children when they were babies so her younger sister may have stepped in to help behind the bar.

A further reason to believe that Mary was "The Maid" is that the readers of the *Oxford University and City Herald* are more likely to know who the ballad is about if she married a person from the circulation area, which is not the case with Hannah who moved to Sandleford on the south side of Newbury where Richard farmed.

Mary and Daniel went on to have four children: Caroline, Daniel Thomas, Jennett and Julia. Daniel died in 1847 and Mary on 4th February, 1856. She was buried in the churchyard at St Helen's, Abingdon 4 days later.

After George's untimely death, Elizabeth put a notice in the *Oxford Journal* of 9th September 1826 and amongst things stated that she was going to "carry on the

business for the benefit of herself and family, and trusts, with the assistance of her friends, and an unremitting attention on her part, to merit a continuance of their favors. N.B. Wines of the very choicest quality, well-aired Beds, neat Post Chaises, and careful Drivers."

She is shown as being the landlord of the Swan in *Pigot's Directory* of 1830; however just three years after that she died on the 8th October, 1833 at the home of Mr D. Burden in Shippon near Abingdon, presumably at her sister Mary's. She was buried at East Ilsley.

A BERKSHIRE BALLAD,
UPON
ANOTHER FAIR MAID OF THE INN.

MOTTO.

Forgotten is sweet MOLLY MOE of the ROSE,
And long ago dead is poor GAY;
Then I may be famous in ballad, who knows?
For every dog has his day.

A Berkshire Hound.

The Maid of the Inn at East Ilsley I sing;
The Maid of an Inn, but a Maid for the King:
Look over the country, look over the town,
You'll not see a Maid to compare with Miss Brown.*

Her Inn—it is elegant, sparkling the wine,
And white is the Swan that hangs out for a sign;
But ah! how these qualities all are put down
By the elegance, beauty, and charms of Miss Brown.

The wine it is sparkling—her eyes are more bright;
And white is the Swan—yet her bosom's as white;
But I say this at guess, for 'tis hid by her gown,
So modest a girl in her dress is Miss Brown.

This being the case, you may certainly swear
That hundreds have courted a Maiden so rare;
Yet I know not of one that is kill'd by her frown,
So hard are the men, or so gentle Miss Brown.

But Nature, that else is so bounteous and good,
Has denied to East Ilsley both water and wood,
That no tree to hang on, nor river to drown
May be near for the swains who despair of Miss Brown.

The young men of Oxford, if ready and fit
To display in a ballad their taste and their wit,
Would repair to East Ilsley, there stroll on the Down,
Turn shepherds, and sing to the praise of Miss Brown.

But none of those rakes will come at her, I hope,
I'd rather by half she was sent to the Pope;
So the Maid of the Inn might be lass of renown,
And Dame Buonaparte give place to Miss Brown.

But now in good earnest, all jesting apart,
(For I wish the fair damsel success from my heart)
Dismissing the Pope, and the Rake, and the Clown,
I'll sketch out a suitable match for Miss Brown.

Young, handsome, kind-hearted, and gay, let him be,
And generous, and rich, or if not, be so free,
That out of ten shillings he'll give her a crown,
Such a husband as this would I choose for Miss Brown.

* This Ballad was written some time ago. The young lady it commemorates, we understand, is lately married.