



**The Chequers  
Fish Bar & The Square Fish**

*By Danny Coorsh*

Chequers Fish bar, that we all know so well as the source of marvellous fish and chips, actually has one of the most varied histories of all the buildings in the village. The building itself is Grade II listed and dates back to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, with alterations made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of course more recently. Before being weather boarded, the first floor of the building used to be tile-hung and there was a large well in the ground floor, now blocked, which could have been the town well.



Photos courtesy of Maz

Throughout the centuries, the building was part of the lands owned by the lords of the manor<sup>1</sup> and in 1744, Thomas Best purchased the manor of Lenham. In 1778, the building was purchased by Julius Shepherd of Shepherd Neame brewery and was one of the relatively early Shepherd Neame pubs. Insurance and licensee records show that it was certainly operating as a pub, The Chequers, by at least 1789; Mary Turner was the landlady from 1789 to 1793. In March of 1801, Benjamin Groombridge took over as landlord and put an advert in the local papers “Benjamin Groombridge, having taken the Chequers Inn, in Lenham, begs leave to solicit the favours of the Gentlemen Travellers, and assures them he means to render every accommodation and attention in his power to travellers and the public in general.”



Not just a public house, The

Chequers was also an inn and a posting house where carriages stopped and changed horses on the very popular main coach route from Rye and Dover to London. Then later on, the inn was the perfect stopping off point for cars travelling to the coast from London and was also used as accommodation by commercial travellers. However, by 1915, things were not so rosy for The Chequers Inn and Shepherd Neame. A hearing was held at which the police opposed the renewal of the pub license on the grounds that there were already 10 licensed premises in Lenham Parish and that the accommodation and service provided by The Chequers, was not so different from The Dog and Bear or The Red Lion. The Shepherd Neame lawyers argued that the inn was superior and that in the last year, their turnover had been 216 barrels of beer and 164 gallons of spirits. Despite their best efforts, the lawyers lost the case and the license was not renewed.

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<sup>1</sup> See our article [https://cde37143-ed22-472c-a8f1-abc71483bfe5.filesusr.com/ugd/5cd011\\_c595d974d27a4112b5bc751c22a7f0e3.pdf](https://cde37143-ed22-472c-a8f1-abc71483bfe5.filesusr.com/ugd/5cd011_c595d974d27a4112b5bc751c22a7f0e3.pdf)

By the 1930's the building was used as a tearoom and was very popular with the many coach parties that stopped off on the way back from a trip to the coast. Later on, a pool table and pin ball machines were added, to appeal to local teenagers. At that time, the rear of the building was a coach and minibus workshop run by a Mr Bush. The fish and chip shop has been feeding happy Lenham customers since 1996 when Mr Michaelas, father of the current owner Maz, first began to trade. Here's to The Chequers, one of the most fascinating buildings in the village, with a very chequered history!