



**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 16th century, with alterations made in the 19th 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.



Throughout the centuries, the building was part of the lands owned by the lords of the manor¹ 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.

¹ See our article 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!

List of Landlords while the Chequers was in the Ownership of Shepherd Neame (kindly provided by the Brewery)

The Chequers		Lenham	Backs
Date.	Owner	Tenant	
1778	? Purchased by John Shepherd	John Sammet	
1781	John Shepherd	John Turner	
1787	"	Mary Turner	
1789	"	John Barker	
1793	"	- Westover	
1801	"	John West	
by 1803	"	John Westover	
by 1811	"	Richard Hughes	
by 1826	Henry Shepherd		
not searched			
Refer: Po / Pigots / Kellys Directories			
Census / Tithe Schedules			
by 1864		James Palmer L21	
1882		John George Palmer L2	
1887		John Palmer	
1890		John James Hughes	
1911		George Hughes	
1917 & 1918		Albert Goldsack. L	
?	Sold by SN c. 1925.		

John and Mary Turner are most ancestors of the first landlords of the 'Duke of Wellington' in Woodside Green (see our article).

A John Westover was a butcher living in the Butcher's Cottage on Faversham Road. (see Tithe Awards 1839)

Benjamin Groombridge (1801 mentioned above) farmed Ham Farm on Ham Lane which he had taken on from his father (see Deeds in Kent Archive)

John Barker, named in 1793 as landlord, witnessed together with William Shepherd in 1777 the marriage of John Payne and Susanna Davis (Parish Records entry 1422). He appears as

witness to many marriages in the record and will have had some other role on the village, possibly as Excise Officer (see our article 'The Chequers'...'What is In A Name' tab). In 1858 a Samson Baker (not Barker) appears as excise officer and landlord of the Dog and Bear. (research into families added by Henny Shotter)

