

After substantial alterations and extension the former 'White Horse' opened under new ownership as " The Wishful Thinker " with a transformational concept in the Lenham pub scene. The pub doesn't have only a wide ranging menu and guest rooms, but also attracts families with its outdoor play area and children menu. A novelty in Lenham.

The field opposite is part of Forestry England's new woodland stretching down almost to Harrietsham (see www.forestryengland.uk/pleasant-farm). The 'Wishful Thinker ' is ideally located to cater not only for families but also for the extra walkers, horse-riders and cyclists who will visit.

A brief History of the White Horse in Sandway

by Liz Meek

A notice on the wall of the pub said that this inn, "known by the name and sign of the White Horse was built in the 18th year of Charles II, in 1678". The monarchy had been restored in 1660. This was a country that was just one generation away from the turmoil of the Civil War. Charles II was known as the merry monarch, partly because his reign was such a contrast to the puritanism that had gone before. Theatres reopened, as did ale houses. The Royal Oak was a popular name from that time, because the king was said to have hidden in an oak tree when he fled the Roundheads after the Battle of Worcester. Although the white horse is the emblem of Kent, it is also the symbol of the House of Hanover, which gave us George I in 1714. There are White Horse Inns and pubs all over the country.

A major route from Dover to London ran along Lenham Heath Road. William Henry Ireland, who in 1830 published *England's Topographer, A New and Complete History of the County of Kent*, said: "On the southern part of Lenham parish, where the soil is mostly barren sand, there are several small heaths or forstalls; through this part of the parish the high road from Ashford runs over Lenham, formerly called Royton heath, and by Chilston park pales and Sandway, over Bigon-heath, towards Leeds Castle and Maidstone."

The road was the main road connecting London to the ports of Rye and Dover. Much common folk but also royalty and armies will have travelled on it.

Sandway was originally the hamlet around The White Horse, while the staggered crossroads on Headcorn Road was known as Spital Crouch¹ or Biggin Heath

In August 1778, an advertisement appeared in the Kent Gazette, announcing that the White Horse in Sandway "near Lenham, in this County" was to be sold at auction "by T Argles on Wednesday the 2nd day of September next, precisely at 3 o'clock in the afternoon".

The description is of "a freehold Estate, situate at Egerton, consisting of a Dwelling House, Farm, Stables and other Conveniences in Tenable Repair, with 13 acres of very good planted and arable land, in the occupation of Phillip Hook, tenant at will, who will shew the same".

It finishes: "The premises are very improvable, but now let at no more than £14 per annum."

A tenant at will means that there is no lease, the let can be terminated at any time by either tenant or landlord, so this is telling the buyer they don't have to take on Mr Hook as a

¹ See our article under Place Names

sitting tenant. Tenable repair puts the onus on the tenant to keep the property in a good state of repair.

Less than a year later, in June 1779, the Kentish Gazette carried another advert for the pub: “that old and well-known Inn called the White Horse at Sandway in the parish of Lenham, halfway house between Maidstone and Ashford.” This time it was to be let with ten acres of land. Those interested were to apply to Mr John Tabraham, who presumably had bought the pub the previous year and then parted company with Phillip Hook.

The ten acres includes a “large and commodious garden, well planted”, two acres of hops and “the rest good meadows”. Outbuildings include stables, a barn and a malt house with a lead cistern “which will wet seven Quarts of Barley, with a Malt Mill and everything in the most convenient manner, and room to make three hundred Quarters of Malt in this season”.

The advert continues: “The household furniture and fixtures, stock of liquor, husbandry tacking, hop poles and other articles, to be taken at a fair appraisalment.”

In the Tithe Awards of 1838 ²the White Horse is owned by James Stoddart Douglas Esq, the most prominent landowner in the area at that time who resided at Chilston Park and was Lord of the Manor of Lenham. John Collins and Edward Chambers were licensees.

In 1881, the census tells us that one Edward Barten, aged 34, lived there with his wife, Ester, also 34 and their children Stanley, 6 and Nellie, 1. Also living there were Louise Godden, aged 18, Charles White, 22, Olive Wood, 17 and Willian Ottaway, 44.

The 1901 census has a 70-year-old widow named Frances Grace as the licensee.

In September 1948, the 'White Horse' was one of two inns sold by the Chilston Estate. On September 23rd, an auction was held at The Royal Star Hotel in Maidstone. The particulars describe a “valuable agricultural and sporting estate, well-known as the Chilston Estate and consisting of 13 good farms, small holdings, two inns, accommodation land, allotments, woodlands and 14 separately let cottages”. This was the year after the death of the 2nd Viscount Chilston. The estate had been left to his second son, Eric, who may well have been forced to sell off a large chunk of it to pay the death duties, which were a hefty 75% at that time.

Lot 32 was the “fully licenced and well situated property known as "The White Horse Inn". It is described as “a fine stone gable building (circa 1830) of stone and tile, in delightful rural surroundings on a good road and about 1 mile from the centre of Lenham village”. However, we learned the old inn was demolished in 1842. In the South Eastern Gazette, from May 1842, tenders were being sought for the demolition and rebuilding of the White Horse. Plans and a specification of the proposed work were available to view at the offices of a firm of architects, Messrs Whichcord and Walker, in Maidstone.

The particulars mention that it has a “Glow Worm” boiler and its own electric light plant. The outbuildings include a brick and tile coachhouse “used as a garage”,

² Lenham Tithe award schedule - Part 1

engine room and wood lodge with loft over. There is a timber and tile cowshed used for storage, timber and corrugated iron cart shed and piggeries. There's an "excellent" garden, well stocked with fruit trees and land of 11 acres, 2 rods and 34 perches.

Many people alive today will remember the pub from the later 20th century when it was a popular place catering to coach parties and clubs who used the large function hall at the back.

By the 1990s, the pub was bang in the way of the Channel Tunnel rail link, otherwise known as HS1. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996 mentions the realignment of Boughton Road, including a bridge over the railway. The pub garden now ends at that point. The property was subject to a compulsory purchase order and the railway let it out to a number of tenants over the next few years. Some were more colourful than others.

One New Year's Eve in the early 2000s, locals were woken in the wee small hours by a running riot in the street.

This incident made big waves. Even in London where I work. When a local was interviewed over the incident, the interviewer realised and shouted out: 'You must live near Liz!'

There were periods of stability. For a few years, the Kent Kit Car Club met there on the last Sunday of the month. Their former chairman, Chris, said it suited their purposes well. "There was a private room we could meet in and the beer and food were good. The car park was large and we held an open day once a year on the field next to the pub."

But for every up there was a down. One landlord ended up in jail after selling shares in a racehorse he did not own. He also commissioned work on the pub which he did not pay for and one disgruntled builder dug out the retaining wall along the road and dumped the spoils in front of the pub's front door.

The lack of consistency was not good for business, and the White Horse shut its doors for the last time around Easter 2016.

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