

Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust

New lease of life for a Wycombe landmark



I am pleased to report that Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust has taken a long lease of 2/3 High Street, High Wycombe from Wycombe District Council. Listed Grade II the building currently comprises two shop units, only one of which is occupied, and two upper floors last used as offices and which have been empty for some time. For many years the first and second floors were the studios of photographer, Cyril Roberts. Perhaps some readers of this newsletter (like me) had their photograph taken here. Unlike most of the old buildings in the High Street, which were refronted in the 18th century, this one still has its jettied timber frame on show. The list description and Pevsner have it as 16th century but it may be older. The building poses many questions.

When was it built and what was it originally used for? We know it was the Wheatsheaf public house until 1903 when a fire almost gutted the property but not when that use began. The County Museum has trade tokens from the late 17th century bearing the Wheatsheaf symbol and the name Thomas Butterfield. So far I have been unable to find a source to verify the story that it was Mr Franklyn's coffee house around 1700. Why was it not "Georgianised" when the rest of the High Street had a face-lift? The Squires family owned the freehold towards the end of the 18th century and from them it passed, probably via marriage, into the Biddle brewery family and thence to Robert Wheeler of Wheeler's Wycombe Breweries. A succession of landlords kept the pub until the fire and newspaper reports suggest there may have been some "rum goings-on". If only walls could talk! As part of an exercise to reduce the number of pubs in the town The Wheatsheaf was due to be de-licensed anyway in 1903 and after the fire Butlers the Chemists took over the whole building, by then much altered. By the 1930s the downstairs had been split into two shops, a tobacconist and dry-cleaners, and Cyril Roberts was installed upstairs. Several different tenants followed and now only one shop is left

selling pretty hats, fascinators, costume jewellery etc.

Mike Hogan, a BAS member, and the Trust's first Project Manager did so much to help secure the property for the Trust and we were shocked and saddened by his sudden death. This only made us more determined to press ahead. The project to restore the building to a thriving concern will be a memorial to him.

The Trust's Chairman, Dr James Moir, is now managing the project and we have appointed Oxley Conservation to investigate the fabric of the building. Opening-up work has already proved interesting and we must discount our initial theory that there might have been an upper open hall. Next will be the formulation of a conservation plan and meanwhile I am continuing my historical research. Once the building has been made safe the Trust would welcome a visit by a group of BAS members. If you would be interested in such a visit please send me an email. I would also be very pleased to hear from BAS members with any reminiscences or information about the building. My email is marianjanemiller@gmail.com

Marian Miller – a Trustee of the Buckinghamshire Historic Buildings Trust