



# HISTORY OF THE LIDGATE STAR



*Thank you to John Chambers for most of the photos used in this document, which shouldn't be used without permission, and for providing extensive information about the pub in the twentieth century. Thanks also to Anthony Foreman for information about the pub in its earlier days and to Greene King for supplying some images.*

There is evidence of human occupation in the area from the Bronze Age and Roman period, with the church thought to date from the ninth century. By the time of the Domesday Book in the late eleventh century, Lidgate was an average sized village on the trade route between Clare and Exning.

In the mid-twelfth century there was a large expansion of the village, primarily a planned development with the construction of an unusual quadrangular motte and bailey castle. A market began and the town was enclosed by ditches to make the collecting of taxes more

efficient. The literary monk, John de Lydgate (1370-1451), is from the village and gained a reputation as a writer and secured the patronage of King Henry V. There is graffiti in the village church which it is thought was written by the poet.

The building which today houses the Lidgate Star dates back to the mid-sixteenth century when it was constructed as a hall house. A hall house was a property defined by its central open room which would have had a large fireplace and a timber frame with a wattle and daub infill. It's not known exactly when in the sixteenth century the building was constructed, but it was likely in the early mid part.

It's not known when they were constructed, but there are tunnels to the neighbouring house and evidence of these can still be seen from both properties as there are two blocked up doorways in the cellar of the Star.



This model made by Anthony Foreman, kindly now gifted to the pub, shows the building as it might have looked in the sixteenth century. It would have had a fire at the middle of the building and a central hall area with no upper floor. It's thought that the door was likely still in the same location as today and there would have been a corridor which went to a door at the rear.

It's not clear when the building became a pub, but it was likely to be in the 1830s. The first documentary evidence of the Star is from 1858 when the local newspaper reported that the

police apprehended an arsonist who was hiding at the pub. The main pub in the village before then was the Oak, now a private residence, which closed between the two wars.

John Parker pulled the pints at The Star with Charlotte until 1883 when he was in his seventies. He originally came from Attleton Green in Wickhambrook, the neighbouring village to Lidgate, and was a bricklayer by trade. He's buried at the bottom chapel in Wickhambrook.

It was reported in the Bury and Norwich Post that in April 1873 a coomb of barley meal was stolen from John Parker's premises. The newspaper noted that *"considering the number of people in and about the house at the time, it appears strange that the depredators could have got clean off."*

The same newspaper reported in August 1876 that a small haystack belonging to John Parker was accidentally torched by his grandson. The eight year old child was playing with lucifer matches, but the newspaper reported that fortunately Mr. Parker was insured by the Liverpool, London and Globe Office. The newspaper didn't report if the grandson got into any trouble.

John Parker was Anthony Foreman's great great grandfather and Ebenezer (Ned) from Upend was John's grandson and he moved into the Star for a short while. He ran the Old Stores and was a cattle dealer, as well as being involved with the Congregational Chapel and the Parish Council. He emigrated to Arden in Canada and returned to persuade others to emigrate to avoid poverty.

Samuel Banks, a widower from Barrow was the publican at the Star in 1891. In 1901, William Leach from Kirtling moved in with his four daughters, Margaret, Dorothy, Winifred and Florence. As well as being a publican, he was a farmer and carrier. Also living at the property was the army veteran, William Crick.

Greene King acquired the building in 1893. and they owned it until 2011. The sales documents note that there were also numerous residential properties, piggeries, stables, barns, offices and a well, most of which have been sold off since. The original sale documents are in the pub, let us know in advance if you'd like to see them

## **THE KITCATS**



In 1927, Fred and Constance (known as Connie) Kitcat moved in. Fred had been a groom at Ickworth House. The pair had met in 1919 at the Three Goats pub in Bury, which was run by Connie's mother, Malinda Loades (Connie's father had died in 1914), following Fred's demobbing from the Royal Artillery. Fred and Connie went on to run the Prince of Wales at Glemsford as well as the Star, originally retiring to Kirby Cross before moving back to Bury St Edmunds. They celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary in 1981 and received a letter from the Queen.

Connie's mother retired from running the Three Goats in 1930 and moved in with Fred and Connie. Malinda had a remarkable connection with the licensed trade as not only was her daughter the landlady at the Star, but her son Lionel Loades had managed the White Lion in Bury St. Edmunds, her son Charles Loades had managed the Queen's Head in Bury St. Edmunds and her daughter J. Harrison was the landlady at the Lion in Alpheton.

## **THE CHAMBERS**

Albert Chambers and his wife took over in October 1956 and they stayed until 1977. John Chambers, the son of Albert, remembers the pub from this time and he has supplied us with invaluable information about the building's history. There was a large renovation to the premises in the 1950s which saw substantial changes to the layout.



This is the handover day at the Star from October 1956. From left to right, a relative of Connie Kitcat, Albert Chambers, Joyce Chambers, June Chambers, Fred Kitcat, Sheila Chambers, Connie Kitcat and John Chambers.

One of the most practical improvements in this period was the introduction of running water, which the Star hadn't previously had. There was a small building at the rear, which is where the current kitchens are, that formerly housed external toilets that had to be cleared out by hand and the contents moved to the celery trench.



There is some evidence of the former male toilets at the old stables at the rear of the property. The fittings for the urinals are still visible on the brick wall and the cubicle can be seen with its green wall.

The bar of the Star used to be located above where the cellar hatch is now, there's a notch in the supporting pillar which is where the bar used to come across. The rear wall of the pub was partly removed, and the supports for this are still visible above the bar, and the bar was then placed in its current location.





A photo of how the former saloon area (the room by the corridor to the current toilet) looked after the renovation in the 1950s. One of these tables is still in the bar billiards room. What is now the bar billiards room used to extend further back and there was a hatch at the rear of this room that could also be seen from where the bar used to be located.



Albert Chambers and Joyce Chambers, behind the newly refurbished bar.



The pub in 1955, before the renovations.





The pub in 1965, after the renovations.

Until the renovation, there was no food served other than Smiths crisps with a little pinch of salt in blue paper. John Chambers remembers:

*"After the alterations we had a toasted sandwich machine with a bain-marie soup warmer on top. This was popular with passing horse racing traffic. My mother Joyce would make meals to order in particular for the executive from W.D&H.O Wills & his accountant whose favourite was steak & kidney pie."*

John also remembers the opening hours at the time, which in 1956 were from 10:00 until 14:00 and from 18:00 until 22:30 on weekdays, from 10:00 until 14:00 and from 18:00 until 23:00 on Saturdays and from 10:00 until 14:00 and from 18:00 until 22:00 on Sundays. The village policeman, PC Horsburgh, would stand outside the entrance to Pippin Park, opposite the pub, to ensure no lock-ins took place.

There was a jug and bottle (takeaway) hatch which could be seen from where the old bar was located. This corridor is no longer there; it's now the location for the stairs to the first floor.





Sadly no longer at the pub is this wonderful model house which was made by Albert Chambers. He told the Newmarket Journal in 1973 that it had taken him five months to create and that it perched on the gateway beside the pub (which now leads into something of a hidden garden and is where goats were kept in 2023) being taken down every winter for a fresh coat of paint. It was entirely made of wood other than for the metal piping and guttering, with the model being so realistic that water flowed through these. He told the Journal:

*"The idea to build it just came to me. It is not based on any house - I designed it myself. Mind you, if I had the money this would be my dream home."*



Albert Chambers behind the bar. The wooden shelving in the photos is still present and the location of the bar snacks hasn't moved!

### **THE STONES AND JOHN WARD**

In 1977, John and Pat Stone arrived and this was the advent of more meals being served and the pub's entry into the CAMRA Good Pub Food Guide. The local newspaper records that customers could have a Mature Cheddar Cheese Ploughman's for £2.70 or the seafood special of tiger prawns, cockles, mussels and smoked mackerel on a bed of salad for £5.





There was great excitement with bar billiards and darts at this time (the bar billiards introduction was an idea of John Chambers), with most local pubs having a table and dartboard. The above photo is from July 1978 when twelve regulars from the Star took part in an attempt to get into the Guinness Book of Records for the most points scored in 24 hours. They managed to score a total of 172,800 points between them, with the Star of the Star being Michael Bennett who scored 23,490 points. In the photo above are David Grant, Michael Bennett, Alan Baker, John Stone and Peter Ollington.



The Star darts team back in 1973 when playing in the Stradishall league when the Chambers were still at the pub. The local newspapers named those in the photo are (back row, left to right) M. Mendham, R. Eley and F. Gage and (front row, left to right) E. Smith, A. Fidler (the captain), Albert Chambers and I. Buttle. However, a couple of these names might not have been correctly reported by the journalist at the time.

The local newspaper reported in 1975 about the success of the Star's bar billiards team, winning all of their games in the season. Opponents that year included Bridge Street, the Newmarket British Legion, the Plumbers, the Chippenham Tharp, the Snailwell George, the Hundon Crown, the Lawshall Swan, the Bury SN and the Blackbirds.





A large barn at the rear of the building was demolished at around this time. A sturdy building, its demolition was a loss but it was at a time when Greene King was looking to gain money from the sale of some of the pub's land. The lodges are now located on the site of where the barn previously stood.



The old track that went to the barn. This is now the route of the path to the play area in the neighbouring field.

Following the Stones, John Ward was briefly the landlord. He died at the Star and is buried in the village graveyard.

## THE SPANISH RESTAURANT



Toni and Teri Axon (above with the Two Julians in 2024) moved in during the 1990s and turned the Star into a Spanish restaurant, where it obtained a national reputation for its tapas food and atmosphere. A number of celebrities visited during this period, including David Cameron and Prince Harry.

## NEW OWNERS

The pub was sold in 2011 to a group of villagers and they kept the pub until 2022 when it was acquired by Outdoor Inns who have two lodges at the pub. The landlord at the time was Alex Hastie. The Two Julians (Swainson and White) took over the pub in late 2023, during a period when the pub was expanded to add a new toilet and cold room. The stairs to the



cellar were reinstated and a door opened up into the new cold room, which was formerly the corridor to the female toilets. The pub re-entered the Good Beer Guide in 2024.