

## **Tragic happenings at The Old Star**

### **By Paul Hurley**

In 1871 a beerhouse was opened in Swanlow Lane, Winsford opposite the School Lane junction. There were few dwellings in that location at the time and the few that existed clustered around the imposing vicarage, home to the Vicar of St Chads, the ancient church at the back of the pub.

The pub was named the Star Inn, the reason for the name is lost in the mist of time. When opened originally the premises were owned by the Cross family of Sandiway and the first licensee was a John Prince.

At the side of the pub, a track led to St Chads Church which at the time boasted its own pub, The Bell, now a day nursery.

Like all old buildings, the Star had its fair share of tragedy, some that we know of - some that, like the meaning of its name, is lost in time.

In 1892 the mantle of licensee was placed upon the shoulders of Joseph Fletcher. It is his name that adorns the board at the front of the pub in one of the oldest photographs taken of it. Joseph was a married man and lived at the pub with his wife Elizabeth and whilst there, they started to raise a family. The life of a licensee caring for a pub in a quiet part of Over was not too difficult; the pub was a happy one and catered for farmers from the area and people from the cottages along the lane. There would also be a steady trickle of passing trade coming from the road to Nantwich that passed the front door. But as time went by Joseph became less and less happy with the cards that fate had dealt him.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1913, after 21 years at the helm, Joseph tied one end of a scarf around the cast iron bed post and the other end around his neck committing suicide.

His young son Harry found him and tried to cut him down with a knife, the knife was blunt however and he had to seek his mothers help. By then it was too late to save Joseph and Elizabeth was left alone to care for Harry. The family remained at the pub and Elizabeth took over the licence, it wasn't long however before she re-married and with her new husband remained at the Star.

The spectre of tragedy however had not left the Star with the death of Joseph. Not long after the birth of Nancy, Elizabeth fell down the cellar steps causing a serious head injury from which she died in hospital a short time later. Amanda Charlesworth took over the pub in 1923 and remained as licensee until 1969. Frederick Kendrick then took over and decided upon a name change out went the Star Inn and in came The Old Star, the name that it trades under today.

There were no more long term incumbents like the Charlesworths, the tenancy changed hands every few years until the present Licensees took over. Deborah Capper and her partner Mark Massey arrived in August 2002 with their children Chelsea and Ashley aged 11 and 13 years. Both Debs and Mark were new to the licensing trade and they were going to make the pub their own. But the old building still had some shocks in store, shocks that still go unexplained!

It had been an ordinary night in October 2002; they had been there for two months and were settling in and getting to know the regulars. When the last of them said goodnight and headed for home around midnight, Debs and Mark set about tidying up and washing the glasses. They never liked coming down to a mess and preferred to clean up before going to bed. Some time after 1am they went up to the private quarters and checked to see that the children were sleeping soundly in their beds. Debs made cups of coffee in the kitchen and Mark turned out the day's takings on to the table to cash it up.

This was just a routine job, something that they had got used to doing in the early hours. Mark was sitting with his back to the open door that leads out onto the landing and as he looked up from the piles of loose change, the look on Debs's face sent a cold shiver through him. This sensation was both physical and mental, physical because the room had suddenly gone very cold and mental because the look on Debs's face was one of sheer terror. In all the time that they had been together, he had never seen her like that before. Slowly she started to speak.

'Please Mark; tell me that Ashley has just walked along the landing to go to the toilet.'

Mark had heard nothing, but could see that Debs was very frightened. Resisting the impulse to panic, he walked out on to the even colder landing and went to Ashley's bedroom, his son was fast asleep. Returning to the kitchen, he saw that, she had not moved, standing behind her he put his hands on her shoulders feeling the rigidity in her body.

'You're scaring me Debs, what is it?'

Her reply came out hesitatingly, 'a boy, a young boy, younger and smaller than Ashley has just walked along the landing. I saw him clearly; he was dressed in a floor length old fashioned night shirt.' Slowly she turned to Mark 'I've never believed in ghosts, I thought it was all rubbish, but I think I just saw one!' Again the hairs stood up on the back of his neck, although he had not seen anything, he had felt the sudden drop in temperature and he believed her.

Mark made a full search of the building, but all was in order. When he returned, Debs told him that the boy had collar length dark hair that covered most of his face. She also said that she did not feel threatened at all and they both noticed that the temperature in the kitchen had returned to normal.

**Has a child fitting that description died in the building? It wasn't young Harry who tried to save his father; he died of old age in America. Is there another secret that the Star Inn or The Old Star is keeping to itself, at least for the time being!**

**Words 1.083**

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