



White Hart

Hotel, Eatery & Coffee House

A BRIEF HISTORY

BY WILL SWALES



WELCOME

Welcome to a brief history of The White Hart Hotel, Boston, Lincolnshire. During the late spring and early summer of 2016 we had the good fortune to be able to revitalise and refurbish one of our fabulous sister inns, The King's Head in Richmond, North Yorkshire.

During the planning stage of this project we started to look hard at the building and its many historical attributes, at how some parts of the building had been added during its 300 years of existence. And whilst contemplating the small changes and additions we wanted to make, it dawned on me that we will only be its custodians for a generation or two at most. I can't foretell who will follow but started thinking about who had been its keepers in the past.

Therefore, we asked a good friend if he would research The King's Head and try to separate the fact from the fable; what's true and what has been elaborated during the storytelling process over the years.

Will Swales made such a good job of The King's Head that we then asked him to complete the same task for The White Hart Hotel.

What follows is that research. We think it's as accurate as can be, but naturally there are many gaps and we would welcome any additional information.

I hope you enjoy this small booklet and the hospitality and service we provide within The White Hart Hotel. We are now busy researching the other inns we own and operate within our group and hope that eventually we will have all our inns within one publication, but until then please feel free to take this copy with you.

Kevin Charity
Managing Director
The Coaching Inn Group

www.coachinginngroup.co.uk





**“THE WHITE HART WAS PLACED
AT THE CENTRE OF A VICIOUS
POLITICAL TUG OF WAR.”**



GEORGIAN BOSTON'S BOOMING ECONOMY...



Fydell House, South Square, Boston.

The White Hart Hotel, at the end of High Street, Boston, Lincolnshire, is on the west bank of the River Witham, just beyond the point where the road turns sharply to cross the Town Bridge. To the side and around the back of the hotel runs Stanbow Lane, which was first recorded in 1220. The earliest history of the hotel is unknown. Of its two main buildings, the one facing the river is the oldest, and is said by Historic England to date from the mid-1700s.

At that time it was called The Unicorn and was a smaller and plainer-looking building than today. The first we know of The Unicorn is in 1786, when it was run by Thomas and Rebecca Borkwood. It was a time of a booming economy for the sea-port town, brought about by the recent construction of good-quality turnpike roads and improvements to the river, including the erection of the Grand Sluice to the north of the town. The sluice prevented high tides flooding the fens, which were then drained to create thousands of acres of new arable land.

This in turn stimulated a huge, new trade for Boston in the shipment of grain. The increase in shipping attracted more industries, leading to an upward spiral of jobs and wealth. Thomas and Rebecca Borkwood must have enjoyed the commercial benefits of this growth during their twilight years. Thomas died in April 1788 and Rebecca, who briefly carried on running the inn alone, died in August 1789.

Local historians have said that in 1788 the freehold of the Unicorn was bought by Thomas Fydell (1740 – 1812). He was a wealthy merchant from an esteemed Boston family and had extensive property holdings throughout the town. Thomas lived in South Square at the magnificent Fydell House, which is now owned and maintained by Boston Preservation Trust. He was a long-standing member of Boston Corporation, three times the mayor, a deputy recorder, and a receiver of land tax.

...AND ITS DEEPLY CORRUPT POLITICS

In 1790 Thomas Fydell was elected as one of the two MPs for Boston, and was re-elected twice afterwards.

Near-contemporary reports stated that Boston electors were openly bribed for their votes, and election crowds frequently turned into riotous and violent mobs. Efforts were made to clean up politics nationwide, and so immediately after Fydell's third victory in 1802 his opponent lodged a petition against the result.

A House of Commons committee found Fydell guilty of corrupt election practices, unseated him, and debarred him from standing at the re-run in 1803. So he got his son, Thomas Fydell junior, to stand in his place. He won, and kept the seat warm for his father who regained it at the next general election in 1806.

"A House of Commons committee found Fydell guilty of corrupt election practices..."



The White Hart buildings are to the right of the tree, which obscures the narrow Stanbow Lane. On the left of the lane and the tree is the old bank, which played a fascinating part in the history of The White Hart.

NEW TENANT, NEW TOWN PLAN, NEW OPPORTUNITIES

"...its wooden structure was sagging under the weight of increasing traffic."

Early in 1802 John Curtis, aged 27, took over as the tenant innkeeper at The Unicorn. He was previously a shoemaker, who had learned his trade in the town from his father. It was an exciting time for him and his wife Ann to take over because The Unicorn was about to enjoy the significant benefits of a major urban redevelopment project.

The Town Bridge, at that time located almost in front of the inn, was 60 years old. According to one drawing of the period, its wooden structure was sagging under the weight of increasing traffic. So it was to be replaced with an iron bridge. The new structure would be on the downstream side of the existing one, a little farther away from The Unicorn, thus leaving the High Street approach to the old bridge, a space known as Bridge Foot, as an effectively private area in front of the inn. It would be ideal for coaches and commercial wagons waiting and turning.

Connected to the plan, a new road was to be built linking West Street with High Street, taking out an otherwise tight corner into High Street for traffic heading for the new bridge. The new road was to be created by cutting through the 50-metre-long yard of The White Hart Inn, which had its frontage on High Street, about 50 metres along from The Unicorn. The new road would involve the closure and demolition of The White Hart, which was one of the oldest and most important inns in Boston, dating back to at least the 1550s.



The sagging Town Bridge, looking downstream, circa 1800. The Unicorn Inn was out of view to the right. The drawing is by G F Sargent, and appeared in the 1856 book 'The history and antiquities of Boston', by Pishey Thompson.

NEW LINK ROAD PROMPTS REBUILDING OF THE UNICORN

The White Hart was owned by Thomas Fydell, who would have seen its demise as a small loss compared to the commercial benefits to the town as a whole, and the opportunity it presented him to make improvements at The Unicorn.

Work on the link-road scheme got underway early in 1802, and by November that year, John Curtis was able to announce in the press that 'in consequence of The White Hart being shut up' he had made 'material additions' to The Unicorn. The extent of these additions isn't known. However, it seems to have been an early stage in a substantial rebuilding of The Unicorn that would include a new façade in the style of the period, although not yet the style seen today.

It would take another five years for the new bridge to be formally opened. Notwithstanding the apparently exciting commercial opportunities this might provide for the tenant innkeeper of The Unicorn, it was soon apparent that things weren't working out for John Curtis. By March 1804 he gave it up and went to work for Boston Borough Corporation as the beadle and constable.

The new tenant innkeeper at The Unicorn from April 1804 was Robert Borkwood, probably a relative of Thomas and Rebecca Borkwood who ran the inn during the 1780s. Robert and his wife Mary were in their 30s, and moved from The Three Crowns in Wide Bargate in Boston.

"... he gave it up
and went to work
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THE NEW WHITE HART AND A COACHING ENTREPRENEUR

"The change of name... was timed to coincide with the rebuilding, symbolising the re-creation of the former White Hart on this new site."

The rebuilding of The Unicorn during the previous two years appears to have been completed by June 1804, from which date all press advertisements about events at the inn used its new name – The White Hart.

The change of name happened apparently without ceremony or formal announcement, but nonetheless it seems logical to conclude that it was timed to coincide with the rebuilding, symbolising the re-creation of the former White Hart on this new site.

Two years later, in April 1806, innkeeper Robert Borkwood entered the coaching trade by launching a new service, the Boston and Stamford Telegraph. It ran from The White Hart to an inn at Stamford on the Great North Road, linking with services to London. He operated it in partnership with two others, presumably innkeepers at towns along the route. By July the service was extended all the way to London.

Soon afterwards, in July 1806, it was announced in the press that the freehold of The White Hart was to be sold by auction. It was described as 'a capital and commodious inn, lately erected, situate very near the New Bridge, late known as The Unicorn and now The White Hart, with chaise-houses, stables, and suitable buildings and conveniences, in the tenure of Robert Borkwood.' It looks as though the owner, Thomas Fydell, aimed to realise a return on his investment. The outcome of the auction is not known.

In August 1806 Robert Borkwood announced that he had procured 'from the first manufactory some extremely handsome and commodious new post-chaises,' which he declared would 'enable him to execute the posting business in a style rarely equalled.' These were the taxis of their day, being lightweight carriages with two horses, which were hired out with a postilion driver.

From September 1806, a partnership of Messrs Borkwood, Butt, Fagg and Co. advertised the launch of a new three-days-a-week coach service between Boston and London. It was called the Admiral Nelson in honour of the hero of the Battle of Trafalgar just under a year earlier.

COACH OPERATOR AND PUBLICAN WORK TOGETHER

The new Town Bridge opened in May 1807. In July that year Robert Borkwood secured a joint contract with the innkeeper of The Peacock Inn, in Market Place on the other side of the new bridge, to run a daily Royal Mail Coach between Boston and London.

Borkwood was one of five innkeeper partners behind another new coach service, the Lord Nelson, which was launched in March 1809 to run between Boston and Nottingham.

The next month he quit The White Hart, but continued to operate his coaches from there. He took on The George Inn at Spalding, where he appears to have installed a business partner as innkeeper so that he could focus mainly on developing his coaching business.

The replacement tenant innkeeper at The White Hart was Charles Plummer, who moved there after 16 years running The Anchor Inn at Freiston Shore, a sea-bathing resort four miles east of Boston. He was in his 40s and his wife Elizabeth was in her 30s. They had many children, but a few died young and so it's not clear how many were with them in 1809. Plummer and Borkwood would become close associates; their two businesses effectively promoting each other.



The iron Town Bridge, which opened in 1807, looking downstream. A three-storey building adjoining The White Hart is seen on the right, abutting the river wall. The undated drawing is by J S Prout, and appeared in the 1856 book 'The history and antiquities of Boston', by Pishey Thompson.

CONSIDERABLE ADDITIONS AT THE WHITE HART

The identity of the owner of The White Hart in 1809 isn't known for certain, but it seems likely that it had been acquired by another of Boston's most distinguished and wealthy citizens – Samuel Barnard.

He was a shipping merchant, brewer, multiple inn owner, and banker, as well as a leading proponent of the Radical Movement, which promoted electoral reform. He and his family were also staunch supporters of the Baptist Church.

Investment continued at The White Hart. In June 1810 Charles Plummer announced in the press that since taking over the inn there had been: 'considerable additions... in sitting rooms, bedrooms, and stabling.' It's possible that these additional rooms were freed-up by Charles Plummer and his family moving out of the inn and taking up residence in a three-storey house, which was attached to the inn, almost at right-angles to it, with its east end abutting the river wall.

The date of this building, which encloses the area in front of the inn, is unknown. All we can say is that it was smaller than that seen today and its façade much simpler. It was definitely present in 1811 when it appeared on a harbour plan of that year; and it can be seen on a drawing, known to date before 1812, which shows a view from the Market Place across the new iron bridge to The White Hart in the distance.



View from Market Place, dated between 1807 and 1812, looking across the new Town Bridge to the distant White Hart with its adjoining house at a right-angle. The drawing is by W H Prior, and appeared in the 1856 book 'The history and antiquities of Boston', by Pishey Thompson.

BARNARD BANKRUPTCY SCANDALISES THE TOWN

Samuel Barnard died in the summer of 1810, aged 58. His eldest son, Samuel, seems to have inherited the shipping and trading business, while the second son, William, and his younger brothers seem to have inherited the bank, the brewery, and the inns, which almost certainly by this time included The White Hart.

All might have appeared well for the heirs at first, but by 1812 the winding down of the war against Napoleon was accompanied by a slump in the price of grain and manufactured goods. Wages fell, workers were laid off, and the UK economy fell into a recession that would last for 10 years. Press advertisements show that Robert Borkwood was forced to slash his coach fares from The White Hart. The poorest were hit the hardest, forcing many into starvation and crime. And even the rich were not immune.

On Monday 27 June 1814, William Barnard stopped payments from his bank. The shock forced a run on another Boston Bank, Sheath's, which stopped payments two days later. Four other Boston banks survived, but there was a general air of panic. It was reported that the failures were due mainly to 'unfortunate speculations in grain.' For the Barnard family, the position was catastrophic. Within a few days they put all their businesses into bankruptcy proceedings.

The so-called Barnard Bankruptcy was a great scandal in the town. Several creditors meetings were held at The White Hart, and by December 1814 there was a three-day auction at the inn of the first tranche of the family's commercial real estate. Lots included a brewery in High Street, The White Hart itself, 17 other inns in Boston, 15 inns in neighbouring villages and towns, an 83-acre farm, and various other pieces of agricultural land. Much went unsold and was offered again January 1815. Either then or shortly afterwards The White Hart was purchased by its tenant, Charles Plummer, presumably at a bargain price.

Charles Plummer and his daughter Ann Pepper would between them own and run The White Hart from 1815 to 1850, after which Ann Pepper retired from the trade and installed a tenant called Joseph Challans. During his long tenure, The White Hart maintained its growing reputation and attracted wealthy patronage. For example, Boston Yacht Club established its headquarters there in 1854, and had about 100 members at its monthly meetings.

"The poorest were hit the hardest, forcing many into starvation and crime."



BECOMING THE TOWN'S LIBERAL-PARTY HOUSE...



Statue of Herbert Ingram in the churchyard of St Botolph's Church near Market Place. He is depicted leaning on two bound volumes of *The Illustrated London News*, and at the base of the plinth is a water nymph symbolising his role in bringing piped water to the town.

Since the time of Samuel Barnard's ownership, The White Hart had become the favourite inn for meetings of the Radical Movement in Boston.

It was the campaign headquarters of the Radical John Wilks, a London-based solicitor who won one of the two Boston parliamentary seats at four general elections held between 1830 and 1835, and of another London-based Radical, James Duke, who served the town as an MP for 12 years from 1837. As the Radicals evolved into the Liberal Party, Boston electors generally returned one Liberal (known locally as the Blues) and one Conservative (the Tories) to represent the borough's two seats.

At a bi-election in 1856 the successful Liberal candidate, who naturally established his campaign headquarters at The White Hart, was a local hero, Herbert Ingram. The son of a Boston butcher, he trained as a printer, became an entrepreneur, and in 1842 launched a hugely successful newspaper, *The Illustrated London News*. Ingram lived at Rickmansworth in Hertfordshire but didn't forsake his home town of Boston.

In 1846 he founded the Boston Waterworks Company, which brought the first piped water to the town. He was instrumental in a major restoration of St Botolph's Church, he gave generously to local charities, and he was chairman of the company that built a new railway line from Boston to Sleaford and Grantham. He was re-elected an MP for Boston at the general election in 1857, and again in 1859, when his popularity ensured that both the Boston seats were won by the Liberals.

He died tragically in 1860. He and his eldest son were among 300 ship's passengers drowned in Lake Michigan in America after their vessel collided with another and sank. His body was repatriated for burial in Boston. Within weeks of his death the corporation commissioned a grand monument and statue to be erected in his honour, and launched a public subscription to pay for it.

After the loss of an MP with such a strong personal following, it was no surprise in 1860 when the vacant Boston seat went to a Conservative, thus returning the town to its traditional political balance. The Tories sought many ways to capitalise on their resurgence. In one initiative The White Hart was placed at the centre of a vicious political tug of war.

...UNTIL BEING OCCUPIED BY THE TORY PARTY

The High Street property next to The White Hart, on the other side of Stanbow Lane, was bought in 1863 by one of Boston's leading banks, the second oldest in the town, Messrs Gee, Wise and Gee. Its partners were leading backers of the town's Conservative Party. They redeveloped their new building as a sumptuous head office and bank, with a grand, ornate façade. It was completed and opened in 1864.

At around this time, Ann Pepper, owner of The White Hart, moved to live with her daughter in Hackney, East London, leaving the three-storey house adjoining the front of the inn vacant. She let the ground floor to the Boston Waterworks Company for their head office, and in 1868, in a move that seems to have been a careless snub to the Liberals, she let the upper floors to the Boston Conservative Association for use as a club and reading room. Events to follow suggest that this was the first stage of a cunning political plan by Messrs Gee, Wise and Gee.



The newly erected bank of Messrs Gee, Wise and Gee seen next door to The White Hart Inn, still run by tenant innkeeper Joseph Challans. The date of the photograph must be between 1864 and 1878. Note the simple Georgian façade of the inn and the smaller house attached.

TORY TAKEOVER PLAN...



Lincolnshire Chronicle 28 May 1869. Introduction to the prospectus by Conservative Rooms and Music Hall Ltd.
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In a move that was perhaps designed to further embarrass the Liberals, the bankers Messrs Gee, Wise and Gee formed a company for the purpose of buying the freehold of The White Hart, and bringing it under the absolute control of the Conservative party.

The new company was called Conservative Rooms and Music Hall Ltd., and in 1869 it published a prospectus with a call for shareholders to invest a total of £4,000 to fund the project.

The proposers stated publicly that under the scheme the inn would continue to trade as normal with Joseph Challans as tenant, but the former adjoining house would be developed as a new facility for public and private entertainment. They lamented the inadequacy of the existing public rooms in the town for their lack of 'ready access, ventilation, cleanliness, acoustic qualities and general completeness,' which had 'marred the enjoyment sought from the best entertainments.'

They expressed the aim: 'to raise an edifice which shall be an ornament to the town, with a suite of rooms for the Conservative Club and to build for the public use a spacious hall equally adapted for banquets, concerts, theatrical entertainments, bazaars etc.' The Conservative Club would be tenants of the company, and the ground floor would continue to be let for offices. The combined rental income from the entire complex would provide a good return for investors.

The company was made to wait for its opportunity to buy The White Hart. It eventually came on 1 March 1872 with the death in Hackney of the owner, Ann Pepper, aged 75. By the end of April her executors announced in the press that The White Hart and all its associated buildings and land would be sold by auction sometime in May, unless previously sold by private contract. Everything was in place for the Conservatives to make their move.

...THWARTED BY MRS INGRAM

A newspaper report on 17 May 1872 revealed that the Tory plan to acquire The White Hart had been thwarted at the last minute.

It reported the shock news that the entire lot had been purchased for £2,500 by an agent acting for Mrs Ann Ingram, widow of the town's former Liberal MP and now herself the wealthy proprietor of The Illustrated London News.

The article continued: 'The Conservative Club were not a little disconcerted when the circumstances were made public. It is said that some of their party had bid £2,300 for the property and that they had "no idea Mrs Ingram had her eye on it!" The Conservatives, accepting Mrs Ingram's purchase as a "notice to quit" have lost no time in making provision for quarters elsewhere.'

Immediately after securing The White Hart, Mrs Ingram announced that in celebration of the marriage of her daughter Annie, which had taken place on 17 April at Walton-on-Thames, a gift of a thousand bags of coal would be distributed to the residents of Boston. In mid-June, to no-one's surprise, William Ingram, 24, by now joint owner of the Illustrated London News with his brother and mother, announced his candidacy for the Boston constituency. Shortly afterwards Ann Ingram signed The White Hart over to him.

A general election was finally called for 5 March 1874. Surprisingly the Liberal Association in Boston remained at its base at The Lord Nelson in High Street. Nonetheless, The White Hart was again an important venue for the party during the campaign, which turned out to be dirty in more ways than one.



William Ingram. A photograph from his family's publication The Illustrated London News.
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ELECTION DIRTY TRICKS

"A crowd estimated at 5,000 cheered more than 500 Liberals as they processed along High Street..."

By the time of the general election in March 1874, Ann Ingram's largesse in distributing free coal had become an annual event.

In response, the Conservatives, bankrolled by Messrs Gee, Wise and Gee, tamely offered the townfolk half-price coal, which prompted William Ingram's Liberal running mate for the second seat, Thomas Parry, to distribute 2,300 bags of free coal, which became known as 'blue coal'.

The Liberal candidates won both seats, but the ousted Conservative from one of the seats lodged an immediate petition alleging that both Ingram and Parry were guilty of corruption.

LIBERALS TRIUMPHANTLY RECLAIM THE WHITE HART...

Before the trial of the 1874 election petition could be held, the Liberals set up a great show of strength and defiance when on 11 April they formally transferred their club rooms from The Lord Nelson to The White Hart.

According to the Stamford Mercury, a crowd estimated at 5,000 cheered more than 500 Liberals as they processed along High Street from the old rooms to the new, with a band playing, and flags and banners flying.

The news report stated that in a public address to the crowds at Bridge Foot, made from a first-floor window of the new club-room, a Liberal councillor congratulated the party on taking possession of the premises: 'on which their forefathers had laid plans which have resulted in repeated victories for the Old Blue Cause.' The procession then walked through the Market Place, around Bargate, and returned to The White Hart. The report concluded with the comment that: 'The whole affair appears to have vexed the soul of the Tory Party sorely.'

...BUT MP UNSEATED

Later in the year, the judge in the trial of the election petition ordered that Liberal MP Thomas Parry was not fairly elected and declared him unseated.

Judgment against White Hart owner William Ingram was reserved pending consideration of a point of law. The judge also expressed his opinion that there had been widespread corruption on both sides, which Parliament should examine further.

WHILE TORY BANKERS GO BUST

Any joy among the Conservatives at this result was short-lived when on the same day news started to circulate that the party's bankers, and White Hart neighbours, Messrs Gee, Wise and Gee had gone bust.

A press report noted the extraordinary timing of the news given the role supposedly played by one of the partners in raising the election petition.

The cause of the collapse was the failure of a major corn dealer. Crowds of angry depositors gathered at the Bridge Foot bank in the hope of withdrawing their savings, but were refused. On the next day they found the doors closed as the bank had filed for bankruptcy. Within a few days the receivers sold the premises to the Lincoln and Lindsey Bank, which opened its new branch there on 17 June 1874.



Lincolnshire Chronicle 5 June 1874.

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BRIBERY COMMISSION PROBES THE WHITE HART



The White Hart's bar today.

Later in 1874, the petitioning Conservative candidate in the election was awarded the second Boston seat in Parliament by default. **William Ingram was exonerated from all accusations of corruption, but this was far from the end of the scandal.**

On the recommendation of the judge at the election petition trial, a Royal Commission of Inquiry into corrupt practices at the 1874 Boston election was opened on 21 August 1875. Hearings and deliberations went on for seven months.

The White Hart was among several inns that came under suspicion as a place of alleged 'treating' of voters with free food and drink. Innkeeper Joseph Challans was examined and was required to show his books, but seemed to satisfy the inquiry that no electors had enjoyed favours at his inn from the pockets of either Ingram or Parry, or any of their agents.

In April 1876 the final report exonerated the Conservatives, although noted that the senior clerk at the bank of Gee, Wise and Gee had used his position to advance money for illegal payments. Five Liberal members of Boston Corporation, including the mayor, were 'scheduled' for alleged bribery, and a sixth man was scheduled for treating. However, the Attorney General subsequently decided that there was insufficient evidence to warrant any prosecutions.

LIBERAL CLUB REBUILT AND A NEW FACE FOR THE INN

In 1878 William Ingram invested in a major redevelopment of his property at The White Hart. The Georgian façade of the inn was modernised, but the major project was the rebuilding of the Liberal Club, which was officially opened on 5 August 1878.

It isn't known whether the work followed exactly the abandoned plans of the Conservatives, but it must have been at least similar. The former adjoining house was rebuilt from the first floor upwards, creating a high-ceilinged grand hall, and thus raising the full height of the three-storey building above that of the inn.

The decorative stucco work on the front elevation was described by the eminent architectural historian and critic Nikolaus Pevsner as 'part Italianate, in a robust Victorian classicism.' It features both Corinthian and Doric pilasters, and is topped off with a roof-line balustrade, which was also added to the inn.

"...rebuilt from the first floor upwards, creating a high-ceilinged grand hall..."



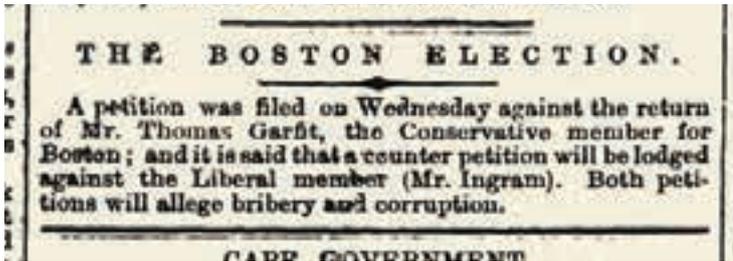
Results of the 1878 rebuilding of the Liberal Club and facelift of The White Hart. Note the first-floor balcony on the Liberal Club.

WILLIAM INGRAM IS UNSEATED FOR CORRUPT PRACTICES

"...Boston remained unrepresented in Parliament for five years until the next general election..."

At the central first-floor window of the lavish new Liberal Club, William Ingram installed a balcony, which is still in place, from where he must have addressed election crowds gathered at Bridge Foot.

Such events would certainly have happened during the campaign for the general election of April 1880. This was another unpleasant and hostile contest in which Ingram retained his seat while a Conservative was elected as the borough's second MP. However, immediately afterwards both parties lodged petitions accusing their opponents of bribery and corruption. At the subsequent trials of both petitions, the judge found evidence of widespread malpractice, and so he unseated both the MPs.



Lincolnshire Chronicle 5 June 1874.
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www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

There followed another Royal Commission of Inquiry into bribery allegations. One witness said that at Boston elections: 'money had always been flying about', and the only distinction between the parties was that the Liberals' bribery was subtle, whereas that on the part of the Conservatives was 'ridiculously open.' Representatives of both parties were on the list of 95 men who were 'scheduled' by the commission for corruption. William Ingram escaped, but the list included

the unsuccessful Conservative candidate, seven Boston magistrates, and 11 of the 24 members of Boston Corporation. The Attorney General prosecuted only seven of them, on various charges of bribery, corruption and perjury. All but one was acquitted at trial.

The government was less forgiving. The Corrupt Practices (Suspension of Elections) Act of 1881 decreed that there would be no re-run of elections at Boston, which would simply not have any MPs. The period of the ban was extended in 1882 and again in 1883, so that in the end Boston remained unrepresented in Parliament for five years until the next general election of November 1885.

LIBERALS MOVE OUT AND THE WHITE HART CHANGES HANDS

From 1885 to 1895 William Ingram, owner of The White Hart, fought four more general elections in Boston, all conducted fairly and without controversy. He won the now-single seat twice and lost it twice.

He was made a baronet in the Queen's birthday honours of 1893, and then gave up parliamentary politics after his election defeat of 1895.

By 1904, when Sir William was aged 57, he generally divided his time between his principal home at Westgate-on-Sea, in Kent, and his villa near Monte Carlo, and so he no longer had any compelling reason to keep his Boston connections. He put The White Hart up for sale by auction, but the bidding fell short of the reserve price and the property was withdrawn.

However, the Boston Liberals saw the writing on the wall, and in 1905 moved their club out of The White Hart and into premises farther along High Street. They were replaced by new tenants – the Franklin Lodge of Freemasons, who moved from The Peacock and Royal Hotel in Market Place.

At this time the inn was being run by Kate Challans. A 49-year-old widow, she had been left with the tenancy after her father-in-law, Joseph Challans, died in 1885, aged 67, and then her husband William died of consumption in 1896, aged 40. In June 1907, Kate Challans decided to retire, ending her family's 57-year run in charge of The White Hart. She was replaced by Charles and Ada Mather, who transferred with their young family from The Red Lion in Boston.

The Mathers developed an unrivalled reputation for the excellence of their hospitality. Leading organisations in the town, such as the rowing, hockey and rugby clubs, and a number of trade associations made The White Hart their headquarters. Many more leading groups routinely held their formal dinners and luncheons there. The food and service were so highly regarded that Charles and Ada were invariably called upon to provide the catering at major events at the town's Assembly Rooms and other leading venues.

In 1920 Sir William Ingram tried again to sell The White Hart by auction, but the bidding failed to reach the reserve. However, not long afterwards a deal was done because by 1923 it was noted in the press that Charles and Ada Mather were now the owners as well as the occupiers of the inn.



Sir William Ingram, baronet. A photograph from The Illustrated London News. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

THE EXTRAORDINARY TALENTS OF THE MATHER FAMILY



Charles and Ada Mather pictured at the wedding of their daughter Doll in 1927.

By the time that Charles and Ada Mather became owners of the freehold of The White Hart, their children were becoming young adults and were starting to join their parents in demonstrating an extraordinary breadth of talents that served to enhance the reputation of the whole family in the community.

Charles was vice-president of Boston Rowing Club, his eldest son, John Hugh 'Jack', was the club captain, and he and his brother Arthur Henry 'Jim' were leading oarsmen. Jack and Jim were also both vice-captains of Boston Hockey Club, and keen golfers. In September 1923, Jack, Jim and their sister Violet Louise 'Doll', then aged 23, 18, and 20 respectively, formed a dance band called the Bonzo Trio. Jack played drums and sang, Doll played piano, and Jim played banjo.

The Bonzo Trio was an instant success. They played concerts for various charity events and soon became regular performers at local dinner-dances. They gave it up in 1927 when Doll got married, but Jack went on to become a star of the Boston Amateur Operatic Society as well as continuing to be a popular after-dinner solo singer at numerous functions. At The White Hart he sometimes provided impromptu entertainment for his guests.



The Bonzo Trio (left to right) Jack, Jim and Doll Mather. Image from the Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian 28 May 1927.

JACK MATHER'S TOUCHING TRIBUTE TO HIS MOTHER

It came as a shock to many in the town when in 1928 Charles Mather died, aged 62.

Ada carried on running the business with family support, principally from her son Jack and daughter Joan. Together they continued enhancing the excellent reputation of The White Hart. They invested in significant building work in 1939, increasing the number of bedrooms by 10, upgrading the kitchens, and improving the layout of the bars and lounges.

During the Second World War Jack Mather served in the RAF. In 1941 he married a WAAF corporal, Ethel Wattam, and then he spent most of the rest of the war stationed in Palestine, where he rose quickly through the ranks to become a commissioned officer. After the war, Jack took the lead role in running The White Hart. His mother, Ada, died in 1947, aged 76. Once again the town mourned a well-known and respected figure. A local newspaper report described her as a 'gracious lady' with 'an elegant and forceful personality.'

In 1948 the Franklin Lodge of Freemasons moved out of its first-floor rooms adjacent to The White Hart and went to join another lodge at Main Ridge in Boston. Jack Mather converted the vacant lodge room into the hotel's new dining and ballroom, fitting it with a new dance floor, and he made the adjoining meeting room into a cocktail bar and lounge. In honour of his late mother, Jack named the suite after her middle name, Louise. And so was created The Louise Rooms.

The Louise Rooms became a well-known and popular venue in Boston. Jack and his sister Joan ran The White Hart until 1959 when, partly because of Jack's ill-health, it was sold to an independent hotel company from King's Lynn. It was the end an era for the Mather family that had lasted 52 years.

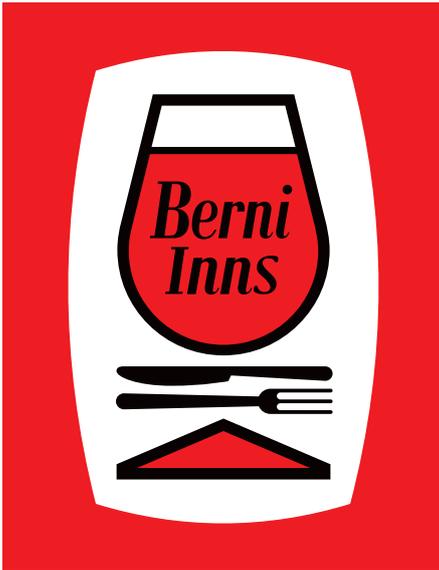


Jack Mather pictured in 1927.



Lincolnshire Standard and Boston Guardian 8 January 1949. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

MEMORABLE BERNI INN YEARS — DECLINE — AND REJUVENATION



In 1963 The White Hart was purchased by Berni Inns, a newly emerging national chain of restaurants that was revolutionising the nation's eating-out market. Noted for what at the time was a simple but exotic fayre typified by prawn cocktail, steak and chips, and Black Forest gateau, Berni Inns was the UK's first retail brand of its kind, and the first to make high-quality restaurant meals affordable and accessible for ordinary families.

The format was the brainchild of Anglo-Italian brothers Frank and Aldo Berni, who were based in the south-west of England. They created the idea from restaurant chains they saw in America. Early success in Bristol led to rapid expansion, the business growing eventually to 147 outlets nationwide. The Berni brothers were especially keen to combine their essentially American-style menu with the traditional old-world charm of the English inn.

And so The White Hart at Boston was snapped up and converted to the Berni formula. Bostonians still recall with affection their experiences during the Berni Inn years at The White Hart. The brothers sold their whole business in 1970 to Grand Metropolitan, a national brewing and pub-operating company, which maintained the Berni brand during the 70s and into the 80s.

In 1994, after a regulatory shake-up in the brewing and pub sector, The White Hart was among a large tranche of de-branded pubs sold by Grand Metropolitan to a new national chain called the Magic Pub Company. This was the first in a rapid series of changes of ownership that accompanied a decline in trade. In 2004 The White Hart was sold to a developer who closed it with the intention of converting it into flats.

But planning consent was refused, so in 2005 The White Hart was rescued by a Boston-based, independent, fledgling hotel company, which restored it as a hotel and reopened it in May 2006 with great success. Now named the Coaching Inn Group, the current owner of The White Hart is a multi-award winning company going from strength to strength as it expands nationwide.



The White Hart Hotel's popular Eatery today.

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The White Hart Hotel, Boston, is part of The Coaching Inn Group Ltd. The group has a particular passion for lovely old historic inns and is fortunate enough now to have thirteen of these iconic buildings in our collection, several of them former coaching inns. We have established a reputation for refurbishing, revitalising and breathing life back into these inns, creating elegant, comfortable and well-priced accommodation, tempting menus, relaxed and stylish bars and coffee lounges where friends, families and business people can relax and enjoy everything we have on offer.

Our vision for the future is based around our core value of 'Unlocking Potential'. From our properties to our people and everything in between, we take every opportunity to invest in developing all aspects of our business to give our guests the best possible experience.

As a company we are rapidly expanding and bringing new hotels into the Coaching Inn Group. You can see the latest additions to our group by visiting www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.

We hope you've enjoyed your visit to The White Hart Hotel, Boston, and would love to invite you to try our other venues, nationwide. For full details please visit www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.



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