
The early history of the Queen's Arms at Goring

The hostelry called the Queen's Arms on the corner of Reading Road and Gatehampton Road, opposite the railway station in Goring, is currently the subject of controversy. Following its closure as a pub in 2013 there was much local speculation about the fate of the building. Many hoped that it would become the site for some of the extra housing in the village required under local government directives, but when it emerged that Tesco plc had acquired the premises for conversion to an 'Express' convenience store a protest group was immediately set up to fight the proposals. At the time of going to press the issue has not been resolved and the story of the battle against Tesco, including the bitter disputes between the pro- and anti- lobbies, will be a tale for future local historians to tell.

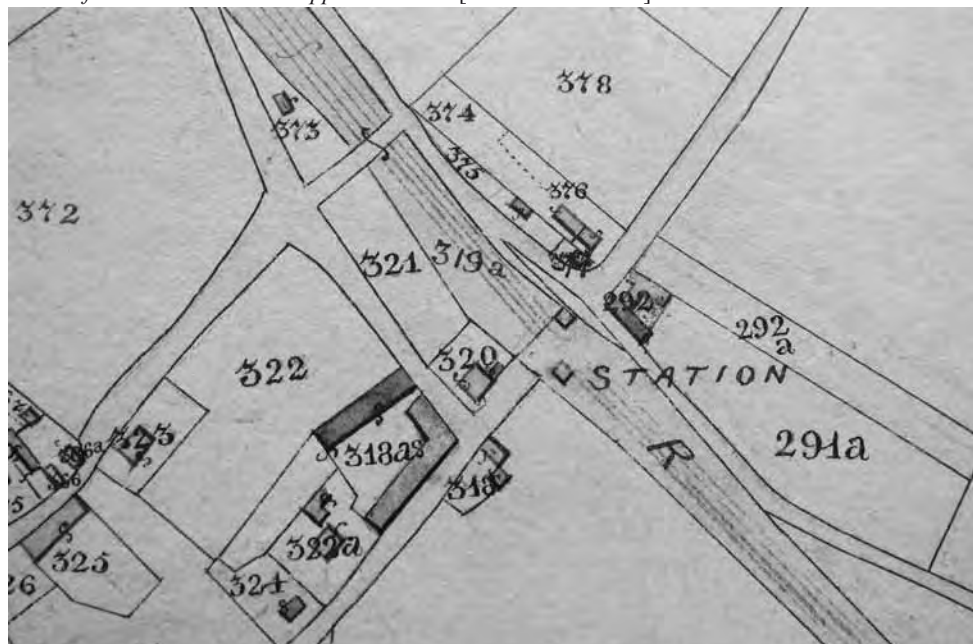
One of the questions about the Queen's Arms that soon came Goring and Streatley Local History Society's way was, 'is it a listed building?' Surprisingly, the answer was 'no'. Most people had assumed that the pub was at least a couple of hundred years old. However the building has been rendered and painted and has no significant architectural features so it

is difficult to estimate its age. Scrutiny of old maps showed that in 1787 at enclosure there was a building on the site, but this is clearly not in quite the same location on the plot or the same shape as the present one. An 1819 map shows no change.



Enclosure Map 1787 showing Goring village, with the Queen's Arms plot (J. Leach) at the top RHS [GSLHS collection]

Below: Tithe Map 1846 showing the Queen's Arms on plot 292. The railway line has cut off the road and the first station is located opposite the inn [GSLHS collection]



Until the Great Western Railway was built through Goring in the late 1830s, the Reading Road on which the Queen's Arms stands ran straight down the hill and became 'The Street', which was the main road through the village, ending at the ferry across the Thames to Streatley. The railway line bisected this road, forcing travellers approaching Goring by the Reading Road to turn right on to a new length of highway before crossing by the railway bridge built a few hundred yards away. This led them into what became the High Street and ultimately the village's main thoroughfare in place of 'The Street', helped by the construction of the river bridges in 1838 which were at the other end of what had just been a lane to the mill.

The first available map after the railway opened in 1840, with its small station for the people of Goring, little more than a shack, obtained after petitions from the locals as none was originally planned by Brunel, is the 1846 Tithing Map. This shows a rather indeterminate rectangle on the Queen's Arms site, but it seems to be in a different position from the building on the earlier maps. It was beginning to look as if the pub appeared at about the same time as the erection of the railway station, no doubt a venture aimed at profiting from the new train travellers. Another clue into its origins is that it was presumably named after the newly crowned Queen Victoria who acceded to the throne in 1837.

The earliest mention of the hostelry in local newspapers is a report in the *Reading Mercury* of 21 October 1843 describing how William James, Mary James and William Druce had been taken to court for stealing a silver spoon on 8 October from John Curtis of the Queen's Arms Inn at Goring. (William James was acquitted but the other two got a month's hard labour.) The 1841 census lists a John Curtis, brewer aged 35, but gives no address.



The Queen's Arms around 1900 [GSLHS collection]

The 1846 Tithe Award reveals that John Curtis was occupier of the plots on the plan with the numbers 291a, 292 and 292a. Together these cover the area where the Queen's Arms and Railway Cottages and their gardens now stand. Number 292, known as Lewington's Pightle, was the small corner plot occupied by the inn. This and the long strip where the railway cottages were later built belonged to the Squire – Samuel Weare Gardiner of Coombe Lodge, Whitchurch. Plot 291a, fronting the Gatehampton Road, described as a garden and pightle, belonged to a local farmer, James Frewin. Did John Curtis build the inn complex? Was he a local man? The 1841 census states that he was born in Oxfordshire, but this census does not give actual birthplaces.

The parish registers do not have a baptism entry for John Curtis but they reveal that he had had connections with Goring since at least 1825 when he married Sarah Pittman at St Thomas' church. He was then a bachelor of Thorp, Surrey. His wife came from the long established Goring family which owned Cleeve Mill, its attendant maltings, wharves and much land and, by the late 1840s, the brewery off the High Street. In 1826 John and Sarah baptised a son John Pittman Curtis but they were said to be of Trumps Mill, Thorp and John's occupation was mealman, a dealer in grain or flour. Presumably his trading in grain brought him into contact with the Pittmans. Thorp(e) is on the River Thames near Staines and now known for its theme park.

In 1828 Sarah Curtis was buried in St Thomas's churchyard and had probably died in childbirth as six months later a son, George, was christened at Goring. John remarried in 1833 to Elizabeth Howes, the daughter of the pastor of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion chapel (now the Free Church). By then he was 'of this parish'.

Local newspaper reports and notices provide some clues as to the character of John Curtis and what he was doing in Goring. He must have been fairly well off as in December 1834 he and Mr Hewett gave most liberal donations to the labouring classes and the poor of Goring for which 'they returned most grateful thanks'.

In April 1838 it emerges through a detailed notice of sale that John Curtis was the proprietor of Goring Brewery in Goring [High] Street, 200 yards from the river, a freehold complex of buildings including a large house with walled garden and orchard, the contiguous brewery and malthouse with cellars, storerooms, barns, stables and yard, three adjacent newly built brick and tile cottages, a nearby 3 acre close of land and a messuage used as a retail beerhouse with shop and garden in the occupation of Mr Dafters, harnessmaker. The latter was the John Barleycorn in Manor Road, still going strong today. The leases of several other public houses in the locality were also included in the sale.

This advertisement is a treasure trove of information not only about John Curtis, but about Goring at the time. Not only do we learn the date of erection of the three little houses that still stand on the corner of the High Street and Cleeve Road, but it is noted that the 'new Goring and Streatley Bridge is being erected' over the nearby Thames. 'The proprietor has for many years carried on a good and improving business, which the purchaser will secure at a most advantageous time, as the works of the Great Western Railway are about to be commenced in the parish and neighbourhood of Goring.' John Curtis clearly hoped to exploit the increase in prosperity and trade that the new form of transport would bring.

TWO BREWERS and MALTSTERS.—Eligible Investment.—TO BE SOLD by PRIVATE CONTRACT, a very desirable FREEHOLD PROPERTY, consisting of a Dwelling House, BREWERY, and MALT-HOUSE, Orchard, and Close of LAND, a Messuage used as a Retail Beer-house, Cottages, and other Premises, at GORING, OXON, the property of Mr. John Curtis, who is retiring from business.—The HOUSE is a substantial and commodious Residence, with suitable offices, and in good repair, having a walled Garden, and a productive Orchard, measuring upwards of half an acre, adjoining to it. At a short distance is a Close of Arable Land in a high state of cultivation, measuring upwards of Three Acres.

The BREWERY and MALT-HOUSE, with the Cellars, Store Rooms, Barn, Stables, Yards, and other Premises belonging to them, are contiguous to the Residence, and the Buildings are substantial and in good repair. The Cellar (10 feet under ground) will hold 200 barrels. The Malthouse is capable of wetting 20 quarters of Barley, and the Store-rooms will contain from 4 to 200 quarters of Malt.

The Proprietor has for many years carried on a good and improving business, which the Purchaser will secure at a most advantageous time, as the works of the Great Western Railway are about to be commenced in the parish and neighbourhood of Goring.

The Premises are Freehold and Title-free, and in the occupation of Mr. Curtis, the proprietor; they are advantageously situated in Goring Street, about 200 yards from the River Thames, over which the new Streatley and Goring Bridge is now being erected. The Land-tax is redeemed. Also a MESSUAGE used as a RETAIL BEER-HOUSE, with a Shop and Garden, in the occupation of Mr. Joseph Daffors, harness maker, at a low rent of £9.

And Three newly-built Brick and Slated COTTAGES, and Gardens adjoining, occupied by Mr. Ford, bricklayer, Stephen Huggill, carpenter, and David Alum, wheelwright. The latter Premises are Freehold, and are situated in Goring-street, and in good repair. Land-tax 12s.

Also Three other FREEHOLD TENEMENTS and GARDENS, at the upper end of Goring Street, near the line of the Railway, now undergoing repairs and improvements. A part of these Premises is intended to be converted into a Beer-house, and advantageous terms are made for letting them.

The STOCK in TRADE at the Brewery and Malthouse, Plant and Utensils, may be taken to by the Purchaser at a Valuation. The Copper is newly new.

The Proprietor is willing to arrange for giving up immediate possession of the Premises in his occupation, with the Good-will of the Business.

The benefit of the Leases and Agreements under which the Proprietor holds several Houses in the neighbourhood, used for the Sale of Beer, will be transferred to the Purchaser.

For further particulars, and to treat, apply (if by letter, post paid) to Mr. Curtis, at the Brewery, Goring, or to Messrs. Badges, solicitors, Wallingford.

If he was thinking about building the Queen's Arms at this time he kept quiet about it. The advert states that he was selling up because 'he is retiring from business'. However it is possible that he was already in possession of the property on the Queen's Arms plot, for included in the sale were three other 'freehold tenements and gardens at the upper end of Goring Street, near the line of the railway, now undergoing repairs and improvements. A part of these premises is intended to be converted into a beerhouse'. It is hard to see on old maps where these properties could be other than on the site of the Queen's Arms.

Sadly no-one took up this amazing investment opportunity, for on 5 January 1839 another notice of sale appeared in the *Reading Mercury*. This was much briefer and described a compact freehold brewery with a good business to include a dwelling house, malt house and associated buildings, 'the property of Mr John Curtis who is retiring from the business'. It was 16 September 1843 before a short announcement in the *Reading Mercury* under the heading Goring Brewery announced, 'All persons having in their possession casks or barrels belonging to Mr John Curtis are requested to return

the same on or before 27th instant, he having disposed of the business ...' The issue of 23 September carried an advertisement for the sale by auction 'of the useful and miscellaneous effects of Goring Brewery, the property of Mr John Curtis'.

By 1847 William Pittman was listed as the owner of Goring Brewery and its associated public houses. A book on the history of Oxfordshire breweries states that there was a conveyance of the brewery and the John Barleycorn dated 22 March 1844 but no parties are named. It is obvious that this was between John Curtis and his late wife's relative. This means that John Curtis owned both Goring Brewery and the Queen's Arms for several years; a considerable undertaking and no doubt financial gamble.

Initially the Queen's Arms appeared to do well. In October 1844, according to the *Berkshire Chronicle*, the hotel hosted a 'highly respectable and numerous attended meeting of the residents of Goring, Streatley and Basildon' for the purpose of setting up a fishing association to protect the local stretch of the Thames. It was presided over by no less than W.H. Stone, Esq. of Streatley House. Upwards of 50 local gentlemen subscribed a guinea to join the new organisation which held its first Annual General Meeting at the inn in the following August. Around 40 members and friends 'partook of a most excellent dinner, beneath a spacious marquee erected for the occasion, which was served in a manner which would not have disgraced our leading hotels!' The repast included six varieties of fish, as well as joints and poultry and 'a very elegant dessert', all washed down with the choicest of wines. Gentlemen from London and Reading joined the local members. The Witney Brass Band played throughout and a special train was engaged to take the departing guests home. The Queen's Arms at this stage was evidently an upmarket establishment.

By 1847 things were going downhill. According to the *Reading Mercury* of 14 August John Curtis, an innkeeper and brewer at Goring, was in court accused of assault and false imprisonment! He was sued for damages by Mr George Hope, boot and shoemaker, assistant overseer and tax collector of Checkendon. In many column inches the paper reported that on 17 March Hope and two friends had been playing draughts in the Queen's Arms with George Curtis, a cousin of the landlord, for two glasses of gin and water. Hope lost and ordered the drinks, but a dispute arose over whether or not the gin had been paid for and John Curtis became aggressive and knocked Hope down. The latter apparently fought back and the landlord called in a railway policeman and the local parish constable and locked Hope in the tap room all night with the two coppers on guard. The next day Hope was conveyed with the constables in an open cart to magistrates in Henley, accompanied by John Curtis and his cousin George on horseback. There the JPs immediately dismissed the case and told John Curtis he was responsible for paying the expenses of the policemen. Mr Hope paid Curtis for the gin and went home. The court case arose because Hope sued Curtis for loss of earnings during his enforced captivity. The detailed evidence given by all parties in this debacle makes entertaining reading and the judge clearly thought that both plaintiff and defendant were lying and equally at fault. He reluctantly found in favour of George Hope, whom he said was obviously drunk when he entered the Queen's Arms and whom Curtis should not have served with the further drinks that led to the incident. Curtis had to pay £5 damages and all costs.

Apart from giving an insight into tap room life in the 1840s, this account also shows that perhaps John Curtis was not the most temperate of men. It could explain why his second wife Elizabeth, with her young daughter Harriet, was back living with her parents at the chapel manse according to the 1841 census whilst John was at the Queen's Arms with the two sons from his first marriage. John had also seduced the parson's daughter for their child was born before her parents' marriage. Harriet was baptised at the chapel on 25 June 1837 by her grandfather James Howse; the register in his own hand records her date of birth as 2 May 1833. The wedding took place on 15 July that year.

The mention of a cousin George Curtis in the court case also provides a clue to the origins of John Curtis. The only person of this name connected with Goring was the owner of Goring

Farm and associated land according to the Tithe Award. But this George did not live in the village although he brought ten children to be baptised at St Thomas' church from 1819 to 1832. Like John he was a mealman and miller but living at Fleet Mill, Yateley, Hampshire. By the time of the 1851 census he was a farmer of 600 acres at Chineham aged 57. His birthplace was given as South Stoke and the parish registers show a George Curtis baptised there in 1794, son of William and Sarah. A John Curtis, son of George and Susannah was baptised at South Stoke in 1802. The dates tally with known facts. This was probably our man, a local after all.

John Curtis must have been a 'character'. Further glimpses of this are provided by the local papers. In September 1838 the disagreeable Perpetual Curate of Goring, Dr Hunter Francis Fell (father of the equally awkward George Hunter Fell, see article on p.16) inserted a letter in the *Reading Mercury* 'I ... do hereby give notice to John Curtis of Goring, that I do hereby forbid his attendance in the singing gallery of Goring church, with his instrument or instruments of music, according to the authority invested in me as incumbent of the said church ...' The response printed underneath from John Curtis makes for equally amusing reading. See illustration. John Curtis must have lacked musical talent but presumably made up for this with enthusiasm.

Mr. Editor, — I shall feel obliged by your inserting the following in your *Mercury*; and if you will point out, for the benefit of myself and others, any law, either statute or ecclesiastical, by which this Rev. (non-resident) Divine can infer his notice, I shall, with the public in general, feel obliged.

" Goring Vicarage, August 23rd, 1838.

" To Mr. JOHN CURTIS.

" I, HUNTER FRANCIS FELL, M. A. perpetual Curate of Goring, in the County and Diocese of Oxford, do hereby give notice to JOHN CURTIS, of Goring aforesaid, that I do hereby forbid his attendance in the singing gallery of Goring Church, with his instrument or instruments of music, according to the authority invested in me as the Incumbent of the said Church.

" Given under my hand this twenty-third day of August 1838. HUNTER FRANCIS FELL.

" Witness, WILLIAM CRITCHFIELD.

" To Mr. JOHN CURTIS, Goring."

If this be a specimen of Church *liberality*, it is no wonder that there are so many seceders from the Established Church. I now defy the Rev. Gentleman to bring forward any accusation against me, to warrant him in causing such notice to be forwarded to me.

In Christian charity I trust that the whole is the fabrication of some designing person, and that it does not emanate from the pen or heart of the Rev. HUNTER FRANCIS FELL.

I am, Mr. Editor, your obedient servant,
JOHN CURTIS,
Goring Brewery, 28th Aug., 1838.

Reading Mercury
1 September 1838

In November 1841 the *Berkshire Chronicle* reported that John Curtis sent a 15lb carp that he had caught in the Thames to Queen Victoria at Windsor Castle! On 16 October the Master of the Queen's Household wrote to thank him for the gift, which would be served 'this day at the Royal table' and the Queen informed of the loyal sentiments which had accompanied the present.

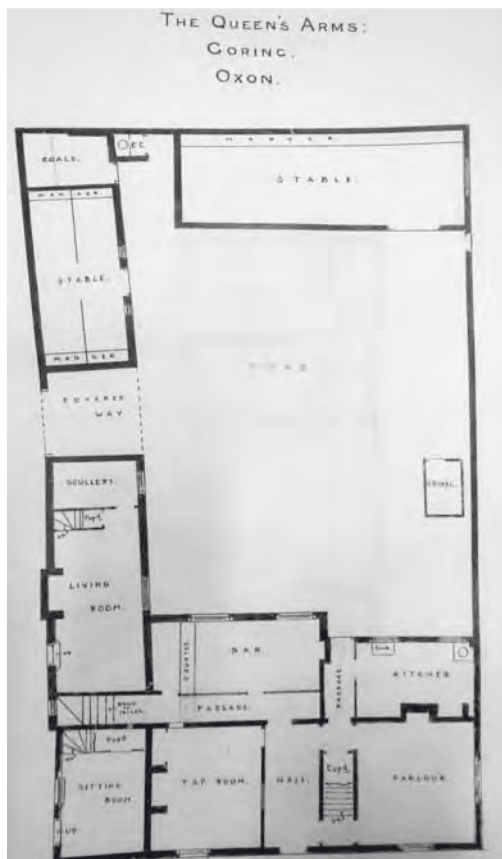
On 11 February 1848 the Queen's Arms was put up for auction. The advertisement in the *Berkshire Chronicle* confirms that the inn was 'newly-erected' and gives a

very detailed description of the premises. As well as the 7-bedroomed house with 3 parlours, bar, tap room, kitchen, pantry, scullery and two cellars there was a brewery and 4 stall stable, harness house, chaise house with lofts over and a granary. 'The house, brewery and buildings ... were pleasantly situated near the Railway and are well worthy of the attention of brewers, innkeepers, etc. either for investment or occupation.'

Right: *Berkshire Chronicle* 5 February 1848

It is not known who bought the property but on 10 November 1849 the Queen's Arms Hotel, Goring Station, was advertised as 'to let and entered into immediately, the present occupier retiring from the business'. Maybe it did not find a tenant as on 9 March 1850 the contents of the hotel were put up for auction by order of the creditors. The business had clearly gone bust. As well as the domestic furniture and furnishings, described in great detail and seemingly of good quality, all the bar fittings were up for sale and included 'a capital five-pull beer engine'.

FREEHOLD RAILWAY INN & BREWERY,
Adjoining the Goring Station on the Great Western Railway
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, BY
MESSRS. HILLIARD,
 On Friday, the 11th day of February, 1848, (unless previously disposed of by Private Contract), At the Postlers Inn, Wallingford, at 2 o'clock in the Afternoon, subject to Conditions then to be produced, in One Lot,—
A Newly-erected FREEHOLD INN or TAVERN,
 adjoining the Goring Station on the Great Western Railway, known as the "Queen's Arms," together with the stable, coach-house, harness house and loft over, and Brewery attached. The house contains 7 bedrooms and a water closet on the first floor, 3 parlours, bar, tap room, kitchen, pantry, and scullery on the ground floor, and 2 capital cellars.
 A very commodious 4 stall stable, harness house, and chaise house, with lofts over, part forming a granary.
 A neat compact and well-arranged **TWO QUARTER BREWERY**, the fittings of which are of a very superior description.
 The house, brewery, and buildings are of a recent erection, most elevation, in good substantial repair, pleasantly situated near the Railway, and are well worthy the attention of brewers, innkeepers, &c., either for investment or occupation. Land-tax 9s. 6d. per annum.
 For further particulars apply to Messrs. Hodges, Solicitors Wallingford; Rupert Clarke, Esq., Solicitor, Reading; or the Auctioneers, Timber, Coal, and Slate Merchants, Lower Wharf, Wallingford.—Agents to the Phoenix Fire Insurance Company.



Was this occupier John Curtis? There is no further trace of him until a notice of the death on 18 October 1855 at Littlemore, Oxon, of John Pittman Curtis, 'son of the late Mr John Curtis, brewer, Goring, Oxon'. John Curtis was not buried in Goring or South Stoke, but the death of a John Curtis is recorded in the Bradfield Registration District in the December quarter of 1847. The sale of the Queen's Arms in 1848 would tie in with this date. He would have been only 45 years old. In his relatively short life this fascinating character not only set up two breweries in Goring and founded the Queen's Arms, but also provided us with many insights into mid 19th century life in the village.

In 1887 the Queen's Arms was bought by Morrell's Brewery of Oxford, whose owners lived just across the Thames at Streatley House, and it became part of their chain of public houses. A block plan

Left: *Block plan of the Queen's Arms 1887*
 [Oxfordshire History Centre]

of the property survives from this time and the layout cannot have changed much from when it was built in the late 1830s. The rival Sloane Hotel on the opposite corner of Reading Road did not appear until the early 1860s. It's origins are so far unknown although it was a Pittman's pub.

The Goring Brewery complex in the High Street, which remained in the hands of the Pittman family for over 90 years, was eventually taken over by Brakspears of Henley in 1940 following the death of Mrs Ann Gundry, nee Pittman. They kept the chain of pubs but closed the brewery. Used for various light industrial purposes, the buildings survived until the 1990s; a few of them were incorporated in Thames Court which now occupies the site. The attractive rendered dwelling house where John Curtis must have once lived was allowed to decay to the point where it had to be demolished.

Janet Hurst

Sources

Berkshire Chronicle (British Newspaper Archive online)

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Census returns 1841 & 1851 (online)

Goring Enclosure Map 1787 (GSLHS archives)

Goring parish registers (Oxfordshire History Centre)

Goring Tithe Map and Award 1846 (GSLHS archives)

Map showing transfer of property in Goring from Powys Lybbe to Weare Gardiner 1819 (GSLHS archives)

Morrells Brewery block plans B25/1/Y3/1 (Oxfordshire History Centre)

Reading Mercury (British Newspaper Archive online)

South Stoke parish registers (Oxfordshire History Centre)
