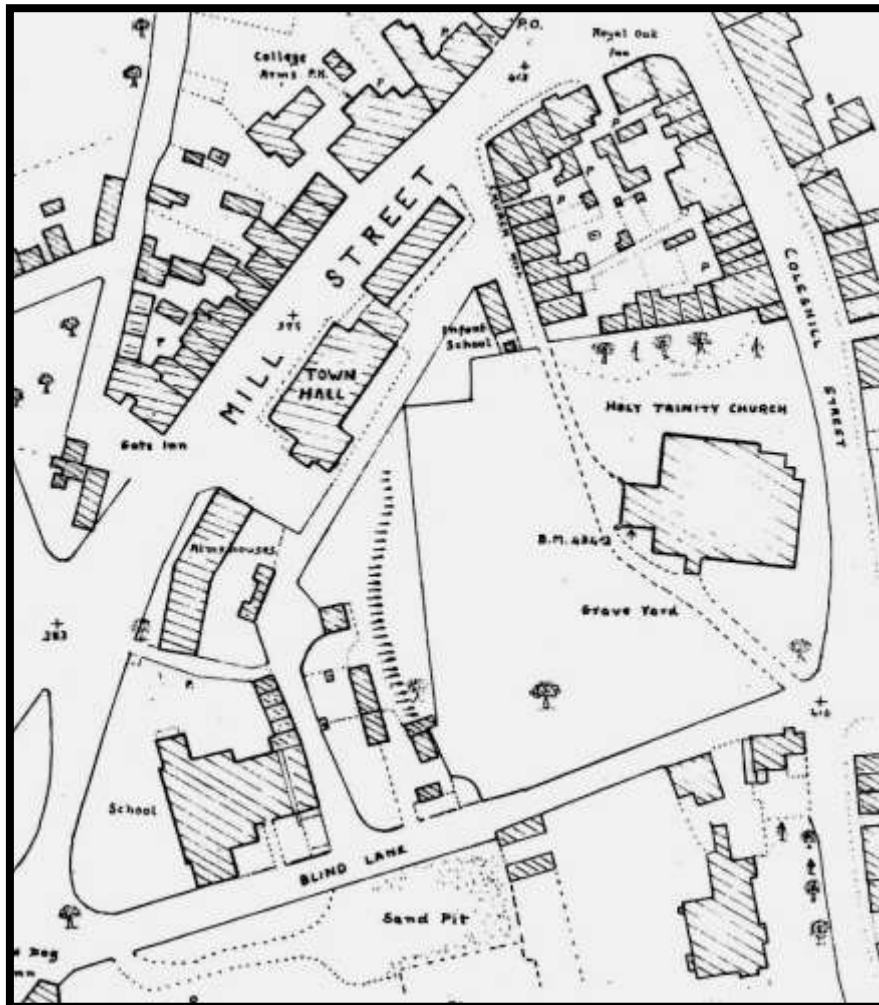


Church Hill, Coleshill Street and Mill Street

Part 2

The 'Royal Oak' Public House



1886 Survey Map

By Keith Jordan

(Member of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group)

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CHURCH HILL, COLESHILL STREET AND MILL STREET **THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE**

In the 1800's the 'Three Streets' were well provided for with public houses. Travelling down Mill Street in the direction of the Parade, at the bottom of the hill, on the right hand side, was the 'Gate Inn'. This establishment can still be seen today and, although its name was changed to 'The Case is Altered,' it has reverted back to the 'Gate Inn'.



The Gate Inn. 2000.

On the same side of the road, but situated closer to the top of the hill, was the 'College Arms'. On the opposite side of the road, on the corner near to the junction with Coleshill Street, stood the 'Royal Oak' and, finally, continuing around the corner into Coleshill Street itself, and located nearby, was the 'Old Sun Inn'.

Prior to the 'Royal Oak' opening its doors to customers there was a pub, described by Richard Holbeche in his diary, as a "low stuccoed beerhouse", which stood where High Street met with Coleshill Street. The publican at the time was John Weldon (aged 50) and he lived there with his wife Sarah (aged 48). Their names can be found on the Census Return for 1841, together with their daughter Elizabeth (aged 15).

Richard Holbeche, writing his memoirs in the early 1890's, remembered it being known as the 'Beehive'. However, it should be born in mind at the time he was writing this, forty years had passed and it had ceased to be a hostelry. The building had been demolished and replaced by a row of shops, now known as 'Estate House'.

THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE (Continued)



Estate House, Colleshill Street Circa 1940's.

In the 1860's, Mrs Weldon's license was transferred to a Mr Thomas Archer. He had owned the premises in Mill Street, vacant since the butcher and chandlers shop, run by Mr Wilkins, had closed. According to an article in the Sutton News, dated 17th April 1937, "The 'Royal Oak' originated when the license of the 'Dun Cow', which was held by a Mrs Weldon, was removed to the premises recently occupied by Mr Wilkins". No doubt the names of pubs changed as often as they do now, so from the 'Beehive' to the 'Dun Cow' and on to the replacement premises in a larger building it needed a more dignified name, hence the 'Royal Oak'.

Exactly why the decision was made to name the public house the 'Royal Oak' will be forever shrouded in mystery. It was, by no means, an unusual title and no doubt originated from the well known tale of Prince Charles' escape from the Roundheads, following the Battle of Worcester in 1651, during the English Civil War. He managed to flee to Boscobel House in Bishops Wood, Staffordshire to seek refuge. In order to evade Cromwell's troops, Charles found an ancient oak tree a short distance from the house. This tree is now known as the 'Boscobel Oak'. He successfully climbed the tree and hid out in its branches for a day, before spending the next night cramped into a tiny priest-hole within the house.

When Charles was eventually able to escape to France, little did he know that his tree climbing escapade would become so famous. The tale captured the public imagination and people told and retold the story of the oak tree, so much so that when he later returned as King Charles II on his Restoration in 1660, many pubs were re-named the 'Royal Oak' in his honour. Instead of being regarded as a symbol of defeat, the Royal Oak came to represent defiance and loyalty to the kingdom. Not only that, but Charles' birthday on the 29th May was declared Royal Oak Day and the famous episode also inspired the oak-apple day celebrations. Even today the 'Royal Oak' is the third most popular pub name in Britain, behind the 'Red Lion' and the 'Crown'.

THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE (Continued)

The 'Royal Oak' overlooked the old Moot Hall, which was demolished by order of the Warden and Society in 1854. A replacement Town Hall was built in 1859, which was situated half way down Mill Street and is now the Sutton Coldfield Masonic Hall.

In the same year, on the site of the old Moot Hall, a weighing machine was installed, together with its own small hexagonal building housing the office. It was almost immediately nick-named the 'Pepper Pot'. It lasted approximately 50 years before being pulled down in 1901.

Thomas Archer became the first licensee of the 'Royal Oak' and opened for business in 1866. His name can be found in the Directory for Sutton Coldfield of that year, where he was described as a *Beer Retailer at the 'Royal Oak' Public House and Cab Proprietor*. Thomas Archer held the property as an Executor for the late Henry Hope (deceased).

Thomas Archer ran the alehouse for ten years until his death in 1877. The license was then taken up by his wife Mrs Elizabeth Archer and she continued to serve her customers for a further 12 years until 1889. The long association of the Archer family with the 'Royal Oak' therefore lasted for almost a quarter of a century. The property at this point in time, was in a very dilapidated state and it was duly demolished.



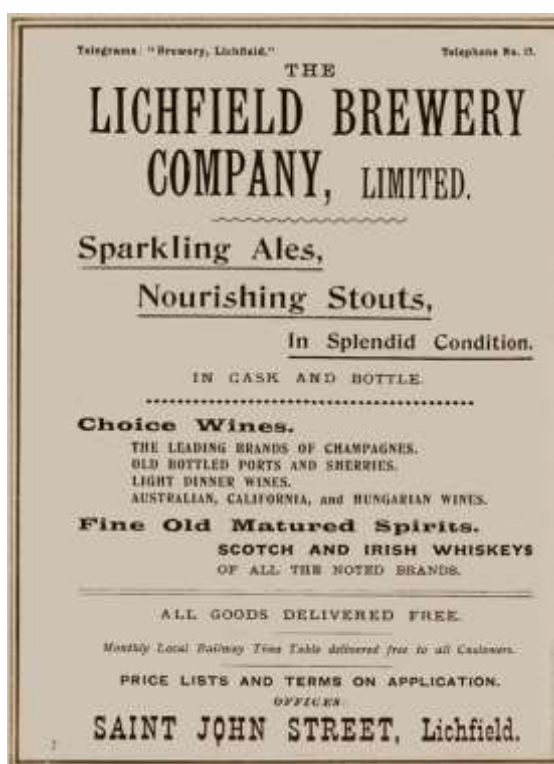
The 'Royal Oak' shortly before it was demolished. Note the 'Pepper Pot' immediately in front of the building.

It might not go amiss at this stage to expand briefly about the history of public houses around the time the 'Royal Oak' was being re-built. In 1830 the Beerhouse Act was introduced, in a bid to reduce public drunkenness created by gin. The Government attempted to counter this threat by passing the Act, which created a new lower tier of premises – 'the beerhouse'. At the time, beer was viewed as harmless and nutritious, even healthy. The Beerhouse Act was an attempt to wean drinkers away from the evils of gin and encourage the consumption of a more wholesome beverage. Under the Act any householder, upon payment of two guineas (roughly equal to £190.00 in today's money), was permitted to brew and sell beer or cider in his home. Beerhouses were not allowed to open on Sundays.

THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE (Continued)

In the first year 400 beerhouses opened and, within eight years, this figure had climbed to 46,000 across the country! The situation soon got completely out of hand and finally in 1869 the growth had to be checked by magisterial control. New licensing laws were imposed, making it harder to get a license and the regime which operates today was established.

The latter half of the 19th century saw increasing competition within the brewing industry and, in an attempt to secure markets for their own products, brewers began rapidly buying local pubs and directly employing publicans to run them. In 1889, when the new 'Royal Oak' was being constructed, ownership was transferred to the nearby Lichfield Brewery Company Limited. The brewery and head office was situated in St. John's Street, Lichfield. The Company also owned several other pubs in Sutton, these being: the 'Fox & Dogs', Little Sutton; 'Four Oaks Inn', Belwell Lane; the 'Swan Inn', High Street and the 'Holly Bush', Little Hay.



Advertisement for the Lichfield Brewery Co. Ltd.

The Company, which by then had 182 public houses in their portfolio, was acquired by Samuel Allsopp and Sons Ltd in 1930. Allsopps, however, closed the brewery down four years later and merged with Ind Coope of Burton-on-Trent, to become Ind Coope and Allsopp Limited.

The Lichfield Brewery Company must initially have set their sights high when it came to the new public house they had purchased, because in an advertisement dated 1890 it stated that:-

"At this hotel, which has recently been rebuilt and fitted up in the most modern style, there is every accommodation for visitors. Only refreshments of the best quality and choice wines and spirits from bond are supplied. A large billiard room, with one of Wright & Co's noted tables with low Excelsior cushions is provided. Cigars of the choicest brands, draught and bottled ales and also stout are on offer from the noted Lichfield Brewery Co. Ltd. Proprietor Mr John Deakin.

THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE (Continued)

The billiard table mentioned, was supplied and built by George Wright & Company, Billiard Table Makers, 162-164 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE. They claimed, in the middle of the 1880's, to have the largest showroom in England with over 100 tables in stock to select from.

In May 1890 an article appeared in the Lichfield Mercury which stated:-

“Mr C A Loxton LLB, Solicitor of Walsall and Birmingham, appeared on behalf of the Lichfield Brewery Co. Ltd. to submit a plan of the alterations proposed to be effected in the 'Royal Oak' Public House, Mill Street, which recently passed into the possession of the Company. The Bench formally sanctioned the alterations”.

The new property was a vast improvement on what had gone before, as can be deduced by examining the Rate Books. In 1881, under the tenancy of Elizabeth Archer, the rateable value was a mere £14 10s 0d, but the rateable value for the new building in 1889 was calculated at a vastly increased amount of £42 10s 0d.

At the same time additional improvements were made to the corner of Coleshill Street and Mill Street where two cottages in Coleshill Street were pulled down. The one nearest to Mill Street had been tenanted by Mr & Mrs Weaver, who had run a business from there; in it four or five generations of the Perkins family had resided. In the reconstruction scheme, provision was made for a shop on the site of the old cottages and a Greengrocery business was carried on there for many years. It later became known as the Bank Stores.



The 'Royal Oak' with the Bank Stores on the left hand side. Circa 1930's.

THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE (Continued)

At the rear of the 'Royal Oak' was a slaughter house and this remained until 1897 when it was demolished to make way for new stables, which were then in demand. Customers must have been relieved that they no longer had to put up with the aroma and noise that would have emanated from the premises.

Following the long association of the Archer family with the 'Royal Oak', their successor was a Mr John Deakin. However, it would seem that he may have been drafted in by the Brewery to oversee the initial running-in process and to make sure everything was functioning smoothly because, only a short time later, in 1891 a Mrs Emily Adams had taken up the license.

Mrs Adams, however, did not stay long and William E Webster took possession for the next three to four years until, in 1896, Thomas Robinson became the licensee. He stayed a further five years before handing over to James M Garland in 1901. Things then settled down somewhat and it was not until 1907 that any more movement occurred. There was one incident that took place shortly before he left, which would have displeased him greatly, as it did nothing to enhance the reputation of his establishment. This was the article that appeared in the Lichfield Mercury on the 24th August 1906:-

Commission Agent fined at Sutton Coldfield. William Ronan, a Commission Agent, of 4 Coleshill Street was fined £3.0s.0d and costs or one month's imprisonment for assembling with other persons in an outhouse at the 'Royal Oak' Mill Street for the purposes of betting.

This may have had nothing to do with his demise but, shortly afterwards in 1907, George E Johnson took over. His tenure was also very short lived, as he was there less than 12 months. He did, however, make his mark, as during his period in control he placed an advertisement in the Sutton Borough Guide setting out the 'Royal Oak's' finer points.



Advertisement for the 'Royal Oak'. 1907.

THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE (Continued)

There followed a period of uncertainty, as his replacement, Frederick S Pullen, lasted only a year and there was no record of anyone in control during 1909. In 1910 Alfred Henry Smith became the licensee and he 'steadied the ship', so to speak, for the next seven plus years. He handed over to Henry Poole for the short period up to the end of the First World War. It was then that the other great stabilising influence appeared in the form of the Stanier family. Husband James, his wife Clara Ann and later their son George Edward remained in control of the 'Royal Oak' until its closure on the 14th April 1937.

A poignant article in the Sutton Coldfield News, later the same week, sums it up perfectly:-

At ten o'clock on Tuesday night Mr George Edward Stanier, tenant of the 'Royal Oak' Hotel, called "Time, gentlemen, please", and never again will the phrase be echoed within its walls – for the next day the full license of the house was transferred to New Oscott Tavern, Chester Road. The 'Royal Oak' is one of a number of properties adjoining the Parish Church and having frontages to Coleshill Street, Mill Street and Church Hill, which the Corporation intend to remove in order (as the Mayor expressed it at a meeting of the Town Council, in July last) "To transform what now seemed an eyesore into a beautiful picture".

The 'Royal Oak' was duly demolished along with other buildings and a letter, submitted by a reader in the Sutton Coldfield News dated 3rd December 1993, stated:-

"He was aghast whilst walking down towards the Parade one day in 1938, when he spotted that the 'Royal Oak', B W Lees Cycle Shop and the 'Sun' Public House had all been demolished and the gentleman who kept the sweet shop, who was blind, was relocated to a shop in Jerome Road."



Site of the 'Royal Oak' and surrounding buildings after demolition. 1938.

**LIST OF LICENSEES AT THE 'ROYAL OAK' PUBLIC HOUSE,
MILL STREET, SUTTON COLDFIELD.**

This list is compiled by way of information obtained via Burgess Rolls, Registers of Electors, Street Directories, Census Returns, General District Rate Books and Poor Rate Books.

1860	No Record
1861	No Record
1862	No Record
1863	No Record
1864	No Record
1865	No Record
1866	Thomas Archer became the first Licensee of the 'Royal Oak'. His name can be found in the 1866 Directory for Sutton Coldfield, where he is described as a <i>Beer Retailer at the 'Royal Oak' Public House and Cab Proprietor</i> . Thomas Archer held the property as an Executor of Henry Hope (deceased).
1867	Thomas Archer
1868	Thomas Archer
1869	Thomas Archer
1870	Thomas Archer
1871	Thomas Archer
1872	Thomas Archer
1873	Thomas Archer
1874	Thomas Archer
1875	Thomas Archer
1876	Thomas Archer
1877	Thomas Archer
1878	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1879	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1880	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1881	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1882	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1883	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1884	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1885	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1886	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1887	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1888	Mrs Elizabeth Archer
1889	Mrs Elizabeth Archer/John Deakin. The long reign of the Archer family being associated with the 'Royal Oak' comes to an end at this juncture, after a period of approximately 23 years.
1890	John Deakin
1891	Mrs Emily Adams
1892	Mrs Emily Adams/William E Webster
1893	William E Webster
1894	William E Webster
1895	William E Webster

LIST OF LICENSEES (Continued)

1896	Thomas Robinson
1897	Thomas Robinson
1898	Thomas Robinson
1899	Thomas Robinson
1900	Thomas Robinson
1901	James M Garland
1902	James M Garland
1903	James M Garland
1904	James M Garland
1905	James M Garland
1906	James M Garland
1907	James M Garland/George E Johnson
1908	Frederick S Pullen
1909	No Record
1910	Alfred Henry Smith
1911	Alfred Henry Smith
1912	Alfred Henry Smith
1913	Alfred Henry Smith
1914	Alfred Henry Smith
1915	Alfred Henry Smith
1916	Alfred Henry Smith
1917	Alfred Henry Smith/Henry Poole
1918	Henry Poole
1919	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1920	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1921	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1922	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1923	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1924	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1925	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1926	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1927	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1928	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1929	James & Clara Ann Stanier
1930	Mrs Clara Ann Stanier
1931	Mrs Clara Ann Stanier
1932	Mrs Clara Ann Stanier
1933	Mrs Clara Ann Stanier
1934	Mrs Clara Ann Stanier
1935	George Edward Stanier
1936-37	George Edward Stanier
1937-38	No Record – possibly at this time the public house would have been empty pending demolition. The Stanier family had been associated with the ‘Royal Oak’ for a period of approximately 19 years.
1938-39	No Record, as the ‘Royal Oak’ by then would have been demolished to make way for Vesey Gardens.

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Photographs (all taken from Keith Jordan's Photographic Collection)

The 'Gate Inn'. 2000.

Estate House, Coleshill Street. Circa 1940's.

The 'Royal Oak' shortly before it was demolished. Note the 'Pepper Pot' immediately in front of the building.

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Site of the 'Royal Oak' and surrounding buildings after demolition. 1938.

Maps

25 inch Survey Map 1886 enlarged to scale 1:1250. Norman Granville Evans 1979.