

# Public Houses

The oldest surviving pub is the **Railway Inn**, which dates from about 1600. It was then called **The Horne** and was a small copyhold which extended to Mortimer Lane. Brewer William Stephens acquired it in 1807, disposed of the land and installed Robert Bush as tenant. When the railway came the pub was rebuilt and renamed **The Railway Hotel**. The Christian Brothers from Wokefield Park were regular customers and loved to play Irish songs on the wind-up gramophone in the bar. About 1970 it became **The Fox and Horn** and remained so until 1991. It has always been the favourite pub of the local farming community.



The coming of the railway brings to mind **The Silchester Arms** on the Devil's Highway, an old farmhouse which opened a bar to provide ale for the navvies. It was better known as **The Jackdaw** to those who visited it after walking down Drury Lane and across the fields. It closed in about 1950.

The **Horse and Groom** would be one of our oldest pubs if it had remained in its original 17th century half-timbered building. About 1850 the present pub was built next to it and the **Old Malthouse**, as it was called, became a butcher's shop. It was demolished in 1976. The 'Groom' used to be home to the Mortimer Cricket team and in the last war it became in pre-Home Guard days the headquarters of the local LDV, called 'Frank Soper's Army' after the landlord. It has seen several changes since then. The door in the bay which led straight into the public bar has been blocked and the two small rooms on the right thrown into one. The pillars at the entrance disappeared in 1991.

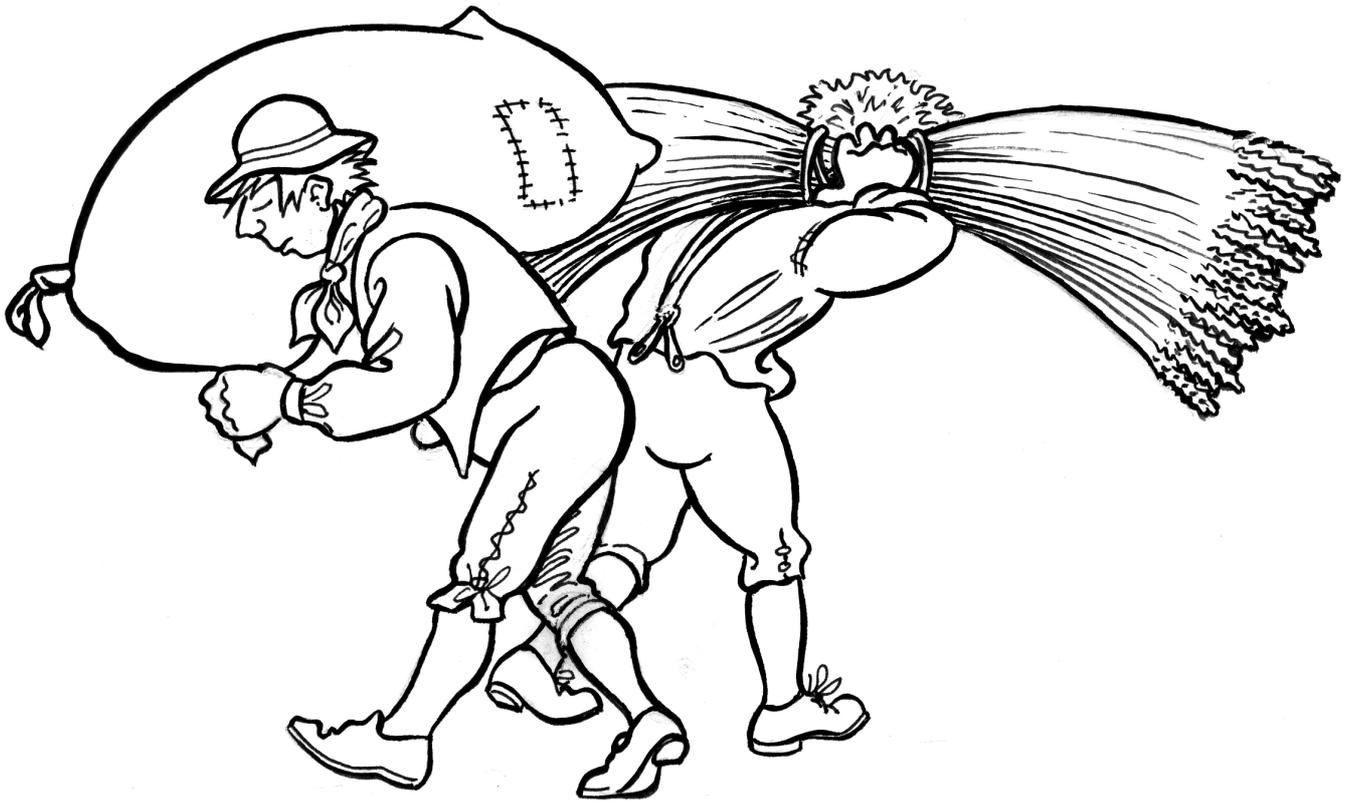
Another public house to open about 1850 was the **Queen's Head**, almost in Beech Hill. The first landlord, Thomas Seward, stayed for fifteen years as also did the last one, Mr Willis, a retired singer whose bass voice was heard at local concerts from 1939 until 1954. Tragedy struck when his daughter fell to her death from a train at Mortimer Station. In recent years the premises have been well known to owners of MG cars.



*The Queen's Head*

The **Victoria Arms** was built about 1860, its polychrome brickwork and arched windows echoing Brunel's railway station built fifteen years earlier. The dignified porch linking the two bay windows was a later addition. The big black shed to the left was once the steaming room where broom handles were straightened and scythe handles bent to shape. Between the wars the 'Vic' was known as a quiet pub for a game of chess, cards or dominoes.

Unloading grain at the windmill and fetching away sacks of newly milled flour must have been thirsty work, so it is not surprising that the next building to appear in Windmill Road was **The Carpenters Arms**. Having outlasted the mill by over 150 years it now ministers mainly to the thirst of local residents.



**Ye Olde Turner's Arms** is actually Mortimer's youngest public house, having been converted from two cottages in 1867, and customers park their cars where the turnery once stood. In the 1930s the saloon bar was graced by a grand piano, Mr Parlovitz the landlord having been a professional musician at a Reading theatre. A favourite stop for walkers and cyclists, the Turner's Arms has in its time played host to motorcyclists, footballers and lifeboatmen - well the local branch of the RNLI anyway.

**The Red Lion** did not start as a pub. It was originally a small farmhouse on a copyhold known since about 1700 as Kinchins, after Simeon Kinchin. Copyholders were often absentee landlords with tenants in occupation. In 1794 The Red Lion was separated from the farm and acquired by William Stephens of Aldermaston, a brewer who also held The Horne (The Railway Inn). In 1862 the lease of The Red Lion, by then owned by William Jefferys Strange of Aldermaston, brewer, was acquired by William Turner at an annual rent of œ10, and held until his death in 1897 when it was transferred to his daughter, Eliza Ann Arthur who in turn held it until her death in 1929. In all it was held by father and daughter for 67 years. This has long been another pub much favoured by walkers, welcomed in winter by a great open log fire.