

A History of the Wheatsheaf Inn and Crowtrees¹ Farm, Bowburn



*The Cooperage, formerly the Wheatsheaf, in 2009
The extension on the right was built between 1899 and 1915 – see page 5*

The Crowtrees / Wheatsheaf [later Cooperage] site contained farm buildings from at least the late 18th century. Before that, there well have been the most significant building in the parish. For Robert Surtees, the great Durham historian, wrote in 1816 that he believed “the old Mansion-house, near the Crow-trees just East of the turnpike, to be the original [Quarrington] Grainge”²

A 1797 plan of the Coxhoe estate of John Burdon (for whom Coxhoe Hall was built), of Hardwick Hall, shows “Crowtrees”, north of the land in his ownership, at the site of the Wheatsheaf Inn.³

A plan of the estate of Heugh Hall & Old Quarrington farms⁴, which were [sub-]leased to Wm Story and Wm Lee, dated 4 February 1835, shows land north-west of them (presumably including Crowtrees farm) as belonging (under a lease from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners) to J. W. Williamson.

¹ I have largely used “Crowtrees” in this paper, as that is the normal spelling today, unless quoting from a contemporary document which used “Crow Trees”. It used to be spelt “Crow Trees” or “Crowtrees”, apparently interchangeably – though more often “Crow Trees” early on and more often “Crowtrees” latterly.

² Robert Surtees (1816/1972): “The History and Antiquities of the County Palatine of Durham”, re-published by EP Publishing Ltd in collaboration with Durham County Library, Vol. I, p. 73.

³ Source: Plan 2 of Quarrington OCCS heritage chapter.

⁴ Source: Durham Record Office

A plan of Crowtrees farm itself⁵, dated 26 January 1835 (i.e. a month earlier) showed it was leased to Robert Hopper Williamson. This was probably the RHW who was John William Williamson's father, though he died 13 January 1835, rather than JWW's elder brother, the Rev. Robert Hopper Williamson, of Hurworth, who later had extensive interests in the area. The farm then comprised 73 acres, 2 roods, 23 poles [according to its description – although I made it only 58.5 acres], and was valued at £48/10/- p.a. (about £2,390 in 2013 prices).

A note from the 1835 valuer of the farm, Thomas Davison, pointed out that "In consequence of the Clarence Railroad⁶ coming into this District, the Coalmines will be more intensively worked, which will increase the value of the Public House on this Estate".

This 1835 plan has pencilled in each field what was being grown (possibly added in a later year). There were approx. 19.75a of wheat, 8.3a clover, 6.4a oats, 14.3a grass and 8a fallow (totaling 56.65acres).



Boundary of Crowtrees farm in 1904

⁵ Source: Durham Record Office

⁶ The first "Crowtrees Wallsend" coals from Crowtrees Colliery went down the so-called Sherburn branch of the Clarence Railway, from Coxhoe to Stockton, on 16 January 1834. They were shipped at the Clarence Railway staiths, on board the brig Etherley, for London. (Source: Local Records by Jn. Latimer [1857] – extracts in Kevin Duncan [2000, ed.] "N.E. Coal Mining – Press & Historical Extracts".)

In the 1839 Tithe Apportionment, Crowtrees Farm was "owned" (i.e. leased from Sherburn Hospital, to whom tithes had been due) by John William Williamson and occupied (i.e. farmed) by Edward Swinbank. The latter was described as Innkeeper, of Crow Trees, in the Kelloe Parish baptismal record of his second daughter, Phoebe, on 2 October 1836. He clearly combined farming Crowtrees farm with keeping what was probably not yet called the Wheatsheaf.

In the 1841 census, Swinbank was listed as Edw[ard] Swinburn [sic], at Crowtrees, Farmer.

The farm did not then include what was later known as "Toulson's field" (i.e. the site of Oxford Terrace etc. and adjacent field, south of Crowtrees farm)⁷, though that was later farmed by the licensee of the Wheatsheaf. (In the 1839 tithe apportionment, this field, only, was leased and occupied by John Foster, or Forster, though he was not resident nearby in the 1841 census.)

Although there was a public house on the Wheatsheaf/Crowtrees site in 1835, and this was labelled "Wheat Sheaf P. H." on all OS maps⁸ (the first having been surveyed in 1857), the name of the Wheatsheaf was not given as an address in any censuses before that of 1881⁹. Nor were any occupants of Crowtrees farm described as innkeepers or publicans, only as farmers, before that year. (In 1861, the address of Eleanor Herron, publican, was given as "Crow Trees". However she was the publican at the Pit Laddie – as indicated in both the 1851 and 1871 censuses – not the Wheatsheaf.)

On all OS maps, "Crow Trees" was the name attached to the house still called "Crowtrees" today, next to the Tursdale road, at the top of the lane that once led down to the Crowtrees Tile Works. On the 1839 Tithe Plan, this building was called "Tile Sheds" and was presumably where tiles from the tilery were stored, near the road. It seems to have been converted into one or more dwellings in the mid-19th century and the address of the tile manufacturer, Thomas Birkett, was given as "Crow Trees Tilery" in both the 1851 & 1861 censuses and in the National Probate Calendar. (He died in 1866). A later resident, Mrs. M. Lee, in 1904-5 received postcards addressed to her at "Crowtrees", "Crow Tree [sic] Tilery" and "Tile Sheds"¹⁰. Moreover this "Crowtrees" was in Cornforth township (later parish), not in Quarrington, where the "Wheatsheaf" Crowtrees was located. Indeed the tile works were sometimes called "Cornforth Tilery".

⁷ On a plan and valuation dated 21 February 1854, "Toulson's field" was part of lands whose lease from the Bishop was assigned to John Forster (cf Lambs Close) and occupied by Robert Story. It will presumably, therefore, have been worked at that time from one of the Old Quarrington farms. It was bought from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, on 17 November 1864, by John Race, who in 1861 was a Grocer & Draper at Quarrington Hill but by 1871 had moved his business to Close House, Bishop Auckland. When he died, on 30 March 1883, the land was inherited by his son, John Race jnr, who in turn left it to his daughter, Ann Boston, in 1933. She sold part of this area (1a 3r 14p out of 5a 3r 35p) to Lane Fox & Co. Ltd., in 1936, and the latter then built what are now Oxford and Cambridge Terraces. Mr. Toulson rented the land from the Race family. Source: Deeds of 12, Oxford Terrace, Bowburn. (When, later in 1936, part of Lambs Close farm was sold to Wm Forster & Wm Rutherford, on which they then built the Grange Park Crescent estate, the attached plan showed the adjacent Toulson's field as being in the ownership of G. [sic] Race, presumably in error for J. Race [and out of date as he had died and left it to his daughter]. [Source: Deeds of 10, Grange Park Crescent.]

⁸ Ordnance Survey maps referred to here and elsewhere are the 24 inches to the mile maps in Durham Record Office.

⁹ Census information here and elsewhere was obtained via genealogical websites such as Ancestry.com and Findmypast.co.uk. Where dates such as 1871, 1881, 1891 etc. appear, this invariably refers to census information, unless otherwise specified.

¹⁰ Postcards owned by Brian Hall, of Coxhoe.



Location of Crowtrees Tile Sheds.

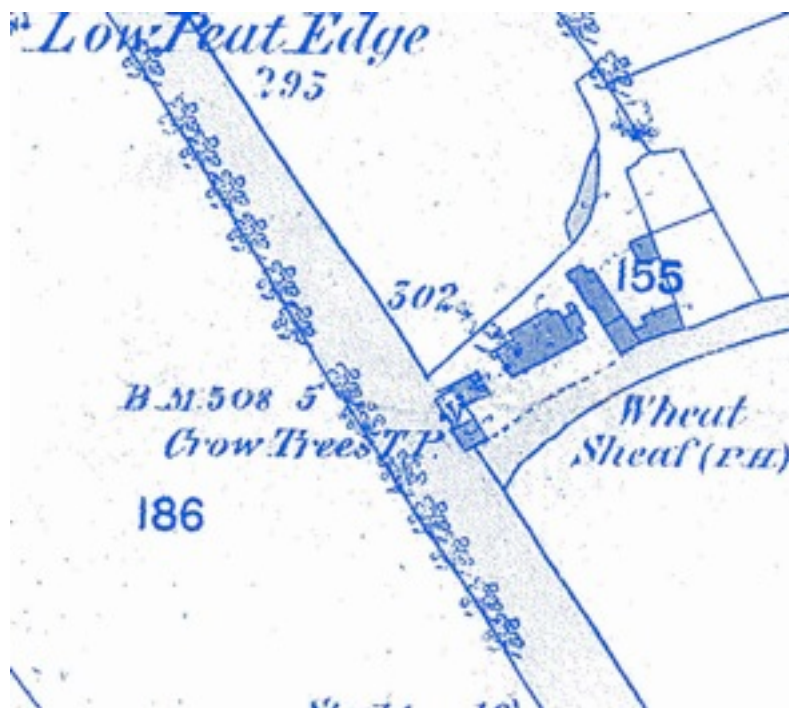
Although in 1851 Thomas Birkett was described not just as “Brick & Tile Maker”, but also as “Farmer of 30 acres”, it is virtually certain that neither he nor any other resident of the “Crowtrees” on Tursdale road had anything to do with Crowtrees farm and the W heatsheaf. It seems clear that the farmers of Crowtrees farm actually lived at the W heatsheaf or, later, in the farm buildings behind it.

It is perhaps worth noting that the address, “Crow Trees” was generally applied to an area, rather than a specific building – as in the case of Eleanor Herron in 1861. (See above.) It was presumably regarded as a hamlet in its own right, between Bowburn and Park Hill.¹¹

In 1857, the W heatsheaf P. H. was not facing on to the Durham-Stockton road but situated behind a house that then stood there (on the southern half of the site of today’s pub building). It was set some way back from Crowtrees Lane, presumably facing it, roughly where today’s car park is. There was a lane running behind both buildings, from Durham Road into what was probably the farm yard. The inn presumably doubled as a farm house. What are presumably farm

¹¹ A further confusion can arise from the fact that the original Crowtrees colliery was at Crowtrees – probably just north of Lambs Close farm. After William Hedley acquired the Heugh Hall & Crowtrees royalty in 1824, he sunk a new colliery about 2km to the east, in the vale beneath Quarrington Hill, which he named “Crowtrees”. People who lived at “Crowtrees Pit” (there were four households there in 1851) did not live at Crowtrees, but near Quarrington Hill. (Hedley also sunk a new “Heugh Hall” colliery, at Old Quarrington. In that case, the name stuck: most older residents of Bowburn still call Old Quarrington “Heugh Hall” – although Heugh Hall is actually about 800 metres to the north!)

buildings were situated east of the inn / farm house. They occupied much of the area now included in the curtilages of nos. 1, 2 & 3, Crowtrees Lane and probably backed on to the lane, with access from behind the Wheatsheaf.



1857 OS1 map

John Bell (widower, aged 69) was in the 1851 Census living at Crowtrees, described as "Farmer of 66 acres", employing 4 labourers. He was still living there in 1861, described as "Retired Farmer", but Luke Robson (aged 82) was the farmer. At the time of the 1841 Census, John Bell had been living at Lambs Close, described as [owner of] Landsale Colliery. He was the owner of "[John] Bell's Pit", as it was known, which was between Lambs Close and Park Hill¹². Although he came from Bedlington, in Northumberland, his family was well established in the area. His daughter Isabella (born about 1809) was married to John Newton, Publican & Cordwainer [shoemaker] at the Hare & Greyhound.

John Bell bought Crowtrees farm from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1858¹³ and presumably first farmed it himself (probably after his colliery closed) and later, after he had bought it, leased it to Luke Robson to farm.

¹² Bell's Pit did not develop new seams but "robbed the pillars" of earlier workings. Part of it was revealed during the construction of the A688 link road from Park Hill to Wheatley Hill, in 2007, when remaining coal on the line of a road cutting was sold to help pay for the new road.) Source: Durham Record Office

¹³ A schedule of Dorman Long's transfer to the NCB of title to land in Bowburn includes: "subject however to the covenants rights easements and reservations contained in an Indenture dated the 19th April 1858 made between the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for England of the first part and William Cummings and William Peacock of the second part and John Bell of the third part". Presumably John Bell was the purchaser and William Cummings & William Peacock were party to the indenture conveying Crowtrees farm from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to him. (Source: Deeds of 8, Clarence Street, Bowburn. There is similar reference in the registered title of Mabey's Yard.)

In 1871, George Robson, son of Luke Robson, was the farmer at Crowtrees, farming 63 acres, employing two labourers. This is clearly the Wheasheaf-Crowtrees farm, as the acreage is the same. There was a separate household containing Lucy Walker, tollgate keeper. This will have been at the Gate House, on the corner of Durham Road and Crowtrees Lane. The Wheasheaf is not named as a separate schedule in the Census. However in Kelly's 1873 Directory, and again in 1879, George Robson was listed at the Wheasheaf, presumably as publican.

In 1881, George Robson (unmarried, aged 61) was still living at Crowtrees, with his sister Mary. He was described as Retired Farmer and in a separate household from Ann Curry, who was described as Publican and Farmer of 63 acres at the Wheasheaf, Crowtrees. The Robsons probably lived in the house next to the Durham road. They may even have lived in the former tollgate house, as although county councils had not yet been given responsibility for maintaining main roads by the 1888 Local Government Act, no tollgate keeper was listed in the 1881 census.

Ann Curry had only recently taken over the pub & farm, as her youngest son, James, was aged 1 and born at Stanley. She had left by 1891, having been widowed and returned to the Stanley area.

In 1890, Kelly's Directory listed George Robson at Crowtrees, Bowburn, presumably referring to the farm, not the pub, but that may have been an out-of-date entry. His occupation was not specified. In the same year it listed Edward Sisson Toulson at the "Wheasheaf PH and Crow trees", describing him as "Farmer". Toulson (who in 1871 had been the licensed victualler at the Commercial Inn, Coxhoe, and in 1881 at the Railway Hotel, also in Commercial Row, Coxhoe) was in the 1891 Census living at "Crowtrees (Wheasheaf Inn)", described as Innkeeper and Farmer. It is just possible that he only farmed the 5 acres he rented from John Race, south of Crowtrees Lane, while George Robson farmed Crowtrees farm. This seems unlikely, however, given that Robson was described as Retired Farmer in 1881 and 1891.

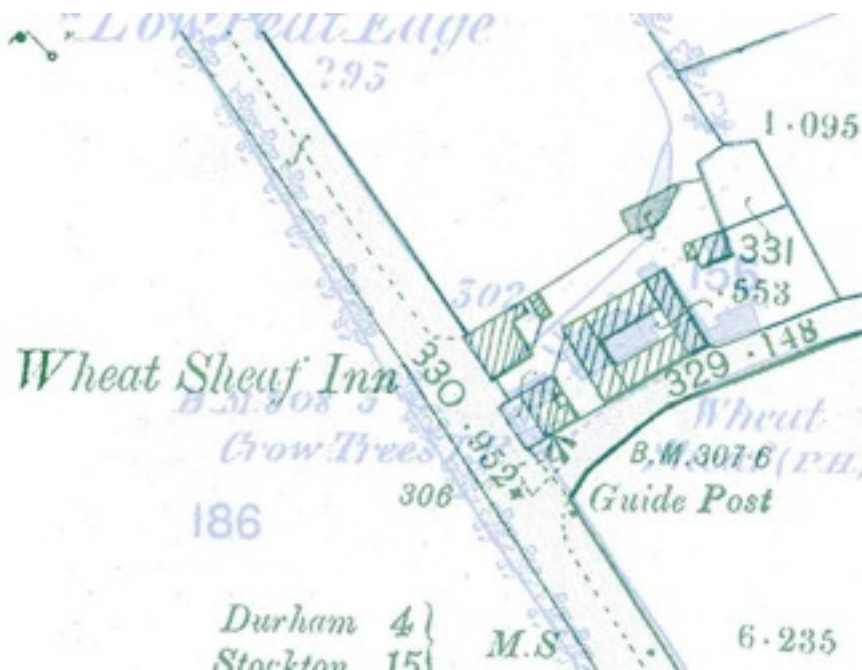
By 1895, when the Ordnance Survey map was surveyed for a second edition, the old farm house / inn had gone. An enclosed farmyard, probably incorporating some of its walls, had taken its place. (The wall behind today's Cooperage – see photograph – may well part of the original farmhouse and inn building.)



The wall between The Cooperage and its car park may be part of the original pre-1857 farmhouse

A completely new building, labelled “Wheat Sheaf Inn” in 1895 stood on the site of the northern part of today’s pub. (See map.) There was still a lane to the farm yard, which now separated the new pub and the enlarged house on the corner of Durham Road and Crowtrees Lane. (That lane had been built over by the time the Ordnance Survey map had been revised, in 1915, for its third edition. See photograph on page 1, above.)

Edward Sisson Toulson was probably the first licensee at the new pub.



1899 OS map (in green), on 1857 OS map (in blue)

John Bell, who had died in 1862, was still shown as the owner of land at Crowtrees adjoining Park Hill, on the deeds of Park Hill farm as late as 1899. However he had agreed to sell the farm (apart from the house which he had “recently erected” when he wrote his will in 1861) to Hugh Kirton, farmer, of Hill House, Brandon. His will required his executors to complete the sale¹⁴. He left the house to his housekeeper, Jane Stubbs, and his adopted daughter, Elizabeth Bell.

In September 1900, Bell Brothers Ltd’s directors “confirmed” the purchase of Crowtrees farm, for £2,250¹⁵ (about £141,120 in today’s prices). However there were problems with the vendor’s proof of title. It was not till March 1904 that it was reported to them “that this matter is now completed and the conveyance submitted.” This was no doubt heard with some relief, as the farm (c. 63 acres) included not just the fields immediately north of the W heatsheaf, where the first colliery streets were to be built, but the 1840 pit shaft that was to be developed as the

¹⁴ Source: Copy of will obtained from Certified Certificates UK, Sheffield.

¹⁵ Source: Minutes of Bell Brothers Ltd. Directors’ meetings, held at Middlesbrough Library.

upcast, ventilation shaft for the new colliery¹⁶. It also included land later occupied by the recreation ground, Bowburn Modern (later Landsdowne) School and council housing west of today's park and Junior School, south of Prince Charles Avenue and east of Newburn Avenue. Bell Bros. bought the farm from Ann Farrow. She was the stepdaughter of Hugh Kirton, of Brandon, and inherited the farm from her mother in 1892¹⁷.

A plan of the farm dated 1904¹⁸ shows that the new Wheatsheaf was part of the land conveyed, although the plan itself was drawn before that was built and the boundary to the site sold added at the time of sale.) A small plot on the corner, not included in the conveyance, contained the house that John Bell's executors had not sold to Hugh Kirton. Bell Brothers bought that separately: the company's directors agreed in June 1907 that the "purchase of Messrs. Robson & Toulson's Cottage near the Wheatsheaf Inn for £120 [about £7,582 in today's prices] [be] ordered to be charged to the Special Reserve"¹⁹. However the purchase may have preceded that date.)

The colliery streets began to be built in 1906 but the Wheatsheaf continued to be run by Edward Sisson Toulson. His description had again been "Innkeeper and Farmer" in the 1901 Census, when his address was given as the Wheatsheaf Inn, Bowburn. He was still there in 1911. (See below.)

On 6 July 1908, Bell Bros. sold "a piece of land containing 2 roods 23 perches and 41/4 sq.yds. [= 3,120 sq.yds.] or thereabouts" to Matthew Forster²⁰. Forster was at that time the Managing Director of Forster's Brewery, of Bishop Middleham, and had lived at Bishop Middleham Hall since the late 1870s. He was still living there in 1901 but in 1910 his brewery was taken over by Newcastle Breweries²¹ – though it must have been as an arm's length company. (See below.) In 1911 he was living at Jesmond, described as Managing Director of Brewery, so presumably he had become MD at Newcastle Breweries. That company acquired the Middleham brewery's plot of land at Crowtrees, though it appears to have still only leased the farm buildings from Forster's Brewery till they were sold in 1934. (See below.) At some stage the Wheatsheaf itself must have been bought outright by Newcastle Breweries [Scottish & Newcastle Breweries Ltd. from when that company was formed in 1960], as S&N sold it in 1993²².

In the 1911 Census, Edward Sisson Toulson's address was given just as "Bowburn, Coxhoe" but his occupation was "Hotel Keeper and Farmer". This is despite the fact that Crowtrees farm had by

¹⁶ This first "Bowburn Colliery", sunk by John George Quelch, had not produced any coal, as it hit a wash-out (where the best expected seam of coal was only thin, due to erosion before the overlying rock was laid). See: www.bowburnhistory.co.uk/bowburn-coliery-1906-1967/three-bowburn-colleries.

¹⁷ Hugh Kirton married Susannah Shorrock (née Wilkinson), who inherited from him when he died in 1875. Ann Farrow (née Shorrock) was her daughter by her first marriage. (Sources: BMD Index, Censuses and National Probate Calendar, via ancestry.com)

¹⁸ Source: Deeds of 8, Clarence Street.

¹⁹ Source: Minutes of Bell Brothers Ltd. Directors' meetings

²⁰ On 4 December 1908, Bell Bros. also sold "two pieces of land containing together 2,432 sq.yds [about 1/2 acre]" to J. Nimmo & Son Limited, of Castle Eden. These two plots had nothing to do with the Wheatsheaf Inn. They were in the vicinity of the Hare & Greyhound – actually along part of Dene Street (the road going east from today's post office) and connecting Eden Street (the road going east from between the former Hare & Greyhound and Romaine Square) and the top of Castle Street. (Source: Title deeds of 1, Norton Avenue.)

²¹ Source: www.fundinguniverse.com/company-histories/scottish-newcastle-plc-history/

²² Source: Title register of The Cooperage

then been sold to Bell Brothers and much of it was occupied by the colliery streets. Toulson was presumably still farming, as a tenant farmer, the fields north of these, as far as the line of today's Prince Charles Avenue. (These are still shown as fields in the 3rd edition OS Map, 1920.) He may or may not have also had "Toulson's Field", just south of Crowtrees Lane, at that time.

E. S. Toulson died in 1920, leaving his estate to his widow, Isabella Margaret (his second wife), and his son, Edward Toulson, who was described in his father's will as "Innkeeper and Farmer"²³. Edward Toulson jnr. was listed in Kelly's Directory at the "Wheat Sheaf PH" in 1921, 1925 & 1929. No occupational description was given (i.e. neither as "Publican [or Innkeeper]" nor "Publican [or Innkeeper] and Farmer"). However it is probable that he continued farming till the end, or near the end, of his tenancy. The Colliery Welfare Ground, occupying about 8 acres, was opened in 1930²⁴. This presumably included the whole of the Crowtrees farm field (about 5.9 acres) that was to form the recreation ground, plus about 2 acres from Lambs Close farm – no doubt the area used to contain the bowling green and tennis courts, but not today's football pitches.



1915 OS map (in red), on 1899 OS map (in green)

In 1934, Forsters Bishop Middleham Brewery Ltd. sold the farm buildings, and other land in the block between Durham Road and the top of Clarence Street, to Kenny and Parker Ltd.. The conveyance named Newcastle Breweries Ltd. as lessees and the Middleham brewery as vendors.²⁵ What were then numbered 3 to 9, Crowtrees Lane, and are today known as numbers 1 to 7, were then built on the site. (These were re-numbered when the higher numbered houses in Crowtrees Lane, and Heath Close, were built in the 1960s. Miller's bakery, for instance, was originally at no. 7 but is now no. 5.)

²³ Source: National Probate Calendar, via Ancestry.com

²⁴ Source: Co. Durham Adv. 30 August 1928 and 20 May 1966 p.16

²⁵ Source: Title register of [today's] 4, Crowtrees Lane, Bowburn

Between at least 1934 and 1945, John Clapham Galbraith was the landlord at the Wheatsheaf. He was listed there by Kelly's Directory, in 1934 and 1938, and on the Electoral registers of 1939 & 1945 his address was given as 1, Crowtrees Lane – the official address of the Wheatsheaf.

Robert Henry Wilkinson and Rose Ann Wilkinson had the Wheatsheaf from 1947 till 1955. They then moved to the Commercial Hotel, at Barnard Castle.²⁶

William & Isabel Napier came from a pub at Hexham to take over the tenancy in 1955. Bill Napier died in 1963, aged 53, but his wife continued as licensee until 1967.

The next tenant at the Wheatsheaf was Nancy Wilson. She and her husband Eric were there for about twelve years, leaving in about 1980. They were the last of the long-serving landlords. After them came:

- James E. & Jean Duffy, 1982.
- Joyce P. Tate, 1983.

In 1984, The Wheatsheaf Hotel was included in the First Durham Beer Guide, produce by the Campaign for Real Ale. It was described as a "Cheerful local on outskirts of ex-pit village just off the motorway. Don't be put off by the basic exterior that hides a warm welcome within. Mainly local clientied." CAMRA's Guide listed its Youngers No. 3. The Wheatsheaf was the only pub listed under Bowburn. The Kicking Cuddy, purveyor of Lorimers Scotch Ale, was one of two pubs listed under Coxhoe, the other being The Cricketers, in Cornforth Lane, which sold Vaux and Samson ales.

However there was no one living at the Wheatsheaf in 1985.

- Colin & Pamela Hutchinson, 1986-1988.
- Ralph & Freda Widdrington, 1992.

The Wheatsheaf was sold by Scottish and Newcastle plc to Ronnie Stappard on 11 June 1993²⁷. After some refurbishment, it re-opened as The Cooperage.

- Tony & Linda Andrews, 1995-1997.
- Linda Newby, 1999-2002.
- Brian & Sharon Latue, 2003-7.

The Cooperage was acquired by Marston's Pubs Ltd. in about 2007.²⁸ The pub re-opened on 7 April 2008, with a new landlord [lessee], John Guarnaccio, who had since December 2006 been the landlord of the Hare & Greyhound. He was there for about two years.

- Hope Millar [?], 2011.
- June McTomney, 2012

²⁶ Source: Their son, Rob Wilkinson, of North Wales, Pennsylvania, who was born in the Wheatsheaf in November 1948 (e-mail 23/8/2013).

²⁷ Source: Title register of The Cooperage

²⁸ The company registered title of ownership on 19 December 2007.

The end of the Wheatsheaf / Cooperage?

In August 2014, Ramside Hall Estates applied for permission to demolish The Cooperage and its outbuildings, and to build an entirely new retail and office building in their place, with a car park in the same place as before.