

## The Nags Head, Walthamstow

**H**ow can this be, you ask, a pub can't be both 800 and 150 years old! Well, it almost can. Some time after the founding of St Mary's church in Walthamstow, nominally in 1108, a public house was built on the then main through route, diagonally opposite the church and across what is now Church End. It is known that there was certainly an alehouse on the site by 1208, as there was a curiously modern report of a stabbing outside! What the alehouse was originally called we do not know, but it continued operating down the centuries that followed.

In 1764, or shortly thereafter, the pub, by then known by its present name of the Nags Head, was taken over by the Wragg family, who also made a sure supplement to their income by running stage-coaches from Walthamstow to London. When the railways came, the then incumbent, Thomas Wragg, adapted his operations to run an omnibus from the 'Nags' to the nearest station, at Lea Bridge, from 15 September 1840, as well as continuing the stage operations. By this time, the building was becoming somewhat worn out and, in the spirit of the times, Thomas decided to build a completely new Nags Head, rather than refurbish the original mediaeval building.



The new pub opened, as a local-history plaque on the frontage reminds you, in 1857, in a slightly old-fashioned, more Georgian than Victorian style, with purpose-built accommodation for the omnibus carriage through the arch on the south side to the rear of the building. At the same time, the original pub was partially demolished as 'unsafe', though parts of it still remain. The cellars of the original 'Nags' still survive, under the paving

stones, and are supposed to be inspected by a council official, once a year!

The two buildings' sites are very close together, as the original pub stood where the signpost stands in the picture and the present pub can be seen behind.



Thomas Wragg's stagecoach and bus operations came to an end in 1870/71 when the line to Chingford was opened, but there is still a strong railway connection, as the trains pass directly beneath the premises in Nags Head Tunnel! Since then the Nags has had its ups and downs, the lowest being during the period 1970-2000 when it was owned by the dreaded Watney's and their successors.

Now, however, it has been taken over and improved enormously by Roger and Flossie, who are still, slowly, improving the place. The beers, especially, are superb, and the Nags well deserves its good Beer Guide listing. Currently there are usually five beers on handpump, Mighty Oak Oscar Wilde mild, Fuller's London Pride, Timothy Taylor Landlord, a variable guest, and St Austell Tribute. What your author calls "the barmaids co-operative" will give you excellent, cheerful service, the seating is comfy, and "Billie" (short for Wilhelmina) the pub cat may come around to supervise.

The 'Moon under Water', as Eric Blair well knew, does not exist in real life and, from this writer's perspective, the only real defect at the Nags is the sometimes overly loud piped music. Nor does it do food, though Roger-and-Flossie's other pub, the Castle (an ex-Bass house) which is only about 300 metres away, does so.

But, if you are in E17 after 4pm Monday to Friday, or after 1pm at the weekend, and want a really good pint, I don't think you can beat the old/new Nags Head.

*Greg Tingey*