

PEOPLE HEADINGLEY



Hannah Clark 1779-1861
Publican

Hannah Clark was landlady of the ‘Original Oak’ for more than thirty years, from 1819 to 1852, and lived through the transformation of the quiet rural village of Headingley into a bustling new suburb of the town of Leeds. Only six years after she and her husband arrived to take over the old village inn she was widowed, but she carried on running the inn herself, full of energy and initiative – a successful businesswoman in her own right.

She was 40 when she and her husband Joseph came to Headingley from town. She was originally from Idle and he from Leeds, from a family of butchers in the Shambles. They had at least three surviving children, but like so many others had endured heartbreaking losses – their gravestone in St Michael’s churchyard has a poignant memorial to five of their children who had died in infancy, and another stone marks the death of a son and two small grandchildren.

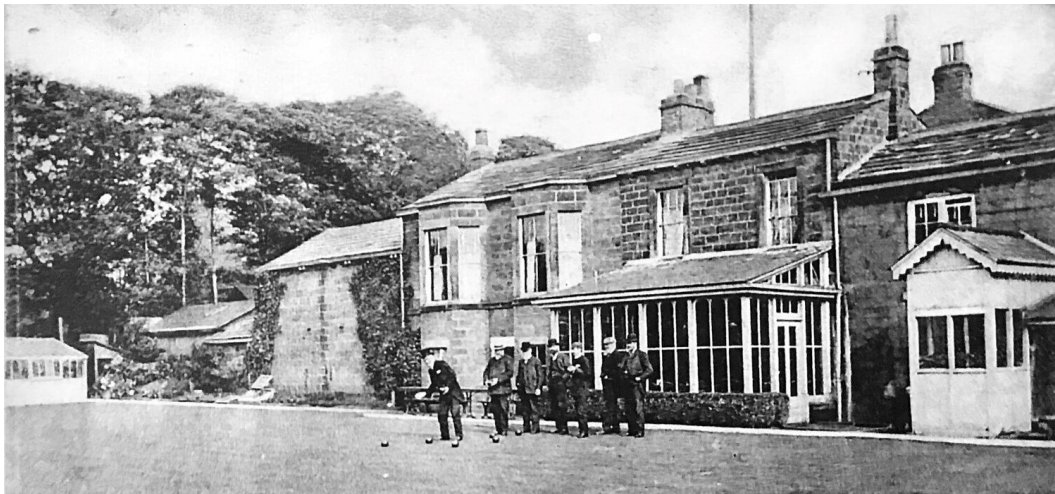
When they took over in 1819, ‘The Oak’ was already long-established as an inn and alehouse, dating back perhaps to the seventeenth century. It started life as a farmhouse and smallholding, rented from Lord Cardigan, Lord of the Manor, who owned most of the village. It had some land next to the house and larger fields further away along Kirkstall Lane, which could provide overnight grazing for drovers bringing their cattle down to market next



day in Leeds. The previous landlady, an elderly widow, had died in 1818 and the inn was probably quite run down, for she left numerous debts. The Clarks had their eye on a new market. They changed the inn’s name to ‘The *Original* Oak’, linking it with

the famous Shire Oak tree nearby, the local landmark. They rebuilt and improved the old house, and in 1821 advertised that the inn now had ‘superior accommodation’ for dinner or tea parties of up to 40, in this ‘remarkably pleasant village, only 10 minutes walk from Kirkstall Abbey’. But they did not forget their old customers, the drovers, promising ‘accommodation for cattle near the house’ and good hay and corn.

After Joseph’s death in 1825, Hannah took charge and proved a great success – Lord Cardigan’s agent admired her spirit. She foresaw the growth and increasing prosperity of the village, and developed the business by adding ‘a dining-room for Societies’ and other improvements – it became the ‘Headingley Hotel’, offering bedrooms and a full range of food and drink. It was an important focal point for the village: all the public meetings for the Headingley Enclosure were held there (1829-34), and it hosted local auction sales, political meetings, societies and clubs, and the annual dinners Lord Cardigan provided for his tenants. ‘Mrs Clark’s House’ acquired a high reputation for convivial company: some of the local Leeds merchants were regulars with their own seats, and others braved the dark journey from town across Woodhouse Moor and up the muddy turnpike road to enjoy the camaraderie of the ‘Oak’. As an additional attraction Hannah turned part of the garden into a bowling green, a popular pastime for local residents which flourished for 150 years.



In 1847 Hannah was granted a new lease of the property from the Cardigan estate, still with 14 acres of grazing land for drovers and their cattle, although this trade was dying with the advent of the railway. Change was everywhere, and in 1850 Lord Cardigan saw a chance of profit by selling some village property, offering long-term tenants a good price. Hannah Clark’s son bought the inn, but Hannah, now 71, gave up running it herself and it was leased to a new landlord. She died in 1861, aged 82. Her grave is overgrown, her name forgotten, but this spirited woman played her part in the history of Headingley.

Eveleigh Bradford

Local Historian, 2010

The original article is on The Thoresby Society website, at <https://www.thoresby.org.uk/content/people/clark.php>

For a history of the Original Oak, see [Historic Pubs](#).