

The Mystery of Assington (Assendon) Cross

Several old county maps of Oxfordshire show Assington or Assenton Cross.

The 1722 Oxfordshire map by Robert Morden (opposite) shows a cross in the area of Lower Assendon, together with a church. This may lead one to believe that the cross refers to a religious site. However, the surveys and subsequent engravings of this period were not very accurate and, while they appear in close proximity on the map, the church and cross are not necessarily together. The location for Assington on this map is roughly where we would find Middle Assendon today, but remember that Assendon has three parts – Upper, Middle and Lower Assendon. Upper Assendon is also marked on this map.



On the 1805 Oxfordshire map by John Cary and William Stockdale (opposite), the inclusion of the principal roads of the time allows us to locate places more accurately. Assington Cross is marked at a crossroads. These would probably have been the old Henley-on-Thames to Oxford road, via Lower Assendon and Bix, and the road from Lower Assendon to Fawley. These still form a crossroads, although the modern Henley to Oxford road does not. Significantly, the Assington Cross is at the foot of a steep hill up to Bix.

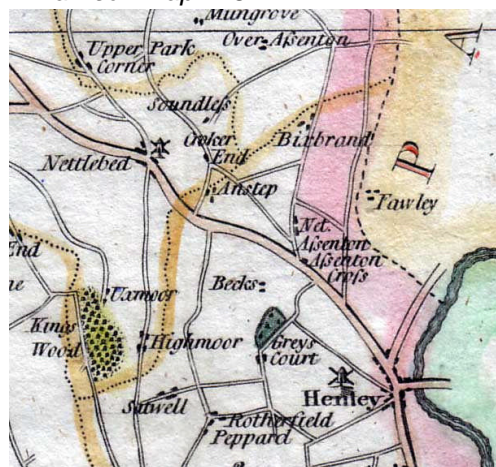


The Assington Cross continues to be shown on maps in the mid and late 19th century.

Lewis (Creighton/Walker) map 1831:



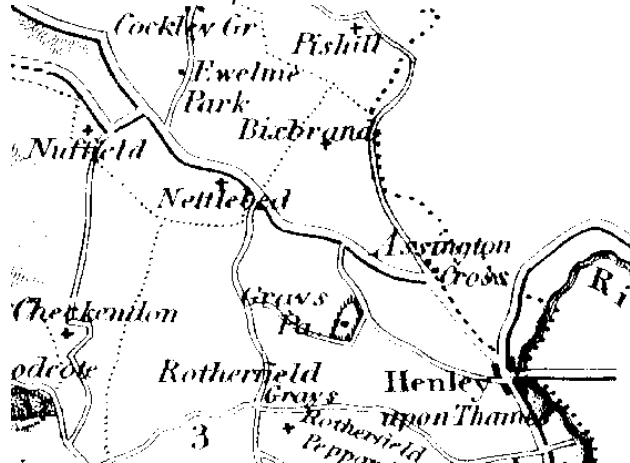
John Harrison map 1787:



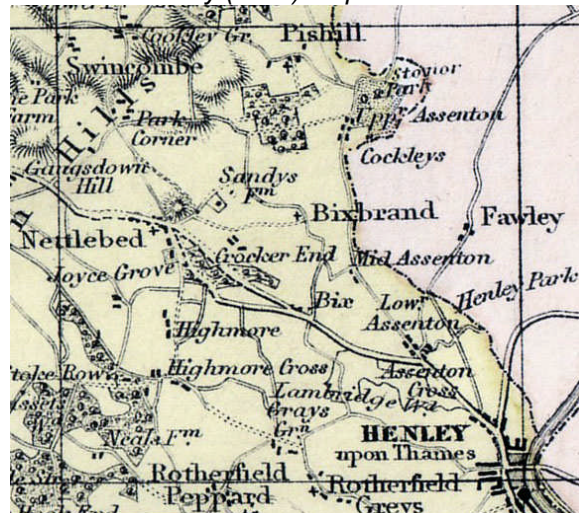
Note that in the Ordnance Survey map published in about 1900 (but surveyed about 1890) the spelling has changed to Assenton Cross. The crossroads have also changed on this later map, indicating the existence of the modern Bix Hill dual carriageway road.

The Assington Cross could still be a religious cross, refer to a crossing of roads or be an early name for Lower Assendon. These seem unlikely as no other similar references occur at other crossroads and in 1787 and in 1900 Lower Assenton and Assenton Cross are both marked on the map.

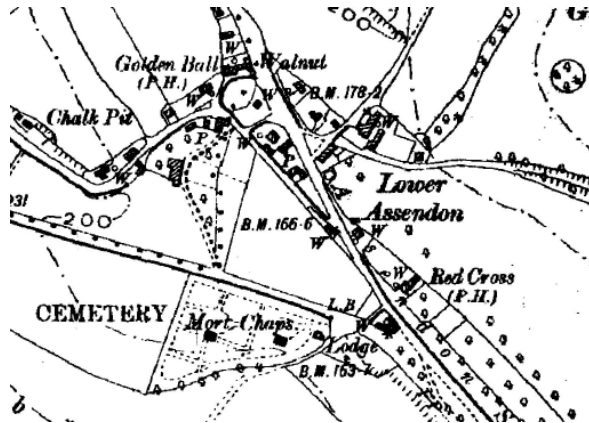
Thomas Moule map 1837:



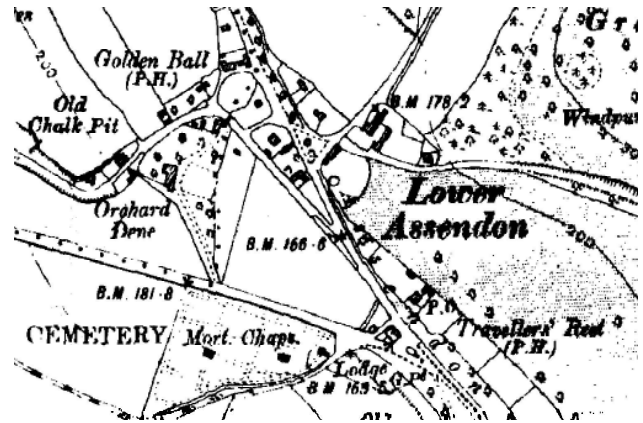
Ordnance Survey (Letts) map 1900:



The possible nature of the Assington Cross is not revealed until we examine more detailed Ordnance Survey maps of Lower Assendon from 1900 and 1919. Here we see the Red Cross PH in the location of the Assington Cross and its replacement, the Travellers Rest PH.

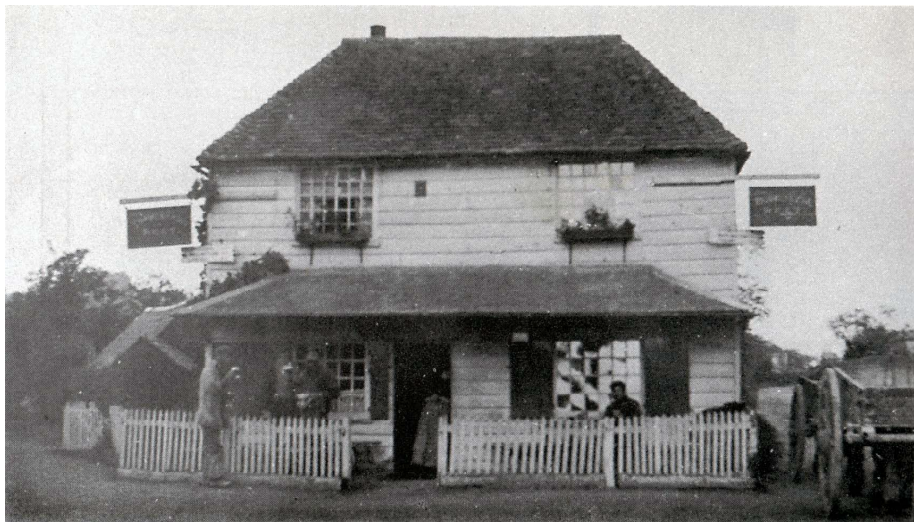


From 1900 OS map



From 1919 OS map

Photographs in several Henley-on-Thames publications show an 'old' and 'new' Travellers Rest public house situated at the top of the Fairmile on the junction of the Oxford and Watlington roads. In their book, Ann Cottingham and Hilary Fisher (*Henley on Thames, pub: Phillimore 1990*) have added the following explanation: 'c1899 shows on the right the roof of the Red Cross or Assendon Cross soon to be converted to a private house'.



The Old Travellers rest from *Henley on Thames* by Ann Cottingham and Hilary Fisher

This confirms that Lower Assendon had three inns – The Golden Ball, the Red Cross and the Travellers Rest – at this time.

The building with the identified roof is two cottages, one of which was the village post office, run by Miss Ellen Froomes, and this is also marked on the 1919 OS map. It was not the Assendon Cross.



Cecil Roberts' account of the village's inns (*Gone Rustic pub: Hodder & Stoughton 1934*) is slightly different. He writes: The Travellers Rest ... is a large gabled house, flat-faced and roofy. The original Travellers Rest, where travellers by horse or carriage probably did rest, is across the road, and is now a picturesque private house nestling by a park wall.

What is well documented (*Brakspear's Brewery by Francis Sheppard pub: Latimer Trend & Co 1979*) is that The Travellers Rest PH was closed and demolished for road widening in 1939. Its licence (but not the building) was transferred to the Travellers Rest in Caversham.

Further evidence can be gleaned from the census results for England from 1841 onwards.

In 1841, Thomas Marks, aged 50, occupied the Assendon Cross. The rest of the household comprised his wife Sarah Marks (aged 55), daughters Hannah Marks (20) and Maria Marks (15) and son William Marks (1). Thomas' occupation is given as labourer. A second household is identified in the previous record, but with the only address as Assendon. John Gomm (labourer aged 60), Helen Gomm (25), Jane Gomm (20), Mary Gomm (65), Ann Gomm (13 or 63) and Thomas Gomm (12). There is no reference to the Travellers Rest.

In 1851, the Assendon Cross is described in the census as a public house and has two households. Thomas Marks (aged 63) is still there with Sarah Marks (69), and William Marks (10). Other members of this household are George Marks (38) and Charles Taylor (34), both labourers. The publican is Ellen Gomm (aged 35) and her other household members are Ann Gomm (20) and Martha Gomm (25).

In 1861 Thomas Marks, now aged 73, is described as a publican and labourer. His household comprises Maria Marks (house keeper, aged 43), Thomas Marks (agricultural labourer, 45). There are four lodgers: Charles Tayler (carter, 48), James Clisby (agricultural labourer, 68), his wife Angelina Clisby, 64) and son George Clisby (8). The Gomm family has left the village.

By 1871 Thomas Marks has retired to live in Sonning and the Assendon Cross has a new 'beer house keeper' and labourer. He is George Taylor (aged 64), with his wife Letitia Taylor (59). They have two families lodging with them: Jonas Parsons (castrator, aged 68) and John Saunders (post messenger, 29), his wife Elizabeth Saunders (28) and a daughter Mary Saunders (2 months).

The Assenden Travellers Rest first appears in the census of 1881. The licensed victualler is Isaac Brown (aged 70) who lives with his wife Esther Brown (66) and daughters Sarah Brown (40) and Emily Brown (26). In the same census, the Assenden Red Cross has a licensed victualler named William Budd (aged 21). He lives with this wife Emma Budd (22), daughter Edith Budd (1) and mother Hannah Budd (64).

Isaac Brown appears in the 1871 census as a market gardener. It is possible that, when he became too old to continue, he converted his house into an inn – the Travellers Rest. This idea is supported by the fact that Orchard Dene, situated immediately behind the Travellers Rest site, was a market garden in the 20th century.

So The Travellers Rest opened as a public house between 1871 and 1881. This gave Lower Assendon three public houses from this period until 1900. This is further evidenced by the 1891 and 1901 censuses.

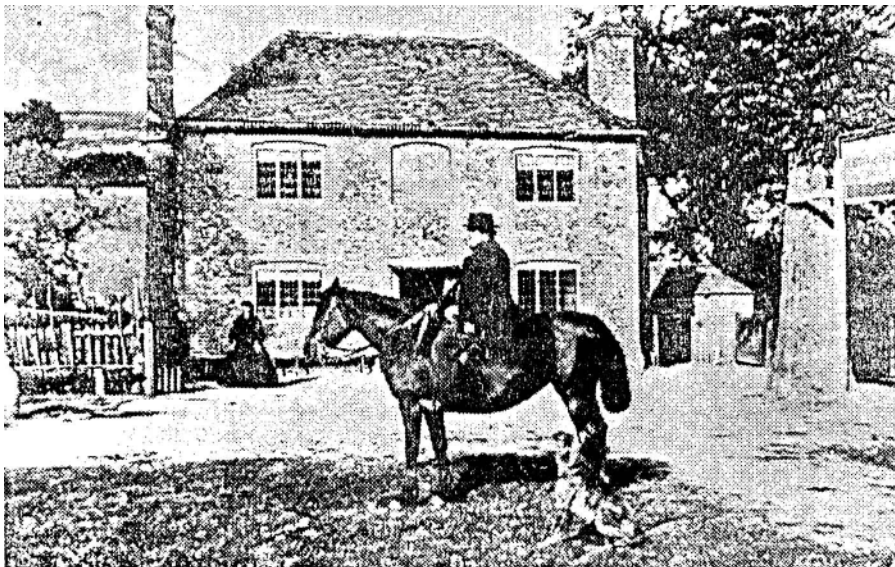
The Travellers Rest Inn is still managed by Isaac Brown in 1891. He is described as a 'pub inn keeper', aged 80. He lives with his daughters Elizabeth Brown (38) and Emily Brown (dressmaker, 36). The Red Cross Inn has as its publican Robert C Bratchell (aged 46) who

lives with his wife Mary Ann Bratchell (42). The Froomes family (John, Emma, Charles, James, Harry, Ellen, George and Walter) live next door. Ellen Froomes is aged six.

In the 1901 census, The Travellers Rest has been taken over by Robert C Bratchell (57) as publican with his wife Mary A Bratchell (53). The Froomes family (John, Emma, James, Harry, Ellen, George and Walter) is still resident in Assendon.

In Kelly's Directory of Henley-on-Thames in 1936, Walter Willcocks is shown as the publican of The Traveller's Rest public house and Miss Ellen Froomes is proprietor of the Lower Assendon post office, a post she continued to hold into the 1960s whereupon the post office transferred to Middle Assendon. The landlord of the Golden Ball is Tom Harris, whom Cecil Roberts frequently quotes in his local books.

Robert Aitken of Mile End, Lower Assendon, finally solved the mystery for me. He was able to show me an extract of a copy of out-of-print *The Hostelries of Henley* by Ann Cottingham, which identifies the Red Cross or Assendon Cross as being at the junction of the Fairmile with the road through Assendon. His house is at that location and still has the beer cellar with beer drop and the old stable block, now converted into accommodation.



The Red Cross, or Assendon Cross, c1890 from *The Hostelries of Henley* by Ann Cottingham

The park wall behind the Assendon Cross was not built until 1804, so it could have had access to the fields for horses in the 18th century. The building was certainly used as a staging inn, like The Golden Ball. In the 19th century it is clearly a beer house with lodgings, as evidenced by the census results.

The Assendon Cross was a public house for most of the 18th century and maybe earlier. The earliest recorded landlord is William Webb in 1753. It closed in 1900 when it was sold to Brakspears with a restrictive covenant that it should never be a public house again. The old Travellers Rest had been rebuilt at this time and the licensee of the Assendon Cross, Robert C Bratchell, transferred to the new Travellers Rest.