

# Mr John Smith, Gentleman

by Wanda Foulkes

I first came across the name of Mr John Smith in reference to him buying Abbot's House. In 1795 he is reputed to have bought the house from Anne Clarke's executors. He then apparently gave the house to his son Thomas (husband of Sarah Smith). I was curious about such generosity and wanted to find out more.

The parish records for St Lawrence, Abbots Langley confirm that on 13th June 1797 Mr John Smith, 63 years, was buried. The title 'Mr' had great significance at that time. It indicated that he had land or fortune, so that he held status above the rest of the untitled members of his society. Mr John Smith, Gentleman would certainly have viewed himself above John Smith, Ploughman. His son Thomas also carried this status, being buried as Mr Thomas Smith.

Unfortunately there I became stuck, as I found no record of the birth of either father or son. The parish records for St Lawrence also do not hold information about John Smith's marriage.

More information was forthcoming from Sun Fire insurance policies held in the London Metropolitan Archives. Here I found two policies separated by 10 years.

In the 1781 Sun Fire insurance policy I found John Smith, Maltster & Mealman, Abbots Langley. He was insuring a 'house and offices only adjoining in the tenure of Frances Knowles, a Barn Stable and Hogsty and Brewhouse'. I have interpreted this to possibly be the Unicorn pub.

In 1791 I now found that John Smith was now referring to himself as a Hertfordshire Gentleman. In this policy he was covering far

more properties in Kitters Green, Sarratt and Bovingdon, as well as the Unicorn pub. I assume he owned these properties, as he was insuring them. Certainly he seems to have shed the title of Mealman and Maltster.

The final historical evidence that I hold for Mr John Smith is from the Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists. The Napoleonic War caused concern about a possible invasion of England from France. The Militias were formed from volunteers, who undertook basic military training. Hertfordshire is lucky to still have extensive lists. In them I found various entries. In 1758 I found John Smith Abbots Langley Farmer Mr. 1769 John Smith South End Gentleman. In 1778 for South End there are various entries as 'Servant to Mr. Smith'. I am not sure where South End, Abbots Langley refers to and John Smith is quite a common name!

I offer what little information I have found in the hope that someone in the future will be able to fill in the missing parts of John Smith's life-story. ■

*Wanda Foulkes*

## References

1. Abbots Langley Then: 1760-1960 by C.W. Clark
2. The Hertfordshire Militia Ballot Lists <https://www.hertsfhs.org.uk/hfphs26.html>
3. <https://www.history.ac.uk/gh/fire.htm>
4. Sun Fire insurance policy TRANSCRIPTION 3/7/2017 by WF – on next page

*The front cover of this Journal shows a present-day photograph of the Abbot's House. See also Journal 47, page 16 'Searching for Sarah' for further information relating to Thomas and Sarah Smith.*

**443372 Sun Fire Insurance Policy (17 May 1781)**

**John Smith of Abbots Langley in the county of Hertford, Maltster and Mealman.**

6/-			
Midi 1782			
6/7			
Bunniworth			
On a house and offices only adjoin (?the presence Eugene?) ?evaluate as afore said? in the tenure of Frances Knowles Victualler Brick plaister and ??value not exceeding one hundred and fifty pounds			£160
Barn Stable and Hogsty only as joining each other separate timber value not exceeding twenty five pounds			£25
?Brev four?			-----
19 May 1781			£185
Brewhouse only separate timber value not exceeding fifteen pounds			£15
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A Darell	?C.Buwicke?	J.Pole	£200

**Title Insured: John Smith, Abbots Langley, Hertfordshire, Gent**

**Reference Code CLC/B/192/F/001/MS11936/381/593014**

**John Smith of Abbots Langley in Hertford, Gent.**

£1"8"-			
Xmas 1792			
£1"10"4			
On His house only in tenure of William Dyer, Farmer not exceeding one hundred and twenty pounds			£120
On a house and offices only adjoin (?the presence Eugene?) ?evaluate as afore said? in the tenure of Frances Knowles Victualler Brick plaister and ??value not exceeding one hundred and fifty pounds			£160
Wheat Barn only adjoining not exceeding eighty pounds			£80
Barley Barn adjoining not exceeding sixty pounds			£60
Stable and cow house adjoining not exceeding forty pounds			£40
Cottage only in Long Lane in the tenure of Puddifont not exceeding sixty pounds			£60
Barn only separate not exceeding forty pounds			£40
Stable and Ban adjoining at Bovingdon Green in the tenure of John Element not exceeding fifty pounds			£50
Tenement only in the tenure of James Cook Private. Brick and tiled not exceeding sixty pounds			£60
Two tenements adjoining in the tenure of Element, brick and tiled not exceeding one hundred and forty pounds			£140
The above situated at Bovington in Herts			
House only at Sarratt in Herts in the tenure of Philemon Stone not exceeding Fifty pounds			£50
House only the Unicorn at Gallows Hill in the parish of Abbots Langley in Herts in the tenure of Frances Knowles Victualler Brick and tiled not exceeding one hundred and fifty pounds			£150
Four tenements adjoining near in the tenure of Hannah Collings, William Collings, Joseph Chapman and Peter Crouch of no hazardous trade not exceeding one hundred pounds			£100
House only at Kitters Green in the tenure of Jeremiah Smith brick and tiled not exceeding one hundred and fifty pounds			£150
All Brick and timber or Timber and tiled except as above.			-----
			£1100
		Duty	16/6
			17/10
J. Godrey	J.Moffatt	J.Dea	