

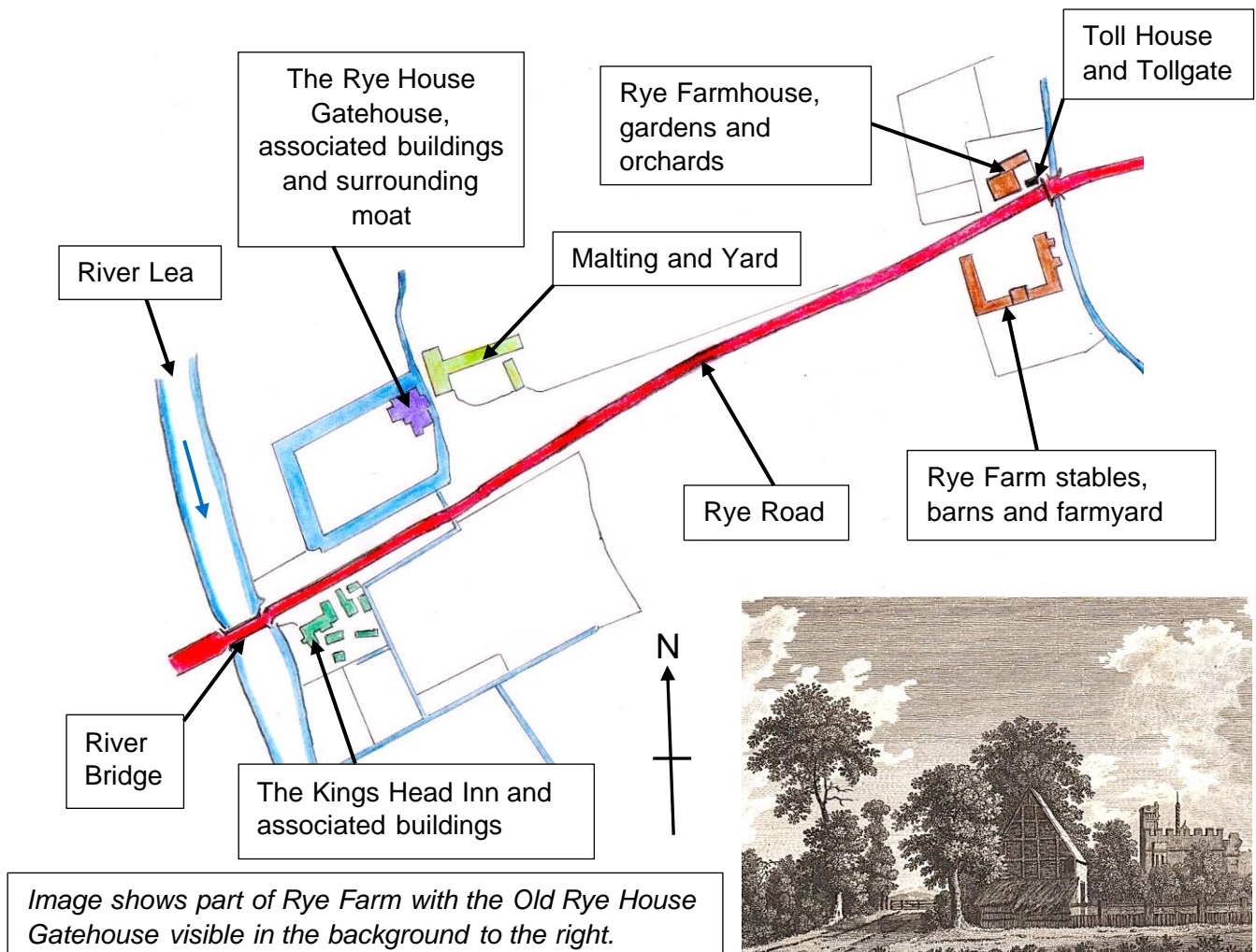
THE KINGS HEAD INN AND THE RYE HOUSE BEFORE THE VICTORIAN PLEASURE GARDENS

1683 -1847

BY
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Rye House is located on the eastern side of the River Lea in the south of the Parish of Stanstead Abbots. The Rye is historically notable for its early brick built fortified manor house dating from 1443 and its association with the Rye House Plot to kill Charles II in 1683. The plot involved waylaying the King on his expected return from the horse races at Newmarket. Following this failed attempt and the subsequent executions the area of the Rye slipped into quiet obscurity during the 1700s. The remains of the ancient Rye House being in use not long after 1734 as the Stanstead Abbots Parish Workhouse. References to the Rye in the 1700s tend to refer to Rye Farm rather than the remains of the old Rye House. The farm was located several hundred yards to the NE of the Rye House along the toll road that led to the parish church of St James. The farm was located close to the tollgate and toll house on the Rye Road a once important main road. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly in this fairly isolated spot was the roadside Kings Arms Inn, located not far from the river bridge. It is thought that an Inn had been in business here since at least the late 1600s when the toll road across the Lea Valley had been a much-used main road for those travelling from London to and from Cambridge and Newmarket. With the improvement of the road through Epping Forest in the first half of the 1700s the use of the road through the Rye for long distance travel was much reduced. This probably explains why by the 1800s the King Arms Inn had become established as a venue for wealthy gentlemen to indulge in the art of fishing.

THE RYE IN 1840



The first possible mention of an Inn at the Rye can be found in Izaak Walton's book "The Compleat Angler" in which he refers to an Inn called the "Trout Hall Inn." It may be the Inn at the Rye is being alluded to when he described "an honest alehouse, *where we shall find cleanly rooms, lavender in the windows, twenty ballads stuck about the wall and a hostess both cleanly, handsome and civil.*" Izaak Walton first published his much-read book in 1653 with the last, the 5th edition, published in 1676. The book describes the techniques of fishing he used at various locations along the River Lea. The book did a great deal to attract many gentleman fishermen to visit the Lea to enjoy their angling. His book predates the Rye House plot of 1683 following which the area of the Rye falls into historical obscurity. Perhaps in the aftermath of the plot many felt uncomfortable being associated with the Rye House. As for much of the next century the use of the term Rye House was used as a reference to Rye Farm. Perhaps the old Rye House building was better not mentioned due to its unfortunate association with a plot to murder a King. Meanwhile the road through the Rye remained a main road often used by private coaches running between London and Cambridge or Newmarket. Samuel Pepys in his diary in 1668 mentions how coachmen would divert away in wet weather from the Old North Road through Ware and travel along a better less muddy route taking them along the privy [private] road through the Rye as they crossed the Lea Valley between Hoddesdon and Stanstead Bury. The value of an Inn on such a road in those times supplemented by income from gentlemen fishermen enthused by Izaak Walton's words goes a long way to explain the location of an Inn at this then very isolated location.

The road through Epping Forest suffered poor quality surfaces and from the robbery and violence of Highwaymen and Footpads who deterred many travellers from venturing that way. The most obvious alternative route was via Ware and Puckeridge but that road was notorious for extremely muddy and slow progress after heavy rain. These factors led to many using the private toll road passing the Rye House as their preferred route. After 1750 the problems on the two routes mentioned had been solved by the work of the Epping to Ongar and the Wadesmill Turnpike Trusts as well as police successes in suppressing the violent robbery, once particularly prevalent on the Epping Forest Road. This resulted in the reduction of travellers passing the Inn at the Rye which then became more reliant on the Gentlemen fishermen from London pursuing their Izaak Walton inspired fishing expeditions. The workhouse at the Rye is mentioned in 1767 as housing 50 inmates. This is a notably large number of inmates for Stansted Abbots parish alone, so one might assume they were taking in the poor from other parishes. The Rye House Gatehouse building is not big enough to hold so many people so the other associated buildings around the gatehouse must also have been part of the workhouse accommodation.

THE RYE HOUSE



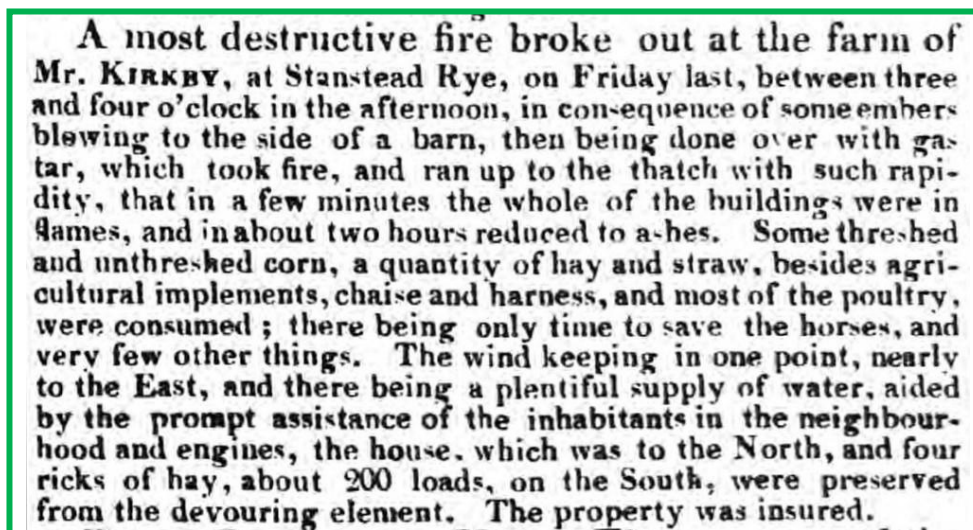
The above engraving is typical of the many artists' impressions of the Old Rye House made during the period of the "Picturesque Movement." This image, like many of the engravings of the house at the Rye of that time, included a considerable degree of artistic licence.

The late 1700s saw the rise of the "Picturesque Movement" which valued the appearance of landscape and buildings which invoked rustic memories of the past. This was a very British movement which was to last well into the 1800s. The Rye House became considered to be one of those rustic buildings and was visited both by artists and touring visitors to draw and view its crumbling grandeur. This occurred despite its association with the Rye House Plot and also becoming the Parish Workhouse for Stanstead Abbots, not long after 1734. By 1805 the Rye House Workhouse house was recorded with only a few elderly ladies in residence.

Across the road the Inn at the Rye, named the Kings Arms, was still providing accommodation and refreshment at this isolated spot, both for touring visitors chasing the picturesque as well as the fishermen. Both groups tended to be drawn from the more affluent middle-class many of whom lived and worked in London. They made their own way to the Rye, sometimes in their own carriages. While staying at the Inn the fishermen were entitled to fish from the east bank of the Lea from the river bridge downstream to Fields Weir. This was a private fishery so the guests at the Inn had exclusive use of the east bank of the Lea. It is probable that the choice of name as "The Kings Arms" was designed to draw attention through an indirect reference to the Rye House Plot. However, it is not known exactly when this name was adopted. Just to confuse matters the advertising for the Inn often referred to the hostelry as the Rye House Inn, no doubt to be more familiar as a location to prospective guests.

THE FIRE AT THE RYE IN 1826

The isolated tranquillity of this spot down by the river was rudely interrupted in 1826 when a fire raged at The Rye Farm; the farmers at the time being the Kirkby family.



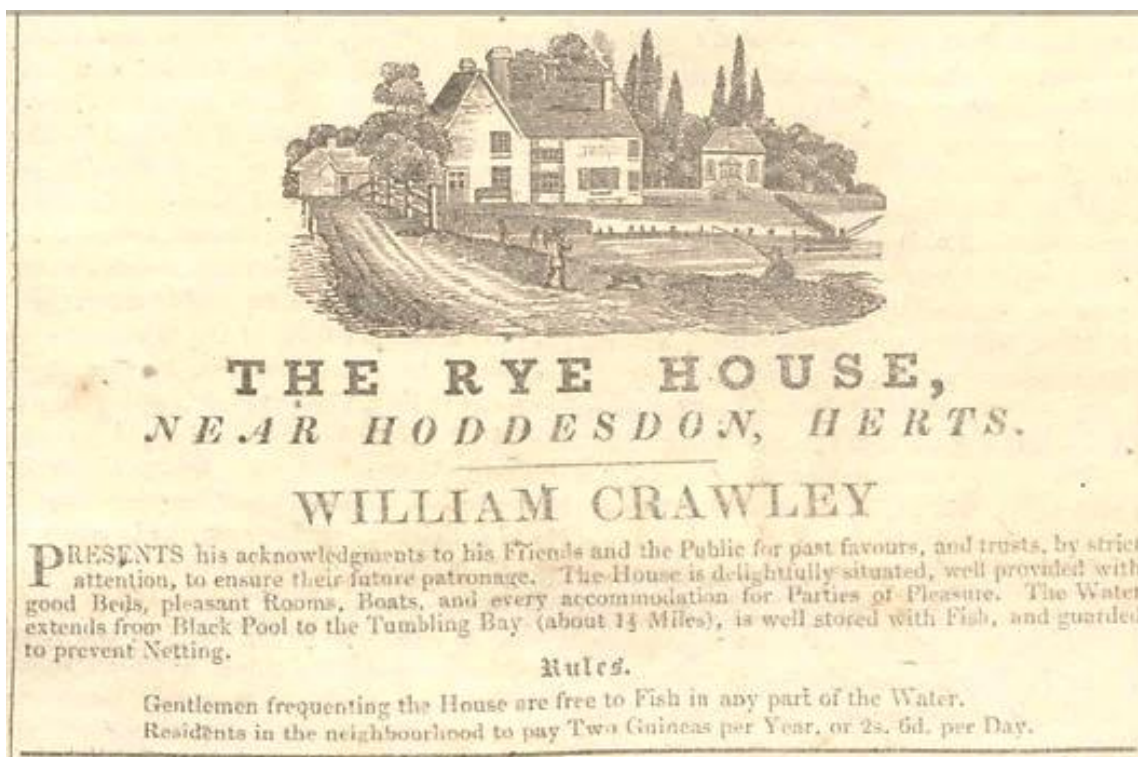
A most destructive fire broke out at the farm of Mr. KIRKBY, at Stanstead Rye, on Friday last, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, in consequence of some embers blowing to the side of a barn, then being done over with gas-tar, which took fire, and ran up to the thatch with such rapidity, that in a few minutes the whole of the buildings were in flames, and in about two hours reduced to ashes. Some threshed and unthreshed corn, a quantity of hay and straw, besides agricultural implements, chaise and harness, and most of the poultry, were consumed; there being only time to save the horses, and very few other things. The wind keeping in one point, nearly to the East, and there being a plentiful supply of water, aided by the prompt assistance of the inhabitants in the neighbourhood and engines, the house, which was to the North, and four ricks of hay, about 200 loads, on the South, were preserved from the devouring element. The property was insured.

The above report appeared on the 23rd March 1826 in the London Morning Post

The Kirby family had been the tenant farmers at Rye farm since Samuel Kirby had moved from Derbyshire to live at the Farm likely to have been in 1774. [Samuel's wife had given birth to a child in Derbyshire in 1773 and the next in Stanstead Abbots in 1775]. The Kirkby family were to remain as the tenant farmers at Rye Farm until Samuel's grandson George emigrated to Australia in 1853. The fire took place in the area of the barns and farmyard on the opposite side of the road to the Farmhouse, gardens and orchards which limited the damage to the farm as a whole. Fire was a constant concern in days when many of the buildings were made of wood and not infrequently water proofed with flammable tar. It suggests in the report that the barn was in the process of being re tarred; a most vulnerable time for a fire to catch hold. If they were using the hot tarring method this would typically involve a metal tub being heated over a wood fire. Thus, although this is not specifically mentioned in the report above it may be that sparks from that very fire were the cause of the conflagration. The fire caused much to be lost including the barn, but insurance would have covered the majority of the cost for the Kirkby's. It is noted that the locals, just a few in this location, stepped up to assist in fighting the flames. The mention of engines suggests that hand pumped wheeled fire appliances were available at the Rye to quell the flames before they spread further. No doubt this fire was a much-remembered event by those who lived at the Rye in those days

A Poor Law Commission survey of 1834 reported that the workhouse at the Rye had few inmates with David Straken as the resident proprietor. It was also recorded that the Rev. Thomas Fielde, vicar of Stanstead, oversaw the spiritual needs of the workhouse with John Bigg also of the parish acting as the Overseer. It also mentioned that the workhouse at Rye House had been in operation for just short of 100 years. In 1835 a Poor Law Act was passed which locally ushered in the Ware Poor Law Union and was to lead to a new large workhouse being built in Collett Road in Ware. Although this was not built until 1839-40 the inmates at the Rye House Workhouse were moved out sometime in the period 1836-1838. We find that in 1839 William Godfrey is in residence in his home in the Old Rye House building which has now returned to being a private residence; as it had been previously, for some three centuries.

AN 1836 ADVERT FOR THE KINGS ARMS AT THE RYE



In 1836 we find Mr William Crawley the proprietor of the Kings Arms at the Rye is advertising his establishment as "THE RYE HOUSE." However, the image on the advert is clearly the Kings Arms Inn, as viewed from the west bank of the River Lea, and as it would have been seen by guests approaching from the Hoddesdon direction.

It might suggest from the wording acknowledging past favours that he had been there for some time. The advert emphasises the provision of good beds, pleasant rooms and the availability of boats on the river providing perhaps a little insight into previous guest's stated preferences. It is interesting to note that the one and a half miles of fishing bank available to guests for free is also offered to local inhabitants on the purchase of a yearly or day pass.

A year later we find that William Cook is leasing the Kings Arms and its associated land and fishing rights with George Cook mentioned as the on-site landlord. The 1840 tythe award documents reveal that William Webb held the lease of the Rye Farm along with the maltings [worked by Mr Straken] located close to the Old Rye House Gatehouse occupied by William Godfrey. All of the properties at the Rye being administered by the Trustees of the estate of the deceased William Henry Fielde.

Also, in 1840 the Rye House featured in an article in *The Penny Magazine*. An illustrated weekly published on Saturdays aimed at the members of the working class at the very affordable cost of one penny. It was published between 1832 and 1845 on behalf for the "Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge". The following are extracts from the *Penny Magazine* article on the "Rye House and the Rye House Plot" in the issue of Saturday May 16th 1840.

THE RYE HOUSE



To the disciples of Izaak Walton, the house represented in the above engraving is well known as marking a spot where they are sure to find a good angle; but it has obtained a more extended celebrity from its being the home in which the conspirators, who intended it was said to have murdered Charles II on his road from Newmarket, were to have assembled to put their plans into execution....

The Rye House is situated on the River Lea near its junction with the River Stort. And contiguous with the village of Hoddesdon in Hertfordshire. It is on the east bank of the river [Lea], but a short distance from it; an alehouse, which has adopted the well-known name of the building being situated south of it on the side of the road to Stansted. This Alehouse has been from time immemorial the favourite resort of London Anglers when the Lea has been the scene of their operations, and doubtless to this when the cheerful Izaak Walton alluded when he speaks of the "honest alehouse" The house, however is now [in 1840] altogether modern...

The House and grounds of the Manor House of the Rye formerly occupied a considerable space surrounded by a moat now partially filled in.... The house was built in the reign of Henry VI, by Andrew Ogard, to whom the King granted licence to impark the whole consisting of 85 acres. In the time of Elizabeth, it was occupied by Sir Edward Baest [Baeshe] 'Surveyor General of victuals for the seas;' and from him it came into the procession of Edmund Fielde Esq., in whose family it still remains.

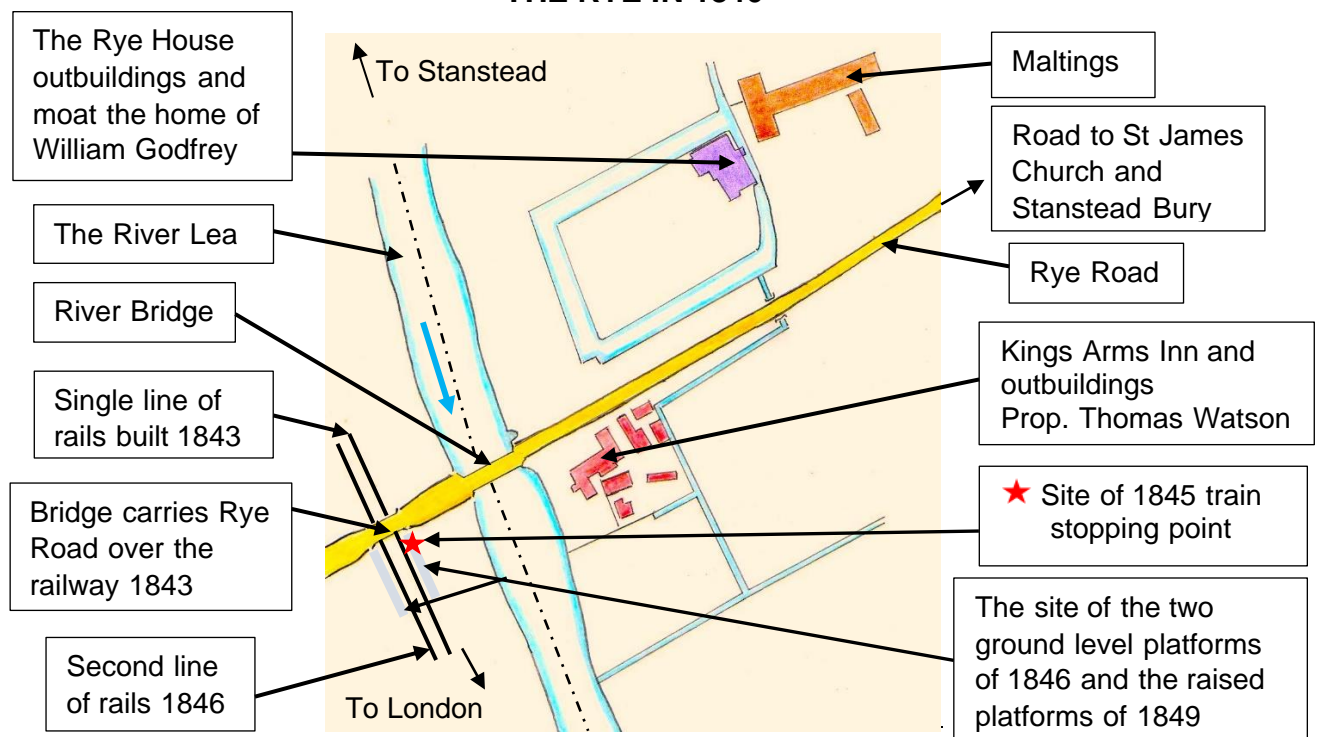
..... The only portion of the [original] Rye House now standing is the embattled gatehouse, built of brick and ornamented with a handsome stone gothic doorway. This was formerly used as a workhouse for the poor of Stansted, in which parish it is situated.

The buildings around the still extant gatehouse in 1840 appear to have been built after the original Rye House buildings were demolished. By 1840 these later buildings were themselves showing their age and in a relatively poor state. However, some of these buildings would be rescued in the not-too-distant future by Henry William Teale, to have a second life as part of his Victorian Pleasure Gardens.

The year 1840 saw the opening of a railway line, by the Northern & Eastern Railway Company. [N&ER] from Shoreditch in London to a temporary terminus at Broxbourne. It was the harbinger of things to come that would bring great changes to the Kings Arms Inn at Rye House and in time the Old Rye House itself. In November 1843 the N&ER opened a single line branch from Broxbourne Junction to Hertford passing close to Rye House. However, the small and isolated hamlet of the Rye just across the River Lea from the railway did not warrant the building of a station. By this time the mainline of the railway had been extended to Bishops Stortford with the railway cutting through the southern part of the land attached to the Kings Arms at the Rye.

Despite there not being a station, the proprietor of the Kings Arms, now Thomas Watson, approached the railway company regarding the possibility of his gentlemen fishing guests being able visit the Rye by train. His attempts were delayed a little no doubt with the N&ER being taken over by the Eastern Counties Railway Company [ECR], officially coming into force from the 1st January 1844. Just over a year later the ECR Directors agreed that railway tickets could be sold at the King Arms but only to those members of the fishing club staying at the hotel. Of course, there was the small matter of how the passengers might actually leave the train to go to the hotel and indeed catch a train at the end of their stay. These matters were passed to the Traffic Committee of the ECR to deliberate on. They wrote a letter to Mr Watson of Rye House on the 22nd May 1845 explaining that only the first down train [from London] and the last up train can be allowed to stop at Rye House. Clearly Mr Watson was not pleased by this which led the same committee agreeing on the 29th of May that with respect of the matter agreed on the 22nd last, "the 7am down train may also now be allowed to stop at Rye House." In order to stop a train at Rye House a red flag was to be shown in daylight and the flag to be held in front of an oil lamp at night. This was undoubtedly carried out by a member of the staff at the Inn seeing their guests safely on their way. To ensure a passenger could alight at Rye House a passenger would need to inform the head guard at the start of the journey, on those specific trains, that they wished to disembark. There were no facilities provided at the trackside in 1845 with passengers waiting for the train on the grass at the side of the track. In those days the four wheeled coaches had a lower footboard that ran the full length of the coach at axle box level allowing the agile to egress or enter the carriages. In this way Mr Watson took his first steps to increase the number of London fishermen visiting the Kings Arms at Rye House using this new form of transport.

THE RYE IN 1846



On the 31st May 1846 the ECR opened a request halt at Rye House. It is thought that this was built in conjunction with the doubling of the line to Hertford. The halt consisted of two ground level cinder covered platforms marked at night by bullseye oil lamps showing a white light. The lamps being raised up some 10 feet above ground level, by being fixed to tall white painted post. This was a position indicator for locomotive drivers so that they could judge more accurately where to stop the train during the hours of darkness. Today it is difficult to realise how dark nights could be back then, with no street lamps and little in the way of light escaping through thick curtains from the oil lamps used in people's homes. One can imagine a group well-off gentleman huddled by the side of the track awaiting their train home in the gloom. Then on the arrival of the train clambering up with all their luggage and fishing equipment to reach the soft seats of the first-class carriages. Then their train journey to Shoreditch Station and on by horse drawn cab to their respective homes in London. Railway tickets at this time continued to be sold at the Kings Arms by the proprietor who no doubt saw his guests safely onto their homeward bound train. It was going to be 1849 before the ECR built a proper station with two raised platforms and a staffed booking office to serve members of the general public at Rye House.

The number of passengers using the halt in the 1845-49 period must have been adequate for the Board of Directors of the ECR to feel it was worthwhile to invest in a proper if small station. This would appear to be somewhat unusual for such an isolated location. It should be noted that the land area between the Lea westwards to the Hoddesdon - Stanstead Road was still a wide expanse of agricultural land with little in the way of habitation. However, those using the station are likely to have been predominantly first-class passengers as both the fisherman and visitors seeking the picturesque at Rye House would be drawn from the more affluent of the middle class. The first-class travellers presented the one group of passengers whose fares provided a significant profit for the railway companies. Therefore, Rye House presented an unusual example of an isolated location that was perceived by the railway Directors as a possibly worthwhile investment. However, the ECR made it clear that this was a temporary arrangement and traffic levels would be closely monitored to judge whether continued or further expenditure was justified.

Meanwhile, in 1845 William Henry Teale had relinquished his role as the landlord at the Horse and Groom public house in Leyton and in 1846 was living in Shoreditch, not far from the ECR terminal station. He was also contemplating his future aware that he was about to, or already had, received an inheritance of a considerable sum of money. It was at this time that the lease of the Kings Arms Inn at Rye House became available and no doubt caught Mr Teale's attention leading him to consider the site's possibilities and how they might relate to his now enhanced aspirations.

The Kings Arms had changed hands quite a few times in the previous few years and perhaps this was an indication that it was difficult to earn a good income from it relying just on seasonal visitors and fishermen. Mr Teale saw that the isolated spot would not be a disadvantage for a noisy and busy venue with the potential of considerable numbers of people arriving by train. The ECR terminal station at Shoreditch [*about 400 yards north of the later Liverpool Street station*] in the middle of the populous East End of London was just over an hour away by train. This meant there would be a plentiful source of potential customers. The Kings Arms came with the fishing rights as well as a significant amount of land for the development of some form of pleasure gardens. With the benefit of hindsight one can imagine him concluding that he could attract a variety of people by offering a range of leisure activities at the Kings Arms and much enhance the income of the Inn. He must have concluded that Rye House was a more than suitable location to invest for the future as he and his family moved to Rye House in 1847.

This signalled the beginning of a whole new era for the Kings Arms and indeed in time for the Old Rye House. Mr Teale was soon to rename the Kings Arms as the Rye House Tavern, not too dissimilar to how it had been advertised for at least several decades. He also worked hard to encourage the railway to build a proper station, which they did in 1849. The Pleasure Gardens and other attractions Mr Teale added over time were to become a great success attracting tens of thousands of visitors yearly. Several decades after William Henry Teale took over at the Kings Arms the railway company declared that Rye House was the principal excursion station, by passenger numbers, on their railway system. [*The railway companies' network by 1880 included the majority of railway stations in East Anglia*]. The Pleasure Gardens remained in operation until the late 1920s after gently fading away and closing as other attractions drew visitors elsewhere.

A summary of events at the Rye from 1653 to 1850 is to be found on the next page .

A BRIEF HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY OF THE RYE

1653 TO 1850

1653	It may be that Izaak Walton was referring to the Inn at the Rye when he mentioned the "Trout Hall" in his well-read book "The Compleat Angler".
1683	The Rye House Plot followed by executions of those in failed plot to kill Charles II
1734-40	The Rye House becomes the Workhouse for the Parish of Stanstead Abbots.
1750s	Main Road passing through the Rye lost much of its long-distance traffic. The Inn at the Rye becomes more reliant on fishermen and other visitors.
1767	A documented mention of the Rye House as a workhouse for the poor. [50 inmates]
1780s to the 1840s	The Rye House becomes one of those places visited and drawn by artists as part of an interest within society about the old and picturesque.
1805	Workhouse at Rye House noted as occupied by a few old women as inmates.
1834	Rye Workhouse mentioned as having been a workhouse for nearly 100 years.
1836	Inn at the Rye referred to as a "Fishing House" William Crawley proprietor of the Kings Arms.
1836-38	Workhouse inmates moved to Ware and The Rye House vacated. [<i>Stanstead now part of the area of the Ware Poor Law Union formed in 1835</i>]
1839	Pigot's Directory records Thomas Godfrey as occupant of The Rye House. [<i>Still there 10 years later.</i>]
1840	William Cook holding lease of the Kings Arms at the Rye. [Tythe Award] George Cook recorded as proprietor of the Kings Arms. Tythe Map shows the Inn named as the Kings Arms. Lease of the Inn held from the Trustees of William Henry Fielde deceased. Article in the Penny Magazine of May 16 th states the Inn has adopted the name of the well-known house on the other side of the road [The Rye House] [<i>This use of "The Rye House (Inn) / (Hotel) " was for advertising purposes.</i>]
1843	Northern and Eastern Railway opened a single line branch to Hertford. No station was provided at the Rye.
1845	Thomas Watson proprietor of the Inn. Eastern Counties Railway [ECR] allow tickets to be sold to fisherman resident at the hotel. Simple trackside request halt arrangement for limited use and for a few trains only.
1846	William Henry Teale having left Leyton now living in Shoreditch. ECR make Hertford branch a double track railway. ECR provide a basic ground level request halt at Rye House.
1847	William Henry Teale and family take up residence at the Inn at Rye House.
1849	ECR construct two raised platforms and booking office creating a proper station. Thomas Godfrey in residence at The Old Rye House
1850	Henry Teale has begun to develop his Pleasure Gardens. The Rye House; a private residence with some visitors shown round on a limited basis.