**Kings Head Hotel (to 1900)**

Robert Doncon (1814-1881) and his wife Sophia (1816-1881) were the publicans at the Half Way House by at least June 1847.[[1]](#footnote-1)

They bought a 2 acre property from Revett Henry Bland on 16 July 1846 for 2 pounds[[2]](#footnote-2) and started building the Kings Head Hotel.

In November 1849 Doncon was offering goods for sale at the hotel.[[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4) He also continued to run the Half Way House until 1855.[[5]](#footnote-5) He ran the Kings Head with his wife Sophia.

In March 1850, Doncon was charged with serving brandy to the aboriginal police. [[6]](#footnote-6) Doncon claimed that the native police were buying the alcohol for the Protector, Walkinshaw Cowan, who was known to be opposed to the “fiery spirits”, but it was probably John Drummond they were buying for.

The Kings Head Hotel was granted a “Publicans’ Retail Spirit Licence” in January 1851.[[7]](#footnote-7) Relicensed next year the same time as the Dusty Miller.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The hotel was used for meetings of the York Agricultural Society until they began to meet at the Castle Hotel. [[9]](#footnote-9) It was also used for other meetings such as the Race Club.[[10]](#footnote-10)

At the meeting of the York Agricultural Society in July 1851, “about 30 of the members sat down to a dinner provided by Mr Doncon; the cloth having been removed, the usual loyal toasts were drank”.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Doncon took a conveyance of another lot nearby in 1853.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In 1856, Doncon put up the Kings Head for lease:

 “The proprietor is about to relinquish the conduct of the above establishment, in consequence of other business requiring his attention. To an active person desirous of entering into the public line, the above offers advantages rarely to be met with in the colony. The House contains 11 bedrooms, 2 sitting rooms, tap room, bar and kitchen with bake and brew-house and a five bushel oven, together with stabling for 20 horses, cart lodges, carpenter’s shop and 4 stockyards, well of good water, &c, and 7 acres land adjoining.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

No mention of what happened following this.

In November 1858, Doncon advertised for a House Carpenter, promising six months constant employ at good wages.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The Kings Head was improved in appearance in 1859. [[15]](#footnote-15)

Doncon was proud that the “Working Class” came to his hotel. In October 1959, Doncon advertised:

 “ROBERT DONCON, proprietor of the “Kings Head”, York, begs to return his thanks for the liberal support he has received from all classes, more especially *the Working Class*, and to assure them that he has been enabled from that support to erect a first-class House, where he can accommodate either *rich or poor* with refreshments of the best quality and upon reasonable terms. RD can at any moment provide Bedrooms well-aired, for upwards of thirty persons, and comfort that requires one visit to prove the fact. RD begs to assure the public that his bottle Ale and Porter department will be found well supplied, and as usual every pains taken in purchasing the same to select what his customers give him credit for having – a good article and cheap. Wines of the first quality either in draught or bottle, and some excellent Champagne. Draught Porter and Ale drawn with an engine A BALL will be held on Wednesday, the 26th of October, and a first-rate band will attend. Supper at 8 o’clock. Good and extensive stables, gig and coach houses locked, stockyard, sheep pens, and a large paddock, and a supply of excellent corn and hay. An experienced Ostler will be kept.”

In the same newspaper, Doncon advertised for a bread and biscuit baker.

A reporter in 1859 said:

“Of the King's Head I can speak in praise of its appearance, and the vast improvements in that establishment certainly make it most inviting. From this impartial account it will be seen that I have adhered to truth, without any approach to disparagement of either party.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

Doncon continued to improve, advertising in 1860 for tenders for 550 yards of plastering.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Doncon then advertised the hotel “to be let” for a term of 5 years. Advertisements in 1862 described the Kings Head Inn as follows:

 “”a drawing room, parlour and dining room, ballroom, 10 bedrooms, bar and tap room, commodious kitchen and pantry with large baker’s oven, also extensive cellarage. The outhouses are complete consisting of 14 stall stables, looseboxes, hay and cart sheds, stock yards etc, the whole in excellent repair, together with 32 acres of land; the whole in a high state of cultivation.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

On 1 January 1863, Robert Doncon published that "having again resumed the management of the [King’s Head] Hotel, “begs to acquaint his friends and the public that the same assiduous attention which he formerly gave and which was so long appreciated, will be renewed, every attention to guests of all grades will be cheerfully given”.[[19]](#footnote-19)

On 8 November 1872, Richard William Chipper applied for a publican’s general licence for the King’s Head Hotel “containing three sitting rooms and eight bedrooms…now in the occupation of Mr Robert Doncon”.[[20]](#footnote-20) In about September 1873, Doncon leased the hotel to Chipper.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In 1874, Chipper, as licensee was charged with allowing gambling on the premises. Henry Stevens (the blacksmith), Henry Turner (or Ware) and John Dott were the customers. They were watched by Lance Corporal Parker and Police Constable Lavery, who observed at least 20 games of dice each for the stake of a “dollar”, Chipper being present during the whole affair. After one party had been “spun up”, Chipper lent him a pound so he could keep playing. “As it was in the small hours of the morning, it was considered necessary to smoke and liquor down, before proceeding any further”. While Chipper left the room to get refreshments, the constables entered the room. One of the customers suggested “sending over a gallon of pale brandy to square the Beak”.

Chipper declined to cross examine and pleaded guilty and was fined 20 pounds, given that Chipper had been convicted of the same offence a few months earlier.

In January 1878, R W Chipper the “landlord” of the Kings Head was fined for having a drunken man on the premises.[[22]](#footnote-22)[[23]](#footnote-23)

In March 1878, Robert Doncon gives notice applying for an Eating, Boarding and Lodging House licence.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Then in November 1879, Thomas Davis (farmer) gave notice that he applied to hold the Publican’s General Licence for the Kings Head “containing 6 bedrooms and 4 sitting rooms, exclusive of those required by my family, the premises being rented from F Doncon of Boyadine. The notice says “I have never held a license before”[[25]](#footnote-25).

In January 1880, Chipper was reported as going to a new residence and was:

“removing a quantity of manure from the premises of the “Kings Head” during the last week. One of the men employed discovered a sovereign amongst it, directly upon which a further search was made, when nearly a score were soon obtained. This singular discovery is quite unexplained, and it is conjectured that a robbery has been committed, and in the hurry they have been “planted” by some one who has not had the opportunity afforded him of opening the ‘mine’”.[[26]](#footnote-26)

The journalist goes on to say:

“The last article to be removed by Mr Chipper from the “Kings Head” to his new residence was a moveable Water Closet, of wooden structure. It was placed in the wagon with the poor blind fiddler sitting on it, with another man holding an umbrella over him. This this useful structure was taken through the street, and our readers may imagine the wonderment of the seeers of this uncommon sight. Spectators could plainly observe that it was in the market, on reading the words in large letters upon it, ‘TO LET – INQUIRE WITHIN.’”

In 1882, Davis’s application for a licence was refused.[[27]](#footnote-27)

In 1883, Edward Doncon of Boyadine (Robert DOncon’s son) applied for the liquor licence for the Kings Head, presumably on behalf of Davis.[[28]](#footnote-28)

The hotel was rented again to Chipper and then purchased by him in 1883 for a price of 2,500 pounds.[[29]](#footnote-29)[[30]](#footnote-30) [[31]](#footnote-31) [[32]](#footnote-32) Chipper applied for a publican’s licence on 17 May 1883.[[33]](#footnote-33) The hotel was described by one journalist as being “a rather aged, incommodious, and somewhat out-of-the-way place”.[[34]](#footnote-34) Described by another as “small”, but doing “good business”[[35]](#footnote-35) with “many of his old customers apparently rallying round him”.[[36]](#footnote-36) His “old customers” were a rough bunch.

In 1885 a discharged sailor named John Doyle was drinking at the Kings Head, gradually getting drunk. He claimed he had paid 7 shillings and 6 pence to Mr Chipper and not received his drink. He started to get angry and said he would rip Chipper’s inside open and he would take his life and burn his premises down, and leave his wife a widow. Two nights later, Chipper’s haystack next to the hotel was on fire. 20 to 25 tons of hay were burnt, and fortunately the hotel was not destroyed. One journalist said “a crowd soon collected, chiefly navvies from their camp at Mr Keane’s workshop which is close by, and with great labour, a few tonnes of hay was saved, but if it had been summer not only would the whole of the hay have been lost but nothing could possibly have saved the adjacent buildings.”[[37]](#footnote-37) Doyle was charged.[[38]](#footnote-38)

One of the problems of the hotel was that the urinal adjoined the footpath and was causing a nuisance. In September 1885, the York Municipal Council required Chipper to abate the nuisance.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In January 1886, Edward Pettit and Edward Cook assaulted Arthur Dougherty, breaking his nose and finger.[[40]](#footnote-40)

In 1886, a year after the railway line had been put through by “Mr Keane’s railway boys”, a drunken horseman “thought proper to try a few feats of horsemanship; in the public streets”. He was chased by three mounted police who yelled to him “surrender!” and “shtop!”. The rider did not follow these orders but “made tracks for a three bar rail fence, crossing it with a splendid wars-whoop and pulling up on the other side” to watch the three policeman unable to follow him, and pulling up violently. They let him go, to find him later in the day with his boots off drinking at the Kings Head inn, “from whence he was safely deposited in gaol” where “he will be provided with all necessaries for the space of six months certain” with a further six months should he not deposit a fine pound note.

Chipper was not well and called for tenders to lease and purchase the hotel in early 1886.[[41]](#footnote-41) A number of “highly satisfactory offers for the leasing and purchasing of that valuable hostelry” were received. [[42]](#footnote-42)

Chipper died suddenly on 23 November 1888 while in an epileptic fit.[[43]](#footnote-43)[[44]](#footnote-44)[[45]](#footnote-45) The December 1888 licence renewal was granted to H J Horley as administrator to Chipper’s estate.[[46]](#footnote-46)

“A DARING robbery was perpetrated at the “Kings Head” hotel in this town on Sunday morning last, at about 9 o’clock. One of the bedrooms was entered and three valuable rings were extracted from a box placed in the room, the property of Mr John Burke. Fortunately one of the servants saw two men quietly emerging from the bedroom in question, and at once gave the alarm; Mr Burke immediately went in pursuit of the plunderers and when close upon their heels noticed one of the men throw something on the ground, which turned out to be the stolen property. They were almost immediately placed under arrest and taken to the lock-up, where they are at present awaiting their trial.”[[47]](#footnote-47) The thieves were James Davis and Alexander Miller. They were sentenced to three years’ jail.[[48]](#footnote-48)

On 4 February 1891, Fletcher & Burk took over the hotel. They advertised “first class accommodation” to travellers to the Eastern Goldfields, with “plunge and shower baths”, “good stabling and an attentive ostler”. The hotel was said to be “within an easy distance of the Railway Station”.[[49]](#footnote-49) [[50]](#footnote-50) Fletcher & Burk applied for a publican’s general licence in May 1891.[[51]](#footnote-51) The hotel was described as “containing nine bedrooms and three sitting rooms, exclusive of those occupied by ourselves, and rented from H G Stirling, Esq, executor of the estate of the late RW Chipper”.

By 1899, the hotel was run by W Bell.[[52]](#footnote-52)

In 1905, it was being run by someone called Shead, who refused permission to the police top enter without a search warrant.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Rob Garton Smith

President

The York Society (Inc)

July 2022

1. Inquirer, 7 July 1847, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Landgate Memorial Book IV, No 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Inquirer, 7 November 1849, p.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ad repeated Inquirer, 14 November 1849, p.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 22 June 1855, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Rodger Jennings: Over the Hills, A history of York 1834-1880, p.118, note 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Inquirer, 15 January, 1851, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 23 January 1852, p.4; Inquirer 21 January, 1852, p.3. Also licensed on the same day was S Hayes Travellers’ Home on the York Road (later the 19 Mile Inn). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 9 February 1851, p.2; 14 February 1851, p.3.; 10 October 1951, p.3; 23 April 1852, p.3; 16 September 1853, p.2.;14 April 1854, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 19 September 1851, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Inquirer, 23 July 1851, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Landgate Deeds and Ordinances index Volume 5, 189 on page 250 (2 acres purchased for 7 pounds 10 shillings); and 241 on page 308 (purchased for 18 pounds). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 24 October 1856, p.5; 28 Novembere 1856, p.6.; smaller ad 3 October 1856, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 19 November 1858, p.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Inquirer and Commercial News 19 October 1859, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Inquirer and Commercial News 19 October 1859, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 6 July 1860 p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 11 July 1862 p.2; 3 October 1862, p.1.. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News 2 January 1863, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Inquirer and Commercial News, 13 November 1872, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Inquirer and Commercial News, 24 September 1873, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Inquirer and Commercial News, 30 January 1878, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 19 January, 1878, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 9 March 1878, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 15 November 1879, p.2.; 29 November 1879, p.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 2 January 1880, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. West Australian, 29 December 1882, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 12 January, 1883, p.2 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 20 April, 1883, p.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Daily News, 30 January 1883, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Victorian Express, 10 January 1883, p.3; Eastern Districts Chronicle, 29 December 1882, p.3.. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The notice for the licence application is at Eastern Districts Chronicle, 18 May 1883, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 25 May 1883, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Herald, 23 December 1882, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 20 April 1883, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. West Australian, 20 March 1883, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. West Australian, 4 July 185, p.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 11 July 1885, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 12 September 1885, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 16 January 1886, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 6 February 1886, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Inquirer and Commercial News, 3 February 1886, p.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. WA Record, 29 November 1888,p.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Western Mail, 1 December 1888, p.12; West Australian, 24 November 1888, p.3.. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Chipper’s trustee called for creditors to make claims on 7 February 1889: Eastern Districts Chronicle, 16 February 1889, p.6. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 8 December 1888, p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 26 January 1889, pp.3 and 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 2 February 1889, p.7; 6 April 1889, p.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 7 February 1891, p.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 4 July 1891, p.8. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 23 May 1891, p.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 30 September 1899, p.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Eastern Districts Chronicle, 30 September 1905, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)