

# Stylish living

Thursday, February 3, 1977

## loses an old ally

**RUISLIP'S** best known landmark, The Orchard restaurant, closed on Friday after more than 40 years' ownership by the Ansell family of Ickenham Road. It has been sold to Whitbread Britannia Inns. But before it closed reporter **MIKE POLLAK** and photographer **GRAHAM BOWLES** took a nostalgic look at this survivor from a grander era.

**LOVERS** of true class and stylish living were in mourning last week — for the closure of The Orchard, Ruislip.

For the past 40-odd years the imposing, wood-beamed restaurant has battled to preserve elegance in a world being taken over by plastic imitations.

The family business finally had to give up the unequal struggle in the face of harsh economic reality. With basic overheads of £2,000 a week the financial equation no longer balanced.

And however fine a job new owners, Whitbread Britannia Inns, make of refurbishing and relaunching the restaurant the style is bound to be very much that of the 1970s still searching like a teenager for its own identity.

It will be years before the restaurant reaches wise and reflective late middle-age as The Orchard in the years since 1932 when it was bought by the Ansell family of Ickenham Road.

Perhaps that was the main problem — the place had become such a part of the landscape that it was one of those places you pass year in year out and say "we must go there some time."

I'd done just that for six years so I leapt at the chance of making a belated visit when the editor suggested I go and have a nostalgic last meal there — more accurately my first.

I admit I felt it was a bit like arriving for the last five minutes of a bull fight. I'd missed all the grace and grandeur and was just turning up like a ghoul for the final death thrust.

But it wasn't like that at all. The Orchard did things graciously to the end and my wife and I were warmly greeted by managing director, 72-year-old Mr. John Tambourne who has been at the Restaurant since 1945.

We were ushered into the spacious bar with its leafy decor and subtly-lit alcoves. No matter that the gilt paint on the chairs was just a wee bit tarnished and the carpet showed signs that a few too many diners had passed across it.

Quality can't be so easily dismissed. It's like a well worn expensive jacket — it still looks and feels better than a brand new cheap creation from a trendy, brash boutique.

The restaurant — that once could seat 185 — had no more than 60 diners on this last Wednesday evening.

"We used to have 20 waiters," said Mr. Tambourne wistfully. "Now we're down to seven." He handed me the menu (pictured right). That was the biggest shock of the evening — it was such outstandingly good value.

For a set £5.25 you got a four-course meal with a choice varied enough to satisfy the most demanding gourmet.

I chose the mackerel and narrowly missed going schizophrenic by watching my wife Anne enthusing over her smoked trout and horseradish sauce.

The whole meal — masterminded from the kitchen by Mr. Tambourne's son John — was pure culinary perfection. The Sicilian cassata with cream and marinated pears almost rules out my ever wanting to go into a run-of-the-mill restaurant again.

But it was the little touches that topped off the meal. The way the impeccable waiters in their smart red and black outfits, consulted with the diners to see if the next course was required, or whether they would prefer to take a break with some chilled water. Most decided to pause and helped their digestion by taking a few turns round the floor to the music of the Eric Mack Trio.

Then there were the puzzles on each table for you to exercise your mind with — the curious lady that contains two faces in one (reproduced below right), and another more difficult which recommends you consult your waiter for explanation.

And the celebration cakes that come on the house for those with birthdays or wedding anniversaries.

Incredibly it was once even grander. "All the women used to receive a little gift like a trinket bowl, or a small ask tray," said John Tambourne, Jrn, who has been at The Orchard for 26 years and worked through everything — waiter, buyer, bar waiter, restaurant manager, chef

"Then we've always had a tradition to give out little paper umbrellas and everyone dances to Flanagan and Allen's umbrella song."

Unfortunately the umbrellas were missing on this particular night but it didn't top the middle-aged and elderly diners from gliding around the dance floor.

"The slide started about four years ago when costs rocketed," said Mr. Tambourne, Snr. "We still do well on Fridays and Saturdays but the week trade just isn't there."

On the Micawber principle that means unhappiness when outgoings top £2,000 a week not counting the cost of food and wine. The weekly figures make one blanch — wages £700, band £200, rates £250, fuel 250 gallons a week.

You don't have to be a financial wizard to see that the restaurant needs to be well-used seven days a week.

Why isn't it? Probably because the majority of people going are regulars who remember the immediate post-war years when The Orchard was just about the finest — and one of the only — places to dine in west London.

"Even this Boxing Day we had a family sit down for lunch who had four generations that have regularly been coming here," said Mr. Tambourne Jrn.

Unfortunately, many other regulars have died, or moved away, or felt the financial pinch of the austere seventies. And the grand exterior of The Orchard probably scared off potential customers who thought it would be beyond their pocket.

So last week Mrs. Margery Ansell, whose husband Leslie died in 1963 bowed to economic pressures.

To console her were others whose lives have for decades been wrapped up with the restaurant — Mrs. Ansell's two daughters, Pamela and Michelle; the Tambournes; Pepe and Sole Roibal who have worked in the kitchens for 16 years; 81-year-old Fred Pearson who has been at the

restaurant a mere eight years, plus other equally attached to The Orchard.

Some of them will be taking a few weeks off to consider what to do next, others have already found themselves new jobs.

All they can do is remember how it was, and reminisce about the poignant last night with a traditional Orchard menu of whole Spring chicken, and filigree sole, plus all the usual garnishings.

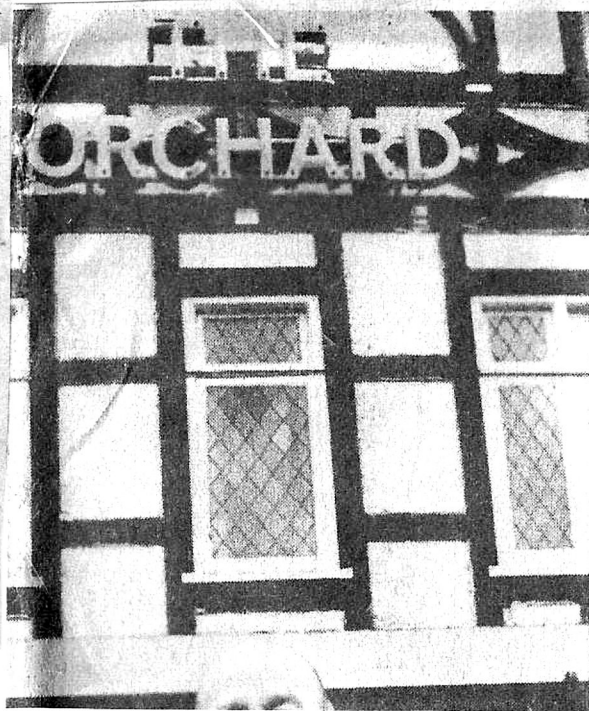
The Orchard kept its *savoir faire* to the end.

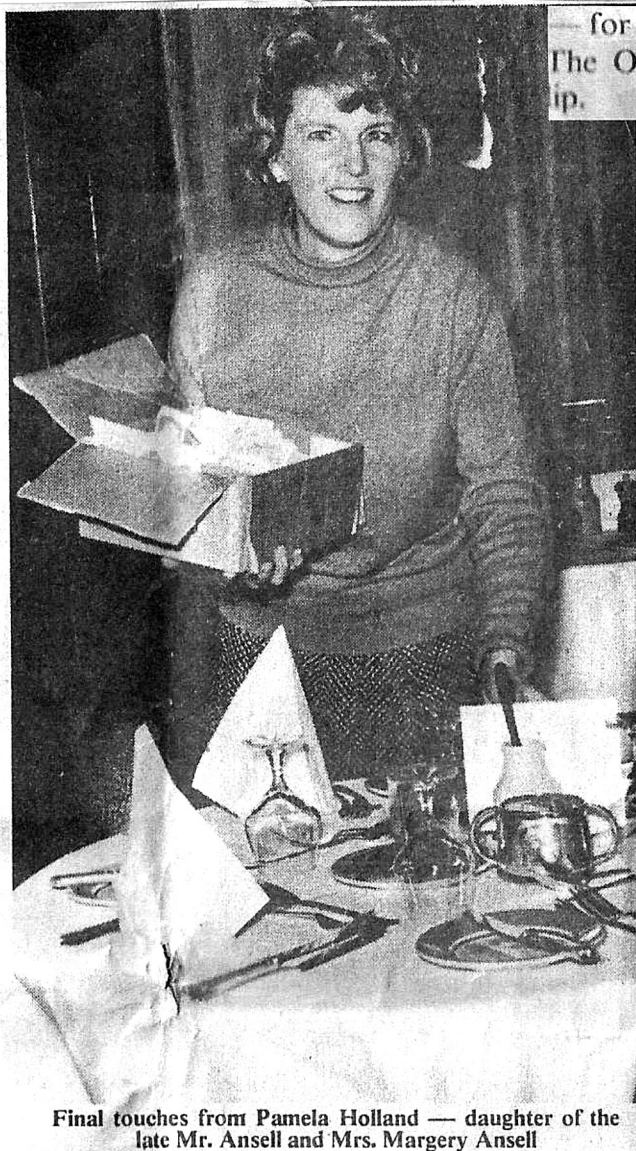
● Whitbread Britannia Inns this week announced its plans for The Orchard.

FIND THE LADIES



One of the puzzles traditionally placed on the tables





Final touches from Pamela Holland — daughter of the late Mr. Ansell and Mrs. Margery Ansell

for the closure of  
The Orchard, Ruis-  
lip.

## Menu

Chilled Tomato, Pineapple or Grapefruit Juice — Grapefruit Cocktail  
Home Made Pate — Butter Beans, Egg and Onion Salad  
Tomato Soup — Spaghetti Bolognaise  
Cold Mushrooms with Onions and Bacon — Chilled Melon  
Cold Fillet of Mackerel with White Wine and Herbs  
Palm Hearts and Pineapple — Cold Ham and Sauces  
Sardine and Anchovy Salad — Egg Mayonnaise with Anchovies

Jellied Eels — Fillet of Brill, Bonne Femme  
Cold Hickory Ham with Assorted Sausages — Potted Shrimps  
Cold Fillet of Mackerel with White Wine and Herbs  
Smoked Trout, Horseradish Sauce

Grilled Entrecote Steak — Roast Sirloin of Beef with Yorkshire Pudding  
Prawn Salad — Roast Veal with Sherry and Mushrooms  
Grilled Gammon and Peaches — Cold Ham, Beef or Chicken  
Breast of Chicken in Red Wine with Mushrooms and Ham  
Vol-au-Vent of Chicken and Mushrooms — Grilled Lamb Cutlets  
Chicken Pancake with Cheese Sauce — Roast Chicken and Bacon

Buttered Brussels Sprouts — Buttered Peas and Carrots  
Parshied New Potatoes

\* Sicilian Cassata with Cream — Pineapple with Cream  
Strawberry Meringue Glacé — Candied Chestnuts with Vanilla Ice Cream  
Maple Walnut Ice Cream — Cream Caramel  
Peach Melba — Blackcurrant Ice Cream — Strawberry Melba

Selection of Various Cheeses and Biscuits

Items marked \* are made with non-milk fat

DINNER £5.25

*Dinner Ticket is requested on Saturday and welcomed on other evenings*

*Music is played for you by Eric Black's Two*

*V.A.T. at 8% will be added to accounts*



The Orchard's imposing facade