

# **Building Report**

## **The Swan Hotel, Swan Street, Kidderminster**

**Author:** Nigel Gilbert/John Combe

**Date:** 10<sup>th</sup> November 2009

**Historic Kidderminster Project Ref:** 744

### **Introduction**

This report was prepared as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. The Swan Inn, as it was first called, was important as a part of Kidderminster's historic medieval streets which were recklessly destroyed in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s. Like many of the buildings which once stood in these streets, the Swan had probably been rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, possibly retaining some of its timber framed structure. The street was known as Behind the Shops in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It seems, therefore, that the Swan Inn gave the street its later name. It was one of the largest properties in the vicinity. Resources of both Kidderminster Library and Worcester Record Office have been used to compile this report. Also we have used a collection of Kidderminster material concerning Harveys wine merchants held at Bristol Record Office.

### **History**

The earliest known reference to the Swan Inn is contained in the Harveys collection in Bristol Record Office. An indenture of 1773 relating to the neighbouring property, which was to be purchased by Harveys a century later, reveals that the Swan Inn was occupied by James Goddington in 1766. It is unlikely that Goddington owned the Swan. It is not mentioned in his will dated 1771. (PRO ref: PROB 11/975) He died by 1772 leaving his widow Mary with a son, George, born in 1765.

The Commercial Directory of 1818 lists Thomas Potter as the occupier of the Swan Inn at Swan St. He remained as landlord until at least 1823, when he was listed in the poor rates. (WRO BA10470/170) Even at this time its valuation was one of the highest in the locality. Twentieth century maps show that it continued to be one of the largest properties in the immediate locality.

The list for September 1833 has Robert Pritchard at the Swan. He was still in occupation in the list for August 1837. (WRO BA10470/173) By this time the owner was shown as Mrs Joseph or Joshua Smith. The list included the description of the property as the Swan Inn with stable and coach house. The valuation of £48 pa was a little below that for the nearby premises of Prichard and Harvey wine merchants, which was valued at £52. It was substantially more than that for that other inn with a stable and coach house in Swan Street, the Bull, which was valued at £36.

Pritchard evidently died before 1840 when Jane Pritchard, who was presumably either his wife or daughter, was listed in Bentley's Directory as the proprietor of the Swan Inn. The entry made clear that the Swan was a posting house, that is to say it was a place where coaches could rest and exchange horses. Also listed as based at the Swan

was Edward Jordan, a 'coach proprietor'. He was regarded as a 'celebrated whip' and his coach was called L'Hirondelle. Apparently he 'performed wonders with his whip. He would sometimes, in coming down Hagley Hill, lasso a duck at the *Fountain*, landing it on the lap of the passenger on the box seat.' (p30, Broadfield Directory 1889) Another story is that he would sit at the dining table at the Swan, on which he placed six tumblers with a spoon in each one. Then with a flick of his whip he would remove the spoons without upsetting the glasses. (p123, Tomkinson and Hall, 1975) Jordan married Jane Pritchard in 1841 and they are listed at the Swan in the census of that year, but they were not to stay long.

Of course the above stories may not be completely accurate. L'Hirondelle travelled between Cheltenham and Liverpool, which is difficult to reconcile with a route up Hagley Hill, and its stopping point in Kidderminster was at the Lion. Another perplexing point is that Bentley's Directory has the British Queen starting from the Swan every morning at 7.45 for Wolverhampton and then at 8.15 for Birmingham.



**A late photograph of what was once the Swan, showing the access to the yard behind through the central part of the building. Part of the offices of Harveys wine merchants can be seen on the right. (Photo courtesy of Kidderminster Library)**

In April 1845 Edward Ree was listed by the poor rates as the occupier with Sarah Smith as the owner. This was still the case in September 1846 (WRO BA10470/183) The 1851 census still had Edward Ree there as innkeeper aged 66. The hotel flourished for a few years. In 1855 John Stockall was listed in the Billings directory at the Swan, which was described as a family and commercial hotel. Ebenezer Guest referred to him as a 'genial and clever publican' who could not make it a success.

Perhaps surprisingly the Swan may not have been a major coaching base except for the few years when Jordan was in residence. It is not mentioned in the trade directories of 1835 or 1850 as a stopping point for coaches or carriers. In the 1835 Pigot directory, for example, it is clear that the main coaching inns were the Lion and the Black Horse, where the L'Hirondelle and Hibernia coaches stopped on their way between Cheltenham and Liverpool.

The railway opened in Kidderminster in 1852. Perhaps in the consequent changes to the transport system the Swan managed to find a niche. A carrier is mentioned in 1855 Pigot Directory. Bloomfield & Co. departing three times a week from the Swan for London. In the Cassey Directory of 1860 the Swan Inn is listed as a posting house, from which conveyances left to meet each train.

By April 1860 the poor rate list showed substantial changes. (WRO BA10470/194) The occupier was Robert Lloyd, and the owner was William Talbot, presumably the local solicitor. The property was now clearly listed as the Swan Hotel. It is fair to assume that the Swan was one of the many Kidderminster businesses to struggle in the 1850s due to the crisis in the carpet industry. The attempt to change the nature of the business, or at least its image, seems to have continued with a subsequent owner, Richard Cowles or Coles. The picture below shows that he seems to have changed the name to the White Swan, and to have presented it as an agricultural, commercial and family hotel all at once. Cowles died in October 1863, and the Swan Hotel was inherited by his nephew, William Harris of Montgomery. In 1864 Harris leased the property to John Mellings, innkeeper of Montgomery. (WRO BA 5278/19) The changes did not work and the Swan ceased to be listed in trade directories. We believe it closed c1872.

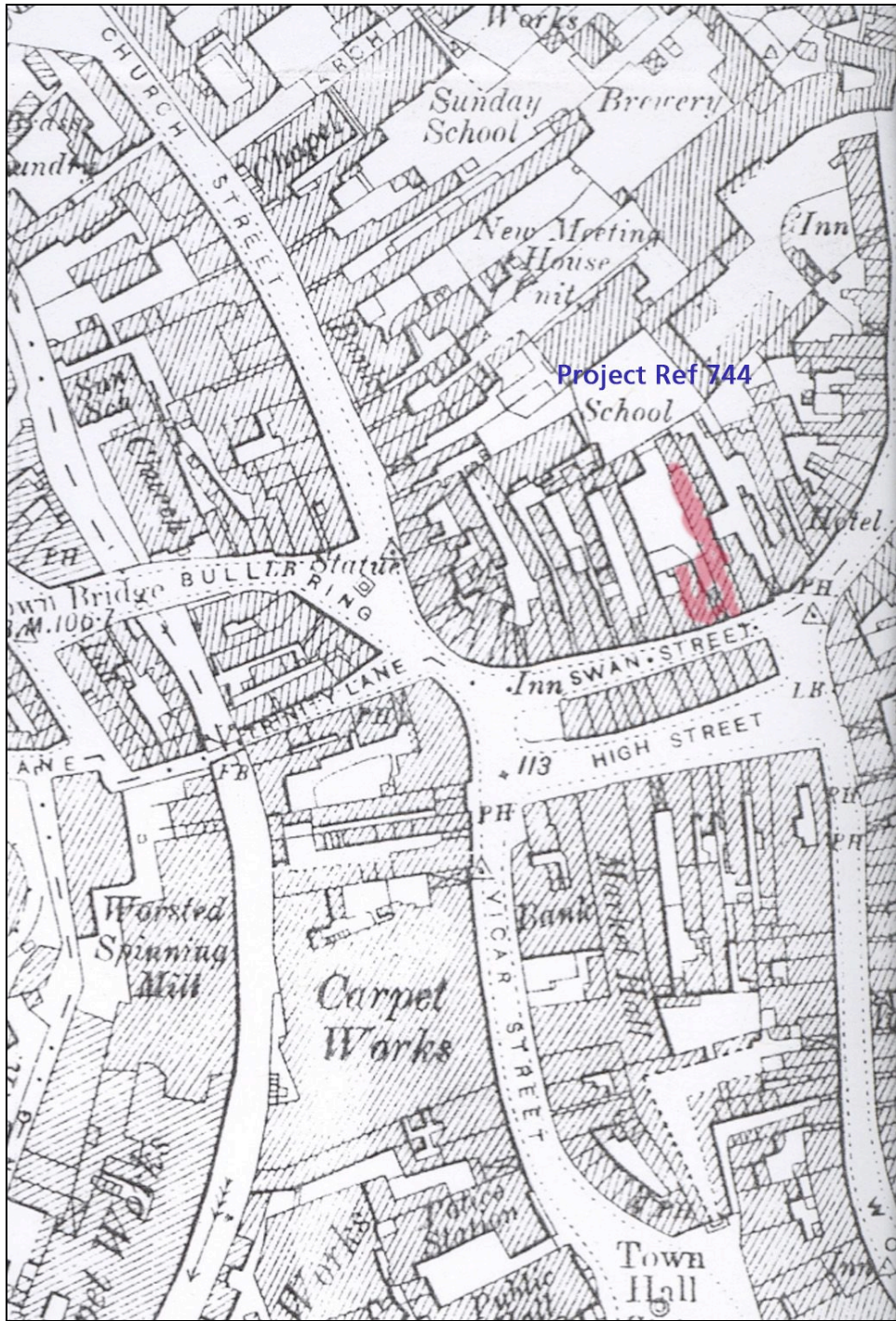


Advertisement c1860. (Courtesy of Kidderminster Library)

The premises were purchased by the surgeon William Cowen, who was living there in 1879. (Littlebury's Directory) The poor rate list for that year shows Cowen as owner and occupier. (WRO BA10470/230) Cowen was three times Mayor of Kidderminster in 1868-9, 1869-70 and 1878-9. According to Ebenezer Guest, he was presented with a silver cradle when he became a father during his term of office. He was still at Swan Street in 1887, and the valuation suggests that he had improved the property a little. (WRO BA10470/231) He died about this time, and the house became the home of, in Guest's words, the brilliant and popular solicitor, Miller Corbet, who is listed in the 1889 Broadfield Directory as residing at Swan Street. Corbet died in 1894.

According to Guest, the Swan became an eating house in 1905. By 1912 Kellys showed that another effort was being made to run the premises as a hotel. Frederick A. Potter was listed there at Ye Olde Swan Temperance Hotel and Coffee Tavern. He offered every accommodation for commercials, motorists, cyclists and tourists. There was stabling and a motorhouse. The 1914 Bennett's Business Directory listed him there still.

By 1928 the building no longer served as a refreshment or lodging establishment. The occupiers were the Singer Sewing Machine Co. Ltd. (Kelly's Directory) The building was finally pulled down in 1968, along with the whole of Swan Street, in order to build the Swan shopping centre.



The Swan Hotel 1902, showing the long line of outbuildings behind its right frontage.  
OS Ref: 832768