



# The Incredible History of the Swan Hotel as told by the Wells Journal



ACKNOWLEDGED  
AS THE LEADING  
HOTEL IN WELLS

LEASE GRANTED IN 1422

WALLS OVER FIVE FOOT THICK

#### Wells Journal November 1893

The Swan Hotel Wells is one of the most ancient and best known of the hostelrys in England.

The Swan, in guide books and in reminiscence conversation of visitors, is almost as closely associated with Wells as is the Cathedral and many of its old fine buildings.

So far back as 500 years ago it was known as an important inn and frequent reference to the Swan occur in the city records of remote times.

In 1422 the Mayor and Corporation granted a lease to John Pury and his wife Isobel at a yearly rent of 46s 8d.

In the lease it referred to it as called "unum magnum hospicium vocatum Swan".

In 1501 the corporation granted; "A lease for three lives of the inn in Sadeler Street" to William Chamberlayne who subsequently became an important man in the corporation.

In 1549 the corporation, of which the younger Chamberlayne like his father was a member, very kindly rebuilt the house for their colleagues.

Here it was that the members of the City Trading Companies met and enjoyed themselves and here too, for some years past, the annual civic banquets have been held.

On May 20, 1692, the corporation granted a lease to Joseph Pearce at a yearly rental of £10. This lease is hanging in the coffee room and is an object of much interest to visitors.

Within the last few years it has been thoroughly renovated especially in its internal arrangements, a dining room 65 feet long being added in 1885 by Mrs Louisa George and it may now be said to be one of the best appointed hotels in the West of England.

The hotel still retains traces of structural reminiscences of its old time origin many of the walls being over five foot thick and old oak beams may be seen in many of the rooms.

It is also one of the best known hotels in the United

States and on reference to the Visitor's Book it will be observed that it is patronised by visitors from all parts of the world.

It is acknowledged as the leading hotel in the city and all the important gatherings of the past and present have been associated with the hostelry.

#### Unique wall

#### Wells Journal March 1938

During renovations at the Swan Hotel annex last week the builders discovered a wall in which mortised oak beams and wattle and daub had been used. It is in a splendid state of preservation and probably in Wells is unique. The oak timbers which are the main support are fixed with stout wooden pegs and the willow sticks are plaited much as one sees in a hurdle. The whole is about a normal brick thickness. A red clay appears to have been strengthened with something like cow dung and mixed with chopped grasses reminiscent of the Bible days of the Israelites in Egypt. It is presumed that the main timbers were at one time exposed the wattle being finished off with plaster and the whole probably decorated with a floral or geometrical design.

#### Royal visit

#### Wells Journal December 28, 1895

A Royal visit was paid to the city in 1613 when Queen Anne of Denmark, consort to King James, came with a great retinue and dined at the Swan Hotel. The Queen was welcomed with a most elaborate pageant held in her honour. She was met at Brownes Gate by the Mayor and Brethren in their scarlet robes and there was a quaint procession of tradesmen and merrymaking. In her retinue were Sir Thomas Somerset, the Earl of Worcester, Lady Walsingham, Lady Gray, Lady Hatton and the Countess of Derby.

The Favourite—wherever it is known.

## "Quantock Vale" Cider

Made in Somerset—the Cider County—  
from the choicest selected vintage apples.

Beautiful Amber Colour, Pure and Distinctive  
Flavour, the choice of the discriminating palate.

Ask for it at THE SWAN, where, like  
many other High-Class Hotels, it is the  
Exclusive Brand.

Sole Makers:

THE QUANTOCK VALE CIDER CO. LTD.,  
NORTH PETHERTON, BRIDGWATER, SOMERSET.

#### Fashionable arrivals at the Swan Hotel

Throughout the centuries the Swan Hotel has been the hostelry of choice for the great and the good visiting Wells. From Rudyard Kipling, J.B. Priestley, H.V. Morton, Henry Longfellow to Robbie Williams the hotel has played host to politicians, lords, ladies, journalists, clergy, authors and the fashionable elite.

In 1854 Alfred Lord Tennyson visited Wells and writes in his memoirs;

"Walked over to Wells today. To Wookey Hole to see a cave. It was not quite what I wanted to see though, very grave. Am at the Swan Hotel."

During the late 1800s the Wells Journal published a weekly list announcing the latest arrivals.

August 26, 1880  
The Duke of Argyll and the Ladies Campbell and their suite have been staying at the Swan Hotel for some days in order to visit Wells and Cox's Stalactite Cavern at Cheddar.

October 21, 1880  
Mr Vincent Stuckey, president of Stuckey's Bank, dined at the Swan Hotel.

21 July 1881  
General Sir Francis Roberts

and Lady Roberts are staying for a short time in the city and are lodging at the Swan Hotel.

20 October 1881  
Sir Alexander Acland Hood and Sir John Sairl Lurnley are staying at the Swan Hotel

7 September 1882  
His Grace the Duke of Westminster with the Duchess and the Honourable William Cavendish arrived at the Swan Hotel on Saturday last and left on Monday

29 December 1892  
Mr James Theobald MP and Lady Theobald have been sojourning at the Swan Hotel.

29 August 1895  
Sir Frederick Leighton Bart R.A. has been staying at the Swan Hotel since Monday last.

September 9 1885  
The Lord Chief Justice and Lady Coleridge arrived at the Swan Hotel last Saturday and left yesterday for Clifton driving through Cheddar en route.

July 2 1891  
Nineteen people from the United States of America arrived at the Swan Hotel in the past two weeks.

Americans have brand new buildings but no ruins of majesty and beautiful Cathedrals which are the pride of the

Englishman. These are objects which have such an attraction for educated Americans a large number of whom spend time and money to visit the quaint old cities. All are enraptured with the beauty of our Cathedral.

October 12, 1899  
Sir Francis and Lady Jeune have been on a short visit to Wells. They stayed at the Swan Hotel and arrived in a motor car.

July 12, 1906  
Miss Ellen Terry the famous actress was a visitor to the city on Monday and stayed at the Swan Hotel.

May 14, 1913  
The Right Hon. Col. Seely, Secretary for War, and the Right Hon. Joseph Pease President of the Board of Education, have been amongst the visitors at the Swan Hotel during the week-end.

July 3, 1914  
Mr Nisheido the chief water engineer of the city of Tokyo visited this city on Tuesday and Wednesday during a tour of water undertakings. He stayed at the Swan Hotel and was very impressed by Wells water works.

One guest of the hotel seems to have caught the imagination of the local press and populace and his appearance in the city is reported upon in June 1879.

#### Father Christus!

A good deal of excitement and curiosity has been aroused in this city during the past few days by the presence of a stranger of eccentric habits and peculiar idiosyncrasies who designated himself "Father Christus" and affects a kind of semi-monastic garb being attired in an alb and cassock but wearing no head gear whatever.

He has auburn hair which he wears long and parted down the middle and slightly curled upwards at the ends. The beard and whiskers are of the same hue and evidently trimmed with much care. The general appearance of the man has led to a common belief in his likeness to the most authentic pictures of Jesus Christ. He frequents the Cathedral where he walks alone with hands in prayer as if in rapt contemplation.

We understand that he readily enters into conversation if opportunity offers and is a man of most agreeable and gentle manners. His strange habit and mien however cannot escape observation and inquisitiveness has attended him like a shadow and must have been intolerable to any man less ambitious of notoriety.

He is staying at the Swan Hotel.

#### Mr F.C. George. Hero

Fire was an ever present danger in Wells with the city being made up of many ancient buildings lit by naked flame and with a large wood content. Mr George of the Swan Hotel was however was often at hand in case of fire.

One of the major employers in Wells in the 1800s was the brush making industry. Messrs Parsons and Company was situated behind the current Town Hall.

#### Wells Journal August 8, 1869

The late destructive fire in this city which has completely destroyed the whole of the brush manufactory and the stock in trade of Messrs Parsons and Co was one of the largest ever known to have taken place in Wells. The scene was somewhat magnificent when the fire was at its height the flames shooting up to an immense height lighting up the cathedral and the houses in the Market Place with a deep red glare. Such a fire has not been witnessed in Wells within memory of its oldest inhabitant. No cause has been assigned to the outbreak.

Great credit goes to Mr F.C. George of the Swan Hotel for the courage he displayed in bringing out books, invoices etc of the firm from the counting house when the building was still burning.

#### Wells Journal March 1872

An alarming incident at the house of Mr Counsel, supervisor of the Inland Revenue who has just come to reside in Sadler Street. About 8 o'clock in the evening in the children's bedroom a lamp was being filled with paraffin when suddenly the whole took fire, the liquid escaping from the vessel and running over the room in a sheet of flame and noxious fumes filling the room. The children were at once removed, an alarm raised and means taken to extinguish the fire. Mr F.C. George of the Swan Hotel rendered valuable assistance in the rescue of the children and the putting out of the fire.

#### Crime and punishment

#### Wells Journal August 12, 1865

John Wright age 30, ostler at the Swan Hotel, pleaded guilty that he did feloniously forge an authority for the delivery of three gallons of French Brandy purporting to be an order from the Swan Hotel. The prisoner pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 18 months of hard labour.

#### GENTLEMEN'S WEAR.

PERFECT IN CUT, FIT,  
WORKMANSHIP & COMFORT.

SOLE LOCAL AGENT FOR JÆGER AND AERTEX GOODS,  
LINCOLN BENNETT HATS.

## H. C. NORTON & SON

Ladies' and Gentlemen's Outfitters,

30-34, High St., WELLS

FULL SELECTION OF  
BUSINESS & SPORTS OUTFITS.  
EXCEPTIONAL VALUE.