

Axminster's Hotels, Inns and Pubs

Introduction

In the 18th and 19th centuries Axminster had a relatively large number of inns and other hostelries relative to its population for two main reasons: the large number of coaching and waggon (freight) services which ran through the town, and the presence of the market, which brought farmers and dealers into the town on a regular basis.

That said, the numbers were not greatly different from today, and in fact there were almost exactly the same number in 1939 as there had been 101 years earlier, with most of them still bearing the same name and in the same location. This brief account looks at six 'snapshots in time' over that period of 101 years, as well as identifying a number of older inns which had already disappeared by 1838.

Further research is required, particularly using the Petre map of 1776/78, the census returns and the British Newspaper Archive website.

1838 and 1850

The inns (and their landlords) and the independent beer retailers listed in Directories as existing in Axminster in both 1838 and 1850 were are follows:

- The George Hotel, between Market Place and Trinity Square (James Pound, both times)
- The Castle, Market Place (Robert Hook, both times)
- The Green Dragon, at the foot of Castle Hill (Thomas Stevens, then George Harvey)
- The Old Bell, Trinity Square (Thomas Towndrow, both times)
- The New Inn, Trinity Square (J Martin, then John Ryall)
- The Hotel on the corner of West Street and Church Street (James Aplin, then William Newbery)
- The Rose and Crown, Lyme Street (Samuel Goddard, then George Newbery)
- The Red Lion, Lyme Street (George Hook, then John Bunston)

Also listed in 1838 was H Loveridge, a beer retailer on South Street. His premises may well be the ones named as the Black Dog (landlord Benjamin Westlake) in 1850.

The 1838 directory also names John Newbery as a brewer with premises on Church Street, and George Slyfield as a maltster on Castle Hill.

By 1850 two further inns had been opened:

- The Old White Hart, Lyme Street (Emanuel Dommatt)
- The Lamb, Lyme Road (Samuel Goddard)

1857 and 1889

By 1857 and 1889 the status of the inns which had been named in 1850 was as follows:

- The George Hotel, between Market Place and Trinity Square (John Ryall, then Henry Brice)
- The Castle, Market Place (John Morgan Southard, then probably Alfred Frost, though the entry for him actually says Castle Street)
- The Green Dragon, at the foot of Castle Hill (George Harvey, then George Heal)
- The Old Bell, Trinity Square (Thomas Towndrow, then John Sutton)
- The New Commercial, Trinity Square (William Wakefield, then Frederick William Moass)
- Dening's Hotel, then the Western Hotel, on the corner of West Street and Church Street (John Dening, then James Morgan)
- The Rose and Crown, Lyme Street (James Ackfield, but gone by 1889)
- The Red Lion, Lyme Street (not listed in 1857, then William Lumbard)
- The Old White Hart, Lyme Street (E Plummer, then James Plummer)
- The Lamb, Lyme Road (Samuel Goddard, but not listed in 1889)

Newly opened inns were as follows:

- The Black Lion, Castle Hill (James Phillips, then Henry Studley)
- The Phoenix Inn, Castle Street (Isaac Dare, but not listed in 1889)
- The Trout Inn, Millbrook (Thomas Hill, then David Holt)
- The Axminster Inn, Silver Street (Charles Loring, then Joseph Chick)

In 1887 Henry Potter was also listed at Smallridge, at an unnamed inn.

1914 and 1939

The position as reported in 1914 and 1939 was as follows:

- The George Hotel, between Market Place and Trinity Square (not listed in 1914, then G Lambert)
- The Castle, Market Place (possibly Frederick Alexander Enticott, though he was actually listed in Castle Street, then not listed at all in 1939)
- The Green Dragon, at the foot of Castle Hill (Tryphena Heal, then Bert Guest)
- The Old Bell, Trinity Square (William Henry Horn, then G S Woods)
- The New Commercial, Trinity Square (Frederick William Moass, but not listed in 1939)
- The Western Hotel, on the corner of West Street and Church Street (James Morgan, then Percy Reginald Stapleforth)

- The Red Lion, Lyme Street (Levi Welch, then George Harry Willmington)
- The Old White Hart, Lyme Street (Edwin Swain, then Philip E Bartlett)
- The Lamb, Lyme Road (John Gillingham, then Clement Gillingham)
- The Black Lion, Castle Hill (Charles Neale, but not listed in 1939)
- The Phoenix Inn, Castle Street (not listed in 1914, then William J Strawbridge)
- The Trout Inn, Millbrook (Richard Fowler, both times)
- The Axminster Inn, Silver Street (James George Stuart, then William H Stuart)
- The New Inn, Smallridge (Henry Miller, then Mrs Nancy C Reader)

Inns which had closed before 1838

The **Dolphin** was a famous inn, facing onto Market Place. It was chosen by William of Orange when he passed through Axminster in 1688 as his base for three nights. It was also the loading point for London- (and Exeter-) bound freight waggons for many years. It is not listed at all in the Directories consulted, but the building itself did not burn down until 1881, suggesting that it had by then become a private house or some other business. The freight waggons had switched their business to the Old Bell as early as 1829.

The George Hotel, Axminster's best-known inn, and for many years the stopping-off place for the fast stagecoaches from Exeter to London, was first mentioned in Manorial documents in 1574. It was previously located on a site a short distance to the east (on or just off South Street). That inn closed when the business moved to its present location when the **Cross Keys** burned down on that site in 1759.

The **Golden Lion** was another large coaching inn, located close to the Church and occupying part of the space that is now Trinity Square. Newspaper reports from 1745 show that it was the venue for cock-fighting and gambling involving the 'gentlemen of Devon, Dorset and Somerset'. In 1760 it was burned down, and evidently was not re-built.

'Around Axminster in Old Photographs' (by Les Berry and Gerald Gosling, Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd, 1993) has a photograph of the Black Lion in the 1890s, which it says had been called the **Boot Inn** in the 1820s. The building was presumably used for some other purpose in the 1830s and 1840s.

The **Green Dragon** moved to the foot of Castle Street from its original premises close to where the Western Hotel was subsequently developed.

The **King's Arms** gets occasional mentions during the 19th century.

The **Old Bear Inn** used to have its entrance from Silver Street, between what are now the Law Chambers and Thomas Whitty House.

The **Three Cups** was a name used by an inn in Axminster in 1833, but nothing further has been found about it.

Inns which opened after 1939

The **Millwey** opened after 1945 on the Chard Road, close to the northern edge of the town, but has since closed.