

The Victoria Tavern, Shrivenham Station

A general history 1842 - 2015

By Neil B. Maw



Aerial photo showing the location of the former Shrivenham Station, the Victoria Tavern on the far right, the new Railway Bridge being installed in 2016. Photo by Neil B. Maw

The history of the public house known as the Victoria is unusual in that we know exactly when it came into existence. George Canfield had been the landlord of the Barrington Arms in the High Street of Shrivenham since 1835 and by 1840 had built up a successful business. His trade was not only drinks, food and rooms, but he also operated a Posting House, which was similar to our modern-day Taxi/Courier. He placed an advertisement in the Reading Mercury on 22nd August 1840 where he announced, *'George Canfield begs most respectfully to acquaint the Nobility, Gentry and Public at large, that in consequence of the increased travelling through Shrivenham since the opening of the Great Western Railway to the Faringdon Road Station, he has been induced, for their better accommodation, to have Post Horses always ready.'* It was that business of taking people to and from the Station that gave him another idea. With the opening of Shrivenham Railway Station in 1841, George built a hotel. The Reading Mercury newspaper of 17th September 1842 confirmed it with the information that, *'the Justices of the*

Faringdon Division conferred on Mr George Canfield of the Barrington Arms Inn, a licence for the house he has recently erected at this station which will open shortly as a hotel.' The Victoria Tavern would go on as a pub for 170 years, being converted to a domestic dwelling in 2015.



The former Victoria Tavern now a domestic dwelling. Photo by Neil B. Maw

At the rear of the Barrington Arms, there were many stables and lean-to buildings that housed the horses and equipment that George needed for his Posting House. But it was obvious that he would have needed at least a single stable and coach house at the Victoria as well. The red brick building next door was just that, a stable and coach house and would almost certainly have been originally thatched. It still stands and has had many uses over the years. (See below and refer to SHS Listing N592 for more details).



The business was taken over by his son Charles when George died in September 1865. He decided to advertise the fact by public announcement two years later when on 28th October 1867, an article in the Swindon Advertiser stated, *'Charles Canfield begs to inform Noblemen, Gentlemen and the Public that he will continue the business of the (Barrington Arms Hotel and Victoria Tavern) which have been carried on for the last 31 years by his late father.'* At the bottom he stated that there will be a conveyance at the Station at Shrivenham, to meet every train. In the same year he held a, *'House-Warming Dinner'* and that was to be held on 31st October and tickets for the event would cost three shillings and sixpence (today 35pence) and would include Dinner and a Dessert. He added that Dinner would be, *'on the table precisely at Five o'clock.'* Business was obviously good for Charles but sadly his health was not as he died in April 1870 aged 30. It must have been a sad time for his wife Sarah, as in May of the same year she lost her baby, Charles Newman Canfield who was 10 months old.

The newspapers are a great source of information for modern day historians, but in 1866, one was used for a more damaging purpose towards the Victoria Tavern. The Swindon Advertiser newspaper of 6th August 1866 printed a letter from an unhappy *"Traveller"* who tried to obtain refreshment whilst waiting for a train to arrive. The first time he knocked the locked door of the Tavern, he claimed a servant lady came to the window and basically told him to go away. He tried again later when his friends had arrived on a train and met with the same service, *'so that they were, obliged to go on our journey fasting.'* However, the following edition of the same paper, printed a letter in defence of the hostelry when the author wrote, *'I have always seen and found Miss Canfield most attentive and obliging to her customers.'* He further explained that, *'your correspondent saw only a servant who was leaving in a few days.'* He then finished his defence by summing up that, *'I think your readers will agree with me, that it would have been more manly and considerate, also more like a "Traveller," had he first complained to the mistress of the hotel, and heard her explanation, before publishing in your columns a statement so calculated to do an industrious and worthy person an undeserved injury.'* His name was John Kent from Sutton Courtney.

In 1871 Sarah Canfield married Percy Morley at St Andrew's Church, Shrivenham and he took over the licence for the Barrington Arms. The census of 1871 listed that 21year old Maria Rich was running the Victoria Tavern, and a notice that appeared in the Oxford

Journal for 7th December 1872, confirmed that she was the licensee. It seems likely that the transfer of the licence occurred during Sarah Canfield's tenure. We know that the Barrington Arms was owned by the Barrington Estate at Beckett, and it's likely that the Victoria Tavern was by this time, owned by a Brewery, but we have no evidence to confirm it. The Wilts & Glos Standard on 22nd June 1872 explained the story of a young girl called Ann Hinch who worked at the Victoria Tavern. Her mistress, Miss Maria Rich had called in P.C. Winchcomb to search the room of her employee whom she suspected had stolen three cigars. We learn that the young lady had been working at the pub for nine months and had yet to receive any wages. At the subsequent court appearance, Ann pleaded guilty to taking the cigars and was sentenced to seven days imprisonment with hard labour. The magistrates also censured Landlady Maria Rich and suggested that it was highly improper keeping young servant girls so long without wages and that was bound to lead to temptation.

As stated above, the Oxford Journal provided the information that the licence of the tavern was given up by Maria Rich at the end of 1872. The new licensee was Miss Sarah Jane Arnold. She didn't stay long and her short tenure may have had something to do with the events towards the end of 1873. The North Wilts Herald newspaper for 22nd of November described the events leading to the sudden death of William Streat, a 54year-old farmer from Hinton Marsh. A few days earlier he had been in the Victoria and while there, *'he drank rather too freely of brandy.'* Even though Sarah Arnold refused to serve him anymore, she still sold him a bottle of whisky, from which he drank about a pint. A little later he was found by the landlady in the tap-room, *'a lifeless corpse.'* The inquest was held at the pub two days later and the jury found death by, *'apoplexy brought on by excessive drinking.'*

The following July the licence was transferred from Sarah Arnold to John Godfrey Wentworth who took the licence for the Barrington Arms as well. The following year though, he was in trouble. The Reading Mercury dated 13th February 1875, carried the news that he had been prosecuted for keeping the Victoria Tavern open on the 27th January beyond the permitted hours. It was made worse by the fact that he tried to bribe P.C. Winchcombe into taking money not to report it. He was duly fined £6 with 10 shillings costs and his licence endorsed. The Chairman of the bench warned him that when he applied for the renewal of his licence, he would not have it granted. The men who were drinking there on that evening were also fined 3 shillings each.



The Barrington Arms opposite the Cross Trees, Shrevenham circa 1910.
Photo courtesy of Paul Williams

It was quite normal practice at this period for public houses to allow auctions to be held on the premises. It made good commercial sense to the proprietor with those attending to be certain to want refreshments. An example of this was printed in the North Wilts Herald on 16th October 1880, when Messrs Dore, Smith & Radway would sell buy auction at the Victoria Tavern, about 90 tons of prime old meadow hay, from a farm close by at Bishopstone.

The census of 1881 shows that Licensee, John Wentworth, had put his 21year-old son, also called John, in charge of the Victoria, along with his two sisters. The Faringdon Advertiser dated 4th August 1884, carried the rather disturbing story of how a 9year-old local lad called Percy Tovey, died after an accident involving falling off a branch of a tree. The inquest was held at the Victoria Tavern and during the examination some very disturbing evidence was uncovered concerning the actions and attitude of a Shrevenham Surgeon, Mr Parker. (He lived at Normanby Cottage, Claypits Lane.). He was asked to attend the lad at his home in Bourton, and even though he sent word back to his mother that he was on the way, he didn't turn up. The boy was walked all the way to Shrevenham in severe pain due to a badly broken arm, and although Mr Parker dressed the wound, he failed to attend the lad on several promised occasions afterwards. Eventually young Percy Tovey died. At the inquest the jury returned a verdict of, *'Accidentally killed by a fall from a tree,'* to which the rider was added, *'the jury are unanimously of opinion that the conduct of the surgeon in this matter is decidedly reprehensible and*

regret that he did not pay such attention as the case demanded.' Upon hearing the verdict with the rider, the reporter for the newspaper added that he, the surgeon, 'made use of an expression unbecoming a man in his position and anything but complimentary to the jury.'



The Victoria Tavern from the 1960s. Photo courtesy of Blue-Pelican website

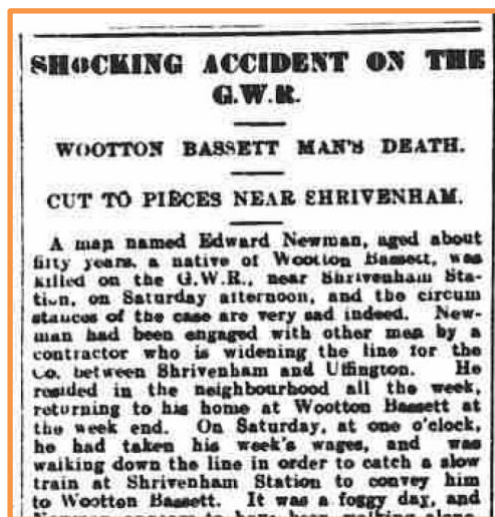
The Wilts and Glos Standard dated 9th November 1889, provides the information that the licence for the tavern was transferred from John Godfrey Wentworth to Thomas Phipps. In May of 1891 another inquest was held at the Victoria on the death of George Reeves, who managed the receptacle of the night mails for the passing trains to scoop up. The evidence suggested that he got his foot caught in the wires and fell in front of a passing train. The verdict was accidental death. He was a popular and respected Shrivenham man. The census for Shrivenham for 1891 informed that the landlord of the Victoria was Edward Charles Laurie, aged 32. His family consisted of his wife Alice 32, and daughters Mabel 9, Nora 7 and Ethel 5. Edward Laurie was the manager of pub, the licence being held by Thomas Phipps who also held the licence for, and ran the Barrington Arms in Shrivenham. This information is confirmed by an article that appeared in the Witney Gazette on 22nd September 1894. A man called George Sherman from Bishopstone, after drinking at the Victoria Tavern, started to shout and swear just outside the pub. He was told by Edward Laurie to stop shouting and go away. He refused to do so and in the melee that followed, Alice Laurie got in the way and was hit several times by Sherman. Dr Nixon of Shrivenham gave evidence in court as to her injuries and the magistrates called the attack, 'a gross and

cowardly one.' They subsequently sentenced Sherman to one month's prison with hard labour.

Another inquest took place at the Victoria at this time, with the death of railway worker Abel Town. The newspaper article that appeared in the Swindon Advertiser on 28th May 1892, contained the sentence that, '*On the morning he met his death, deceased left home full of life, vigour and cheerfulness and within three hours was a mangled corpse.*' It was a long story of a man simply misjudging a situation with disastrous results for himself. We learn at the end of this that the payment to the landlord of a pub for the use of a room for an inquest was five shillings. Thomas Phipps, the licensee, gave the five shillings to the deceased man's widow.

The census of 1901 listed Henry Phipps aged 61 as the landlord of the Victoria Tavern. With Thomas Phipps holding the licence since 1889, it maybe that Henry was a relation put in the pub as another manager. With him was his wife Mary aged 38, and a young son Henry age 4. There was also Elsie Willis a young servant girl age 14.

Another inquest was held at the Victoria on yet another accident on the railway line close by. The usual shocking headline appeared in the Swindon Advertiser dated 2nd December 1904. It was a very foggy day and Edward Newman had been employed on contractual work in the widening of the line between Shrivenham and Uffington. Nobody really knew why he was walking on the line and the engine driver stated that he didn't see him until he was literally on the front of the train. At 58 miles per hour, Edward Newman stood no chance of survival at all. (A full account of the incident can be read on SHS catalogue N1085).



It was at this period in time, that the Barrington Arms and the Victoria Tavern probably parted company. It has always been clear that the Barrington Arms was owned by the Barrington Estate. In 1910 we see that it was owned by Hall's Brewery, and it's likely that the sale took place somewhere around that time. The Victoria Tavern/Hotel was built in 1842 by George Canfield, and it is assumed that he purchased the land freehold and built the premises at his own cost. It is likely that the ownership stayed with the Canfield family until Sarah Canfield left the trade in 1874. We don't know if she owned the property and leased it or had sold it to a brewery.

The census for 1911 showed that the Victoria was still in the hands of the Phipps family when it listed Herbert Phipps, aged 30. Thomas Phipps of the Barrington Arms had just retired, and he appeared on the 1911 census as a widower, aged 70, staying at the Victoria Hotel, confirming a family connection. We don't know as yet what relation Henry Phipps was to Thomas. In 1911 Herbert Phipps, who had Norah Emily as his wife, age 26 and Phyliss Louisa Alice age 2. The Faringdon Advertiser of 18th March 1911 confirmed that the transfer of licence occurred then. But Herbert didn't stay for long, as in October 1911, the licence was transferred to Robert James Brickell. It seems likely that Herbert, his family and Thomas, all moved to the Greyhound pub in Swindon.

From this period the information starts to get less. We know from a case of arbitration over some land, the details of which appeared in the North Wilts Herald on 12th January 1934, that Robert Brickell was still the licensee. But a few months later, the same newspaper of

14th April 1934 announced that the thoroughbred Stallion called '*Shireherb*' would be at Mr Clark's, Victoria Inn, at Shrivenham Station. Four years later the same newspaper of 1st July 1938 reported on a '*rear plate offence*,' when Ernest G. Shelbourne of the Victoria Tavern, was fined 10 shillings for driving his motorcar at Stratton without the rear number plate properly illuminated. From the Shrivenham Parish Register of deaths, James & Ruth Kent were both listed as of the Victoria Inn. Ruth was buried at Shrivenham churchyard on 8th July 1941, age 70 and James was buried on 31st January 1946, age 81.

At this point we are grateful to Diane Wyatt-Hayden who provided the information of the next proprietors. They were here grandparents, Walter Edward Wyatt and his wife Maud, who moved from London during the war of 1939-45 to get away from the bombings. At first, they stayed in one of the cottages by the junction at the Memorial Hall, called Pump Cottages, but then took over the licence of the Victoria. They had three children; Walter, (Diane's father), James and Florence Jean (to become better known as Jean Treadaway - landlady of the pub). Diane is not certain how Jean met George Treadaway, but when Walter decided to retire, George and Jean successfully took over the licence. After the death of Walter, his widow Maud stayed on at the pub with George and Jean. It was the beginning of a memorable period in the history of the pub. Summers of the 1970s were legendary and even though it would be packed to the rafters with youngsters on a Friday and Saturday evening, a glance from George or some colourful words from Maud, was always enough to curb any bad behaviour. Maud sadly passed away in 1976 and George and Jean decided to move on in 1983.

A copy of the parish magazine in the Heritage Centre Archive, Shrivenham for January 1983 contained an advertisement for the Victoria courtesy of Karen and Jamie Pope. However, they didn't stay long when a parish magazine of September 1984 carried another advertisement courtesy of John and Anne Ward, and they were eager to announce that the pub was then a '*Freehouse*' and no longer part of the brewery Ind Coope or Halls. Sadly, their tenure ended in tragedy when John took his own life. From another parish magazine dated November 2000, the information came that Alison and Mark were the proprietors, but there no family name was mentioned. In February 2001, the pub was being run by Nyki and Alan Martin.

In 2006 Paul and Amy Studholme acquired the premises in order to operate a Bistro restaurant called by the unusual name of '*The Fat Dog.*' The Swindon Advertiser of 14th August 2006 covered the story of the beginning of a new business. The building was renovated and brought up to date to restaurant standard and the future looked good. In general, the food served was very good and it had a nice atmosphere, but by the end of 2012 it was struggling. It closed in December of that year and by 2015 was converted into domestic use.



If any reader has information on names and dates, or has any stories related to the Victoria, please contact us:

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