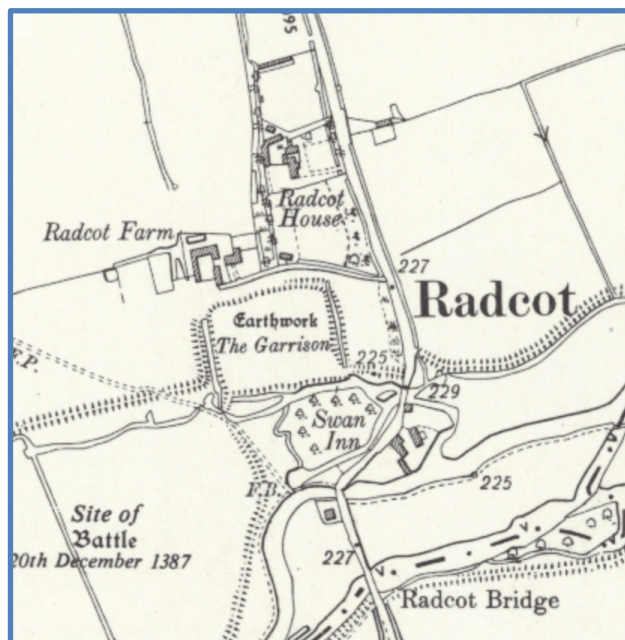


The Swan Inn and Wharf at Radcot

The documentary evidence so far

The road here is an important one that runs from Burford to Faringdon. An early 11th century road followed a direct north-south route through Radcot, but was diverted to its present course in two stages in the 12th and 18th centuries. To the north side of the road by the Swan Inn, there is archaeological evidence of a system of wharfs. It is likely and logical that these wharfs were used in the 11th century to convey the highly sought after, Taynton Stone, mined from the quarry near Burford. There is also documentary evidence that the farmers of Wyke Monastic Grange at Faringdon, were sending grain to London via the river at Radcot in the 12th century. (For more info on Wyke Grange see SHS N1086).



Extract from OS Map of 1949-69, courtesy of National Library of Scotland

The earliest documentary information we have on the public house known as, '*The Swan*,' is from the Victoria County History of Oxfordshire, Vol 17, under the heading of Langford Parish. The Swan Inn was first mentioned by name in 1775, and John Wells was the Innkeeper. The Oxford Journal newspaper for 13th March 1790 advertised that an auction would take place at, '*the Swan Inn, Radcot*,' in order to sell a freehold estate that was located at Clanfield. Then in 1803 an auction was held there for, '*the largest and fattest cow ever seen*

in this part of the country.' The cow belonged to John Hemming a local farmer who occupied Radcot Farm. (Oxford Journal 12th Nov 1803). Another auction informed that a John Wells was still running the Swan Inn in 1828, when a batch of, *'Fine Meadow Grass,'* was auctioned. (Oxford Journal 31st May 1828). But this is likely to be the son of the original John Wells. Two years later a newspaper article appeared concerning the, *'Agricultural Poor.'* It stated that, *'To such a state of degradation are the poor reduced in this neighbourhood, that numbers of them are daily seen carrying on their backs half a hundred (56 lbs) of coals from Radcot Wharf to Burford, a distance of eight miles and a half, going over a space of seventeen miles, on a miserable pittance of 6d or 8d per day.'* (Berkshire Chronicle 2nd January 1830). We can glean some building information from an auction that took place at the Swan to sell, *'Two newly erected Freehold Cottages, with one and a half acres of superior Arable Land adjoining thereto, situate close to the turnpike road at Radcot.'* Mr John Wells was still the contact. (Oxford Journal 4th Feb 1837). The Great Tithe survey that took place from 1839 – 1844, included Radcot and at the beginning of 1842, John Wells was listed with his Coal Yard, House and Garden and he's also confirmed as the owner. Although it makes no mention of the Swan Inn specifically, we know it was there by earlier newspaper advertisements. Therefore, on the north side of the river was located John Wells with a Wharf directly alongside the riverbank, a Coal Yard and the Swan Inn. On the south side of the river was another Wharf and Coal Yard, with a meadow attached. The Tithe survey of 1842 shows that it was occupied by Thomas Morse, but owned by William Bennet. The advertisement below was brought about by the death of the previous occupier the year before, called John Gandell.

RADCOT, OXON.

TWO be LET by TENDER,—A newly-erected MESSAGE or TENEMENT and Garden, with a Coal and Slate Wharf and Sheds, and 5 Acres of excellent Pasture Land, or thereabouts, near thereto, adjoining the River Thames, situate at Radcot, Oxon, at the side of the turnpike road leading to Faringdon, and about two miles from that town, where an extensive business has been carried on for some years past.

Immediate possession may be had of the Wharf and Land, and possession of the Dwelling House, &c. at Michaelmas next.

Tenders (free of postage) to be addressed, on or before the 6th of April next, to Mr. R. W. Crowdy, solicitor, Faringdon, Berks, of whom further particulars may be obtained.

The Wharf, Yard and House located on the south side of the river, now just a riverside car park. Oxford Journal 20th March 1841

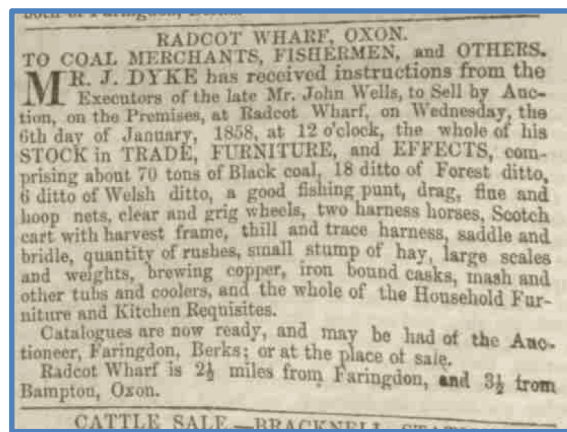


An extract from the Tithe Map showing the Wharf, Coal Yard and pub of John Wells No 44 and the Wharf, Coal Yard and House of Thomas Morse Nos 48 & 49

The census of 1851 listed that John Wells was still there as a Coal Merchant. He's aged 55 and living with him was his sister Ann who was 48. But six years later he passed away in the latter part of 1857. An advertisement duly appeared in the newspaper announcing the sale of all his stock-in-trade, household furniture and possessions. The advert doesn't mention the sale of the actual premises. It was sold privately to William Clare of Clanfield.



A photo from, *'In the footsteps of Henry Taunt,'* circa 1880. This shows the barn and little cottage on the south side of the river occupied by Thomas Morse



Sale of goods belonging to the late John Wells.
Reading Mercury 26th December 1857

From the description of the goods included in the sale, it would be difficult to discern that a pub was included but there is mention of a, '*brewing copper*.' The census documents from 1841 to 61, list only the coal business, and make no mention of an Inn or Beerhouse. However, the advertisements of the auctions from as early as 1775 mention the Swan Inn by name. After the sale of all the belongings of John Wells as listed in the above advertisement, the census of 1861 show that George Wilsdon who was aged 55 took over the Coal Yard and Pub. With him was his wife Jane aged 53, and they had three children, Charlotte 17, Albert 14 and Louisa 12. Thomas Morse was still at the Coal Yard on the other side of the river. George Wilsdon began the process of leaving Radcot in 1863. He decided to sell much of his furniture, but the sale notice includes John James who occupied the farm premises that is on the site of Radcot House today. We can only presume from this, that there was some kind of association between them. At the same time, George also tried to call in his debts by making a claim in the county court for coal that he had sold to Henry Cook, who died before the bill was settled. Mrs Cook of Standlake, Executor of her husband's estate was the defendant. (Reading Mercury 21st March 1863).

RADCOT,
About midway between Faringdon and Bampton.
SALE NEXT SATURDAY.

MR. J. DYKE has received instructions from Mr. J. James and Mr. Wilsdon (who are leaving Radcot), to **SELL** by AUCTION, on the premises at Radcot, on Saturday next, March 28th, at One o'clock,—Their neat **HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, SOCIABLE, FISHING PUNT, NETS, BASKET RODS, &c.**; comprising more particularly mahogany and oak dining, tea, and other tables; four-post, tent, and other bedsteads; feather and flock beds; chests of drawers, sets of chairs, sofa, piano, barometer, clock, bureau and bookcase, large screen, carpets and matting, dressing tables and glasses, blankets, wash stands, night commodes; white and brown basket rods, casks and stands, mash and other tubs, elm planks, fire-wood, tools, large kitchen range and fender, coppers and fittings, tin ware, and a variety of useful effects.

Sale of George Wilsdon's and John James' furniture & household goods. Oxford Journal 21st March 1863

But sometime between then and 1867, the Coal Yard and Pub was taken over by John Turner. A public announcement advertisement gave the information that John Turner's wife had been delivered of a daughter on 23rd October 1867 at the Swan Inn, Radcot. (North Wilts Herald 23rd Nov 1867). And something had happened to make him pay for an advertisement to announce that, '*All persons found bathing or fishing in the private water belonging to the Radcot Wharf House, will be prosecuted.*' (Faringdon Adver 4th June 1870). By 1871, things had changed in that John Turner was listed in the census as an Inn Keeper, James Adams as Toll Gate Keeper, and there is no mention of a Coal Merchant at all. An interesting point about the listing is that John Turner was 48 and his wife, Elizabeth was 40. He was born in Lechlade, she in Kent, but two of their children, Edward 10 and John 8, were both born in India. Did the Turners live in India or were the two boys adopted?

In the book, '*Radcot and its Bridge*,' Ernest Allen Pocock gave the information that the Swan Inn was built by William Clare in 1873. This is confirmed by a newspaper advertisement in August the following year, stating that the Swan Inn at Radcot would be available to be let from Michaelmas (29th Sept). (Oxford Journal 8th Aug 1874). Applications for the let were to be made to W.T. Clare at Clanfield. On the 1861 census, William Clare is the son of the Landlady of the Masons Inn at Clanfield. We don't know when he purchased the premises that was the Swan or whether the Clare family had owned it for some time. If a comparison is made of the tithe map of 1840 and a present-day photo, (below) it looks like the new pub is referring

to the building that lies closest and parallel with the road. The two smallest buildings in the foreground seem likely to be the earliest and original Swan Inn. The outbuilding with the centre roof garret seems likely to be a stable for four horses, a building probably heavily used by the former coal merchants.



The Swan Inn above, photo by Neil B. Maw.
Below - extract from Tithe Map of 1840



Edward Lambeth aged 36 was the Licensee listed on the 1881 census, with his wife Mercy aged 34, but it's likely they had been there since September 1874. A newspaper article in 1879 mentioned that after an annual cricket match, the players retired to the Swan Inn, Radcot for a dinner served by hostess, Mrs Lambeth. (Oxford Times 9th Aug 1879). It was normal practice at the time, to hold inquests at the nearest public house. Christopher Forshaw,

schoolmaster of Clanfield, was drowned whilst swimming in the river at Radcot, and the inquest held at the Swan Inn declared an accidental death. (Reading Mercury 13th June 1885). The Sporting Gazette reported that, '*Messrs W. Hall and J. Clifford of St Aldates, who were fishing at Mr Lambeth's, the Swan Inn, Radcot, succeeded in landing two splendid Pike weighing 21½ and 20lb, four brace ranging from 4lbs to 12lbs and 12 brace of good Perch.*' (Sporting Gazette 2nd Jan 1886). The following year Edward Lambeth left the Swan at Radcot and moved to the Salutation Inn at Faringdon and he announced it in the newspaper. (Faringdon Adver 15th Jan 1887).

The new landlord was George Clare, the son of the former owner, William Tuckwell Clare, who died in 1887. It's likely that on his inheritance, George wanted to take over the running of the pub and had asked Edward Lambeth to move on. The following year saw another fatality with Herbert Oswald, who had been paddling in a shallow spot and could not swim, suddenly disappeared. The inquest held at the Swan Inn returned a verdict of accidental death. (Reading Mercury 8th Sept 1888). By 1897 it seems that George Clare wanted to move on and in April a holdover licence was granted to Harry Humphris. This was probably caused by George Clare selling the pub to Messrs Belcher and Habgood, Brewers of Abingdon. This information comes from a newspaper article that tells of Harry Humphris being charged with allowing drunkenness on his premises and Mr Belcher from the brewery was there. (Witney Gazette 14th Oct 1897). In November the same year, Harry was in trouble again for having discharged a firearm on the River Thames, which was illegal. He initially pleaded not guilty, but being confronted with a letter in which he admitted the offence, he changed his plea. He was fined 6pence and ordered to pay 16shillings 6pence costs. (Reading Mercury 20th Nov 1897).

Harry didn't stay long as the following year a holdover licence was granted to Francis Crichton Temple. (Faringdon Adver 10th Sept 1898). We learn from an inquest that took place at the Swan Hotel, as it was called then, that Frank Hayward was the manager for Mr Temple the proprietor. The inquest was over the death of John Clark who after a few drinks had ended up in the river. The jury returned a verdict of, '*Found Drowned.*' (Faringdon Adver 6th April 1901). The census of 1901 listed Margaret Temple as the Licensee aged 34 and had a daughter Maud aged 18. Francis Temple was not listed but the manager Frank Hayward was listed as a Licensed Victualler in his own right.

In the early part of 1903, the Temple's left the pub and a holdover licence was granted to Gilbert Railton, and it was given to him permanently in July. (Faringdon Adver 11th July 1903).

When the Inquest took place at the Swan Hotel on the body of James Clack of Uffington, who was the resident agent on the Craven Estate, Gilbert testified that the deceased came into his pub on the 3rd Nov. He was eventually found dead in the river. It was a curious case and the inquest could not establish the details of how it happened so the jury returned a verdict of, *'Found drowned.'* (Full details Faringdon Adver 14 Nov 1903). However, Gilbert didn't stay long and before he left at the end of December 1905, he held an auction on site to sell an enormous amount of his furniture and outdoor effects. (See advert below).

NEXT WEDNESDAY.
Swan Hotel, Radcot.
 2½ miles from Faringdon, & 1 mile from Clanfield.
 A portion of the **FURNITURE and OUTDOOR EFFECTS,**
 Including Bedroom Furniture, Blankets, Bed and Table Linen, Windsor Chairs, 4 Mahogany Chairs in blue repp, ~~Arm~~ Chair, Timepiece, Sporting and Hunting Prints and Engravings and other Pictures, Plated Articles, Cutlery, Glass, China, 4 Silver and 1 Cycle Watches, Breech-loading Gun and Cartridges, Set of Table Tennis, Folding Bagatelle Board and Accessories, Phonograph and Records, Shooting Range Automatic Machine, "Try your skill" Automatic Machine, 3 Heating Stoves, useful Kitchen Effects, 2 Egg Boxes, Gents' Free-wheel Bicycle, capital Cob-size Four-wheel DOG CART, DOG CART in good condition, 2 Carriage Jacks, Chaff Machine, Galvanized Double Corn Bin, Bull-Terrier Bitch and Fox-Terrier Dog, Dog Kennel, Wheelbarrow, 2 Garden Frames and Lights, Wood and Iron Garden Seat and Chairs, Iron Garden Roll, Ransome's Lawn Machine, Garden and Stable Tools, Bar-frame Hive and Bees, Firewood and Fagots, Carpenter's Machinery and Tools, including Lathe and Tool Chest; about 60 Head of **POULTRY and DUCKS**, and a variety of useful effects, comprising about 120 lots,
 Will be Sold by Auction, by
M. C. INNOCENT & SON
 BY direction of Mr G. Railton, who is leaving, on Wednesday next, December 13th, 1905, at One o'clock prompt. No Catalogues.
 Auction Offices—Leechlade.

Gilbert Railton's auction details. Faringdon Adver 9th
 December 1905.

The very start of the following year, the licence was granted to Albert Joseph Yammer. (Faringdon Adver 13th January 1906). Once he was settled, he went to the trouble of placing an advertisement in several newspapers, announcing that the Swan Hotel was, *'under entirely new management.'* (Faringdon Adver 2nd June 1906). However, in October of the same year, he placed another advert to say he was leaving and selling up much of his furniture and outdoor effects. (Faringdon Adver 27th Oct 1906). The Witney Gazette of 17th November the same year, provided the information that the new Licensee was Frank Fowler.

By the summer of the following year, Frank Fowler displayed the kind of character he was when he was prosecuted for allowing a horse to be used for work when it was badly lame.

His responses to the police show him to be something of a belligerent individual. He was fined and Magistrate, Mr Butler, noted that, '*it was one of the most vile cases he had ever heard.*' (Faringdon Adver 1st June 1907). But Frank Fowler seemed also to be a resourceful fellow as in 1909 he advertised the service of his well-known Brake called Faithful (a large Wagonette) and would deliver to all parts. And moving along with new technology and the rapid rise of the internal combustion engine he announced that he had a Motor Launch.



Fowler's Motor Launch - Faringdon Adver 20th July 1912
Fowler's Brake Service - Faringdon Adver 8th May 1909

Frank Fowler was the landlord when the Inquest was held at the Swan for the death of Alfred Almond. He was a former military man who had served with the Royal Field Artillery and was employed as a temporary Lock-keeper. It was suggested that he may have been suffering from depression and possibly taken his own life, but there was no real evidence to substantiate that, so the verdict returned was, '*Found Drowned.*' (North Wilts Herald 24th Feb 1911). There were several other instances of Frank Fowler's name appearing in the local newspapers, several for others being prosecuted for stealing from him, sale of a horse and his lost dog. It was also reported that two trout were caught from the lawn of the Swan Hotel, one weighed 3½lbs and the other 5lb 3oz – beauties. The census for 1911 recorded that he was aged 39 with his wife Emma 38, a daughter Florence 15, and sons Cecil 13 and Charles Radcot Fowler 2.

Considering the amount of use that Frank Fowler had made of the local newspapers during his eight years at the Swan Hotel, it was puzzling not to find any reference to his leaving. But whatever the reason for his departure, a temporary holdover licence was granted to Leonard Wraight. (Faringdon Adver 26th Sept 1914). At the moment we don't know much about him and with the first world war already started, information from newspapers became sparse. However, we do know that Leonard was a fisherman when a news snippet reported that he caught a Pike weighing 20lbs that was nearly 4 feet in length. (Faringdon Adver 18th Nov 1916).

It's at this point of history that we are struggling for information. There was a sale of furniture and effects on 3rd July 1919, carried out on the instructions of the owners, Belcher & Habgood, brewery. The entire contents of the property, room by room, plus boats and punts, were to be sold. We can only assume that this was the end of Leonard Wraight's tenure.



Boating on the river circa 1920s by the Swan Pub. Picture from VCH Oxfordshire Vol 17

We are grateful to Philipa Lockwood who is the Great Granddaughter of Edward Samuel Tyler who informed us that Edward was the landlord of The Swan in the 1920s. Confirmation comes from a newspaper article that reported on the accidental death of David Burgess from Littleworth who drowned in the river during a summer punting trip with a friend in June 1926. The formal inquest was held at the Swan and landlord Edward Tyler was quoted as giving evidence. (Oxon Weekly News 30/6/1926). An article by Geoff Saunders

in a publication called '*Clanfield Memories*' by D. Oakey, gives further information by explaining that when a teenager, Edward Tyler gave him a job. He described that '*Ted Tyler was a big ex-submariner with a voice like a foghorn.*' (Below) His military bearing explained why he was Captain of the local Home Guard, a body of local armed men who could be relied upon during the war years of 1939 – 45. Unfortunately, Ted became ill in 1942 and sadly died. Geoff Saunders also provided the information that after the Tylers the pub was sold to Mr and Mrs Goddard who also gave him a job. However, it wasn't for long as about a year later they sold up and moved on. Geoff further explained that next to the pub came a Mr Pigeon as the new landlord, who apparently had been an employee of De-Havilands at Witney.

We run out of evidence at this point concerning the landlords of the The Swan. However, from the book, '*The Stripling Thames,*' we learn that Sandra and Denis Fairall were landlord and lady from about 1990 and that the pub was then owned by Morlands Brewery.

This history was inspired by the late Alan Watkins who had a keen interest on the property and had made so many improvements to it during recent years, even though he only leased to the property. His tragic end is much regretted by many people who knew him.

Updated 2025

