

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Stewkley's Pubs and Beer Houses.

This month our pub trail takes us north along the village High Street to the former Black Swan and the Bull and Butcher pubs. The Black Swan is today's No 41 High Street South, a shallow pitch, slated-roof residence.

It was built with Stewkley red bricks in Flemish bond in the first half of the 19th century and opened as a pub in 1838. The central front door to the pub remains in the west elevation to High Street South. A reproduction pub sign of a black swan on a metal bracket alludes to its former life. The old image shows publicans, Mr and Mrs John King, licensee 'to retail ale, beer, porter and cider', posing at the front in the early 1930s. The signboard tells us that their source was Ivinghoe Ales, the Roberts and Wilson Brewery, taken over by Benskins of Watford in 1927. There is also a billboard advertising Singer sewing machines. The timber 'lean-to' on the left of the old photograph shielded the gents, a rather public outside privy, accessed through the front entrance and probably a bit whiffy prior to 1940s mains sewerage. The Black Swan appears in trade directories from 1877 to 1939 and closed as a public house in the early 1960s. An unattractive, later extension to the right of the building (since demolished) was to house a drapery shop in the 1960-1970s.

The Bull and Butcher public house, known locally simply as The Bull, is today a private residence at No 6 High Street North. When the pub closed in 1963, the premises were transformed intermediately into the village library and occasional doctors' surgery until closing in 2006. Perhaps the more auspicious name 'The Old Library', has been chosen for the residence today.

Built in red bricks in Flemish bond, the early 19th century building has a carriage archway entrance to a rear courtyard, with rooms over the carriageway. The Bull and Butcher opened as a pub in 1832 and is mentioned in trade directories between 1853 and 1939.

As a pub, it served Benskins of Watford ales and stout.

(Brian Bottomley's *Stewkley Ale Song*, to be found on YouTube, is a fun reminder of village pubs and characters of yesteryear – *Heritage Editor*.)



The old Black Swan



The modern Black Swan house



The old Bull and Butcher



The Old Library aka The Bull today