

DOWN MEMORY LANE

Stewkley's Pubs and Beer Houses.

Arriving in the centre from both north and south directions, The Swan occupies possibly the most prominent commercial position in the village. Previously known as both The Old Swan and The White Swan, it is designated in the Stewkley Conservation Area as a landmark building at No 1 Chapel Square. It is built of local red brick in Flemish bond with early 19th century alterations to a much older 17th century building. Some timber framing remains internally from that period. Importantly, it enjoys the protection of strict planning restrictions as a Grade II Listed Building, according to the National Heritage List for England.

Opening as The Old Swan public house in 1796, the ownership and tenancy of The Swan is relatively well recorded and appears in trade directories from 1853 to 1939. For many years, The Swan brewed its own beer and was one of three malting yards in the village. Kate Mayne (*Stewkley, Bucks, 1955*) recalled that it was the principal Stewkley brewery. Owned in the mid-19th century by Thomas Hedges, who also owned the White Horse Hotel at Islington Cattle Market, beer for his London premises was brewed at The Old Swan and hauled by horsedrawn waggon

up to London. Apparently much appreciated by drovers and dealers at the cattle market, they invariably ordered a pint of 'Old Stewkley'.

At the time of the 1907 image of The Old Swan, Henry George Rugg was the landlord and the pub purveyed Berkhamsted brewery Locke and Smith's ales and stout. This brewery went into receivership in 1913 and was taken over by Benskins of Watford. At that time, the pub offered good accommodation, teas and cyclists' rest. During World War II, The Old Swan was designated by the military as the Keep at the centre of the village defence plan in the event of a hostile invasion. If the enemy drove back village defenders, they would fall back on The Old Swan *blockhaus* to be defended to the last.

Despite valiant efforts in recent years to make The Swan a commercial success, it became the most recent village pub to close its doors in March 2022. Over the last few weeks, internal renovations have been underway, and the village awaits anxiously to learn whether what was becoming a rather ugly duckling, will be sensitively transformed...a delightful White Swan?



Swan public house, Chapel Square, Stewkley, 1907



The Swan public house, Chapel Square

The Cricketers Arms is the only one of the ten known public houses which no longer physically exists, having been demolished in the early 1970s. Standing on the corner just south of No 78 High Street North, it was a public house from about 1753 until its closure in the 1920s, when it became known as Cricketers Farmhouse or No 76 High Street North. It appeared in trade directories from 1864 to 1915. In the old image, we learn that the pub purveyed J W Green's Luton ales and was owned by Edmund Mead. Standing in the doorway was employee Win King, who worked at the pub until it closed.

J W Green's Phoenix Brewery in Luton became Flowers and Sons in 1954 prior to acquisition by Whitbread in 1961 and closure in 1969.

The Cricketers Arms site is today occupied by the new Cricketers Close housing development, hence the origin of the name.



The Cricketers



Site of old Cricketers