NEWS IN BRIEF

Property sales

BEFORE the days of estate agents the City Arms was also the location for sales of property in the city.

CITY OF WELLS.—SOMERSET.

DWELLING-HOUSES, GARDENS, AND PREMISES.

June 6, 1856

Wells Journal
June 23, 1910
On Friday evening at the City Arms Wells Mr R Bowring, auctioneer, and before a large company offered for sale six cottages in Green's Court Southover belonging to Mr John George. After spirited and competitive bidding the properties were knocked down to Mr Chisholm of Wells for £407.

Wells Journal
June 8, 1917
On Tuesday last week there was offered for sale at the City Arms Hotel in Wells five freehold cottages with gardens situated at 19 to 23 Broad Street Wells. The properties were knocked down to Mr F Webb for £450.

September 6, 1877

The City Arms itself was also advertised for sale in the pages of the paper:

Estate of Mrs. Elizabeth Gould, Decd.

WELLS, SOMERSET.

Sale of a valuable Freehold and FULLY LICENSED FREE HOUSE known as the CITY ARMS.

VACANT POSSESSION.

October 29, 1949

LICENSED HOUSE SOLD.
Messrs. King, Miles and Co. offered for auction at the Star Hotel, Wells, on Wednesday, the freehold and fully licensed free house "The City Arms." The property was purchased by Messrs. Ushers, Ltd., of Trowbridge, for £7,300.

November 11, 1949

Grim prison to cheery pub

THE City Arms in Wells is an historic building which away from the ecclesiastical centre of the Cathedral and Bishop's Palace has an equally interesting story to tell.

Built during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First in the 1550s it was granted a royal charter to be used as the city's gaol with the jailer, who was employed by the Wells Corporation, living in a house across the courtyard form the single cell.

It continued to be used as a prison until 1810 and in 1841 became a hostelry.

Among the items of torture that were used on the prisoners there was a ducking stool, head gear for scolds, leg irons, stocks, manacles and a Scavengers daughter.

This A frame instrument was invented during the reign of Henry VIII by Sir William Skeffington who was the Lieutenant of the Tower of London and it compressed the victim into an extreme sitting position which forced the blood in the body under pressure to the chest and head where it would come out of the nose, mouth and ears and sometimes the chest wall would burst open as blood filled the rib cage and heart.

The City Arms still possesses the Scavengers daughter, manacles and leg irons and the old stocks were incorporated into the front of the bar during a re vamp in the 1960's and are now long gone.

Those who were kept in the gaol under sentence of death would be taken by a wooden sledge to the outskirts of the city, now the Keward Estate, to Gallows Field where they would be hung.

In a location close by was Burnt Stakes Field where poor unfortunates would be burnt at the stake. The story has it that women were strangled before being put on the stakes but men were not.

After the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685 when an attempt was made to overthrow James II, Judge Jeffries sentenced many of the rebels to death at an assize court in Wells.

Many of the rebels were hung in the Market Place in Wells and as the city gaol was full some of those sentenced to death were hung on a gallows across the road opposite the City Arms.

Having witnessed troubled times the building became a public house in 1841.

The iconic rounded corner of the building into Queen Street was an early road widening scheme when travel and trade in the city depended on horse and cart and the Swiftsure stage coach came in to the city to pick travellers up from the Swan Hotel to take them to Bath, Taunton and Bristol.

The Wells Journal was founded in 1851 and their archive tells the tale of the life and times of the City Arms.

The business of the pub and the reporting of some of the incidents that happened within it provide an important social history of the people of it served and continues to serve.

The stories about the people that ran the City Arms and the people that drank within its walls enhances the already unique history that Wells has and tells a social as well as an architectural tale.

Clare Blackmore

Actress charged with stealing a carriage rug

Wells Journal
September 10, 1920
REVUE ACTRESS CHARGED AT WELLS. THEFT FROM TRAP IN CITY ARMS YARD.

At the Wells City Police Court Catherine Robinson, described as a revue actress was charged with having stolen from a trap in the yard of the City Arms a carriage rug valued at 30s the property of Reginald Corp.

Mr Corp said he had driven his trap into the yard of the City Arms at 7.30pm spreading the rug over the back seat of the trap and he then went up to the town on business returning at 9.30pm when he discovered that the rug was missing.

He looked around the yard and asked in the bar and no-one had seen it.

He reported his loss to the police and on the following day it was produced to him by PC Giblett and he identified it as his property.

Sarah Loxton, wife of the licensee of the Golden Heart in St John Street said that at 10.00 am on the morning following the theft the prisoner came into her tap room where she produced the rug and laid it out on the bar.

The prisoner said she was going to Shepton and didn't want to take the rug with her and asked Mrs Loxton if she could leave the rug in the Golden Heart.

Mrs Loxton said she would look after it behind the bar. Later in the day PC Giblett came around making enquiries and she handed the rug to him.

After Mr Corp had identified the rug as his PC Giblett proceeded to Shepton and found the prisoner in Town Street.

He then told her he was making enquiries as to the theft of a rug from the yard of the City Arms. He cautioned her and asked her to account for the rug that she had left at the Golden Heart.

She told him that she had picked it up at the crossroads outside the Mermaid Inn.

The prisoner was detained.

Mr Corp said that at no time had he driven near the Mermaid Inn. The prisoner was remanded in order for further enquiries to be made.

Wells Journal
September 17, 1920
CHARGE AGAINST A REVUE ACTRESS. DRAMATIC OUTBURSTS IN WELLS COURT

Catherine Robinson a revue actress was brought before the court charged with stealing a carriage rug value 30s from the yard of the City Arms in Wells.

Evidence came from William Tripp of the Cheddar Valley Inn at Wells who said that the prisoner had come into the bar and had a drink and asked if anyone would give her 15s for a carriage rug that she had with her as it was too heavy to carry about. No one replied to her offer and she went away after a few minutes.

In reply to the formal charge Miss Robinson told the court;

"All I want to say is that I am guilty and if you bought twenty charges in front of me I would plead guilty as I am sick of living."

The Bench committed the prisoner for trial at the next quarter sessions.

The prisoner said;

"I don't mind being in prison because I am better off there but will they take time off at the sessions as I have a good job waiting for me."

The Bench: "That will rest with the Chairman of the Court. It does not rest with us here."

The prisoner: "But I am sure you gentlemen can use your influence."

The Bench said that sometimes the time of waiting for trial was taken into consideration.

The prisoner then became very dramatic and exclaimed:

"I have never been out of prison for a year since I started and yet all my convictions do not add up to one crime.

"Other people can take thousands and get away with it but if I take a penny I am imprisoned. I had 12 months once for 12s 6d.

"What is the good of saying anything when my character is gone. If I had the chance I would put myself out of the way."

The Chairman also remarked that PC Giblett should be thanked for the promptitude and alertness he had shown when arresting the prisoner and recovering the property.

The prisoner shouted out at PC Giblett: "You have me to thank for that."

Wells Journal
October 15, 1920
CHARGE AGAINST A REVUE ACTRESS SENTENCED TO 15 MONTHS HARD LABOUR AT SOMERSET QUARTER SESSIONS IN WELLS

At the Somerset Quarter Sessions Catherine Robinson described as a revue actress was indicted on two charges. Firstly for having stolen a carriage rug from the yard of the City Arms and on the second count for having stolen a waterproof coat the property of Alice Bide.

She pleaded guilty to both counts but did not want her previous convictions read out in court as she "had a living to make."

The prisoner said her acts had been due to desperation. Indeed all her offences did not amount to one decent crime. Her downfall was she said to having a loving husband who did not like to work.

This was however going to be her last appearance in any court. She was not old and she intended to make good if the court would give her a chance.

Mr Wiltshire, prosecuting, said that in 1917 the prisoner had stolen the contents of a Red Cross box.

The prisoner shouted: "Shut up. Please forbid the reporters to put my details in their papers as I have a living to make when this is all over."

PC Giblett showed 34 previous convictions against the prisoner. He was proceeding to read them out when the prisoner shouted again: "Stop him from reading them out!"

PC Giblett said that he had made further investigations and told the court that the prisoner was married but not happily as the husband complained of her taking things form the house to sell and of her intemperance. The husband did not want any more to do with her.

Prisoner: "You ought to add that the husband is the cause of all my troubles."

The Chairman said that the prisoner was an almost hopeless case. She was in an inebriate's home in 1911 and 1912.

Again the prisoner called out; "And I was far worse when I came out than when I went in."

The Chairman told the court:

"No. It does not to have done you much good. You have been engaged on a career in crime and society must be protected from people like you."

The prisoner was given a sentence of 15 months in Shepton Goal with hard labour.

She had the last word as she was taken away;

"I am very much obliged and I hope the pubs are open all day when I come out."

INFANT KILLED BY AN OVERDOSE OF SYRUP

Tragic stories told at City Arms inquests

IN the early and mid-Victorian age inquests were frequently held in public houses usually because there was a space large enough for a body to be viewed, a table for 12 jurymen, the coroner, witnesses and reporters.

It was not until later in the century and into the early 20th century that dedicated coroners courts began to appear.

In Wells a body would be held until the inquest in the mortuary at the Wells Union Workhouse on Glastonbury Road, the building which is now the medical centre for the city.

The City Arms held many inquests during this time.

Wells Journal
April 20, 1851
"DIED BY THE VISITATION OF GOD"

An inquest was heard at Wells before Daniel Ashford Esq and a reputable jury on the body of Ann Butler Lovell, wife of Thomas Lovell, clerk to St Cuthbert's. It appeared that the deceased was in the act of dressing when she made a groan and fell back on the bed. Surgical assistance was acquired but the spark of life had gone.

Verdict. "Died by the visitation of God."

Wells Journal
November 21, 1857
DEATH FROM THE ADMINISTRATION OF SYRUP OF POPPIES. CORONER SAYS THAT "STRINGENT MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKEN TO PREVENT THE INDISCRIMINATE SALE OF SUCH MIXTURES"

An inquest was heard at the City Arms Wells on the body of Benjamin Charles Boug the infant son of Police Sergeant Boug of Wells Police residing in Priest Row who met with his death under circumstances detailed in the following evidence.

The father stated that the deceased was eight months old and that for the four nights prior to the child's death he had been very restless and by the advice of Mrs Farrow, a neighbour, his wife went to Mr Flooks the chemist for a pennyworth of syrup of poppies.

Mrs Farrow said that the child should be given a teaspoon and a half of the syrup. This was administered and in a quarter of an hour the child became very sleepy and its head fell heavily upon the mothers arm. She became alarmed and sent for Dr Purnell who did everything he could to restore consciousness but the child continued in a kind of stupor and apparently convulsed until its death.

The bottle containing the syrup was given to Dr Purnell.

Dr Purnell told the jury that stated that the symptoms showed by the child were occasioned by the syrup. Mrs Boug and Mrs Farrow were unaware that the syrup contained opium. Dr Purnell had not examined the strength of opium in the bottle but said that it was estimated that it contained one grain of opium to the ounce and that in a teaspoon and a half there would be three or four drops of opium. Dr Purnell had no doubt that this amount had caused the death of the child.

He also said that an extraordinary number of infant deaths were caused this way.

The Coroner then expressed a hope that through the medium of the press the injurious effect of syrup of poppies should be made known in order to prevent the use of it. No less than forty cases such as this had come his way and he thought that a stringent measure should be passed to prevent the indiscriminate sale of such a mixture.

He next requested Mr Flooks to be careful to whom he sold such things and a juryman intimated that the bottles should be labelled with "Poison"

The jury decided that the child "Died of an overdose of soothing syrup containing opium."

Wells Journal
April 4, 1863
DIED IN CHILDBIRTH

An inquest was held at the City Arms on Christina Simmons of Portway Wells who died in childbirth.

Charles Simmons, a mason, gave the following evidence.

"My wife was 41 years of age and it was our ninth child. Mrs Noise the mid wife attended her on Saturday night. She was taken ill at half past one in the morning and died at half past eight the same morning. She never complained of pain in her heart or in her side."

Mrs Noise said she had attended the deceased on a similar occasion in 1861. She was called for at two o'clock in the morning and she was letting nature take its course as the deceased was doing well. After a while a faintness had come upon the deceased. Mrs Noise gave her toast and tea and she rallied for a while but then the faintness came again and she called for Dr Livett.

Mr Bonnor assistant to Dr Livett said he went to the deceased at half past seven in the morning. He administered brandy to her. The death was very sudden and he believed it was due to an internal haemorrhage. He did not believe that any blame could be attached to the mid wife and he believed no doctor could have saved the woman.

Verdict given. "Died through exhaustion in childbirth."

The husband is now in a decline and has been absent from work since his wife's death.

Wells Journal
January 12, 1876
DIED AGED SIX MONTHS

Dr Craddock, Wells Coroner, held an inquest at the City Arms in Wells touching upon the death of John Thomas Hill aged six months, the son of Sarah Hill of St Cuthbert's Place.

From the evidence given by the mother it appears that the child was subject to convulsions and was taken on Saturday night after a prolonged fit. Dr Risdon deposed that he had examined the body which weighed only 7lbs and found a large quantity of fluid at the base of the skull and this was in his opinion the cause of death.

Verdict accordingly.

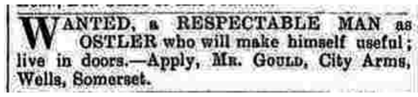
Wells Journal
October 29, 1896
FOUND DEAD

An inquest was held at the City Arms before Dr S Craddock, coroner, on the body of George Ernest Trim aged three months the infant son of Mr and Mrs Trim of 65 High Street.

The mother of the child told the jury that she had found the child dead in her bed at 7.30 in the morning. The child was on its back and away from her. She did not nurse it during the night. The child had been born delicate.

The jury returned a verdict of "Found dead in bed."

Job vacancies at City Arms


WANTED, a RESPECTABLE MAN as OSTLER who will make himself useful; live in doors.—Apply, MR. GOULD, City Arms, Wells, Somerset.

Wells Journal
January 22, 1892
HELP WANTED. Respectable domesticated person able to cook good plain food and assist in bar when required. Treated as family.
Apply: Mrs Evans City Arms Wells.

Wells Journal
February 9, 1900
WANTED. A useful man as an ostler.
Apply: A Gould City Arms Wells

Wells Journal
May 3, 1900
WANTED. A good GENERAL SERVANT who understands plain cooking. Man kept for boots, knives etc
Apply: MRS GOULD. City Arms Wells

Wells Journal
July 13, 1900
HELP WANTED. Respectable young person who understands plain cooking. Farmer's daughter preferred.
Apply. Mrs Gould City Arms Wells

Wells Journal
December 5, 1903
WANTED. A young girl to act as NURSE aged 14 or 15 for one little boy.
Apply: City Arms High Street Wells

Wells Journal
May 20, 1904
WANTED. A respectable man to act as Ostler.
Apply: Mrs Gould City Arms Wells

Wells Journal
May 29, 1905
WANTED. Help, domesticated and to assist in business.
Apply: Mrs Gould City Arms Wells

Wells Journal
March 30, 1906
Wanted a respectable man as OSTLER who will make himself generally useful. Live indoors.
Apply: Mr Gould City Arms

Wells Journal
August 30, 1907
WANTED. A respectable young MAN to work as Ostler. Live indoors.
Apply: Mr Gould City Arms Wells

Wells Journal

Victorian boy racer fatality

Wells Journal
August 11, 1871
FATAL ACCIDENT ON SHEPTON ROAD. SAD DEATH OF CITY ARMS EMPLOYEE.

We regret to state that during the evening after the Shepton Flower Show a fatal accident happened to a person named Colston of Wells when returning from the fete.

Colston was amongst a party travelling in a light waggon and the conveyance was driven by a man named Hatcher also of Wells.

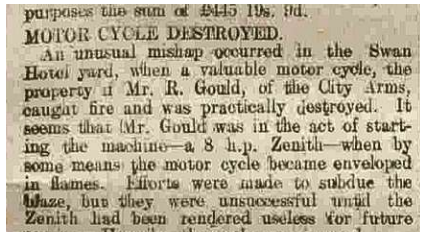
Hatcher passed another vehicle on the road the driver of which strove to repass Hatcher and the accident then occurred.

A severe collision took place between the vehicles and Colston and Hatcher were both thrown out.

The wheels of the cart passed over Colston injuring him so much that he expired soon after.

Hatcher escaped though suffered a broken arm.

Colston was in the employ of Mr Halliday of the City Arms.


purposes the sum of £445 19s. 9d.

MOTOR CYCLE DESTROYED.

An unusual mishap occurred in the Swan Hotel yard, when a valuable motor cycle, the property of Mr. R. Gould, of the City Arms, caught fire and was practically destroyed. It seems that Mr. Gould was in the act of starting the machine—a 8 h.p. Zenith—when by some means the motor cycle became enveloped in flames. Efforts were made to subdue the blaze, but they were unsuccessful until the Zenith had been rendered useless for future service. Happily, the cycle was insured.

DEATH OF MRS. STUBBS.

No light on ostler's cart

Wells Journal
June 12, 1914
CITY PETTY SESSIONS. OSTLER FINED.

JESSE Marshall, ostler at the City Arms, was summoned for not having a light attached to a cart in Queen Street at 9.15pm.

PC Wake gave evidence and Superintendent Sparkes said he would not have summoned Marshall but for the fact that he claimed that he had the right to leave the cart there.

Superintendent Sparkes said that he wished to remind Marshall that he was causing an obstruction by leaving his cart there for an unreasonable time.

The Deputy Mayor told Marshall that he should have listened to the advice of the police and imposed a fine of 1s and 6s costs.