

The Swan Inn, Stoneleigh



Sketch by M. Leigh, early 19th c., courtesy of Stoneleigh Abbey

The Beginnings

Although Stoneleigh has boasted various “ale-houses” or “beer-houses”, there has been only one *inn* – a substantial building occupying a prominent corner site by the village green. Usually known as The Swan, although some records call it The Three Swans, it has now completely vanished, but along with its stables and outbuildings it would have been a significant landmark within the village. It would have been used by travellers as well as local people, specifically those wishing to travel from Birmingham to Southam and Banbury; some of these would undoubtedly have been travelling with livestock. There is also evidence that the inn was used as a manor court, and the term Courthouse Green, possibly referring to the present village green, may derive from this.

Innkeepers were of yeoman status and were often farmers or men with other professions, such as butchers or bakers. In Stoneleigh there was an ale-house held by the Hall family, who were butchers. Thomas Hall was often in trouble in the courts, on occasions selling “unwholesome bread” and bad meat, as well as selling ale in wrong measures. Some of the court’s regulations concern the kind of pastimes allowed in inns and ale-houses, but of note also are those which disallow “the entertainment of persons other than their servants

and travellers in time of divine service” (1609), and prevent “the harbouring of inmates who break hedges or pull pales” (1608).

In 1621 Richard Winsmore of Ashow, a baker, was also an ale-house keeper. He was the brother of the first recorded innkeeper of The Swan, **Walter Winsmore**, whose will was proved in 1615. Walter is named frequently in court rolls for breaking the assize of ale and bread or allowing “unlawful games” (probably cards) on the premises. After his death his widow **Alice** took over the running of the inn, where the steward was dined in 1619 at a cost of 12 shillings - she sub-let it with its 20-acre holding to her nephew **Walter Hunt**, whose will valued his worth as £125. In 1620 Walter’s uncle **Alexander Priest** became the inn-keeper, and by his death in 1629 the premises had fourteen rooms together with “a barne, common stable and loft, and other stable and loft.”

The inventory of the fourth inn-keeper, **Robert Osman**, who died in 1638, reveals the truly substantial nature of The Swan. His first bequest, to his nephew William, is “my red Coate and ye suite wherein I wayted upon the Sherife, and my rapier” – everything else was left to his wife. For over twenty years the inventories had shown the number of Chambers, one interestingly named the Unicorn Chamber (the unicorn forming part of the Leigh crest). The number of beds shown in the various seventeenth and eighteenth century inventories is between seven and ten. By 1671, when **Christopher Brooks** kept the inn, one of the chambers was called Hunts Chamber, and there were three taxable hearths.

How big was The Swan Inn?

By the eighteenth century the acreage of The Swan had extended from 20 to 79. In 1726 it was described as the “dwelling house of **Thomas Cashmore** being known by the sign of The Three Swans” and the manor court was summoned to meet there. When he died in June 1742 the inn-keeper who took over was **Edward Casemore** (Cashmore?)

In 1783 **The Swan** was the subject of an affidavit sworn by a number of men including Robert Johnson, carpenter, of Pear Tree Cottage, [c.1810 map **SBT DR 18/25/78a**] and Michael Clark, mason [of Church Lane, c.1810 map] Acting “In Chancery in the matter of Edward Lord Leigh, a lunatic” (**SBT DR 18/17/15/84**). They are writing to Mr Hill, “the receiver of the said lunatic’s estates” – Edward had been declared “a lunatic of unsound mind” by a Lunacy Commission in 1773, after which date his estates were administered by Hill and he was committed to the care of Mary Leigh, his sister, and William Lord Craven, his uncle.

It would seem that many of the properties on the Stoneleigh Estate were now in a very bad state of repair, and Johnson, Clark and others had been called in to assess the situation and make recommendations for repair/demolition/rebuilding. Their docu-

ment, dated **12 December 1783**, includes a recommendation that the “offensive” pig sties twenty yards from Lord Leigh’s mansion should be removed to a fitter place!

The document provides important information about the status of The Swan: that it was the only public house in Stoneleigh, and was large: it provided stabling for both farm horses and, separately, for Lord Leigh’s and his household’s horses when the former were attending church. It is likely, therefore, that these parts of the building would be the forerunner of the coach house in what is now the Village Club. It also notes that travellers would stable their horses there, meaning that The Swan was still, as nearly two centuries before, a useful stopping place, with Stoneleigh being at the nexus of roads leading to Coventry, Warwick, Leamington, Birmingham and London.

As regards The Swan, they state:

The Barn and stables at The Swan Inn at Stoneley Town, in the Occupation of John Soden – which is the only public house in the Township of Stoneley – are in a very ruinous state – that the roof of one of the said stables heretofore used for the accommodation of travellers and the convenience of his lordship and his servants and also of his tenants who bring their families to this parish church on Sundays is fallen in so as to render the same unserviceable and the other stables used for the farm horses is in a decayed state and is also too small for the necessary horses for the said farm. That the barning upon the said premises is very ancient and much decayed and the roof of a part of the same lately fallen in and that there is no proper building upon the said premises for the reception of wagons and carts necessary for carrying on the said farm business.

They go on to state that the stables and barn should be demolished immediately – at a cost of around £202.

Johnson and Clark et al give their estimate “*for repairs and rebuilding stabling at John Soden’s at The Swan Inn at Stoneley Town*”. **SBT DR 18/17/15/85**

Their list of building materials and costs includes “*19000 bricks and 7000 tiles. Also for erecting a new wagon hovel. Total cost £202.6.6*”

The Swan, then, was a substantial building, with a separate stable for farm horses and those of travellers and Lord Leigh, together with a large barn.

John Soden, whose stabling was at The Swan, was linked to The Swan, either as a bondsman to the victualler or a victualler himself, right up to 1813; he had a farm of 160 acres set at a yearly rent of £74. In return for refurbishments at his premises he was willing to pay an extra £10 a year.

As can be seen from the cover sketch, it is likely that the same ancient building had been there since Elizabethan times.

The Swan as a village centre

We know that The Swan had been used for many years as a place where the manor court was held, or where the steward or sheriff dined. It was also a place where meetings were held at which important decisions about the future of the village were made. Earlier in the same year, on February 13th 1783, a group of residents gathered to petition the agents of Lord Leigh that a workhouse might be erected in the parish for the “poor and indigent.” - SBT DR 18/3/60/2.

“At a general meeting of the Principal Inhabitants of the Parish of Stoneley, assembled the thirteenth day of February one thousand, seven hundred and eighty three, at the Sign of The Swan, in the said Parish, in order to take into consideration the most salutary Plan in making and providing provision for the poor and indigent part of the said Parish, it is unanimously agreed that a Petition and request be represented to the Honourable directors and Agents to the Right Honourable Lord Leigh that they will be pleased to give leave and liberty to the said Parishioners to erect and build on some convenient part of waste or other land in the said Parish, such Building and Buildings we may be thought most convenient to accommodate and provide for the Poor of the said Parish, which buildings shall be governed and directed under the denomination of a Workhouse and in order that the said intended build.

Inhabitants do agree to advance the sum of two hundred pounds to be collected by a general rate or levy throughout the said Parish.

Witness.

Joseph Judd – Church Warden	William Rawlins	Robert Harris
Ralph Cure – Church Warden	William Parker Jnr	Thomas Harris
Richard Sammons	Henry Jackson	Thomas Smith
William Gamble	Richard Garlick	Hugh Hayes
James Palfrey	Thomas Jeacock	William Watts
Richard Shephard	Thomas Hadley	Jonathan Perkins
Abraham Cox	Thomas Wotton	Jonathan Jeacock
Richard Farmer		John Soden }
Jane Harborne		William Adkins} }
Ann Wigan		Overseers of the Poor

Further evidence of the significance of The Swan comes in 1817 when it was named as a place where Lord Leigh’s agents would sit to receive information. After the death of Edward Lord Leigh in 1786 his Will had made the Gloucestershire line of the family the heirs to the Warwickshire estates, but there were many counter-claimants and the prob-

lem culminated in a challenge to Chandos Leigh. It was claimed that Julia Judith, his mother, had attempted to destroy evidence to prove that the heirs of one Christopher Leigh should be the true inheritors, and that she had given orders to destroy a monument in Stoneleigh Church which gave weight to the claim. Evidently considerable measures were taken to discover the truth of this, as witness **WRO CR 2981/6/3/37**, an early document in what was later to become a famous court case.

Ten Pounds Reward

Whereas

The Monument, which was dedicated to the memory of the Honourable Christopher Leigh, the fourth son of the Right Honourable Thomas Lord Leigh the first Baron of Stoneleigh, and which was erected on the South Side of the interior of the Parish Church of Stoneleigh and which Monument described the Honourable Christopher Leigh's Marriage and Issues in the County of Chester; as also the marriage and Issues of his Sons in the County of Lancaster, was soon after the decease of the Honourable Mary Leigh, sister of the late Edward Lord Leigh, who died in July 1806, taken down and removed from the said church.

Any person who can give any Information so as to lead to discovery of the said Monument will receive the above reward, by application to the Agents of the Heir at Law of Lord Leigh, who will be in attendance at the Craven Arms Inn, Coventry, and Swan Inn Stoneleigh; who at the same time will be glad to receive such honest and just information as may be useful and lend to a furtherance of the claim of the heir to the Title and Estates.

August 30th 1817

Early Nineteenth Century Innkeepers

Although the recorded names of innkeepers in the eighteenth century have been few, **the Victuallers database, 1801 – 1828**, held at Warwick County Record Office, gives details of the victualler, or licensee, and bondsmen, or those who stood guarantee for the licensee, for a continuous run of years until 1820 (with the exception of 1809). Frequently those who hold licensed premises in Bubbenhall are standing guarantee for the Stoneleigh licensee, and vice versa. Research into family histories also shows that many were related!

- 1801 and 1802: victualler **Richard Hands**, bondsman John Soden, and vice versa.
- 1803: victualler/bondsman **Hands** and Soden but with the addition of **Tew** as victualler and bondsman as Joseph Nason.
- 1804-1808: victualler **Richard Hands**, bondsman John Soden.

There is no record for 1809

- 1810: victualler **John Soden** , bondsman Thomas Campbell
- 1811: victualler **Soden** , bondsman James Elliot of Bubbenhall
- 1812 : victualler **Soden**, bondsman Jos Hallam of Stoneleigh

In 1813 more detail is given: **John Hollom (Hallam)** is the victualler with John Soden, a yeoman of Stoneley, as bondsman. The inn name is given as The Swan Inn. However later in the same year Soden's name is given as victualler and the bondsman was James Ellet (presumably Elliott) of Bubbenhall. The inn name was given as The White Swan.

- 1814 - 1815: victualler **John Hallam**, bondsman Thomas Jeacock of Bubbenhall; the inn name is The Swan
- 1816: victualler **Mary Hallam** , bondsman William Jeacock of Bubbenhall
- 1817: the inn name was again given as The White Swan, victualler **William Walker**, bondsman William Jeacock, of Bubbenhall.
- 1818-1820: victualler **William Walker** ,bondsman Jeacock of the Malt Shovel, Bubbenhall.

The Hallams' story

From 1816 onwards, keepers of The Swan are of some interest: on February 5th 1816 the burial is recorded at Stoneleigh of "Joseph Hallam Innkeeper aged 56 who cut his throat being a lunatic"; as seen above, he had been at The Swan between 1812 and 1815, his widow Mary Hallam being licensed to run it in 1816.

Mary and Joseph Hallam had a son, Jacob , and he was christened on August 9th 1815 at Stoneleigh. One wonders why Joseph, when his son Jacob was less than a year old, cut his own throat...

Just over a year later, on April 1st 1817 Mary Hallam, widow, married Joseph Whitehead widower, by licence. She quit The Swan at Lady Day, just a week previous to the marriage.

Mary Hallam's new husband, Joseph Whitehead, a cordwainer/carpenter, had also been married before, and his first wife Mary had died aged 27 in July 1815. In 1814 their son William had died aged 20 weeks, and four months following her death, another son, Thomas, died in November 1815, again aged 20 weeks. A daughter, Mary, had been born in 1813; presumably Joseph needed a wife to look after his 4 year old daughter. Incidentally his brother, John Whitehead, was the carpenter who made the new pews for the church in 1818.

The Walkers' story

From Lady Day 1817 documents reveal a **Mrs Walker** leasing land as follows:

"The Swan at Stoneleigh with the Barn Close and Bowling Green as rented by Mrs Hallam £30.0.0

Farce (?) Close as rented by Ditto from 1816 to Lady Day 1817 £6.6.3

The Orchard by Wrights £1.10.0

The small parcels by Workhouse Paddock £3.12.2

The piece of the late Open Fields £6.15.9

Total: £48.4.2 SBT DR 18/17/43/46 (undated document)

So who *was* Mrs Walker, who was leasing land which included The Swan?

Between 1803 and 1808 three children of William and Mary Walker were baptised at Stoneleigh, each time the father's occupation given as **Workhouse Master**.

The supposition that Mrs Walker took over from Mrs Hallam is corroborated by **SBT DR 18/3/69/12**, in a letter dated **27th March 1817** from W. and M. Walker to the Hon. Mrs Julia Judith Leigh .

The Walkers were leaving The Workhouse on its imminent closure, and were asking the Leighs whether they might take some of the contents with them to The Swan. It seems that the Leighs were not inclined to agree, as three only of the items they requested have been given a value for them to buy, the other items being struck through in heavy black ink. Indeed, in **SBT DR 18/3/69/15** Julia Judith Leigh listed "*Articles to be disposed of from Workhouse to Mr Walker if he wishes to have them at the estimated value*", and her list included items which would all have been useful for setting up a future business; what she did not allow to be purchased were household items such as beds, chairs and tables.

William Walker wrote:

To the Hon. Mrs Leigh.

Honoured Madam,

I humbly beg leave to offer you mine and my wife's unfeigned thanks for the many marks of favour and kindness we have uniformly experienced from you; be assured that we shall ever make it our constant study to merit your future favour and patronage by a uniform adherence to that line of conduct that we hope will always merit your approbation.

We thank you for this last instance of your goodness in placing us in the situation at The Swan Inn.

We now solicit the favour of being permitted to select a part of the goods which are now in our possession at the Poor House and to pay for them at a fair valuation as it will save us much inconveniency and trouble in making purchases elsewhere.

We would not have presumed to ask you this favour had the establishment at the Poor House continued, but as the goods at the Poor House are to be disposed of we should feel ourselves much obliged by being permitted to select out such as we stand in need of and pay for them at a fair valuation. This favour will add to the many obligations we already feel ourselves under to you. In assuring your Ladyship of our unfeigned gratitude, we beg leave to subscribe ourselves

Your ladyship's humble and devoted servants,

William and Mary Walker.

When did The Swan close its doors, and why?

In 1817 the Walkers transferred from being workhouse master and mistress, to The Swan. The Victuallers Database for Warwickshire continues to 1828, but no details are given for Stoneleigh after 1820. The fate of The Swan Inn appears to have rested in the hands of this last recorded innkeeper, William Walker.

The beginnings of trouble connected with Walker becomes clear in the following note: **SBT DR 18/3/61/48** – an unsigned and undated document but presumably from Leigh's agent, which reads as follows:

To the Magistrates of the Knightlow Hundred in the Petty Sessions

Gentlemen,

The Clergymen and Churchwardens have not signed the certificate of Walker, the present occupier of The Swan Public House in Stoneley, in consequence of his misconduct in the management of it. I have also given him notice to quit the same at Lady Day next, may I therefore request of you not to renew the licence to the present tenant but to withhold it for the present.

A second letter from Walker to the Hon. Julia Judith Leigh, **SBT DR 18/17/45/47**, presumably of about the same date as the agent's note, continues to plead his case in the style of his first:

Honoured Madam,

Impressed with a due sense of the many favours I have experienced at your hands, and for which I shall ever feel bounden to acknowledge in the warmest terms of gratitude and respect, permit me to address you upon a subject which if not successful must inevitably involve me and my family in the greatest distress – it is the restoration of my licence for six months that I do most humbly entreat your influence and support in obtaining, which for that short period would considerably alleviate the difficulties under which I labour, though not effectually exterminate them. In case of your being pleased to grant me this indulgence, I shall be ready to enter into any written engagement to bind myself to quit at Lady Day next without putting Mr Leigh to any expense, and at the same time to keep such order as you may be pleased to point out. This indulgence I beg you will have goodness to consider will, and I hope without the least injury to Mr Leigh or any other person whatever, enable me to dispose of my present stock, particularly malt liquor, without loss, and possibly terminate the sufferings of my son, without his being hurried off by a previous removal – it will also enable me to procure another residence where I may obtain a livelihood and support my family – to do this at this time is beyond my ability, having exerted every power I possess without success, which had I succeeded would have prevented me trespassing at this time upon your time and requesting your further indulgence, which if I obtain and do not in your opinion deserve during the remainder of my residence here, you will have the means to obviate by putting an end to the Licence before Lady Day next. I once more repeat my earnest prayer that you will consider my situation, accept my acknowledged contrition and repeal that decree which has involved in it the future existence of my self and family. Waiting the result of this, my most humble address, I remain with all due deference,

William Walker.

A later document, however, **SBT DR 18/17/47/34**, dated 14th September 1821, confirms the Leighs' unwillingness to renew the licence. The writer, the Leighs' agent Richard Darley, had presumably been given a letter to deliver to the magistrates. His letter to Julia Judith reads:

Madam,

I attended the magistrates at the Black Dog yesterday and delivered Mr Leigh's letter to them, when it was determined that no future licences for The Swan should be granted to Walker. He was there, and anxious to obtain a permit to extend the time and enable him to sell off his stock, particularly about 1700 gallons of ale. But in speaking to Mr Adams and informing him that Walker had notice in March last, when he was warned not to keep his stock up, the magistrates declined attending to this plea, but Mr Adams intimated that he should keep a licence to enable Mr

Leigh to place some other person there if he thought proper to do so at Lady day. I told him I had not any orders on that point.

I find Walker has been making enquiries and applications for several houses in Warwick and Coventry, so that he may probably be induced to quit at Michaelmas if he can obtain one.

Richard Darley.

Darley wrote again to Julia Judith on October 2nd 1821 **SBT DR 18/17/47/37** as follows:

Walker brought me, in the afternoon after I had been at the Abbey, a paper to sign in order to obtain a licence for a house at Stoke near Coventry, which he had the offer of, but which had been shut up for a short time. As it is necessary to produce to the magistrates in the County of Coventry a certificate of the character of the person applying for a licence, I thought it proper to enquire of Mr Morrison what has passed between him and Walker on the subject, and learnt that he had objected on the same grounds which I did, that is, there would be an impropriety in certifying "that he is a sober, honest, industrious man and for upwards of four years lived as a victualler at the Swan Inn, Stoneleigh, during which time he has kept good rules and order to the best of our knowledge" - because we could not truly assent that we had. But if it met with your approbation and Mr Leigh's, we would and could truly and honestly certify "that he was a man of sober life and conversation and had kept The Swan that time" - which I believe would be sufficient. The fact is, the man's conduct would justify the certificate and be the means possibly of removing him quietly from this place and give him an opportunity of procuring a livelihood for his family....

Richard Darley.

NB Mr Morrison was the Curate of Stoneleigh parish at the time.

The end of The Swan

No dramatic ending, such as a fire, has been discovered in newspapers of the time.

Can we assume, then, that the Leighs did not keep a licence for The Swan and it was allowed to slowly disappear? There is no record of a victualler after Walker left.

Had the building, in fact, been repaired in 1783 as recommended, or did it gradually fall down as Johnson and Clarke warned it would?

Intriguingly, **SBT DR 18/3/69/11** "An Inventory of the Furniture at the Workhouse" dated March 1817 and which contains the legend "every article was furnished and paid for by the

late Honourable Mary Leigh", itemises everything in each room of the workhouse at that date, but includes in red ink alongside each item its eventual destination. Several items have gone to the abbey, whilst others remain at the workhouse but of considerable interest is the fact that some are marked as having gone to The Swan – and a date alongside reads “Nov 6 1822. One bedstead, 2 pairs of sheets, 4 blankets and 1 coverlid, 2 bolsters, 2 coffers, 3 benches, 2 chairs and 1 stand table” have all migrated from various rooms in the workhouse, to the inn.

It seems reasonable to suppose, therefore, that the inn continued to operate as such for at least another year after the Walkers' departure.

Perhaps the Leighs were glad of an excuse to close down a building which would be expensive to repair.

And afterwards...

What became of Walker and his wife? No further record of them exists in the Stoneleigh Registers. Did they receive a licence for a house in Stoke? Perhaps so, but **Pigot's Directory of Warwickshire 1829** lists, at The Red Lion, Hertford Street, Coventry, a licensee called William Walker. Could it be the very same man?

Today the Village Club occupies a portion of the site, possibly the former stables, and the map of 1810 suggests that the buildings themselves continued around the corner into Birmingham Road, perhaps as far as the current number 26. Perhaps if the Swan was pulled down, some of its materials were used when building the Club - or the Reading Room, as it was first known.



All document references are given throughout the text as follows:
SBT = Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford; WRO = Warwick Record
Office

Other information gained from

- ▮ the Stoneleigh Births, Marriages and Burials Registers
- ▮ *People at Home, Living in a Warwickshire Village 1500-1800* - Nat Alcock

With thanks for their help from Pam Baker, David Vaughan, Lisa Reay and Roger Gilbert

Places booklet 1

Revised 2015

The logo is a decorative, horizontally-oriented oval with a textured, parchment-like background. It features a thin gold border and the text "Stoneleigh History Society" in a dark red, serif font, centered within the oval.

Stoneleigh History Society