A BRIEF HISTORY

BY WILL SWALES
Welcome

Welcome to a brief history of The Talbot Hotel, Oundle, Northamptonshire. During the late spring and early summer of 2016 we had the good fortune to be able to revitalise and refurbish one of our fabulous sister inns, The King's Head in Richmond, North Yorkshire.

During the planning stage of this project we started to look hard at the building and its many historical attributes, at how some parts of the building had been added during its 300 years of existence. And whilst contemplating the small changes and additions we wanted to make, it dawned on me that we will only be its custodians for a generation or two at most. I can't foretell who will follow but started thinking about who had been its keepers in the past.

Therefore, we asked a good friend if he would research The King's Head and try to separate the fact from the fable; what's true and what has been elaborated during the storytelling process over the years.

Will Swales made such a good job of The King's Head that we then asked him to complete the same task for The Talbot Hotel.

What follows is that research. We think it's as accurate as can be, but naturally there are many gaps and we would welcome any additional information.

I hope you enjoy this small booklet and the hospitality and service we provide within The Talbot Hotel. We are now busy researching the other inns we own and operate within our group and hope that eventually we will have all our inns within one publication, but until then please feel free to take this copy with you.

Kevin Charity
Managing Director
The Coaching Inn Group

www.coachinginngroup.co.uk

2nd (revised) edition 2017
First published 2016
Copyright © 2017 The Coaching Inn Group Ltd., Boston, Lincolnshire, PE21 6BZ
Designed by www.penny-wilson.co.uk
“...DESCRIBED BY THE LEADING EXPERT IN ENGLISH HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE, NICHOLAS PEVSNER, AS THE FINEST BUILDING IN OUNDLE.”
A TUDOR INN OF THE GUILD OF OUR LADY OF OUNDLE

The Talbot Hotel in New Street, Oundle, is of such exceptional architectural and historical importance that it is classified as a Grade I heritage building by Historic England, placing it among the top three per cent of all listed buildings in England.

Its façade and main structure are thought to date from 1626, around which time much of the street was redeveloped. Behind the frontage are significant remaining elements of an earlier, timber-framed building, which traded as an inn during the Tudor period of the 1500s, under the name of The Tabard or possibly The Tabret. It was part of the extensive holdings in the town of a wealthy religious organisation called the Guild of Our Lady of Oundle.

Such local guilds, which existed in many towns, were endowed with considerable amounts of property and cash by wealthy citizens. The income from the assets was used primarily to pay for the livelihoods of priests whose task was to pray for their patrons' souls at chantries – specially constructed altars or chapels in local churches. As the number of subscribers to the guilds increased, so did their assets and income. The guilds used their spare cash to provide important social services such as schools, hospitals and alms-houses for the poor, but also invested in yet more property, creating an upward spiral of wealth.

The Tabard or Tabret, in what was then called Bury Street, would have been a particularly lucrative asset for the Oundle guild. However, following Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries, the regency council of his successor, the boy-king Edward VI, seized the assets of a whole range of other religious bodies, including those of the guilds like the one at Oundle. All its lands and buildings were taken by the Crown at Easter 1548, and sold on 3 April 1550 to two London property dealers.

As was common practice in such cases, the dealers immediately offered the properties for sale to the sitting tenants, no doubt at very attractive prices, although of course still expensive enough to ensure a resounding profit. The earliest evidence that the inn was among the guild property that featured in these transactions is found in a survey completed in 1565, and known as The Oundle Terrier.

“...income from the assets was used primarily to pay for the livelihoods of priests whose task was to pray for their patrons' souls...”
Timber-framed building from the time of The Tabard or Tabret Inn of the Guild of Our Lady of Oundle.
The 1565 property survey, called the Oundle Terrier (from the Latin terra, ‘land’), was commissioned by John Russell, 1st earl of Bedford, when he was newly appointed as lord of the Manor of Oundle.

A surviving copy of the terrier is written initially in the abbreviated Latin of the original document, with additions in English, which appear to be further information added at the time of the copying. The terrier recorded the status of all the properties of the manor in 1565, and identified those that were the former holdings of the Guild of our Lady of Oundle.

From an entry headed, in English, ‘Bury Street’ we learn in the Latin text below that Thomas Power was in possession of the guest house or holding called ‘Le Tabret’. The entry’s additional English text tells us that at the end of the inn yard there was an ‘easement’ or right-of-passage across the neighbouring land of John Dobbs ‘for guests to come into and from the common fields with carts, horses and cattle’. The fee for this right, noted as previously paid by the guild to John Dobbs, was two shillings per year.

The inn remained in the ownership of Thomas Power until his death in 1572, when he left it to his wife Susan. His will described it as a tenement ‘cawled the tabard, now in the occupation of Wylym Dynnys’. It was among four tenements Power left to his wife, all described in the will as ‘sometime belonging to the Gylde of Our Laydie’. There are no later known references to the inn by the names Le Tabret or The Tabard. Since the former was seemingly expressed in French within a Latin passage, and the latter was written in English only seven years later, it prompts the question – which was the correct name?

Le Tabret has no relevant meaning in Latin or French. In English, a tabret is a small, hand-held drum in the shape of a tambourine. But Tabret is unknown elsewhere as an inn name, albeit there was once an inn called The Tambourine in the village of Ashwell in Rutland, just 26 miles away from Oundle. By contrast, Tabard is a very well-known and common English name for an inn. The word means a sleeveless over-garment, which in the Middle Ages was worn by all levels of society from knights to farm workers. The earliest known example of an inn by this name dates to 1384. The name was most famously recorded in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales (written 1387-1400) in which The Tabard Inn at Southwark in London was where the pilgrims met before setting out for Canterbury.
EARLIEST REFERENCES TO THE TALBOT IN OUNDLE

An article written in 1934 by Henry Marvin King, a local historian and former master at Oundle School, indicated the earliest-known instances of the inn being called The Talbot.

The first was in 1617 when by a decree of the Justices to the High Constables of Corby, the citizens of Oundle were ordered to deliver 100 pounds weight of butter to The Talbot for the king's larder.

The second was an order by the High Sheriff of Northamptonshire that wealthy citizens who had failed to pay a fee to the Crown in lieu of military service were to meet the king's commissioners on 17 September 1631 at the sign of The Talbot in Oundle. Henry King also found the journal of a soldier who wrote in 1635 that in Oundle he lodged 'at the sign of The Talbot where I found a good inne'.

"...the citizens of Oundle were ordered to deliver 100 pounds weight of butter to The Talbot for the king's larder."
The 1626 rebuilding of The Talbot was clearly done at great expense and in great style. It was described by the leading expert in English historical architecture, Nicholas Pevsner, as the finest building in Oundle.

The façade alone might qualify for that praise, but probably the most interesting aspect of the rebuilding is viewed from the courtyard where can be seen structures said to have been taken from the nearby medieval castle and royal palace of Fotheringhay, the scene of the execution of Mary Stuart, better known as Mary Queen of Scots.

Early in 1587, the cream of the English nobility gathered at Fotheringhay to try Mary for plotting the assassination of Queen Elizabeth. She was found guilty, sentenced to death, and on 8 February 1587 was beheaded in the castle’s Great Hall. When Mary’s son James VI of Scotland ascended the throne of England in 1603 as James I, he sold Fotheringhay Castle into private hands. According to a survey it was still intact in 1625, albeit abandoned. Thereafter it was gradually demolished and elements of the fabric were re-used in various buildings, including, according to tradition, the rebuilding of The Talbot in Oundle.

There are records of some eminent people buying materials from the dismantled castle, including the famous archivist and historian Sir Robert Cotton (1570 – 1631). He acquired parts of the Great Hall, the scene of Mary Stuart’s execution, which he installed at his house at Connington in Huntingdonshire.

There are no records of anyone purchasing materials from the castle for the rebuilding of The Talbot in Oundle, although according to local tradition the developer, thought to have been William Whitwell, obtained the Great-Hall windows, which now shed light on an oak staircase, also said to be from Fotheringhay and down which Mary Queen of Scots is said to have walked to her execution.

Over many years, learned commentators have accepted that the scale and design of the large window at the rear of The Talbot could support the tradition that it was sourced from Fotheringhay Castle. However, they have been less convinced by the oak staircase, which was described in an 1897 edition of the Architectural Association Sketch Book as ‘a first-rate example of early, well-proportioned Jacobean [1603 – 88] carpentry.’ Even to the layman’s eye it seems to lack the grandeur of a staircase from a royal palace of a much-earlier period.

“...elements of the fabric were re-used in various buildings, including, according to tradition, the rebuilding of The Talbot in Oundle...”
Light from windows thought to come from Fotheringhay Castle shines on a staircase, which is almost certainly of a later period.
Any scepticism about materials from Fotheringhay Castle being used in the rebuilding of The Talbot has not diminished the legend of the inn's associations with Mary Queen of Scots.

Indeed it has been further enhanced by stories of her ghostly appearances on the staircase, and an assertion that a curious small imprint of a royal crown on the finials of two of the newel posts were somehow made by Mary with her signet ring. Legend also relates that her executioner stayed at The Talbot the night before her death, and dined on pigeon pie.

Fully promoting the association between The Talbot and the ill-fated queen has played a large part in expanding the inn's already rich heritage. Two very large paintings hanging at The Talbot today pay testimony to this. Only one of them is signed, but they are reputed to be a pair, both painted by the highly regarded artist Charles Edward Stewart (1887–1938). The signed work hangs on a landing adjacent to the proclaimed staircase, and shows a despairing Mary seated at a table.

It is similar to earlier paintings by other artists recalling the moment when she was overseen by nobles who forced her to sign papers renouncing the throne of Scotland. In Stewart's work she sits alone. Perhaps his intention was to depict her last hours at Fotheringhay, which it is said she spent alone, in prayer.

The other painting at The Talbot hangs in the front bar. It's a variation of a famous work painted by Laslett John Pott in 1871, now hanging at Nottingham Castle Art Gallery. Both Pott's and Stewart's paintings depict Mary Queen of Scots being led down a broad, stone staircase to her execution. Pott is known to have been inspired by a staircase at Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire. This was of course based purely on his imagination of how the scene at Fotheringhay might have looked, and so doesn't necessarily contradict the legend of the oak staircase at The Talbot.

Since 2013, the legend of Mary has been further promoted by a very large mural painted in the dining room of the hotel by a Nottinghamshire artist, Jennifer Bell. It shows the figure of Mary looking out from the grounds of Fotheringhay Castle, across fields, towards Oundle town. In the middle-distance the executioner, refreshed from his stay at The Talbot, approaches the castle on foot, while leading a horse carrying the Grim Reaper. In the foreground is a Talbot – a medieval breed of white hunting dog.
The rebuilding of The Talbot is traditionally dated to 1626 and accredited to William Whitwell who is also said to have rebuilt most if not all of Bury Street and renamed it New Street. This was the story deduced by a Vicar of Oundle, Canon William Smalley Law, in his book Oundle’s Story, published in 1922.

His assertion was based on knowledge of a stone bearing the inscription ‘WW 1626’ which he noted was built into the gable of the corner property of New Street and West Street. However, in 1955, when that building was listed as Grade II by the predecessor organisation of Historic England, the date-stone was noted as ‘very badly weathered; only the “26” being discernible.’ The previously suggested full date of 1626 was accepted, but the listing did not record that the stone had once borne the initials WW.

Today, there is no evidence at all remaining of this date-stone. Either the face of it has weathered away to obliterate the inscription completely, or the stone might have been removed, since at some stage the apex of the gable has clearly been rebuilt with new stone. It seems that no photograph or drawing of it exists and nor has its exact location on the wall been recorded in any way. It must be assumed that the date-stone was in a poor state even in 1922 when Smalley Law knew of it. Perhaps his assertion that it bore the initials WW was based more on local oral tradition than on what he could determine by sight.

The fact remains that Smalley Law’s attribution of the rebuilding of The Talbot to William Whitwell is light on evidence. Therefore it helps to examine information that Smalley Law did not develop. Whitwell is a long-established name among the gentry of Northamptonshire and Rutland, with surviving family wills dating back to the early 1500s. The earliest record of a Whitwell in Oundle was a William Whitwell, who lived from 1662 to 1711, about two generations too late to have rebuilt New Street and The Talbot in 1626. Nonetheless, there is circumstantial evidence that he owned the inn, and so he could have inherited it from another William Whitwell for whom no records have survived.
The known William Whitwell was said to have come to the town in the 1680s, from Richmond in Surrey. He practised as a solicitor, had the status of gentleman, and had a coat of arms featuring three griffons’ heads. In 1688, at the age of 26, he married 16-year-old Sophie Borfett, from Richmond. They settled in Oundle, in a house called Berrystead, and remained there for the rest of their lives.

In 1697 William Whitwell donated some items of silver plate to the parish church, one piece of which bears the words ‘EX DONO Will Whitwell, Gent.’ All the pieces are inscribed with an image of a Talbot dog ‘passant’ – a heraldic term describing the animal standing in profile, facing left, and with its right fore-paw raised. Underneath the image is inscribed the word Oundle.

Smalley Law thought that the connection between William Whitwell and the Talbot dog was through an emblem on the coat of arms of either his wife or, unfeasibly, his daughter-in-law. He confused the two, but it’s of no consequence because in neither case does his idea stand up to scrutiny. Also, it might be considered that the word Oundle under the image on the church silverware clearly indicates that the Talbot dog in this instance had nothing to do with a family coat of arms.

A more likely explanation was a three-way connection between the Whitwell family’s involvement with The Talbot Inn, which contrary to Smalley Law’s view, must have been renamed for reasons unrelated to the family, and a link between both the Whitwells and The Talbot Inn with the town’s principal provider of Christian charity in the 1600s – The Feoffees and Overseers of Oundle.
The Feoffees and Overseers of Oundle was a charitable trust drawn from among the most distinguished and honourable men of the town. In essence they took over the charitable work previously performed by the town’s religious guild.

A historian of the early 1900s, William C Wells, identified a 1672 record of the accounts of the feoffees and overseers, in which an unspecified payment of 7 shillings and 6 pence was paid to ‘the Talbot.’ The implication of this is that the members of the charity held their meetings at the inn. Further evidence suggests the connection with the inn was probably much more significant.

One of the functions of the feoffees, in succession to the former religious guild, was to distribute financial aid to the poor. However, during the Commonwealth government of Oliver Cromwell (1649 – 60) and for another 12 years thereafter this task was hampered because there weren’t enough small-value coins in circulation. Instead, traders in many towns produced their own coinage, called tokens, mostly to the value of half-pennies and farthings. Local authorities and church bodies did the same, and their coins were called ‘town pieces.’

Several examples of tokens and town pieces from Oundle were among the private collection of William C Wells, who was a well-known numismatist as well as a historian. Two of his town pieces are of interest concerning The Talbot. On the face of one is the image of a Talbot passant. Around the image is stamped the words ‘OUNDLE HALF PENY TO’. On the reverse is the image of griffon passant, surrounded by the words ‘BE CHANGED BY YE FEEFEES.’ The second piece has a Talbot passant on both faces. On one side it has the words ‘AN OUNDLE HALF PENY 1669,’ and on the other is imprinted ‘FOR THE USE OF THE POOR.’
The griffon passant is not the same as the griffons’ heads on the Whitwell coat of arms, so there is no obvious connection there. More enlightening is the fact that the Talbot passant is the same device as that inscribed above the word ‘Oundle’ on each of the items of silver plate given to the parish church by the known William Whitwell in 1697. He was of the right social status to be a feoffee, as would have been any forebears of his in Oundle, who might have rebuilt The Talbot in 1626.

Therefore, we might conclude that The Talbot Inn was somehow entwined with the feoffees, perhaps through its ownership by one of their members – possibly a Whitwell – who perhaps had assigned the rental income from a tenant innkeeper to the charitable purposes of the feoffees, just as the Guild of our Lady of Oundle seems previously have done. Conceivably for this reason the feoffees adopted the image of the Talbot passant as their own emblem.

If this suggested link with the feoffees is correct, it might also help to explain why the inn was renamed from The Tabard to The Talbot, because there are other cases of inns being renamed in the same way in the same period. In Towcester, in south Northamptonshire, the local feoffees are known to have run one of the town inns, and used its income to fund charitable works. The inn at Towcester was called The Tabard, and had its name changed to The Talbot in 1643. Further, the famous Tabard Inn of Southwark had its name changed to The Talbot in 1676.

Each of the three inns was at one time owned by a pre-Reformation religious body, so the changes of name are perhaps not coincidental. In the 1600s the Protestant establishment ruthlessly disassociated itself from anything commemorating the ‘old religion’ of the Catholic Church. Perhaps the name Tabard had too many bad associations for the feoffees. More research is required to understand what appears to be an intriguing pattern of events.

“One of the functions of the feoffees, in succession to the former religious guild, was to distribute financial aid to the poor.”
William Whitwell, the presumed owner of The Talbot into the early 1700s, died in 1711, aged 49.

His will listed in only the broadest terms his considerable property holdings, which were to be inherited by his son and heir, William, on him reaching the age of 24. The son is thought to have been under 18 at the time of his father’s death, so in the meantime the will entrusted the property to three friends of the deceased. They were instructed to sell whatever they saw fit to settle any debts of the estate and to generate the substantial amount of money required to pay generous cash bequests that Whitwell made to his daughters.

Individual properties were not specified in the will and so there was no mention of The Talbot. However, one of the trustees was John Smith, identified in the will as a barber of Oundle, and who seems likely to have been related to a future owner of The Talbot, another by the name of John Smith. In the early 1700s a barber was a significant person in any community. For those who could afford it, he was the puller of teeth, the letter of blood with leeches, and the general surgeon. This John Smith, as a trusted friend of William Whitwell, was clearly also a man of substance. He was once again named and identified as a barber of Oundle in a deed of 1717 when he oversaw the sale of the Manor of Tansor from Whitwell’s estate, for £4,500.

The Smiths, like the Whitwells, were long-standing members of the Northamptonshire gentry, and have records in the county stretching back to the 1500s. If William Whitwell was the owner of The Talbot Inn, then it appears that his friend John Smith must have had something to do with its disposal from the dead man’s estate, and might have sold it to himself or someone else in his family. All that is known from this period is that in October 1725 The Talbot was advertised in the Stamford Mercury as a business to let, and was offered with or without 19 acres of farmland. It isn’t known who owned it at that time, or who took it on as the innkeeper.

**DID THE SURGEON BARBER OF OUNDLE BUY THE TALBOT INN?**

“For those who could afford it, he was the puller of teeth, the letter of blood with leeches, and the general surgeon.”
For most of the 1700s very little is known about The Talbot Inn.

In 1716 and 1720, a very expensive herbal tea ‘solely prepared by Mr Peter Lenoir at The Talbot in Oundle’ was advertised in newspapers. It was called The Countryman’s Tisane or Cordial Drink, and was claimed to treat ‘several distempers’. At the healthy price of four shillings per bottle it was available at named retailers in London and throughout the Midlands. Mr Lenoir was perhaps a fictitious character, made-up to add an exotic value to the potion. And it might be speculated that such a potion could have been part of the stock-in-trade of John Smith, the surgeon barber of Oundle.

In 1755 some of The Talbot’s guests from Ireland – probably horse dealers who traditionally came to English markets – left their mark on the inn, in the form of love messages scratched onto the window panes of the oldest part of the building. The graffiti survives today on small panes of glass that might be 500 years or more old. Among the legible and dated inscriptions we learn that the objects of the writers’ desires were Fanny Nunn of Enniscorthy, County Wexford, and Polly Winter, of Cork – ‘no girl can stitch so well.’

MEMORIALS OF THE 1700s – CURE-ALL POTIONS AND MESSAGES OF LOVE

Graffiti preserved at The Talbot since 1755. © Oxford Archaeology East.
It isn’t known what happened to the John Smith, the barber of Oundle. He might have been one of six people of the same name who according to parish records died and were buried in Oundle in the mid-1700s.

Significantly, a John Smith of Stoke Doyle, a village just two miles south-west of Oundle, came to reside in the town in the 1770s. This John Smith, a farmer’s son, was a wealthy man. Aged about 30, he built the town’s new commercial brewery, which was completed in North Street in 1775. It isn’t known how closely he might have been related to John Smith, the barber, but seemingly he was a young man of considerable wealth and entrepreneurial skill. The sign of the brewery, carved in stone on an exterior wall, was three tuns (barrels), which he adopted from The Three Tuns Inn in North Street, one of the first inns that he bought in Oundle.

It isn’t clear who owned The Talbot at this time, although it is known that the tenant innkeeper was Thomas Ellis, who seems to have prospered during the 1780s. Important local organisations met at The Talbot, including the commissioners for the Nene Navigation, and the members of the gentry, clergy and freeholders who formed an Association for the Prosecution of Felons.

In 1790 the freehold of The Talbot was advertised for sale by auction in the local press. It was described as having a garden, stabling for ‘near one hundred horses,’ and 14 acres of meadow and arable land. Possibly it was as a result of this sale that it first came under the ownership of John Smith the brewer.
CASUALTIES OF A CUT-THROAT COACHING WAR IN THE 1790s

Advertisements in the Northampton Mercury of the late 1700s show that the principal passenger-coach operator in Oundle was George Smith. It isn’t known how closely he might have been related to John Smith the brewer.

By the 1780s George Smith was running a direct link from Oundle to London called the Oundle and Thrapston Flyer. From its timings, leaving Oundle at 9.30pm and arriving at Holborn at 2am, it became commonly known as the London Night Coach.

In June 1791 Smith launched a ‘new and elegant post-coach’ called The Brothers, which he ran in partnership with four other Oundle men, including Thomas Ellis the tenant innkeeper at The Talbot. The Brothers ran between Oxford and Peterborough three days a week, stopping along the way at The Talbot in Oundle where it connected with the same firm’s Diligence coach, which ran to Stamford and back.

There were ructions in March 1796 when a day-coach to London was launched from Oundle by a rival operator. The Mercury left The Talbot at 5am on three days a week, heading south to St Neots and on through subsequent towns along the Great North Road to terminate near Barnet in North London. The operators were Stephen Hodges of Oundle and John Roberts of London.
The new enterprise prompted an immediate and furious response from George Smith, who within a month launched an almost identical service called The Expedition. It left The Talbot in Oundle on the same days, at the same hour, calling at the same towns, and at the same price, although terminating in central London, at Holborn.

Smith announced in the press that he had been forced to launch the service because of ‘an unexpected attack recently made upon him in this his particular line of business.’ He trusted that his loyal customers would support him as the founder of coach services from Oundle, and that they would ‘not desert him and go to the glittering colours of a new thing.’ It all might have been too much for Thomas Ellis, who in June that year put all his fixtures and fittings at The Talbot up for sale by auction. He quit both the coaching and the inn-keeping businesses, and instead took over the town’s Post Office.

In August, the new coach operator Stephen Hodges became the replacement innkeeper at The Talbot. He was soon advertising The Mercury coach as the ‘original day coach’ to London, with an improved central-London destination, at Charring Cross, and he had formed a partnership to run it with at least three other men. Hodges seemed to be on the up, but in the space of a year things went badly wrong for him. By August 1797 the Oundle Mercury departure was moved to the Swann Inn, Oundle, and Hodges was dropped from the list of partners. It’s apparent that he also left The Talbot because in September 1797 the owner, John Smith, installed his daughter and son-in-law Sarah and Daniel Southwell as innkeepers. Announcing his arrival in the press, Daniel Southwell promoted The London Expedition coach, run by Smith and Co., as continuing to operate from The Talbot.

Soon afterwards a new investor was on the scene – Messrs Ibberson – who apparently tried to work with George Smith and the other coach-service partners to unite the two rival day-coaches to London. It didn’t work. By January 1798 the two services had swapped departure points. The newly named Loyal Mercury was returned to The Talbot and run by a new partnership led by George Smith. His new press advertisement for the service announced that he had ‘no connection with Messrs Ibberson and Co., in any coach to Oundle, having various disagreeable reasons to withdraw himself.’

Next to this advertisement was one from Messrs Ibberson and Co., who were now running the newly named Loyal Expedition ‘removed from The Talbot to The Swan Inn,’ and commented that they had ‘several times been applied to by the Mercury coach company to make a coalition, which they were ready to do had it not been for Mr Smith's general dogmatical ways, and declaring he never would be concerned with such a set of people.’

Meanwhile for Stephen Hodges, who started the whole rivalry, things were going from bad to worse. In the midst of the fractious consequences of his initiative, Hodges had not only been defeated by George Smith but had gone out of business completely. In June 1798 he was reported in the press as a bankrupt.
THE DAY THE PRIME MINISTER AND HERO OF WATERLOO CALLED IN

From time-to-time, important people would pass through The Talbot, but few could be more important than the visitor who called in November 1829.

A brief note in the Stamford Mercury reported: ‘The Duke of Wellington changed horses at The Talbot Inn, Oundle, last Sunday afternoon on his way to Woburn Abbey.’

At this time the nation’s heroic commander at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, was serving a short stint as Prime Minister. It isn’t known where he was travelling from, but his journey to Woburn Abbey, 50 miles south of Oundle, was to the home of John Russell, 6th Duke of Bedford. Wellington probably intended to visit one of the duke’s sons – one of whom was Wellington’s former aide de camp, or another who would be a future Prime Minister.
A WELCOME HOME FOR A HERO OF THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

In 1855 newspapers throughout the country reported the role of The Talbot in the extraordinary events surrounding the town's welcome home to a hero of the Charge of the Light Brigade.

In October 1854 Lieutenant General James Thomas Brudenell, 7th Earl of Cardigan, whose family seat at Deene Park was just eight miles from Oundle, led the infamous charge at the Battle of Balaclava in the Crimean War. Lucky to survive, and fortunate not to be deemed part of the chain of command that was blamed for issuing the fateful order, Cardigan was hailed a hero along with the entire brigade.

When he returned to England in January 1855 he was met with a rapturous welcome when his ship docked at Folkstone. In London he was mobbed by crowds, and it was the same when he arrived by train at Oundle station.

Such was the reverence for the earl in the town that a group of men intercepted plans to harness horses to his lordship's road carriage for the last leg of the journey, and instead put themselves in harness and pulled their hero through the streets to a specially arranged reception at The Talbot. The owner of the hotel, John William Smith, read an address of appreciation on behalf of the community, and presented a copy of it to the earl. Afterwards, as the earl continued along the rest of the route to Deene Park, the procession passed under several triumphal arches erected by local people.

"...he was met with a rapturous welcome when his ship docked at Folkstone."

John Smith (circa 1745 – 1817), founder of John Smith’s brewery in Oundle and from the 1790s the owner of The Talbot, seems to have been an entrepreneur who went from strength to strength.

In his middle age he was ably supported by his son and heir, John Smith (2), who played a significant role in the development of the business.

Good fortune came their way in 1797 with the opening of the world’s first purpose-built prisoner-of-war camp, at Norman Cross, about 10 miles east of Oundle. Throughout the war against Napoleon it housed on average 5,500 French and Dutch prisoners, and had a large garrison of soldiers. John Smith and his son obtained a contract to supply beer to the military camp.

In 1812 John Smith (1) let a room above the stables at The Talbot to the Northampton Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, becoming the town’s first National School.

John Smith (1) died in 1817, aged 72. From this time onwards the firm traded as Smith and Co., and became additionally involved in banking and trading in timber and coal. John Smith (2) shared the business with his brothers Thomas, a banker, and William, a brewer. In line with their personal strengths they were nicknamed Goldsmith, Silversmith and Coppersmith. A nephew, Richard Tibbits, also joined the firm.

On the death of John Smith (2) in 1844, aged 77, the firm passed to his two sons, John William Smith and Herbert Staples Smith, along with their cousin Richard Tibbits. By 1864, following the deaths of both his partners, John William Smith became sole proprietor, although the firm still traded as Smith and Co. By this time it had an estate of 39 inns and hotels throughout Northamptonshire and neighbouring counties.

John William Smith died in 1897, aged 83, when the firm was inherited by his son, John Hume ‘Jack’ Smith, who was then aged 38. At a time of brewery company mergers and acquisitions, Jack became a director of a Wellingborough brewery called Campbell Praed and Co. Jack’s only son, John Herbert Michael Smith, born 1889, was expected to be the next in line at Smith and Co., but it was not to be.
Estate map circa 1840 showing the land and buildings of The Talbot (centre) as part of the possessions of John Smith Esq. Northamptonshire Record Office, Fisher and Sanders Collection, refs. MAP/1725 and F&S/361.
END OF THE SMITH FAMILY ERA

On 9 September 1914, within the first five weeks of the start of the Great War, the 25-year-old heir was killed while serving as a lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion of the Manchester Regiment at the battle of the Marne. Jack Smith's grief was compounded when his younger brother Edmund Percival Smith, 51, a colonel in the Royal Field Artillery, was killed at Gallipoli on 1 May 1915. And then Jack himself died suddenly and unexpectedly, of a suspected heart attack, on 14 February 1916, aged 57.

His widow Mary took control of the business, but with no male heir, plans were made for a smooth transition to ownership outside the family. In 1922 Smith and Co.'s general manager, Basil Ludlow, who had been with the firm since 1894, was made a partner and took effective control of the business. Ludlow also became a director of the Wellingborough brewery. By 1934, when Ludlow died, aged 64, the two firms were jointly owned although still trading under separate names.

Basil Ludlow's roles in both firms were inherited by his son, Guy Ludlow, who in 1935 oversaw the incorporation of Smith and Co. into a limited liability company, with himself as managing director. At that time the company's assets comprised a maltings, a brewery, and an estate of 85 licensed premises, including The Talbot. Shortly after Guy Ludlow's death in 1954, aged 61, the company was acquired by Warwick and Richardson Ltd of Newark-on-Trent, but continued to trade separately as Smith and Co.

The Newark-based company was acquired in 1962 by John Smith's Brewery of Tadcaster – no connection with the Smith family of Oundle – which closed the Oundle brewery and absorbed the licensed premises, including The Talbot, into its own estate. When the Oundle brewery was demolished, the local manager of Smith and Co., Jim Irving, saved the stoned-carved brewery sign of the three tuns, inscribed 'J S 1775', and had it built into a courtyard wall of The Tabret Room at The Talbot.
SOURCES AND FURTHER READING


Will of Thomas Power, 1572, Archdeaconry Court of Northampton Wills, Administrations, Inventories and Accounts, Book T, folio 71, Northamptonshire Record Office. Transcription on display at The Talbot Hotel.

Barrie Cox, English Inn and Tavern Names, Centre for English Name Studies, University of Nottingham (Nottingham, 1994)


Fotheringhay Castle, Historic England National Record of the Historic Environment, Monument Number 361605.


W Smalley Law, Oundle’s Story (London, 1922).


Oundle Parish Records from 1545, Northamptonshire Record Office, ref. 249P.


Sir Bernard Burke, The general armory of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales; comprising a registry of armorial bearings from the earliest to the present time (London, 1884).

William C Wells, Seventeenth-century tokens of Northamptonshire from the manuscripts of the late John Bridges (Oxford, 1791).


Brian Giggins, William Sponne (c. 1380-1448), Archdeacon of Norfolk and Rector of Towcester (Towcester, 2010).

Northamptonshire and Rutland Probate Index 1469-1857, Northamptonshire Record Office.

The Athenaeum, the journal of literature, science, the fine arts, music, and the drama, bound editions July to December 1897, p. 71, edition 10 July 1897, a review of the Architectural Association Sketchbook, Series III, vol. 1 (1897), commenting on the Jacobean staircase at The Talbot, Oundle.


Lesley Richmond and Alison Turton, eds., The Brewing Industry: A guide to historical records (Manchester, 1990).

Peter Hill, A History of the Hostelries in Northamptonshire (Stroud, 2010).


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Peter Irving, for advice and information from the papers of his late father Jim Irving, local historian and former general manager at Smith and Co., Oundle.

Iaon Thomas, John Hadman, and colleagues at The Oundle Museum for advice and help on numerous issues of local history, including providing a copy of a section of the Oundle Terrier, the survey of the Manor of Oundle of 1565.
The Talbot Hotel, Oundle, is part of The Coaching Inn Group Ltd. The Group has a particular passion for lovely old historic coaching inns and is fortunate enough now to have thirteen of these iconic buildings in our collection. We have established a reputation for refurbishing, revitalising and breathing life back into these inns, creating elegant, comfortable and well-priced accommodation, tempting menus, relaxed and stylish bars and coffee lounges where friends, families and business people can relax and enjoy everything we have on offer.

Our vision for the future is based around our core value of ‘Unlocking Potential’. From our properties to our people and everything in between, we take every opportunity to invest in developing all aspects of our business to give our guests the best possible experience.

As a company we are rapidly expanding and bringing new hotels into the Coaching Inn Group. You can see the latest additions to our group by visiting www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.

We hope you’ve enjoyed your visit to The Talbot Hotel, Oundle, and would love to invite you to try our other venues, nationwide. For full details please visit www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.