

CASTLE SQUARE BY JOHN ALDRIDGE

The open area at the corner of Watlington Road and adjoining the **ROUND HOUSE** was the site of three or four stables, a coach-house and a Blacksmiths' Shop. These premises were used to service the requirements of the Castle Inn from posting days until about 1924, when Mr N Snowie undertook motor car repairs and service there. Mr Ernest Walters used part of the building from 1930 to 1939 for a motor hire service. In about 1965 all these building were demolished in order to make a car park for the Castle Hotel. From the materials saved I bought about 3,000 sound clay tiles, which now form part of the roof of the barn at "Brookside" in Brook Street.

In my young days, before the kerbs for paths and the central reservation were constructed, the whole of the **Castle Square** was an open area. This was the village boarding and alighting point for the South Midland and Black & White Motor Coaches which, between them provided a two-hourly service from Oxford to London. One can imagine the hustle and bustle here, when the coaches and carriages with their horses and passengers were arriving and departing during the posting days.

The **ROUND HOUSE** with its well-known circular front was constructed in the 18th century, perhaps replacing an earlier "end" of the Castle Inn. It is built with vitreous bricks (probably from the old Nettlebed brick kilns) and has clay roof tiles. The front wrought-iron railings and gate are 19th century. Records show that the ground floor was used by Mrs E Hatt for Tea Rooms from about 1926 to 1934. Advertisements in Kelly's Directory of Oxfordshire state "...Special attention to motor coach parties". From 1935 to the early 1940's Mr & Mrs Reynolds used the premises for board residence.

Next is the **CASTLE INN**, described as a Posting and Commercial Inn in 1830 and was probably used as such from the early posting days until about 1844, when it suffered from the advent of the railway network with Wallingford Station only two-and-a-half miles away. The main structure is complex. The main chimney at the rear is 17th century, whilst the road frontage is 18th century. The chimney is of particular interest with an open fireplace, as well as many exposed beams and floor joists. I have records of all of the landlords from 1830 to 1939. Morlands Brewery of Abingdon acquired the property in 1889, when it became a tied Public House.

CASTLE CLOSE AND BIRMINGHAM YARD

To the south-west is **CASTLE CLOSE**, a modern development. On the sites of numbers 2 to 14 stood a blacksmith's shop with two forges, a wheelwright's yard, a builder's workshop and a range of buildings used by coach-makers and harness-makers, from the early posting days until about 1835. With the loss of the posting activities, parts for railways carriages and trucks were made here by Albert and John Bailey until 1883, which is the last reference I can find. The Lane family was in possession of the blacksmith's shop and the adjoining workshop from 1884, with George, Ernest and Albert in partnership. They were followed by Joe Lane and then by his widow, Ellen, who continued as Proprietor after his death.

I clearly remember the very large chestnut tree which stood outside the blacksmith's shop, with a cast-iron wheelwright's circle bedded solidly at ground level, which I saw being used to shrink a new iron rim onto a wagon wheel. Until the demolition of the whole site and clearance for new houses, the area was known locally as "Brumagum" yard, being a colloquialism for Birmingham, the great industrial town. The terrace of early 18th century cottages to the east of Castle Close path probably housed the workforce in the posting days.