

**The Castle Inn (formerly called the King's Arms)
adapted from *The Ditmas History of Benson* by Edith Ditmas**

The exterior of the Castle is eighteenth-century but it incorporates earlier structures. The inn-sign probably relates to *Offa's Castle*, the name given by earlier antiquarians to the earthworks which used to be visible between the church and the river and which were something of a tourist attraction. During the eighteenth century, an impressive extension with a circular frontage was added to provide accommodation for travellers. It is thought that the curved walls made it easier for horse drawn carriages to negotiate the corner and pass around the back of the inn to the stables, where there was also a smithy.

Of the early innkeepers of the Castle we can catch a few glimpses through **Jackson's Oxford Journal**. Edward Biggs, a coachmaster handed over as landlord to his son of the same name about 1750. Richard Smith, *later waiter at the Star, Oxford*, had taken over in 1777 and two years later in 1779, we are told that he had greatly enlarged it. Thomas Sherman is recorded as Victualler in 1801 and again in 1822 and the probability is that he was innkeeper during the intervening years.

In 1851, Thomas Powell, who had made a fortune in the coachbuilding business left the Castle and its neighbouring cottages in his will. In 1863, James Atkins was recorded as the landlord.

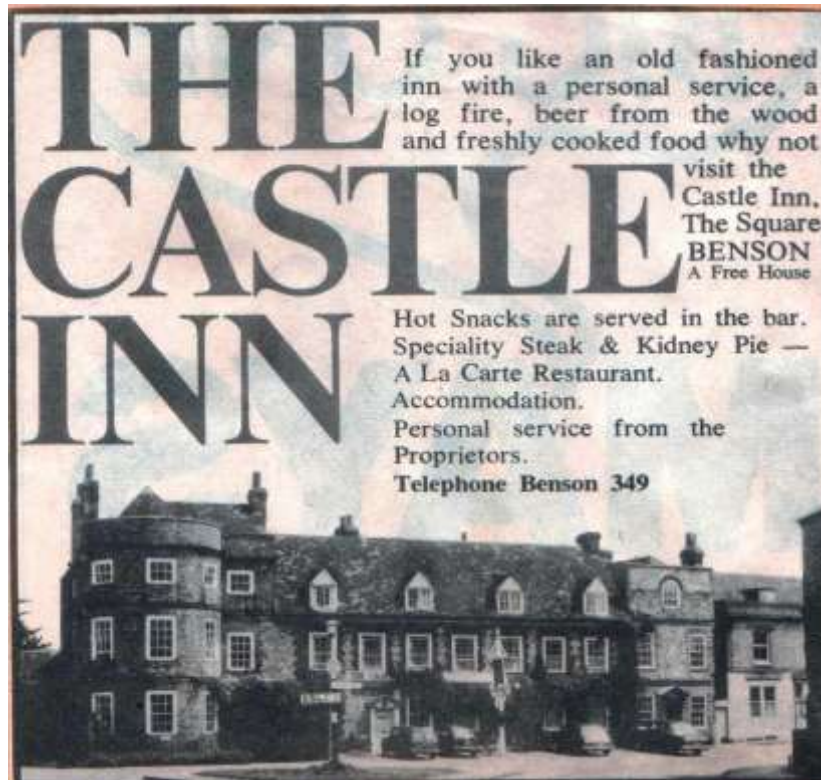


The Castle with its horse trough



The magnificent sign in the 1960

Like the White Hart, its heyday was in the coaching era, but business dwindled with the arrival of the railways and at one time a bakery operated there. It too saw a revival of prosperity with the development of motor cars and its small but comfortable bar and tea rooms attracted many. During World War Two, the Castle was popular with the RAF airmen. Under the management of Edward (Teddy) Bear and his wife in the early 70's it provided lunches and dinners whose excellence brought customers from Oxford and elsewhere and at one time it won a mention in the Good Food Guide.



Newspaper advertisement from the 1970s

Village reminiscences note that one of the landlords kept a fine pair of greys for weddings, and a man rode postilion. Another village memory records that the very handsome inn-sign with its fine ironwork once had two large bunches of gilded grapes hanging from it.
