

Recollections of Old and New Kidderminster

(Kidderminster Shuttle 12 March 1910)

by Henry Bennett

VII.

Before I give my recollections of the old High-street and its tradesmen of more than fifty years ago, I think, perhaps some of our fellow townsmen and women across the seas would like a brief reminder of the Old Town Hall. They would also like to see the new Municipal Buildings in Vicar-street, adjoining the Music Hall. Whatever the faults our old town ever had, her sons and daughters in all quarters of the globe are ever ready to testify that they still cling to many cherished memories of their native town. The old Town Hall, with its over-hanging clock on the High-street side, and flat-face one opposite Regent House; the iron bars to the windows and its steps to the Police office, stood out rather prominently in the old days from its position at the bottom of High-street. It was the first home of Municipal government that I can remember, also the "hall of justice," the police office, and the casual abode of criminals in the cells beneath. I can call to mind when one portion of the underground cellars (next to the draper's shop) were occupied by an old tradesman named Wall, making baskets. The entrance was down some steps on the High-street side; there was also another door in Swan-street, where you could see the men at work at all times. This Mr. Wall removed (to get more space) into Blackwell-street, and there carried on the same trade for years. When I pass by the site, now the cab-stand, I feel inclined to remark "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." Before many years we may see a motor garage erected thereon.

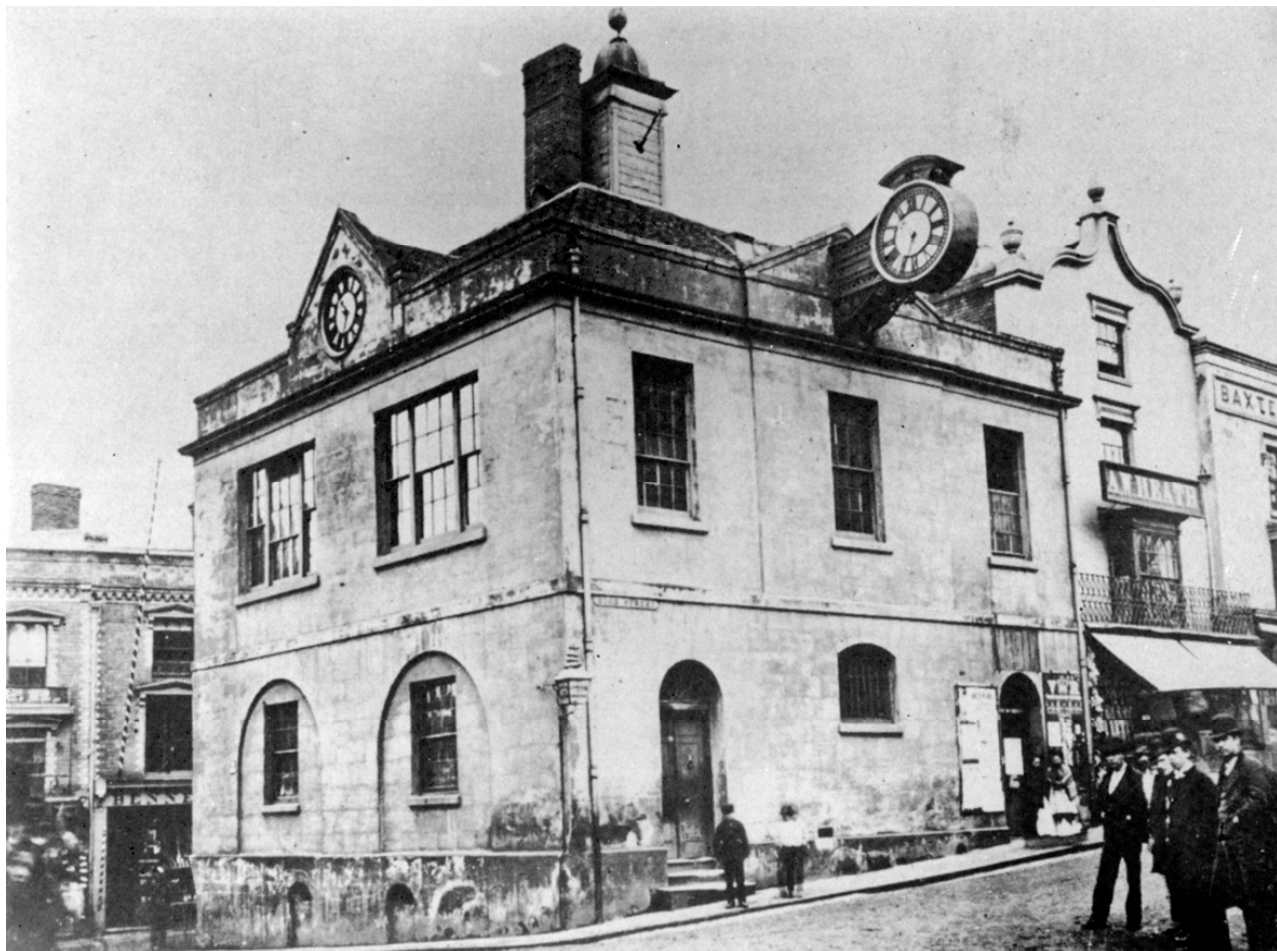
It is of the scenes in and around the old Town Hall that I have many remembrances. Mayor's Sunday in the old days was a great institution, and was eagerly looked forward to. Superintendent Merrifield, with the assistance of his deputy Lloyd, had a good name for making mulled port, which was served round after the Mayor and burgesses returned from the church—it was good on a cold frosty morning. I must not forget to mention that the church did not accommodate all who accompanied the Chief Magistrate, as I have seen, year after year, many supplied with a little refreshment while the sermon was on, by the proprietors of the *Boat Inn*, at the top of Clensmore-lane, whose back premises reached the boundary wall of the churchyard. I think it would be worth relating a humorous incident which I remember taking place the year Mr. Charles Edward Jefferies was made Mayor. His old employer, Mr. Thomas Lloyd, was present in the Council Chamber, and after the election was made, exclaimed, in an audible voice, addressing himself to the new Chief Magistrate, "That now that he, Mr. Jefferies, was Mayor he ought to have a crest."

The first of November Municipal Elections were generally marked as "red-letter days." Before the Borough was divided into six wards, as at present, the political parties were more evenly balanced by North and South Ward elections—three Councillors for each ward. It was characteristic of the South to return three Liberals and the North three Conservatives. When a candidate for Municipal honours thought he could capture a seat and break the tradition of either ward, he did not meet with success, although there were some surprises at times at the "Municipal races," as they were called. An instance occurs to me of the South Ward, when Mr. Reuben Rogers (butcher), defeated Mr. Henry Dixon; and in the North Ward Mr. John Brinton was defeated by Mr. James Binnian (builder), by 70 votes. I well remember the year that John Perry (of the *George and Dragon*), and Mr. Ayres (Broad-street). were returned for the North Ward. The late Mr. William Green could not help showing that their election did not meet with his approval."

If there had been written, while the old Town Hall was standing, a history of all it had stood witness to, the record would have been of great interest. It is the "fashion" now for great men to write their own history while they are alive—thus is said what they would like to be remembered after they are dead—so could it have been with the old Town Hall. It was in the old Council Chamber where it was decided to build the new Town Hall; also the important scheme—the Sewage and Waterworks—(what a blessing a good supply of water is). Then followed other great improvements of our town. Such a record would be of interest as part of the past history of the

Borough, more so that the biography of an individual. I am afraid that I shall have to hold over till my next contribution my recollections of the old tradespeople in the High-street.

Added Notes:



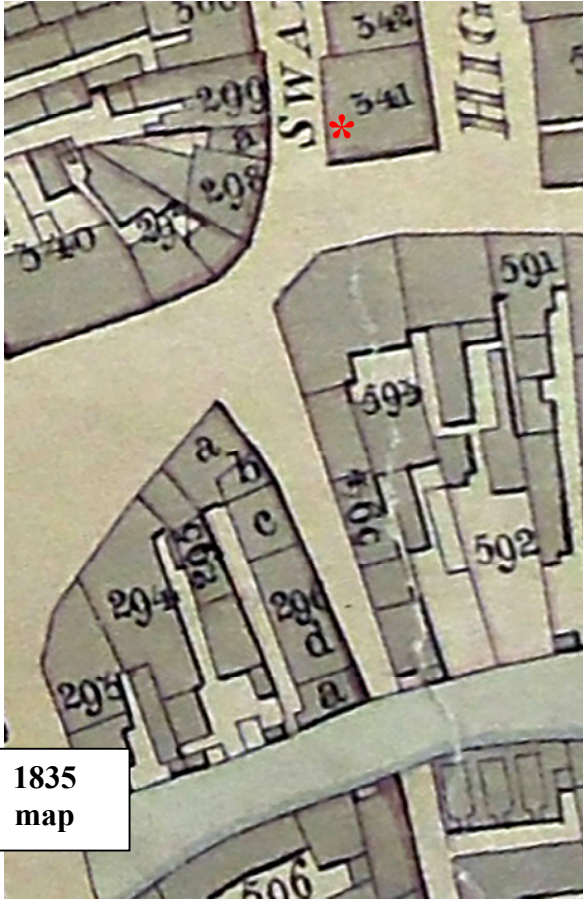
The Old Town Hall (Guildhall) described by Henry Bennett.

The new Town Hall opened on 19th January 1877 and the old Guildhall above was soon demolished early in 1878. The water supply and sewage disposal schemes in Kidderminster were installed between 1870 and 1874 ('Kidderminster since 1800', Tomkinson & Hall).

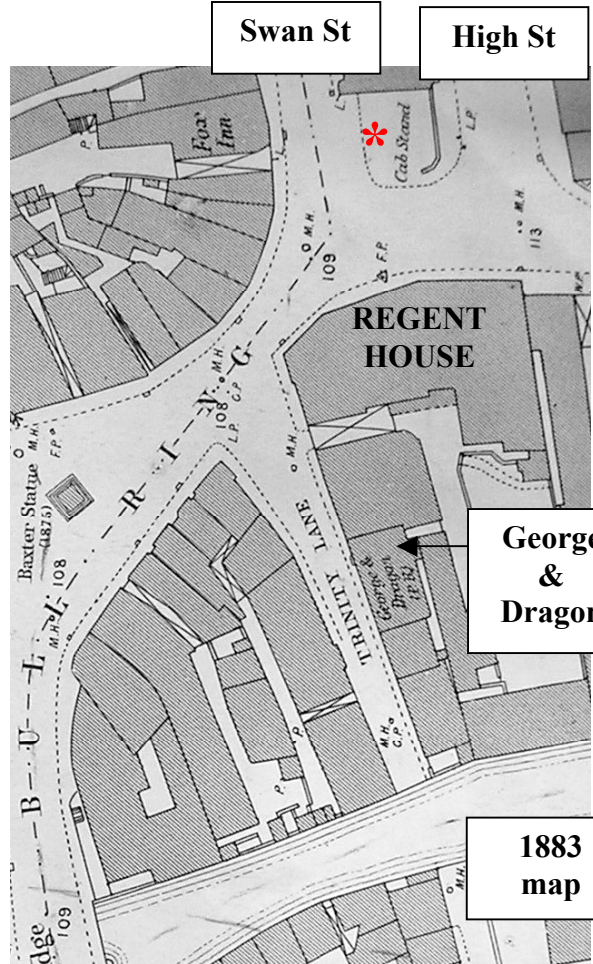
The basket maker, referred to by Bennett as once carrying his trade underneath the Guildhall, was John Wall, a cooper & basket maker. Census records and Trade Directories enable us to follow Wall's movements. He was in Coventry St in 1841 but in 1851 he was at Leswell Bank as a Beer seller and living at the Lion & Lamb (see Historic Kidderminster Project 462 on the Kidderminster Civic Society website) as well as having premises as basket maker in Blackwell St. He was a basket maker in Blackwell St in 1861 & 1871 but not at Leswell. Alfred Heath's Draper's shop can be seen next door to the Guildhall where Wall once had his workshop.

Bennett also mentions the Cab Stand that once stood on the site of the demolished Guildhall. It was donated by John Brinton and erected in 1878. On the maps below, the symbol * shows the position of the Guildhall (1835 Mathews map) and the Cab Stand (1883 OS map). A photograph of this shelter is given below after it had been removed to Brinton Park. Its history can be read in Robert Barber's Historic Kidderminster Project report number 7.

(Bob Millward May 2013)



1835 map



Swan St

High St

George & Dragon

1883 map



The Cabby's shelter ended its days in Brinton Park