

Recollections of Old and New Kidderminster

(Kidderminster Shuttle 26 February 1910)

by Henry Bennett

VIb.

I think that Oxford-street, at the time of my earliest recollections, would be of interest, as it would show the many changes that have been made during the last fifty years. Before the Market Hall was rebuilt there was fixed against the wall, at the bottom of the steps, next the *Junction*—now the *Swan Hotel*—a relic of bygone days in the shape of a "whipping post." I never saw justice administered to a culprit, but I have no doubt that it was fixed in the old thoroughfare for more public witness when the lash or the birch was used. The oak post was about 5ft. high and a foot thick, with two bars fixed at the top, with a big staple (one for each side of the post)—they had the holes in for the wrists, and used to hang down against the post. Many a time I have taken hold of the bars and let them fall against the old post, and they would ring like a large bell.

There was in existence at the same time the old stocks in Church-street, at the foot of Church-hill. I just mention the stocks, as the one instrument of justice was a twin to the other. These relics of the past never ought to have been lost sight of, and I think they are in existence, if one only knew where to look for them. The buildings all up the side of the street have changed since I can remember. Where the Co-operative Stores now stands was a coach-house and stables belonging to Messrs. Hooman & Pardoe. Mr. James Hooman used to ride from the Copse to church on a donkey on Sundays, and the animal was stabled there while Divine service was attended, under the care of an old servant of the firm named Grove. The old *Junction Inn*—now the *Swan*—was the house where the 'buses used to start from, in the stage coach days, to Worcester and Birmingham. Mr. Gardiner was the proprietor of the *Junction* and also the *Whip*. This property came into the hands of the late Mr. Philpott, and then the present front was built, also the shops adjoining, on which site were the stables and hay and straw lofts over, opposite the Town Hall. Where the Coffee Tavern now stands, there were two or three cottages. One was occupied by a man named Ayres. This old cabman was a celebrity in his day—and a man with a "steed-fast" faith that it is "the pace that kills."

We now come to the butchers' shambles which were part of the Market Hall. Mr. David Lane has occupied one-half for a quarter of a century, and Messrs. Brooks, the fruiterers, now carry on business in the other portion. I have seen the old Shambles full of butchers' stalls on Saturday night, and a great quantity of meat was sold in the open market. The public were not waited on so much in those days. I wish to mention that Mr. Lane is the oldest tradesman still in business that there is in Kidderminster to-day. He has never been out of business since he started about the year 1853, and is as keen on his business as a man half his age.

The next property is that of old Farley Turner's Bank—now Lloyds' Bank. Mr. Turner resided at Moor Hall. I well recollect the Saturday morning that the Bank did not open. There was great trouble in the town that day as there were many poor people who had a "fiver" or two which they never got full value for. After the failure Lloyds' Banking Company came and took the business, and erected the present buildings, the frontage of which is set back very much from the old line of High-street. I may have a few words to say about this when I come to the old High-street.

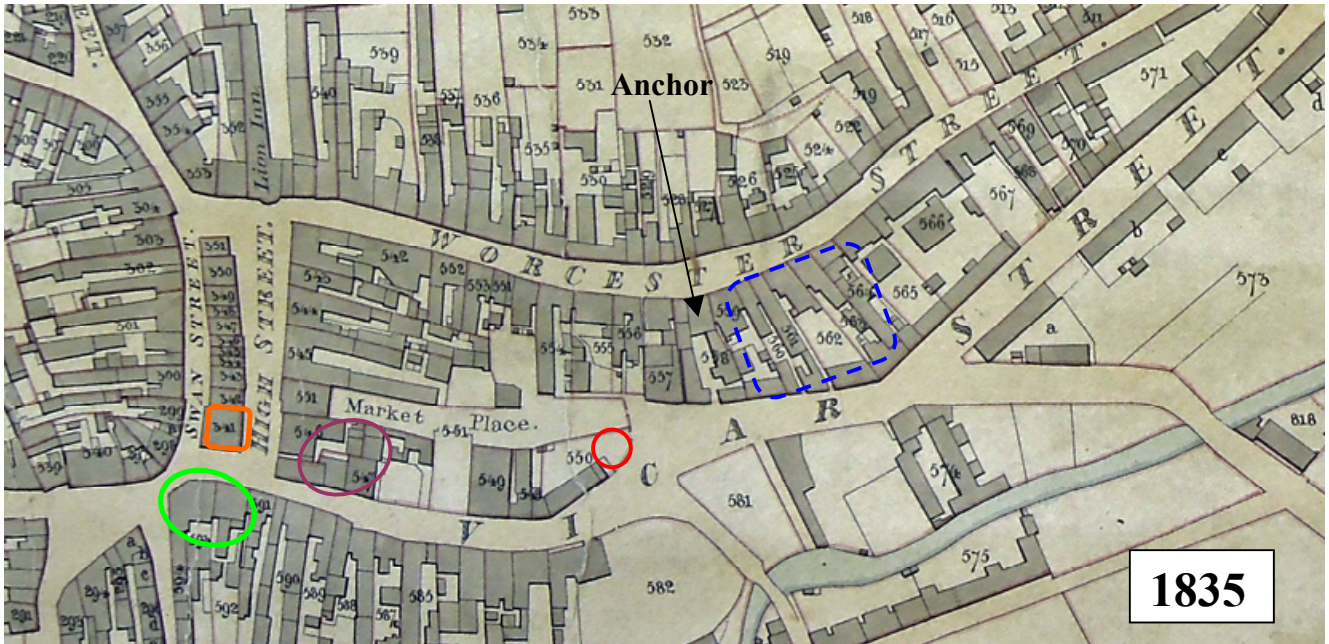
Next to the *Three Tuns* there is another old property, which was formerly an old-established printing and stationery business carried on by a Miss Fowler and afterwards by a Mr. Condy. There was a fire here before the property, which included the *Three Tuns*, was purchased by Mr. Reuben Rogers, who built the present front for a butcher's shop and the shop next to it. I believe the Corporation paid £14 a yard for the setting of the frontage, and it was worth the money. Now I come to a very important piece of property, viz., Messrs. Attwood & Isaacs. This part of High-street came to my notice when I was very young. I can recollect one of the proprietors, Mr. Joseph Boycott, and have seen him at one of the front doors many a time. The business was carried on in the name of Boycott & Belcher for many years. Mr. Boycott was a fine old-English gentleman; he was a magistrate of the Borough, and a good one. He could always be found at his shop opposite

the Old Town Hall. I well remember part of the Regent House frontage being set back at the end next the Bull Ring. What it was then the present inhabitants cannot realise—it is called a "neck" today. It was taken back eight or nine feet opposite Wheeler's fish shop. About twenty-four years ago I saw some men belonging to the Gas Company laying a new main, and they came upon an old foundation. I was in business then at the bottom of Swan-street, and I happened to see it and called Messrs. Isaacs' attention to it. Anyone that will stand at the farthest door they can see the original line of the frontage. Before it was altered it was impossible for a wagon load of hay to get through. I remember when the alteration was completed the then road surveyor—Mr. Buchan, who resided at Aggboro' and farmed it, and had the name for being a good farmer—objected to the owners being paid, as he considered that they had encroached over the footpath by the over-hanging cornices and the over-hanging balcony in front of the second storey windows. There was a large meeting of the ratepayers held at the Old Town Hall. My father was one of the meeting, and he came home and told us that it was unanimously agreed to pay, also that a vote of thanks was passed to the owner for making such a good job of it, and that a wish was expressed that others would do likewise. I well remember two young men who were shopmen in Boycott's shop—the late Councillor Hassell and Mr. Grainger, the latter, of the Bull Ring. Hassell was in the tailoring department, and Grainger in the gent's outfitting department. After Boycott & Belcher a Mr. Ransome came and took over the business, carrying it on for many years. About forty-four years since there was another change to Messrs. Isaacs, and the name is still in the firm as Attwood & Isaac, who are both young business men, and I hope that they will live to see many improvements in the old town and trade of Kidderminster.

The Post Office building will be in the recollection of many of the inhabitants, and I need not say much about it now that we have the handsome Municipal Buildings adjoining the Music Hall (as it was called for years) in Oxford-street. I knew Mr. Merrifield (the superintendent of police) very well. There was a very old man in the force at that time named Lloyd, who lived in a house opposite St. George's gates in Coventry-street. He was always at the station when the Chief was out, and that was very often. When the dog days were on I have seen on more than one occasion half a dozen dogs down on the steps which led to the cells under the Town Hall facing Attwood & Isaac's shop. There are still in town a good number of people whose ancestors were members of the old brigade of police, and their names are as "familiar as household words"—Footman, Edwards, Russell, Harry Beach, and, later, George Haigh.

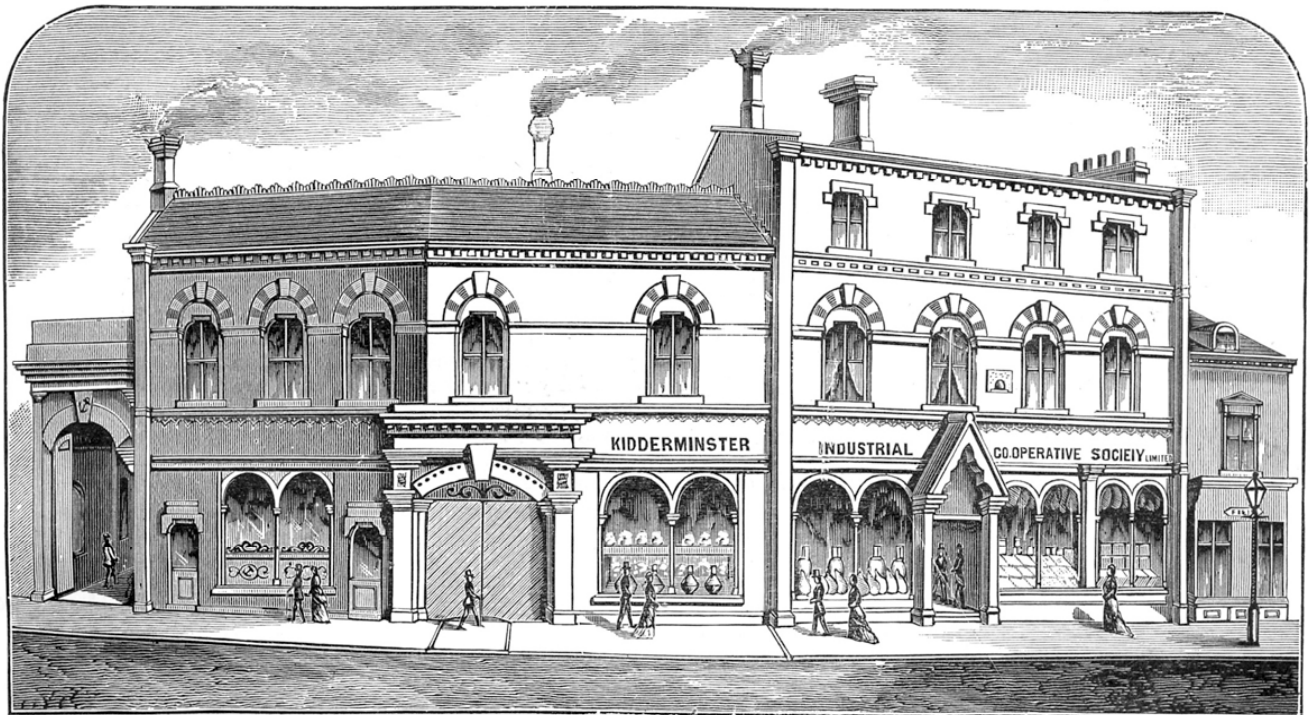
In my next contribution I shall try and recall some of the old tradespeople in High-street.

Notes:



Jeremiah Mathews Map of Kidderminster Borough

In the 1835 map above the site where the Junction/Swan Hotel was later situated is shown by a **red circle**. The approximate position of where the Coop stores were later built is located by a **blue dashed rectangle** and Lloyds Bank by the **purple oval**. The site of Attwood & Isaacs and its forbears is marked **green** and the Guildhall **orange**. The present building on the Attwoods site is the now defunct T J Hughes.

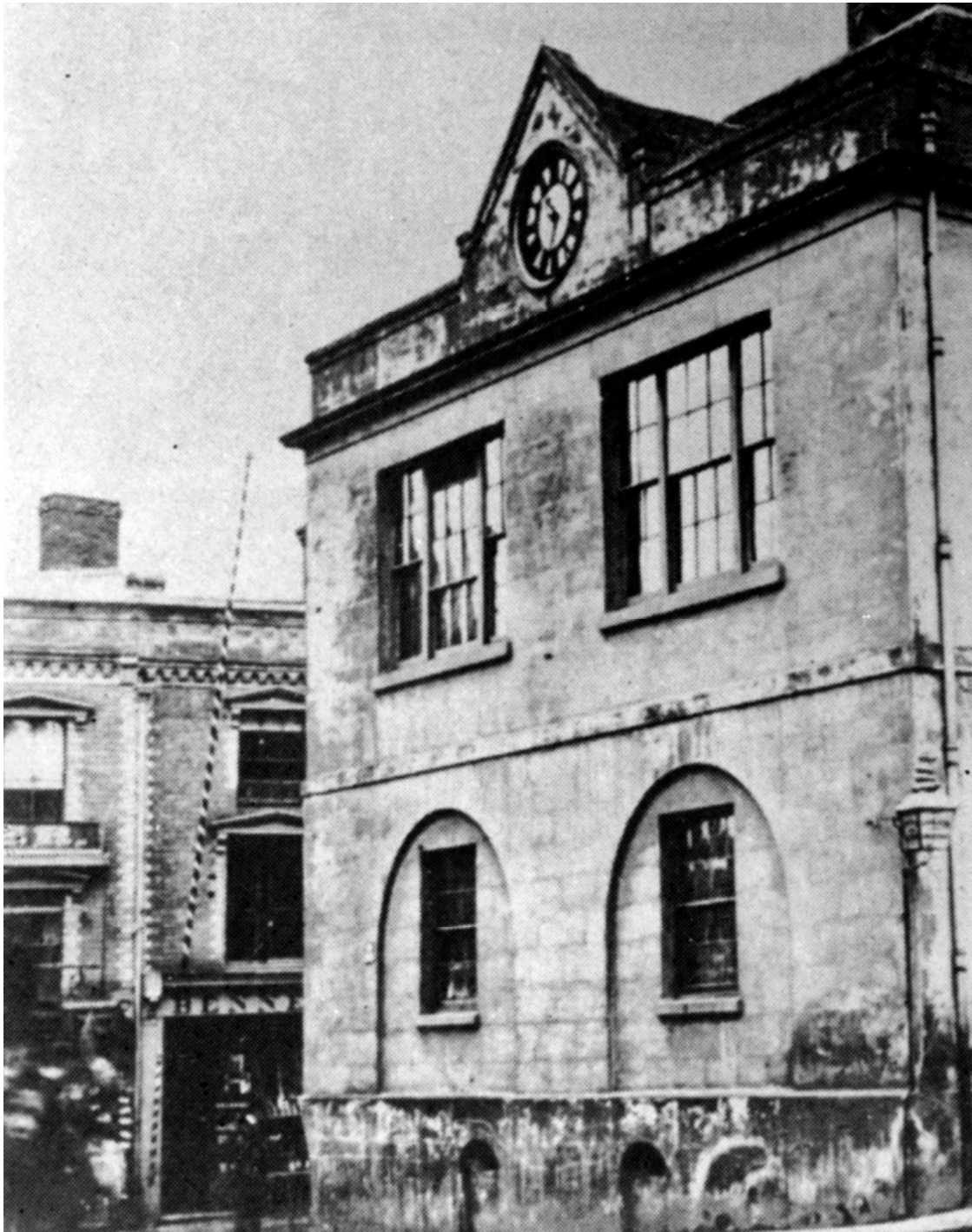


The Coop store in Oxford Street c 1896



To the right of the Three Tuns was the double fronted property the front of which was rebuilt by Reuben Rogers after a fire. He was listed at the Three Tuns in Kelly's Directory of 1888.

William Merrifield became the 1st chief of police in 1835 when borough police force established. He retired in 1857 ('Kidderminster since 1800' by Tomkinson & Hall).



**The old Guildhall at the bottom of High Street.
In the background to the left can be seen Henry Bennett's hairdressing
establishment including the barber's pole.**

(Bob Millward May 2013)