

# THE HISTORY OF THE FOUR OAKS PUB, BELWELL LANE, FOUR OAKS, SUTTON COLDFIELD

FROM THE EARLY 1800's - 1955

Author: Paul Harrison, September 2024



*The Four Oaks Pub, September 2024 (Image authors own)*

## Overview

This piece of research traces the history of the pub from its origins until the mid-1950's, after which information from online research, my main source, dries up. I've included newspaper cuttings where possible, however I've transcribed longer articles to make them easier to read.

Throughout its history, the pub has variously been known as The Park Tavern, The Four Oaks Inn and The Four Oaks Hotel. In more recent times it has been a carvery since the 1980's and is currently a pub restaurant known simply as The Four Oaks.

## Early History

An article published in the Sutton Coldfield News on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 1993, gave some information on the history of the building. The article relates to two capped wells that were discovered beneath floorboards during refurbishment works at that time. It states that the building was originally a house built "around 1800" and became an inn "around 50 years later".

It also mentions the presence of Victorian summer houses in the garden, which were also being refurbished. The landlord at the time was reported to be taking photographs of the building, both before and after the work, and planned to print a complete history of the pub. Whether this was completed is not known.

The earliest document mentioning the pub that I found dates from 1839. It appears that a local man named Thomas Thornton wanted a rematch with "Lawton, the Walsall Locksmith" to avenge a recent defeat in a prize fighting contest. Thornton's tin, (presumably his prize pot), was kept at the Park Tavern, Four Oaks. Also of interest is Thornton's alternative potential pugilist, should Lawton decline his offer, a local man named George Hollins.

In his book Glimpses into Sutton's Past, Stephen Roberts described how in the early 1800's, it wasn't uncommon for the rural outskirts of Sutton Coldfield to be the location of prize fighting, with many people travelling from near and far to look on and place bets. It was reported that a prize fight that took place in October 1816 on the outskirts of Sutton was watched by as many as 10,000 people.

**Thomas Thornton, the Sporting Tailor, of Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, wishes to inform Lawton, the Walsall Locksmith, by whom he was defeated a short time back, that he is prepared to have another shy with him for from £25 to £50 a side, providing Lawton will confine himself to 10st. 10lb. The fight to take place half way between Walsall and Four Oaks in one month from this date; Thornton's tin is ready at the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, any time Lawton thinks proper. To prove Thornton means fighting, and not chaffing, should Lawton decline this matter, Thornton will have a shy with George Hollins on the same terms.**

*Clipping from Bells Life in London and Sport, February 24th, 1839*

There are no indications that a pub was present at the site on the earliest available census in 1841, as all addresses are simply listed as Four Oaks. The only indication of which property might be the pub building is the presence of George Hollins (mentioned above), who was also shown on both the 1841 and subsequent census records to be living near the building. Hollins' occupation was given as Agricultural Labourer and there was no mention of him being a part time prize fighter. Incidentally, Hollins would have been around 38 years old at the time of the above article.

## Early Days as a Known Public House, The Park Tavern

In 1846, the pub is mentioned as the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, in a notice regarding the sale at auction of a nearby farm premises and its contents, as a place where sale catalogues would be available.

Catalogues will be ready by Wednesday next, at the Barley Mow, Hill; Park Tavern, Four Oaks; the Inns in Sutton Coldfield and Erdington, and at the offices of WILLIAM WEBB, Auctioneer, Castle Bromwich, and 114, New-street, Birmingham.

*Clipping from Aris's Birmingham Gazette, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1846*

The Sutton Coldfield Directory of 1850 provides the earliest apparently official record found of the building being used as a pub. A Beer House was listed in Four Oaks run by a J. Turner. Though it was not stated exactly where this was, it was most probably the Four Oaks Tavern, as the 1851 census listed a James Turner to be a Victualler, a person who is licensed to sell alcohol.

## 1851 census Four Oaks

James Turner	M	36	Victualler	b Lichfield, Staffs
Elizabeth Turner	M	40		b Clifton Campville, Staffs
John Turner		3		b Sutton Coldfield

Census abbreviations: M – married; U – single; W – widow or widower; b place of birth

## The Park Tavern

I expect that the name The Park Tavern was chosen for the pub due to its close proximity to the Four Oaks Gate entrance to Sutton Park, being almost opposite. Perhaps the footfall from visitors to the park was one of the reasons for converting the property into a pub, assuming that it was previously used as a private dwelling house.

The pub wasn't mentioned in the 1854 Sutton Coldfield Directory. However, there was a Joseph Pickstone listed as a beer retailer in Four Oaks, but no other details were given. This was highly likely to be the pub as Joseph Pickstone was recorded as being a publican at the Park Tavern on the subsequent 1861 census.

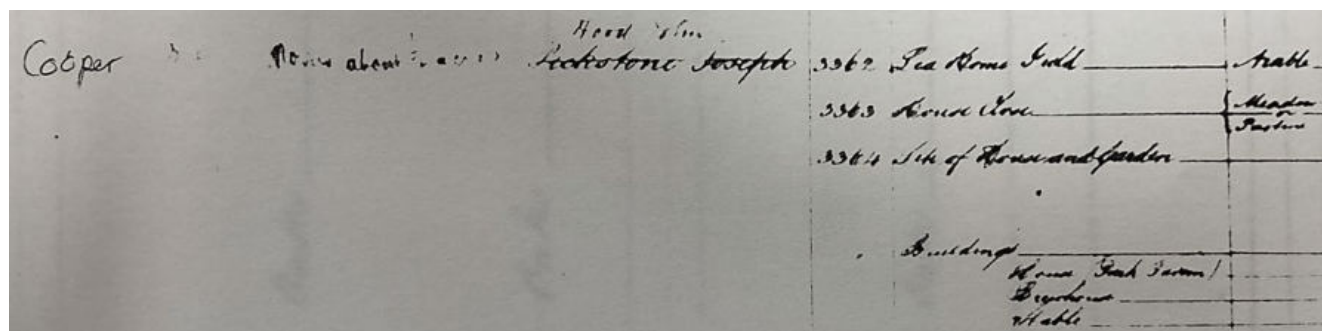
## 1861 census Park Tavern, Four Oaks

Joseph Pickstone	Head	M	43	Farmer of 12 acres & publican	b Sutton Coldfield
Mary Pickstone	Wife	M	40	Farmers wife	b Windsor, Berks
William Pickstone	Son	U	18	Farmers son	b Sutton Coldfield
Joseph Pickstone	Son	-	11	Scholar	b Sutton Coldfield
Fredrick Pickstone	Son	-	8	Scholar	b Sutton Coldfield
Herbert Pickstone	Son	-	6	Scholar	b Sutton Coldfield

The pub was recorded in a document named the Sutton Coldfield Parochial Valuation, dated 1856. According to an article by Roger Lea (Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group, History Spot 470 - Valuation), due to a population increase by the mid 1850's, Sutton had four parishes instead of one large one. It became necessary to establish the exact boundaries of each parish, together with a survey of all the land and property belonging to each. A land agent was utilised, and the Sutton Coldfield Parochial Valuation was published in 1856. It contained a large-scale plan marking all fields and buildings and an accompanying schedule provided the names of the owners and occupiers of each plot and some details about the buildings present.

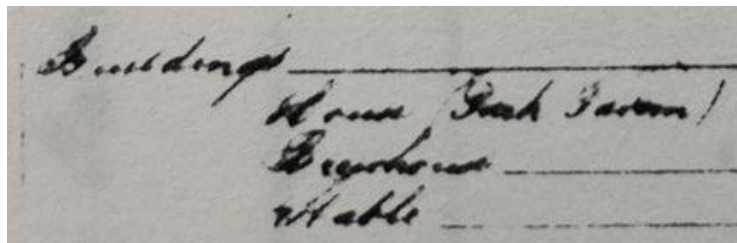
For a few years after its publication, the schedule was updated to reflect changes of ownership or tenant.

Although hard to discern, the property was described on the schedule as "Buildings" comprising a "House (Park Tavern), Brewhouse and Stable", occupying land of about half an acre in size. It was listed as being owned by a Mr Cooper and occupied by Joseph Pickstone, however this name was later struck through, and the name John Wood written above it, presumably indicating change of tenant. The same register listed George Hollins as living in an adjacent property.



Extract from the Sutton Coldfield Parochial Valuation dated 1856





*Close up detail of previous image mentioning the Park Tavern*

Sutton and its park were much visited by people from nearby cities and towns as a resort to get away from dirty air and to enjoy the many facilities on offer to tourists. An article by Roger Lea (Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group, History Spot 271 - Omnibuses) states that, "Omnibuses were available for hire, much used by factory workers on their Monday outings, or "gypsying parties"". These activities do seem to have included visits to public houses, apparently including the Park Tavern. The article by Roger Lea, indicates that such outings could be rowdy, noisy, and clogged up lanes causing accidents and, as a result, were not always popular with Sutton folk.

**J O H N   W O O D ,**  
**P A R K   T A V E R N ,   F O U R   O A K S ,**  
*Within 200 yards from one of the Principal Entrances  
 to Sutton Park.*  
**Every Accommodation for Gipsy Parties and Others.**  
 928

*The above advert appeared in the Walsall Free Press several times in August and September 1863*

The 1866 Sutton Coldfield Directory listed John Wood as the licensee of the Park Tavern, though the above advert indicates he had taken charge of the pub by August 1863. However, the 1868 edition names Henry Middleton as the licensee.

According to the Birmingham Daily Post, Henry Middleton had a horse stolen from the Park Tavern in 1868. This must have been deemed a serious charge to be referred to the Warwick Sessions, as lesser crimes were normally dealt with by local Petty Sessions.

**STEALING A HORSE.**—An old man named William Pool was yesterday charged at the Police Court with stealing a horse, belonging to Henry Middleton, of the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield. The horse was missed at four o'clock yesterday morning, and at eight he offered it for sale at Mr. Leach's, horse slaughterer, for 21s. Information of the robbery was received soon afterwards, and the prisoner was arrested. The prisoner was committed to Warwick Sessions for trial.

*From the Birmingham Daily Post November 5th, 1868*

In 1869, rooms available to let at the pub were advertised in a Birmingham newspaper.

A9295

**SUTTON Coldfield.**—To be Let, a **SITTING ROOM** and two Bed Rooms, at the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, opposite the entrance of the Park. Convenience for Horse and Carriage.—For particulars, apply at the above.

A9321

*This advert featured in the Birmingham Daily Gazette on May 26th and June 5th, 1869*

In May and June 1870, the Park Tavern was mentioned in the Tamworth Herald. It appears a notable horse named 'Young Magician', described as the "handsomest thoroughbred pony in England", was touring various midlands pubs, the last of which was the Park Tavern.



*Advert from the Tamworth Herald, featured on both May 28th and June 18th, 1870*

An advert in the Walsall Advertiser from summer 1870 announced that the Park Tavern now boasted pleasure gardens and summer arbours.



*Walsall Advertiser August 16th and September 10th, 1870*

#### 1871 census 20 Park Tavern, Four Oaks

Henry Middleton	Head	M	45	Licensed Victualler	b Witton, Warks
Ann Middleton	Wife	M	46		b Handsworth, Staffs
Louisa Middleton	Daughter		11	Scholar	b West Bromwich, Staffs
Edward Wilkins	Lodger	U	46	Brewer	b Sutton Coldfield

Fancy winning a fine fat young pig? Or would you prefer a cash prize instead? Well in January 1871 you would have had the chance of having the luxury of choosing from these options had you won a pigeon shooting competition at the Park Tavern. Not a great event for pigs nor pigeons though.

Note that the below article states that the pub is a twenty-minute walk from Sutton Coldfield Station. The much closer Four Oaks station wasn't built until 1884.

**PIGEON SHOOTING.**—At H. Middleton's, the Four Oaks Tavern, Four Oaks (20 minutes walk from Sutton Coldfield Station), on Monday next, Jan 30, a fine fat young pig (put up for £11 11s), by 22 members, 10s 6d each, the winner to take either pig or money, the entries for which will remain open till the morning of shooting. Conditions : 3 birds each, 1½oz of shot, 21 yards rise, double guns 1½oz of shot, and allowed two yards, the field the boundary. The birds supplied by the veteran Woodshaw, of Middleton. The first bird trapped at 11 o'clock. Trains from New-street, Birmingham (L.N.W. rail), 10, 11, 12 a.m., and 1:50 p.m.

*Clipping from Bells Life in London and Sport, January 28th, 1871*

In 1871, adverts in the Walsall Free Press & General Advertiser named The Park Tavern as one of the stops on a travel service from Walsall to Sutton Coldfield town centre.

It appears that it was common at that time to repeat a word as the headline three times, as this was apparent on several adverts on the same page, presumably some sort of basic attention-grabbing tactic.

<p><b>SUTTON! SUTTON!! SUTTON!!!</b></p> <p><b>MILLS, EDWARDS, &amp; Co.,</b> will RUN Every SUNDAY a BREAK or OMNIBUS (as the weather permits) to the DOG INN, SUTTON, (Center of Town.)</p> <p>Leaving Station Street, Walsall, at 2-30 p.m., Calling at Aldridge, and Park Tavern, and Four Oaks, each way; leaves Sutton at 7 p.m.</p> <p>Fares to Sutton, 1s., to Aldridge 6d. <span style="float: right;">558</span></p>	<p><b>SUTTON! SUTTON!! SUTTON!!!</b></p> <p><b>MILLS, EDWARDS, &amp; CO.</b></p> <p>Will run every Sunday a Break or Omnibus (as the weather permits) to the Dog Inn, Sutton, (centre of town), leaving Station Street, Walsall, at 2 30 p.m., calling at Aldridge and the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, each way, leaving Sutton at 7 p.m.</p> <p>Fares to Sutton, 1s.; Aldridge, 6d.</p> <p>N.B.—Omnibuses, Breaks of all sizes, covered and open; Wagonettes, Traps, and Gigs, built to suit the coming season. Pic-Nic parties can be accommodated from 20 to 500, at very reasonable prices. <span style="float: right;">313-9</span></p>
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*Adverts from the Walsall Free Press & General Advertiser and Walsall Advertiser. These appeared frequently in the papers during the spring and summer of 1871.*

It appears that Henry Middleton was having something of a clear out of the building and its contents in 1876.

**FOUR OAKS, SUTTON COLDFIELD.**

**TO BE SOLD by AUCTION, by MESSRS. BINDLEY & SONS,** on the premises in the occupation of Mr. Middleton, Park Tavern, Four Oaks,

On **THURSDAY, MARCH 23rd, 1876,**

the Useful

**HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE**

Comprising Chairs, Tables, Sofa, Bedsteads, Feather Beds, Chest of Drawers, Wardrobe, and other Chamber Appendages,

**CONTENTS OF TAP-ROOM, BAR,**

Dairy and Brewing Utensils, Implements; also a variety of Kitchen Requisites, 2 Spring Traps, large Tent, complete, 4 Store Pigs, Fowls, and other Effects.

Sale to commence at Eleven o'clock.

*Advert from the Tamworth Herald March 18th, 1876*

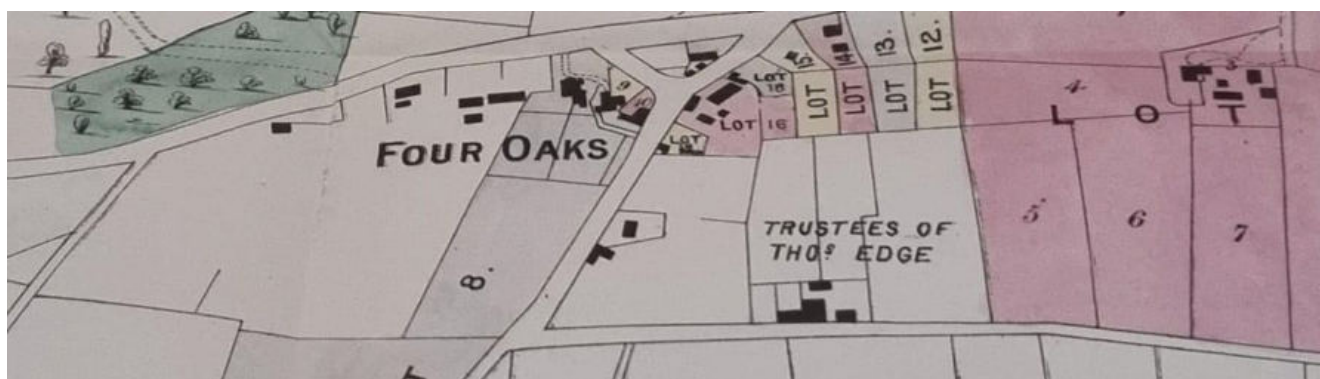
Henry Middleton was listed as the licensee in the Sutton Coldfield Directory until 1878, when it was taken over by Henry Jackson.



## 1881 census Four Oaks Inn, Four Oaks

Henry Jackson	Head	M	50	Licensed Victualler	b Newton Regis, Warks
Maria Jackson	Wife	M	50	Licensed Victualler	b Halesowen, Worcs
Harriet Evans	Servant	U	25	Barmaid	b Wednesbury, Staffs

The pub was featured on the particulars for sale of freehold estates belonging to Mark Barker esq comprising; land, ten cottages, building land and an “old licensed inn”. These were for sale at auction by Thomas. S. Fallows at the Midland Hotel, New Street, Birmingham on Thursday 30th June 1881 at “six o’clock precisely”. Each lot was marked out on a plan and a description of the land, and any buildings present provided. The available lots were situated on Belwell Lane, Walsall Road, Streetly Lane and Clarence Road. The Four Oaks Inn was included as Lot 16 as shown below.



*Extract from plan of sales particulars dated 1881. With thanks to Chris Owen at the Sutton Coldfield History page on Facebook for his permission to reproduce details from the above plan.*

Lot 16 was described in detail as below;

“The truly valuable freehold old-licensed inn at Four Oaks, known as the Four Oaks Inn or “Park Tavern”, which has been partially re-built and enlarged; it is very conveniently arranged for carrying on the large and profitable business the place is now doing, as, being the only full licensed house in the locality, it has a monopoly of trade of the district.

The accommodation is as follows: four Bedrooms, two Closets, good Smoke Room, Tap Room, Bar, and Private Parlour, Cooking Kitchen, Pantry, dry Ale and Wine Cellars, and a large Tea or Supper Room suitable for excursion or other parties.

The Outbuildings are excellent, in a capital yard, and include 3-stall Stable, two Loose Boxes, Corn Room, Carriage Shed, four Pigstyes, Fowl-house, and other minor erections.

There is also a small Paddock of old Turf Land.

The pleasure gardens and grounds are not only extensive but remarkably picturesque and tastefully laid out, planted with rare and fine growing trees and shrubs, and contain three large brick-built summer houses and refreshment bar, and other attractions and conveniences.

The whole contains an area of about 4,395 square yards, and has a frontage of about 53 yards, and is held on Lease by Mr. Jackson for a term of which seven years remained unexpired at Lady-Day last.”

Lady Day is March 25th, Feast of the Annunciation and the first quarter day of the year. Traditionally on quarter days tenants paid their rents to landlords and servants were hired.

It is unclear when the above alterations and enlargements were made to the pub and their nature. It should also be noted that the description of the pub and grounds was made to promote its sale and therefore may not be entirely accurate.

Interestingly, as the plan predates construction of the extension of the railway from Sutton to Lichfield, a proposed site of a new station was shown where the line now passes beneath Belwell Lane.

In October 1882, the Park Tavern was used for the auction of land at nearby Hill Hook.

**HILL HOOK, Near SUTTON COLDFIELD.  
VALUABLE FREEHOLD PROPERTY.**

**TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, BY  
MR. O GILLIARD, at the PARK  
TAVERN, FOUR OAKS, near Sutton  
Coldfield, on WEDNESDAY NEXT, October 11th,  
1882, at Five o'clock in the Evening, in one or more  
Lots as may be determined by the Auctioneer. and  
subject to conditions—**

**THREE CLOSES OF FREEHOLD LAND,**  
with BUILDINGS thereon, containing together  
4a. 3r. 8p. or thereabouts, situate at Hill Hook, in  
the Parish of Sutton Coldfield, having a frontage of  
about 250 yards to the road leading from Little  
Aston to Four Oaks, and bounded by lands of the  
late Mr. Edges' Representatives, Mrs. Hastilow,  
and Mr. Samuel Smith.

Two of the Fields are occupied by Mr Samuel  
Proffitt, the remainder of the Property is in the  
occupation of Mr. George Ensor. There is a good  
well of hard water on the Property.

The Property is about six miles from Lichfield,  
three from Sutton Coldfield, and within a few  
minutes' walk of an intended Station on the new  
line from Sutton Coldfield to Lichfield. It is situated  
on an eminence, and, having a beautiful view of the  
valley beneath, is admirably suitable for cutting up  
into building plots.

For further particulars apply to the Auctioneer, or  
**MESSRS. HINCKLEY, HODSON, & Co.,**  
Solicitors, Lichfield.

*This advert featured in the Walsall Observer on September 16th and October 7th 1882*

In 1882, Henry Jackson was sued for selling horses that soon afterwards proved to have several defects.

**BEFORE MR. J. MOTTERAM, Q.C., JUDGE.**  
**THE ALLEGED BREACH OF WARRANTY.**—This case,  
commenced on Monday, was resumed yesterday. The  
plaintiff, it will be recollected, was Thomas Wilcox,  
jeweller, 10, Richard Street, and the defendant Henry  
Jackson, Four Oaks Park Tavern, Sutton Coldfield. The  
action was brought to recover £50. for breach of warranty  
of a mare. Mr. Hugo Young (instructed by Mr. J. O.  
Fowke) was for the plaintiff, and Mr. Alfred Young (in-  
structed by Mr. Fallows) for the defendant.—The plaintiff  
was put into the box, and spoke to receiving the mare from  
the defendant in exchange for one which he had previously  
purchased from him, and which was found to be unsound.  
He obtained a warranty as to the soundness of the second  
mare, but he had only had it a week when it fell lame.  
The mare was consequently sent back to the defendant.—  
Mr. Parker, veterinary surgeon, said he had examined the  
animal, and found that it had chronic lameness, spavin,  
and other defects.—At this stage it was arranged, with his  
Honour's concurrence, to allow the defendant to retain the  
fifty guineas paid for the second mare and for the plaintiff  
to be permitted to have his choice of several other horses  
which Jackson now possessed.

*From the Birmingham Daily Post, December 13th, 1882*

It was around this time that the pub changed its name to the Four Oaks Inn according to listings in both the Sutton Coldfield Directory and Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire.

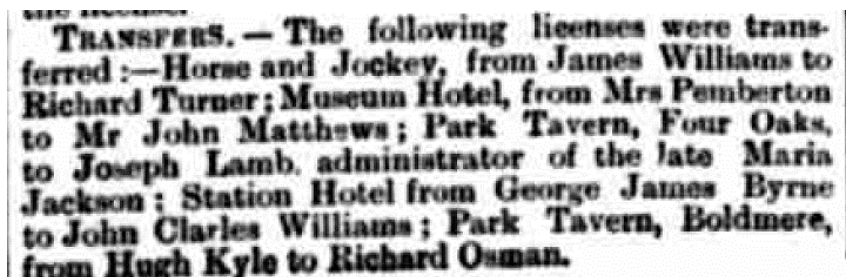
It appears from the below advert from 1884, that Henry was known as Harry, though somewhat confusingly, the pub was now named the Four Oaks Hotel. The advert boasting that the pub had considerable provision of stables and "pleasure grounds". Presumably these being the pleasure gardens and grounds mentioned in the sales particulars from 1881.





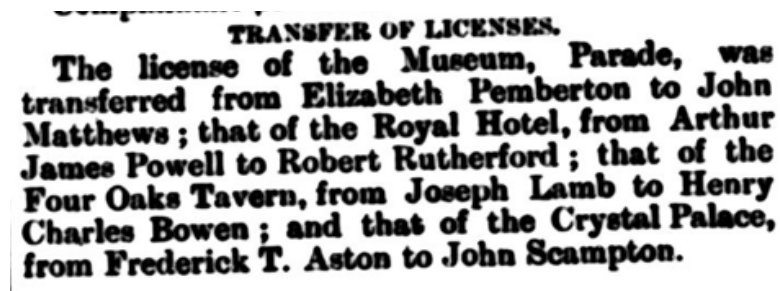
*Advert featured in the Harborne Herald and District News, August 30th 1884*

Then followed a rapid turnover of licensees. In the 1888 Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire, Maria Jackson, Henry's wife, was listed as the licensee of the Four Oaks Inn. However, it appears that Maria Jackson died soon after, as Joseph Lamb became the temporary licensee of the pub whilst acting as her administrator.



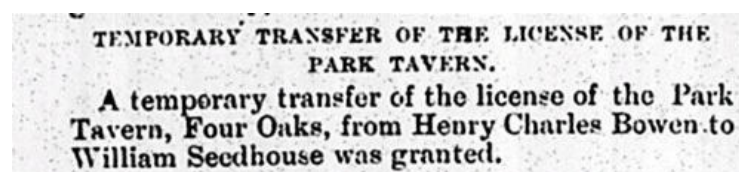
*Taken from The Sutton Coldfield & Erdington Mercury September 29th 1888*

Subsequently, in November 1888, it was reported that the licence for the Four Oaks Tavern was being transferred from Joseph Lamb to Henry Charles Bowen.



*From the Birmingham Suburban Times November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1888*

It was soon all change again as by December 1888 the license was transferred from Henry Charles Bowen to William Seedhouse. Again, the pub was referred to as the Park Tavern. Perhaps that was still the name used on legal documentation referring to the pub?



*Taken from the Warwickshire Herald, December 6th 1888*

This was reported on again in January 1889, but not as a temporary transfer.

**SUTTON COLDFIELD PETTY SESSIONS.  
TUESDAY.—Before Dr. Duncalfe (in the chair), and  
Mr. A. L. Crockford.**

**TRANSFER OF LICENSES.**

The license of the Railway Tavern, Station-street, was transferred from Thomas Hill to William John Pittam; that of the Fox and Dogs, Little Sutton, from William Burton to John Stevenson Ordish; that of the Three Tuns, High-street, from Harry Hollen to Henry Cecil Burlton Edwards; and that of the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, from Henry Charles Brown to William Seedhouse. Sergeant Smye stated in answer to the Magistrates that their characters were very satisfactory.

*Extract from the Warwickshire Herald, January 10th 1889*

It appears to have been a temporary measure anyway as by 1891, Joseph Russell was running the pub, having taken over in January 1890. However, his tenure was also a short one.

**A TEMPORARY TRANSFER.—The license of the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, was temporarily transferred from William Seedhouse to Joseph Russell.**

*Clipping from the Warwickshire Herald January 23rd, 1890*

1891 census Four Oaks Inn, Four Oaks

Joseph Russell	Head	M	40	Licensed Victualler	b Walsall, Staffs
Annie Russell	Wife	M	39		b Walsall, Staffs
Ada Russell	Daughter	-	11	Scholar	b Walsall, Staffs
Millie Russell	Daughter	-	9	Scholar	b Walsall, Staffs
Annie Russell	Daughter	-	7	Scholar	b Walsall, Staffs
Edith Russell	Daughter	-	6	Scholar	b Walsall, Staffs
Rose Woolley	Servant	S	24	Barmaid	b Aston, Warks

The pub was 'To Let' in February and March 1891, providing a "rare opportunity for energetic couple". The previous occupier had satisfactory reasons for leaving apparently. The 1891 census was taken on April 5<sup>th</sup> so it seems that Joseph Russell was seeking to leave at the time.

**TO LET, the FOUR OAKS TAVERN, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, close to Sutton Park; rare opportunity for energetic couple; satisfactory reasons for leaving.—Apply to  
WATKINS & POWELL,  
Auctioneers, Walsall.**

*Advert from the Lichfield Mercury February 20th & March 6th, 1891. The same advert also appeared several times in the Walsall Observer until March 21<sup>st</sup> 1891.*

Joseph Russell appears to have remained as the licensee until May 1891 when Maria Rose took over.

**TRANSFER OF LICENSES.—The license of the Three Tuns Hotel, High-street, was transferred for the late Mr. B. Edwards to his widow Mrs. S. Edwards; that of the Old Dog Inn, Lower Parade, from William Crowley to Thomas Good; that of the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, from Joseph Russell to Maria Rose; that of Station Hotel,**

*From the Warwickshire Herald May 28th, 1891*



The pub was again available 'To Let' in 1892. The below advert appeared in both the Walsall Observer & South Staffordshire Chronicle, and the Walsall Observer between April 30th and May 24th, 1892.

**OLD-LICENSED COUNTRY INN.**  
**TO LET, with immediate possession, the**  
**FOUR OAKS TAVERN, Sutton Coldfield.**  
**For particulars apply,**  
**WATKINS & POWELL,**  
**Auctioneers, Walsall.**

*Advert from the Walsall Observer & South Staffordshire Chronicle May 21st, 1892*

The 1892 Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire listed Maria Rose as the licensee of the Four Oaks Public House, but by August of the same year, the license had been transferred to Clara Waite. Presumably the above advert was prompted by Maria Rose wishing to move on.

**TRANSFERS OF LICENSES.**—The license of the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, was transferred from Maria Rose to Clara Waite, and the New-road Tavern, Hill, from Agnes Jones, to William Edward Richards.

*Taken from the Warwickshire Herald August 4th 1892*

It was only a few months before the new licensee found herself mentioned in the papers as a witness in an incident where a local young man was in trouble with the law for being drunk. I read this article a few times as I was unsure if Miss Wait was lying about Pickerill having drunk beer at the pub, or if he was already drunk before arriving and then drank only ginger beer there, I suspect the latter. I presume Miss Wait is the same person as Clara Waite as mentioned above. She was also later reported as Mrs. Waits.

**DRUNK AT THE FOUR OAKS TAVERN.**—James Pickerill, jun., labourer, Four Oaks, was charged with being drunk at the Four Oaks Tavern, on the 24th September.—Police-constable Bracebridge said about ten minutes to eleven on the night in question, he was on duty opposite the Four Oaks Tavern. He saw the defendant in the passage of the inn very drunk and being led by a relative of the landlady, Miss Wait, out of the house. The man said to the defendant "Now then Jim, pull yourself together," and led him through the passage into the road. Seeing witness the man left the defendant and ran back into the house. Witness thereupon went to the door and said "I want to have a few words with Miss Wait as to Pickerill's condition." He saw Miss Wait, and in answer to his question, she said "Pickerill has had nothing but ginger beer here."—Defendant now admitted that he was the worse for drink, but denied that he had partaken of anything beyond ginger beer at the tavern.—The Chairman: Then you admit being drunk, but you had nothing but ginger beer at the house in question.—Defendant: Yes, I had a little beer.—As it was the defendant's first offence, he was fined 1s. and costs.

*From the Warwickshire Herald October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1892*



On June 21<sup>st</sup> 1894, the Warwickshire Herald reported on the below incident from the Sutton Coldfield Petty Sessions.

"George Trainor, ostler, Four Oaks Tavern, was charged with being in possession of eight young thrushes at Sutton Coldfield on the 5th June. -Mr. W. Rabnett appeared for the defendant, who pleaded not guilty. -Police constable. Bracebridge said on the day in question he visited Mrs. Wait's premises, the Four Oaks Tavern, and in the saddle room he found eight thrushes. They were young birds and could not peck. Defendant, who was in the employ of Mrs. Wait, was in the room and said he did not know it was wrong when he took the birds from two nests in the hedge of his mistress' garden. -In answer to Mr. Rabnett, witness said he did not know defendant had Mrs. Wait's authority to take the birds from the hedge. Inspector J. Ruane of the S.P.C.A., said on the 6<sup>th</sup> inst, he saw the birds in Police-sergeant Smye's possession, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> went to the Four Oaks Tavern as saw defendant. He asked in how he came by the birds in his possession, and he said they were bred in the garden and he asked a youth to take and bring them to the saddle-room. He did so and he kept them in a cage until they were taken away by Police-sergeant Smye. He asked him if Mrs. Wait had ordered him to take them, and he replied in the negative, saying he alone was responsible for taking them. -Police-sergeant Smye said he had since turned the birds loose in the park. -Mr. Ruane said he did not wish the defendant to be fined but let off on the payment of the costs. -Mr. Rabnett pointed out that the birds were not scheduled in the Wild Bird's Protection Act, and defendant had been authorised by Mrs. Wait to take and kill the birds, which she had a right to have done. -The Chairman pointed out that defendant was charged with having the birds in his possession and ordered him to pay the costs, 7s, the Chairman adding that if defendant was brought before them again for a like offence, he would be more severely dealt with."

Mrs. Waits employed James Salt as a groom. In July 1895, Salt was fined 2s 6d with costs of 14s 6d for assaulting a customer in an apparently unsavoury incident.

**An Unjustifiable Attack.**

James Salt, groom, The Tavern, Four Oaks, was charged on remand with assaulting John Brown, butcher, Mere Pool, on the 25th June.—The case was adjourned from the last court to enable the complainant to summon a witness who had failed to appear.—Complainant went to the Four Oaks Tavern on the evening in question at about ten o'clock. He called for a glass of ale, but before he could be served, defendant came in and struck him five or six times about the head and face. As his sight was bad he did not then recognise defendant, but on the following Friday in the presence of the constable, defendant admitted it was he who had knocked him (complainant) about, adding that he would have given him some more if he had not had someone to escort him home.—Edward Daniels, a groom in the employ of Mr. Caldicott, of Four Oaks House, who wished to know who was going to pay his expenses for the day, said on the evening of the 25th ult. he went into the Tavern and called for a pint of beer. He had not been there but two or three minutes before he saw the defendant strike the complainant. Defendant was urged on to do it by another man. He (witness) afterwards helped to bathe the blood from the complainant's face.—A witness called by the defendant, named Arthur Owen, said complainant annoyed and struck the defendant previously the same evening at the Barley Mow. They were turned out of the inn, and complainant followed them to the Tavern. At the Tavern complainant asked defendant to go out, but he would not and struck the complainant.—The Chairman said the Bench had not the slightest doubt that the assault was committed on Brown, and the defendant would be fined 2s. 6d. and 14s. 6d. costs.

*From the Warwickshire Herald July 11th 1895*

A good general cook was required in 1895. The advert stated that the applicant, "must cook well", which is surely a prerequisite for a professional cook!

**G**ENERAL (good); must cook well.—Apply, Four Oaks Tavern,  
Sutton Coldfield. cl377

*Advert from the Birmingham Daily Post September 11th, 1895*

### A Tragic Incident

In February 1898, the pub was the scene of an inquest into the tragic death of Emma Beck who lived nearby. Emma was the wife of Edward Beck and they had lived close to the pub for many years. Emma Beck's death was somewhat gruesome, dying from burns received having (possibly drunkenly) fallen asleep by the fire.

**FOUR OAKS.**

**THE FATAL BURNING CASE.**—On Wednesday, Dr Iliffe (coroner) held an enquiry at the Park Tavern, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield, relative to the death of Emma Beck (69), who was burned to death on Sunday morning. Edward Beck, husband of deceased, deposed that on Saturday night he went to bed, leaving deceased sitting in front of the fire. About three next morning he heard her call out, "Ned, I'm all on fire." The fire was put out, but she was frightfully burned. In reply to the Coroner, witness admitted that deceased had had beer on most Saturday nights, and that she had been previously warned that if she continued to get the worse for drink she might get burned. Dr. Hobbs said deceased was burned all over the upper part of the body, her face and arms being frightfully charred. A verdict of "Accidental death, caused by burning," was returned.

*Extract from the Walsall Observer February 19th, 1898*

Emma Beck was reported to have previously been arrested for being drunk in public twice, once in Sutton High Street and in Four Oaks Lane several years earlier.

**A DRUNKEN WOMAN.**—A married woman named Emma Beck, Four Oaks, was charged at the Sutton Police Court on Monday, before Mr H. Duncalfe, with being drunk in High-street on the 3rd inst.—The defendant was found in the street helplessly drunk by Police-constable Evans, she having fallen down and injured her face.—Defendant was let off on the payment of the costs, 4s.

*Extract from the Warwickshire Herald on June 8th, 1893*

### DRUNK.

**Emma Beck, no occupation, Four Oaks Common, Sutton Coldfield, was charged with being drunk in Four Oaks-lane, on the 28th ult.—Police-constable Hawkes said that at about a quarter to eight on the evening in question he saw the defendant very drunk, and could scarcely walk.—The defendant denied being “fresh,” and added that that was the first time she had been in a police court, and she hoped she would never come again.—The Chairman remarked that the Bench did not want to send the defendant to prison, but she had run very close to it. However, to give her another chance the present case would be dismissed.**

*Extract from the Warwickshire Herald on May 17th, 1888*

On February 24<sup>th</sup> 1898, the Warwickshire Herald featured a more detailed account of the inquest. The article is transcribed below however it has been redacted as its middle section contained irrelevant details on the swearing in process. The article was perhaps typical of Victorian reporting of the era as it appears to be somewhat tawdry with more than a hint of sensationalism.

### “AWFUL DEATH AT FOUR OAKS

One of the saddest and most distressing deaths it has been our duty to chronicle took place at Four Oaks on Sunday morning, the victim being a well known old woman named Emma Beck, 69 years of age. On Saturday night deceased and her husband came to Sutton to do some shopping and returned to their home about ten o'clock. Shortly after eleven Beck went upstairs to bed, leaving his wife sitting down stairs before a small fire. About two o'clock the next door neighbour Mrs. Carr, heard deceased moving about, and at three was awoke by hearing her screaming. She went to her bedroom window and saw deceased enveloped in flames. She at once partially dressed and went to the deceased, and with assistance succeeded in extinguishing the fire, but not before the deceased had been frightfully burned from her waist upwards—in fact we might say almost charred. They at once dressed her frightful injuries and sent for Dr. Fraser, who was quickly in attendance. Dr. Hobbes was also called, but both medical men at once saw that nothing could be done to save her life, and she lingered on in agony until about eight o'clock, when she passed away. The police were communicated with, and also the coroner (Dr. Iliffe).

### THE INQUEST

Was held on Wednesday at noon at the Park Tavern, before Dr. Iliffe, coroner for North Warwickshire.” *I've redacted the next section as it concerns irrelevant details on the swearing in process.*

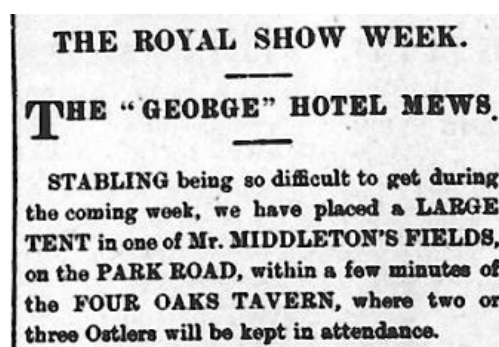
“and the first witness called was Edward Beck, labourer, and husband of the deceased. He said deceased was 69 or 70 years of age; he could not say which. She had been ailing for the last nine years—from the time her brother was killed. She was rather near sighted. On Saturday night they went to Sutton and on their return they entered the Park Tavern, where they remained until nearly closing up time. They then went home, and witness went to bed at 11.20. Deceased remained downstairs to see to the fire and other things, which she always did. He went to sleep and two or three hours later was awoke by deceased calling out, “Ned, I'm all on fire.” He ran down, and found deceased in flames. Deceased was sober, but was accustomed to have a little beer on Saturday or Sunday night. At Sutton she had four-pennyworth of whisky, but no more. He did not know what she had at the Park Tavern. —The Coroner: Were you both sober? —Witness: Yes sir. The poor creature had only fourpennyworth of whisky at Sutton and what she had at the inn I could not tell you how much she had there. I am sure she did not spend more than 1s. When I went to bed she was sitting by the fire. She always saw the fire clear before going to bed. —The Coroner: Had she not been warned several times that if she did what she did on Saturday she would either set the house on fire



or get burned? –Witness denied that she was the worse for beer that night. He found a candle on the hob when he came downstairs. –The Coroner: Having been cautioned that she would die when under the influence of drink from fire, might she not on Saturday been under the influence of drink, and while rocking about in the chair have caught her clothes on fire? –Witness: She might have. \_In reply to Mr. Field (a juryman), witness said he went to bed, as was his custom, before deceased. He could not say whether or not she made up the fire after he went to bed: but there was a good fire in the grate when he came down and a candle was on the hob. -Elizabeth Carr, a neighbour, said on Sunday morning she was awakened by the cracking of some coal at the back of deceased's fire grate. She lighted her lamp and found it was quarter past two. At about quarter to three she heard deceased scream two or three times. She jumped out of bed, and on looking out of the window saw deceased enveloped in flames. She held her arms up but the flames were above them. Deceased took a little beer only on Saturday nights, and she had been warned of the result if she did not desist. It was a quarter to three when she heard deceased scream. She never heard such screams and did not wish to again or see such a sight. -Dr. Hobbes of Sutton Coldfield, said he was called to the deceased on Sunday morning. He found that she had been burned all over the upper part of the body. The lower part was not burned, but all the other part was burned very deeply. He had warned her about her habits and that if she was not careful she would set the house on fire or burn herself. She was a woman of peculiar habits; always fond of sitting over the fire, especially at night. She was a weak woman and a pint of beer would overcome her. She never took much food. In his opinion, death was due from shock, caused by the burns. -The Coroner said there was no doubt this was one of the cases where they found people addicted to drink on Saturdays nights. They often sat down and fell asleep in their chairs in front of the fire, and at other times they got too near and caught their clothes on fire. There was no evidence to show that she was drunk. -A verdict of "Accidental death by burning" was returned by the jury. The house in which the deceased and her husband lived could not have been in a more dirty or filthy state, and the interior of no house in the slums of our adjacent city or in London could be much, if any, worse."

### The Four Oaks Hotel

A prestigious event took place in Four Oaks Park from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> June 1898, namely the 50<sup>th</sup> Annual Country Meeting of the Royal Agricultural Society of England. On June 18<sup>th</sup> 1898, this was advertised in the Walsall Advertiser as a "Great Show of horses, cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry, farm & dairy produce, implements etc." Also featured were; butter making demonstrations, competitions of shoeing smiths, daily parades of horse and cattle and the band of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Bedfordshire Regiment. Extra rail services between Wolverhampton, Willenhall, Walsall and Sutton Park (show ground station) were laid on. For those arriving by horse drawn transport, an enterprising landowner named Mr. Middleton offered stabling on his fields "on the Park Road, within a few minutes of the Four Oaks Tavern", stabling being supposedly in short supply during Royal Show Week. Presumably the proprietors of the Four Oaks Tavern were pleased to be mentioned in the advert during a time of increased visitors to the area.



*From the Walsall Advertiser June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1898*

In August 1898, the pub was refused an application to stay open an extra hour on the occasion of a cricket club dinner. The owner was given as Mrs. T. Shillcock, presumably Emma, wife of Thomas Shillcock as detailed in the 1901 census below.

An Extension of Time Refused.

Mrs. T. Shillcock, of the Four Oaks Tavern, applied for an extra hour for the night of the 20th inst., the occasion of the Cricket Club annual dinner.—The Chairman said the Bench must refuse the application. To grant it would not be just to the other publicans, several of whom they had previously refused a like extension.

*From the Warwickshire Herald August 18th, 1898*

The pub was mentioned in an article in the Walsall Advertiser dated January 7<sup>th</sup> 1899 entitled "A Chat With Mr. W. H. Westwood. Interesting Reminiscences". The article, authored by "The Tyke" is both lengthy and rambling and therefore too long for inclusion here.

The author starts off by admitting that, "Matters journalistic have been at almost a starvation point this week in Walsall". Perhaps this gave The Tyke cause to fill out column inches with some padding, of which there was plenty. The subject of the article was Mr. W. H. Westwood, the proprietor of the Grand Theatre up until the previous December. He had set up a company which was going to take over two Walsall theatres and was apparently a well-travelled and dapper gent who'd had a "decidedly unique career". He had been good cyclist and performed as a trick rider and decided to try ascending a spiral on a bicycle. He claims to have practised his act at the Park Tavern using specially made equipment.

and Ethardo also suggested this to him. Before he was twenty years of age Mr. Westwood decided upon having a try in this direction, and he went to live at Park Tavern, Four Oaks, where for two years he practised with a view to the feats which made him such an attraction in public performances. First of all he practised on the straight, increasing the gradient up and down, until he was able to ride his bicycle along planks from the yard of the inn over the stables and into the croft on the other side. He had his spiral frame built for him here, and gave his first public exhibition at Aston Cross at a Whitsuntide fête in 1872. This was a

*Extract from article featured in the Walsall Advertiser, January 7th, 1899.*

Apparently, his performance was successful and being a unique act, he was soon in demand, performing across England, Europe and eventually, America and Canada. He performed under the stage name "Leonati", derived from lion-hearted.

The article goes on to further describe his performing career leading up to the then present day. He had been managing theatres in Walsall since May 1885. From the article above, it would seem he lived at the Park Tavern around 1870.



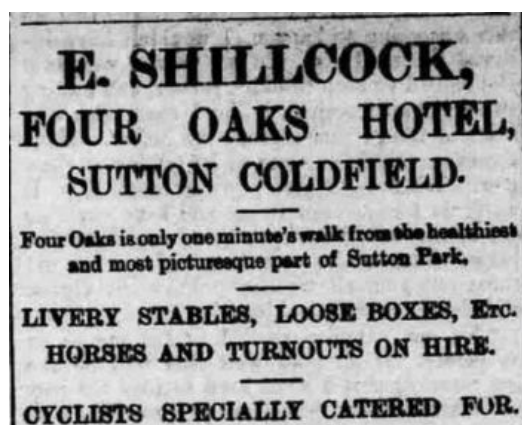
*Advert for Leonati's Show*

The licensee listed in the Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire for both 1900 and 1908 was Emma Shillcock, wife of Thomas Shillcock.

1901 census Four Oaks Hotel, Four Oaks Village

Thomas Shillcock	Head	M	39	Hotel Proprietor (Pub)	b Birmingham, Warks
Emma Shillcock	Wife	M	37		b Birmingham, Warks
Daisy Shillcock	Daughter	S	17		b Birmingham, Warks
Percy Shillcock	Son	S	16	Apprentice Electrician	b Birmingham, Warks
John Shillcock	Son	S	14		b Aston, Warks
May Shillcock	Daughter	S	12		b Aston, Warks
Albert Shillcock	Son		10		b Aston, Warks
George Shillcock	Son		7		b Handsworth, Staffs
Albert Gumbley	Bro in law	S	28	Barman	b Birmingham, Warks
Florry Gumbley	Sis in law	S	25	Nurse Sick	b Birmingham, Warks
Louisa Minott	Servant	S	50	Housekeeper	b Birmingham, Warks

According to the book 'The Public houses of Sutton Coldfield' (by Stephen Roberts), Emma Shillcock carried on the business after the death of her husband Thomas. The 1901 census indicates that Emma's brother Albert, worked as a barman at the pub.



*Advert featured in the Sutton Coldfield News on May 18th 1901, November 8th 1902 & November 7th 1903*





*Advert featured in the Sutton Coldfield News on July 4th 1908 & June 27th 1908*

The next licensee was Minton Edwin Toddington.

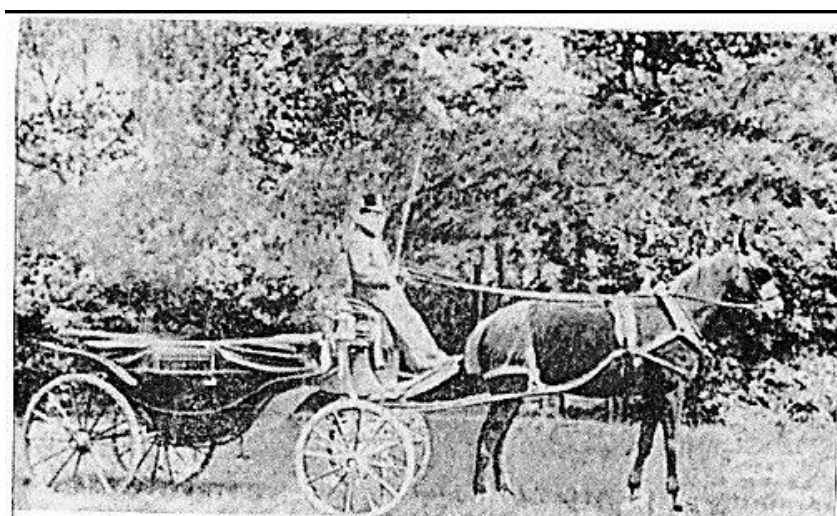
1911 census Four Oaks Hotel, Belwell Lane, Four Oaks

Minton Edwin Toddington	Head	M	40	Licensed Victualler	b Lilleshall, Salop
Annie Kate Toddington	Wife	M	34	Assisting in the business	b Harborne, Staffs
Mildred Gladys Toddington	Daughter		13	At school	b Harborne, Staffs
Victor Edwin Toddington	Son		3		b Harborne, Staffs
Katherine Gould	Servant	S	30	Barmaid	b Tipton, Staffs

The 1911 census recorded the building as having eleven rooms.

According to research done by Yvonne Moore, Minton moved from the Four Oaks Hotel to the Bradford Arms in Castle Bromwich in 1913. He later ran (among several other pubs) The Duke Inn in Sutton Coldfield.

Further research by Yvonne Moore, discovered that a local man named Frederick Beard used the Four Oaks Hotel to stable the horses he used for his taxi business. The 1911 census records him as living at 'Iona', Mere Green Road, Sutton Coldfield. He was 31 and a "Job Master own account", born in Sutton Coldfield and was married to Eunice Beard. He worked as a baker, chauffeur and delivery driver. His landau taxi was available for passengers from Four Oaks Station, and he kept two such vehicles and his horses at the Four Oaks Hotel. A landau was a horse-drawn four-wheeled enclosed carriage with a removable front cover and a back cover that could be raised and lowered. The photograph below was posted on Ancestry.com for public access – with thanks.



*Photo uploaded to Ancestry on 3 April 2010 by 'joanshowell73' – with thanks*

Sadly, Frederick was killed in action during the First World War on June 6th, 1918, while serving as a Private in the 33rd Battalion Machine Gun Corps.

By 1914, the pub was being run by a former jockey named Thomas Morley with his son-in-law Ernest Ogden working as a barman. This was not a happy arrangement as in May 1914, the pub was mentioned in local papers under below headlines.

**BETTING RAID AT SUTTON.**  
**CHARGE AGAINST HOTEL**  
**LICENSEE AND BARMAN.**

*Headlines from an article in the Birmingham Daily Post, May 27th 1914.*

On the 27th May 1914 the Birmingham Daily Post reported that;

"The Sutton Coldfield Magistrates had before them yesterday the three prisoners arrested at the Four Oaks hotel when the house was raided by the police on Tuesday. The Licensee, Thomas Morley, was charged with unlawfully suffering the licensed premises to be kept in contravention of the Betting Act 1853 by allowing them to be used by Ernest Ogden for the purpose of betting with person resorting hereto on various days in May; and Ernest Ogden, and Charles Wood, painter, Lower Queen Street, Sutton were charged on the same dates. Mr. F Mason (Messrs, Glassyer, Porter and Mason) was for the prosecution and Mr H. W. Willison (Messrs Philip Baker and Co.) for the defendants Morley and Ogden, whose cases were taken first. Both pleaded not guilty.

Mr. Mason explained that information reached the police which caused them to keep a watch on the house at the beginning of the month, and they enlisted the services of a person whose name it was not desired to make public, and who passed under the alias "Alfred Cheshire." He acted under the instructions of Detective-Sergeant Grant, and on May 5 he went to the house at about one o'clock, dressed as a workman, and apparently to eat his midday meal. No betting was seen on that day, but on the next day, May 6, the Chester Cup was run, and Cheshire, after a conversation with a man named Allsop handed him a slip with 6d. each way on a horse called "Aleppo," and Allsop passed the paper to Ogden. The horse won, the only win the police managed to bring home, and the next day Cheshire asked Ogden what there was to come and received 3s 9½d after a drink had been paid for. Later Ogden said he had paid out 1s too much and Cheshire returned it. There were other betting papers handed to Ogden on the 7th, 8th and 9th. On the 11th, Morley was in the bar and Cheshire saw no betting slips pass, but when Cheshire asked where Ogden was Morley replied, "If you want to see him you will have to come tomorrow." On the 12th there was more betting, but on the 13th, when Cheshire offered Ogden a bet, the latter said, "I cannot take it. I am giving it a rest this week." He again declined on the 14th, but on the 15th, he took slips from Cheshire and another man. On May 19th the house was raided, and on Ogden being searched twenty betting slips were found on him, while sixteen others were found in his bedroom, as well as two relating to Derby sweep stakes and a book of starting price rules.

Evidence was called up in collaboration of these facts and Detective-Sergeant Grant said that when at the time of the raid Morley saw the warrant and what was found on Ogden, he exclaimed "Good God! What is the meaning of this Ernie? How long has this been going on? It means ruin to me." He seemed genuinely surprised and upset.

Police-Inspector Lambourne also spoken to ten men being searched in the tap-room. On the prisoner Charles Wood were found five slips in his pockets and two others in a parcel of food, together with a wine list, a piece torn from which had been found among Ogden's betting slips. Witness agreed that Morley seemed genuinely surprised. He added, in reply to Mr. Willison, that it was correct that when Deputy Constable Hannah applied to the chief of police Youngstown U.S.A, in reference to certain characters Morley had put in when applied for the license, the reply came that they were all genuine and he "could have fifty more of the same kind," if necessary.

Mr. Willison submitted there was no evidence on which Morley could be "placed upon his answer"; he had not connived at the offence nor clothed Ogden with his authority. The point was discussed for over an hour, and the Bench decided against him.

For the defence Mr. Willison called Morley, who denied that he had any knowledge whatever of betting taking place at the house until the police raid. In reply to Mr. Mason, he said that in 1873 he was a jockey in Tom Green's stable in Beverley, Yorkshire and in 1893 he went to the States, and for two years rode as a jockey before entering the employ of Major Logan.

Mr. Willison contended that in spite of decisions in other cases, it would be possible to convict Ogden while dismissing the case against Morley, because Ogden acted as a barman, but then could not in strict law convict both.

After retiring, the Chairman said that the Bench had decided to ask Morley to pay £2 2s. costs. He should have given better oversight to the business. They found that Ogden had been absolutely deceiving his father-in-law and fined him £10 and £2 2s 6d costs, or one month\*.

The case against Wood was then taken. He pleaded guilty and was fined 20s and 12s costs, or fourteen days\*.

\*Although not stated in the article, I assume the durations refer to length of jail time to be served in lieu of payment of fines.

The above incident was also reported on in the Birmingham Daily Mail on May 26<sup>th</sup>, 1914. The wording of the article was exactly the same, but the headline read "Sutton betting Raid. Mr. Cheshire finds the Chester Cup winner." I imagine this incident caused some tension among the family.

On February 10<sup>th</sup> 1915, the Birmingham Daily Post reported that during the annual Brewster Sessions for the borough of Sutton Coldfield held the previous day, there were issues regarding the license of the Four Oaks Hotel. According to Deputy Chief Constable Hannah, "There was a certain half-door between the bar and the tap room of such a nature that it was impossible to exercise proper supervision of the tap room, and he asked the magistrates to insist upon the necessary alterations to be made." The alteration to the tap room was a requirement of the license being renewed. There was also a general warning to all licensees, "As to the indiscretion of serving soldiers in uniform and wounded, British, French and Belgian soldiers now staying in Sutton". As it had apparently been "a painful experience to see the disastrous results of what had been intended as kindness to these men but which was really quite a mistake and against the principles of kindness". A rather vague statement presumably arising from incidences of soldiers drinking too much and causing trouble.

It is unclear if the aforementioned betting raid cost Thomas Morley his job but by 1916, the Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire listed Thomas McDowall as the licensee. By 1921 however, William Hinton was running the pub.

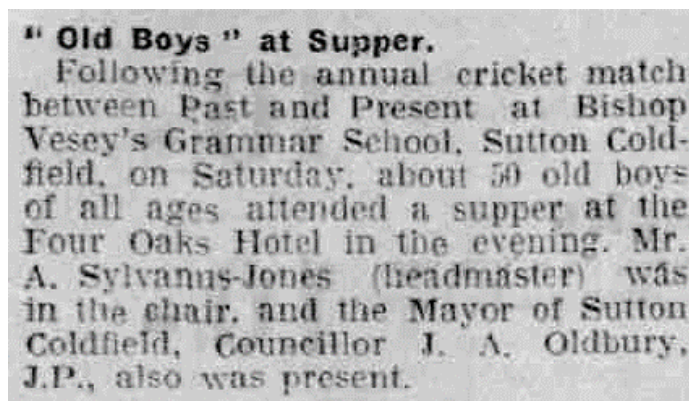
1921 census Four Oaks Hotel, Belwell Lane, Four Oaks

William Hinton	Head	M	57	Innkeeper	b Sneinton, Notts
Mary Ann Hinton	Wife	M	54	Home work	b Worcester
Lilian Hinton	Daughter	S	34	Work at Home	b Nottingham
Ethel Hinton	Daughter	S	32	Work at Home	b Nottingham
Constance May Hinton	Daughter	S	16	Apprentice ladies tailor	b Nottingham

The 1921 census records the building as having nine rooms.

William Hinton was listed as the licensee in the 1924 Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire.

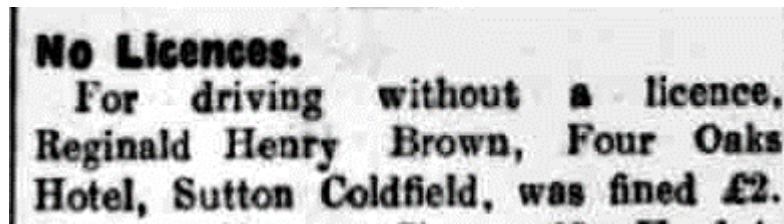
In 1931, the Evening Despatch reported that the pub hosted a supper for some Bishop Vesey old boys.



Clipping from the Evening Dispatch July 13th 1931



There is a subsequent gap in the available information until 1932 when Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire records Reginald Henry Brown as the licensee. He had been in charge of the pub the previous year as in 1931; Reginald Henry Brown had been fined for driving without a licence as reported in The Tribune.



*Clipping from The Tribune dated November 20th 1931*

Harry Alfred Hodgkinson was listed as the manager of the Four Oaks Hotel on the 1939 Register (a register taken in preparation for the outbreak of war) and in both the 1936 and 1940 editions of Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire. A later newspaper article from 1948 stated that Harry Alfred Hodgkinson had been running the pub since 1932.

1939 register Four Oaks Hotel, Belwell Lane, Sutton Coldfield

Harry A Hodgkinson	M	b 1898	Hotel Proprietor & Licensed Victualler
Elsie M Hodgkinson	M	b 1894	Unpaid domestic duties
Eva Bruce	W	b 1901	Barmaid
Claude H Clarke	M	b 1892	Manager at concrete works

On February 11<sup>th</sup> 1939, the Coventry Herald reported that on the previous Monday, "The Railway Bagatelle Club (from Berkswell) visited the Four Oaks Hotel, Sutton Coldfield, and a very enjoyable game resulted in a win for the home team". I had no idea what bagatelle is, but a quick internet search revealed that it's a game in which small balls are hit and then allowed to roll down a sloping board on which there are holes, each numbered with the score achieved if a ball goes into it, with pins acting as obstructions, a sort of a precursor to pinball.

On June 3rd 1940, the Birmingham Post reported on an outing for a large party of wounded soldiers. They went to New Hall, Sutton Coldfield, then to the Four Oaks Hotel where "tea was served on the lawns" and were finally received by the Mayor and Mayoress of Sutton Coldfield who "later conducted the party around Sutton Park".



*The Four Oaks Pub in the centre left of the photo, looking down Belwell Lane c1940 (Image courtesy Sutton Coldfield Reference Library)*

The pub featured in a news item in the Evening Despatch on September 14th, 1948. The news story is a little hard to follow but I believe the crux of the matter was that the barmaid was believed to have watered down some gin. The article, written by the papers "Sutton Coldfield Correspondent" read as below.

#### "WATER IN HER GIN WENT INTO BOTTLE

Barmaid Mrs. Eva Bruce told Sutton Coldfield magistrates today that she only liked minerals with gin. That was why, when a customer bought her a gin in the Four Oaks Hotel, Belwell Lane, Sutton Coldfield, where she worked, and added water to it, she put it on one side.

Later she put the drink back into the gin bottle- "We don't know why we do these things" she said. Her action cost the licensee, Mr. Harry Alfred Hodgkinson a fine of £20 with £2 4s. costs, for unlawfully selling gin adulterated with an excess of water.

At first Hodgkinson entered a plea of "Not guilty" but he changed it to "Guilty" because, he said, he realised he must take the responsibility for his employees.

Mr. L. P. Wallen, prosecuting said the chief sampling officer of Warwickshire County Council with three members of his staff, brought two double gins in the Four Oaks Hotel on 17 July. The gin was found to have 11.5 percent excess water.

#### *Implicit Trust*

Mr. John. S. Preston, the chief sampling officer, said informal samples taken in the hotel during May and June of this year were found to be adulterated. No proceedings had been taken.

Hodgkinson said he had been in the trade since 1926 and at Four Oaks since 1932. Mrs Bruce, who lived at the hotel, had been working for him for 19 years. She was a widow with two grandchildren, and he trusted her implicitly."

Harry Alfred Hodgkinson made the local press again in 1949 when The Evening Despatch reported on May 23<sup>rd</sup> 1949 that;

#### "TWO CRASHES COST EX-LICENSEE £30

A former licensee of the Four Oaks Hotel, Sutton Coldfield who was said to have driven along Church Hill Road and Hamstead Road, Handsworth, knocking down a man and then colliding with a lorry, was fined a total of £30 with one guinea costs, by the Birmingham Stipendiary (Lord Ilkeston) today.

He was Harry Alfred Hodgkinson of 5 Flamborough Close, Castle Bromwich, who admitted charges of driving while under the influence of drink, dangerous driving, and failing to stop after an accident. He was disqualified from driving for three years.

Mr. M. P. Pugh, prosecuting, said that on the afternoon of 13 May a man leading a horse in Church Hill Road was struck in the back by Hodgkinson's car, and knocked to the ground. He suffered a bruised leg and grazed forehead.

#### *Mounted Pavement*

Hodgkinson, who did not stop was seen shortly afterwards driving along Hamstead Road on the wrong side of the road. The driver of a van coming in the opposite direction had to mount the pavement to avoid a collision, and Hodgkinson went on and collided with a stationary lorry.

He again failed to stop, but the van driver followed him and eventually stopped him in Friary Road. Police officers were called, and Hodgkinson was taken to Thornhill Road Police Station where he was certified as being under the influence of drink.

Inspector Whittall said Hodgkinson had been a well-known licensee for many years. He had latterly been licensee of the Four Oaks Hotel, Sutton Coldfield. He was a man of excellent character.

### *Chances Prejudiced*

Mr. A. J. Hatwell (defending) said Hodgkinson had been a well-respected member of the licensed trade for very many years. He left the Four Oaks Hotel in January, and one of the city breweries had promised him another house, but this conviction might seriously prejudice his chances.

Hodgkinson, he said, was in ill-health, and his doctor had now advised him that he must not take drink and must not drive a car."

It appears that Mr. F. Cash was running the pub until the autumn of 1950.



*Clipping from The News October 28th 1950*

In September 1950, The Erdington News reported that Mr E.J. Bagley was the new proprietor of the Four Oaks Hotel. "Mr. E.J. Bagley licensee of the Roebuck Inn, High Street, Erdington, for the last ten years, has left to take over the Four Oaks Hotel, Belwell Lane, Sutton Coldfield. At a social gathering at the Roebuck, Mr. and Mrs. Bagley were presented with an inscribed barometer by Mr. H. Darkes on behalf of the Social Club of which Mr Bagley was president. Mr. V. Jones, vice-chairman also paid tribute. Picture (below) shows the presentation". It was later stated that, "Mr. Bagley has been in the licensed trade for about 14 years. He was at The Reddicap, Sutton Coldfield, three months after it opened 14 years ago. He remained there for about three years and then opened a new house, The Beacon hotel, at Burton, where he remained until coming to Erdington. He was born at Warley, Birmingham, and educated at Camberley, Surrey."



*Mr. Bagley receiving his leaving gift. Image taken from Erdington News September 23rd 1950*

A Sutton Coldfield Directory dating from circa 1955 (exact year of publication not known), recorded the building as "62 Belwell Lane Four Oaks Hotel (P.H.) (R. C. Merchant)".



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