

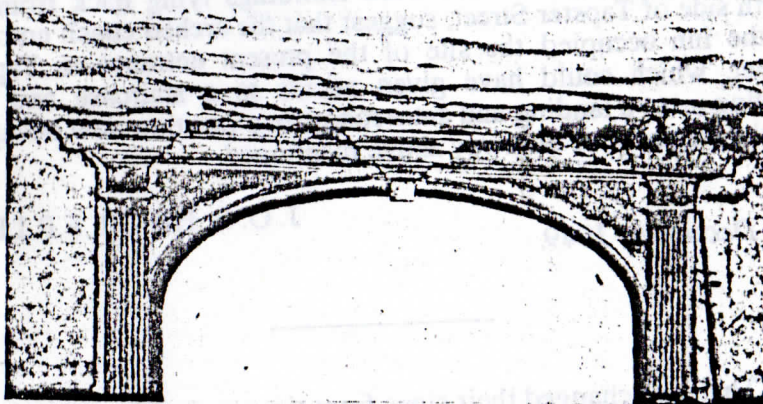
Barnet & District Local History Society

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Nos. 72, 74 and 76 High Street, Barnet

**Formerly the Old Red Lion,
later The Old Assembly Rooms**



Upon a recent survey made of the existing buildings by some members of the Society, little trace could be found of any remains of the "Assembly Rooms" that could be accepted as self-evident or completely reliable, but the following consideration, apart from the wording of Pepys' entry, would seem to indicate that the rooms were upon the first floor.

The roofs of Nos. 72, 74 and 76 High Street, standing upon the recognised site of the old inn, are, in the main, apparently the original roofs, and it may therefore be credibly accepted that at least the outer walls and main internal walls are, and are in, their original positions. From this inference, observation indicates that the only large space existing and able to contain a suite of Assembly Rooms is that constituting the upper floor over Nos. 72 and 74, High Street.

There is a good fragment (the upper part of an overdoor or

archway in the Georgian manner) on the south wall above the first-floor ceiling of No.76, High Street (see illustration), which is a typical example of what might well ornament the principal access to assembly rooms of that period, and, from its position, could well have given admittance from an approach stairway and ante-room to a "Great Room" situated in the upper part of the building over Mawers' and Sanders' shop (now Fritzch Continental Bakery), above alluded to.

The plan of the site of the old Red Lion Inn, given on the map attached to the Prospectus of Sale in the Barnet Museum, and the existing remains of the Inn Yard Buildings lying back from the north side of Tapster Street, suggest that the arched coach entrance to the inn occupied the site of the present entrance to Tapster Street, which could have given access to a staircase and hall leading up to a landing and ante-rooms in a position now occupied by the fragment of doorway above mentioned.

2nd December, 1949.

J. O. B. HITCH, F.R.I.B.A.

That inns changed their signs from time to time is well known, and caution is therefore required in tracing their history.

When the estate of the Monastery of St. Albans was being sold in 1553, Edward Taylor, with other property, bought "a great message or inn called The Red Lyon, in Chipping Barnet, and 27 acres of land in the occupation of Robert Pettyt". Although the subsequent owners have not been traced, there is reason to think that it stood on the site now occupied by Nos. 72, 74 and 76 High Street, Barnet. However that may be, it is certain that an inn called the Red Lyon stood next to No.78 (Hobley's Ltd. - now), in 1669, because that shop, then a cottage in the occupation of John Burgess, was described as "adjoining an inn called The Red Lyon on the south" and "the High Road from London to St. Albans on the west", and the same description was used in all subsequent records until 1865, although from 1799 it was amplified as "The Red Lyon and George".

Having thus fixed the northern boundary, take the southern boundary. Roger Deynty, of Chipping Barnet, on his death bed in 1611, bequeathed to his daughter, Ann, and son, Moses, a cottage and shop next to The Red Lyon, which can be identified as a house occupied in 1864 by James Hawkins Sayer, linen draper, now part of No.70, adjoining No.70 (Salmons).

The famous Samuel Pepys, riding on horseback, visited Barnet on 11th July and 5th August, 1664, stopping to drink water at the Physic Well. On Sunday, 11th August, 1667, Pepys set out before five o'clock in the morning "very cold all the way in the coach", and reached the Wells in Barnet by seven o'clock, and there found many people a-drinking, and says, "After drinking three glasses and the women nothing, we back by coach to Barnet, where to The Red Lyon where we 'light, and went up into the Great Room and there drank, and eat some of the best cheese-cakes that ever I ate in my life, and so took coach again, and W. Hewer, on horseback, with us, and so to Hatfield", where he went to church and afterwards dined.

When Pepys mentions the "Great Room upstairs", he must have referred to the room quoted in Col. Hitch's report.

The property was later owned by Thomas Moxon, apothecary, who died in 1775, and was sold by his Trustees in 1825. It was then called Barnet Assembly Room", in the occupation of King, ironmonger, and Sherlock cooper. It was a condition of the sale that the wall on the north side of the entrance in Tapster Street should be carried up to the roof as a party wall, thus dividing No.74 from the upper part of No.72 over the archway; the occupier of No.72 was Mrs. Robinson, linen draper.

In the "Barnet Gazette" for 14th August, 1858, is an account of the Assembly Rooms. written apparently by the editor and proprietor, W. Baldock. "Like other provincial towns, Barnet could boast its theatre; the room appropriated to this use is still standing in the High Street, near the Church, being the 'Great Room' now in the occupation of Mr Thimbleby, and used by him as a store room, for which its altitude and dimensions render it well adapted. It was until very recently always spoken of as 'The Old Assembly Room', having been originally built for holding public assemblies; it had a recessed orchestra, with a complete suit of

refreshment rooms and other appendages. It is spacious and lofty, lighted from the street by three large windows, and bears evident traces of having been in its time a handsome and well-proportioned saloon; and it was no doubt frequently called into requisition by the gay and fashionable visitors of the town and neighbourhood when Barnet Mineral Water was in the zenith of its fame.

"The Barnet Theatre was largely patronised in particular by the late much respected family of Wrotham Park and the then residents at Trent Park, by whom plays were frequently selected for performance 'By Special Desire'. Upon these occasions the manager usually presented his distinguished visitors with a programme of the entertainments of the evening, printed on white satin.

"Osborne's Company rented the theatre for many years, and had their annual season at Barnet, during which Incedon, Emery, and other theatrical celebrities of the day made their appearance on more than one occasion". "The theatre was very neatly fitted up after the London style; the fittings were taken down and sold nearly fifty years ago, from which period the drama rapidly declined in Barnet, and has now become obsolete. The last performance in this room took place on 30th March 1835, the pieces being *The Rivals*, 5th Act of *Richard III*, and *Timour the Tartar*, by a company of strollers of considerable ability, but whose exertions during a season of several weeks were nightly productive only of a beggarly account of empty benches".

W. McB. MARCHAM

December, 1948.

NOTE - The owners are proposing to demolish the top floor of No. 72 High Street Barnet.

The 'Archway' was subsequently donated to Barnet Museum in 19 ...

See also Bulletin No.18.