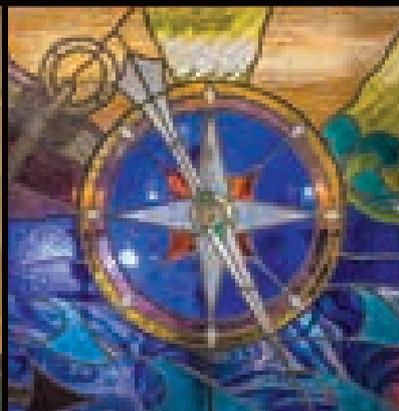


CASTLE HOTEL
CONWY

Castle Hotel

A BRIEF HISTORY

BY WILL SWALES



WELCOME

Welcome to a brief history of The Castle Hotel, Conwy, North Wales. During the late spring and early summer of 2016 we had the good fortune to be able to revitalise and refurbish one of our fabulous sister inns, The King's Head in Richmond, North Yorkshire.

During the planning stage of this project we started to look hard at the building and its many historical attributes, at how some parts of the building had been added during its 300 years of existence. And whilst contemplating the small changes and additions we wanted to make, it dawned on me that we will only be its custodians for a generation or two at most. I can't foretell who will follow but started thinking about who had been its keepers in the past.

Therefore, we asked a good friend if he would research The King's Head and try to separate the fact from the fable; what's true and what has been elaborated during the storytelling process over the years.

Will Swales made such a good job of The King's Head that we then asked him to complete the same task for The Castle Hotel.

What follows is that research. We think it's as accurate as can be, but naturally there are many gaps and we would welcome any additional information.

I hope you enjoy this small booklet and the hospitality and service we provide within The Castle Hotel. We are now busy researching the other inns we own and operate within our group and hope that eventually we will have all our inns within one publication, but until then please feel free to take this copy with you.

Kevin Charity
Managing Director
The Coaching Inn Group

www.coachinginngroup.co.uk





“EACH OF CONWAY’S THREE BRIDGES WAS CELEBRATED AT THE CASTLE HOTEL.”



THE CASTLE HOTEL AND THE KING'S HEAD INN

The story of The Castle Hotel, in High Street, Conwy, is entwined with that of its former next-door neighbour, The King's Head Inn, which was on the downhill side of The Castle Hotel's red-sandstone archway.

The two establishments merged in 1884, but previously they were associated with different phases in the development of the town as a resting place on the strategic route along the North Wales coast. The earlier of the two inns by far was The King's Head, which it is thought could date from Elizabethan times.

A writer in 1860 noted that it was 'now modernised but retaining traces of its antiquity', and was the place 'where rested in former times a large proportion of the travellers between Chester and Holyhead'.



The King's Head building and the archway linking it to The Castle Hotel.

THE CHESTER–HOLYHEAD ROAD AND THE CONWY FERRY

The importance of the road between Chester and Holyhead can be dated from 1576 when Queen Elizabeth I decreed that the sea-port used for the weekly mail service between London and Dublin should be switched from Liverpool to Holyhead because of its shorter and faster crossing of the Irish Sea.

Thus Conwy became a vital staging post for refreshing the mail-carriers and their horses, and a designated town for the collection and distribution of mail.

The route was significantly improved in the mid-1700s through the construction of maintained toll roads, known as turnpikes. But the journey continued to have significant difficulties, not least two ferry crossings. One was over the Menai Strait between Bangor and Anglesey.

The other, known to be highly dangerous in bad weather conditions, was over the River Conwy at Conwy. Here the ferries operated effectively only when the tide was high enough to fill the estuary, which sometimes meant waiting for a crossing in the middle of the night.



The Conwy ferry in 1795. Drawing by Edward Pugh (1761 – 1813). © The National Library of Wales.

KING'S HEAD OVERTAKEN AS THE TOWN'S PRINCIPAL INN



John Varley's 1809 painting 'The Welsh Harp Inn, Conwy' shows in the foreground the timber-framed house that would become the site of a later part of The Castle Inn.
© The National Library of Wales.

Improved roads heralded the era of long-distance travel by coach, serving the needs of commerce and the new pastime of tourism. This in turn prompted the emergence of coaching inns, providing better standards of hospitality.

A new inn that quickly rose to prominence in Conwy was The Harp Inn, in High Street. It is thought to have been erected in 1770, and was on the same side as The King's Head, three doors up the hill. Local newspaper reports from around the 1780s clearly indicate that The Harp Inn emerged as the town's new principal coaching inn, while The King's Head started to diminish in importance.

In 1798 the first survey of roads commissioned by the Postmaster General, published as 'John Cary's New Itinerary of the Great Roads throughout England and Wales', listed The Harp Inn as Conwy's only post-house for changing horses. Several tourists of the late 1700s and early 1800s kept diaries containing recollections of staying at The Harp Inn, and of being entertained by a resident Welsh harpist.

This probably explains the title of a watercolour painting 'The Welsh Harp Inn, Conwy', dated 1809, by John Varley. It is one of a series of studies he made of High Street, Conwy. Curiously the title of the painting refers to the building in the background, which has a traditional gallows inn-sign depicting a harp. The Harp Inn was enlarged in later years and traded until 1936 when it was demolished to make way for a shop. The more interesting building in Varley's painting was the late-medieval, timber-framed house in the foreground, which was on the site of what would later become part of The Castle Inn.

TELFORD'S PLAN TO BRIDGE THE RIVER CONWY

The unification of Britain and Ireland in 1800 compelled the government to improve communications between the major English cities and Dublin, and in particular to provide a faster, daily delivery service for the mail between London and the Irish capital.

The government committed to fund the improvement of the key roads, and hired the great engineer Thomas Telford for the task. His priority for North Wales was to develop a shorter route from London to Bangor, going via Shrewsbury and Betws-y-Coed, thus cutting out Chester and Conwy. Key to its success would be the construction of a bridge at Bangor across the Menai Strait.

However, Telford also made a case for improving the traditional route from Chester along the North Wales coast, in order to boost links between Dublin and the important industrial towns and cities of northern England. It included a plan to build a bridge over the River Conwy at Conwy. Initially the government had major concerns over the cost, but after lobbying by powerful northern industrialists, and the submission of a revised, cheaper bridge plan by Telford, the scheme for the Chester-to-Holyhead improvement was approved in full in 1821. Work on the roads and bridges for both the Shrewsbury and Chester routes began almost immediately.

Nothing is known of The Castle Inn at this time. It existed, but for some reason had not attracted the attention of diarists and newspaper writers. However, someone had the idea that the coming of the bridge and the new road was the perfect time to transform The Castle Inn into the town's newest premier coaching inn.



Thomas Telford. Engraving by William Raddon, after Samuel Lane, 1831. © National Portrait Gallery.

THE CASTLE INN BEFORE IT WAS ENLARGED

The earliest glimpse of The Castle Inn before Telford's bridge is probably seen in another of John Varley's studies of Conwy. It's dated 1803 and shows a view down High Street towards the river.



High Street, Conwy, in 1803, by John Varley. Just visible on the right appears to be a three-storey building of The Castle Inn before it was expanded. With thanks to the Paul Mellon Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

The large timber-framed building on the left of Varley's painting of The Harp Inn is now seen on the right. The next building down the street, which appears to be a three-storey Georgian building, must have been The Castle Inn before it was expanded.

In 'The History and Antiquities of the Town of Aberconwy and its Neighbourhood', published in 1835, Rev. Robert Williams described some of the grand old town-houses in Conwy, and noted that: 'A large building of the same kind was taken down in 1823 when erecting the addition to the Castle Inn.'

It seems clear that the large house featured in the two paintings by John Varley is the one that was demolished, and that made way for The Castle Inn to be doubled in size, filling the space between The King's Head and The Harp Inn.

It isn't known who was responsible for the expansion of The Castle Inn, but there is a good chance it was the first recorded occupants of the new premises, Samuel and Cordelia Owen. In 1825 they were both aged 31 and had a daughter aged about seven.

THE NEW CASTLE INN AND THE NEW BRIDGE

In a newspaper announcement of 7 June 1825, underneath the heading 'Castle Inn, Conway', it was stated that 'Cordelia Owen begs leave most respectfully to inform the nobility, gentry, commercial travellers and the public in general that she has lately entered upon the above inn, which is most desirably and conveniently situated in the centre of the town, having the Chester and Holyhead new line of road passing in front of the house.'

Telford's suspension bridge at Conwy opened on 1 July 1826, just five months after the opening of the bridge over the Menai Strait. On the big day at Conwy, a marching band led the Chester-Holyhead mail coach across the bridge, followed by a procession of local dignitaries in their private carriages and coaches.

Telford didn't attend, but local newspapers reported that the supplier of the ironwork, the then-famous iron founder and structural engineer, William Hazledine, chaired a celebratory dinner hosted that day by Cordelia Owen at The Castle Inn. It was attended by 'those gentlemen immediately connected with the work'.

Within two years, trade directories and newspapers started to record Samuel Owen as the proprietor of The Castle Inn. From 1831 The Castle Inn started to be recorded as The Castle 'Hotel' – a term that was becoming popular to denote superiority over traditional inns.

In 'Wanderings and Excursions in North Wales', published in 1836, Thomas Roscoe recalled recently arriving at The Castle Inn and finding 'it has been rebuilt and rendered more commodious and comfortable since I visited Conway some years before.'



Invoice from 1840 for Samuel Owen's Castle Hotel, featuring a popular image of Telford's bridge.

ROYAL SUPERSTARS CONFIRM THE HOTEL'S TOP POSITION



Princess Victoria and the Duchess of Kent. Lithograph by Richard James Lane, 1834. © National Portrait Gallery.

"...the streets were festooned with welcoming banners and triumphal arches of green boughs and flowers."

Any lingering doubts over whether The Castle Hotel had become the premier establishment in Conwy were dispelled in 1832 when Samuel and Cordelia Owen played host to the widowed Duchess of Kent and her daughter, the 13-year-old Princess Victoria.

Successive deaths in the royal family had only recently caused the teenager to be elevated to the status of 'heir presumptive' to the throne. In the event of the aging King William IV dying while Victoria was still a minor, the glamorous duchess would be temporary regent. Therefore she and the teenage princess were the superstar royals of the day, and their summer visit to North Wales was headline news.

On 13 August the royal party sailed from Beaumaris in Anglesey on board the steam vessel Menai. On arriving in the River Conwy they transferred to a pinnacle of the royal family's lesser sailing vessel, the cutter Emerald, which was already anchored in the river. Ten oarsmen rowed them to the quayside and then they walked through the town to visit the castle. It was reported that the streets were festooned with welcoming banners and triumphal arches of green boughs and flowers.

Their royal highnesses were greeted at the castle by a deputation of 24 leading gentlemen of the town, including Samuel Owen. There were speeches and a tour of the castle, after which the royal party proceeded to The Castle Hotel for lunch, about which the press reported: 'The collation was served up in a very elegant style by Mrs Owen, the landlady, who as well as her husband, was most assiduous in attention to their illustrious guests.'

After lunch the royals walked again through the town to the cheers of adoring crowds and then boarded a coach for the return journey to Beaumaris. Four days later, the leading gentlemen of Conwy dined at The Castle Hotel to celebrate the birthday of the Duchess of Kent, while a royal salute was fired at Conwy Castle.

SAMUEL OWEN'S EXPANSION IN HOTELS AND COACHES

In the years following the royal visit, news reports and press notices show that Samuel Owen embarked upon a frantic expansion of his business interests.

He took on The King's Arms Hotel at Cernioge Mawr. It was on the Shrewsbury-to-Bangor road, and it came with an adjoining farm of 630 acres. He also bought a lodging house in Conwy, and got involved in race-horse breeding. But most importantly of all he invested in coaching businesses.

In 1834 he became a partner in the new Tourist Coach operating between Conwy and Caernarfon. It went via LLanrwst, Betws-y-Coed, Capel Curig, and Llanberis, and boasted 'scenery unrivalled in the world', while for locals and business travellers it also made important connections with a much wider transport network. At Caernarfon, coaches connected to destinations in South Wales; Conwy was connected to the north of England; and at Capel Curig, and Betws-y-Coed there were coaches to Shrewsbury and London.

By 1838 Samuel Owen was the principal owner of The Tourist Coach and had taken a share in a new service running from Caernarfon to Liverpool via Conwy. He was also a partner in a coach called The Wonder, which competed on the road between Shrewsbury and Holyhead.

Meanwhile Cordelia Owen kept up the reputation of the couple's home business at The Castle Hotel. In 'A Pedestrian's Guide through North Wales', published in 1838, G J Bennett noted of Conwy that, 'The principal inn is The Castle, which affords every accommodation the traveller can desire.'

Samuel and Cordelia Owen must have thought their success was unstoppable. But there was trouble ahead. From 1837 the UK economy went into decline, which according to one historian would develop over the years to 1844 into 'the worst economic depression that had ever afflicted the British people.'



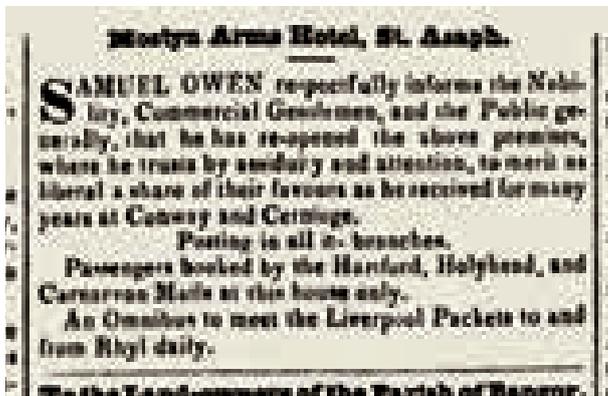
North Wales Chronicle, 7 August 1838. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

SAMUEL OWEN'S SLIDE INTO BANKRUPTCY

"...an omnibus service that ran to Rhyl to meet a daily steam packet to and from Liverpool."

Samuel Owen's financial troubles first emerged in 1839 when he was sued by his partner in The Wonder coach service for non-payment of a debt. A court heard that he owed £280 for horses and harnesses sold to him to run the coach on his portion of the road. The outcome of the case isn't known.

In January 1840 Samuel Owen tried to let the inn and farm at Cernioge Mawr, but apparently without success because two months later he offered for sale by auction all the beds, carpets, curtains, furniture, fittings, and wet-stock of the inn together with the entire livestock and equipment of the farm, including scores of horses, cattle, pigs, and 1,350 sheep. Seemingly the land and the buildings were not his to sell.



North Wales Chronicle 30 June 1840. © The British Library Board. All rights reserved. With thanks to the British Newspaper Archive, www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

It was not yet a complete financial crisis because in June 1840 Samuel Owen announced in the press that he had taken over and was reopening The Mostyn Arms at St Asaph, on the road between Conwy and Chester. It served mail coaches running between Chester and Caernarfon, and also had an omnibus service that ran to Rhyl to meet a daily steam packet to and from Liverpool.

However, it proved not to be the solution to Samuel Owen's problems because according to a diary kept by Thomas Roberts, the postmaster of Conwy at the time, The Castle Hotel was sold in November 1841. It seems likely that it was bought by a well-known North Wales landowner, Colonel Thomas Peers Williams, of Craig-y-Don, Anglesey, whose estate is later

found to be the owner of The Castle Hotel, as well as The King's Head and several other licensed premises in Conwy.

It soon becomes clear from local reports that Samuel and Cordelia Owen were retained as the tenant innkeepers, even after it was reported in the press in February 1842 that Samuel Owen had been declared bankrupt.

THE CASTLE HOTEL'S COACH SERVICES IN 1844

Slater's Trade Directory of North Wales for 1844 confirmed that The Castle Hotel was still controlled by Samuel Owen, no doubt mainly thanks to the sterling efforts of his wife Cordelia.

The hotel was also recorded as the posting house for two Royal Mail coach services passing through Conwy, each stopping in both directions to change horses and allow staff and passengers to be refreshed. The daily timetable was:

12.00 – Chester to Caernarfon

13.00 – Caernarfon to Chester

22.00 – Holyhead to Chester

02.00 – Chester to Holyhead

According to the directory, no other inn or hotel in Conwy acted as a posting house for through coach services. The Harp Inn was listed as the terminus for a coach that ran three days a week, to Voryd Harbour, Rhyl, to meet the steam packet to Liverpool, returning each following day.

THE KING'S HEAD'S REPUTATION FOR FIGHTING

The King's Head was listed in the 1844 directory as one of the town's taverns. According to a history published in 1939, elderly customers recalled that old timers from their youth, whose memories might have stretched back to the 1840s, spoke of a cock-pit at the rear of the inn.

Cock fighting had been a sport of gentlemen in the 1700s, so the existence of a pit at The King's Head was an indication of past glories. But cock-fighting was banned in 1835, and only continued under the auspices of the criminal classes. It was also said that The King's Head cock-pit had become a place where gipsies settled their differences with fist-fights.



A typical mail-coach scene of the period.

‘FATHER OF THE RAILWAYS’ IS AN HONOURED GUEST



George Stephenson.



Robert Stephenson. Mezzotint engraving by John Richardson Jackson, 1846. © National Portrait Gallery.

The passing in 1844 of the Chester and Holyhead Railway Act signalled the impending death-knell for the coaching services on the Chester-to-Holyhead road.

Leading railway engineer Robert Stephenson, famed for designing and building the steam locomotive Rocket, was commissioned to build the new line, which would involve constructing new bridges over the River Conwy and the Menai Strait.

Stephenson's bridge at Conwy was the first application of his revolutionary design using a pre-constructed cast-iron tube which was delivered in sections by rafts on the river. Dubbed the Tubular Bridge, the nation's media reported every stage of its construction. It was completed in April 1848, allowing the line from Chester to be opened as far as Conwy early in May, and prompting the organisation of a celebratory dinner at The Castle Hotel.

A pavilion measuring 75 by 25 feet was erected at the rear of the hotel especially for the event, which was attended by 120 gentlemen. Decorations included giant letters R and S formed in illuminated coloured lamps and garlanded with laurels. A party of glee singers from Liverpool was engaged to entertain the diners.

Robert Stephenson was the guest of honour alongside his even-more-celebrated father George Stephenson, who was considered a national hero and was known as the Father of the Railways. Both father and son gave speeches outlining the remarkable achievements of the age, in which they had both been consistently at the forefront of innovation. The Castle Hotel dinner was one of George Stephenson's last public appearances. Shortly afterwards he contracted pleurisy and died in August 1848, aged 67.

From the same month, the first trains started carrying the mail between Chester and Holyhead, bringing an abrupt halt to the mail-coach trade at The Castle Hotel. However, there were still opportunities in coaching. In that same summer, Samuel Owen and a John Owen of The Eagles Hotel, Llanrwst, launched a four-horse coach service between the two hotels, timed to connect to the trains passing through Conwy.

Samuel and Cordelia Owen gave up the tenancy of The Castle Hotel in 1861, by which time they were both approaching 70.

PRINCE ARTHUR CALLS IN

From at least 1863 The Castle Hotel was let to Mrs Margaret Kertland, who had the pleasure in August that year of entertaining a royal visitor – 13-year-old Prince Arthur, the seventh child and third son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

Coincidentally, Prince Arthur was the same age as his mother had been on her visit to The Castle Hotel 31 years earlier. Newspapers reported that the prince visited the town's castle, and then after lunch at The Castle Hotel he received a visit there from a Conwy resident, Mrs Hughes, who had previously lived in the royal household for 12 months while serving as wet-nurse to the prince's sister, Princess Beatrice.

Mrs Kertland's tenure at The Castle Hotel did not end well. She filed for bankruptcy in January 1868.



Prince Arthur. Photograph by Hills & Saunders, 1864.
© National Portrait Gallery.

SARAH DUTTON TAKES CHARGE

From at least 1869 The Castle Hotel was run by a remarkable young entrepreneur, Sarah Dutton, supported by her younger sister Emma.

In that year they were aged 26 and 23. They took on the tenancy of the hotel and of Mount Farm, an 18-acre holding on the Upper Gyffin Road, just outside the town.

Known in Conwy as 'the Misses Dutton', they came from Bridgnorth in Shropshire. Their parents, William and Maria Dutton, moved into the hotel with them. Maria died there in 1871 and was buried in the churchyard of St Agnes, Conwy. In 1874 Emma Dutton married David Richards, a joint owner of Richards Brothers, brewers of Shrewsbury. From then onwards Sarah, or 'Miss Dutton', ran The Castle Hotel and Mount Farm on her own. She would never marry.

"...The Castle Hotel was run by a remarkable young entrepreneur..."



The Castle Hotel's bar seating area.



SARAH DUTTON BUYS TWO FREEHOLDS

In February 1884, the then owner of The Castle Hotel, Colonel Owen Cope Williams, of the Craig-y-Don Estate, Anglesey, advertised a forthcoming auction of large swathes of his land and numerous properties in various parts of North Wales.

The lots in Conwy included The Castle Hotel, The King's Head, The Black Horse, The Red Lion, and The Royal Oak. The sale would take place at The Castle Hotel, Conwy, over three days in late June. Before the auction, Sarah Dutton bought The Castle Hotel privately for an unknown sum. Then at the auction she successfully bid £400 for The King's Head.

The old inn was five years into an 80-year lease to Jones, Lloyd and Co., brewers, of Mold in Flintshire. However, at the licence renewal hearing in September 1884 the local police inspector complained of 'general bad conduct' at The King's Head, adding that, 'The house was not required. It was only a low pot-house, and was used for the lowest traffic in the town.' The magistrates refused the licence.

The brewery had no further use for the property and so presumably surrendered the lease to Sarah Dutton. It seems that she simply incorporated The King's Head building into The Castle Hotel, reopening the bars as The Castle Hotel's new tap room and smoke room, later known as The Castle Vaults, and incorporating the bedrooms by knocking through on the first floor above the archway between the two premises.

"The King's Head...
was only a low pot
house, and was used
for the lowest traffic
in the town."

SISTER EMMA RE-ENTERS THE TRADE — AND A TWIST OF FATE

In 1884 Sarah Dutton's sister, Emma Richards, formerly joint host of The Castle Hotel, re-entered the hotel trade. Her husband David resigned from his family's brewery, Richards Brothers, of Shrewsbury, and the couple took over The Royal Oak Hotel, Welshpool, Montgomeryshire, which coincidentally is now another of the hotels in the Coaching Inn Group.



THE ROYAL CAMBRIAN ACADEMY OF ART



Plas Mawr, drawn by Arthur Baker and first published in The Graphic newspaper in 1887.

Since the railways had created easier access to the countryside, the valley of the River Conwy had become the haunt of many leading artists, especially those hailing from the north-west of England.

A group of the most distinguished of them formed an academy, which in 1882, at the command of Queen Victoria, was renamed the Royal Cambrian Academy of Art. In 1885 it opened a new base and gallery in the Tudor mansion of Plas Mawr (Great Hall), in High Street, Conway, almost opposite The Castle Hotel.

THE DUTTON FAMILY AND THE ARTISTS OF THE CONWY VALLEY

In 1883 Sarah Dutton and her younger brother, Thomas, took a 99-year lease on The Belle Vue Hotel in the heart of the Conwy Valley, overlooking the river at Trefriw.

Thomas and his wife Mary, who had been living with their young children at The Castle Hotel, moved to Trefriw to run the new enterprise.

Thomas Dutton quickly established himself as a distinguished host and as one of the leading patrons of the Conwy Valley artists. In August 1886, the Liverpool Mercury described the Belle Vue as 'a storehouse of art', reporting that 'the walls are covered with pictures, chiefly in water colour, of the sweetest spots in the neighbourhood, by artists of distinction; the panels of the doors and shutters of the windows are filled with floral devices and Shakespearian and other figures.'

In other newspaper reports The Belle Vue was called the 'Artists' Home' and an 'Art Palace'. Among the artists favoured by Thomas Dutton was Buckley Ousey, who was to play an important role in the stories of both The Belle Vue Hotel and The Castle Hotel.

BUCKLEY OUSEY AND THE DUTTON COMMISSIONS

Buckley Ousey came from Stalybridge, near Manchester. He arrived in the Conwy Valley in 1884 when he was aged 32, and settled with relatives in the village of Rowen, not far from Thomas Dutton's Belle Vue Hotel at Trefriw.

From 1885 Ousey was away for 18 months studying art in Antwerp. He suffered severe ill-health, and by the time of his return to the UK in 1887 he probably already knew he was dying. He established a new home in the town of Conwy, and immediately obtained a number of lucrative commissions.

It must have been around 1887 – 88 that Sarah Dutton commissioned Buckley Ousey to create paintings for The Castle Hotel. Many of them can still be admired today in their original settings, on furniture and on the door panels of the public rooms. Together they represent probably the largest collection of Ousey's work currently available on public view. He died on 3 February 1889, aged 36, leaving a widow and six children.

A much larger collection of 47 Buckley Ousey paintings, now held privately, is known to have been part of group that was probably also painted around 1887 – 88 and commissioned by Thomas Dutton. A newspaper report of the period described Dutton's Belle Vue Hotel as 'all covered with the works of Mr Ousey'. Thomas Dutton would later take this collection with him to the Gogarth Abbey Hotel in Llandudno, where he incorporated them within new wall panels. An eminent commentary on them published in 1904 stated:

'Those that illustrate Welsh scenery show acute observation and a fine perception of choice colour. Others, which represent Shakespearian characters and romantic imaginary scenes, are the work of a man of considerable reading and fertile invention.

'There can be little doubt that Ousey, but for his premature death, would have surmounted the drawbacks of his early career and made a considerable reputation in art.'



An example of Ousey's work, circa 1887 – 89, at The Castle Hotel.

JOHN DAWSON WATSON AND HIS CASTLE HOTEL COLLECTION



John Dawson Watson self-portrait.

The artist most prominently associated with The Castle Hotel is John Dawson Watson. A native of Sedbergh in Yorkshire, he was a graduate of Manchester School of Art and of the Royal Academy in London.

During the 1860s and 70s he became a nationally recognised artist, noted for his knowledge and expertise in historical dress, and for designing theatrical costumes.

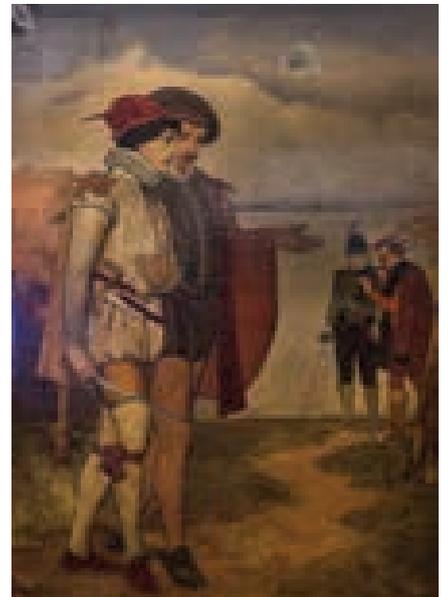
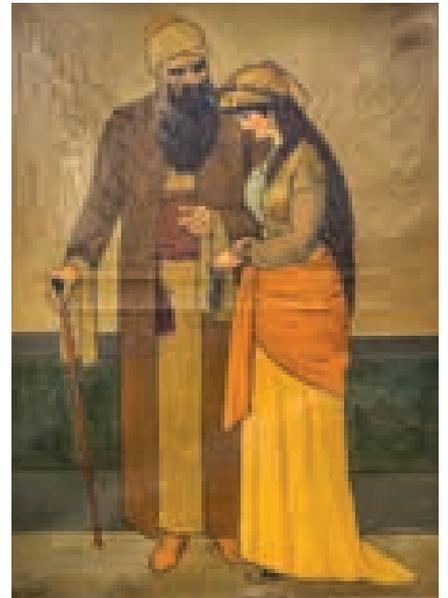
In 1884, when he was aged 52, he left his London base to live and work in Conwy. He obtained early commissions from Thomas Dutton. Press reports confirm that his paintings were displayed at The Belle Vue Hotel, Trefriw, from at least 1886. They were later described in the press as: 'some of the best specimens of Mr Watson's portraits of children and [his] lighter work.'

It becomes clear that Watson also provided a large number of paintings for The Castle Hotel from around this time. When work on a major remodelling of the building began in 1891 he was engaged to provide yet more works, many of which remain in the hotel, and some of which are signed and dated to that year. It turned out to be the last year of his life. He died of a respiratory infection on 3 January 1892, aged 59, and was buried at the St Agnes cemetery, Conwy.

The parish burial register recorded his abode as a house named Plas Uchaf (Upper Hall), but one newspaper obituary reported that he had been living at The Castle Hotel for the previous two and a half years. An unsubstantiated story that his paintings were provided in lieu of board and lodging is therefore plausible, although rather than being made under financial duress, as has been suggested, it was perhaps merely an agreement that sensibly benefited both parties.

Of the many works John Dawson Watson provided for The Castle Hotel, the majority remain on display in the public rooms today.

In later years a large collection of Watson's sketches dating back to his prime as a developing artist was donated to the hotel, so that today there are more than 60 of his works decorating all the public rooms. It is undoubtedly the largest permanent public display of his work to be found anywhere.



1	3
2	4

- 1: 'A marriage procession in the time of Henry VIII', one of the finest works by John Dawson Watson on display in The Castle Snug.
- 2: An unfinished watercolour copy of one of Watson's most famous earlier oil paintings, the Yeoman's Wedding.
- 3: Shylock and Jessica from Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice.
- 4: The duel scene from Shakespeare's Twelfth Night.

JACOBEOAN STYLE FOR THE GRAND NEW FAÇADE



"...the creator of some of the most luxurious edifices in north-west England and North Wales."

Sarah Dutton's major remodelling of The Castle Hotel, completed in 1891, was clearly planned to enhance further the already peerless reputation of the establishment. And so in choosing an architect for the project she hired the best in the region.

John Douglas, of Chester, did much work for the Cheshire estate of the Duke of Westminster, and had already established his name as the creator of some of the most luxurious edifices in north-west England and North Wales. Noted for his work on large houses and public buildings, especially churches, Douglas was a prominent revivalist. Much of his work favoured the Gothic style, sometimes called Victorian Gothic, and as a leader of the so-called Chester black-and-white movement he was responsible for many of the Mock Tudor buildings that now characterise the city centre.

Douglas's extravagant design for a completely new and grand facade at The Castle Hotel has been described as a Renaissance revival, or more precisely a Neo-Jacobean style. There is evidence that work started on the designs as early as 1885, but they would not be finally approved by the council for another six years. Only a single detail drawing survives in the Conwy Archives but the heading of the original file describes the whole project as, 'New front and additions to coffee room for Miss Dutton,' and is dated 10 December 1890.

BESPOKE AND INTRICATE DESIGN FEATURES

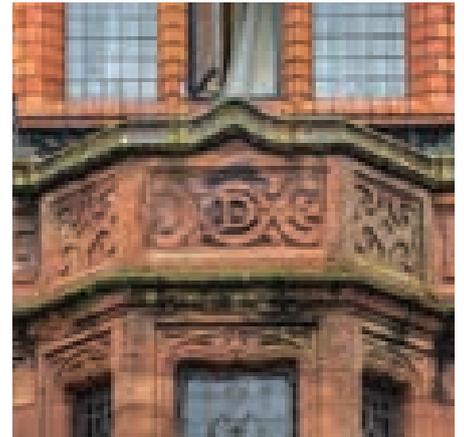


Douglas's striking design for the façade of The Castle Hotel combines contemporary ideas with classical influences.

The largest element was a new portico at the front of the building, rising two storeys high, and with a base that was originally planned to project across the full width of the public pavement. The council initially rejected this design in December 1890, by one vote, and ordered that it should project no farther than the bay windows it was replacing.

Columns on each side of the portico's arched entrance are topped by carved, shield-bearing lions. Between them an ornate corbel supports a first-floor oriel window. Above the window is a parapet that bears the words 'CASTLE HOTEL', and centrally, between the two words, is a design featuring a letter 'D' for Dutton.

To the right of the portico, between the ground and first-floor windows, is a decorative panel featuring at its centre the mirrored and linked letters 'C' for Conwy and Caernarfonshire. On the left is the castle-and-river motif of the arms of Conwy town, and to the right is a coat of arms featuring three golden eagles, traditionally associated with the 12th-century king of North Wales, Owain Gwynedd, and supposedly emblazoned on the banners of the men of Caernarfonshire at the Battle of Agincourt.



Left: A panel honouring the town of Conwy and the county of Caernarfonshire.

Right: D for Dutton on the parapet above the oriel window.

Opposite: Striking facade designed by John Douglas and erected in 1891.

END OF AN ERA



Each of Conwy's three bridges was celebrated at The Castle Hotel.

Sarah Dutton died on 16 November 1920 at the age of 84, after running The Castle Hotel for more than 50 years. Her estate went to her brother Thomas, then running the Gogarth Abbey Hotel at Llandudno. He died in November 1923, leaving everything to his widow Mary, who then had control of three hotels in North Wales. She died in March 1929, after which the then-named Dutton Group of hotels was broken up. The Castle Hotel was acquired in 1931 by an organisation emerging as the country's first national hotel chain, Trust Houses Ltd.

ANOTHER ROAD-BRIDGE

On 4 February 1955, the Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation, John Boyd Carpenter, was guest of honour for a lunch at The Castle Hotel to celebrate his cutting of the first sod in the construction of a new road bridge to be built across the River Conwy.

The new bridge was opened in December 1958 by Henry Brooke, Minister for Welsh Affairs. It provided the first toll-free road crossing. On this occasion there is no record of a celebration at The Castle Hotel. In 1986 work started on a Conwy by-pass that would run through a tunnel under the river. It was opened by the Queen in October 1991.

A RETURN TO INDEPENDENCE

In 2000, after 63 years under the management of Trust Houses, later renamed Trusthouse Forte, followed by six years in the hands of Regal Hotels, later rebranded Corus Hotels, The Castle Hotel was returned to independent ownership when it was acquired by two senior figures in the region's hospitality sector, Peter Lavin and Graham Tinsley.

By this time the drinking rooms on the ground floor of the former King's Head had been converted to meeting rooms. Later they would be let as a shop, while the bedrooms above remained part of The Castle Hotel.

A CONTEMPORARY ADDITION TO THE ARTISTIC HERITAGE



Drew Pritchard and his stained-glass work at The Castle Hotel.

Peter Lavin and Graham Tinsley restored The Castle Hotel's reputation for quality food and service to the heights previously established by Cordelia Owen and Sarah Dutton.

And as part of a large-scale refurbishment in 2005 they enhanced and added to the hotel's artistic heritage. Many of John Dawson Watson's paintings were re-framed and re-hung more prominently, while a new work was commissioned from local artist Drew Pritchard. His large screen constructed in Welsh-oak and stained-glass is sited at the entrance to the dining room. It portrays the Conwy Valley, the estuary, and its marine life.

The Coaching Inn Group acquired The Castle Hotel in December 2016, and is committed to maintaining and enhancing its reputation for hospitality and heritage.

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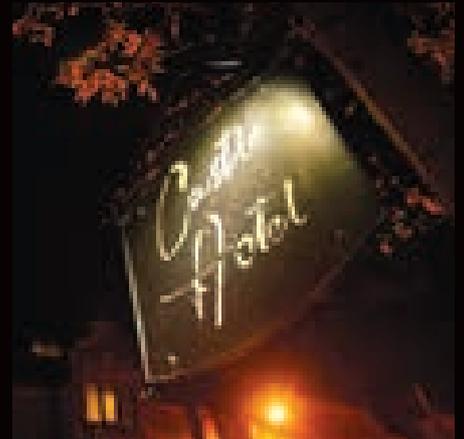


The Castle Hotel, Conwy, is part of The Coaching Inn Group Ltd. The group has a particular passion for lovely old historic inns and is fortunate enough now to have thirteen of these iconic buildings in our collection, several of them former coaching inns. We have established a reputation for refurbishing, revitalising and breathing life back into these inns, creating elegant, comfortable and well-priced accommodation, tempting menus, relaxed and stylish bars and coffee lounges where friends, families and business people can relax and enjoy everything we have on offer.

Our vision for the future is based around our core value of 'Unlocking Potential'. From our properties to our people and everything in between, we take every opportunity to invest in developing all aspects of our business to give our guests the best possible experience.

As a company we are rapidly expanding and bringing new hotels into the Coaching Inn Group. You can see the latest additions to our group by visiting www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.

We hope you've enjoyed your visit to The Castle Hotel, Conwy, and would love to invite you to try our other venues, nationwide. For full details please visit www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.



**The Castle Hotel,
Eatery and Coffee House
High Street
Conwy
LL32 8DB**

**T: 01492 582 800
E: castle@innmail.co.uk
www.castlewales.co.uk**



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