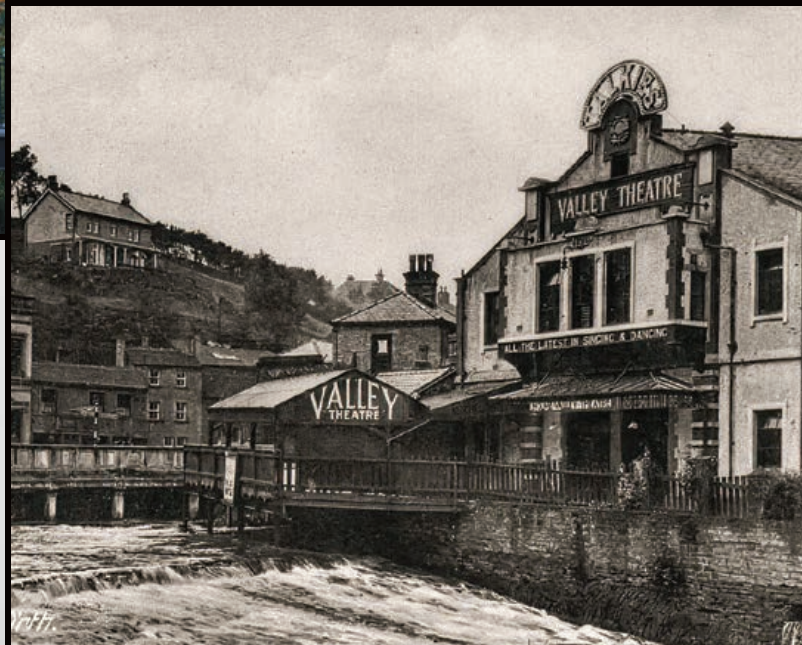


Old Bridge Inn
Holmfirth

A BRIEF HISTORY
BY WILL SWALES



WELCOME



Kevin Charity, founder of The Coaching Inn Group.



Adam Charity, chief operations officer.

Welcome to a brief history of The Old Bridge Inn, Holmfirth, West Yorkshire. This booklet is one among a series of published histories, which The Coaching Inn Group has been producing since 2016. At that time the company had become established on its specialist mission to acquire and revitalise hotels of heritage, many of them old coaching inns and some with histories dating to the 1500s or earlier.

My father, Kevin Charity, the company founder, and its chief executive until his retirement in 2024, wrote: "While contemplating the small changes and additions we wanted to make, it dawned on me that we will only be the custodians for a generation or two at most. I can't foretell who will follow but we can take the trouble to discover more about who were the hotel owners and keepers in the past."

Will Swales, a writer and historian with a background in the hospitality industry, was invited to research and write the series of booklets. His brief was to separate fact from fable, to discover what was true and what had been elaborated or invented during the story-telling process over the years. Will has engaged with other historians, local-history groups, and people with long personal memories of the hotels. He has also searched historic newspapers and local archives to garner new information from sometimes previously undiscovered records. We will always welcome contributions of new information that might be considered for inclusion in future revised editions.

It is hoped that these history booklets will be recognised as memorials to those who were involved in running the hotels in the past, and as heart-felt contributions to the heritage of the communities in which the hotels have played such pivotal roles throughout their existence, and in which they continue to serve today.

Adam Charity
Chief Operations Officer
The Coaching Inn Group
www.coachinginngroup.co.uk

First published 2022 by The Coaching Inn Group Ltd., Boston, Lincolnshire, PE21 6BZ.

This 2nd edition published by The Coaching Inn Group Ltd., 2024.

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ISBN: 978-1-0686663-5-3

Designed by www.penny-wilson.co.uk



**“...IT WAS THREE CONJOINED BUILDINGS –
A MILL-OWNER’S GRAND HOUSE...
A SMALL HOUSE... AND A WAREHOUSE.”**



HIDDEN HISTORY OF A MODERN HOTEL



The original Regency-period neo-classical portico, preserved at The Old Bridge Inn.

Looking at the outside of The Old Bridge Inn in the centre of Holmfirth, next to the River Holme, the only hint at the true antiquity of the building is a surviving neo-classical portico at the front entrance.

Inside there are a few more visible clues to the fact that parts of it date back more than 200 years, to the Regency of George, Prince of Wales, before his accession as King George IV in 1820. Originally, it was three conjoined buildings – a mill-owner's grand house on the left, a small house in the middle, and a warehouse on the right, the whole occupying roughly the same footprint as today's inn.

The mill-owner's house became home to a succession of important characters, whose lives impacted on some of Holmfirth's most significant historical developments, notably in wool manufacturing, and later in the newspaper industry and the town's special associations with the pioneering years of the movies.



LAND OF THE MANOR OF WAKEFIELD

The land now occupied by The Old Bridge Inn, together with much of the property in and around Holmfirth, used to be part of the ancient and extremely large Manor of Wakefield.

From 1799, the freehold and lordship of the manor was held by George William Frederick Osborne (1775–1838), the 6th Duke of Leeds, who in 1811 moved his principal seat from Kiveton Hall, near Rotherham in Yorkshire, to Hornby Castle, in lower Wensleydale in the north of the county.

Manor properties were let by a form of tenure, abolished in 1925, called copyhold. It was a legacy of medieval times when copyholders might be called upon to provide a range of services to their lord, such as to bear arms in the event of war. Copyhold tenure was without limit of time and could pass through families by right of inheritance, or could be sold on the open market, each newly registered copyholder paying to the lord a once-only admission fee and a modest annual rent.

“...a legacy of medieval times when copyholders might be called upon to provide a range of services to their lord, such as to bear arms in the event of war.”



Shaded areas showing the extent of the Manor of Wakefield. Based on Tim Midgley, www.midgleywebpages.com/thornhill.html and K M Troup, ed., *Wakefield Court Rolls 1338-1340* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, WCR Series vol. XII, 1999).



WILLIAM DICKINSON'S NEW HOUSE...



William Dickinson's plot at Cuttall Bottom (outlined in red) as it was in 1802 before he built his house on it and before the current road bridge was built. Section from a map of Holmfirth's Upperthong township, courtesy West Yorkshire Archive Service, Kirklees, ref. WYK 1449/5/1.

A surviving property record shows that the grand house that formed the core of The Old Bridge Inn was built in 1819 by a local mill owner, William Dickinson.

It was the year in which, on the death of his father, he inherited a one-sixth share in a woollen mill and dyeworks in a part of Holmfirth called Ribbleden. He was aged 29, married to Nancy Moorhouse, a mill-owner's daughter, and the couple had two young children. The new house was built in a part of Holmfirth then known as Cuttall Bottom or Cuthill Bottom, or otherwise as Norridge Bottom by which it is most-widely known today.

The map on the left, drawn in 1802 before William Dickinson built his new house, shows outlined in red the extent of the property he occupied as a copyholder of the Manor of Wakefield. His new house was built on the middle field by the roadside, with the front facing a new garden overlooking the river. No record has been found of the building date of the adjoining small house.

...AND HIS PREMATURE DEATH

UPPERTHONG

The town of Holmfirth straddles three ancient townships, originally tax districts, called Upperthong, Cartworth, and Wooldale. The designations were in common use until the early 20th century. The Old Bridge Inn stands in the township of Upperthong, which was bounded on one side by the River Holme and was within the ecclesiastical parish of Almondbury.

In 1824 it was recorded that William Dickinson was a partner in the tenancy of another dyehouse, described as being at 'Norwith [Norridge] or Cuttall Bottom', but exactly where is not known.

But any impression at the time that business was going well would unravel in 1833, when William Dickinson died, aged 43, apparently suddenly because he didn't leave a will. It turned out that he was seriously in debt, which took his widow, Nancy, and her sons, Frank and Henry, a matter of years to sort out.



PROPERTY TRANSFERRED TO JOSEPH CHARLESWORTH...

William Dickinson's assets, including the copyhold of his house and other buildings and land at Cuttill Bottom, were assigned in 1836 to a group of local worthies, appointed as trustees.

His widow Nancy Dickinson and her sons remained in the house as sub-tenants until 1837 when the trustees transferred the copyhold to Joseph Charlesworth, another prominent member of the local wool trade.

The record of the transfer described the property as two houses, a barn, stable, newly erected warehouse and workshop, a garden, and additional land. The warehouse and workshop might have replaced a building seen in the upper field of the 1802 map (opposite page).

DICKINSON'S ASSIGNMENT.—
Whereas FRANK DICKINSON, of Cuthill Bottom, in Upperthong, in the Parish of Almondbury, in the County of York, Clothier, Eldest Son and Heir at Law of William Dickinson, late of Cuthill Bottom, in Upperthong aforesaid, Clothier, deceased, Intestate, and Nancy Dickinson, of Cuthill Bottom aforesaid, Widow and Relict, and also Administratrix of all and singular the Goods and Chattels, Rights, and Credits which were of the said William Dickinson

Introduction to the notice of assignment of the assets of William Dickinson in the Leeds Intelligencer, 19 November 1836.

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www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

...WHO MADE IT HIS FAMILY HOME

Joseph Charlesworth, who in 1837 was aged 45, moved into the large house and made it his family home.

With him were his third wife, Anne, also aged 45, and three children, aged 17 to seven, who were from Charlesworth's previous two marriages; the first to Betty and the second to Ruth, both of whom died at the age of 42.

Joseph Charlesworth was a highly respected pillar of the community, once described as 'a man of such uprightness of character, amiability of feeling, and devout religious principles as is seldom to be met with in commercial circles.' He was a successful woollen cloth manufacturer and merchant, in a business he had inherited from his father, and he was also well-known as a leading light in the parish church.

William Dickinson according to his Custom hereof All those two messuages dwellinghouses or tenements with the barn stable cowhouse and shop garden and parcel of land hereto belonging situate standing lying and being at Cuthill Bottom in Upperthong aforesaid late in the possession or Occupation of William Dickinson deceased of Frank Dickinson and Frank Dickinson but now in the possession or Occupation of the said Joseph Charlesworth his Widow or Administratrix

Extract from the Wakefield Manor Court Roll of 27 October 1837, etc, Yorkshire Archaeological and Historical Society, c/o Leeds University, Brotherton Library Special Collections, YAS/MD 225/1/566.



WOOL MANUFACTURING BUSINESS



Child workers in a textile factory, illustrated by Auguste Hervieu, in Frances Trollope, 'The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy' (1840).

Joseph Charlesworth's wool manufacturing business was conducted on several sites in and around Holmfirth.

As a tenant at Holmbridge Mill, farther up the valley, he had raw fleeces processed by 'scribbling' and 'carding' into clean threads, ready for spinning into yarn. He put the next stages of the process out to traditional cottage-based spinners and weavers, and then had the woven cloth delivered to his tenanted premises at Holmfirth Mill, opposite his house on the other side of the River Holme, to be washed and finished. It seems likely that the finished cloth was then moved to the warehouse next to Charlesworth's house at Cuttall Bottom.

A questionnaire, returned to the Factory Commissioners in 1832, showed that at Holmfirth Mill, Charlesworth employed 21 men and boys, mostly men over the age of 21, but four of them boys under the age of 14, including one under 12. Charlesworth commented on the return that he advocated 'some restriction as to the labour of children.'

NEW LORD OF THE MANOR

George Osborne, the 6th Duke of Leeds, lord of the Manor of Wakefield, which included ownership of Joseph Charlesworth's home and premises at Cuttall Bottom, died in 1838.

The lordship was settled on the late duke's son-in-law, Sackville Walter Lane-Fox, a widower whose family hailed from Bramham Park, near Tadcaster in North Yorkshire, but who lived mainly in London. A noted spendthrift, despite his fortune and vast income he was often in debt and would later endure a spell in a debtor's prison.

“...he was often
in debt and would
later endure a
spell in a debtor's
prison.”

NAMING OF ELDON HOUSE

Joseph Charlesworth was a leading member of the local Tory Party, which in 1838 petitioned the Lord Chancellor to establish the first magistrates court in Holmfirth, so that local cases didn't have to be heard in Huddersfield.

It cannot have been a coincidence that at that time, Charlesworth named his home at Cuttall Bottom, Eldon House, apparently in honour of John Scott, the 1st Earl of Eldon, a long-serving, charismatic, and extremely popular former Lord Chancellor, who had died in January 1838, aged 86. Lord Eldon was nominally a Whig but was well-known for pursuing more traditional Tory values.

The lobbying worked, and in July 1839 it was reported that Joseph Charlesworth, of Eldon House, Holmfirth, was one of two newly created West Riding magistrates appointed to serve in the town. He and his colleague, John Harpin, immediately started holding weekly courts in the town, and a new courtroom was built in 1842.



Lord Chancellor, John Scott, 1st Earl of Eldon, by Henry Meyer, published by Colnaghi & Co, after William Owen, mezzotint. © National Portrait Gallery.

FAITHFUL RETAINER NEXT DOOR

The census of 1841 reveals who lived in the small house that filled the gap between Eldon House and Charlesworth's warehouse, all of which formed the footprint of today's Old Bridge Inn.

The occupants of the middle house were Joseph Battye, a labourer, his wife, Mary, and their six children, ranging in age from 15 years to 10 months. A later record revealed that Joseph Battye was a long-serving employee of Joseph Charlesworth's brother, James, who was a well-known banker in Holmfirth.



A view of picturesque Holmfirth from a bedroom at The Old Bridge Inn.

CHARLESWORTH'S RETIREMENT

In 1842, when Joseph Charlesworth was aged 50, it must have been obvious to him that none of his three children would be interested in inheriting his wool business.

His son, Joseph Rhodes Charlesworth, then aged 22, was shortly to become a priest in the Church of England, and both daughters would go on to marry vicars. So, in that year, Charlesworth withdrew from operations at Holmfirth Mill, and apparently retired from wool manufacturing altogether. Afterwards he undoubtedly relied on a comfortable income from property and investments.

NEW BRIDGE OVER THE HOLME

In the early 1840s, Holmfirth and its transport infrastructure were expanding rapidly, with plans being made for a branch railway to run up the Holme Valley and with various road improvements already underway.

One of the most important new roads was Victoria Street, leading to a new Victoria Bridge, which crossed the River Holme, just a few metres upstream from Joseph Charlesworth's Eldon House property. The bridge was completed in 1844, and the effect on the environment of Eldon House was captured on a map (right), published in 1847. Properties marked on the map as numbers 25 to 29 were newly built shops along one side of Victoria Street.

Eldon House and its land and buildings can be seen occupying plot 23. The linking symbol, tilde ~ on the map, and a written description accompanying the map, confirm that the property comprised a large plot of yet-undeveloped land, including the site of what is now the Picturedrome, two conjoined houses, one large, one small (coloured pink), and an adjoining warehouse (grey) next to a small yard with a riverside barn and stable (grey), and a private riverside access road from the new Victoria Street.



Environment of Eldon House, Victoria Street, and Victoria Bridge. Section from the Almondbury Parish tithe map, 1847. Number key in the text (left). Image courtesy West Yorkshire Archive Service Kirklees, ref. E/A/E.

GREAT DAM-BURST DISASTER

“...terrified local people left their homes, despite the ‘pelting storm’, and took to the heights.”

During Wednesday 4 February 1852, the rain poured all day in the Holme Valley, causing increasing alarm among residents at the valley head.

Their homes were below the controversial Bilberry Reservoir dam, which was built to ensure a continuous supply of water during dry spells to power the valley's numerous mills. It had been completed nine years earlier, but there had long been concerns about its clay-and-earth construction, for fear that intensive, heavy rain might overtop the dam and wash away the dam bank. Late into the evening as the reservoir was seen to be filling near to its capacity, terrified local people left their homes, despite the ‘pelting storm’, and took to the heights.

But the warnings did not spread quickly enough down the valley, where at midnight, most householders were in their beds, oblivious of the impending disaster. The dam was overtopped, and at about 1am it broke asunder, releasing the explosive mass of an estimated 86 million gallons of water, raging down through the valley. It destroyed bridges, roads, mills, churches, and houses, while on its way picking up more and more debris that increased its lethally destructive power.



An imagined scene at the bursting of the dam, by an unknown artist, published in *The Illustrated London News*, 14 February 1852.
© Mary Evans Picture Library.

DESTRUCTION IN HOLMFIRTH

About 60 people had already lost their lives by the time the brutal force reached Holmfirth, about three and a half miles down the valley.

Here the valley is wider, and so while the power of the deluge was slightly diminished, it was still destructive enough to wreck the new Victoria Bridge and to destroy part of Holmfirth Mill and several other commercial premises. Householders who had an upper floor and were asleep there, escaped with their lives but not without suffering a great fright and loss of property. Among them were the residents of Eldon House, who at that time were Joseph Charlesworth, then a widower living with his two adult daughters, and those in the adjoining small house, who were Joseph Battye, his wife, and four children.

Both houses were inundated with water, filling the ground floor and rising up to two feet high in the first floor. The Battye family were reported to have been forced into their top garret where they remained until the water subsided. As the torrent continued its path down the valley, disappearing almost as quickly as it had arrived, traumatised survivors came out of their homes to find scenes of widespread devastation.

“...destructive enough to wreck the new Victoria Bridge and to destroy part of Holmfirth Mill...”



The aftermath of the flood in Holmfirth, looking towards Victoria Bridge, drawn at the scene by an unknown artist and published in *The Illustrated London News*, 6 March 1852.
© Mary Evans Picture Library.

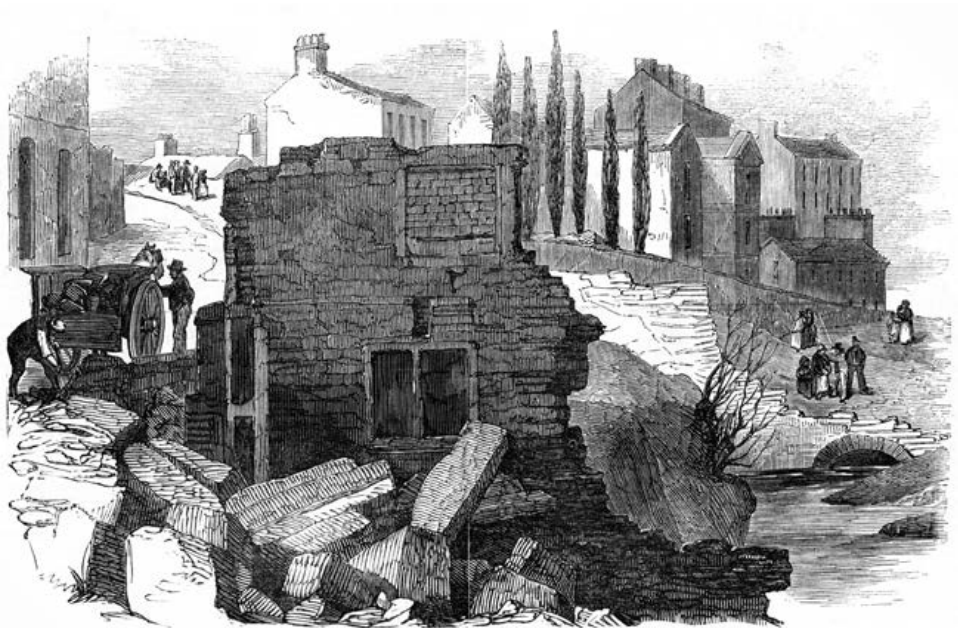
EMERGENCY MEETING HELD AT ELDON HOUSE

“All were sworn as special constables and set about immediately clearing debris from the streets.”

While most people rushed to rescue the injured and recover the dead, Joseph Charlesworth immediately assumed his special responsibilities as the then chairman of Holmfirth magistrates.

By 4am he had issued an official notice requesting the ‘respectable inhabitants of Holmfirth and vicinity’ to meet with him and his fellow magistrates immediately at his Eldon House home, ‘for the purpose of taking steps for the protection of property and other measures as may be needful.’

A reported ‘large number’ responded. All were sworn as special constables and set about immediately clearing debris from the streets. On the following day, Joseph Charlesworth published a notice instructing the finders of any ‘deeds, books, money, papers, or other portable property’ to deliver them to the magistrates’ clerk at the Town Hall. A separate notice was addressed ‘To the benevolent and humanely disposed’, communicating arrangements for them to make donations to a relief fund. Among the first contributions was £100 from Charlesworth himself.



The destruction of Holmfirth's Tom Mill, previously owned by Thomas Charlesworth, a cousin of Joseph Charlesworth, drawn at the scene by an unknown artist and published in *The Illustrated London News*, 6 March 1852.
© Mary Evans Picture Library.

A ‘NATIONAL CALAMITY’ DECLARED

Within two more days, Joseph Charlesworth wrote to the Home Secretary, Sir George Grey, declaring the event a ‘national calamity’.

He explained that the loss of life and property was compounded by the loss of business and employment, leading to severe want in the valley. He requested a Queen’s Letter, appealing for donations, to be read in all churches throughout the land, and he asked Grey to send an engineer to assist in the ‘fullest investigation’ into the causes of the dam burst.

The final death toll was 81, and the tally of properties destroyed included more than 30 cottages and houses, seven bridges, four mills, 10 warehouses, and numerous other commercial and domestic buildings. The relief fund was said to have raised more than £50,000 (about £5 million today). Later, an inquest found that the reservoir had been constructed defectively and that the controlling commissioners were guilty of negligence, although as a corporate entity they could not be held accountable under the criminal law.

“The final death toll was 81, and the tally of properties destroyed included more than 30 cottages and houses.”

CHARLESWORTH’S SUDDEN DEATH

According to the local press, the events of the flood took a severe toll on Joseph Charlesworth.

It was said that the ‘excitement was too much for him, and after the abatement of the water it became gradually apparent that his nervous system had received a severe shock, although he ... discharged arduous duties ... most admirably ... his health perceptibly gave way ... which suddenly terminated his valuable life.’ He died, aged 59, on 10 April 1852, just over two months after the great disaster.





The bar at The Old Bridge Inn.

JOHN TAYLOR'S WORKING MEN'S CLUB

From 1853, the copyholder and resident of Eldon House was John Thorpe Taylor, another woollen manufacturer.

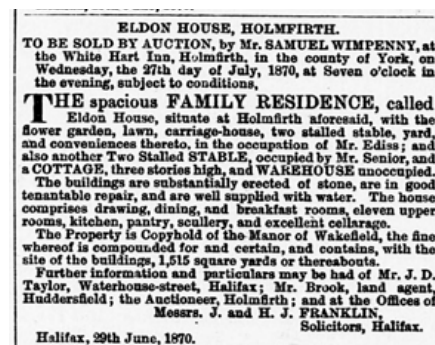
His operation was at Dover Mill, and later at Ribbleden Mill, both within a mile to the south of his house. He employed about 120 people and was noted for treating his workers to meals and parties to celebrate any suitable occasions. Taylor was one of the local worthies responsible for establishing a working men's club for the district. Its aim was to provide education and improved leisure-time activities for all members of the working classes.

Taylor became the club's first treasurer, and in 1866 he gave up his home and sub-let it to be used as the club headquarters. He moved elsewhere in Holmfirth. The club opened at Eldon House in March 1867, when the press reported there were rooms designated for music, reading, and games, and it was intended to develop a bowling green in the riverside garden, along with pitches for skittles, quoits, and other outdoor games.

However, the scheme seems to have failed quickly because by 1870 John Thorpe Taylor advertised the copyhold of Eldon House for sale, describing it as a 'spacious family residence' then occupied by a local surgeon, George Ediss, as sub-tenant.

COPYHOLD TRANSFER TO JOSEPH SHAW

The 1870 buyer of the copyhold of Eldon House, its buildings, and ground, was Joseph Shaw, aged 36, a joiner and cabinetmaker whose house and shop were in nearby Victoria Street. As an investment purchase, his priority was to continue sub-letting Eldon House to the surgeon George Ediss, who would later be replaced by George Tolson, a wool manufacturer, operating at Holmfirth Mill.



Huddersfield Chronicle, 23 July 1870.

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BARON CONYERS

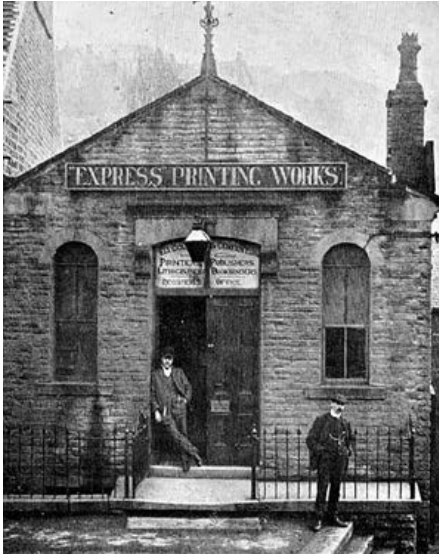
On the death of Sackville Walter Lane-Fox in 1874, the lordship of the Manor of Wakefield passed to his son, Sackville George Lane-Fox, the 12th Baron Conyers, a title he had inherited in 1859 on the death of his maternal uncle, Francis D'Arcy-Osborne, 7th Duke of Leeds.



PARTITION OF ELDON YARD

Under Joseph Shaw's tenure, Eldon House and its associated buildings and land, started to be identified in records as the Eldon House Estate.

Shaw built a fence or wall to separate from the garden of Eldon House, all the land that extended up to the backs of the Victoria Street shops (see maps on opposite page). He named the partitioned area Eldon Yard, and in 1873 he erected on it, at the end farthest away from the river, a large shed and warehouse, possibly for his own joinery business.



The office of the Express Printing Works and newspaper on Huddersfield Road. Image from Eli Collins, ed., 'The Express Popular Illustrated Guide to Holmfirth' (1909), courtesy Stephen Longley.

HOLMFIRTH EXPRESS NEWSPAPER LAUNCHED IN ELDON YARD

By 1886 Joseph Shaw's building in Eldon Yard had been adapted for a new purpose by a new occupier.

It was Eli Collins, a local entrepreneur who was making his mark in Holmfirth as a printer and a prominent member of the growing Temperance Movement. Earlier, in 1879, he had built a lecture hall fronting onto Huddersfield Road and extending at the rear down the steep slope to Norridge Bottom, where it backed onto Shaw's building in Eldon Yard. The hall was mainly used by the Temperance Movement, but it was also let as a general-purpose public room.

When Eli Collins occupied Shaw's building in Eldon Yard, he installed in it a newspaper printing press, and in 1886 he launched the first newspaper to be dedicated to the town, the weekly Holmfirth Express, with himself as proprietor, editor, and printer. By 1894, Collins had converted his lecture hall on Huddersfield Road (left) into offices for his printing works and for the editorial and advertising departments of his 'Express' newspaper.

JOSEPH SHAW'S MARKET WALK

Joseph Shaw's most dramatic development on the Eldon House Estate came in 1888 when he capitalised on what appears to have been a popular trend in Holmfirth, of building over the river.

The development can be seen in a before-and-after comparison of the two Ordnance Survey maps below. The survey in 1888 (left) was made before the development, and the survey in 1904 (right), shows where Shaw had built a row of six new shops on the private riverbank access-road leading from Victoria Street to Eldon House, and then in front of the new shops, he built on pillars over the river, a new access road, named Market Walk.

Both maps show the fence or wall dividing Eldon Yard from the large riverside garden of Eldon House. The later map shows an extension to Eli Collins' printing works in Eldon Yard.

LORD AND LADY OF THE MANOR

Sackville George Lane-Fox died in 1888 when the barony of Conyers and lordship of the Manor of Wakefield passed to his daughter, the 25-year-old Marcia Amelia Mary Pelham, Countess of Yarborough. Her husband was Charles Pelham the 4th Earl of Yarborough, whose seat was near Immingham, Lincolnshire. The earl and countess became joint lord and lady of the manor.



Sections from Ordnance Survey maps, Yorkshire CLXXII.3, 25-inches-to-the-mile: left, surveyed 1888, published 1893; right, revised 1904, published 1906. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland, <https://maps.nls.uk>.

DEATH OF JOSEPH SHAW



Eli Collins, founder and editor of the Holmfirth Express. Image from Eli Collins, ed., 'The Express Popular Illustrated Guide to Holmfirth' (1909), copy courtesy Stephen Longley and Dave Pattern.

On Joseph Shaw's death in 1901, his copyhold tenure of the Eldon House Estate descended automatically to his children, John William Shaw and Sarah Jane Brown.

The latter's interest was registered in the name of her husband, Joseph Douglas Brown, a long-serving schoolmaster at the Wesleyan School in Holmfirth. They continued to sub-let Eldon House.

ELI COLLINS IN ELDON HOUSE

Sometime in or shortly after 1904, the then-sub-tenant of Eldon House, Dr Henry Williams, moved out and was replaced by Eli Collins, the owner and editor of the Holmfirth Express newspaper.



Women print compositors, unknown artist, Illustrated London News, 16 June 1861.
© Mary Evans Picture Library Ltd.

He was aged in his late 50s or early 60s, and for him, the house was ideally located, being next door to his newspaper office and printing works. Living with him were his wife, Jane, and their five children, all unmarried young adults, and all employed in their father's printing works. One son was a clerk and the other a printer and bookbinder. The three daughters were all compositors, arguably the most highly skilled job in printing at that time. It involved fast and accurate handling of metal type to form it into columns that had to be fitted perfectly and tightly into a metal page frame.

At around that time, there was a trend of employing women as printworks compositors, supported by the notion that women were better than men in the dexterity required to do the job at speed. Employing women printers was also promoted by the Women's Printing Society and the growing suffragette movement, although ironically Eli Collins was a prominent local figure in the National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage.

FILM THEATRE IN ELDON YARD

In November 1911, Eli Collins purchased the copyhold of Eldon House and its garden from the partnership of John William Shaw and Shaw's brother-in-law, Joseph Douglas Brown.

It's not clear whether Collins separately purchased the copyhold of Eldon Yard, which included his printing works. Whoever held the controlling interest in Eldon Yard, the vacant land within it, between the printing works and the Market Walk access road, soon became the site of much excitement when work started in 1912 to build on the plot a new film theatre for the town.

The Holme Valley Theatre opened on Easter Monday, 1 March 1913, with popular showings of three films through the day. The proprietors were Messrs Hawthorne and King, of Mirfield, West Yorkshire. Film theatres were opening all over the country and the Holme Valley Theatre was the town's second, the first, the Picturedrome, being on Dunford Road.

BAMFORTH'S — FILM PIONEERS

The earliest films shown at the Holme Valley Theatre almost certainly included productions by Holmfirth's pioneering film makers, Bamforth's Ltd.

Already established as world-famous makers of illustrated-postcards and lantern-slides, in the period 1898 to 1901 the Bamforth family also produced a catalogue of 14 short comedy films. They used local actors performing in a style soon to be made famous by Hollywood comics such as Charlie Chaplin. The family re-commenced film making in 1913, and in the next three years made 114 films before production was ended by the continuing war in France.



Actress Queenie Thomas featured in a 1913 film made by Bamforth's and went on to become one of Britain's most famous silent-movie stars.

THE GREAT WAR 1914-18



The Holme Valley Theatre's roof-top sign proclaiming 'Talkies' indicates that this photograph was taken after October 1930, when the theatre was equipped with its first movie sound system. Image courtesy David Hobson and Huddersfield Exposed.

Eli Collins' wife, Jane, died in December 1914, aged 68. In their grief, the family were well placed to support each other.

All five of Eli Collins' children – three daughters and two sons - were unmarried young adults, still living with him at Eldon House, and working with him at the print works in Eldon Yard. During the Great War of 1914-18, printing and newspapers were reserved occupations, so Eli's sons, Joseph and Albert, were spared conscription.

INTO THE MOVIES

In 1921, members of the Collins family became directors and significant investors in a new company formed to run the Holme Valley Theatre in Eldon Yard.

The film industry trade press described the board of the new company as 'principally local people, new to the industry', although that was hardly true of two of the directors, the brothers, Edwin and Frank Bamforth. The company chairman was a local worsted manufacturer, and other directors included Eli Collins, then aged 73, and his sons, Joseph and Albert, who by that time had both married and moved out of Eldon House to set up new homes with their wives.

Sometime in the 1920s, the brothers moved back into Eldon House, replacing their three sisters and their father, who moved together to a house in Huddersfield. Eli Collins remained editor of the Holmfirth Express, but apparently left his sons to run the family printing business.

ENDS OF TWO ERAS

The Law of Property Act of 1925 abolished the system of tenure by copyhold, which also ended the old feudal manors such as the Manor of Wakefield.

On payment of a one-off fee to the manor, freeholds passed to the sitting copyholders, and so Eli Collins became the outright owner of Eldon House together with the buildings and land around it. However, within a few years, the Collins family's link with Eldon House came to an end, after a series of deaths.

In October 1926, Eli's youngest daughter, Beatrice, died aged 43. In June 1927, his eldest son, Joseph, died aged 50, and just over a month later, Eli Collins died, aged 79. In 1929, his surviving children, Albert, Adelaide, and Helena, sold Eldon House to the Holmfirth and District Conservative Association.

THE 'CON' CLUB

The Conservatives immediately developed the three buildings of the Eldon House block into a single unit.

Foundation stones were formally laid for a complete rebuild of the right-hand, or north end, of the block, principally to create a hall for large functions. For the next 55 years, the 'Con' Club, as it became known, was an enduringly popular venue for wedding receptions and all kinds of significant events in the town. Dance classes were held there, and it was even used by the Catholic Church for mass on Sunday mornings, when the billiard table was covered and used as the altar.



The official party at the formal laying of foundation stones for the new north wing of Holmfirth Conservative Club in 1929. Image courtesy Rich McGill.

ELDON YARD'S CHANGING ROLES



The Market Walk access road to Eldon Yard and House had to be rebuilt in 1944 after it was destroyed by a major flood. The damage was captured (above) by local photographer Harry Bray. Image courtesy Helen J Bray Studio.

In 1967, the Holme Valley Theatre cinema was closed and reopened as a bingo hall.

That closed in 1993, and then five years later the building was reopened by Peter and Rachel Carr as a revived cinema and concert venue. The building was renamed The Picturedrome, recalling the name of Holmfirth's first movie theatre, elsewhere in the town.

HOLMFIRTH EXPRESS

In the late 1970s, the Holmfirth Express was sold, renamed the Holme Valley Express, and its printing was transferred from Eldon Yard to the new owner's pressroom at Barnsley.

The editorial and advertising office, on Huddersfield Road, remained in use until 2002 when those functions were transferred to Huddersfield. In 2007 the newspaper ceased publication and its content was incorporated in the Huddersfield Examiner.

PRINTWORKS TO BOX OFFICE

The Eldon Yard printworks, which survived several years as a general commercial printing business called Victoria Press, was converted in 2009 into The Box Office, a theatre bar for the Picturedrome.



ELDON HOUSE TO OLD BRIDGE INN

In 1984, Holmfirth Conservatives closed their club at Eldon House, and sold the building to a local builder, Hervey Woodhead. He carried out a major rebuild to convert it into The Old Bridge Inn. It opened in 1986 with 16 bedrooms and a 60-seater restaurant.

THE COACHING INN GROUP

The Coaching Inn Group bought The Old Bridge Inn in 2000, the same year in which the local council erected a new footbridge over the River Holme, linking the bus station with the inn garden. The inn was refurbished in 2014, and it remains part of the group's growing nationwide estate of heritage properties.



A typical bedroom at The Old Bridge Inn.



The new footbridge, built in 2000, leading to The Old Bridge Inn.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Several of the references to events concerning wool manufacturing in the Holme Valley are sourced from Michael Day's excellent book *Wool & Worsit: A History of Textiles in the Holme Valley* (Huddersfield, 2013).

Thanks also for advice and assistance to: Deborah Wyles and members of the Holmfirth Local History Group; Dave Pattern and contributors to the website *Huddersfield Exposed*; several members of the Facebook group *Holmfirth History*; staff at the West Yorkshire Archives at Wakefield and Kirklees; and staff at the Special Collections Section, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

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The Old Bridge Inn, Holmfirth, 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 more than 30 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.

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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 Old Bridge Inn, Holmfirth, and would love to invite you to try our other venues, nationwide. For full details, please visit www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.



The Old Bridge Inn

Market Walk

Holmfirth

West Yorkshire

HD9 7DA

T: 01484 681212

E: oldbridge@innmail.co.uk

www.oldbridgeholmfirth.co.uk



coachinginnngroup.co.uk

ISBN: 978-1-0686663-5-3

