

A brief history of The Old Bell Hotel

Many of the buildings which survive in the Market Place owe their origin to the great corn market days when they were used as stores and warehouses, or as inns and hostleries for the buyers and sellers who came from many miles around. The Old Bell is one of the best examples of Warminster's old inns. The hotel has had several different names through history. In 1483 it was originally called The Bell and much later known as the Bell and Railway when the railway came to the town in 1851. In 1889, the name had changed to the Australian Hotel by the then landlord Henry Ling who had spent many years living there. By 1899 the inn had reverted to its present day name of Old Bell. The colonnaded front of the Old Bell was used in the days of Warminster's great corn market as a place where sellers displayed their wares. Corn was pitched under cover here so buyers could inspect what they were purchasing. At that time the area under the colonnades was much larger as the frontage of the building at the ground floor was about 7 metres further back (the area of the main bar would have been outside but undercover from the first floor).

In the days before motor transport the red horse van of the Royal Mail was housed at the Old Bell and two horses drew the mail van when it left at 8pm each day for Bath returning the next morning at 5am. During times of unrest the central courtyard was also used by the home guard for practising their drills.

Our archive picture is dated around 1877 showing Market Place traffic free, a complete contrast to the Market Place of today.

