THE WHITE SWAN INN, ST. PETER'S STREET, NORWICH by A. B. Whittingham, Hon. Life Fellow 1983, M.A., F.S.A., R.I.B.A. With Appendix by Barbara Green

SUMMARY

Evidence of much of the building history of the great White Swan Inn at Norwich emerged during its demolition in 1961. The oldest feature was a re-used early 14th-century window, but the site was extended and the building remodelled by Henry Lomynour in the latter part of the century; a wall-painting of a charging horseman of this date is decribed and illustrated. Later alterations and additions includes two early 15th-century undercrofts, a wing of about 1480, some modernisation about 1660, and refronting and the conversion of the Great Chamber to a club room in the late 18th century or the early 19th. It declined with the end of the coaching era. The building was subdivided in the 1870s and it ceased to be an inn in the 1880s.

In 1961, the Council of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society asked the writer to watch the pulling down of this celebrated Inn. Between 29 April and 14 May he was able to take details which explained much of its history. Little was obvious except two medieval brick undercrofts below adjoining shops on the North; but when the kitchen dresser was removed, a series of blocked openings was revealed. These the writer investigated with the help of A. P. Baggs who was then on the staff of Norwich Castle Museum. After searching up the documents then in the City Library, the writer lectured to the Society on 19 October 1963 on the subject. This paper is based on the writer's lecture and notes.

The early owners can be found from conveyances and wills, mostly in the Enrolled Deeds of the City.

The Swan Inn stood in St. Peter's Street, the medieval Omanset Row, opposite the west door of St. Peter Mancroft Church, with a frontage of 68 feet, its winevaults extending another 34 feet towards Bethel Street, formerly Upper Newport, on the North. It was bounded by Lady Lane on the west, in front of the modern City Library, and had an entrance from Theatre Street on the south. A more important entrance had been from the north and led to 'the Stone House'.¹ Part of a window of the early 14th century was found in the flint wall blocking a Buttery door. It had a bulging wave-moulding like those of the Ethelbert Gateway of the Cathedral Close; there was probably a Circle in the tracery over a pair of uncusped lights.

In 1298 Henry le Caux is mentioned as owner of a property in Omanset Row, south of Richard de Felmingham.² The stone window presumably was in Henry's Hall or his Solar. In 1313³ John le Kauz, son of Henry and Alice, sold an adjoining property in Bethel Street 40 x 55 ft.; the writer measured the distance 54 ft in 1961, clear evidence that John owned the Swan site. It is called his 'capital messuage' in 1317⁴ when he sold to Richard de Ely the next property to the west. His trade is given as Draper in 1310⁵ when he sold two stalls in the Fishmarket. He also owned six acres in the fields of the College of St. Mary-in-the-Fields (Chapelfield) to which the Rector quits claim.

There is a gap, 1340–1377, in the enrolled deeds, but in 1365 John Tilney appears in the list of St. Peter Mancroft parishioners as bound to provide one fully-armed man.⁶ He was one of the four City-Bailiffs and held this property.⁷



Plate I Swann Inn, street front. Photograph by G. A. F. Plunkett

Henry Lomynour (illuminator) merchant was three times Bailiff and five times Burgess in Parliament for Norwich between 1371 and his death in 1400.⁸ He had acquired all the site by 1390, gaining 100 foot along the west in 1384 when Lady Lane was moved, providing space for his garden, stables and pasture behind separate properties along Bethel Street. (See plan, Fig. I) In 1381 he was one of those chosen to treat with the rebel Litster; when he was also paid £10 by the City for wine at the time of the Tumult. In 1398 he was on the Committee to consider the way of Choosing the Mayor. The next year he (and William Everard) were paid £6 expenses for 18 days going to London about the Charter; this resulted in the New Charter and Mayor of 1404.⁹

It appears that Lomynour undertook a complicated reconstruction of the earlier buildings on the Swan Inn site which was about one hundred feet long from east to west. His plan was Tee-shaped, the Main Wing running west from St. Peter's tower. However he evidently began by improving a Small Hall of flint and brick at the west base of the Tee. He provided it with Buttery and Pantry doors on the north under a four-centred relieving arch set flush. The openings were 1ft. 10ins. wide, with a 12-inch pier between, the rebates being on the north. This was built of red brick plastered, the colourful wall-painting extending onto the chamfer. In the frieze-panel was a charging horseman with 'in (bellum)' on a scroll between its front legs, an appropriate reference to the defeat of Litster in 1381. Hallam Ashley's photograph (Plate II) shows the rear of horse and rider over the right-hand of the two blocked doors. The frieze was framed by a 1¹/₄-

inch deep-blue border at a height of 6ft. 6 ins. from the floor. The man wore pale-blue armour and may have held a pike, but that and the heads of the man and his horse were missing. Behind his gauntlet were three crimson plumes. The horse was ochre-yellow, its tail coming forward between its rear legs. Below was a diaper of sexfoil red rosettes and pale-blue birds 6 inches high facing left, in black outline; they had red beaks and legs, long-clawed, one raised. The birds were at 14 inch centres on the apex of the arches and lamp-niche, the claws overlapping the chamfer. Four birds and two rosettes can be seen to the right and over the niche.

The left door-cill had been worn level and on it was a 4½ inch black, glazed floor-tile and black ash, the flames having scorched the painted diaper, and red paint on newer plaster adjoining to the left. To the right, the second door was blocked by a low four-centred brick arch springing at a height of 4 ft 9 ins. from the floor which may have been part of a service-hatch, but was later replaced by a flat-headed doorway.

As he prospered Lomynour determined to rebuild the property on a larger scale. He doubled the length of the Small Hall to 39ft. 8 ins. and converted it into a Kitchen with a fireplace at its east-end. He flanked it by Service rooms to the



Plate Il Swan Inn, Buttery doors (horseman over right) and niche (birds and roses diaper over). Photograph by Hallam Ashley



Plate III Swan Inn, entrance from St. Peter's Street. Photograph by A. P. Baggs

north. East of the kitchen he provided a new Great Hall 39ft. 6ins. long to Bethel Street by about 24 ft wide, the extra width being towards a kitchen-yard on the north. In this wall were the remains of a bay-window with 4-centred rear arch, a fireplace 15 ft. wide across the breast, where the plaster stopped at a projecting hood (9 ft. wide on 5 ft. high jambs) narrowing as it ascended. Presumably the hood was of lath and plaster; there were traces of grey patterns on the adjoining breast. A 3ft. 4 inch pair of doors opening from the kitchen-yard into the Hall had a hollow-chamfered arch, but splayed jambs, and reached 13 ft. 3 ins. from the street wall-face.

Over this end of the Great Hall was a Solar, the floor of which cantilevered out in a jetty of 1ft. 7ins., and carried oak studding on the end. A roof-truss between Hall and Solar forming the dividing wall had a tie beam and two collars with curved braces or struts. The spaces were filled with clay on hazel rods covering the west face but flush on the east. There were also two Queen-posts and a Crown-post.

The studding on the street-front was elaborated with buttresses; a loose cinquefoiled equilateral window-head for a 9¼-inch opening had traces of red paint. The studding was wormy and reused casually in a reconstruction, some members being moulded. The beam over the Gateway to the Inn-yard had slots for joists at 21-inch centres. One of the four figures over this entrance survived, but the jambs had been recut with folded Curtains to indicate the later Theatre within. Previously St. George's cross was also over the gateway.

The Great Hall extended through to a window on the street for light and interest, but this end below the Solar was 10ft. high, whereas in the opposite direction the Kitchen was only 8ft. high. Over it, and the adjoining Service-rooms on the north, was Lomynour's Great Chamber. Being the largest room of the house (40ft. x 26ft. 6ins.) it was probably more altered than any other.

It may have started with an Arch-braced roof, followed perhaps by Tudor panelling and a Jacobean ceiling. Finally above the cornice it had coving rising a few feet to the ceiling (see Plate V).

William Ashwell, merchant and alderman, a former owner,¹⁰ Sheriff in 1431, five times M.P., Mayor in 1441 and 1448, left in 1457¹¹ his property in St. Peter Mancroft and other parishes to be sold for his wife Alice and sons. In 1447 a breakfast was held in his 'Hospice' for the Justices and other notables, for which the City paid £48.5¹/₄d.¹² for this he hired three sets of pewter. Possibly he added two vaulted Undercrofts, north next the street, the first (18ft. x 9ft.), of two bays with an ornate low 4-centred brick vault. The diagonal ribs divided into two, enclosing a diamond-shape at the springing, a device used in Gloucester Cathedral cloisters in 1377. At the north end was a recess to carry a Parlourfireplace: there were two under the yard on the west. Amongst the corbels was one rounded earlier Capital, and one cusped niche, both of about 1300. Beyond was a simpler 10ft. square undercroft with a recess under the pavement; it had diagonal ribs but no ridge-ribs to the three bays. The first undercroft was entered by a 4-centred doorway from Cellars below the Great Hall and presumably intended for choice wines. This wing had become a Regency Dining-room (31ft. 9 ins. x 16ft.) with a succession of 13 wallpapers (1750-1850). It was refronted in Victorian times, the two upper stories with rusticated quoins, when it was used as Shops, including two Taverns (see Plate IV for two-bay Undercroft).

Nicholas Noble was a Brewer when admitted Freeman of the City in 1468. In his will as fishmonger in 1498 he bequeaths 'to Ann my well-beloved wyfe all that my place or Inne called the Swan that I dwell in' in St. Peter Mancroft.^{1 3} Here is a change in emphasis, a man who devoted himself to his business, rather than becoming a city magnate. In the south-east room on the far side of the Inn Yard was an inscription or rhyme of four lines in a frame 26ins. x 6ins. in Black-letter characters, the wall being coloured deep crimson; line 1 had 'the' in the centre with 'Servytor' below; the 3rd line '[God] b[lessest] both [beast and man?]'; the last line ending with a welcome to the [Sw] 'an'? The rest of this wing was a Victorian building mostly on a garden wall, but having four windows (of 1825) on the back.

Another wing of about 1480 extended north from Lomynour's original Buttery doors at the base of the Tee. Across a lobby there was a Scullery with a chamfered and arched blocked doorway of purple brick. The room measured 19ft. 7ins. x 14ft. with a fireplace at the end; the doorway was opposite a hatch; the west wall had a medieval window, its sill 6ft. up, its chamfered jamb-bricks tailed off into the wall instead of the later systematic quoining. The room above was useful for service to the Great Chamber, in fact the later Stair mounted from the west through this room to the Stage-end of the Big Room. The Main Stairs were at the opposite end, passing from the Inn Yard at the back of the Kitchen range to a lobby in the Great Hall bay-window. The medieval stairways must have been in corresponding positions, but were perhaps spiral in square projections.

The Landgable (Langol) rent-books take the Swan through the years 1547 to 1626. There is 'the White Swan, late John Tompson, late Christopher Layer gent, for diverse tenements next, called the Swan' paying a farthing a year and therefore only collected after some years. Layer was a grocer, and died in 1600. He had been Mayor in 1581. These Landgable rents are of value as showing a succession of owners and who were their neighbours.¹⁴

Thomas Garwood¹⁵ was assessed in 1680 on £40 rental, according to the Churchwardens' accounts of St. Peter Mancroft. Next year £2. 15s. 8d. was paid

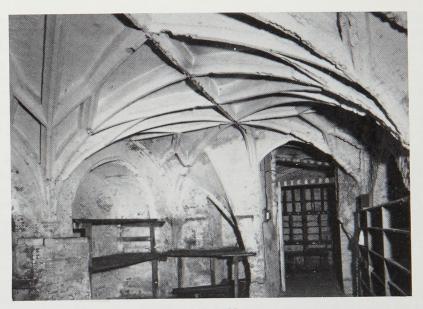


Plate IV Swan Inn, Undercroft. Photograph by Hallam Ashley

to him for the Easter Parish Meeting held at the 'White Swanne'. Probably he had modernised the building, to judge by a moulding found from a vertical casement-window like those of 1660 in the entrance-court of the Strangers' Hall. A 1752 sketch of the Swan shows dormer windows and a 'Jacobean' type of gallery in the yard. At the Election of 1680 fifty persons were accommodated here.

The Gregorians, a semi-masonic Club, met in their Chapter-room at the White Swan from 1764 to 1806 when they were dissolved. They apparently rebuilt the Big Room, as in the coving over the stage was a baroque shield, a Dove on a ribbon over two entwined serpents; supporters a Wyvern and a Fighting-Cock; a Strong Man as crest stood at the top. A cryptic motto 'O. J. I. w' possibly referred to Jeremiah Ives, mayor in 1756. The club had presented his portrait to the City. The 'Gregorians' room' at the Swan was used by the High Sheriff in 1838 (see Plate V).¹⁶

The room had large baroque panels over a dado; there were four large sash windows and at the east end a fireplace opposite the Stage. The ceiling was raised a little above the cornice to allow for the coving all round, while the roof was firmly tied in, and was consistent with good proportions for the room. This allowed for the upper tier of sash windows instead of dormers for the second storey bedrooms while maintaining the medieval floor-levels. Collar roofs for the upper bedrooms were acceptable. Externally the walls were faced with 'white' brick except on the street-front where 'mathematical' tiles were used to match the brickwork in appearance after the timber-framing had been reconstructed to a greater height above the jetty. The openings had flat arches except over the hotel entrance-gates where the gateposts were carved with curtains drawn back to suggest the Theatrical connection (see plate III).

Till 1758 when the new theatre opened in Theatre Street, the Norwich Company of Comedians had performed since 1731 at the White Swan Playhouse giving a

combination of acting and singing as in 1736. This was certainly in the previous necessarily taller or wider Big Room before the Gregorians rebuilt it, and not in the open air; it had two Galleries and Boxes at two levels, but the Pit had backless benches. From 1758 the Little Theatre, Swan Inn, continued with a series of Touring Companies especially those parading freaks or novelties. It served as a Boxing-ring in 1827 and until the Cornhall of 1863 was available. A great Main of Cocks took place between Local Gentlemen and those of Northampton in 1827, but cock fighting was presently prohibited. Mr. John Russel sang his own American popular songs in the Concert Room at the Swan in 1847.¹⁷

It was coaching that produced the heyday of the White Swan. By 1821 a coach left the Bull in Bishopsgate at 5.30 a.m. on three days a week and reached the Swan twelve-and-a-half hours later, but routes to London varied. There were also coaches to Yarmouth, and through Lynn and Newark to the Midlands and the North. The 1783 Directory lists Thomas Tilbury at the White Swan 'post-chaises to let'. In 1811 there are three Inn-keepers there, Barnard, Thomas Chamberlain and John Sayer and in the Swan Yard it is Sayer and Bond, Post chaise and Horse hostlers.

When the City bought the whole site in 1958, the Abstract of Title included two plans and showed William G. Edwards and Thomas Edwards of Bramfield had acquired the property and disposed of a Blacksmith's Shop and Yard next Lady Lane for a Methodists' Meeting-house in 1825.¹⁸

That year Samuel Asker, hairdresser, took advantage of the Coaching prosperity and bought the Swan Inn from the Edwards for £5,750. The plan shows Asker as already occupying the adjoining north Diningroom wing next the street. It could now revert to being a Dining-room. The main Swan Inn block has a Parlour at the east end, an Entrance Hall approached from the Inn Yard and two Staircases, one leading to the hotel Bedrooms, the other to the Grear Room, and



Plate V White Swan Inn. The Great Chamber. Photograph by Hallam Ashley

three Bar-counters encroached on the yard. The Kitchen had a Travellers'-room cut off the west end. Pantries and a safe intervened on the north between Privies and a Wash-House flanking the Kitchen-Yard. The south wing had two Parlours next the Gateway, a Porter-room with a wide window, a Subscription-room with a bay-window and a round-headed doorway, leading also to a staircase. This wing was presumably built for Samuel Asker as Thomas Moore Keith of Intwood is mentioned in the conveyance as 'of the second part'. He would have financed this new wing. The eaves are about 4ft. higher than those of the main block.

Mr. Keeble went as waiter to the Old Swan in 1845 when it was a good Family Commercial Hotel and extended as far as Bethel Street. He was in charge of the Porter room, the Tradesmen's room and Gentlemen's Servants' room. The Magnet Coach left at 8 p.m. and arrived at 7 a.m.¹

The conveyance to Samuel Asker includes the Yard, Taproom, Harnesshouse, Coalhouse, Chaise house, Stable, Hay lofts, Straw house, Granaries, Bins, Outhouses then in the occupation of Daniel Burton Nobbs (the ostler?). Also the Coach house, Chaise house and other out-buildings in the occupation of the proprietors of the Magnet (formerly Expedition) and Lynn Coaches. Also the Coach-maker's shop, Counting room, Wheelwright's shop, Blacksmith's shop and yard and outhouses in the occupation of James Smith. These are all shown in the far part of the yard with access to Theatre Street and Bethel Street.

In 1848 the last Coach ran to London. The new railways had put a sudden end to the heyday of the White Swan. Samuel Asker had died in 1845 (will) and was succeeded by his widow Elizabeth till 1858 who appeared in the 1854 directory as landlady of the Swan Hotel and Posting house. Their son Samuel Henry Asker sold it for \pounds 325 to John Browne, publican, in 1872 (presumably without the main block).

In 1876 Joseph de Carle Smith²⁰ (mayor in 1877) and others sold for £1300 the medieval main block to the Norwich and Norfolk Liberal Club, evidently rebuilding the west end of the South Wing as a 'new dwelling-house' so that wing and the hotel bedrooms had a kitchen instead of the former old kitchen across the yard. This accounts for the extra window next the round-headed door. The new kitchen extended into what had been stables in 1825. In 1884 the Norwich and Norfolk Liberal Club Estate Co. sold the Swan Inn main block and Chaise-house west of it to Messrs. John Wainwright, Samuel Wainwright and Alfred Wainwright, Wholesale Grocers, but Samuel had to wait till 1895 to obtain the 'new dwelling-house' with Stables, Warehouses, Workshop and Yard (part of the Old Swan Inn) with access from Theatre Street. That was the end of the long vsage of the premises as an Inn. Samuel Wainwright died in 1927, and his executors sold the whole for £6,500 to Johnson, Burton and Theobald, Motor-cycle and radio factors. The only obvious change in the structure from when it was the White Swan, was the insertion of a cast-iron spiral fire-escape stair instead of the wooden stair to bedrooms in the Old Main Block. The basic trouble was perhaps that the Stabling and other provision for the coaching days was so ample and in varied ownership that it became neglected.

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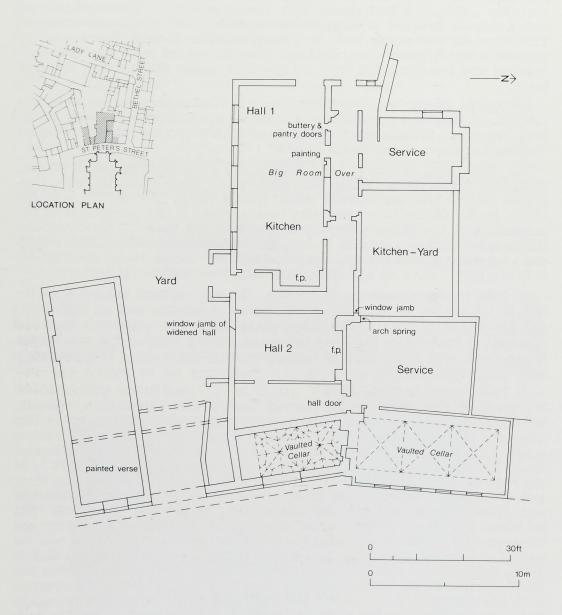


Fig. 1 The White Swann Inn, Norwich, redrawn by Robert Smith from a survey by A. P. Baggs.

¹Norfolk Record Office, Chamberlain's account 1470-90 f.134; Kirkpatrick 'Streets and Lanes of Norwich' 30. ²N.R.O., Enrolled deeds, Roll 3, m. 30. ¹ N.R.O., Enrolled deeds, Roll 7, m. 1d.

- ³N.R.O., Enrolled deeds, Roll 7, m. 1d.
- ⁴N.R.O., Enrolled deeds, Roll 8, m. 3d, three from last.
- ⁵N.R.O., Enrolled deeds, Roll 5, m. 24d and 25d. ⁶W. Hudson and J. C. Tingey, *The Records of the City of Norwich*, vol. I, p. 395.
- ⁷N.R.O., Chamberlain's account 1470-90 f. 133d.
- ⁸N.R.O., Enrolled deeds, Roll 16, m. 6d, 3.
- ⁹ Francis Blomefield, *History of the City of Norwich* pt. I (vol. III of Norfolk, 1806), 1371-1400 lists. ¹⁰ N.R.O., Chamberlain's account 1489, f. 133d.
- ¹¹N.R.O., Norwich Consistory Wills, Brosyard 78-9.
- ¹²Hudson and Tingey, *Records*, II, p.72.
- ¹³N.R.O., Norwich Consistory Wills, Multon 92-93.
- ¹⁴N.R.O., Langable Rent book 4, f. 18d.
- ¹⁵Walter Rye, Antiquarian Miscellany, II, part 2, p. 348.
- ¹⁶Eastern Counties Collectana, p. 196; B. Cozens-Hardy, Norwich Mayors, p. 127.

¹⁷Leonard P. Thompson, Norwich Inns, (Ipswich 1947), pp. 7 and 8 and Chapter 12.

¹⁸N.R.O., Town Clerk's Deeds, bundle 42.

¹⁹*Eastern Daily Press*, 6/7/1937, from W. S. 28/2/1903 and E. S. 25/2/1903.

²⁰P. T. R. Palgrave-Moore, Mayors and Lord Mayors of Norwich (1978).

The Local Studies Library at the Norwich Central Library has topographical boxfiles; those which include items on the White Swan provide useful views and items. Leonard P. Thompson, Norwich Inns illustrates (frontispiece) 'The Christmas Coach at the White Swan' and (p.61) 'The Gregorians' shield'.

The writer wishes to thank Mr. Hallam Ashley, Mr. A. P. Baggs and Mr. G. A. F. Plunkett for the use of photographs and drawings.

Editor's Note Our Secretary's files show that the Council of this Society, while regretting the loss of this piece of old Norwich, did not consider they could reasonably seek to have the entire building preserved in view of its condition and all the other circumstances. Efforts were made to have the vaulted undercrofts saved from destruction; but due to their ceilings being well above the outside pavement level the city authorities decided the additional work and expenditure was not justified.

Appendix:

The White Swan Inn, Norwich by Barbara Green

During the demolition of the White Swan in 1961 bricks, wooden window tracery, fragments of wall paintings and a wooden bracket were recovered and presented to Norwich Castle Museum by the City Engineer's Department of Norwich Council (Accession number 227.961, County number 611N).

a. Wooden bracket with the figure of a young man (Plate VI) maximum length of bracket 58 cms.

The bracket is roughly triangular with a right-angle at the back and a concave front face. The bracket was attached to the building by a 23 cm. long tenon along the length of the upper side. There is a hollow chamfer along one front edge only.

Cut from the same piece of wood is the figure of a young man. His back is attached to the bracket from head to waist; the lower part of the body and the legs stand proud. The legs are bent slightly at the knees so that the feet rest naturally on the lower part of the bracket, with the toes of the boots curling over the edge. The right arm is bent to the breast and something is held in the hand; but this and the hand are damaged. The left arm and shoulder are missing.



Plate VI Swan Inn. Photograph by G. Yardy

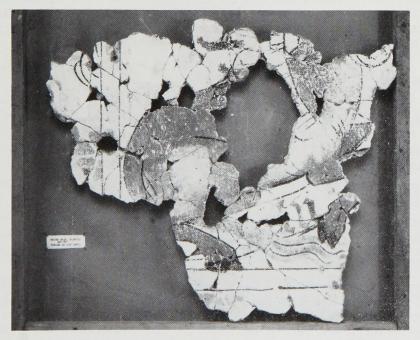


Plate VII Swan Inn. Photograph by G. Yardy

Photographs Copyright Norfolk Museums Service (Norwich Castle Museum).

The figure is wearing a short closely fitted garment which barely covers the hips. It is padded at the chest. It is closely buttoned down the front from the high standing collar to the dagged edge. Slung low around the hips is a broad belt carved to suggest metal plaques joined together and fastened at the front with an ornamental buckle. Raised circlets around the legs just below the knees suggest he is wearing boots or soled hose with long pointed toes or pikes. The face is clean shaven and the hair waves away evenly on either side of the face to cover the ears. He is wearing a soft round-crowned cap with a rolled brim.

The comments which follow on the date and style of the costume are based on Cunnington and Cunnington (1969):

It is difficult to be certain whether the body garment is a gipon (doublet) or cote-hardie. In the second half of the 14th century both were tight fitting, waisted and buttoned down the front from neck to hem. Both became very short. Both had tight fitting sleeves; however the sleeves of the cote-hardie had a hanging flap or tippet, while those of the gipon fitted tightly to the wrist. Between 1380 and 1420 the cote-hardie was given a high stand-up collar; after about 1420 the high collar was transferred to the hitherto low-necked gipon.

The carefully carved belt can be identified as a knightly girdle, worn by nobles between about 1350 and 1410. Piked shoes were fashionable between about 1395 and 1410. The long spear-like points were less exaggerated on boots and soled-hose than on shoes. The hair style is that of the later 14th/early 15th century which was replaced about 1410 by the bowl crop when the hair usually



Plate VIII Swan Inn. Photograph by G. Yardy

Photograph Copyright Norfolk Museums Service (Norwich Castle Museum).

reached the upper edge of the ears. The hat is of a simple style which was worn during the 14th and 15th centuries.

The care with which the carver has depicted details of the costume such as the structure of the knightly girdle, the dagged edge of the cote-hardie (surely this in view of the other dated features) and the piked footweat suggests that he was showing a fashionable young man of his day, that is a young man of about 1400.

Cunnington, W. C. and Cunnington, P. (1969) Handbook of Medieval Costume, 2nd ed., London.

b. Remains of a wall painting of knight in armour on horseback. Body of horse c. 35 cm across. (Plate VII; see also pp. 39-40).

The picture has been outlined in black and filled in with paint. Much of the horse's body and head is missing. Only the right leg of the knight survives clad in plate armour.

The horse's body is yellow ochre in colour while the knight's leg and the border to the picture are silvery grey. Two letters from an inscription can be seen beneath the horse's belly 'in (bellum)'.

Outside the border are two halves of stencilled red roses, part of the decorattion which covers much of the wall.

c. Head of a 15th century window cut from a single piece of wood 41 cm x 28.2 cm. (Plate VIII).

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