

AWDRY BAILEY & DOUGLAS

SOLICITORS

A History of Awdry Bailey and Douglas

We can all see from our letter heading that the long sequence of legal partnerships which today culminates in Awdry Bailey & Douglas can be traced back to around 1750. What though can we say about the history of the partnerships and the sequence of buildings and modifications centred on St John's Street?

The firm's original founder was William Salmon (1729-1781) who started out as a young attorney in Devizes around 1750. He was not only the first of three generations with the same name but each William Salmon was an attorney and served successively as Town Clerk and Solicitor to the Borough of Devizes. The firm was passed to his son, William Salmon (the Second) (1748-1826), who in 1793 became owner of much of Devizes Castle. He was later joined in the legal firm by his own son William Wroughton Salmon (d. 1855), who also succeeded to ownership of the castle in 1809.

William Salmon (the Second) became a partner in Devizes' first bank, situated in St John's Street and was later known as Salmon Tylee & Co. Due to his banking revenue, civic influence and, so we would like to think, because of the financial success of his law practice, William Salmon (the Second) became known in Devizes as 'King' Salmon and is described as 'running the Corporation'. He was also noted for having married a society beauty. In 1783 he shrewdly managed to obtain the taxation stamp distributorship for the county of Wiltshire, in place of a Mr Flower who had held it from 1779, more of which later.

As yet we are uncertain as to the precise whereabouts or layout, of the firm's offices prior to the 19th Century but it appears that these always were in St John's Street, close to the castle. The firm has in its archives original deeds relating to the various parcels of land making up our present holding in St John's Street, from 1750 to 1856, further research is needed on these impressive and detailed documents before we can make full sense of them. What is clear though is that the legal firm and the early bank in St John's Street were closely linked through having partners in common, through marriage, and the firm's origins are tied closely to the Castle. Indeed the bank's premises at that time formed part of the pleasure gardens of the Castle until sold off in the early 1840's. The bank then moved into its new building at 41 St John's Street, now occupied by Weeks the accountants. Neighbouring plots of land in St John's Street were owned by some of these individuals and even a cursory examination of the deeds and other sources reveal what was evidently a very 'small world' in Devizes.

The firm's most notable client was Henry Addington, the 1st Viscount Sidmouth, who later became Prime Minister, from 1801 to 1804. The ledgers relating to his legal accounts are still preserved and part is illustrated here on our website.

In any event, William Wroughton Salmon later sold the castle to his banking partner Thomas Tylee, to whom he was also related by marriage and moved to London in 1828. The law firm was left to his two partners, William Edward Tugwell and Alexander Grant Meek. In 1865 those partners were joined by Joseph Jackson and for almost 90 years that followed, the firm had at least one partner from the Jackson family. A full list of the succession of partnerships from around 1750 to 1983 is preserved today on two wooden tablets that were previously on display at the Devizes office.

Despite the long ancestry of ABD it was the late Henry Godwin Awdry (1911-2002), father of our Senior Partner Tony Awdry, who effectively commenced the modernisation of the firm and gave it its present form. After war service in

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the Wiltshire Yeomanry, being in the first wave of British tanks at El Alemein, he joined the Awdry family practice in Chippenham with his cousin Daniel Awdry. This later became Wood Awdry and today is known as Wood Awdry Ford. That firm prospered in Chippenham and Henry then began to assist with the legal practice in St John's Street, Devizes, then known as Jackson and Jackson, at the rear of no 33. The Jackson brothers were Guy Jackson (d. 1953) and Joe Jackson (d. 1936) after whom Jackson Close in Devizes is named. Henry Awdry came over to the Devizes office one day a week from around 1948 and then joined the Devizes firm and became a partner the following year, to form Jackson and Awdry. When Guy Jackson died in 1953 Henry Awdry's move to the Devizes office became full-time. In the then style HGA had practised as a sole principal as did Cordell Newbery of Phillip Johnson and Newbery of the Market Place in Devizes. Cordell Newbery was in poor health due to his own war experiences as a Japanese prisoner and both sole practitioners had a gentlemen's agreement to look after each other's practices during holidays and illnesses. Unfortunately Cordell Newbery died and as in assistance to his widow Henry Awdry joined his firm in 1965 with that of Cordell Newbery's to form Awdry, Newbery & Co. By then Henry Awdry's firm still had its offices mostly to the rear of 33 St John's Street. Up to that time the firm had a long standing license, negotiated by 'King' Salmon as long ago as 1783, to act as a stamping office for tax documents, hence the number of pigeon holes and safes in various rooms, which still survive. Tony Awdry suspects that the rear building in its original form in the 19th century was purpose-built either as a stamping office or even the early bank, the location of King Salmon's original stamping premises is uncertain.

Once the two partnerships had been joined together Henry Awdry recruited Peter Wyles as a partner and embarked upon a programme of expansion and refurbishment, to accommodate the combined staff of the two firms at the St. John Street site. Most of the new building work took place in 1965. At that time the only access onto the street was via the present DX corridor which remained the case for a further 6 years. In 1965 a new storey of brick with a flat roof was built at the rear of the property, onto the existing 19th century building occupied by the stamping offices.

The Devizes office

During the major changes of 1965 Henry Awdry's architect cleverly made good use of the existing room arrangements by removing a number of safes relating to the original use as a stamping office and moved the main safe to the present strong room. The previous year, in 1964, the oldest part of the present buildings, no 33 St John's Street was purchased. This half timbered building with a Grade 2 Listing was bought from what remained of the estate of Alexander Grant Meek, partner of the firm during the 19th century. This carried on for a number of years operating as Appleton's antique shop, and was not brought into use as part of the legal offices until November 1972. This is a very fine example of a late or post medieval timber framed building whose continuous jetty design is typical of the 16th and early 17th centuries. Therefore this is roughly contemporary with Devizes Castle which was still standing, until Cromwell decided to dismantle it after laying siege.

St John's Street was occasionally known as Castle Street during this time and was occupied largely by smiths and fishmongers. Number 33 and indeed all of St John's Street occupy an area formally part of the inner bailey of the Castle. St John's Church served as the garrison church of the Castle. The 'middle' part of number 33, now occupied by Reception and the new Accounts office and corridor, was, during the 19th Century, the offices of the County Court; this can be seen on an Ordnance Survey plan of 1885. Provision had been made for a County Court in Devizes from 1847 but it is not at all clear whether this was in St John's Street during its early years. The area subsequently became used as the Devizes Library from 1936 until this moved in 1968 to purpose built premises in Sheep Street. Tony Awdry remembers, as a young boy, the wooden planked floor of the Library with very high bookshelves and also recalls that the Librarian was a Mrs Robertson, also a client of the firm. The oldest visible part of the present Reception area is the skylight structure which English Heritage advise is of circa 1835 and thereby was in use during the periods when the building was used as a Court and then as a library. By 1968 the housing boom, the expansion of Legal Aid, Magistrates court work and divorce work resulted in Julian Bailey joining the firm in 1968. In 1970 'JJB' became an equity partner and the firm became known as Awdry Wyles and Bailey. In 1972 the all-important expansion onto St John's Street took place with the bringing into use of the front of no 33. Douglas Webster was the architect and devised the broad central glass-walled corridor. Tony

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Awdry became an equity partner in 1981. The same year saw the purchase of the large car park in 1981 for the use of staff, indeed JJB recalls completing the purchase on the day of the Royal Wedding of that year. Then, in 1982, JJB arranged the purchase from Colonel Stackpole of number 32 St John's Street, Lees bookshop, a building probably of early 19th century date. In 1996 Peter Wyles left the partnership to form his own firm in Devizes and when Andrew Douglas became an equity partner in 1987, Awdry Bailey & Douglas assumed its present name. Andrew Douglas arranged for the purchase of the small car park in Castle Road (the approach to the castle cut through St John's Street by 'King' Salmon). At the start of 2000 Alistair Everett became an equity partner when Julian Bailey retired from equity at the end of 1999. The next physical development was in 1990 when the present Reception area was created, with three new interview rooms and the present doorway of number 33 onto the street inserted, thus moving the main point of access several metres to the south, the original doorway of the building now being blocked up, is still visible in the front interview room. The painting by G.A. Renvoize (1991) shows the front before the new doorway was inserted. Such changes to a Grade II listed building obviously needed the approval of English Heritage and these were overseen by Tony Awdry who had also supervised the annexing of no's 32 and, later, 31. St John's Street. In late 2001 a lease was taken of number 31 St John's Street, a mirror image of no 32 and also of early 19th century date. It has provided the firm with both additional office space and a new Boardroom.

Our other offices

Our offices in Royal Wootton Bassett and Chippenham were founded respectively in 1998 and 2013. Our Marlborough office was opened in 2007, a modern building and a radical departure from the character of the firm's premises as a whole which otherwise are all listed.

The current Partners are Tony Awdry, Andrew Douglas, Alistair Everett, Alexander David, Rachel Fereday, Ronna Turley and Tim Hotchkiss.

By, Peter Johnson

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