

# The (Royal) Hotel

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Companion piece to the Hotel Field  
/Winter Gardens (2020)

Brian Austin

2021



Thos Rogers of The Hotel  
Hotel Manager 1834-47 and Owner 1847-81

This piece discusses the development of the Hotel Field and The [Royal] Hotel from 1792 to modern times. You will find cuttings provided by Brian Austin and pictures from Pat Hase. Brian Austin is the researcher and author, Raye Green has typed it up and is responsible for the layout.

Weston-super-Mare notes on the origins of “The Hotel”, later  
the “Royal Hotel”  
being a companion piece to my notes on the Hotel Field (2020)

### 1. Introduction

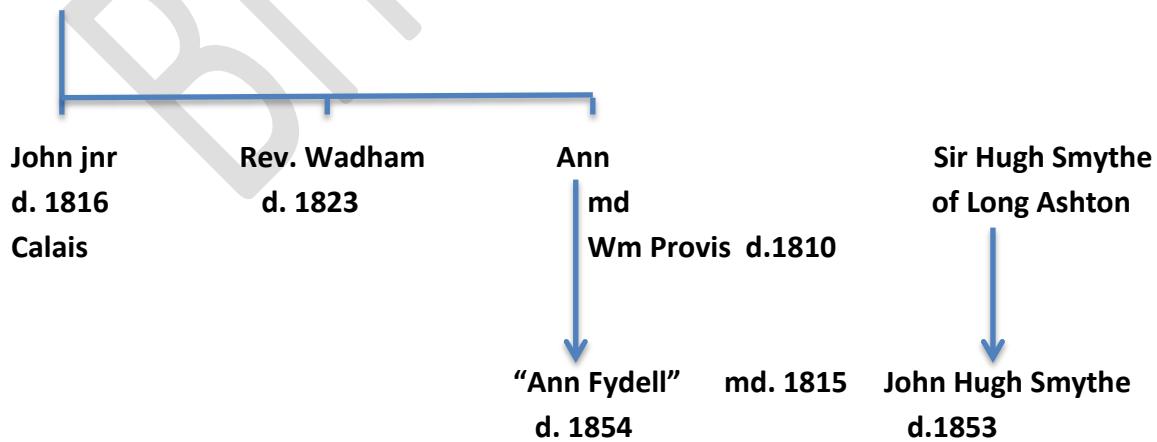
When the old Jones farm house burned down on Whit Sunday 1792 there would normally have been a reaction from the squire as owner of the estate, but the Pigotts had other things on their mind at the time, so nothing was done.

Squire John Pigott was not well and would die in 1794 having fallen out with his son and heir John jnr who had left the country. This meant that the younger brother, Wadham, became acting head of the estates which was a nuisance to him as he was already working as curate of St. John Church due to the seemingly permanent illness of the rector. Wadham had a sister, Mrs Ann Provis, who had left her husband and was enjoying a “society life” in Bath. In 1794 the Pigott siblings had no known heirs.

Wadham seems to have been a gentle soul who preferred a quiet life so when it came to estate business he allowed his father’s old aide, William Cox, to look after complicated decisions. We should also remember that we had just started a twenty year war with France whose revolutionary rule of terror was the main item of news.

#### Pigott Squires of Weston. Research Brian Austin

**John Pigott d.1794**



## **2. Location**

Weston was a small and unexciting village in 1794 but just two miles from the trading port of Uphill and home to the Birnbeck fishery that was a major food supplier to the whole area. The area was good for farming sheep and cows, the soil was good, and a local yeoman farmer, Richard Parsley, was working on growing teasels for the northern wool mills.

The well-known philanthropist, Hannah Moore, had first visited Uphill in 1773 and enjoyed walking the sands. Botanists and artists passed through, hundreds of passing boats out of Bristol carried people who puzzled at the walls on Worlebury Hill, and then in 1789 King George III began bathing in the sea at Weymouth, and if it was good enough for him .....

The ball was rolling!

By 1800 the influence of Richard Parsley had grown, along with his land holdings, and he was a jovial and popular figure with whom William Cox found a kindred soul. Both men were aware of the development potential in and around Weston and this led to them forming a business partnership. Wadham Pigott was interested in their ideas and had moved out of the rectory to live over in Grove House which was far more comfortable.

Wadham began leasing out the rectory to paying guests, in particular to the artist, George Cumberland, starting in 1802. Other locals with larger properties, such as Cornelius Hancock and John Harvey, soon followed suit and a report of 1804 stated that Weston was “attracting many visitors due to the sea air and bathing.”

Cox and Parsley understood that to attract lots of visitors they might need more than the delights of nature and began to modernise and expand. This went down so well with Wadham Pigott that he drew up a deed in 1805 to state that if all three Pigotts died without issue the Weston holdings would go to the Cox-Parsley partnership. Sadly, he misjudged his sister Mrs Provis!

## **3. The Impetus**

Ann Provis was so angry at this agreement that she felt compelled to announce that she had an adult daughter “Ann Fydell” whom even Mr. Provis knew nothing about. This caused a controversy and cancelled the Cox-Parsley deal that was officially null and void by 1808. Now, the developers had purchased most of the old land-holdings of Westonians (the “Old Auster tenements) and cleared all the squatters from the Moor.

By an indenture dated 29<sup>th</sup> September 1808 Cox-Parsley purchased the holding once Jones Farm and known as “Home Ground” consisting of three pieces:

- a. the old farm site and the garden
- b. the field surrounding it
- c. “the old esplanade” being a land strip along the sea front.

The plan was to set up an hotel for the summer season with an arrival point to take stage coaches. This was a serious gamble in such a small village with poor access roads, but hey-ho. Finger crossed, and let’s give it a go.

#### **4. Needham**

The job of building our first hotel was given to Charles Taylor, a local stonemason, and he obviously didn’t waste time. The plan was to construct the place to house thirty rooms – some of which were large enough to be partitioned was required – and this would have required a lot of labour and extensive transport facilities that remain unexplained.

Most of the work was done by the end of 1809 and when the layout was complete there was a big celebration during which Charles Taylor had the honour of “pulling the first pint”. The first lease was held by James Needham who was enthusiastic and not frugal. The opening celebration day featured the local Militia carrying out exercises on the sands before settling down in the hotel for a free dinner in the new dining room.

Unfortunately, there were so many of them that the waiters couldn’t get in, but Needham simply removed the (still unset) windows and meals went in that way instead!

Needham “carried out renovations” in 1810 but his reliance on seasonal trade failed to pay off and by April 1811 his venture had failed and the hotel goods were up for auction followed by the “cows and carriages” in June. When I read the inventory for the auction I was once again puzzled as to how all that furniture had arrived in the first place. None of it was local, much of it came from Bristol, and it was better quality than most Weston houses would ever have seen.

James Needham came and went leaving no traces I could find. Where from and where too? Who exactly was he? Such is life.

## 5. Sawtell

The years from 1810 to 1815 were taken up by the "Weston-super-Mare Enclosure Act" and Cox-Parsley boosted the takings by organising public meetings for that and other topics. The Needham family finally moved out in August 1810 and the place closed for the winter whilst the owners sought a new landlord..

An advertisement appeared concerning "the theft of peaches and nectarines" from the Brockley gardens of Cox and Wadham Pigott suggesting where the hotel got some supplies from, and it was around now that Wadham made out a Bond for Cox allocating him £2,000. The need to repay this money was cancelled in Wadham's will.

In April 1812 the hotel re-opened under John and Ann Sawtell. John was an astute businessman and in 1813 was able to offer "a new stables and lock-up house" in a year that the village was "overflowing with fashionables and invalids" (Bristol Mirror)

Mrs Ann Provis, nee Pigott, died in 1813 and the story of "her secret daughter" came out. Wadham found himself nominated the girls' guardian and, seriously confused by the legalities, called in Mr. Spencer Newcome Meredith of Lincolns Inn as his advisor. Cox and Parsley appointed Emmanuel Violett solicitor to protect their interests.

The Peace Festivities at Weston-super-Mare took place on Tuesday last; when the Inhabitants, to the amount of between one and two hundred, (the gentry and visitors included) partook of a most excellent subscription dinner, laid out on the Strand, which consisted of a fat ox, three sheep, and an ample proportion of good plum pudding and strong beer. The entertainment was enlivened by an excellent band of music, which played many national and loyal tunes. After dinner the sprightly dance commenced with true English spirit, without any regard to rank, and continued without intermission till late in the evening. At night a general illumination took place, in which the Hotel shone most conspicuous. The whole passed off with the utmost hilarity; and the company separated at a late hour, highly gratified with the generosity and munificence of the managers of and the subscribers to the festival.

On August 6<sup>th</sup> 1814 this cutting appeared in the Bristol Mirror

The confusion lasted two years until John Pigott jnr, the squire proper, died in Calais in 1815. Wadham became the true lord of the manor and Ann Fydel (the “secret daughter”) was married off to John Hugh Smythe, the base son of Smythe of Ashton Court. The latter thereby became heir to the Pigott estates.

During all the confusion Cox and Parsley drew up an “Equal Shares Agreement” and the Enclosure of Weston was ratified by Parliament (1815). The village was becoming more organised, the hotel increased its trade, and the “latest arrivals” lists included the Baroness D’Escury and others such.

The old agricultural Westonians must have looked on in wonder at all the new money wandering about. An oddity of this year was an advert offering “*A small cottage to let in the Hotel field with a dining room of fifteen square feet*”. I believe this might have become that where the putting green ticket office stood (for those who remember the 1960s)

In 1816 Sawtell was offering “Posts Chaises as well as bathing machines” and in 1817 a stand-out visitor was Don Petro E.S Marsingellibus(!). Another successful season, but tragedy struck on 28<sup>th</sup> October 1817 when Sawtell unexpectedly died aged only 43 leaving his widow Ann stuck in the place for the closed Winter season.

In December there was a “Sale of Goods” of the hotel, delayed due to Ann Sawtell refusing to leave until being removed tied to a chair. I am pleased to report that eventually Mrs Sawtell was taken up by some “kind gentleman” and put in charge of our first Post Office. She lived another twenty years in comfort. Cox and Parsley had winter 1817 to find a new landlord.

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## WESTON HOTEL.

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION,  
(Under an Assignment for the benefit of Creditors.)  
By Mr. HARRIL,  
On the Premises, on Monday the 10th day of June, and  
Eight following days, (Sunday excepted.)

**A**LL the truly handsome, extensive and valuable  
HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, PLATE, BED  
and TABLE LINEN, CHINA, GLASS capital Mangle,  
four-motion Beer-Machine, Bathing Machine, Stock of  
WINES, several COWS, HORSES, CARRIAGES, a  
Cart, Harness, and other effects, of JAMES NEEDHAM, at  
the above CAPITAL INN AND HOTEL, situated by  
the sea-side, at Weston Supermare, 22 miles from Bristol,  
and 4 from Uphill; in the county of Somerset.

The furniture comprises thirty-one mahogany and beech  
carved and plain four-post, field, and other bedsteads,  
with chintz, cotton and dimity furniture, and window-curtains  
to suit, thirty-one prime goose-feather and milpuff  
beds, twenty-three matresses, a corresponding number of  
sheets, blankets, quilts and counterpanes, wardrobe, ma-  
hogany chests of drawers, night-stools, angular and other  
bason-stands, several sets of Cumberland tables, fine wood,  
card, Pembroke, camp, and dressing-tables; sofas, easy  
chair, mahogany chairs, stuffed over the rail and brass-  
nailed, a variety of painted and other chairs, elegant con-  
vex mirrors, chimney, pier, and dressing looking-glasses,  
excellent suits of window-curtains, Brussels and Kidder-  
minster floor, bedside and stair carpeting, eight-day dial,  
a choice and large assortment of culinary and many other  
articles.

The Public are informed that the above-mentioned  
Hotel was furnished about nine months ago, by one of the  
best Cabinet-Makers in Bristol. The goods are all mod-  
ern, of the first quality, and in every respect fit for the  
use of the most respectable private housekeepers.

N. B. The whole to be viewed with printed Catalogues  
only, on the Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, preceding  
the first day of sale.

Catalogues to be had, at one shilling each, of the  
Auctioneer, at his Public Sale Rooms, No. 4, Bridge-street,  
Bristol, and at the place of Sale.

Sale to begin precisely at Ten o'clock each day.

## WESTON-SUPER-MARE.—SOMERSET.

TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION, 324  
By Mr. MAGGS,

At the HOTEL, WESTON-SUPER-MARE,  
On TUESDAY NEXT, the 2d of Dec. and following days,

**A**LL the STOCK, HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE,  
of the said Hotel, lately belonging to Mr. JOHN SAWTELL,  
deceased.—Consisting of 2 milch cows; 1 horse; tax-  
cart and harness, 1 other cart; 15 goose-feather and other  
beds, with bolsters, pillows, and mattress; 10 bedsteads and  
furniture, with window-curtains to match; 7 stump bed-  
steads; bed and table linen; several sets of mahogany  
dining, tea, card, and other tables; 5 sofas, with coverings  
and cushions; several chimney, pier, and swing looking-  
glasses; several sets of mahogany and other chairs; window-  
stools; several mahogany and other wash-hand stands, with  
basins and ewers; mahogany and other dressing tables;  
several sets of mahogany chests of drawers; 2 wardrobes;  
night-tables; 2 large settles; patent mangle; 2 eight-day  
clocks, with mahogany cases; barometer; mahogany side-  
board; several tea and dinner trays; bagatelle table; several  
large carpets, with hearth-rugs; several sets of fire-irons and  
tenders; prints; a variety of plated, brass, and other can-  
dlesticks; floor and stair carpeting; copper coal-scuttle;  
several sets of tea-china and blue ware; 3 sets of dinner  
blue earthenware; a large number of decanters, rummers,  
tumblers, wine, beer, and other glasses; punch bowls; 4  
tea-urns, and 1 coffee ditto; knife-trays; and a great variety  
of other useful articles of kitchen and household furniture,  
and dairy utensils; empty casks, bottles, and other articles,  
too numerous to particularize.

A small quantity of WINE and SPIRITS.  
Six silver table-spoons, 12 ditto tea, cream jug, punch  
ladle, and four salt-spoons.

The Company are requested to attend early, as the  
sale will commence at 11 o'clock to a minute, on account  
of the shortness of the days; and the whole to be sold  
without reserve.

These cuttings, dated 27<sup>th</sup> April 1811

and

November 29<sup>th</sup> 1817

beg the question "but how did they get all this here in the first place?"



**M**ESSRS. HILL & HARSE beg leave to return  
their most sincere thanks to their Friends, the Nobility,  
Gentry, and Public in general, for the many favours  
bestowed upon them since their commencement of business  
as Coach Proprietors; and they also beg leave most respectfully  
to inform them that, on MONDAY NEXT, the 8th  
Instant they will commence running their

### FOUR-HORSE COACH,

From the HOTEL,  
**WESTON-SUPER-MARE,**

to the SWAN INN, BRIDGE STREET, BRISTOL, every  
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, and to return  
on the Evenings of the same Days, (at 4 o'clock) during  
the Season. Every attention will be paid to the comfort of  
those who may honour them with their favours.

Weston-super-Mare, June 5, 1818.



**J**AMES WOOKEY very respectfully informs his  
Friends and the Public, that he has commenced running his  
original REGULATOR Four-Horse COACH from the HOTEL,

**WESTON-SUPER-MARE,**  
to the TALBOT INN, Bath-Street, BRISTOL, every Morning,  
(Sundays excepted), at a Quarter before Eight o'clock, from  
whence it will return every Afternoon at a Quarter before Four.

J. W. takes this opportunity of thanking his friends for their  
past kindness; and hopes, by attention, to merit the favour and  
support of them and a generous public.

Ship and Castle Inn, Congresbury, 5th May, 1820.

Maybe these cuttings from June 6<sup>th</sup> 1818 and May 15<sup>th</sup> 1820 provide a partial answer.

## 6. Fry



Richard Fry, 1781-1855  
The Hotel 1818-1823

In April 1818 the hotel was taken on by Richard Fry who came to Weston from Clifton with a long list of business contacts and the advantage of being financially secure. Mrs Hester Thrale, a London society lady, visited in 1819 and reported the village to be “as full as an egg”.

Thrale also complained that there were “only two books in the parish, the bible and Paradise Lost”. This allows me to point out that the locals don’t always tell the truth when being patronised. It was about now that a visiting gent found two men carrying a heavy beer barrel on a pole into the hotel and was assured they had carried it from Worle! The local brewers all had horses and carts but

the tale was probably worth a free drink.

Fry refitted the hotel in 1820 in time for Coronation Day (George IV) for which he laid on dinner for three hundred topped off with a firework display. He now had a daily coach to and from Bristol and managed to keep the place thriving without any major incidents.

Richard Fry looked to move on after five years and he built a residence “Myrtle Cottage” opposite the hotel. He became proprietor of the “Mason’s Arms” (later the Bath Hotel, thence “The Imperial”). In later years he became a highly respected influence in Weston and served as a Town Commissioner from 1843 until his death in 1855. His son-in-law Joseph James was a developer who created the modern Knightstone Road to the Island.

## 7. Reeve

John Reeve was a well-known Bristolian when he moved to Weston in 1823, aged 52. He had served for ten years in the Bristol Mansion House before opening his own “Reeve’s Hotel” on College Green from 1806.

He immediately teamed up with Cox and Parsley in creating an improved Esplanade west of the hotel grounds. Bristol to Weston had become a major coach route and local trade had expanded to the extent that the hotel no longer needed to close in winter.

The co-owner, William Cox, died in 1831, and his son William jnr. had other interests, so he and Parsley appointed a legal “umpire” as overseer to divide the Cox-Parsley holdings fairly. In the end this resulted in Reeve buying the hotel from that estate for £3,200 on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1834.

Back in 1832 the Rev. Skinner and his daughter came to stay so that Skinner, an antiquarian with a persecution complex, could investigate Worlebury Hill. The hotel was busy and Miss Skinner was put in a partitioned half room next to two young men and “overheard a conversation she should not have been subjected to”. Rev. Skinner accused Reeve of “profiteering” but Reeve was a diplomat and able to calm the situation.

When Reeve became the proprietor in 1834 he employed Thomas Rogers as manager, giving himself more time to expand his influence in Weston not least by associating himself with the philanthropic developer Thomas Harrill. Reeve joined Fry as an elected Town Commissioner until he was “retired” for non-attendance in 1850. He purchased the old Regent Street Post Office in 1844 and was a member of the committee working on creating Birnbeck Pier. In 1847 he sold the hotel to Thomas Rogers for £4,000. Described as “a gent” he died on 14<sup>th</sup> February 1852.

I should note that in 1842 Weston was designated as a “Town”.

## 8. Rogers

Tom Roger’s father had once run the “Churchill Inn”, and now Tom aged 37, with his wife was able to take on the Weston Hotel with the help of a £2,000 mortgage. This, of course, was the first time that the Hotel field started to be known as “Roger’s Field”. An advertisement of May 1848 announcing “*the first hay of the season*” being cut from that field gives a clue to what it looked like then.

Rogers “enlarged” the hotel in 1849 and again in 1850 when it was described as being “*fifty feet tall with a frontage of 120 feet*” and designed by Mr. Gabriel of Bristol.

One of Weston’s rowdier days occurred during the election 1852 when Mr Elton, candidate, gave a speech from the Hotel balcony. Three years later there were “*extensive alterations with a new south wing designed by Wilson of Bath and built by John Palmer of Weston*”. This was carried out with a £4,000 mortgage from Mr Fisher of Brandon Hill, Bristol, that was paid off in 1873.

Mr. Parson, a Bristol dentist, advertised his weekly surgery at the hotel in 1855 but there came a massive boost for the place on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 1856 when the Prince of Wales

stayed overnight. This visit gave Rogers the chance to rename the place “The Royal Hotel” and “the Hotel” passed into local history.

### **9. And then .....**

In 1856 the Lancaster brothers from Worle were caught stealing Rogers’ apples, and then during the 1858 election Rogers ended up in a fist fight with Dr. Joseph Stringfield. This unsavoury character had been ‘best man’ at the wedding of the author, Wilkie Collins, but had become a volatile presence whose children were *‘removed for their own safety’*. He was reputed to be the best doctor in Weston as patients tended to recover when they heard he was coming!

Mrs Ellen King, newly married, was caught stealing glasses in 1859 and, in 1860, Rogers purchased the furniture and effects from the “Banwell Bone Caves” whilst also campaigning to *‘stop boys from firing pistols outside the hotel windows’*

Tom Rogers retired to London and died in 1881 leaving his son Richard and three daughters as co-owners. Richard Rogers had previously set up his own “Wines and Spirits” outlet reached via the Hotel courtyard.

There was an interesting speculative advert in July 1887 as follows:

*For Sale. The Royal Hotel 7 acres with the Imperial Hotel*

*8 premises in Royal Terrace, no 1 the Esplanade*

*The Hotel Field, Strand House (as two cottages in Kewstoke)*

*Apply to Rogers and Chafe, solicitors of Broad St. London.*

Despite the above, the hotel ownership stayed with the children of Tom Rogers until the death of the last survivor during World War Two. Some parts of the estate had been sold to the Council to create the Winter Gardens.

### **10. The Corelli Affair**

In 1896 the author “Marie Corelli” (Mary Mackay) stayed in Weston until *“frightened by hooligans”* and it is alleged that her novel *“The Mighty Atom”* was a lampoon on Weston as revenge.

She returned later and made a nuisance of herself at the Royal Hotel. She signed a contract to buy a house here from Mr. Lawrence Cowan, but eventually was taken to court for failing to fulfil it.

This Mr. Cowan was described as *“the husband of Baroness Gingold”*. She was discovered to be not a baroness but a self-promoting actress noted also as the mother of the popular performer Hermione Gingold. The unsold house above became “Severn Croft” in Severn Road.

**11. “The Hotel” Weston-super-Mare**  
**A chronological aid.**

- 1792 Jones farm fire left the site available for development
- 1795 “May and Castle” Brewery established in Worle
- 1797 Lodgings advertised in Uphill
- 1801 Population of Weston is 138
- 1804 Banwell reported to be popular with visitors
- 1805 Cox & Parsley clear all squatters from Weston Moor
- 1808 Cox & Parsley buy out the holders of old Weston tenements  
enclose the “Waste Lands”, and purchase the old Jones farm site.  
Solicitor John Baker leases “The Rights to Bathe in the Sea” from the  
squire. See picture and family tree on page 12.
- 1809 The Hotel is built by Charles Taylor and leased to James Needham
- 1811 Needham’s venture failed. John Sawtell takes over.
- 1813 Spectacular dinner at the Hotel for the Blagdon Cavalry Troupe.  
Hannah Moore campaigned to get Napoleon imprisoned on Steep  
Holm
- 1814 A regular stage coach service to Bristol is thriving
- 1815 William Cox promotes visits to Weston on the “Bristol Mirror”  
A deed of Richard Parsley refers to the name “High Street”.
- 1817 Sudden death of John Sawtell. Richard Fry takes over.
- 1819 South Parade is built
- 1820 Excavation on Knightstone unearths “a giant skeleton”
- 1821 Weston Population now 738
- 1822 First Weston “Guide Book” published
- 1823 Richard Fry moved over the road. John Reeve takes on the Hotel  
Richard Hill opens a circulating library 2 South Parade
- 1825 First known sea excursion to Weston from Bristol
- 1829 The Esplanade was extended from Leeves Cottage to Regent Street
- 1831 Death of William Cox
- 1834 Mr Reeve buys the Hotel from the Cox-Parsley estate
- 1837 Victoria becomes Queen
- 1842 Weston is designated a Town
- 1846 Death of Richard Parsley
- 1847 Rogers buys The Hotel
- 1856 Visit of the Prince of Wales. “The Hotel” becomes “The Royal Hotel”
- 1860 Rogers builds 7 modern residences that became Royal Terrace.

## Baker, Manorial Solicitors



**Sam Baker of Brockley**  
1755-1841 solicitor, pictured above

John, solicitor  
1785-1866

Sam of Blagdon  
1796-1866

Jane Plaister Baker  
md. Hans F. Price  
1825-1912, architect

John, solicitor  
1815-1884

Sam Edward, solicitor  
1824-1897

Ernest Edward Baker  
1854-1931, solicitor and first Weston historian