

The Redesdale Arms



This fine old hotel has been one of the principal inns of Moreton-in-Marsh since at least 1661 but for over two hundred year it was known as the Unicorn Inn. In 1671 when the tenant innkeeper was a William Nicholas the inn was assessed for Hearth tax at ten hearths indicating the number of rooms which included five letting rooms plus rooms for visitors, grooms and maids. It is possible that at that time the owners of the inn were the Creswick family of nearby Lemington house.

The inn was advertised for letting in Jackson's Oxford Journal in 1736 and later in the 18th century it was substantially rebuilt. The present Redesdale Arms hotel is basically of that period when it became a three story building of local stone with sash windows, some grouped and with architrave. It was given a simple porch with columns, to the right of which was an arched entrance to the stable yard. Internally it had beamed ceilings, flagged floors and inglenook fireplaces.

In 1782 Richard Phipps became the landlord and his arrival coincided with the development of the coaching market which became the principle source of business for the inn. Like most other innkeepers in Moreton, Richard Phipps was also a farmer owning substantial grazing rights on Moreton Heath. He ran the inn for more than thirty years and appears to have been highly successful before retiring in 1815 and handing over the business to his son George Phipps who was to run it for a further thirty years. The announcement of the retirement in Jackson's Oxford Journal called attention to the Unicorn's good wines, well-aired beds, roomy chaise and excellent horses.

Unfortunately George Phipps does not seem to have been an astute in business matters as his father, as he went bankrupt in 1827 although he continued to trade and declared a dividend the following year! By this time the Unicorn was truly a coaching inn with three coaches calling twice a day and as with innkeepers of today George had occasional staff problems. In 1838 his chaise driver, Richard Miles, aged 71, was found dead at Salford Bridge, having overturned the vehicle after over-imbibing at the Chapel House Inn near Chipping Norton.

By the late 1840's when George Phipps retired the arrival of the railways sounded the death knell of the coaching trade. An indication of that fact is given by the census, which records there was only one visitor staying over night, a 20 year old clerk who was working for the contractors who were building the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway. However, at that time the Unicorn was the site of the local tax office and also hosted the petty sessions both of which would provide sources of income as would catering for major local events. It is recorded that in 1864 the then landlord George Wells provided the luncheon at the re opening of Compton church.

In 1886 the Unicorn was taken over by Mr and Mrs Frederick Tanner. They had been coachman and cook to John Thomas Freeman-Mitford, Earl Redesdale of Batsford Park, who had died on 2nd May 1886 and with the family's permission they changed the name of the inn to The Redesdale Arms to perpetuate his memory. The arms over the entrance are those of the Earl with the wolf crest of the freeman's and the boar's head of the Mitfords.

The Mitford family descends from Robert Mitford of the Mitford Castle, Northumberland and John Mitford who became speaker for the House of Commons and later Lord Chancellor of Ireland was created the first Baron Redesdale in 1802 with his son created the Earl in 1877. Both titles became extinct in 1886. The baronetcy was revived in 1902 with the second baron perhaps best known for being father to the famous Mitford sisters, and figuring largely in Nancy Mitford's books particularly 'Love in a cold climate'.