

HISTORIC INNS OF ENGLAND
A guide to some famous old houses

After the visitor to England, diligently searching for historic places, has seen the Tower, the Abbey, Hampton Court, and divers crumbling ruins which once were castles and strongholds of the gentry, he would be wise to seek those places where, for centuries, the lives of the people have centred -- the inns. They have seen all English history.

When the first road was painstakingly hewn through the countryside, the first inn was born to become woven closely with the daily lives of men of every degree, and with the development of the land. And when England began to stir with life, the inn was there to welcome merchants, scholars, soldiers, pilgrims and pedlars. In its yard and beneath its roof history was made as every rank of society from king to beggar, from judge to malefactor lodged within. It became the centre of things as all threads of interest were drawn into it which, by judicious enquiry, may be drawn out.

Although numbers of once-famous inns have bowed before what is today called progress, many have survived its onslaught, and their stories will interest the visitor. He will be intrigued by the names of many of them, for the landlords who entitled them were truly hosts of furious fancies when they raised such house-signs as The Trip To Jerusalem, Our Mutual Friend, The Man In The Moon, The Quiet Woman, The Cat And Bagpipes, You Might As Well, The Hole In The Wall among a multitude of others.

Whether he be interested in history, architecture, literature or the macabre, the traveller will be rewarded on entering the inns mentioned in these pages, most of which have welcomed the wayfarer for many centuries.

ENGLISH HISTORY LIES HERE

THE FOUNTAIN (Canterbury, Kent). This inn claims the distinction of being England's oldest, circa 1029, and can produce a testimonial, written by the French ambassador in 1120, lauding the excellence of its service. It was here, in the fourteenth century, that Geoffrey Chaucer wrote much of the Canterbury Tales, in an atmosphere truly English,

THE ANGEL (Grantham, Lincolnshire). At this thirteenth century inn, famous for its architectural features, particularly some remarkable windows, one may engage the room where, in 1483, Richard III sat to sign the death-warrant of the Duke of Buckingham. (The luckless Duke was executed a year later in the courtyard of another inn, the SARACEN'S HEAD, at Salisbury, his headquarters at the time.) Like the FOUNTAIN, this inn has proof of longevity, in this case a bill dated 1274.

THE KING'S HEAD (Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire). Like the ANGEL, this 500 years-old house has perfect specimens of the ornate windows of its day. Beneath them sat the farmers and the villagers to discuss, with local news, rumours of a war, soon to be fought in the North, between the Red Rose of Lancaster and the White Rose of York which, after thirty years of sporadic conflict, the White Rose won. The inn is little changed from then.

THE INN (Burford Bridge, Surrey) where John Keats wrote much of his "Endymion", and the GEORGE (Portsmouth) share romance and history with England's naval hero, for it was at the INN that Horatio Nelson took a last farewell of his sweetheart, Emma Hamilton, and it was at the GEORGE that he spent his last night in England before embarking on a journey which ended tragically in Trafalgar Bay.

THE CROWN AND TREATY HOUSE (Uxbridge, Middlesex), THE SARACEN'S HEAD (Southwell, Nottinghamshire) and THE GREYHOUND (Maidenhead, Berkshire) were all closely acquainted with the ill-fated Charles I. At the first -- it was, in 1645, a private residence named Place House, representatives of the King and Cromwell met to discuss terms for an armistice in the Civil War, but negotiations were broken off after Cromwell accused the King of treachery. A year later at the SARACEN'S HEAD, Charles offered the Scots his hospitality at dinner and his surrender, expecting better terms from them than from the Roundheads. The traveller may occupy the room where Charles spent his last night there as King. At the GREYHOUND, in 1647, a King in nothing in nothing but in name. he was permitted to see

his children for the first time since the Civil War began, it proved a sad re-union and a sadder farewell, for the hapless monarch died on the block eighteen months afterwards.

THE ANCHOR (Liphook, Hampshire). Possibly because of its position on the road which led to the naval establishment at Portsmouth, the ANCHOR had closer acquaintance with Royalty than other English inns. On their way to the coast in their times, the inn claims that Queen Anne, George 111, William IV and the Queens of Spain and Portugal broke their journeys there. Lord Nelson was a frequent visitor and, after Waterloo, the German, Blucher, and the Duke of Wellington, with their respective sovereigns, sat down there to decide the fate of France's "Little Corporal".

THE LYGON ARMS (Broadway, Worcestershire) is a superb example of an inn of the seventeenth century affording the guest all the feeling of staying at a great mansion. The stone doorways, the staircase, the great fire place and the carved oaken settles are perfect specimens of the period when Oliver Cromwell and his lieutenants occupied rooms there. An aristocrat among inns, the LYGON ARMS will appeal to the cultivated person with modern tastes.

LUTTRELL ARMS (Dunster, Somerset). With additions, this inn is a ~~survive~~ survival of the town house of the abbots at a nearby monastery, and the hall of the original fifteenth century building is part of today's inn. The centuries since its founding are each represented in different rooms with beautiful oaken features of their times, which make this attractive West Country house one of the finest in England.

THE SHAKESPEARE HOSTELERIE (Stratford-on-Avon, Warwickshire). An inn so named cannot lack interest and this beautifully furnished house does not. A Tudor building of nine gables, it is part of what used to be a great country house upon the grounds of which was built New Place, bought by William Shakespeare in 1597. The original house-sign, showing two portraits of the Bard, is preserved on the landing of the inn, which has long, low rooms, beautifully raftered with oak.

THE TRIP TO JERUSALEM (Nottingham). The seeker of the unusual in inns need go no further than here, for this queerly named house is queerly located, being hollowed out of the rock upon which the Castle stands. Claimed to be of the thirteenth century, perhaps it welcomed Robin Hood and his band from Sherwood when resting from their frequent forays.

THE COOPER'S ARMS (Hitchin, Hertfordshire). Unlike most of the old inns which were originally wayside hostels opened by the monasteries to accommodate the traveller on the highway, this house was built in the sixteenth century as a brickmakers guild hall, an institution much favored by craftsmen centuries ago. One hundred years later it became a meeting and prayer house where John Bunyan, of "Pilgrim's Progress" fame regularly preached. The remarkable windows of this unusual inn have attracted the attention of visiting artists over many years.

THE SWAN (Grasmere, Westmorland). This centuries-old inn which welcomed all the great Lakes poets, earned their esteem through their friendship with the worthy host of their era, Anthony Wilson. Unsurpassed as an innkeeper, his ability did not extend to painting, of which he was very fond. The swan which he painted for his house-sign appeared so amateurish that William Wordsworth, a close friend, wrote of it :-

"Object uncouth, and yet our boast, for it was painted by our host;

His own conceit the figure planned, 'twas coloured all by his own hand".
When Wilson died, another of the famous poets wrote the verses for his epitaph. A visit to this northern outpost will reward those of literary

THE FOX AND GOOSE (Fressingfield, Suffolk). Another of the old inns which did not originate as a monks hostel but as a shire hall in the sixteenth century, this house is a gem of timbering much admired by the architect of today. Unlike, possibly, any other public-house in the world, it is owned by the parish church, the upkeep of which depends upon

THE ROSE AND CROWN (Halifax, Yorkshire), THE ROYAL (Bideford, Devon), THE WHITE HART (Whitchurch, Hampshire) and THE LION (Shrewsbury, Shropshire) all had personal associations with great literary figures. At the Halifax house Daniel Defoe wrote the early part of "Robinson Crusoe"; at the ROYAL Charles Kingsley wrote "Westward Ho!"; at the Whitchurch inn the man who was to become Cardinal Newman began his "Lyra Apostolica", and at the LION Thomas DeQuincey, travelling to London for the first time, began "The Opium Eater". They were, indeed, a famous quartet.

THE EAGLE (Cambridge). This inn may well be known as the museum of the coaching days. Long gone from the highway the coach is ~~known~~ remembered only in the stories such as Charles Dickens wrote. But here a landlord, of those far-off days before the railway sounded the knell of the four-in-hand,

preserved the real stuff of that romantic era -- guards horns, whips, bridles, ornate harness and lamps -- all appearing to await collection by bearded coachmen and guards before setting off with an echoing fanfare on their long journey.

THE HOPE ANCHOR (Rye, Sussex). The visitor keenly interested in chilling tales of dark deeds on the seashore under a scudding moon will relish the atmosphere here, for this place was a smugglers inn where there was no haven for the King's excisemen, and in its vicinity many a vessel, lured by false lights, was stricken on the rocks. An enterprising landlord of yesteryear named the bedrooms for the view seen from their windows -- "Western Watch", "Starland", etc., and its staircases are "Pilgrim's Way" and "Shepherd's Way". Truly a spot to visit at the dark of the moon when the sea pounds the shore.

THE GWYNNE ARMS (Kingswinford, Staffordshire). The queerest of all inns in the world, and better known as the **CROOKED HOUSE**, it stands over a coal-mine in the Black Country. Due to subsidence in the old mine, the building has sunk some feet at one end ^{and} has taken a sharp list, but it remains firm. Inside clocks and pictures lean away from the walls, and ceiling lamps appear to hang at queer angles. In some rooms the floors slope away from the doorways, in others they slope away from the walls. In the tap-room, on a long table which appears to be two feet higher at one end than the other, a bottle will roll up the slope! The traveller would be advised to make his visit when sober otherwise the experience might be unnerving. Note. The inn retains its licence only as a curiosity.

KING ARTHUR'S CASTLE (Tintagel, Cornwall). When the traveller goes west to see the ruins of what could have been King Arthur's stronghold, he will be confronted, on the edge of the cliffs overlooking the ocean at Tintagel, with what appears to be a castle of the great King's day. Instead, it is an extraordinary inn, built only fifty years ago. The reproduction of a castle, which any resurrected Knight of the Round Table would recognise ^{as} of his day, this audacious experiment has preserved the quality of the original while conforming with modern day requirements. It deserves the patronage and commendation of the seeker of inns.

THE CROWN (Hempstead, Essex) and the **RED LION** (Whitechapel, London) had close associations with one of England's greatest miscreants, Dick Turpin. Dick, who was born at the Crown, of which his father was landlord,

joined a friend since boyhood, Tom King, in a series of horse thefts at which they had become adept. One day they stabled a stolen horse at the RED LION but were accosted by a constable who arrested King. To assist his partner, Turpin drew a pistol and fired at the constable. But his aim was wild and he shot King dead. Avoiding capture, Turpin fled to Yorkshire where he led a fugitive life before being arrested for his weakness, horse stealing. Found guilty, Dick was hanged in 1739. The present RED LION is built on the site of the old inn from whence Turpin fled.

THE TOWN OF RAMSGATE (Wapping, London), in the seventeenth century known as the RED COW, harboured unknowingly the villainous Judge Jeffries, known as "the hanging judge", and the most hated man in England at that time. Following the example of his Royal master, James II, Jeffries decided to flee England and, disguised as a sailor, made his way to Wapping to seek passage to the Continent by ship. Lodging at the RED COW, he was recognised by an attorney of his former court, who raised the alarm. Only the swift arrival of the constables saved him from a mob lynching before he was arrested and carried to the Tower of London. There he was to die miserably, unhonoured and unsung.

THE OSTRICH (Colnbrook, Buckinghamshire). If the traveller is interested in the macabre he should visit this inn, upon the site of which the local monastery raised the first hostel or inn eight hundred years ago. Around this half-timbered house the most scarlet of all inn tales is told. Two hundred years ago a landlord and his wife settled prosperous visitors in an upstairs room where that portion of the floor under the bed was hinged and held in place by a bolt in the ceiling of the kitchen below. When the lodger was asleep, the bolt was withdrawn and down tumbled the unfortunate guest into a huge cauldron of water in which he drowned. For many years the profits from the sale of the victim's possessions made prosperous the villainous pair until, betrayed by the ostler, they were arrested and hanged for murder. The ostler, it appears, was their accomplice.

And now we leave the inns of history, of authors, of literature, and of malefactors and arrive at a comfortable old house which shall be the last on our journey. It had no affinity with any of those which we have mentioned, except, perhaps, in longevity, but it became famous after a landlord decided to turn an honest shilling as a sideline to his purveying ales, wines and spirits. Two centuries ago THE BELL, at Stilton, in Huntingdonshire, was a quiet old inn in a quiet old village

when its landlord visited friends at a farmhouse in neighbouring Leicestershire. There he tasted a delectable cheese which so delighted him, he ordered it to be delivered regularly to the BELL where he retailed it to patrons and travellers at an expensive 2/6 a pound. Hence the world-famous Stilton cheese which is not, and never has been made in Stilton. It was named only for the inn of an enterprising landlord!

AN INN ON A WINTER'S NIGHT --- Charles Dickens' rich description

In his famous story "Barnaby Rudge", Charles Dickens, a great patron of the inn and, when it deserved it, its greatest critic, described a fictitious "Maypole Inn", which actually was THE KING'S HEAD, at Chigwell, Essex, pictured in this brochure, thus :

"Cheerily, though there were none abroad to see it, shone the Maypole light that evening. Blessings on the red -- deep, ruby, glowing ^{RED} old curtain of the window; blending into one rich stream of brightness, fire and candle, meat drink and company, and gleaming like a jovial eye upon the bleak waste out of doors. Within what carpet like its crunching sand, what merry music as its crackling logs, what perfume like its kitchen's dainty breath! Blessings on the old house, how sturdily it stood! How did the vexed wind chafe and roar about its stalwart roof; how did it pant and strive with its wide chimneys, which still poured forth from their hospitable throats great clouds of smoke, and puffed defiance in its face; how, above all, did it drive and rattle at the casement, emulous to extinguish that cheerful glow. The profusion, too, the rich and lavish bounty of that goodly tavern! It was not enough that one fire roared and sparkled on its spacious hearth; in the tiles which paved and compassed it, five hundred flickering fires burnt brightly also. In every saucepan lid, and candle, and vessel of copper or brass that hung upon the walls, were ^o countless ruddy hangings, flashing and gleaming with every motion of the blaze, and offering, let the eye wander where it might, interminable vistas of the same rich colour. There were fires and red curtains in the very eyes of the drinkers, in their buttons, in their liquor, in the pipes they smoked."



