

# Inn Names: Signposts to the Local Past

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My interest in the social and economic role and function of the traditional English inn is well-established, having been built on my postgraduate research at Leicester University in 1968-69. What inns offered their communities continues to be a topic for further research and discussion.

However quite recently it has occurred to me that specific research into inn names may represent a further line of enquiry into their origins. In one sense it is straightforward, however onerous, to establish how an inn functioned and made its contribution locally but how its name emerged may provide another dimension to how we consider the emergence and function of our historic inns.

It is important that we appreciate that an inn name, very much like a place name, arises because of a local recognition that such a name reflects a particular local focus or priority.

It is important to define an inn. Sir William Blackstone in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* in 1765 explained the legal standing of an inn:

If an innkeeper, or other victualler, hangs out a sign and opens his house for travellers, it is an implied engagement to entertain all persons who travel that way; and upon this universal assumption an action on the case will lie against him for damages, if he without good reason refuses to admit a traveller.

This definition provides the main ingredient of how we would define or identify an inn: in other words, the provision of accommodation and hospitality for travellers and the care of their horses.

Factors which determine an inn's name are at the heart of my approach. It is not the signboard itself but the significance which led to the name being adopted more than the signboards themselves that is important. The

signboards themselves may be a distortion of the original naming. All over England and Wales there are countless very expressive names associated with licenced premises. It is important not to be distracted by the excitement offered by some of these names. Many have quite recent origins within the past two hundred years. The intention is to try to identify early names: these may not be so expressly exciting but these have historical integrity in how they were chosen. How the name was selected may sometimes be more important than the name itself.

Much of the literature available does not particularly assist my direction of thinking. For example, Eric Delderfield's *British Inn Signs* [1965] is really more about the design of the signboards than their origin and also he does not differentiate between inns, alehouses, taverns and public houses. In terms of ideas and potential associations, Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten's nineteenth-century classic *English Inn Signs* is an important source of guidance.

Basically, the intention is to examine historic inn names, rather than that the wider pool of public house names. What we need to consider are institutions with strong and long histories, rather than the huge proliferation of licensed premises which emerged in the nineteenth century. Clearly there is a difficulty in definition and the boundaries which separated inns from their contemporaneous alehouses are often vague. Indeed, technically until the eighteenth century, inns did not need to be licensed by the JPs. It was only their subsidiary function in selling alcohol, like alehouses, which needed to be licensed.

There are potential literary sources which can help to confirm that various establishments do match Blackstone's definition. For example in 1724 Daniel Defoe made the following observation about Grantham in Lincolnshire:

*..lying on the great northern road is famous, as well as Stamford, for the abundance of very good inns, some of them fit to entertain persons of the greatest quality and their retinues, and it is a great advantage to this place'.[1]*

Unfortunately he does not mention any names but the sheer presence of a number of inns will be sufficient to support a further analysis later in this book.

Equally, apart from documentary and structural evidence, limited literary references can be used. For example Thomas Turner, the East Hoathly shopkeeper, recorded in his diary on 15 June 1764 that he had travelled to, and dined at, the **White Hart** at Newhaven. This is tantamount to a recognition that this establishment catered for travellers and their horses. [2]

It is possible to identify John Stow's *Survey of London in 1598* as a potentially valuable source [3]. It is a detailed topographical study, the accuracy of which is probably unchallenged. He does mention various establishments that he describes as inns but which may prove to be emerging inns of court or indeed the London residences of noblemen. Only in a limited number of instances, using Blackstone's definition, do we discover inns that did function in providing services to travellers and their horses. This evidence may seem fragmentary but, for example, at Southwark he identifies the Spurre, Christopher, Bull, Queene's Head, Tabarde, George, Hart, and King's Head which he describes as 'fair inns, for receipt of travellers'. [4] That latter description is all that is needed to bring them within the definition.

Possibly the earliest inn name may be the **Bull**. In the early stages of the development of the inn as a social and economic institution, these hostels were, in origin, outposts of nearby abbeys or monastic establishments. Some evolved from belonging directly to the abbey or monastery to being authorised – we might say 'franchised' – by the local abbot or prior to enable them to operate in a detached or independent manner. To demonstrate their status their authorisation was confirmed by the placing of a monastic seal – a *bull* – on the entrance. When inn signs began to be commissioned, local linguistics led to many being represented by the creature whose name seemingly had been used. This means that, in many contexts, any Bull inn may have the longest local story. An important example is the **Bull** at Rolvenden, near Tenterden in Kent which has fifteenth-century origins. A variant of the name is the **Bull's Head** at Ashby-de-la-Zouch in Leicestershire which is a sixteenth-century structure and the sign may have been elaborated or interpreted by the sign-maker at a later stage.

Some inns have entirely unique names. The explanation for such a name will have enormous potential in our exploration of its local landscape At Lichfield **The Scales** is such an example. Its role within an assessment of local topographical history is highly significant. It is widely believed in its local community that its name is directly linked to the hugely successful racecourse which stood on nearby Whittington Heath. However in the Harleian Manuscripts at the British Library one of the historic heraldic symbols of St Michael is a set of scales, arising from the Archangel's role, frequently represented in Doom Paintings, in weighing souls as part of people's posthumous experience as they hope to be admitted to heaven. Less than a mile from The Scales is one of the oldest St Michael church sites in England and there may instead be a link between this very important site and this traditional inn with its unique name.

### **Aristocratic Names**

Throughout the Midlands **Talbot** inns are a distinctive reminder of a very prominent family. Possibly the most famous Talbot of all was the Earl of Shrewsbury who served as gaoler of Mary Queen of Scots in Queen Elizabeth I's reign, and who was famously married to Bess of Hardwick. It is believed that he was the most-wealthy man in the north of England in the later Tudor period. The sign of the Talbot is, in effect, a heraldic play on words, drawing together the family surname with the image of talbot hunting-dog. The Talbot inns, interspersed by the **Shrewsbury Arms** at some locations, mark out the area of dominance, political as well as in terms of land-ownership, of the Talbot family. Their heartland may have been between northern Staffordshire and Sheffield but their area of influence easily stretches as far as the Talbot Inn at Chaddesley Corbett in Worcestershire and the Talbot Inn at Belgrave, near Leicester.

In the centre of Chichester historically stood the **White Horse** Inn. The White Horse is the heraldic symbol of the Earls of Arundel, who are also the Dukes of Norfolk, with their stately home very nearby at Arundel Castle. This emphasises the notion that inns frequently celebrate their enthusiasm for a local landowner.

Possibly on a grander scale, instances of the **Bear and Ragged Staff** at locations such as Kenilworth in Warwickshire, Cumnor in Oxfordshire and Stonymarsh, near Romsey, remind us of the extensive influence of the Earls of Warwick for whom the bear and ragged staff was their heraldic symbol. As Shakespeare put it in Henry VI, 'the rampant bear chain'd to the ragged staff' specifically reminds us of Warwick 'the Kingmaker' during the Wars of the Roses.

The **Green Dragon** celebrates the Earls of Pembroke, one of whom was a major figure in the politics of mid-Tudor England.

At a regional level the **Red Dragon** is a reminder of the importance in the north-west of the Earl of Cumberland, alongside the **Golden Dragon** who is a reminder of the territorial importance in the north-east of Percy family, the Dukes of Northumberland. Another regional example is the **Eagle and Child** which is drawn from the crest of the Stanleys, the earls of Derby, who were very powerful in the Lancashire from the fifteenth century. John Taylor, the Water Poet, very clearly identified a functioning Eagle and Child in Manchester in 1618 on his journey from London to Edinburgh. [5]

In some instances, very local dynastic or aristocratic links can be revealed. At Wolvey in Warwickshire, the present-day Blue Pig has three previous names, the earliest of which is the **Black Lion**, the name it carried in medieval times, derived from the arms of the local landowner, Baron Wolvey.

[See Royal category for the wide interpretation of Black Lion]

### **Linguistic Distortions**

At Castle Acre in Norfolk its historic inn is the **Ostrich**. This is an inn with a long history but its signboard arises from a misunderstanding when it was commissioned. This ancient hostelry was known by its Norfolk neighbours as 'the hospice' but their local pronunciation misled the signboard artist. By the time signboards were being adopted, people would have heard about these unusual birds but not as in the early days of this inn. Exactly the same explanation is offered for the Ostrich inn at Colnbrook near to Slough which definitely had its origins as a monastic hostel.

The **St Peter's Finger** at Lytchett Minster in Dorset is another example of linguistic distortion. It stands near to Lytchett Minster's historic St Peter's

Church but there is a fuller explanation of the linkage between the inn and the church. The full name of the church is St Peter Ad Vincula, a rare dedication which celebrates St Peter's escape 'in chains' from prison. Local people's dialect led to this distortion. The link between the church and the inn may have merely been locational but Larwood and Hotten suggest that this inn may have been the scene of a manorial court held annually on Lammas Day which is the feast day of St Peter Ad Vincula [6], or this could have been where the 'church ales' were dispensed.

The **Swan with Two Necks** is a corruption of its original name which was the Swan with Two Nicks. The 'nicks' were horizontal, vertical and diagonal cuts in a swan's bill, so as to identify local ownership of the swan. The Vintners Company swans regularly had two nicks in their bills and that Company did have strong links with part of the licensed trade. A notable Swan with Two Necks was mentioned in London in 1637 by John Taylor, the Water Poet, in his *Carriers Cosmographie* which he describes as follows:

*the carriers of Manchester doe also lodge at the two neck and swan in Lad Lane. They come every second Thursday. Also there lodge carriers that doe passe through divers other parts of Lancashire.[7]*

In Staffordshire at Longdon the long-standing Swan with Two Necks has a tradition stretching back before the award of its liquor licence in 1755.

At Biddenden in Kent **The Three Chimneys** is a wayside inn with a hidden story. The building does not have, and never has had, three chimneys. It stands at the edge of a village where French officer prisoners of war were housed in the Napoleonic era. These prisoners were permitted unrestricted movement within the area, provided that they did not stray beyond a point where three roads met. To the Frenchmen this point by this inn where they met was 'les trois chemins' which the local residents heard in a typically English way and rendered the name as 'the three chimneys'.

The *Frightened Horse* at Handsworth was originally the **Freighted Horse** and its name had evolved over time, possibly due to a mismatch between pronunciation and the written text. In origin this was a resting point on a packhorse route and its name highlighted the 'freight' carried by the

packhorse. This will have been a very specialised hostel, literally just being used by the packhorse drivers and their horses, and, therefore, quite small.

[See also Economic Indicators and Occupational Links – to emphasise wider context]

## **Widely Adopted Nicknames**

Many signs exhibited by licensed premises over the years have attracted amusing substitute names, such as a Black Swan becoming locally known as the 'Muddy Duck'.

A very good example is the **Swan and Sugar Loaf**, to the south of Croydon, which involved represents humorous misrepresentation than a distortion. The fact that the building belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury, as lord of the manor, in historic times was reflected by a signboard which proclaimed his ownership. It showed his archiepiscopal crozier and his mitre, symbols of his status, but locals colloquially described the content of the sign, as they saw it, as 'swan and sugar loaf' and this label became its recognized name into modern times.

## **Economic Indicators and Occupational Links**

In the heart of Gwynedd in the High Street of Bala stands the **Royal Ship Inn**. Not far away there is another Royal Ship Inn at Dolgellau. In neither case does the origin of the inn name derive from any link with the sea. Whilst a cursory glance at the map might suggest that the inn at Dolgellau is sea-related, in fact the town is too far inland to have been accessible by river traffic. In East Sussex East Grinstead has a Ship Inn, located in its eponymously named Ship Street. It is true that East Grinstead stand in the upper reaches of the River Medway but, as with Bala in North Wales, its location in the Downs is so steeply elevated that it can never have been accessible by river. Whilst Ship Inns on the coast and on navigable rivers may have potential links with our national historic sea-faring past, the vast number of inland, and especially upland, Ship Inns require an alternative interpretation. The explanation is that they are clues to the primary economic strength of medieval England in that, notwithstanding misleading inn signs in many places, they are a testimony to England's wool industry. The Chaucerian 'shipe' has been reduced and

misunderstood. 'Shipe' might well have even been pronounced 'sheep' in medieval times. In a few instances documents reveal earlier spellings such as 'shipe' or 'sheep', in places as far apart from each other as Dunster and Croydon.

If the Ship indicates the primary product within the medieval economy, two further signs are indications of how the wool trade was managed.

The **Drovers Rest**, near to Carlisle and Hadrian's Wall, is a reminder of those who conducted droves of sheep or cattle over long distances to market, and such establishments earned their names by their association with these regular visitors. To the south of London, the **Kentish Drovers** on the Old Kent Road and the former **Surrey Drovers** to the south of Croydon are clues to the final drover routes to London markets from the south.

Having identified the wide celebration of the raw material and equally indicated how possible droving routes might be identified, the next stage is to consider the celebration of the industrial processes by which the raw wool was transformed into cloth. The **Bishop Blaise Hotel** in Richmond in North Yorkshire is one such indicator because St Blaise was the patron saint of wool combers, an association brought about by his martyrdom with a wool comb. Eric R. Delderfield in his *British Inn Signs and their Stories* [1972] reported that that inn's origins lay in having served as a wool distribution centre in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I [8]. Jacob Larwood and John Camden Hotten in their highly informative *English Inn Signs* [1866] reported further Bishop Blaise signboards in Burnley, Derby, Leicester, London, Rochdale, Wakefield and York[9]. At the present it is also possible to add further lost locations at Rawtenshall in Lancashire and Cirencester. These ten locations where Bishop Blaise was celebrated far exceed the number of churches where he is traditionally commemorated in a church dedication. This emphasises just how important these locations must have been in the cloth manufacturing sector. Alongside these examples Leicester had an historic **Woolcombers Arms**.

The distribution of the finished wool was also reflected in some inn names. Various **Woolpack** inns could be found at locations as widely dispersed as Derby, Newark, Nottingham, Oswestry, Slad, Stockport and Warehorne on



Romney Marsh. Spalding had a **Crown and Woolpack** and at Tenterden in Kent the Woolpack previously bore another appropriate label in that it had been the **Woolsack**.

The **Pack Horse** Inn, near Hebden Beck is reputedly four hundred years old and stands on an ancient pack horse route between West Yorkshire and Lancashire. Standing just inside Yorkshire it is a testimony to the determination of the pack horse drivers to deliver and distribute their raw materials across this challenging Pennine landscape. At Sandon in Staffordshire, its well-known inn is the 'Dog and Doublet', a name arising from a local legend, but its original name was the **Pack Horse** Inn. This easily confirms to us to us that a traditional trade route coming out of the Pennines passed this way. This is complemented by the evidence of the **Freighted Horse** at Handsworth, which also occupied a location on a packhorse route.

It is such traditional names rather than any aesthetic or heraldic significance of the signs that is crucial to our study.

It is widely believed that the **Bull and Mouth** sign is a corruption of 'Boulogne Mouth' in memory of a siege mounted by Henry VIII at Boulogne in 1544-6 but the reality is rather more prosaic. The corruption is that this originally was 'Bull and Mutton' and a rather special memorialisation of the wider aspects of the English livestock trade. Examples could be found at Mountsorrel in Leicestershire and at Huddersfield.

In a relatively undeveloped neighbourhood of Sheffield, near to its Cathedral, is a **Rainbow and Dove** public house. Its location is at a point close to where the Rivers Don and Sheaf converge. The particular significance of this specific name is twofold: the Rainbow and Dove was the heraldic symbol of the Dyers Company and this type of location is just the type of riverside site where dyers would have been found in medieval times. The heraldic link between the Rainbow and Dove and dyers is because, in the medieval miracle play cycle, the dyers customarily enacted the *Deluge* and so a link between dyers and the role of the dove at the end of Noah's experience of the Flood became a popular association in the public mind. From this example it is possible to consider other traditional Rainbow and Dove, or indeed just Dove, signs as indications of possible dyer activity in other locations.

The **Noah's Ark** at Borrowash on Derbyshire is a reminder of the specialist skills of boatbuilders because the Noah's Ark was the heraldic symbol of the Shipwrights' Company. Borrowash is close to the River Trent and the name is an indication that there was an active community of boatbuilders at this location, sufficiently active and industrious for their symbol to have been adopted for their local inn. Quite near to Borrowash there was another Noah's Ark at Derby, situated on the navigable portion of the River Derwent, and this will represent another comparable local example because boat-building will have been a likely occupation at this location as well

The **Elephant and Castle** is widely believed to have been a corruption of 'Infanta of Castille' but the imagery of the crest of the Cutlers' company, an elephant with a howdah on its back, is the real clue to its origins. The link with the cutlery industry is that ivory was used in early knife handles and this connection may have appealed to the early cutlers as they devised their symbol. Its most famous manifestation was just south of the River Thames at the location that still bears its name. It follows that other examples, at locations such as Trowbridge, may actually signal the presence of early cutlery-manufacturers.

There are a few examples of **Golden Cup** inns, such as at Yoxall in Staffordshire. The golden cup is a heraldic reference to the arms of the Goldsmiths' Company. This is such a specific allusion that it must raise the possibility that, at some time in the past, this former market town must have some link with the trade of goldsmiths. This is a rare naming, shared with a surviving Golden Cup at Darwen in Lancashire and a recently lost Golden Cup at Bilston.

**Three Tuns.** The origin of this sign is that it was the symbol of both the Vintners Company and also the Brewers Company. Tuns were very large barrels used to transport wine and the symbol appears in the arms of both companies as early as 1437.

**Ram.** The ram appeared in the arms of the Clothmakers Company in the fourteenth century and is confirmation that the building was associated with the wool trade. The **Ram** at Wotton-under-Edge in Gloucestershire is a Grade II\* listed building, with late medieval structures.

**Adam and Eve.** This sign is an ironic Biblical reference to the preoccupations of the Fruiterers' Company

**Axe.** This symbol was adopted by both the Coopers and Wheelwrights Companies and directly refers to one of the tools of their trade, used in wood preparation. The **Axe** in The Borough at Southwark is mentioned in a court leet document of 1560 and its yard was part of the local street alignment.

**Lamb and Flag.** This is part of the heraldic arms of the Merchant Taylors Company.

**Catherine Wheel.** The symbol of the Catherine Wheel became part of the arms of the Turners Company in the mid-sixteenth century. The **Catherine Wheel** at Henley-on-Thames has a medieval core to its structure.

**Dolphin.** This was the symbol of both the Fishmongers Company and also the Company of Watermen and Lightermen. To the north of the centre of Derby the **Dolphin** is a sixteenth-century structure, with evidence that its licence to sell alcohol from part of its premises dates back to 1580. Archaeologists confirm that the River Derwent was easily navigable upstream to Derby and so the possibility of a structure near the River which drew its name from a local specialisation is quite realistic.

**Vine.** This appears as a heraldic reference to the Distillers Company in 1638 but it was used much earlier in a religious dimension.

## Religious Inn Signs

### George

Despite a tendency to display what are misleading signboards, George Inns can trace themselves back into the distant tradition of the inns which evolved from establishments to pilgrims and other travellers. They often significantly precede the arrival of the first three Georgian kings frequently by as much as

two or more centuries. In truth they are named in honour of St George, England's patron saint: indeed, occasionally evidence emerges to demonstrate that they were originally named as 'George and Dragon' or 'George and Pilgrim'. Of course, there are a few inns that do bear these additional labels, such as the 'George and Pilgrim' opposite to the deeply spiritual abbey remains at Glastonbury.

Famously Daniel Defoe in 1724 described, in Northampton, 'the great inn at the George, the corner of High Street, looks more like a palace than an inn, and cost above £2,000 building' [10]. This structure was a rebuild after the devastating fire of 1675 but its scale captured Defoe's imagination and confirms for us that it really did function as an inn.

A case study, using the 1839 Pigot Directory for Surrey, readily identifies nine locations within that county which include 'George' establishments. Further research could be undertaken to check the historical antecedents of these premises – at Chertsey, Cobham, Epsom, Guildford, Mitcham, Oxted, Thames Ditton [two] and Wandsworth. However, my focus is on two historic George Inns in Surrey not mentioned by Pigot but for which evidence can readily be provided.

The 'George' inn at Southwark [National Trust] can be traced back to the times when it was the direct neighbour of what might be described as Chaucer's 'Tabard', from whence his pilgrims departed to Canterbury. Potentially this inn can be traced back as early as 1543 and is certainly included in John Stowe's Survey of London in 1598 [11]. At Croydon the George Inn can be traced back to 1497 but it had already closed, long before Pigot was carrying out his surveys, as a result of the rapid decline in business for traditional coaching inns, caused by the acceleration of traffic speeds stimulated by turnpiking of roads.

This chronological evidence for these two significantly pre-dates the Georgian era and so is complete confirmation that the tradition presented by George inns is religious in origin.

**Chequer**

The **Chequer inn** in North End at Croydon was demolished in 1597 to enable the construction of the Whitgift Hospital, John Whitgift's famous gift to his adopted town. It had stood there from as early as 1357. The name has religious significance because it refers to the period just before Jesus's Crucifixion when the soldiers drew lots on a chequered gaming board to decide how to share out his clothes. The fact that its name has a strong religious dimension indicates that this is part of that early wider pattern and tradition of inns being an extension of the monastic custom of hospitality.

[See also Governance and Tax Collection for an alternative interpretation]

### **Blossoms**

The **Blossoms Inn** at Chester does not directly suggest a religious dimension until the martyrdom of St Laurence of Rome is explored. He was martyred on a gridiron, frequently used as an artistic symbol for this saint, but the legend was that, after he died, flowers began to grow prolifically on the site of his martyrdom. In John Stow's *Survey of London* [1598] he describes a large inn in London's Cheap Ward which he reported that it was known as 'Blossoms inn' by travellers and that its sign was to St Laurence the Deacon, with a border of blossoms around its edge [12]. This is confirmation of the intention behind the naming of the Blossoms Inn at Chester.

### **St Luke**

This Biblical saint was celebrated, according to Larwood and Hotten, at the **St Luke's Head** in Old Street in London [13]. The iconographical symbol for St Luke is an ox and this means that in the popular mind he is also associated with farmers and graziers. This means that historic occurrences of an **Ox** inn may be a direct or indirect reference to St Luke through his patronage of farmers and graziers.

### **Cross Keys**

The **Cross Keys** inn in Croydon's High Street had already ceased to function as an inn by 1617 when the Whitgift Archives record that it had become a 'dwelling house'. This had been a substantial establishment with a yard, which became known as Markby's Yard and is basically the alignment of the modern-day Park Street. The name of this inn brings us to the heart of Christian faith

because the 'Crossed Keys' are the heraldic symbols of St Peter, the 'rock' on which the church was built.

At Hednesford in Staffordshire the parish church is dedicated to St Peter and the nearby public house is the Crossed Keys. This mutual pairing reinforces its relevance, even though we cannot know which was the earliest to be named.

### **Angel**

The Angel conveys a conspicuously religious dimension through its name. Possibly the most famous in England is the **Angel and Royal** at Grantham in Lincolnshire. Such a label creates a heavenly perspective and again suggests links with the era when such establishments were closely linked with the religious practice. The Angel and Royal at Grantham only developed its 'Royal' label in 1866 when it was visited by the future Edward VII. Architecturally this building is notable for its carvings of Edward III and his wife Philippa of Hainault, either side of the entrance.

### **Bell**

This sign has a specific religious connection arising from the prominent role that church bells fulfil in their communities. John Taylor provides a clearly defined example of a **Bell Inn** in London's Aldersgate Without in 1618. [14]

## **Pilgrim Routes**

There were two saints specifically associated with travel and travellers and, by extension with pilgrims. St Christopher was the patron saint of travellers. In historic times John Stow in his *Survey of London* in 1598 recorded a **Christopher Inn** in The Borough at Southwark, amongst the inns memorialised around the Tabard, serving Chaucer's pilgrims, at just the most appropriate of places for the start of the pilgrim route from London to Canterbury [15].

Another saint associated with travellers was St Julian Hospitaller, literally the patron saint of innkeepers, travellers, and boatman. Although Farmer described St Julian in his *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* as 'certainly an entirely mythical saint'[16], literally at the best possible location Larwood and Hotten reported a **St Julian Inn** at the crossing of the River Severn at Newport in Monmouthshire [17]. Its signboard carried two St Julian crosses with the motto

‘When I was harbourless ye lodged me’, thus fulfilling all of his patronages in one place.

Less well known for his association with travellers was St Botolph, the focal point of veneration of the Angles. At Cambridge St Botolph Church very clearly announces that he was the ‘patron saint’ of travellers. In Kent at West Hythe Dunkling and Wright record a **Botolph Bridge** inn, with a sign which depicts monks carrying his coffin over a bridge en route to his burial [18].

There are any number of inn names which implicitly memorialise St Mary. St Mary is statistically the most common English church dedication but any **Star** may be a reference to the Blessed Virgin because, in medieval times, she was known as *stella maris* – the ‘star of the sea’ – as a reference to her position in Heaven.

More poignantly any **Pelican** establishment may also be a reference to St Mary because the pelican was used as a heraldic reflection of St Mary. By legend the female pelican will feed her baby with her milk and, when that runs out, she will continue to feed her offspring with her own blood. This sense of selflessness was transposed to the life of St Mary, a woman who knew through her understanding of the prophesy of Isaiah that her son’s life would end in his death in unpleasant circumstances, thereby revealing her own selflessness. St Mary is also referenced in the **Salutation**, an early sign which referred to the events of the Annunciation when St Mary was visited by the Archangel Gabriel who informed her that she would bear the Messiah. Such signs were widely superseded in Puritan times due to reactions to any St Mary veneration and other names were substituted. Equally another early sign was the **Vase of Lilies** which again highlighted St Mary’s holiness and spirituality and, at the Reformation, the Protestant reaction led to some being re-named the **Flower Pot**. There is a considerable range of evidence to indicate a strong reflection of St Mary in inn signs, albeit in a subtle manner, along our pilgrim routes.

The **Star** at Alfriston is possibly exceptional in that it does not provide a reference to the Blessed Virgin. Instead Larwood and Hotten tells us that this fifteenth-century hostelry originated as a shelter for pilgrims en route to the shrine of St Richard of Chichester [19]. The sign was a metaphorical indication

that pilgrims were indeed on the correct route for their ultimate destination in Chichester.

## Governance and Tax Collection

Although there is a strong case for the Chequers having a religious explanation, an alternative secular possibility also exists. The **Chequers** at Tonbridge in Kent is structurally over five hundred years old, and it stands on a site where reputedly an inn has stood since 1264, and it is located just below the castle. Locally it is believed that its name here is derived from exchequer and the tax-gathering role of the lords at the castle.

## Royal Names

The most common inn name in England is the **Red Lion**. This specifically refers to the coat of arms of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who died in 1399. He was the father of Henry IV, and since 1399 the monarch has been at one and the same time Duke of Lancaster. This means that anywhere where one encounters a Red Lion inn sign it is very likely that there is Duchy of Lancaster landownership nearby.

Some royal figures are remembered individually through inn signs. Edward III's wife, Philippa of Hainault, is celebrated in popular memory as the person who pleaded for the lives of the six burghers of Calais in 1347. The medieval chronicler Froissart reported that Edward III had offered to relieve the siege of Calais if six prominent citizens surrendered to him. He had intended to execute them but Queen Philippa pleaded for clemency and they were spared. Her action is memorialised by the **Black Lion** inn sign which is drawn from her coat of arms. This individual act by a now little known royal woman was hugely popular at the time and attracted public enthusiasm.

[See also Aristocratic names for a localised alternative example]

The **Royal Oak** symbolises the celebrations in 1660 at the Restoration of Charles II to the throne of England. It is not possible to date buildings from this



name because there will have been re-namings as part of this celebration. However this was an highly significant occasion in royal history and was a deliberate reference to the good fortune of Charles II when he hid in an oak tree at Boscobel House to escape Roundhead troops after the Battle of Worcester in 1651.

Another royal celebration is commemorated by the **Rose and Crown**. Again, this is not dating evidence in a chronological sense but such a name celebrates the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York in 1485 because it marked the union of the houses of Lancaster and York, thereby bringing the long-running Wars of the Roses to a close. As with the Royal Oak these may have been re-namings but the choice of name does draw attention to what was regarded as a very important turning-point in English history.

Nationally there are a series of King's Arms and Queen's Arms establishments which are potentially relevant to these enquiries but their claim for legitimacy needs to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Daniel Defoe in 1724, in reviewing the reconstruction of London after the Great Fire, mentions a Kings-Arms-Yard in Coleman Street which he explains is on the site of what had been before the Great Fire 'a stable-yard for horses and an inn, at the sign of the **King's Arms**' [20]. The reference to it having been an inn with a stable yard brings it within Blackstone's definition. Equally the **Queen's Arms** at Stony Stratford mentioned by John Taylor, the Water Poet, on his journey from London to Edinburgh in 1618 is definitely described as providing board and lodging and, therefore, comes, within our definition [21]. Other King's Arms and Queen's Arms can be tested against the definition – of providing accommodation for people and horses – to decide whether they fall within the definition.

## **Political Allegiance**

In the Grantham area of west Lincolnshire, there are a number of names prefixed by the label 'blue' This arose because the Manners family, based at nearby Belvoir Castle, purchased a number of local premises and re-named them with the 'blue' prefix to demonstrate their Whiggish political allegiance. At least ten such names can still be identified in the neighbourhood, such as Blue Bull, Blue Cow, Blue Dog, Blue Horse, Blue Pig, and Blue Ram. Of these the

Blue Ram is particularly significant because its former name was the King's Arms, and it has reverted to that name in recent times. Emphasising the political colour was extremely important in the era before secret ballots were introduced in 1872.

Identifying the political 'blue' prefix at and near Grantham applies in that specific neighbourhood: 'blue' may have other interpretations elsewhere.

This latter can be illustrated at Wolvey in Warwickshire the present-day Blue Pig only received its current name in 1800. From 1485 it had been named the **Blue Boar**, having been re-named urgently after the nearby Battle of Bosworth. Until that very significant battle, its name had been the **White Boar**. The defeat of Richard III led to this urgent renaming, with the blue from the arms of the Earl of Oxford, one of the new king's principal supporters, being easily superimposed on those of the defeated Yorkist king. Although different in process, it is another demonstration of political allegiance.

### **Political Perspective**

The **White Hart** occurs quite regularly throughout England. It is frequently argued that it is a symbol connected with Richard II, who was said to have adopted it as his symbol. The argument then follows, therefore, that this symbol was used by innkeepers to demonstrate their loyalty to the king. There are a number of problems associated with this interpretation. Richard II was deposed in 1399, following a tyrannical later phase of his young life, and there must be some doubt about how much loyalty or popularity he attracted.

If one examines the signboards of historic White Hart inns and assesses their locations, another narrative begins to emerge. Looking closely at many of these signs, the figure presented as a 'white hart' usually has a broken chain hanging from the halter around its neck or indeed the halter itself is broken. This is not an artistic accident: it is because this damage is deeply symbolic. It refers to an historical incident involving Richard II. At some point during his short reign, he joined the mysterious and secret White Hart Society and, in so doing, destroyed its purpose. The White Hart Society was an anti-monarchist grouping and drew its name from the fact that its activities were to be found in the open countryside, away from the centre of towns and villages. This was the era of the Peasants' Revolt where anti-monarchist sentiments were widely

expressed and also the era when religious radicals in England were beginning to challenge the orthodoxy of another pillar of the established society, the Church. The people who constituted the White Hart Society presented a challenge to the existing order of society but any chance that their challenge might succeed was destroyed by Richard II's action in, in effect, 'joining' the Society.

An inspection of the sites of a number of these early White Hart inns will reveal something else that they have in common. Their locations are outside the boundaries of what would have been the area regulated by the constables. My four examples amply illustrate this point. The White Hart at Exeter, whilst close to the city centre, is outside the city walls; at Boston the White Hart is just across the bridge from the town centre; at Billesdon in Leicestershire the White Hart is some distance from the village centre; and at Moreton-in-Marsh what is now a substantial structure is again away from the commercial centre of the town. At Exeter and Billesdon there is clear architectural evidence that the buildings have medieval origins, with the latter having a particular well-defined medieval stone undercroft. The proposition is that White Hart inns such as these are, in fact, located on the sites where adherents of the White Hart Society used to meet. The tradition that they had met there became fossilised in its name. Far from being a matter of royal celebration, it may have represented a continuing reminder, like the activities of the Lollards who carried the radical theological tradition forward through the fourteenth century until the Reformation occurred in its fullest dramatic way, that political change had not fully departed.

This interpretation will not explain all White Hart names. Leslie Dunkling and Gordon Wright in their *Dictionary of Pub Names* [1987] have pointed out that in later times the term 'White Hart' was used as a generic reference to a tavern and this may help to explain others that do not fit the locational argument offered above [1]. Unfortunately they also confuse this context by mentioning the fourteenth century origins of the White Hart at Spalding and the splendid nature of the White Hart at Lenton in Nottingham, whose sign clearly conforms with the 'broken chain' argument.

## Inns which celebrate famous events

Occasionally an inn is named to celebrate a famous event. An example is the **Crispin Inn** at Ashover in Derbyshire. Its name memorialises the Battle of Agincourt in 1416, in which a local landowner, Thomas Babington of Dethick, fought and then subsequently returned to celebrate this great victory. The 'Crispin' refers to the fact, as William Shakespeare informed us in *Henry V*, that the battle took place on St Crispin's Day [25 October]. Nearby there is another Crispin Inn at Great Longstone, the origins of its name likely to be similar.

The need to assess individual names, at times almost on a case-by-case basis, is confirmed by the fact that at Worth and Sandwich in Kent there are two St Crispin Inns which instead appear to be part of the local veneration of St Crispin and his twin brother, St Crispinian, who are venerated as martyrs inside Faversham parish church. This situation is even more complicated because, at Sandwich, the prefix 'St' has been abandoned in relatively modern times.

Within the wider possibilities of this category can stand the **Saracen's Head**. This is taking us back to the era of the Crusades when English soldiers were embroiled in various conflicts in the Holy Land. It is a reminder of past glory. John Taylor in 1618 identified a functioning *Sarazen's Head* at Whetstone on the edge of London [22].

## Sporting Inns

Amongst the twenty historic inns at Croydon in Surrey, four have a sporting dimension – the **Falcon**, the **Greyhound**, the **Talbot**, and the **Hare and Hounds**. Between them they remind us collectively that historically Croydon stood in open hunting countryside, a characteristic confirmed as late as 1843 in Robert Surtees' *Jaunts and Jollities of Mr Jorrocks* where he quite accurately sets his story amidst this hunting countryside. Individually such names might yield different interpretations but as a group there is a sense of coherence.

In West Surrey at Ripley its **Talbot** inn, some of its structure dating back five centuries, is celebrated for its role as an historic coaching inn on the main route from London to Portsmouth but it does stand in highly suitable open hunting countryside. This means that its name really does suit its circumstances and location.

Many popular names associated with sport are basically too recent to qualify for this survey. My comments on their potency and value as public house names from the mid-eighteenth century are to be found in *The Historic Sporting Landscape* [2021] [23]. Nonetheless there are possibilities beyond the realms of hunting. At Winster on the edge of the Derbyshire Peak District the **Old Bowling Green** justifies further consideration. The structure and establishment dating back to the sixteenth century provides a clue as to the sporting and recreational preoccupations of the local population. In this lead mining area, this name must be a conspicuous reminder of their sporting enthusiasm in this remote location: the name would not have been applied if the main attraction of this establishment there had not been a popularly used bowling green, so popular that it provided the inn's name.

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This is not intended to have been an exhaustive survey of the possible interpretative benefits of evaluating historic inn names within the local landscape. This is, at its heart, a linguistic study based on the language used generally not distracted by artistic sign board representations, although the subtle detail of White Hart signs has been used as part of the wider analysis. What is offered is a methodological guide to the potential that awaits us in our own local landscapes. To a degree it is a series of case studies built on various themes that we might readily encounter, and this does itself lend itself to possible further local research. What has been explore extends from the wholly unique, as in The Scales at Lichfield and the St Peter's Finger at Lytchett Minster, to the Red Lion which is reputedly the most widely present inn name in the English landscape. The evidence confirms wisdom of the guidance that we inherited from W. G. Hoskins that it really is possible to identify patterns in the landscape as part of our interpretation of its topography.

## Articles

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[20] Defoe, *op.cit.*, I,326.

[21] Taylor, *op.cit.*,12.

[22] Dunkling and Wright, *op,cit.*.

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