



The Monks' Retreat.

Part of a 12th Century Benedictine Monastery.
The Most Curious Bar in England.

Fleece Hotel,
Gloucester.

The Fleece Hotel

The hostelry was constructed about 1498 and was one of the three "Great Inns" built by the Abbey of St Peter in order to reduce the pressures on its overcrowded guesthouses.

In 1534 the inn was held by Henry Marmyon, mayor in 1533 and 1541. Following the dissolution of the Abbey the property was conveyed to the dean and chapter of Gloucester Cathedral. By 1670's the inn was known as the Golden Fleece which reflected the importance of the wool trade to the city, however the "Golden" was later dropped due to a decline in the industry. In 1673 the landlord was a colourful local character called Gray Cox who seemingly had a lack of respect for authority. He was elected a member of the common council of the city by the mayor and burgesses but promptly declined the honour. It was customary for

every newly elected member to pay a fine of twenty nobles (£6.60) to the civic purse and Cox's refusal was met with a larger fine of £50, which he also neglected to pay. The dispute carried on for a number of years and raised the ire of his landlords, the Cathedral Chapter, who censured him for his unworthy behaviour.

By 1770 the inn had fallen out of repair and after remaining empty for a few years the dean and chapter offered the building to the mayor and burgesses for the sum of £150 in order to make a market and shambles on the site. Following the Common Council's rejection of this offer the dean, Josiah Tucker, expressed a personal interest in leasing and running the building. It was considered inappropriate that he should rent the inn from himself so the lease was finally made out in the name of a minor canon. The property was sold by the church in 1799 and since then has been privately owned and remains one of the few 'free' houses in the city.

Beneath the eastern range of buildings lies a twelfth-century tunnel-vaulted basement of five bays with arches supported on round Norman pillars. This cellar has been described as the finest of its type to be found anywhere in northern Europe. Its first occupier may well have been

Benedict the Cordwainer (leather worker) who is known to have traded from premises hereabouts in the year 1200. The undercroft would have provided a secure fireproof storage and selling area for valuable manufactured or imported goods. In more recent years it has served as one of the most unusual bars in England. At the southern end of the cellar is an original access stairway that leads up from beneath a small round headed arch.

The Monk Myth

According to local legend the Fleece Hotel is supposedly connected to the cathedral by a secret underground passage. It is alleged that during the time of St Peter's Abbey it was used by the monks in order to sneak out for an illicit pint when the abbot wasn't looking.

However, the medieval monks had no need of this subterfuge as they each received a gallon of ale a day to drink and they were also responsible for brewing the beer that was sold at inns owned by the monastery.

