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# THE STORY OF GLOUCESTER PUBS

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Gloucester had as many pubs and taverns as it did churches. There used to be a saying 'as sure as God is in Gloucester' reflecting the presence of so many places of worship. In addition to the many parish churches we also had friaries and monasteries. Blackfriars, White friars, Grey friars, Black canons of St Augustin, Benedictine monks etc. etc. These establishments have nearly all vanished, but Gloucester's ale houses still survive and are mostly flourishing. All these religious houses had large breweries as part of their normal business so were a good source of ale.

We will be visiting the most notable or historical today, in the space of an hour we must be selective so we will start with:

**THE OLD BELL.** As you can see only the upper floors of a once grand and important house remain. Built 1665 – so Jacobean in style. Originally built for Thomas Yate, apothecary, and onetime Mayor. Supposedly made from the timbers of the Mayflower- the ship that carried the Pilgrim Fathers to America. It once formed part of the much larger Bell Hotel which was the centre of Gloucester's cultural scene in the Georgian and Victorian eras, it was a coaching inn and was the haunt of Robert Raikes in his younger days- he used to drink here with his pal Gerry Tugwell- both were apparently quite disreputable and were once shown the door by the landlady, Elizabeth Whitefield until she realised who Raikes was- he was known in his youth as Bobby Wildgoose! The small panelled bar has a magnificent fireplace installed for Yates's first marriage in 1650. Allegedly the house was haunted. The Bell Inn also features in Henry Fielding's novel Tom Jones and it was the birthplace and early dwelling place for George Whitefield the notable Methodist and Evangelist.

**CAFÉ RENE.** Originally part of the old Golden Hart or Heart, it is a mediaeval building and records show it was an inn in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The so-called Roman well, which is a feature of the pub today, stood in the courtyard of the Golden Hart and was possibly previously used by the Franciscan Friars who inhabited Greyfriars. There is no evidence to support its Roman origin and the existing well probably dates from the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Records show that wells were a common garden feature

in old Gloucester. There are extensive cellars underneath the area that are supposedly haunted. The Café lies in the old Saxon street called Marylone. The courtyard was covered over after the 1970s and Café Rene opened in 1987 as the Greyfriars but took the current name in 1998.

**THE KING OF HEARTS** In late 2019 news emerged that the owners of Café Rene had acquired the shop near to the Marylone entrance on Southgate St that previously traded as Nevitt's Lighting. They discovered an old Inn sign that suggested that the premises had been a pub called the King of Hearts and made plans to re-open the premises as a pub/restaurant perhaps using the original name, the sign can be seen in the shop window. In April 2020 a detailed planning application was made to utilise an area at the rear of the Nevitt's shop that will include a new bar lounge, a function room and toilet facilities but how this plan will look in reality is not clear.

**THE CROWD TAVERN.** The location of this tavern in the crypt of St Mary's church is most unusual; It was active from 1576 for about 100 years. Records show that gunpowder was stored here during the 1643 siege of Gloucester. The crypt covers most of the ground underneath the church. Half of it is still a charnel house but the side nearest to Marylone was cleared of bones and put to commercial use. The tavern, like the Golden Hart, probably got its beer from the old Greyfriars brewery, that part of the building survived the suppression of the monasteries organised by Henry VIII. In Victorian times the crypt was re-furnished with brickwork to 'modernise' the interior. During the refurbishment of the church in 2018/2019 asbestos was discovered in the crypt and the interior was mostly screened off with MDF boarding to protect church personnel. It is very unlikely that the public will be allowed to visit the crypt in the future. Pictures of the interior prior to the screening process are on display in the church itself.

**ROBERT RAIKES HOUSE.** A merchant's house dating from 1560 and used by Raikes, from 1772 onwards, as a dwelling house and business premises for the Gloucester Journal which he owned and edited. Raikes was the promoter of the Schools on Sunday movement and he used the garden at the rear as an outdoors classroom in which Raikes's Ragged Army as his scholars were known were given educational instruction. Samuel Smith bought it and restored it in 2008 at a cost of £4.5 million and opened it as the Robert Raikes House pub. Before this though, in the back-garden area there was a pub/drinking den called The Mucky Duck that was accessed through the garden gate. This story was related to me on the last tour I did by some local people who used to socialise there.

**THE CROSS KEYS INN.** Situated down Scruddelone- or Shroud Lane, where the shroud makers plied their trade, shrouds were what you were buried in if you were

poor. The building is early to mid 16<sup>th</sup> Century- originally three cottages but it appears in licensing records from 1720 onwards. The sign of the cross keys signified that the inn was supplied by one of the nearby monastic houses. Cross keys are also the symbol of St Peter's Abbey, now the Cathedral so that is probably the most likely affiliation. It is now supposed to be the smallest pub in Gloucester these days.

From the Cross Keys look at the rear of the Fleece – just out of interest- and then take the party down Mercers Entry noting the Masonic Hall as you go past. Explain that the Entry was also known as Fox's Passage, Love Lane and Pinchbelly Lane and briefly explain these with the aid of the mosaic outside the entry in Westgate Street.

**THE FLEECE HOTEL.** One of the three Great Inns built by St Peter's Abbey to accommodate increasing numbers of visitors to the Abbey and to take the pressure of the Abbey guesthouses. The other great inns were the Ram where Hudson's the men's clothing shop is now down Northgate Street and the New Inn. The Fleece was built in about 1500. It became known as the Golden Fleece in 1665 which reflected the importance of the wool trade to Gloucester but that was dropped as wool declined in value. The suppression of the monasteries -1534-1539 meant that ownership passed to The Dean and chapter of Gloucester Cathedral. They were the principal owners but by 1770 the Inn was in a sorry state and the Dean offered it to the mayor and burgesses for £150 to make a market and shambles on the site but this was declined so the Dean Joshua Tucker expressed a wish to take the lease over and run it himself. This was considered inappropriate, so the lease was made out in the name of a minor canon. The Inn passed into private hands in 1799 and remained so until its recent demise. If we are fortunate, we can look inside and underneath the building at the 12 century undercroft which is tunnel-vaulted and supported on Norman pillars – a suitable fire proof storage area for a merchant- used latterly as a bar the Monks Retreat. The building's future use is unclear at present. It is in the ownership of the city council and some internal work to bring it back to its original condition was in progress until an arson attack some 2 years ago brought the work to a halt.

**THE SWORD INN.** This is as far as we know the original name dating from 1680. It has been known as the Union and the House of the Tailor of Gloucester. The former to celebrate the unification of Ireland with England in 1847 and the latter celebrating the fact that the right-hand building with the false front was the workshop of the real Tailor of Gloucester John Prichard. Elaborate on the Beatrix Potter connection and briefly tell the real story and what Beatrix made of it,

**THE FOUNTAIN INN.** One of the oldest known sites associated with the brewer's trade. The inn has had various names, Savages Inn, the Catherine Wheel as well as the Fountain. What do you give to a man that has just crowned you King of England? Well it's a tavern or inn and this is what the newly crowned King Henry III gave to Peter Poictevin in 1216. He was Peter de Roches the Bishop of Winchester and originally from Poitou (Charente). The King remains the only monarch not to be crowned in Westminster Abbey since the conquest and it was not unusual for mediaeval kings to give grants of land in provincial cities to those that had done them an especial service. The appropriately named John Taverner held the premises in the early 1300s and then Sybilla Savage held the place in the mid 1450s. It was known as the Catherine Wheel in Tudor times and was in the tenure of Thomas Bell the eldest son of Sir Thomas Bell of Black Friars fame in 1538. The premises became known as the Fountain Inn in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it is believed that it procured its water from the Trinity well just outside in Westgate Street. In 1672 part of the inn was refurbished and made into a popular coffee house at a cost of £200. The plaster relief of William III is said to commemorate a brief visit of the monarch to Gloucester early in the reign of William and Mary. There were pockets of Jacobite dissenters in the area—supporters of King James II and the Stuart cause and these met in an upper room just here—point it out. William is said to have ridden his horse up the stairs to frighten the living daylights out of the dissenters. The inn has the distinction of being the last of its kind to brew its own beer on the premises before being tied into a major brewery.

**THE OLD CROWN INN.** Originally known as simply the Crown, it dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was large and incorporated a blacksmith, a saddler, and a bakery. Little wonder that it was coaching inn as well. It was the centre of operations of Lt Col Massey during the civil war siege of 1643: an unusual choice because it lies outside the city walls. In the early 1600s it was briefly known as the Tabard but reverted to the Crown under the tenure of Thomas Hale a Sergeant at Arms to King James I. During the civil war it was the subject of attention by the royalist artillery and was hit by 'a bullet of some 20lbs in weight that crashed through an upper chamber and fell into someone's bed and slept there undisturbed' By 1680 it was renamed Old Crown because of another inn of the same name somewhere in the city. It was upgraded in 1730 and became the staging place for traffic between Gloucester, Ross, Hereford, and Monmouth. The coach timetable was leisurely for the operator arrived in the city on a Monday and the return journey would be made sometime in the same week! In 1744 the inn was used as a recruitment centre for His Majesty's Own Regiment, but it ceased trading in October 1760 and was bought by Alderman Benjamin Saunders, Mayor in 1745 who was a wine and spirit merchant. In October 1990, the pub was re-established by Samuel Smith's Brewery and remains a popular watering hole.

**THE DICK WHITTINGTON.** Originally St Nicholas House The town house of the Whittington family who owned the manor and estates at Pauntley, near Newent. This was between 1311 and 1546. Dick Whittington was born in the 1350s the third son of William Lord of Pauntley. He was apprenticed at the age of 13 to John Fitzwaryen a merchant banker and close family friend. Dick proved to be an astute businessman, became court mercer, and bankrolled several foreign wars for Henry IV. He was Mayor of London 4 times 1397 to 1420 and married princess Alice. Elizabeth I allegedly stayed here in 1574, It became a pub in 1980.

**THE LOWER GEORGE INN.** Notable since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century as a coaching inn and one that accommodated travelling salesmen. It was upgraded with a new fascia in 1820 or so and became a fashionable venue. Used to be known at one time as The Pig Inn. Lower George because there was an Upper George further up Westgate Street. Next to the Lower George or maybe next to the Old Crown apparently was a small pub called the White Lamp Inn. Also, at one of the George Inns elephants were often a feature.

### **THREE COCKS LANE AND THE KINGS HEAD**

We start to retrace our steps noting in passing Three Cocks lane the site of another 18<sup>th</sup> century inn known as The Kings Head: This was operated notably by Benjamin Saunders who also ran a popular coffee shop and meeting/eating room in the Cathedral precinct known as the Great Room. It is mentioned also in the Diary of a Cotswold Parson the work of the Rev Francis Witts. The diary covers the years 1820 to 1852 and records the fact that as a magistrate, he would travel by horse or carriage from Lower Slaughter where he lived via Cheltenham (that was the regular route then) to Gloucester on a Monday to attend the Sessions and return on the Friday. He records that the magistrates used to convene in the Kings Head before crossing to the Booth Hall where the sessions were held. We also pass the site of the Lamprey Inn at Number 56 Westgate Street once known as the Westgate but earlier as the Gresham Hotel in 1927 when it was on the opposite side of the road. Also mention the Comfy Pew, possibly an inn at some stage and the nearest establishment to the Cathedral.

**THE THEATRE VAULTS.** The Theatre Royal has long since been rebuilt and its most recent incarnation was as the Poundstretcher shop. The Theatre Vaults located at Number 30 (now number 152) Westgate Street was a popular inn especially with the actors and their admirers during and after theatrical performances. It is possible that Charles Dickens may have used the Vaults as he often red his plays here. The outline of the theatre and entrance to the Pit can still be seen from the upper floors of 26 Westgate looking west,

**THE NEW INN.** We end our tour at the finest galleried inn to be seen in Britain today. Built between 1430 and 1450 by the Town Monk John Twyning- built from oak and chestnut framing it was the largest inn at the time in the country capable of accommodating 200 persons. The proclamation of Mary Tudor's succession to the throne was made at Gloucester Cross in 1553 and the Inn was full to the brim with the vast array of noblemen and their adherents that seemed to be needed for this solemn occasion. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was an important stage point for the Gloucester to London coaches and all manner of exhibitions and shows were held here over the centuries. A Real Tennis court was installed in the rear courtyard in 1649 and the Lion and Serpent have been locked in mortal combat for, probably, as long as that; they symbolise the triumph of good over evil. The Coats of Arms of the city can be seen on the galleried area. The simpler one above dates from the De Clare family who were Earls of Gloucester up until Bosworth Field- the Tudor coat was granted in 1538- the roses are those of York and Lancaster and the boars head is taken from the badge of Richard III Duke of Gloucester. The sword of state granted to the city can be seen in the Mayors parlour as can a replica of the cap of maintenance. The horseshoes and nails represent mediaeval ironworking in the city. The upper coat the chevronels and red rondels are in use today (adopted in 1647) the chevronels from the De Clare family and the rondels or torteaux are from the arms of the Bishop of Worcester which were incorporated Gloucester until 1541. The carriage reminds us of Christmas 1896 when Henry Royce had to stay the night to repair his cars brakes- it was a Peugeot cabriolet and the brakes failed coming down Birdlip Hill. He fixed the brakes next morning but had forgotten that he had left the car in gear and when he started to swing the starting handle the car lurched forward ran him over and ran out and crashed into a passing dog cart in the street outside. Go outside through the small passage to the left of the carvery and see how big the Inn is, tell visitors of the origin of eavesdropping and then end the tour at this point.

These tour notes are based on original work by Darrel Kirby, 'The Story of Gloucester's Pubs' The History Press 2010. Additional material taken from Historic Pubs of Gloucester at [www.cityofgloucester.co.uk](http://www.cityofgloucester.co.uk). Westgate, Gloucester from Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia, various sources within St Mary de Crypt church and, of course, from Gloucester Civic Trust's Phillip Moss.