

## Leicester's Inns And Alehouses

December's meeting (12<sup>th</sup>) of The Woodhouse Eaves History Group was a talk by Lawrence Lock of Markfield entitled "A History of Leicester's Inns and Ale houses." Most people will be familiar with the tales surrounding Leicester's most famous inn, the Blue Boar which stood in the Highcross, because of its association with Richard III around the time of the Battle of Bosworth. However, Lawrence revealed that there were a great many other inns both inside and outside the old city walls that had just as interesting tales to tell. He made a distinction between inns-primarily for travellers offering accommodation, taverns-catering mostly for the middle classes and serving almost exclusively-wine and ale houses- offering cheap beer and ale for the working classes.

Along with the Blue Boar which was around from the early 1400s other early Inns were readily identified from the signs they were obliged to display from the middle of the 14th century. These included the Bell and the George(both in Swinesmarket (where the High St exists today), the Talbot (Talbot St), the Peacock (Peacock Lane), the Antelope and the Saracen's Head (Market Place). Long after Richard was supposed to have spent the night there before Bosworth, The Blue Boar achieved notoriety again in 1605 when its landlady, Widow Clarke, was murdered during a botched robbery by Thomas Harrison and barmaid, Alice Gumbold; both of whom were hanged for their exploits. Sadly the inn was already in decline in 1769 when the owner at that time, John Nutt relocated the inn to Southgate and the Old Blue Boar (as it became known) became dilapidated. It was finally being demolished in 1838. The New 'Blue Boar' met the same fate as recently as 1971 when the St.Nicholas Circle development got underway. However, a third 'Blue Boar' has recently sprung up on Millstone Lane on the site of a former cafe.

By 1533 laws were in place allowing only 2 taverns within the town walls However by 1577 a royal survey identified the following had also become established: the Angel, White Hart, Bulls Head, Green Dragon (Mkt. Place), White Horse, Cross Keys (adj. All Saints ), Maiden Hotel and the Fox. The Angel was probably the largest and most important inn having been established around 1534 across the old town walls in Gallowtreegate. It had 100 rooms over three floors and in its time boasted such clients as Mary, Queen of Scots, Prince Rupert and Charles I. Demolished in 1854, today the only reminder of this inn is the Angel Gateway, a small alley off Cheapside. The Victorian frontage of the Cross Keys (now an empty shop) disguises an old inn dating from before 1551 although you have to sneak down the side alley of the church yard to appreciate the age of this building. The Saracen's Head, which once stood on the

corner of Hotel St. and the Mkt Place, has been rebuilt several times since it was established in the early 14th century. It is now the Knight and Garter wine bar.

Alehouses were less grand affairs and it wasn't until the 1640s that licences were required to establish one. Alongside the licence, proprietors were not able to serve drinks during the times of church services, gaming and the sale of tobacco was banned on the premises and at least one bed had to be provided for visiting travellers.

In the 18th century uncertainty over land ownership rights in the Haymarket and Humberstonegate areas allowed for the establishment of numerous new ale houses and inns. The Three Crowns and the Three Cranes were two rival inns built in the early 1700s. They were both important coaching inns and could accommodate well to do travellers as well as catering for the locals. The King of Denmark certainly stayed at the Three Cranes in 1768. Both of these establishments had gone by the late 1800s. The Crown and Thistle however, on Loseby Lane, dating from around 1636 (although changing its name to the Red Cow for many years) survives behind the facade of O'Neills and some claim it to be the oldest surviving pub in the city.

Other pub sites dating from the 1800s that have been identified include the Queens Head (St. Martins), Nags Head (site of Wyggeston Boys School), The Golden Lion (Jubilee Sq.) and the Bowling Green which was renamed the Polar Bear in the 1990s because of its proximity at the time to the old Fox's Glacier Mint factory.

When licensing laws were relaxed in the 1830 more alehouses quickly sprang up resulting in the city acknowledging 177 inns and 121 alehouses by 1835. The repeal of these laws in 1872 saw a gradual decline as licences were either withdrawn or not reissued when they came up for their annual renewal. By 1970 almost all the alehouses had gone although six still remain from the 1870 period: Bakers Arms (Grafton St.), Black Horse, Bowl-Turners Arms, Bridlelane Tavern, Durham Ox and The Braunstone-Gate Inn (Manhattan Winebar). Redevelopment in Leicester in recent years has all but obliterated the sites of many of Leicester's historic drinking houses. Eleven pubs (including the Stag and Pheasant, Admiral Nelson, Fleur de Lyn etc) were lost when the Haymarket complex was built in the 1960s and 8 more demolished a few years later to make way for the Southgate development.

Lawrence concluded his virtual pub crawl by reminding us that one of Leicester's newest pubs now resides inside one of the city's oldest buildings, Wygston's House Bar.

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