

# ENGLISH HISTORY IN A PUB SIGN

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The Middle Ages saw increased population and industries which began to pollute the water supply. Ale became the only safe drink. Because of the increase in demand, alehouses began to take on a permanent role.

The introduction of hops into brewing brought a new drink onto the market, beer. Ale was still the premier booze since it was unadulterated with preservative hop flowers added to beer.

Recognising a good thing when they saw it Dutch and Flemish immigrants who had settled in England took advantage of the situation to develop hop gardens in counties like Kent and Sussex, and these became well established by the middle of the 16th century.

However, not everyone welcomed the new 'beer' tippie, regarding the addition of 'hops' as a poison and contaminant. In vain, Henry VIII tried to stop the brewing of beer through heavy taxation. But such a heavy handed approach wasn't likely to prevail when it came to the question of tax and brewing.

Brewers of the middle ages were required to hang an 'ale-stake' outside their premises upon completion of a new batch of ale. This was a summons for the local 'ale-conner' to drop by - a civil servant charged with ensuring the quality and quantity of ale.

Brewers caught short-measuring could expect to be ignominiously dragged through the streets as a punishment.

Along with the Church (The Crossed Keys is the emblem of St Peter), the chief influences upon the development of the inn sign were royalty and nobility.

Today we talk about the 'pub' but this is a term invented by the Victorians, an abbreviation of 'public house'.

What is perhaps extraordinary about some of our hostelries is that some of them have remained on the same location through the centuries.... The George at Glastonbury originates from the time of Edward VI, while The George at St. Albans is mentioned as long ago as 1448. Another George, in the Somerset village of Norton St. Philip may have been licensed as long ago as 1397. A quite amazing longevity in historical terms, perhaps only equalled by theological establishments.

With the gradual spread of the road

*In Stony Stratford, Bucks, there are two old coaching inns called The Cock, and The Bull, whose fierce competition for trade gave rise to the phrase "a cock and bull story".*

network and horse-drawn coaches our roadside inns were transformed into coaching inns; such establishments even now preserving the archways which lead to former stables and courtyards behind.

In market towns it was not uncommon for prosperous inns to add function rooms, and private rooms where business could be discussed away from the bustling town marketplace outside.

And so it was that hostelries created a social role for themselves.

During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) England began to assert herself in the world through trade and exploration, as well

as military might. Population growth and a changing economy saw the expansion and creation of towns. There was now a permanent urban population. The professional classes, such as lawyers, bankers, writers and civil servants, prospered most from urban society.

The tavern grew up in the towns and sold only wine. The essential difference between the tavern and the alehouse, was that the tavern was a place for leisure and pleasure, whereas the alehouse was a place of necessity.

In the alehouse, the poor sheltered, spending the little money they had, to sustain themselves and find relief from their plight.

The taverns on the other hand, were where the professional classes ate, drank and relaxed offering comfort and serving superior food.

The image of the cosy tavern; with a large open fire; its customers gathered round in lively conversation; smoking pipes and quaffing ale and wines, hangs in many a modern pub.

This is a romantic, eighteenth century image when the tavern thrived. Although the clientele may have been wealthier than those that frequented the alehouse, their behaviour was not always gentlemanly. There was much drunkenness, but drunkenness was not disapproved of as it is today.

The taverns also attracted confidence-tricksters and prostitutes, who preyed on the inebriated and unsuspecting.

A new era of pubs and signs is now with us, do I hear tears of nostalgia out there?...but even so history shows through in the "modern" choice of name.

The Earl of Warwick's crudely painted heraldic bear and staff easily became The Pig and Whistle, while The Black Swan mutated amusingly into The Mucky Duck to name but two.

Sadly, today pubs are disappearing at a rate of knots and once gone they are unlikely to return. Thousands around the country that have been with us for centuries, their signs as easily recognised by our forefathers as it is by us. Will it survive for generations to come?

*And I leave you with Boswell's famous quote of Samuel Johnson that appears in many a pub; '...No, Sir; there is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn.'*

## GREAT QUESTIONS OF OUR TIME

- Why do we press harder on a remote control when we know the batteries are flat?
- Why do banks charge a fee on "insufficient funds" when they know there is not enough?
- Why does someone believe you when you say there are four billion stars, but check when you say the paint is wet?
- Why doesn't glue stick to the bottle?
- Why do they use sterilised needles for death by lethal injection?
- Why doesn't Tarzan have a beard?
- Why does Superman stop bullets with his chest, but ducks when you throw a revolver at him?
- Why do Kamikaze pilots wear helmets?
- Whose idea was it to put an "S" in the word "lisp"?
- What is the speed of darkness?
- Are there specially reserved parking spaces for "normal" people at the Special Olympics?
- If you send someone 'Styrofoam', how do you pack it?
- If the temperature is zero outside today and it's going to be twice as cold tomorrow, how cold will it be?
- If people evolved from apes, why are there still apes?

- If it's true that we are here to help others, what are the others doing here?
- Do married people live longer than single ones, or does it only seem longer?
- If someone with a split personality threatens to commit suicide, is it a hostage situation?
- Can you cry under water?
- What level of importance must a person have, before they are considered assassinated instead of just murdered?
- If money doesn't grow on trees then why do banks have branches?
- Why does a round pizza come in a square box?
- How is it that we put a man on the moon before we figured out it would be a good idea to put wheels on bigger suitcases?
- Why is it that people say they "slept like a baby" when babies wake up, like, every two hours?
- If a deaf person has to go to court, is it still called a hearing?
- Why do people pay to go up tall buildings and then put money in binoculars to look at things on the ground?
- Why do doctors, when they ask you to strip, leave the room or close the cubicle curtain while you change? They're still going to see you naked anyway.

"NO CHIPPED PAINT; ALL THE HORSES JUMP"

Those seven little words sum up what inspiration is all about.

When Walt Disney took his children to a fair they all had a great time, but after the carousel stopped spinning, Walt noticed that the exciting blur of moving horses and twinkling lights was an illusion. The reality was that the horses were faded and chipped and that only those on the outside went up and down.

At that moment, he asked himself what an amusement park would be like if there was "no chipped paint and all the horses jump"? The result is history.

That little phrase is a metaphor for the process we can all go through every day and in any circumstance.

Everywhere we look there are ideas that have become tired, paint that is chipped and horses that don't jump, that with a small amount of vision we can revitalise into new and exciting concepts.

Creative inspiration is rarely about creating something out of nothing. Most of the best ideas in the world have come about because someone created something better out of something jaded.