

# ENGLISH HISTORY

## IN A PUB SIGN

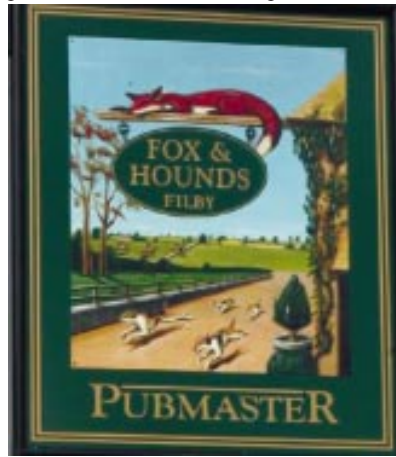
*“Pub names are not just the names of pubs they are key words and phrases that unlock doors to social and military history, folklore, heroes and heroines, natural history, dialects, trades, industries and professions, and sporting interests.”*



Pub signs are arguably the earliest form of poster art in the UK, dating back almost a thousand years, and reflect a rich vein of traditional British life.

The idea of the pub sign came to Britain at the time of the Roman invasion.

Wine bars in ancient Rome hung a bunch of vine leaves outside as trading signs but when the Romans came here they found precious few vines in the inhospitable climate.



### FROM ONE SIGN OF THE TIMES TO ANOTHER?

So simple, yet so annoying, graffiti really is a sign of our times.

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For more information, contact details for Managing Director Christopher Horton are opposite.



Instead, they hung up bushes to mark out the inns and the names Bush and Bull & Bush still survive.

With the departure of the Romans from Britain customer service really went down the tubes and it was not until the middle ages that things picked up as the monasteries created guest-houses and hospices to provide much of the available lodgings for travellers.

Frequently the bread and ale was offered free at these establishments. It wasn't unknown for the brothers, or their visitors for that matter, to over-indulge, which led to ale tankards in monasteries being marked inside with vertical pegs to indicate the amount of ale to be consumed in a single gulp. This is the origin of our phrase 'to take down a peg'.

Strictly speaking, inns provided rooms for travellers, taverns provided food and



drink, while alehouses simply dished out beery substances.

Although most trading establishments were banned from hanging signs above the street pubs were exempt from this ruling. In fact, the pub sign had become compulsory in 1393, when King Richard II passed an act decreeing that all inns must display a sign outside their premises.

Pubs originally had signs outside them so they would be recognised by the illiterate population.

The sign would have been used to differentiate the pub from other trades people something simple like a bush or a crooked piece of wood.

Pubs or inns owned by the church would have displayed traditional Christian signs e.g. the Cross Keys of Saint Peter or an angel. The aristocracy would have borrowed



from the heraldic language as in the King's Arms.

Displaying a coat of arms on a pub was often used to indicate ownership of that pub by a particular family.

Many of the signs which developed over the centuries were adapted from tradesman's signs; hence the Woolpack or Carpenter's Arms. Doves were associated with monastic hostelries. Near a canal or river Navigation and Railway Arms close to the burgeoning 19th century railway routes.

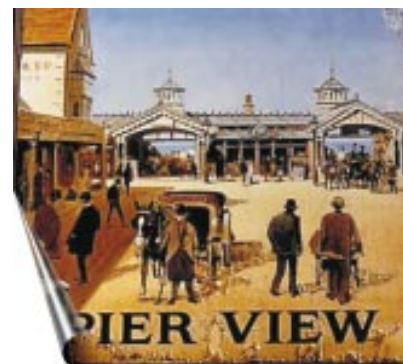
Interestingly, the Pig and Whistle name is a corruption of 'peg and wassail'... wassailing being the drinking to 'good health'

The spread of Christianity did nothing to lessen the English thirst for ale and many Pagan rituals which involved drinking, were adopted by the Christian church.

Ales were sometimes brewed especially for church festivals or to raise funds, these were known as 'scot ales', and those who brewed secretly to avoid giving the church its share were drinking 'scot free'.

*“Only in this green and pleasant land does the inn or pub sign reign truly supreme - and long may it be so.”*

*As Hilaire Belloc wrote, “When you have lost your inns drown your empty selves, for you will have lost the last of England!”*



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