

THE ART OF CONVERSATION



An Artistic Study of London's Most Historic Pubs
by Jan Levy

The history of the Pub goes back to the Romans, who first introduced Tabernae to England, where food, wine and ale were sold.

After the departure of the Romans, Alehouses sprang up all over the country. Ale is a potent brew of malted barley, similar to beer but without the hops. With increasing industrial pollution in England, water no longer was safe to drink, so ale became the drink of necessity, as the process of fermentation served to destroy dangerous bacteria.

Inns were run by Monks to feed and house travellers. The Tabard, one of London's most famous Inns, unfortunately no longer exists.

The aim of this piece is to represent some of the most historic pubs in London in an animated style; to show how important the "pub" is in society as is "the art of conversation".

There is a short synopsis of each tavern to relay the significance of conversation and the enchantment of the public house.

The Art of Conversation

ROW 1

The Anchor

34 Park Street, City of London, Greater London SE1 9EF



This pub is where diarist Samuel Pepys saw the Great Fire of London in 1666. He wrote that he took refuge in "a little alehouse" on Bankside ... and there watched the fire grow". Another fire devastated the pub and it was rebuilt in 1676 and has since had additions over the centuries. It is the sole survivor of the riverside inns that existed here in Shakespeare's time, when this district was the Centre and heart of theatre land and the Thames was London's principle highway.

The Blind Beggar,

337 Whitechapel Rd, London E1 1BU



This is an East End pub with strong historical ties to the notorious Kray brothers. They wouldn't hurt one of their own, but heaven help you if you got on the wrong side of them!

On 9th March 1966 Ron Kray walked into the saloon bar of The Blind Beggar and shot George Cornell in the head using a 9mm Mauser.

Legend would have it that this happened because Cornell had called Ronnie a 'big fat poof', in public, to which Ron obviously took offence and sought revenge. This story seems highly

unlikely according to reliable sources and it is more likely the shooting occurred due to a 'business disagreement' involving the Richardson Brothers.



After getting a tip-off that Cornell was in the pub, Ron Kray arrived with another member of The Firm, 'Scotch' Ian Barrie. Cornell was seated at the bar, drinking a Gin and Tonic. On seeing Ronnie, Cornell mocked him further and in silence Ron took the gun from his pocket and shot George Cornell in the head. Ian Barrie fired some shots into the ceiling. They turned around and walked out as calmly as they had come in.

The record playing on the jukebox (which also took a bullet), at the time was 'The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore' by the Walker Brothers.

This wasn't the first murder in The Blind Beggar. In 1904 a man called Wallis who was a member of The Blind Beggar Gang (a notorious firm of pick-pockets who frequented the pub), stabbed another man in the eye with an umbrella.

The George Inn

77 Borough Street, Borough, London SE1 7NH



One of London's oldest pubs, situated in Southwark near London Bridge. The George Inn, is the city's only surviving galleried coaching inn. It was rebuilt in 1676 after being damaged in a destructive fire. The George Inn was fortunately saved from demolition.

Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese

Wine Office Court, 145 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2BU



Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese is one of the few pubs in London that can justify the 'Ye Olde' in its name. It was well known in the 17th century and many pubs have previously occupied this site, one of them, the Horn Tavern is recorded in 1538. The earliest incarnation was a guest house belonging to a 13th century Carmelite Monastery, the pubs vaulted cellars are thought to belong to that building. The pub was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and rebuilt the following year.

Approached through a narrow alleyway (Wine Office Court) the Cheese beckons you into a bygone world. By the entrance a board lists the reigns of the 15 monarchs through which this grand old pub has survived. The dark wooden interior is an enchanting warren of narrow corridors and staircases, leading to numerous bars and dining rooms. There are so many, even regulars get confused.

Nell of Old Drury

29 Catherine Street, London WC2B 5JS



The Nell of Old Drury is one of the oldest pubs in Covent Garden and has undergone a number of incarnations.

An underground tunnel connects the pub and the Theatre Royal opposite which was allegedly used by Charles II when visiting Nell Gynne during the late 1600s.

The pub was originally called the Lamb but was re-named The Sir John Falstaff by the Victorians. During this period, pubs were often used as exhibition venues for what was considering exotic at the time. The Sir John Falstaff was host to such including a tattooed man from the South Seas and a Zulu warrior woman!

The present day Catherine Street is an amalgamation of what was Brydges Street and Katherine Street. The pub's former address was 15 Brydges Street and was a regular for a number of the literary and theatrical figures over the centuries.

The pub was also a regular haunt of the market traders when the Covent Garden Fruit and Veg market was still in existence. It even made a cameo appearance in the Hitchcock movie 'Frenzy', which was set in the area.

ROW 2

The Clarence**53 Whitehall, London SW1A 2HP**

Theatre-goers, tourists, civil servants and locals eat and drink side by side in this historical venue well known to literary greats such as George Bernard Shaw, TS Eliot, Sir John Betjeman, Iris Murdoch, Richard Hughes and Ian Fleming. This is a genuine English pub, smack bang in the heart of Whitehall, with centuries of faith in its woodwork and King William IV to thank for its name.

The Freemasons Arms**81-82 Long Acre, Covent Garden, London WC2E 9NG**

Moore holding up the World Cup.

The Freemasons Arms was, according to Eric S. Hill in *Historical Britain*, the venue for the first meeting of the Football Association, where the rules of football were first officially drawn up. The meeting was held on 26th of October 1863. The pub doesn't seem to make a big fuss about its history, but the original rules are displayed on a wall, along with a picture of Bobby

Princes Louise**208-209 High Holborn, Holborn, London, WC1V 7BW**

so historically significant, even the men's toilets are listed. The pub was re refurbished in 2007.

The Princess Louise is a historic public house on High Holborn which is famous for its remarkable interior, with its wood panelling and series of 'booths' around an island bar. It is a tied house, being owned by the Samuel Smith Brewery of Tadcaster in Yorkshire. The building is protected by its Grade II listing with an interior dating to the late 19th Century, is listed on CAMRA's national inventory of historic pub interiors. Considered

The Argyll Arms

18 Argyll Street, London W1F 7TP



Completed in 1742, our Grade II listed pub is named after the second Duke of Argyll, who lived in a mansion where the Palladium now stands. Rumour has it that a secret tunnel once connected the pub to the duke's mansion. The pub you see today provides a fascinating social and historical narrative thanks to its Victorian 'snug' areas built to separate the social classes.

The Dog and Duck

18 Bateman Street, London W1D 3AJ



This tiny Soho pub stands on the corner of Bateman and Frith Street. It's a popular place and customers squeeze into its two small bars, spilling out onto the pavement in warm weather. The removal of troughs of foliage has revealed as a handsome exterior of granite and bright gold signage, one advertising the pub as a former hotel.

An uncomplicated exterior hides an ornate interior. From floor to ceiling virtually every inch of wall space is covered in tiles or mirrors, reminiscent of a Victorian butcher's or grocer's shop. The front bar is tiled to dado level with plain and ornamental tiles, some depicting a dog holding a duck in its mouth. Above this, large mirrors in mahogany frames, advertise mineral water and cigarettes. These are separated by columns of decorative tiles. The back bar has even more tiles, arranged to make decorative panels.

Many famous historical figures have enjoyed the hospitality of The Dog and Duck, including John Constable, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and George Orwell. Our pub was originally built in 1734 on the site of the Duke of Monmouth's home. The present building was built in 1897, and is considered to have one of London's most exquisite interiors of the period, characterised by thousands of highly glazed tiles.

ROW 3

The Seven Stars

53-54 Carey Street, London WC2A 2JB



Should it be proved that the building that stands today does indeed date back to 1602 then it will represent an amazing record of survival. Had the Seven Stars been located just a few hundred yards to the East, it would have been engulfed in the Great Fire of London in 1666. Had it been a few hundred yards to the West, it would have likely been demolished in the early 20th Century to make way for the building of Kingsway and Aldwych, a development which claimed many old buildings in the area. Had it simply been on the South, rather than the North side of Carey Street, it would have been demolished in order to build the Royal Courts of Justice.

.Hidden away behind the Royal Courts of Justice (High Court) this exceptional little pub is about as quaint as the courts are grand. It was one of a handful of local buildings to survive the Great Fire (1666) and in 2002 celebrated its 400th anniversary with a street party.

The Lamb

32 Conduit Street, London WC1N 3LZ



There may be a lamb on the sign, but the pub and the street were named after philanthropist William Lamb. In 1577, he improved the conduit that brought fresh water to the people of the area. The pub was built in the 1720's but was "improved" in Victorian times and much of the original structure was lost. What remains is a fine Victorian pub.

The exterior is fairly typical with the exception of striking green tiled walls. Inside, above the U-shaped counter, are rare snob screens. These small pivoting panels of etched glass were positioned at head height to conceal a drinker's identity.

The pub would have originally been divided into several small bar areas, each with its own access to the counter.

The Prospect of Whitby

57 Wapping Wall, Wapping, London, E1W 3SJ



The Prospect of Whitby, originally known as "The Devil's Tavern," was built in 1543 and became notorious during the 17th century as a smugglers' meeting place. Having being destroyed by an 18th-century fire, it was rebuilt and renamed "The Prospect of Whitby" after a ship of the same name that was anchored nearby.

The pub interior is crammed with a fascinating array of ships' relics, including lanterns, ropes and wheels. The dark wood panelling, pewter-topped bar resting on barrels, parts of a ship's mast forming the upright pillars, and flagstone floor all contribute to the pub's unique décor.

It is a rare pleasure to sit out on the small balcony perched above the Thames. Others might prefer the pleasant terrace, from which superb views of the Isle of Dogs and the river may be enjoyed. A rooftop terrace also overlooks the Thames.

The Prospect of Whitby must have been vastly different in past centuries, with its unsavoury clientele and surroundings, when the River Thames was packed with countless foreign vessels. Today, the occasional vessel cruises by, the surrounding warehouses have been converted into exclusive apartments and the clientele is a mix of tourists and locals. An up-market restaurant was opened upstairs in the 1950s and has hosted royalty such as Princess Margaret and Prince Rainier.

The Star Tavern

6 Belgrave Mews West, Belgravia, London SW1X 8HT



At the end of a quiet cobbled mews off Belgrave Square, the Star stands proud, head and shoulders above its neighbours. It was built in the early 19th century to cater for the domestic staff of the many great houses of Belgravia. The mews cottages were used for stabling horses and to accommodate the grooms and coachmen. Today they are more likely to house a millionaire than a servant.

From the outside the Star probably hasn't changed that much, but inside the new social order has left its mark. The open bar would have been divided into many rooms, each one used according to one's status 'below stairs'. Now it is open and bright. There are two fireplaces in the largest room, with comfortable benches and scrubbed pine tables.

Synonymous with London's gangland in the 50s and 60s, the Star Tavern was built when the buildings in Belgrave Mews West were the stables of the nearby houses, whose staff and servants the pub served.

One of the main players of the 1950s underworld was Billy Hill, who regularly drank in the Star Tavern before fleeing to Australia after the attempted murder of his rival Jack 'Spot' Comer.

The 10 Bells

84 Commercial Street, London E1 6LY



The **Ten Bells** is a Victorian public house at the corner of Commercial Street and Fournier Street in Spitalfields in the East End of London. It is notable for its association with two victims of Jack the Ripper; Annie Chapman and Mary Kelly.

A public house has stood on the site since 1752, but it was rebuilt in the Victorian era. Much of the interior has been removed in recent times, but the extensive decorative tiling remains. A pictorial panel of painted tiles on the back wall, entitled *Spitalfields in ye Olden Time*, was designed by the firm of Wm B.

Simpson and Sons and dates from the late 19th century.

The name of the pub is derived from a long-term competition between Christ Church Spitalfields and St Brides Fleet Street to claim the finest peal of bells. Christ Church was built in 1714, with only one bell. These were added to and the public house's name commemorates the addition of the tenth bell. The church now has eight bells.

Between 1976 and 1988, the public house was named *The Jack the Ripper*, and memorabilia relating to the case were displayed in the bars. The brewery ordered the change back to its original name after a long campaign by Reclaim the Night demanded that a murderer of women should not be commemorated in such a fashion.

The pub is featured in the graphic novel *From Hell* (1999), about Jack the Ripper, by writer Alan Moore and artist Eddie Campbell. Certain scenes show its erstwhile, late twentieth century, use as a striptease venue. The film

adaptation *From Hell* (2001), also features the pub, including a scene showing Johnny Depp (as Inspector Abberline) having a drink with Ripper victim Mary Kelly.

The public house was designated a Grade II listed building in 1973.

ROW 4

Ye Old Mitre

1 Ely Court, Farringdon, London, EC1N 6SJ



Ye Olde Mitre Tavern is a well-concealed pub (in a little yard just off Hatton Garden) can often be an oasis in a somewhat manic area.

The original pub was built in 1547 for the servants of the Bishop of Ely from Cambridgeshire, whose London palace was just next door in Ely Place. And, as such the palace and its environs (including the pub) were his domain. The pub was demolished in 1772 and quickly rebuilt. From what we can ascertain, it stayed (officially) under Cambridgeshire's aegis until sometime in the 20th Century - the City of London police, apparently, had no jurisdiction there.

There's also a legend that the tree trunk preserved in the corner of the small bar was the original boundary marker for the diocese and that Queen Elizabeth

I danced the maypole around it - but as we say, that's the legend.

The Lamb and Flag

33 Rose Street, London WC2E 9EB



First licensed in 1623, it's the oldest in Covent Garden, and possibly one of the oldest in London, if claims of a Tudor past are true. Like many an old London building, it has had to grow to meet the demand of an exploding population.

The brick front and upper floors are 19th century but its core is from the late 17th century. The downstairs rooms are delightfully simple, with a well worn, old-world charm, created by the low beams, wood panelling and bare pine floorboards. The back bar area has a fireplace and plain wooden settles.

Apparently Charles Dickens was a regular here as well as the poet John Dryden.

The Jerusalem Tavern

55 Britton Street, London EC1M 5UQ



Convincing and atmospheric re-creation of a dark 18th-c tavern (1720 merchant's house with shop front added 1810), tiny dimly lit bar, simple wood furnishings on bare boards, some remarkable old wall tiles, coal fires and candlelight, stairs to a precarious-feeling (though perfectly secure) balcony, plainer back room, with a full range of St Peters beers tapped from casks.

The Jerusalem Tavern is located in Britton Street, Clerkenwell, London and is named after the Priory of St. John of Jerusalem; founded in 1140. The Tavern has occupied several sites in the area since the 14th century and the current building dates from 1720.

A recent programme on the The History Channel UK features The Jerusalem Tavern. 'How London was Built' podcast tours of the capital, 'St.Paul's Cathedral to The Jerusalem Tavern'.

Cittie of York

22 High Holborn, London WC1V 6BN



The **Cittie of Yorke** pub is one of the most historic public houses in the world, with a history that dates back to 1430, with the present rebuild having been erected in 1924. The Cittie of Yorke is one of the most popular London attractions with those tourists that wish to experience the splendors of historic London and enjoy the delights of Olde England.

The Cittie of Yorke has received the prestigious title of being a Grade II listed building in recognition of its historical importance. The London pub is a city institution, and this particular establishment is a great idea for London tourists with a taste for history.

Some features include the Henekey's long bar located in the grand, hall-like back room, a late Georgian or Regency era triangular metal stove, and Victorian cubicles, which were originally used by lawyers in consultation with clients.

The Grapes

76 Narrow Street, Limehouse, London E14 8BP



The Grapes in Limehouse is a landmark pub with the current establishment built around 1720; a public house however has occupied the same site since 1583. As well as being an historic pub, The Grapes also offers an award winning seafood restaurant upstairs. Passing by the bar and forsaking the pleasures of a liquid lunch, the fish restaurant was today's food venue.

While many might still think of Limehouse as a 'down and dirty' area (it's not really), it does enjoy a notorious past with The Grapes prominently featured: stories of drunks leaving the pub to be assaulted and drowned by local watermen after which the corpses were sold to teaching hospitals were common. Fortunately for drinkers today, following recent budget cuts, our teaching hospitals can no longer afford them.

The Grapes connection, it is Charles Dickens that holds centre stage because The Grapes itself features in his book *Our Mutual Friend* though with the name changed to The Six Jolly Fellowship Porters. Here, the Six Jolly Fellowship is described as 'a tavern of dropsical appearance... long settled down into a state of hale infirmity' but Dickens shrewdly noted that 'it had outlasted and clearly would yet outlast many a better trimmed building' (dropsical is Middle English, short for *hydropesie* from *hydropisis* from *hydro* = water).

ROW 5

The French House

49 Dean Street, London W1D 5BG

The French House opened in 1910 and was run by a German, Schmidt, who was deported when the First World War broke out. He was replaced by the Frenchman Victor Berlemont, then the only foreign landlord in Britain. Berlemont would eject troublesome customers by announcing: 'I'm afraid one of us will have to leave, and it's not going to be me'. During the Second World War the pub became a meeting place for the French Resistance, where Charles De Gaulle allegedly drew up his Free French call-to-arms during lunch upstairs. After the War painters such as Lucian Freud and Francis Bacon became regulars. By then Berlemont had been succeeded by his son, Gaston, who despite being born in Soho and serving in the RAF

during the War played up his Gallic background to the full by sporting a flamboyant moustache and engaging in much hand-kissing.

It was in the French House in 1953 that Brendan Behan ate his *boeuf bourguignon* with both hands. It was also here that year that Dylan Thomas left the only copy of the hand-written manuscript for *Under Milk Wood* a few weeks before he went to America – for good – in 1953. Thomas told a BBC producer, Douglas Cleverdon, that if he found the original he could sell it. All Thomas knew was that he had dropped it somewhere in Soho, probably in a pub, but had no idea where. Eventually Cleverdon realised that the French House was a likely choice. He found the script and sold it for £2,000 (£40,000 in today's money). The French House retains its raffish Gallic Bohemian atmosphere.

The Guinea

30 Bruton Place, Mayfair, London W1J 6NL



The Guinea was established in 1675. The Guinea catered for the stable hands and servants employed by the rich and wealthy residents of Berkeley Square and Bruton Street. Records indicate that the Guinea dates back to the 15th Century and as such is one of London's oldest surviving public houses.

The famous restaurant opened in 1953 with one small dining room and a coal fired grill, there was no menu and guests chose from the display of steaks and lamb chops. The Guinea grill was an instant success with local residents, film stars and politicians competing for tables. The unusual combination of great steaks and a buzzy, relaxed atmosphere within a traditional English pub remains a winning formula.

Princess Margaret, Elizabeth Taylor, Sylvester Stallone and Frank Sinatra are just some of the celebrities who have eaten here.

The Cask and Glass

39 Palace Street, London SW1E 5HN



The Cask and Glass has Victorian origins which are reflected by the dark oak panelling and the fascinating photos depicting Victoria Street, Queen Victoria herself and the brewery trade.

It is a busy and quaint little pub, reputedly one of the smallest in central London and an ideal venue for a quick drink before heading off to the theatre. It aptly describes itself as a country pub in the heart of the city; its pretty exterior is hung with flowering boxes and baskets in summer, and the two outside tables sit under the awning.

Inside, its Victorian origins are reflected by the dark oak panelling and the fascinating photos.

The White Hart

191 Drury Lane, London WC2B 5QD



The oldest licensed premises in London Reputedly first licensed in 1216, Old Bailey archives reveal The White Hart has a colourful and interesting past. It was known as a popular watering hole for London's notorious highwaymen and rogues.

Regular customers included Jack Shepard and Richard (Dick) Turpin just prior to his hanging in 1739. Condemned men also stopped by for a final drink and the comfort of a good (bad) woman before facing the hangman's noose.

The Old Bell Tavern

95 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH



The Old Bell Tavern has a long history, having been a licensed tavern for more than 300 years. Built by Sir Christopher Wren, it housed his masons who were rebuilding St Bride's Church after the Great Fire.

Prior to the Old Bell, the pub was known as the Twelve Bells, the Golden Ball or Bell and when it was known as the Sun in 1500, Wynkyn de Worde, former assistant to England's first printer William Caxton, installed a printing press there. Books printed there were 'emprynted at the sygne of the Sun Flete Strete'.

At the Fleet Street entrance is a small flagstoned area which, according to the menu at the pub, was an off license that was completely separate to the pub. Back then, the pub would have been accessed from the St Brides Avenue entrance at the rear.

Up a few steps is a larger room with a u-shaped bar that's partitioned in the centre. I'm not sure if the partition would have extended further across the room. Around the bar is a variety of seating including comfy seating against the wall and some odd triangular stools. At either end of the room is a roaring fire.