

THE STORY
OF
CHARING CROSS

AND ITS IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURHOOD

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WITH A FRONTISPIECE AND PLAN

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CHAPTER VII.

THE GOLDEN CROSS HOTEL.

ONE of the most interesting spots in this historic neighbourhood is the Golden Cross Hotel. Not that the present house is identical exactly, in its situation, with the old inn bearing that sign, but in that it perpetuates the memory of an old hostelry the antiquity of which is probably traceable to the kind of half-way house between London and Westminster that existed here in the earliest known history of the village of Charing. The probabilities have already been pointed to of a cross—a wooden cross, it is said—having stood here before that erected to the memory of Queen Eleanor, and it is reasonable to assume that the tavern depicted in early engravings was, from its associations, distinguished by the sign of the Golden Cross. The old inn figures prominently in Canaletti's well-known view of Charing Cross in the Northumberland Collection; but it was pulled down when the Trafalgar Square improvements took place in 1830. The purchase of the inn at the time of these improvements was by far the largest that the Commissioners had to make. It was concluded on December 28, 1827, when the extensive premises, with three houses in St. Martin's Lane and two houses and workshops in Frontier Court, were bought of George Howard and others for the sum of £30,000. The "Golden Cross" was the "Bull and Mouth" of the west, and one of the most extensive coaching centres in England, whose fame, as a writer in the year 1815 remarks, had spread from the Pillars of Hercules to the Ganges, from Nova Zembla to New Zealand, and from Siam to California.¹ It may, of course, have escaped one's notice, but in the course of a comprehensive study of the mid-eighteenth century news-sheets I do not remember having encountered an advertisement that related to coaches *regularly* departing from the "Golden Cross." A Chaise and Pair for Portsmouth is announced which

¹ The *Epicure's Almanack*, 1815, a curious and valuable guide to the hostels of that time.

“will set out on Monday next, or *if requir'd*, a Coach and four Horses, either on Monday or Tuesday next.”¹ In cases where they were needed only occasionally, notice was probably given to the drivers of coaches that started from the older-established coaching centres citywards.

Mr. G. Boulton of Leatherhead, described as a man of powerful understanding and considerable acquirements, and of a very kindly, hospitable disposition, was proprietor of the “Golden Cross” at the beginning of the last century. His advertisements are of interest as showing the time occupied in the journey, and the rates to which travellers were subject. The proprietors, Messrs. Tilt, Hicks, Baulcomb, Boulton, and Co., of the Coach from Lewes to London and from London to Lewes, “respectfully inform the public that their fares, either way, are : inside 13s. 0d., outside 8s. 6d. And that they set out from the Star and White Hart Inns, Lewes, every Morning, precisely at half-past eight, and arrive at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, at six in the evening ; which is to the full as early as any Coach from Brighton through Cuckfield arrives in the Metropolis at this season of the year.”² “Died at Charing Cross, October 29, 1814, G. Boulton Esq., of Leatherhead, formerly proprietor of the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, a man of powerful understanding and considerable acquirements, and of a very kindly, hospitable disposition.”³ The “Eclipse,” in 1821, set out from the “Golden Cross” daily at 7.30 A.M., for Exeter, going by Salisbury, Blandford, Dorchester, and Bridport. A Mr. Stratton was the proprietor of the inn in 1814.

Mr. Horne, another proprietor, and one of the largest coach-owners in England, died in the prime of life August 8, 1828. A relative, however, must have succeeded him, for B. W. Horne and Co. are described as the proprietors, in the “Globe” of July 24, 1834, where they “respectfully inform the public that the speed of the Chester Mail has very much increased, rendering it decidedly the best conveyance to Chester (in twenty hours only), through Lichfield, Stafford, and Eccleshall, which sets out every evening at half-past seven o'clock, from the Golden Cross, leaving the Cross Keys, Wood Street, Cheapside, punctually at a quarter before eight, at very reduced fares. . . N.B.—‘Liverpool Umpire,’ from the above inns every afternoon (in twenty-three hours) ; only one

¹ *Daily Advertiser*, March 27, 1742.

² *The Sussex Weekly Advertiser*, Nov. 29, 1802.

³ *Gentleman's Magazine*, Nov. 1814.

guard and one coach throughout the journey ; arrives in time for the Irish Government packets.”¹ In 1833 the late Duke of Beaufort’s father took a house at Brighton and had occasion frequently to run up to London to attend the House of Commons, of which he was a member. The best coach then was the “Times,” which plied between Castle Square, Brighton, and the “Golden Cross,” Charing Cross. It was driven by Goodman, a surly cross-grained fellow, who would not let the then Marquis of Worcester touch the reins. Vexed at this discourtesy, Lord Worcester repaired to a large coach proprietor in the Borough, and within a fortnight a rival to Goodman’s coach was running at greatly augmented speed.²

“An Excellent New Ballad ; being entitled ‘A Lamentation over the Golden Cross, Charing Cross,’ ” which is attributed to Maginn, the Irish satirical writer, bemoans the change wrought in this locality :

No more the coaches shall I see
Come trundling from the yard,
Nor hear the horn blown cheerily
By brandy-bibbing guard.

King Charles, I think, must sorrow sore,
E’en were he made of stone,
When left by all his friends of yore
(Like Tom Moore’s rose) alone.

O ! London won’t be London long,
For ’twill be all pulled down ;
And I shall sing a funeral song
O’er that time-honoured town.

In the days when this breathing-space for Londoners had to cater for the appetites of those whom an enthusiasm for “taking the air ” had brought so far west, the tavern-keepers in the neighbourhood were, no doubt, alive to the opportunity afforded for *victualling* as well as drinking. And although the Malt Duty may have been, as indeed Ned Ward says it was, nowhere better promoted than in the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, yet the taverners were actually licensed victuallers in those days, and it is not impossible that the Carrier, in “King Henry IV.,” had the “Golden Cross ” in his mind’s eye when he recalled a certain duty he had to perform of delivering “a gammon of bacon and two razes of ginger at Charing Cross.”³ And, like the other surrounding pleasure resorts,

¹ *Globe*, July 24, 1834.

² *Daily Telegraph*, August 1892.

³ Part I. Act II. sc. 1.

it was at a later time an attractive spot for those who were bitten with the "Monster" and curiosity mania. In January 1742 was to be seen at the "Golden Cross" an exhibition testifying to the influence of Dean Swift's works upon the popular imagination. Dr. Johnson thought that, in "Gulliver's Travels," "that which gave most disgust must be the history of the Houyhnhnms,"¹ but fifteen years after that strange production's appearance, visitors to the "Golden Cross" were delighting in "the Houyhnhnm, or the most beautiful Harlequin Mare, foal'd on the Mountains in Wales, whose spots by far exceeded the Leopard, and, for its excellency in Make and Shape, is the greatest Curiosity of its Kind in the whole World."²

"To be Seen at the Sign of the Golden Cross. The Great Rhinoceros or real Unicorn, that was taken in the Great Mogul's Dominions, after a Journey of a thousand Leagues by Land to Patna, was shipp'd on board the Lyell, Capt. Acton, and brought to London in June 1740. To be seen at 1s. each.

"This extraordinary Animal is but four Years old; his Body is covered with Folds like a Coat of Mail, and scaled all over; so as to defend itself from the Injuries of all other Animals; besides a large Horn on its Nose, with which he attacks the Elephant, his sworn Enemy. Before he enters into Engagement with the Elephant he whets his Horn on a Stone, and then aims at the Elephant's Belly, knowing it to be the tenderest Part, and in this Manner destroys the Elephant. There has never been one in England since the Memory of Man. He is next in growth to the Elephant

"A great Number of the Nobility and Gentry daily resort to see him."³

The proprietor's repertory exhibits a remarkable *penchant* for zoological curiosities. Here he produced "The largest Horse in England (to be Sold cheap), being nineteen Hands an Inch and a half high, and every way proportionable, which has been shewn at the Golden Cross for some time past, to the general Satisfaction of the Nobility, Gentry, and others, that have had the Curiosity of beholding such a Prodigy in Nature."⁴

Another *rara avis* reputed to be seen at the "Golden Cross," but of a more phantom character, was the "Pretender." Many a Tony Lumpkin arrived fresh and raw in London, hoaxed with a letter of recommendation to Charles Stuart at the "Golden Cross," only, of course, to find his quest of an even less encouraging nature than the

¹ *Lives of the Poets.*

² *Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 2, 1742.

³ *Daily Advertiser*, Feb. 22, 1742.

⁴ *Ibid.* April 3.