

DISCOVERING WORDS ON WEDNESDAYS APRIL 2ND – PUB & INN SIGNS THEME

This may help to follow up the words and phrases discussed if you would like to. As usual, this is mostly copied and pasted!

A history of British pub names

Walk down any British high street and you are sure to see a pub. The local. Nearly every British city, town or village has one. You can also be sure that, no matter the age of the building, the name of the pub draws inspiration from history. There's a unique heritage to the pub names and signs in Britain, which depict everything from historic events, local folklore and occupations to royalty, notable characters, ancient associations and heraldry – a simple pub sign can hold the key to a town or village's past. We take a look at the history behind the names of Britain's much-loved pubs...

Origins

The naming of pubs is said to stem from Roman times, when *Tabernae* would hang vine leaves outside as a trading sign, in order to alert passers-by that wine was sold within. However, it has been suggested that when the Romans invaded Britain, vine leaves were in short supply, so they hung bushes up outside instead in order to mark out the inns. It is said that this gave rise to the many pubs which are now called **The Bush**, **The Hollybush** or **The Bull & Bush**.

Middle Ages

The first proper public houses did not appear until centuries later, when medieval publicans would hang distinctive objects outside their inn in order to distinguish them from the surrounding properties. Names such as **The Plough**, the **Copper Kettle**, **The Boot** or objects which were coloured, such as the **Blue Door**, were commonplace.

Other inns took a different approach. Religious houses during the time of Richard the Lionheart ran the earliest inns catering for pilgrims and knights on their way to the Crusades in the Holy Land. Numerous inns acted as stopover points for the Crusades forces and pub names which can be derived from this time include **The Turk's Head**, **The Saracen's Head** and **The Lamb and Flag** (the lamb representing Christ and the flag the sign of the crusaders).

By the 12th century the naming of inns and public houses was fairly common, and with pub names came pub signs. In a time when most of the working population was illiterate, pictorial signs were used instead of lettering to advertise the inns, or the type of entertainment on offer inside. Considering that ale was their primary trade, many of the public houses opted for something to do with beer. It's likely that names such as **The Hop Pole**, **The Barley Mow** or **The Three Barrels** originate from these times.

In 1393, during the reign of King Richard II, an Act was passed which made it compulsory for pubs and inns to have a sign in order to identify them as official watering holes. Many adopted **The White Hart** as their sign as it was the personal badge of the King – today it is the fourth most popular pub name in the UK.

The Crown was also a popular choice as it was an easy way of pledging support to the reigning monarch without having to change the name with the occupant of the throne. Another popular name from that time is **The Rose and Crown**, which celebrates the end of the War of the Roses and the uniting of the red rose of Lancaster and the white rose of York when Henry Tudor married Elizabeth of York.

Tudor times

Before the Reformation during King Henry VIII's rule, many pub names took a religious theme and the religious influence on British pub names would have continued indefinitely had it not been for the Dissolution of the Monasteries. At this point, many pubs were quick to eradicate any Catholic link; **The Ark** became **The Ship** and **St Peter** (the guardian of the gates of heaven) became the **Crossed Keys**.

Other publicans played it even safer by hastily adopting loyal names such as the **Kings Head** or **Kings Arms**. Names with a religious slant which survived and are still in use today often indicate that the inn is located in close proximity to a church, or was at some point in their history – examples include **The Angel** and **The Bell**.

Heraldry

Another recurrent theme is heraldry, since **Red**, **Black**, **White** and **Golden Lions** have formed part of royal coats of arms following the Norman Conquest. **The Red Dragon** formed part of the Welsh coat of arms, **The Unicorn** part of the Scottish and the **White Horse** was

part of the Hanoverian arms. **The Rising Sun** is said to be from the badge of Edward III and the **White Boar** was from the emblem of Richard III.

Trades

As a way of gathering custom, many public houses chose to associate themselves with the predominant trade in the area. Craftspeople moving to an area would seek out such a pub, so inns such as **The Golden Fleece** (for the wool trade) and the **Bricklayers', Masons', Saddlers', Blacksmiths or Carpenters' Arms** established themselves as meeting places for particular trades.

Sporting names

Many pub names derive from their names from hunting – near old hunting grounds there are plenty of pubs called **The Greyhound, The Fox & Hounds, Dog & Duck** or **Hare & Hounds**. **The Bird in Hand** is said to derive from King Henry VIII's love of falconry and **The Cock** from the days when cock fighting was a popular pastime.

Bull Inn, Stamford : the town was the last in England to practice bull-running

Nowadays more 'modern' sports are represented by names such as **The Cricketers' Arms** or **The Anglers' Rest**.

Travel

In the 18th century, as the population became more mobile, a need for coaching inns grew. Predictably pubs such as **The Coach & Horses, The Wagon & Horses** or **The Horse & Groom** became more commonplace, marking points where stagecoaches would stop. Later the advent of the canals and railways gave many towns a **Navigation** or a **Railway** or **Station Inn**.

THE RED LION MOST POPULAR

The Red Lion is the most popular pub name in Britain, with more than 500 British pubs, so called for **two different reasons**.

The first goes back to 14th-century England and **John of Gaunt, the third son of King Edward III**, and a succession crisis which led to infighting within the family. The country's support was a split between John and his nephew, who would eventually become Richard II. **John had incorporated the red lion into his coat of arms** after he married into the Castilian royal family, which featured the animal on their coat of arms, while, Richard's emblem was a white hart.

But there's a second reason why Red Lion pubs are so popular. Two centuries after John of Gaunt died, **a Scottish king ascended the English throne for the first time. James VI and I ordered many public buildings to show their support for him by displaying his crest, which also happened to be a red lion.**

The Royal Oak

Following the Battle of Worcester 1651 in the English Civil War, the **defeated Prince Charles escaped the Roundheads** and managed to flee to Boscobel House in Bishops Wood, Staffordshire to seek refuge. In order to evade Cromwell's troops, Charles **found a great oak tree** a short distance from the house (now known as the Boscobel Oak) which he climbed, **successfully hiding out in its branches for a day**, before spending the next night cramped into a tiny priest-hole within the house.

When Charles was eventually able to escape to France, little did he know that his tree-climbing escapade would become so famous. The tale captured the public imagination and people told and retold the story of the oak tree, so much so that when he later returned as King Charles II on the Restoration in 1660, many pubs were renamed **The Royal Oak** in his honour. Instead of being regarded as a symbol of defeat, the Royal Oak came to represent defiance and loyalty to the kingdom. Not only that, but Charles' birthday (29 May) was declared Royal Oak Day and the famous episode also inspired the oak-apple day celebrations. Today **The Royal Oak** is the third most popular pub name in Britain (after **The Red Lion** and **The Crown**).



There is “The Royal Oak” pub in both Lower Bristol Road, Bath & Corsham

SURPRISING OR UNUSUAL PUB NAMES

The Elephant and Castle in London is perhaps a distortion of “La infanta de Castilla”, a title given to the first wife of Edward 1st.

The Bag of Nails

Some people have argued that this pub name comes from a hoary old joke where a man walks into a pub and asks for a room. The sign says that it’s one shilling for the night or sixpence if you make your own bed. When the man chooses to make his own bed, the landlord gives him some wood and a bag of nails . . .

The Bag of Nails sounds a very utilitarian name for a pub but its origins could come from classical mythology. The name (try saying it fast a couple of times) could well be a corruption of “Bacchanales”, which means drinking sessions after the Roman god of drinking Bacchus, and were the celebrations of this god of wine.

Bacchus wasn't only the god of wine, he was also the god of ritual madness — and his rites were characterised by maniacal dancing to the sound of loud music, in which his followers, who were mostly female, whirled around, screamed, became drunk and incited one another to greater and greater ecstasy.

This theory works less well when looking at the history of a specific pub, the Bag of Nails, close to Buckingham Palace. The pub was converted from an ironmonger's or blacksmith's shop; the name is thought to have evolved from the old ironmonger's sign, a bag of nails.

The Old Dog and Duck

Centuries ago duck hunting was a wildly popular pursuit. A favourite pastime of Charles II, it consisted of catching a duck, clipping its wings so it could not fly away, throwing it into the village pond and sending the dogs in after it. Ducks diving under water for safety with dogs splashing around trying to bite them in half provided hours of fun for the king.

Although pubs called the Dog and Duck (old or otherwise) were primarily located in small villages in the countryside, the popularity of the name has caused them to spread to more urban communities and across the world, as far afield as Texas in the US and Adelaide in Australia.

The Pig and Whistle

There are three theories behind the pub name the Pig and Whistle. One story has it that innkeepers would insist that their young employees whistled continuously while down in the cellar, to prove they were not drinking the stock. A "pig" was also a common name for an earthenware pot used to store ale.

Others have pointed out that it is derived from celebration and good times, hence the "pig" might be the actual animal, nicely fattened, while the "whistle" could be a corruption of the old English word "wassail", a celebratory drink used to toast someone's health. So a "peg of wassail" would be "a measure of good health".

"Whistle" could also come from expressions like "**wet one's whistle**" meaning to have a drink, current since the seventeenth century, with "whistle" being a jocular name for the mouth or throat as used in speaking or singing e.g. c1386, CHAUCER Reeve's, "So was hir ioly whistle wel y-wet".

The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives several examples of the use of the phrase dating from 1681, “**to go to pigs and whistles**”, to mean “**to go to rack and ruin**” – as when one spends too long in the pub.

The Pack O’ Cards.

This is the most famous building in Combe Martin, North Devon. You’ll see it all over postcards and leaflets and on tourist information websites and all with good reason for this eye-catching building has a fascinating history and a unique story behind it.

A monument to lady luck

The Pack O’ Cards was constructed over 300 years ago by a man called George Ley. He was the local squire in Combe Martin – but more importantly, he was an avid fan of card games. One night in 1690 – or so the legend goes – George Ley won a particularly large hand in a game of cards, and declared that he would use the winnings to build an everlasting monument to Lady Luck.

So George began building his new house in Combe Martin. It had four floors, to match the four suits in a deck. Spread across those floors, it had thirteen rooms and thirteen fireplaces, to match the number of cards in a suit. It had fifty-two stairs to match the fifty-two cards in the deck, and was built over an area of fifty-two square feet – plus an extra foot for the joker. It was also built with fifty-two windows – although with the introduction of the Window Tax in 1696, many of them were swiftly bricked up. The overall impression of the building is a towering black and white structure with a strong resemblance to a house of cards piled on top of each other.



The origins

It's not certain when the building first became an inn, but it is recorded that by 1822 the building was known as the King's Arms Inn, with a Jane Huxtable as landlady. The name was officially changed to Pack O' Cards in 1933, though it had undoubtedly been referred to as this locally for many years before.

Despite some alterations, much of the original interior decoration is still intact, with panelled corridors and decorative plaster ceilings, and the building was Grade II listed in 1953.

Pure magic!

In 1987 the hotel appeared on BBC TV when magician Paul Daniels visited and magically made the 5 of Diamonds appear above the building in a flurry of fireworks.

The Llandoger Trow.

This is a **historic public house in Bristol**, south-west England. Dating from 1664, it is on King Street, between Welsh Back and Queen Charlotte Street, near the old city centre docks. Named by a sailor, Joe McMahon, who owned the pub after Llandogo in Wales which built trows (flat-bottomed river boats), the building was damaged in World War II, but remained in sufficiently good condition to be designated Grade II* listed building status in 1959. The pub is said to have inspired Robert Louis Stevenson to write of the Admiral Benbow Inn in *Treasure Island* and Daniel Defoe supposedly met William Dampier and Alexander Selkirk there, his inspiration for *Robinson Crusoe*. The pub is also supposedly haunted, with up to 15 ghosts and one little green ghoul, the best known being a small man called Uncle Piebeau whose footsteps can be heard on the top floor

The building dates from 1664, originally a row of three houses. It was built on a timber box frame, with brick stacks. The pub has an 18th-century shop front, but the main door dates from the 20th century. The pub was partially destroyed by a bomb in World War II, but three of the original five projecting gables remain. It was designated a Grade II* listed building on 8 January 1959.

In 1962 it became a Berni Inn, and until 2019 was operated by Whitbread and traded as a Brewers Fayre. In 2007, The Llandoger Trow was one of the three locations seen in the "Pirate's Cove" episode of *Most Haunted Live!* The others were Blackbeard's houses and Redcliffe Caves. The most popular ghost story associated with the pub is that of a small child who wore leg braces and haunts the top floor, their footsteps heard at night. The programme claimed that there were at least 15 ghosts at the Llandoger Trow, and since 2009 the owners have organised ghost hunts overnight.

In 2019 Whitbread decided to close the Llandoger Trow as it did not fit Whitbread's style of pubs, and it needed repairs at an estimated cost exceeding £2 million. It closed on 20 April 2019. Whitbread stated they intended to sell the building as a going concern. It was purchased by the Bloomsbury Leisure Group and reopened in 2021

The Rattlebone Inn

The Battle of Sherston was fought in Sherston, England, from 25 to 26 June 1016. between the forces of King Edmund Ironside and Danish king Cnut as a part of Cnut's invasion of England. The West Saxons, fighting for Edmund, were victorious against the Danish and their English allies. The Battle of Sherston was fought in Sherston, England, from 25 to 26 June

1016. between the forces of King Edmund Ironside and Danish king Cnut as a part of Cnut's invasion of England. The West Saxons, fighting for Edmund, were victorious against the Danish and their English allies. The two sides fought intensely for two days before being called away from the battlefield, the West Saxons winning.

Legend states that the **leader of the West Saxon militia was named John Rattlebone**, and that he was injured in battle, but continued to fight, holding in his innards using a nearby piece of stone. There is an inn in town named the Rattlebone Inn, and he appears on the badges for the Sherston primary school.

Cheshire is not only the most literary cheese in England, but the oldest. It was already manufactured when Caesar conquered Britain, and tradition is that the Romans built the walled city of Chester to control the district where the precious cheese was made.

The Cheshire Cheese

“Probably the most famous pub in the world” (*as they say themselves!*), Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese is one of London’s few remaining 17th Century chophouses, on Fleet Street. The site formed part of the 13th century Carmelite monastery and since 1538 a pub has stood here. The medieval pub was rebuilt in about 1667 after the Great Fire of London in 1666.

Over the past 358 years the Fleet Street Cheshire Cheese has been frequented by numerous prominent literary figures: Dr Samuel Johnson, Mark Twain, W.B. Yeats and Charles Dickens, who featured it in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The Spread Eagle

The name "Spread Eagle" refers to the heraldic image of an eagle with its wings outstretched, a common symbol in heraldry. It might be linked to the arms of Germany, which feature an eagle, potentially indicating that the pub served German wines. The name was first recorded in 1590.

The Golden Fleece

The pub name "Golden Fleece" presumably originated from the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts who embarked on a quest to retrieve the legendary golden-fleeced ram, but the name also reflects the importance of the wool trade in many areas where the pub was established.

The Swan with Two Nicks

From the 12th century, the monarch has retained the right to ownership of all unmarked mute swans in open water, but in practice only exercised ownership on certain stretches of the Thames. At that time swans were a common food source for royalty.

Swan upping became the means of establishing a swan census. Under a 15th century Royal Charter, the Vintners' Company and the Dyers' Company, two Livery Companies of the City of London, are entitled to share in the Sovereign's ownership and it is they who conduct the census through a process of ringing the swans' feet.

The annual swan upping takes place during the third week of July, when the monarch's, the Vintners', and the Dyers' Swan Uppers row up the river in skiffs. Swans caught by the monarch's Swan Uppers under the direction of the Swan Marker are ringed. Those caught by the Dyers and Vintners are identified as theirs by means of a further ring on the other leg. Today, only swans with cygnets are caught and ringed. This gives a yearly snapshot as to how well Thames swans are breeding.

Originally, the **two companies made their own marks on the birds' beaks: one nick for a dyers' bird and two for a vintners'**; today the two Companies use their own rings. This was a 16th century pun, the word "nick" also meaning "neck". Humour wasn't quite what it is today... So we also find a lot of pubs called The Swan with Two Necks.

The Bear and Ragged Staff

This is the heraldic emblem linked to the Earldom of Warwick. The *Ragged Staff* is believed to be a symbol of **Morvidus, an early legendary Earl of Warwick who is said to have slain a giant "with a young ash tree torn up by the roots"**. It is a common name for pubs found in areas historically associated with the Earldom of Warwick.

The Moon under Water

The J D Wetherspoon pub chain has used the name **The Moon Under Water** for thirteen of its outlets. This name comes from an essay written in 1946 by George Orwell in the *Evening Standard*, in which he provided a detailed description of his ideal public house, the fictitious "Moon Under Water". **Orwell stipulated ten key points that his perfect pub in the London area should have:**

1. The architecture and fittings must be uncompromisingly Victorian.
2. Games, such as darts, are only played in the public bar "so that in the other bars you can walk about without the worry of flying darts".
3. The pub is quiet enough to talk, with the house possessing neither a radio nor a piano.
4. The barmaids know the customers by name and take an interest in everyone.
5. It sells tobacco and cigarettes, aspirins and stamps, and "is obliging about letting you use the telephone".
6. "...there is a snack counter where you can get liver-sausage sandwiches, mussels (a speciality of the house), cheese, pickles and ... large biscuits with caraway seeds"
7. "Upstairs, six days a week, you can get a good, solid lunch—for example, a cut off the joint, two vegetables and boiled jam roll—for about three shillings." (about £8 today)
8. "... a creamy sort of draught stout, and it goes better in a pewter pot."
9. "They are particular about their drinking vessels at "The Moon Under Water" and never, for example, make the mistake of serving a pint of beer in a handleless glass. Apart from glass and pewter mugs, they have some of those pleasant strawberry-pink china ones.but in my opinion beer tastes better out of china."
10. ".....You go through a narrow passage leading out of the saloon, and find yourself in a fairly large gardenMany as are the virtues of the Moon Under Water I think that the garden is its best feature, because it allows whole families to go there instead of Mum having to stay at home and mind the baby while Dad goes out alone."

Orwell admitted that "to be fair", he did know of a few pubs that almost came up to his ideal, including one that had eight of the mentioned qualities.

The essay finishes: And if anyone knows of a pub that has draught stout, open fires, cheap meals, a garden, motherly barmaids and no radio, I should be glad to hear of it, even though its name were something as prosaic as the Red Lion or the Railway Arms.

The Butt and Oyster

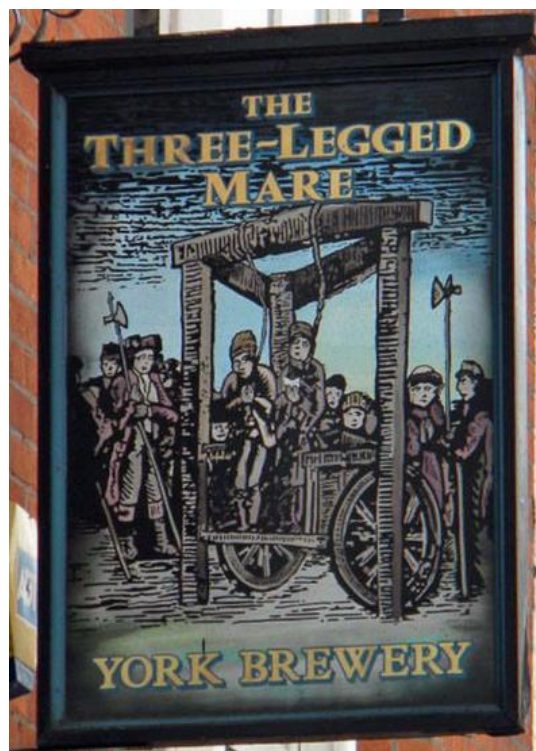
This is an old inn on the River Orwell in Pin Mill, Suffolk.

Historical records go back as far as 1456, when a water bailiff held court hearings there. It was subsequently recorded as a public house in 1553. Its name may refer to the barrels used to pack and ship oysters or flounders.

The Butt and Oyster is featured in the 1937 children's book *We Didn't Mean to Go to Sea* by Arthur Ransome, who patronised the inn himself. It subsequently appeared in the 1950 movie *Ha'penny Breeze* and the 1993 TV series *Lovejoy*, in which it was renamed "The Three Ducks".

The Three Legged Mare

This pub is located in High Petergate, York



This definition is taken from *The 1811 Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, originally by Francis Grose:

A 'three-legged mare' is a medieval term for a gallows that can hang three people at once. It is named after **Tyburn gallows**, formerly consisting of three posts, over which were laid

three transverse beams. This clumsy machine has lately given place to an elegant contrivance, called the NEW DROP, by which the use of that vulgar vehicle a cart, or a ladder, is also avoided; the patients being left suspended by the dropping down of that part of the floor on which they stand. This invention was first made use of for a peer.

There is a replica of such a device in the pub's garden, so you can muse on pain and cruelty while supping an ale.

The Mad Bishop & Bear

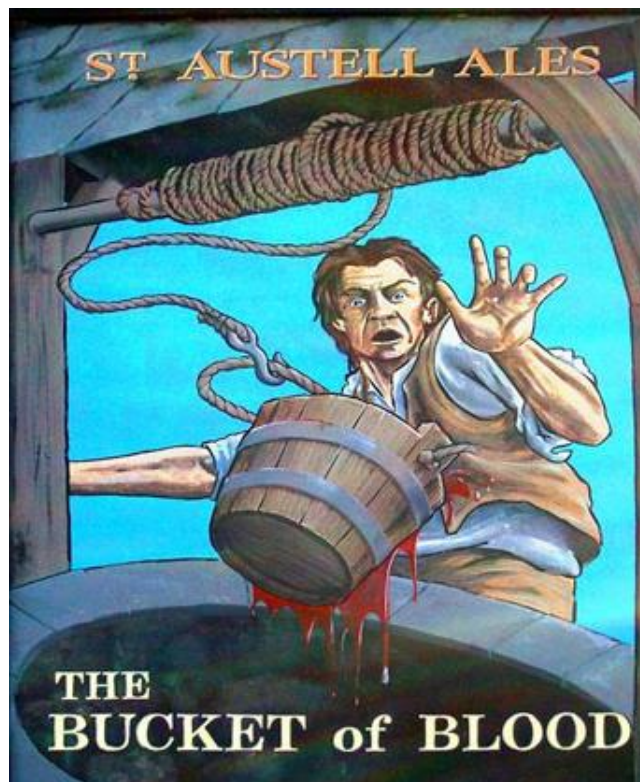
This explanation provides an example of a name which combines a historical with a modern origin. Paddington was a small agricultural village in the district of Marylebone, kept alive and well by its proximity to the Regent's canal. In Saxon times it was given to the Abbey of Westminster by King Edgar and remained the property of the curacy for many hundreds of years. As time and progress marched on, along came the Great Western Railway which brought new prosperity to the area, but they needed more space and lots of it!

The Great Western Railway asked the church if they could buy the land where the pub is located, and the good people of the church agreed, allowing the railway to acquire the land for a nominal fee. So this is how the story goes, that the bishop who authorised the sale must have been potty to do so, knowing the future value of the land, hence the Mad Bishop. As for the Bear, you know who he is, he comes from Peru and likes marmalade sandwiches.

The Old Horse at Home

"The Old House at Home" is a sentimental 19th century ballad written by Thomas Haynes Bayly (1797–1839). The lyrics are a two stanza poem about childhood and yearning for home. There are currently 25 public houses in England with the name "Old House at Home", probably named after the original song.

The Bucket of Blood



Located at Phillack near Hayle (and St. Ives) in Cornwall, and once voted as the “quirkiest pub name”, apparently, the landlord here once went to get water from a well, brought it up and had only blood in the bucket. Further investigation revealed **the corpse of a murdered Customs Officer**. The consensus was that he may have stumbled upon a local smuggling racket and had duly been silenced by the gang, after which his body was dumped into the chilly depths of the well to conceal the crime. A less gory origin theory for the name is the run-off from local tin mining that used to dye the water in the well red.

The Case is Altered

There are several versions of the history of the name “The Case Is Altered” as it has been used for pubs around the country.

The phrase was first used by Edmund Plowden (1518-85), a lawyer. It referred to the effect of new evidence on the case he was dealing with in court.

The phrase seems to have become almost proverbial. It was taken up by Ben Jonson for his comedy, **“The Case is Altered”**, written before 1599. As a pub name the reason for its use is a matter of local legend in each instance. Often it is said that the **landlord’s situation**

altered for some reason, perhaps in his dispute with the licensing authorities. A sign at Banbury shows a courtroom scene. There is a local story about weavers winning a court victory, resulting in the Weavers Arms changing to The Case is Altered overnight.

At Bentley near Felixstowe, the original pub stood further down the lane but to attract passing trade, **a nearby house was taken over and altered to become the present day pub, hence the name.** Similarly, in the 20C the owner of a small cottage in Rowington, Warwickshire, had a licence to sell beers and ales. She made many applications to be able to sell wines and spirits as well, but was always refused on the grounds that her premises were too small. Eventually she was able to buy the cottage next door, and so the 'case was altered', and she got her full licence.

Another probably false explanation for several pubs in the Harrow district is that this name is **a corruption of "Casa Alta"**, supposedly because soldiers returning from the Peninsular War at the beginning of the nineteenth century had often occupied a '**house on the hill**' during the battle.



Several inns of this name in Harrow area; sign for one in Old Redding, near Harrow Weald recently closed

The Snooty Fox.

This pub and hotel in Tetbury, Gloucestershire, originally named the White Hart and dating from 1655, took on its current name after the owner, Maxwell Joseph, was banned from riding with the local hunt due to his lower-class background and then barred the hunt from his pub, renaming it "The Snooty Fox" in their honour

The Brains Surgery

Originally situated on Dafford Street in Bath, this pub was trading in the 1890s as **The Royal Oak**. It was renamed The Brains Surgery in 1980 **after the Welsh brewers**, but now converted into flats.

The Severn Stars

This pub in Winsley takes its name from the stars of the Plough in the constellation of Ursa Major; in the late 20th century its sign **featured the Plough** with the subtitle "Jack and his team". There are references to the pub from the 1720s.

The Blathwayt Arms

In 2020, this pub in Lansdown, near the Bath Racecourse, changed its name to **The Charlcombe Inn**. This was said to have nothing to do with William Blathwayt, a Whig Member of Parliament for Bath (1693-1710) and a promoter of the slave trade. Charlcombe Parish Council found the new name was more appropriate in "many ways".

TWO PUB NAMES SUGGESTED BY STEVE WARD:

e.g. Volunteer Rifleman Arms in Bond St. Place near Bertinet and almost opposite Miles Morgan Travel Agency

Name seems to be derived from volunteer movement (19C military terms common source of pub names)

The British Rifle Volunteer movement came about as a response to the perceived threat of invasion by France in 1859. One of the primary responsibilities of the Volunteers was to function as an auxiliary force for the defence of Britain. However, no invasion would come, and the Volunteers would see no combat outside a small deployment during the Second Boer War.

The **Volunteer Force** eventually became a new organization named the **Territorial Force** in 1908 during the sweeping series of British Army reforms after 1900. The same mission and recruitment pattern was transferred into the Territorial Force which was a vital component of the British Army in wartime.

Volunteer officers worked with **religious youth organizations that aided in Army recruitment, like the Boys Brigade and Church Lads** which sought to interest boys in the Christian faith.

The Jolly Button Turner Inn in Tamworth



Date:1910 - 1915 (c.) George Ball, the Licensee, in the centre with locals standing outside the pub. The Jolly Button Turner Inn was demolished in 1978. Unclear whether name relates to button-making which was an important industry in Tamworth, or to making buttons or knobs to turn on equipment.