In Falcon Yard, off Petty Curly, we have a reminder of the ancient Falcon Inn with its gallery rooms overlooking the yard. The inn existed certainly as early as the 16th century for in 1504 its owner, Richard King of Wisbech, gave it, along with other property in Cambridge, to the Prior of Barnwell on condition that a requiem was sung at the Priory on the first Friday of every Lent for the souls of the donor, his wife and their respective parents.

Galleried inn yards provided an excellent setting for the performance of plays, the gentry watching from the galleries while humbler folk stood about the yard where the stage was erected. A play was acted at the Falcon in 1556 while at the Black Bear, in 1600, was performed an Interlude in which appeared a graduate of Corpus Christi College with an improper habit, having deformed locks of unseemly sight, and great breaches undecent for a graduate or scholar of manly carriage.

For this offence he was ordered by the University authorities to get his hair cut and was further forbidden to proceed with his studies.

Not far from the Falcon, at the corner of Petty Curly and St. Andrew’s Street, stood the Wrestlers, with a fine carved timber frontage. Here, tradition has it, was born in 1631 Jeremy Taylor, an early pupil of the Perse School. He eventually became Bishop of Down and Connor and is remembered especially for his book Holy Living and Dying.

The Cambridge Chronicle of 30th November, 1749 advertised that the Great Muscovy Bear was to be baited on Monday, December 2nd at the Wrestlers, the entertainment to be concluded with a scene worthy of the curious.” The inn was pulled down in 1883 and a new Post Office erected on its site.

The Post Office which this new one replaced had been, since 1850, at No. 4 St. Andrew’s Street. It, too, had occupied the site of a former inn — the Brazen George — whose yard is now Post Office Terrace and Alexander Street. The inn — its sign may be seen in the Folk Museum — was for many years a hostel for Christ’s College.

At No. 4 Bridge Street stood, until 1911, the Hoop, earlier known as the Bell and once a much larger building than it was in its last days. It was a coach terminus and the headquarters of the Whig party. Inside the house was a large room in which, on occasions, plays were performed as, for example, on March 19th, 1830 when a University amateur performance of Much Ado about Nothing was given.

In 1854, when plans were being made for the formation of the A.D.C., it was proposed that rooms at the Hoop should be used for the production of the Club’s plays. These rooms were, by then, being used for billiards, but adjoining them, over a stable, were two unused rooms to which access was either through the inn or by way of a side gate of the Hoop Brewery in Jesus Lane. The inn landlord agreed to let these premises at a reasonable rent and here the Club gave its first performance in the May Term of 1855.

Not far from the Hoop, until the middle of the last century, were a number of alehouses on Quayside, among them the Ship, the Union, the Cutter, the Anchor and the Jolly Waterman. These served the needs of the lightermen who brought goods to Cambridge by river and of the porters who unloaded the barges and lighters by Magdalene Bridge. Some idea of the size of at least one of these inns can be gathered from an advertisement of 1852 which announced the forthcoming sale of the Jolly Waterman and described the house as having 9 bedrooms, a taproom, back parlour,
kitchen and cellar together with four-storied granaries, excellent stables and storage space for 300 tons of coal.

There were a number of alehouses, too, in Silver Street at which the men working on the boats proceeding to Newnham Pool could quench their thirst: the Cock, the Three Crowns, the Black Lion, the Wheatsheaf, the Queen Adelaide (later re-named the Victoria) as well as the Anchor which still stands.

In Trumpington Street was the important Bull Hotel, now a hostel of St. Catharine’s College. Built in 1828 on the site of a smaller inn named the Black Bull, which had been in existence since the reign of Edward IV, the Bull was once the terminus of several London to Cambridge coaches, as was also the nearby Sun which stood opposite the gateway of Trinity College and which was demolished in 1840.

On a site between St. Catharine’s College and the old King’s Lane, which lay further north than does the present one, was the White Horse, not to be confused with another White Horse which is now the Folk Museum. Because dons and undergraduates met at the Trumpington Street inn in the 15th century to discuss the movement for religious reform which had begun in Germany, it was nicknamed “Little Germany.” Among those who attended the meetings was Robert Barnes, Prior of the Augustinian Friars in Cambridge, and Miles Coverdale; an old settle, with bookcases below, found later in the inn and now preserved in the Museum of Archaeology, became known as “Miles Coverdale’s Seat.” Another Protestant reformer, Thomas Cranmer, was also connected with a Cambridge inn — the Dolphin — for he married the niece of the landlord’s wife. This inn was probably the one which stood facing Jesus Lane at the end of what is now All Saints Passage, though it was once known as Dolphin Passage. But there was another Dolphin — sometimes called the Crown and Dolphin, on what is now the New Court of Corpus Christi which was built in 1823. This inn was, in medieval times, St. Bernard’s Hostel, attached to Queens’ College until it was sold to Corpus in 1534.

Until early in this century there were in Cambridge far more inns and public houses than the 156 listed in the current edition of Kelly’s Directory which includes those in Trumpington, Cherry Hinton and Chesterton. In a Register of Soldiers’ Billets now in the Folk Museum and covering the years 1847 to 1895, no fewer than 470 local taverns are named at which, by law, soldiers had to be accommodated. Over 30 of these were in Newmarket Road which, today, can boast only 11 public houses.

The number of licensed premises which still existed in Cambridge in the early part of this century was of great concern to members of temperance organisations. In a Social Survey written in 1904 reference was made to the statistics contained in a leaflet issued by the Cambridge Licensing Reform Committee which revealed that, in one 796-yard stretch of Newmarket Road there was a public house to every 36 yards, while from the foot of Castle Street to the beginning of Huntingdon Road there were no fewer than 11 alehouses, one to every 51 yards of street. The Committee would, doubtless, have been consoled by the rapidity with which many of these houses have disappeared since 1904.

In Bridge Street alone at least 14 ancient inns have vanished in the past hundred years, among them the Black Swan, the barley Mow, the Spotted Leopard, the Cock and Magpie, the Blue Bell, the Globe, the Marquis of Granby, the Half Moon, the Salutation and the Freemasons Tavern. The last-named was also known successively, in its day, as the Royal Oak, the Flying Stag and the Wild Man before it became a private residence, Lindum House. It is inter-
esting to record that the present occupier of the premises has re-named them the Flying Stag.

Over the centuries Cambridge has lost many quaintly-named taverns which doubtless added interest to the streets with their appropriately-painted signs: the Labour in Vain, for example, in Russell Street, the All Round My Hat in St. Mary’s Street; the Chip Axe on Market Hill; the Every House in Town in New Street; the Bleeding Heart in James Street; the Hearts Ease in Emmanuel Street; the Paul Pry in Portugal Place, with another in Tennis Court Road; the Spotted Coe in Northampton Street; the Jolly Ragan in East Road; the Merry Boys in St. John’s Street; the True Blue (once the Lord Nelson) in Sidney Street; the Hole in the Wall in St. Mary’s Street; the Cardinal’s Cap in Guildhall Place, to name but a few. A still earlier Cardinal’s Cap was demolished in 1830 to make way for the Pitt Press. It had a Coffee Room in which, it was advertised in 1797, “the Gentlemen of the University” would find “a neat and convenient room” supplied with newspapers and where “tea, coffee, jellies, etc.” could be obtained.

It is interesting, when walking about the streets of Cambridge today, to recall what inns and alehouses once stood on the sites of present buildings. Many of the old premises were, in addition to those already mentioned, demolished to make way for Colleges: parts of St. Cathearine’s, for example, lie on the sites of the White Swan, the Three Horseshoes and of the inn which was kept by the carrier Thomas Hobson — the George. Magdalene College has absorbed the sites of the Chequers, the Black Boy, the Star and the Green Pele. The building of the Union Society led to the disappearance of the Prince Albert, which was at

No. 2 Round Church Street, and of the George Hotel, from which set out the coach to Birmingham and which itself replaced an earlier George at No. 12 Bridge Street. On the site of the Senate House once stood the Green Dragon, the New Angel and the Devil’s Tavern, the last-named being the first Post House from which set out the first coach to London.

Despite the disappearance, however, of so many inns and public houses, even in the past thirty years or so, Cambridge still fortunately possesses several which can lay claims to antiquity even if, in some cases, their buildings have been modernised. In Benet Street still stands the Eagle, originally the Eagle and Child which was a Post House in 1688, while in Trinity Street is still the Blue Boar at which an Eton boy, in 1576 “died suddenly at cock fighting” through it seems, “laughing exceedingly”. We still have, among others, the Pickerel in Magdalene Street where the bridge porters used to pass their time cock fighting while waiting for the boats to come in to be unloaded; the Little Rose in Trumpington Street; the Fort St. George which once stood on an island, and the Green Dragon in Chesterton which, so a licence granted in 1630 stated, had been “an ancient victualling house” and was “very fit to be an inn” since it could receive 20 men and horses.

Only recently was the Three Tuns where Pepys drank — though it was called the Central Hotel in its last days and had no licence — replaced by the Midland Bank on Peas Hill, and it is sad to see the Lion in Petty Curv, once so important a coaching inn, reduced to its present state and with the threat of demolition hanging over it through the proposed alterations to central Cambridge.

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