



THE GOLDEN LION
HOTEL, EATERY & COFFEE HOUSE

A BRIEF HISTORY

BY WILL SWALES



WELCOME

Welcome to a brief history of The Golden Lion Hotel, St Ives. During the late spring and early summer of 2016 we had the good fortune to be able to revitalise and refurbish one of our fabulous sister inns, The King's Head in Richmond, North Yorkshire.

During the planning stage of this project we started to look hard at the building and its many historical attributes, at how some parts of the building had been added during its 300 years of existence. And whilst contemplating the small changes and additions we wanted to make, it dawned on me that we will only be its custodians for a generation or two at most. I can't foretell who will follow but started thinking about who had been its keepers in the past.

Therefore, we asked a good friend if he would research The King's Head and try to separate the fact from the fable; what's true and what has been elaborated during the storytelling process over the years.

Will Swales made such a good job of The King's Head that we then asked him to complete the same task for The Golden Lion Hotel.

What follows is that research. We think it's as accurate as can be, but naturally there are many gaps and we would welcome any additional information.

I hope you enjoy this small booklet and the hospitality and service we provide within The Golden Lion Hotel. Please feel free to take this copy with you.

Kevin Charity
Managing Director
The Coaching Inn Group

www.coachinginngroup.co.uk





**“...THE GOLDEN LION HAD
BECOME THE TOWN’S
PRE-EMINENT COACHING INN.”**

A HISTORIC DROVERS ROUTE



Smithfield Drover, from William Henry Pyne, 'The Costumes of Great Britain', 1808. Photo source: Chronicle/Alamy Stock Photo.

The Golden Lion Hotel, in the Huntingdonshire town of St Ives, stands in Market Hill, at the heart of the community. The earliest records of an inn on this site date from the 1700s, by which time St Ives was becoming a market town of significance.

As a river-port it was the farthest upstream on the Great Ouse, linking the town with the sea-port of King's Lynn on The Wash. But of more importance to St Ives was the overland movement of cattle and sheep to and from its weekly Monday market; one of the largest livestock markets in England. The street of Market Hill was then called Sheep Market while its continuation to the west, now called Broadway, was the Bullock Market. Both had permanent pens in the streets. The exceptional importance of the St Ives market derived from the town's location on one of the historic livestock-drovers routes running through the country from north to south, and terminating at the biggest livestock market of all – Smithfield in London.

The route for cattle began in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland where local breeds were descended from centuries-old bloodlines noted for strength and endurance. They were driven 'on the hoof' southwards, as part of a production chain to feed the larger centres of population. At markets along the way, the cattle were bought to be developed, either by cross-breeding with different bloodlines to produce less-hardy but bulkier progeny, or to be fattened on lush, lowland grass.

At St Ives, cattle, sheep and pigs at all stages of growth and development were sold throughout the year. Drovers, dealers, and farmers needed accommodation and refreshment, and so there emerged in the town an abundance of inns and alehouses surrounding the market streets.



WHEN RED BECAME GOLDEN

A town survey of 1728 provides the earliest record of the inns of St Ives, and shows a relatively small inn, called The Red Lion, confined to the space on the right of the carriageway that now runs through the centre of the hotel. By 1784 the name of the inn had become The Golden Lion, but its size had not changed. No part of this early building is known to have survived to the present day.

TOWN'S EARLY COACH TRADE

From at least 1803 St Ives was a staging post on the route of a mail coach that ran daily between London and the expanding town of Wisbech, 30 miles north of St Ives. By 1811, Holden's London and Country Annual Directory reported that St Ives had gained a second coach service to London, but it's unlikely that either of them called at The Golden Lion. It was not on the directory's list of the four most important inns of St Ives, which were The White Hart, The Crown, The Unicorn, and The White Horse; the latter being just over the Great Ouse Bridge, in the parish of Fenstanton.

YOUNG INNKEEPER'S DEATH

The first we know of the innkeepers of The Golden Lion is a record from 1819, when the 25-year-old tenant of the inn, William Green, married Elizabeth Bloom, the 24-year-old daughter of Elizabeth Bloom senior, owner of The Golden Lion and also owner-innkeeper of The White Horse at Fenstanton. Tragically, William Green died in 1826, aged 32. The widowed Elizabeth was left with one-year-old twins but still carried on running The Golden Lion.

"They were driven
'on the hoof'
southwards, as part
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population."



WILLIAM GIFFORD AND THE COACH TRADE



The Wisbech-London coach, The Day, from an engraving of an event in 1823.
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Sometime around 1831, when she was aged about 36, the widow Elizabeth Green married a local farmer, 32-year-old William Gifford, who kept his farm but moved into The Golden Lion and set about elevating it to become one of the town's principal inns.

The core of his plan was to attract coach services. By 1839 a trade directory showed that Gifford had secured contracts for changing horses for two important coaches connecting London with market towns to the north of St Ives. They were a daily mail-coach from Holbeach, and the thrice-weekly Day coach from Wisbech, which it was boasted completed the 100-mile trip in 11 hours.

THE COOPERAGE AND THE BREWERY

The buildings to the left of The Golden Lion's carriageway were under separate ownership. They faced onto a narrow street, which during the 1840s was called Knightly's Lane.

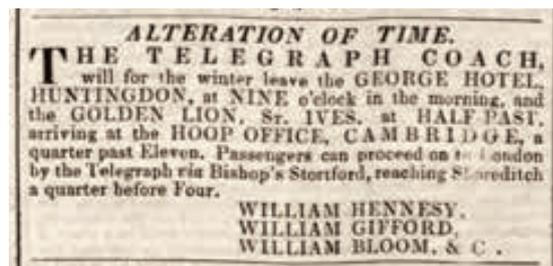
The end-building that fronted onto Sheep Market was part of the tenanted property of a cooper (a barrel-maker) called Fletcher Harrison. His property extended substantially along the lane, and included his home, a cooperage, and a brewery, described as a 'two-quarter brewery', meaning it had a capacity of two quarter-tuns, or 108 gallons (490 litres). In November 1840 Fletcher Harrison put his brewing plant up for sale. It was apparently bought by William Gifford's mother-in-law, Elizabeth Bloom, and left in situ, presumably to maintain a supply to The Golden Lion.



A COACHING JOINT VENTURE

In July 1842 a new coach service, originally un-named, was announced in the press, linking Huntingdon to Cambridge, with a stop in St Ives at The Golden Lion. It was a direct competitor to the long-established Blucher coach, named after the Prussian General who was a hero at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

The new coach soon became known as The Telegraph. Golden Lion innkeeper William Gifford was one of its three proprietors. Shortly after the launch, one of the other partners was replaced by William Bloom and Co.; the 'and Co.' being almost certainly William's brother, John. Both in their late forties, they were the stay-at-home, bachelor sons of Elizabeth Bloom, owner-innkeeper of The White Horse Inn at Fenstanton, and owner of The Golden Lion. They were the brothers-in-law of William Gifford.

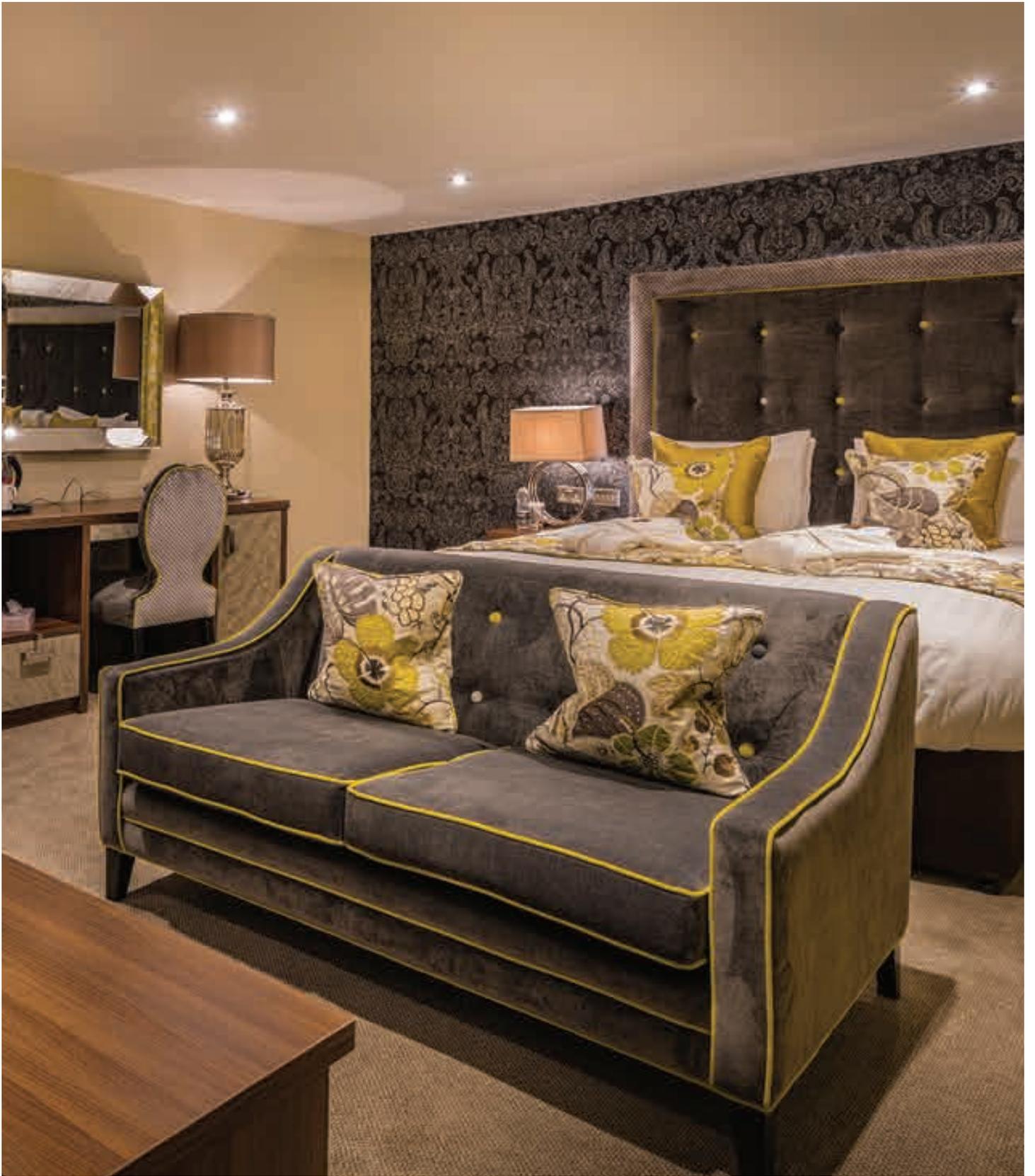


Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 5 November 1842.
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A CHANGE OF PRINCIPALS

Elizabeth Bloom died in February 1844, aged 81, leaving her estate to her sons William and John.

At about the same time, William Gifford declared his intention to give up running The Golden Lion, and retire to his farm. This was probably because his wife Elizabeth, sister of the Bloom brothers, was very ill. She would die at the farm in March 1846, aged 51, reportedly 'after a long and severe affliction'. In anticipation of Gifford's retirement, the Bloom brothers put The Golden Lion up for sale.



One of The Golden Lion's 31 'excellent sleeping rooms' today.

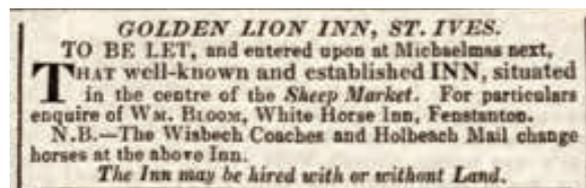


STABLING FOR 40 HORSES

In May 1844, the sale notice for The Golden Lion listed among its assets a large market room, parlour, bar, two kitchens, and six 'excellent sleeping rooms', plus attics.

The yard was said to extend from the 'front to back street'. The outbuildings, which must have been all to the right of the yard, comprised stabling for 40 horses, granaries, hay lofts and a lock-up coach house.

The Bloom brothers were either impatient or changed their minds about selling, because in June 1844 they advertised The Golden Lion to let. The new tenant, from October 1844 was a local man, 25-year-old John Clarke, the son of a carrier (a leather finisher).



Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 22 June 1844.
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THE PRE-EMINENT COACHING INN

Both the sale and letting notices for The Golden Lion boasted that three coaches changed horses at the inn – The Defiance and Day Coaches from Wisbech, and the Holbeach Mail.

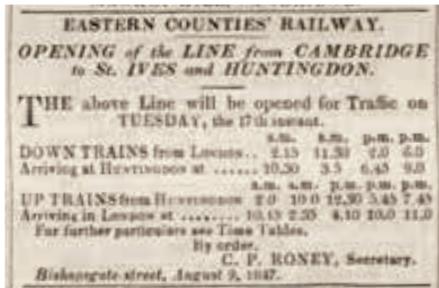
Even though The Telegraph coach seems to have folded, it is clear that The Golden Lion had become the town's pre-eminent coaching inn. It seems that the status was clinched beyond doubt by July 1845 when a press advertisement for The Blucher coach revealed that William Bloom & Co. had become one of the three proprietors, and for the first time The Golden Lion was identified as the coach's calling point in St Ives.



Cambridge Independent Press, 5 July 1845.
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COMING OF THE RAILWAY



Cambridge Chronicle and Journal, 14 August 1847.
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"... it hauled 33
 carriages carrying
 an estimated 2,000
 passengers."

By 1845 it was already apparent that the coaching trade was destined to disappear almost overnight, with the coming of the railway.

The Ely and Huntingdon Railway Company was building a line from near Huntingdon to St Ives, while at the same time the Eastern Counties Railway was building one from Cambridge to St Ives. The two lines opened on the same day, 17 August 1847, providing through trains along the combined route, and opening St Ives to an expanding national network of railways.

Symbolic of the change was the notice of an auction at St Ives Market on Monday 4 October 1847 of 10 coach-horses and their harnesses 'in consequence of the opening of the Cambridge and St Ives rail'. The lot could be viewed before the sale at The Golden Lion stables. It must have been a sad day for everyone involved, and especially for James Betts, the driver of The Blucher coach for nearly 30 years, who was forced into retirement.

However, for the town of St Ives as a whole the railway provided new opportunities for economic growth. The town's connectivity was completed on 1 March 1848 with the opening of the St Ives-Wisbech line, which was celebrated with a special service from Huntingdon through St Ives to Wisbech. According to one report it hauled 33 carriages carrying an estimated 2,000 passengers.



THE GOLDEN LION IN ABOUT 1849

This sketch of The Golden Lion in about 1849 is said to be a copy of a business card of John Clarke, and was drawn by local historian Herbert Norris in about 1922.



The Golden Lion Hotel c.1849. © The Norris Museum, St Ives. All rights reserved.

It shows that Clarke had introduced the increasingly popular term 'hotel' instead of 'inn'. The term 'Posting House' showed that Clarke maintained a stock of horses and carriages for hire by customers heading for places not served by the railway.

In the left foreground is an early form of omnibus, which provided a service to meet every train at St Ives railway station in order to carry passengers to and from the hotel. Clarke had become a parcels agent for the railway, and over the passage to the yard can just be discerned the words 'Railway Office'. It can be seen that the hotel still occupied only the space to the right and above the passage, and was originally only two storeys, which had been enlarged by a flat-roofed loft extension. To the left of the passage were the premises of the cooper Fletcher Harrison.



CLARKE'S RACING INITIATIVE

Growth in the popularity of horse racing throughout the country prompted John Clarke to organise his own event as a way of boosting trade for The Golden Lion.



Vale of Aylesbury Steeple Chase, c1836, by Charles Hunt the younger. The St Ives Steeplechase probably looked something like this. Photo source: The Print Collector/Alamy Stock Photo.

In March 1849 the first St Ives steeplechase was run over fields of flat grassland in Clarke's tenure, somewhere just outside the town. Horses from the Cambridgeshire and Fitzwilliam hunts were entered, and as part of the festivities about 200 gentlemen dined at the hotel during the day.

Clarke organised another steeplechase in March 1850, which was more successful, and encouraged him to arrange a third in December of the same year. It attracted entries of better-quality horses and from farther afield. A local newspaper described the scene before the first race: 'hundreds of vehicles and horsemen of every description were to be seen hastening through the streets, much to the amusement and gratification of all the sight-seers'.

A detailed report of the racing concluded with a statement that: 'Mr Clarke intends to give the public another similar treat in March', and commented: 'We wish Mr Clarke every success and hope his friends will not forget to ... stop and drink his health at his sumptuous ordinary' [set-menu dinner].

The next event, in February 1851, was not so well attended but local newspapers continued to praise John Clarke. One reported: 'The whole arrangements were conducted and concluded by mine host of The Golden Lion Hotel, St Ives, whose management was extremely good in every point and gave great satisfaction to all'. Another stated: 'The public is solely indebted to the sporting landlord of The Golden Lion, Mr Clarke, who leaves nothing undone to promote sport among his neighbours'.



THE NEW GOLDEN LION

The census of March 1851 showed that resident at The Golden Lion on the night of the survey were John Clarke and his wife, Maria, both aged 31, and their two children aged five years and four months.

Also present were eight resident members of staff – a nursemaid, cook, barmaid, waitress, chambermaid, boots, under-boots, and billiard-marker – plus three guests, who were a draper's commercial traveller, a railway clerk, and a cattle dealer.

The premises to the left of The Golden Lion were still occupied by Fletcher Harrison, 51, the cooper, and his wife Elizabeth, 50. The lane at the side of their property, previously called Knightly's Lane, was now recorded as Harrison Lane, and one of its properties was now a beer-house [a small pub] called The Rose and Crown. Residents of Harrison Lane also included two grooms, who probably worked at The Golden Lion stables.

An opportunity for expanding The Golden Lion arose in July 1852 when 43 lots of property in St Ives were put up for sale by the executor under the will of the late Allpress Ashton, a wealthy miller in the town. One lot was the part of Fletcher Harrison's property that faced Sheep Market. It must have been snapped up by the owners of The Golden Lion, who at this time were probably still the brothers William and John Bloom.

There followed the erection of a new building, facing Sheep Market and extending across the footprint of both the old hotel and Harrison's old property adjoining Harrison Lane. It was the current three-storey edifice, with the archway through to the yard at its centre. The magnificent carving of the golden lion was erected at the same time, but seemingly as an afterthought, since it obscures a window on the second floor.

John Clarke placed press notices in November 1853 to announce that 'extensive alterations are now complete'. At around this time we find the earliest reference to a separate property called The Golden Lion Tap, which was a small bar with an entrance on Harrison Lane. It was let and run separately from the hotel, and was probably next door to The Rose and Crown beer-house.



The carved and painted golden lion.

"An opportunity for expanding The Golden Lion arose... when 43 lots of property in St Ives were put up for sale..."



REBUILT HOTEL FOR SALE



One of the 'first-rate' Golden Lion bedrooms today.

John Clarke gave notice of his intention to leave The Golden Lion in the autumn of 1854 and to move to The Globe Hotel at King's Lynn. In response, the owners, presumed to be still William and John Bloom, put the property up for sale by auction.

The sale notice described the hotel as including: a commercial and dining room, a 40-foot-long Cambridge Room, coffee room, two other sitting rooms, a billiard and smoking room, two bars, 13 bedrooms, large nursery, 'very superior' wine and beer cellarage, a Tap, paved yard, coach-houses, a lean-to for market vehicles, stabling, lofts, and a two-quarter brewery. It was noted that the property had: 'within a few years been altered and fitted up in a first-rate style ... the front with the noble carved Golden Lion has a very imposing appearance, and does credit to the skill of the architect'.

SOLD TO A STOCKBROKER

The purchaser of The Golden Lion was a 35-year-old London stockbroker called Arthur Ballantine. He lived in the City of London, just a few yards from the Stock Exchange.

He was the owner of other property around Sheep Market in St Ives, and of a 338-acre farm to the north of the town in the parish of Warboys. His original connection with St Ives is unknown. He was the brother of a very-high-profile London barrister, William Ballantine, a serjeant-at-law and therefore styled Mr Serjeant Ballantine.

The first tenant hotelkeeper under Arthur Ballantine's ownership was Joseph Stephenson. Lacking his predecessor's enthusiasm for horse racing, the St Ives Steeplechase quickly declined and was last held in March 1855. Stephenson stayed only two years and was replaced in the autumn of 1856 by John T Clarke, a former head waiter at a Cambridge hotel, and apparently no relation to the former keeper, John Clarke.



MURDER ON THE HIGH SEAS

On a visit to St Ives in November 1857, to collect rents from his various tenants in the town, Arthur Ballantine had his carpet bag stolen from the Market Room of The Golden Lion. It triggered an extraordinary sequence of events.

The most valuable items in the bag were £230 in cash, a small amount of gold and silver, and some share certificates. Suspicion fell upon 37-year-old Christian Sattler, a Bavarian who had only recently completed a jail sentence for stealing in Wisbech, and who had been seen in the hotel at the time of the theft. It seems that Arthur Ballantine's status and connections prompted a particularly vigorous response by the authorities; to the effect that Sattler was arrested within three weeks, by police in Hamburg.

Detective Charles Thain from Ballantine's home force, the City of London Police, was despatched with a warrant, obtained by himself and Ballantine, to collect Sattler and bring him to face justice in England. Thain and Sattler travelled by the Hamburg-London steam ship 'Caledonia'. On-board, Sattler was detained in handcuffs in a secure private cabin, but while briefly left alone he managed to break into a locked box of his own possessions, and take out a pistol. He loaded it, and when Thain re-entered the cabin, Sattler shot and injured him in the chest. The ship's captain had to protect Sattler against threats from outraged passengers who wanted to hang him or throw him overboard.

On arrival in London, Thain was sent to Guy's Hospital where he subsequently died. At the Old Bailey in December, Sattler pleaded not-guilty to murder, claiming the pistol had gone off by accident. But the jury took only 30 minutes to return a verdict of guilty. Sattler was sentenced to death, and was hanged in public outside London's Newgate Prison on 8 February 1858. The sorry tale has since appeared in published collections of the most-notorious Victorian crime stories.

"... when Thain re-entered the cabin, Sattler shot and injured him in the chest."



The 800-ton steam ship 'Caledonia' on the River Elbe, from Hamburg. Engraving by William John Huggins from an original painting by Edward Duncan. Image courtesy the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.



"...a very well-known and highly respected hotelkeeper in St Ives..."

BETSY BROWN TAKES CHARGE

Hotelkeeper John T Clarke got behind with his rent and his beer bill in 1860, and was forced into insolvency.

His replacement, John Hewitt, made way in January 1864 for William Humphryes. On his appointment, a local newspaper expressed hopes for his success, noting that The Golden Lion had 'not had a very good name for the last few years'.

However, Humphryes lasted only a few months, after which it seems the hotel was let to Huntingdon brewers, John Jenkins and Son. Stability was restored when the brewers installed 56-year-old Miss Betsy Brown as manager. She was a very well-known and highly respected hotelkeeper in St Ives, having previously spent 38 years at The Unicorn Hotel in Bullock Market.

NEW FREE CHURCH ERECTED

Betsy Brown's first year in charge coincided with the construction next door to The Golden Lion of the magnificent new Independent Chapel, known as The Free Church. It was opened officially in September 1864.



Looking west towards the newly-erected Free Church and The Golden Lion in about 1870.
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BILLIARD-TABLE CRASH

The game of billiards has existed in various forms for hundreds of years, but for the English three-ball version the standard rules and specification of the table were not formalised until about 1850.

There was a billiard table at The Golden Lion from at least 1851 when the census had listed 15-year-old George Gilkes as the resident billiard marker.

By 1864, when Betsy Brown arrived as manager of the hotel, the popularity of the game was rising rapidly. So it was shock news in St Ives when at around noon on 1 February 1868 a violent storm blew down a chimney above the vestry of the Free Church, causing heavy masonry to fall through the roof of The Golden Lion billiard room 'breaking the billiard table in pieces and forcing some of the legs quite through the flooring'.



A billiards player in the Victorian age.

HOTEL COMPLEX COMPLETED

The census of 1871 showed that by this time Harrison Lane on the left of The Golden Lion had been renamed Market Lane.

Early in 1872 a group of properties in Market Lane came up for sale, described as a then-unoccupied, six-bedroomed beer-house, which must have been the old Rose and Crown, together with a cottage and a cooper's workshop. The cooper, Fletcher Harrison, now aged 71, had moved away with his wife to a nearby house in Market Place. It appears that the whole lot, occupying a 51-foot frontage along the bottom end of the lane, was purchased by Golden Lion owner Arthur Ballantine, and was absorbed into the hotel complex.



"...the local press praised her 45 years of service to the town's licensed trade..."

DEATH OF BETSY BROWN

Betsy Brown, manager of The Golden Lion, died in post at the hotel in September 1871, aged 68, after enduring a 'long and severe illness'.

An obituary in the local press praised her 45 years of service to the town's licensed trade, and noted that she had been a 'great favourite of the businessmen of the Eastern Counties'.

The leaseholders of the hotel, the Huntingdon brewers John Jenkin and Sons, appointed as replacement manager a 23-year-old newly-wed, Mrs Eliza Cole. It seems likely that Eliza brought her 19-year-old sister, Emma Baker, with her to the hotel because she appears in a later record as the hotel cook. It isn't clear what Eliza's husband, Thomas Cole, was engaged in at the time his wife took on the hotel.

In October 1872 the owner, the stockbroker Arthur Ballantine, died in London, aged 58. His estate, including The Golden Lion, went to his widow, Frances, apparently without causing any interruption to Eliza Cole's position. However there was a change in 1877, when Eliza's husband, Thomas, was first recorded as the hotelkeeper. He might have replaced the brewers as the leaseholder.



Market Hill after 1886, by James G Hankin.
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LIVESTOCK MARKET RELOCATED

In 1886 a new livestock market was opened in St Ives, on a site nearer to the railway station.

The old market streets were cleared of their permanent pens, opening up the prospect of The Golden Lion and its grand neighbour the Free Church. The name of the street, which had been variously recorded as Sheep Market and Market Place, was settled as Market Hill.



COLE BUYS THE FREEHOLD

A new opportunity arose for Thomas and Eliza Cole when the lease on The Golden Lion was due to expire in September 1893.

The freehold owner, 64-year-old widow, Frances Ballantine, still living in the City of London, decided to sell. In July, an auction was held in the market room of the hotel, where a large crowd gathered.

The lot was described in the press as the 'important estate comprising The Golden Lion Hotel with adjoining tap and cooper's shop, each with good residential accommodation'. Local newspapers reported that Thomas Cole's hammer bid of £2,400 was accompanied by cheers, in recognition that Cole had made The Golden Lion the 'most attractive and important hotel of the town'.

"...Thomas Cole's hammer bid of £2,400 was accompanied by cheers..."

STATUE OF OLIVER CROMWELL

In 1899 the worthies of St Ives contemplated erecting a statue to Oliver Cromwell, England's 'Lord Protector' of the 1650s, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of his birth.

Born in Huntingdon in 1599, Cromwell's only connection with St Ives was that before his rise to fame in the Civil Wars he had lived and farmed just outside the town from 1631 to 1636. Attempts to fund a memorial in Huntingdon failed, but a public subscription launched in St Ives was successful, partly due to the strength of the town's Free Church and its association with Cromwell's famously non-conformist religious beliefs.

The creative commission was awarded to the prolific monument-sculptor Frederick Pomeroy, whose statue of former Prime Minister William Gladstone had recently been unveiled in the Central Hall of the Houses of Parliament. The Cromwell monument, in granite and bronze, was erected in front of the Free Church and The Golden Lion, and unveiled, amid great public celebrations, on 23 October 1901. Thomas Cole catered for a meal for dignitaries at the Corn Exchange, opposite The Golden Lion.



The statue of Oliver Cromwell at Market Hill, St Ives.



CORONATION DAY 1902

"...The Golden Lion was adorned on the front and in the yard with 'Chinese lamps and stars'."

This photograph of The Golden Lion and its staff is undated, but was almost certainly taken on 9 August 1902, the day of the coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.



A newspaper report of the celebrations in St Ives that day described decorations erected on the commercial buildings and noted that The Golden Lion was adorned on the front and in the yard with 'Chinese lamps and stars'. Chinese lanterns can be seen in the photograph at the level of the first floor balconies. The large star is thought to be a gas-lit illumination, which five years earlier, on the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria, was described among the decorations on The Fountain Inn, opposite The Golden Lion.

The man standing on the left is thought to be Thomas Cole, while the driver of the horse-drawn omnibus has been identified by his daughter as Ernest Bailey, who in 1902 was aged 21. He later married a maid at the hotel called Delphine Dawson. Their grandson would be a future owner of The Golden Lion.



DEATH OF THOMAS COLE



Thomas Cole, owner and host of The Golden Lion, died in December 1909, aged 72. An obituary notice praised his courtesy and good nature, which had 'won the highest opinions of well-known businessmen', while also noting that he took little interest in the affairs of the town. He had been ill for five years, and it becomes clear that the hotel was already being run by his son, Thomas Samuel Cole.

An old postcard showing the yard of The Golden Lion, circa 1911. Note the now-absent staircase. Image courtesy of Huntingdonshire Archives, Huntingdon.

DEATH OF A WAR-HERO SON

The ownership and occupancy of The Golden Lion in the 1910s and early 20s is obscure, but one story of the period stands out.

In 1918, the last year of the Great War, the hotel was managed by John Cater and his wife Lavinia. Their 23-year-old son Walter was a lieutenant in the 8th Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment.

News came in May that the young officer had been awarded the Military Cross for 'great courage and coolness' in leading his platoon to fight their way out of a position almost surrounded by the enemy. Three months later it was reported that Lieutenant Cater had been seriously wounded and lay in a military hospital in France, and shortly afterwards that he had died of his wounds. Within a few days John Cater was before the magistrates on a charge of failing to keep a register of aliens at the hotel. The bench expressed sympathy for Cater's loss, and the charge was withdrawn.

"...leading his platoon to fight their way out of a position almost surrounded by the enemy."



CROMWELL BAR RAISES A SPIRIT



The Golden Lion bar, renovated by the Coaching Inn Group in 2017.

From at least 1926 The Golden Lion was owned by a Peterborough-based hotel group called Paten and Co., which installed a series of managers. A renovation in 1927/8 included a roof over the balconied yard, and probably also brought the Tap in Market Lane into the hotel.

At this or a later renovation, Paten and Co. created a themed Cromwell Bar, which according to a press article in 1955 had conjured the idea that part of the inn dated from the 1600s. This in turn prompted a tale that Room 13 had been Oliver Cromwell's 'regional headquarters', accessed by the then-lost staircase from the hotel yard. The idea gathered momentum when a guest in that room claimed to have seen a ghost dressed in Cromwellian clothes. The room was renumbered, but then the story developed that Cromwell's ghost walked in the hotel on the 13th day of every month.



Eric Morecambe and his wife Joan.
Photo source: Trinity Mirror/Mirrorpix/Alamy Stock Photo.

ERIC MORECAMBE'S FAMILY HOTEL

A change of ownership of The Golden Lion followed the formation of Barts Inns in 1965.

The two directors were Alan Bartlett, an experienced publican at The Torrington Arms in North Finchley, London, and his sister Mrs Joan Bartholomew. All the funding for the new company was provided by Joan's husband, Eric Bartholomew, better known by his stage-name, Eric Morecambe.

It was a time when the comedy double-act of Morecambe and Wise were revelling in their first smash-hit TV series and had two movies under their belts. Eric's son, Gary, explained that his father wanted to use his new wealth to establish an income for his family outside of show-business. Alan Bartlett ran the new company, but from a distance. He remained at his own business in North Finchley, while employing managers to run The Golden Lion, and another hotel, The Tudor at Fenstanton.



MORE GHOSTLY EVENTS...

Among the period furnishings at The Golden Lion during the Barts Inns years was an old painting of an unidentified woman in a green dress. It inspired sightings of a 'Green Lady' ghost, who it was later said was Cromwell's mistress, who had hanged herself in the building.

It was a new and particularly contentious idea, given that Cromwell was famously a strict Puritan, known to have been committed to the sanctity of marriage and unflinchingly devoted to his wife of 38 years. There were also reports of poltergeists – invisible spirits pulling-off bed covers, opening and closing doors, moving ornaments, and ringing bells, which prompted another new idea that the culprits were the spirits of gypsy children who had perished in some unspecified way in the hotel 'grounds'. There was also a sighting of a cavalier ghost.

A clamour for evidence prompted members of Cambridge University's Society for Psychical Research to spend three nights at The Golden Lion in 1971, staying awake and recording sounds and changes in temperature. They returned a nil result, but the cumulative effect of all the stories is that the hotel is regularly featured in books and websites listing England's most-haunted inns.

...AND SOME EPISODES OF FUN

In July 1974 The Golden Lion was reopened after major improvements, and Eric Morecambe came to join the celebrations.

He wore a Civil War helmet, joked with hundreds of customers, signed autographs, and pretended to spar with another celebrity guest, Joe Bugner, the British and European-champion heavyweight boxer.

Eric's son Gary came to work at The Golden Lion in 1978, with the intention of learning the hospitality trade. His father occasionally called in for lunch, and willingly amused fellow customers. But Gary, then aged 22, soon learned that hotel management was not for him. He gave it up to become a successful film producer, writer and biographer of his father.

"...the culprits were the spirits of gypsy children who had perished..."



From the Cambridge Evening News, 24 July 1974.





The Golden Lion restaurant, renovated by the Coaching Inn Group in 2017.



NEW OWNER'S FAMILY LINK

In January 2003 The Golden Lion was bought from Barts Inns by local entrepreneurs, Michael and Alison Purchas.

Born and raised in St Ives, Michael graduated as a civil engineer and later went on to form his own construction company. Using these skills he converted the town's old Liberal Hall into a successful night club.

Michael and Alison were committed to revitalising heritage buildings, and saw The Golden Lion as their next project. Within a few months they completed a major renovation, which included opening up the ground floor. Only later did Michael learn from his mother, Betty, that both her parents had worked at The Golden Lion in their youth, and that her father, Ernest Bailey, was the omnibus driver in the 1902 Coronation-Day photograph of The Golden Lion, seen on page 20 of this booklet.



The Golden Lion lounge, renovated by the Coaching Inn Group in 2017.

IMPORTANCE OF HERITAGE

While running The Golden Lion, Michael Purchas was a leading member of an action-group formed to lobby the council to retain and renovate its old Corn Exchange building, opposite the hotel.

He used his engineering expertise to demonstrate how the council could affordably revitalise the building and bring it into use as a community resource. The campaign succeeded, and the building was reopened in 2010.

When it came to selling The Golden Lion in 2016, Michael and Alison Purchas sought a buyer who shared their philosophy and commitment to heritage buildings, and were pleased to find one in the new owners, the Coaching Inn Group.



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The Golden Lion Hotel, St Ives, is part of The Coaching Inn Group Ltd. The group has a particular passion for lovely old historic inns and is fortunate enough now to have sixteen of these iconic buildings in our collection, several of them former coaching inns. We have established a reputation for refurbishing, revitalising and breathing life back into these inns, creating elegant, comfortable and well-priced accommodation, tempting menus, relaxed and stylish bars and coffee lounges where friends, families and business people can relax and enjoy everything we have on offer.

Our vision for the future is based around our core value of 'Unlocking Potential'. From our properties to our people and everything in between, we take every opportunity to invest in developing all aspects of our business to give our guests the best possible experience.

As a company we are rapidly expanding and bringing new hotels into the Coaching Inn Group. You can see the latest additions to our group by visiting www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.

We hope you've enjoyed your visit to The Golden Lion Hotel, St Ives, and would love to invite you to try our other venues, nationwide. For full details please visit www.coachinginngroup.co.uk.



**The Golden Lion Hotel,
Eatery and Coffee House
Market Hill
St Ives
Cambridgeshire
PE27 5AL**

T: 01480 492 100

E: goldenlion@innmail.co.uk

www.thegoldenlionhotel.co.uk



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Market Hill, St Ives, Cambridgeshire, PE27 5AL

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