

THE BOLEYN TAVERN

1 BARKING RD, LONDON

London's pubs offer a wealth of eclectic experiences, but it's only at The Boleyn Tavern that you can sit in a curtained booth to eat your fish, chips and mushy peas with the etched-glass likenesses of footballing legends Bobby Moore, Trevor Brooking or Geoff Hurst looking down on you, maybe offering their benign benediction as you succumb to a second helping of chocolate stout cake.

The linking of this beautiful pub with the beautiful game is by no means random. The Boleyn Tavern sits on a busy junction in Upton Park, London E6, just a few yards from what was once the Boleyn Ground, the home of West Ham United football team. On match days, as old hands attest, the surrounding streets were closed off, and The Boleyn was packed to the gunnels with home supporters (clutching their £3 pints in genuine

glasses) and away supporters (who were charged £4 for the same pint in a plastic glass). The pub has now been restored to its Victorian splendour thanks to the independent Remarkable Pubs chain, with seven snugs divided by ornate panels, Carrara marble floors, and a massive stained-glass skylight dominating what was once a dingy billiards room and is now an open kitchen serving elevated pub grub such as gochujang-glazed chicken wings. Regulars will happily scroll through their phones to find old sepia-tinted shots of The Boleyn, taken by their grandparents, with tram tracks running alongside; they're equally happy settling in with a hand-pumped real ale and basking in the glory of a place that's once again an expansive temple to relaxation, pleasure, company and enjoyment. To sum up, in four words: Back. Of. The. Net.





Bobby Moore 1958 - 1974





BOLEYN





A TEMPLE TO RELAXATION





... AND ETCHED IN THE MEMORY



LAVATORIES

DINING & BARS



YE OLDE CHESHIRE CHEESE

145 FLEET ST, LONDON

Fittingly, for a pub in the heart of Fleet Street – once the centre of the tabloid newspaper industry, whose hacks would never let the truth stand in the way of a good story – Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese is a repository of tales that may have grown in the telling. Was this Samuel Johnson’s favoured pub? Well, there’s no actual record of the seventeenth-century polymath’s ever visiting the place, but his “favourite chair” is nonetheless installed in a corner, beneath a slightly dyspeptic portrait of the man. Did the establishment once boast a grey parrot named Polly who could swear like a navy? Yes – he was a fixture for four decades before dying in 1926, and his taxidermic figure now watches over the Chop Room – but whether he could also imitate the popping of a cork, followed by the “glug glug glug” as the wine was poured, and whether he repeated this feat so many times during Armistice Day in 1918 that he fainted from the exertion, are matters of purest conjecture.

What’s indisputable is that the “Ye Olde” bit of the pub’s name is more than mere hyperbole; witness the “rebuilt 1667” legend on its sign (the original wooden sixteenth-century structure having succumbed to the Great Fire) or the list of sixteen monarchs who’ve reigned in England since the pub’s existence, displayed to the right of the entrance. But witness, also, the labyrinth within. Authentically scuffed corridors and precipitous stairwells lead up, down, right and left, ante-rooms are nestled within larger salons, and lowering ceilings lead to echoing caverns. You can work here for months, as the current barman has done, and still not be sure that you’ve ventured into every nook and cranny. The vaulted heights of the Cellar Bar indicate its previous use as a thirteenth-century Carmelite monastery, while the series of bawdy seventeenth-century tiles that once adorned an upstairs fireplace, and have now been packed off to the Museum of London (“they were more

saucy postcard than dark web”, according to one of those who got an eyeful) suggest that part of the building may once have been a brothel. A heritage of contemplation and/or sensual pleasure; no wonder that the Cheshire Cheese has proved so congenial for writers, from Dickens (“he took him down Ludgate-hill to Fleet Street, and so, up a covered way, into a tavern ... with a good plain dinner and good wine”, from *A Tale of Two Cities*) to P. G. Wodehouse (“Yesterday, I looked in at the Garrick at lunch time, took one glance of loathing at the mob, and went off to lunch by myself at the Cheshire Cheese,” from *A Life in Letters*), not to mention the less celebrated contributors to the

pub’s collection of leather-bound visitors’ books, which date back to the Victorian era, and feature many poems that venture to rhyme “Cheese” with “ease”.

The Cheshire Cheese exhibits all the creaks, groans, crackles and booms of a venerable chunk of living history, right down to the basement chills (the recent removal of a manhole cover revealed a gurgling remnant of the River Fleet, one of London’s legendary lost rivers) and up to the roaring hearths (the fires have been

known to be lit right through the tepid English summer). What saves it from becoming a kind of pewter-tankard museum piece is the singular sense of refuge it continues to offer. “A push at the door, and I have passed into another world,” wrote the artist Joseph Pennell in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1887. You’ll no longer be provided with a free pipe and tobacco on entering, and you’ll be nursing a pint of Samuel Smith’s Organic Lager rather than a jug of mead. Even the hacks have long since departed the area. But the Cheshire Cheese rolls on, its assortment of walls absorbing yet more gossip and debate, concord and dispute, as successive waves of patrons put the outside world to rights. After all, there are always new stories to tell.





“UP A COVERED WAY, INTO A TAVERN ...”









SCUFFED SALONS, COSY NOOKS



“A PUSH AT THE DOOR, AND I HAVE PASSED INTO ANOTHER WORLD”

THE GUINEA GRILL

30 BRUTON PL, LONDON

The definition of “conviviality”, according to the *New Oxford Dictionary*, is “fit for a feast, or festive”. The Guinea Grill actually predates the word – there’s been a pub on this Mayfair site since the fifteenth century, and “conviviality” wasn’t coined until the mid-1700s – but it’s not hard to imagine this eminent-ly congenial establishment being its inspiration. Because here, a stone’s throw from the bustle of Bond Street and Berkeley Square, is a place where time seems to slow down, and the eternal verities – a medium-rare porterhouse, a fine claret, a sharp Stilton – can be lingered over and thoroughly savoured.

If The Guinea fosters a strong sense of loyalty among its patrons, from Mayfair residents and local office workers to returning American and European visitors, that’s because of its perception as a hidden gem. Tucked away in Bruton Place – a street of mews dwellings that once held the carriages and servants of Mayfair’s swells, who fled the City of London after the seventeenth-century ravages of the Great Fire and Great Plague – it’s the kind of place you stumble upon, your interest piqued by a compact, wood-panelled, warm-hued bar peopled with patrons nursing pints of ale and tucking into Welsh Rarebit much as the coachmen and ladies’ maids would have done nearly half a

millennium ago. Royal patronage is inferred by a photo of the Queen Mother pulling a pint on a visit from nearby Clarence House (with a tumbler of gin, her tippie of choice, presumably just out of shot), while the crowd good-naturedly spills into the street during the warmer months.

But the delightful sense of discovery doesn’t end with the bar. Through a separate entrance, and past a tilted, smoking-hot grill and a cabinet of choice meat cuts (dry-aged and supplied by

master butcher Frank Godfrey of Islington, who maintains a dedicated fridge for The Guinea), you’re shown into a secluded dining room, where, as food critic Giles Coren wrote in *The Times*, “well-dressed gentlemen and the odd lady are rammed hugger-mugger, as in the chophouses of the Victorian Golden Age.” Portraits of Mayfair eminences look on from the walls as a menu of imperishable British classics – prawn cocktail with Marie Rose sauce, rock oysters, steak and kidney pie, beef Wellington – is served. Here, as afternoon elides into evening and lunch elides into dinner, buttons are undone, friendships are

cemented or created, and the old-school ambience is relished.

Mayfair, for all its conspicuous wealth – this is, after all, the most expensive spot on the London Monopoly board, with as many private members’ clubs and blue-chip galleries as public bars – still retains a somewhat raffish air, which The Guinea personifies. You might find Madonna, Mick Jagger or Henry Cavill here (and one-time Mayfair resident Jimi Hendrix was a regular), but they’ll be hanging out at the bar, or wolfing down a pie, alongside the disparate cast of art dealers, hedge fund CEOs, politicians, impeccably accessorised local residents, and MI5 spooks (who, of all people, appreciate the estab-

lishment’s discretion) that regard The Guinea as their own. The variety of “Ests” it displays mark key moments in its evolution – 1423, when it was established; 1675, when it became The Guinea; 1851, when it became a Young’s pub; and even 2021, as it expands into a building across the street – but, at its heart, The Guinea is simply a fail-safe staple, a trusted friend to those in the know; a place that was around before the notion of conviviality officially existed, but where it came to reign supreme.





OLD-SCHOOL AMBIENCE



