



The White Hart Royal Hotel

A BRIEF HISTORY

BY WILL SWALES



WELCOME

Welcome to a brief history of The White Hart Royal, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire. 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 White Hart Royal 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 White Hart Royal Hotel. We are now busy researching the other inns we own and operate within our group and hope that eventually we will have all our inns within one publication, but until then please feel free to take this copy with you.

Kevin Charity
Managing Director
The Coaching Inn Group

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“RARE DIARY ... PROVES ... THAT CHARLES I STAYED AT THE WHITE HART ON TWO OCCASIONS DURING THE CIVIL WAR.”



HISTORIC INN AT THE MEETING OF TWO GREAT ROADS

"...refurbishment of this area in the winter of 1928 – 9 exposed part of the original wattle-and-daub construction."

The White Hart Royal, originally The White Hart, in Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire, stands at the meeting of two great roads, and has a remarkable story of royal patronage at a pivotal time during the English Civil War.

The hotel's main entrance is on High Street, which is on the line of the Fosse Way, the Roman road that stretched diagonally across the country from Lincoln to Exeter, while the side entrance, for vehicles, is on Oxford Street, which was the principal route from London and Oxford to Worcester.

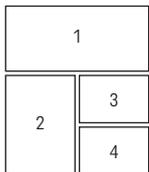
This part of the market town of Moreton-in-Marsh was established in the early 1200s by the Abbot of Westminster, who owned the land. It was originally called New Moreton to distinguish it from an older settlement nearby, which has since been subsumed as the town expanded. It seems reasonable to assume that a building at the important junction of the London road and the Fosse Way was one of the first to be erected by the abbot's builders.

Today the hotel comprises several conjoined buildings, but the one at the corner of the road junction is undoubtedly the oldest. According to Historic England's Heritage Building List, this corner building retains elements dating from the 1500s. Other estimates suggest it might have originated in the 1400s. The most impressive surviving original feature on the exterior is the large stone chimney stack.

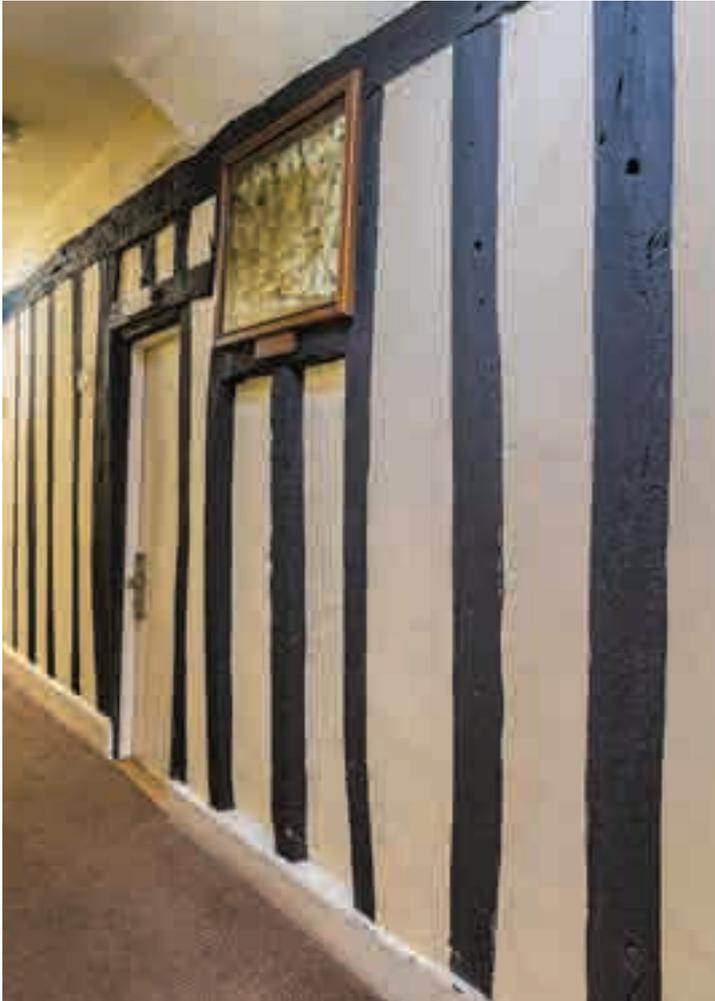
Inside, a first-floor corridor leading to several bedrooms has a fine example of preserved timber-framing. A refurbishment of this area in the winter of 1928 – 9 exposed part of the original wattle-and-daub construction, then thought to be from the 1400s. A section was preserved behind glass, and can still be seen in the corridor today.

The building adjoining at right angles, facing High Street and containing the main entrance to the hotel, retains Tudor elements within its interior. Most notably, in the bar/dining area it has a three-metre-wide fireplace with an oak-beam lintel.

It isn't known when The White Hart started trading as an inn. The earliest surviving documentary evidence concerns its royal visitor, and confirms it was operational in 1644. But its trading history is almost certainly much older. Given its prime location, it's conceivable that it was built as an inn during the 1500s or 1400s, and even that a predecessor building was erected on this site as an inn during the 1200s.



- 1: The multiple buildings of The White Hart Royal, with Oxford Street to the left and High Street to the right.
- 2: Timber-frame corridor wall.
- 3: Preserved wattle and daub section.
- 4: Tudor fireplace with an oak-beam lintel in the bar/dining area.





Charles I in his civil-war armour.

THE CIVIL-WAR VISITS BY KING CHARLES I

The best-known legend of The White Hart is that King Charles I spent a night there on 2 July 1644, at the height of the English Civil War. It's a story that has survived in local oral history, but seems never to have been confirmed in print by any authoritative modern historian.

Now, during research for this booklet, a rare diary has been located, which proves the story's authenticity and shows that Charles I stayed at The White Hart on two occasions during the Civil War.

The king's first visit to the town of Moreton-in-Marsh was part of an extraordinary sequence of events. In the early summer of 1644, he was ensconced in the apparent safety of his wartime headquarters, the loyal city of Oxford. But all was not well. Two Parliamentary armies led by the Earl of Essex and Sir William Waller were heading in his direction. At the same time, the crucial northern royalist city of York was under siege by another group of Parliamentary forces. Charles sent an army led by his nephew, Prince Rupert of the Rhine, to try to save York.

Thus short of manpower at Oxford, and to avoid a siege being established there, Charles left the city with 5,000 cavalymen and 2,500 musketeers. His intention was to buy time by leading the two pursuing Parliamentary forces in a fast-paced chase around Oxfordshire and its neighbouring counties in the hope of eventually linking with Prince Rupert on his return from the north. Inexplicably, the Earl of Essex abandoned the chase and took his army off to Devon to relieve a siege at Lyme, leaving Waller to the task of chasing the king. Meanwhile Charles, now out in the countryside, summoned reinforcements of infantry and artillery from Oxford, which when they arrived took his force to about 10,000 men.

On 29 June, Waller caught up with the tail of the King's forces at Cropredy Bridge, near Banbury, where a series of inconclusive skirmishes left Waller's forces much the worse off. Both armies rested the next day, then the king headed south in the direction of Oxford. He reached Deddington on 2 July. Then, to deceive Waller, he turned sharply westwards. The army set camp for the night at Chipping Norton but the king and his senior commanders, no doubt accompanied by a substantial guard of soldiers, went ahead to spend the night at Moreton-in-Marsh.



Sir William Waller, painted by Cornelius Johnson, 1643.
© National Portrait Gallery.

"...Charles left the city with 5,000 cavalymen and 2,500 musketeers."

PROOF THAT THE KING STAYED TWICE AT THE WHITE HART

(10)

	Nights.	Miles.
Tuesday the 2. to <i>Morton Hinmarch,</i> <i>the white Hart</i> ———	i	xii
Wednesday the 3. to <i>Evesham, Alder-</i> <i>man Martins</i> ———	ix	x
Friday the 12. to <i>Coverley the E. of</i> <i>Downes, by Bradway and Sudeley</i> —	i	xvi
Saturday the 13. to <i>Sapperton, Sir</i> <i>Henry Pooles near Cirencester</i> —	i	vii

Section from page 10 of 'Iter Carolinum...' recording the king's night spent at The White Hart on Tuesday 2 July 1644. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Historians of these events have drawn facts from numerous records made during and shortly after the civil war, including some that briefly mention the night the king spent at Moreton-in-Marsh, then generally recorded as Moreton Henmarsh or Hinmarch. However, none have mentioned the detail that he slept at The White Hart, which is contained in only one extremely rare document.

It's a 36-page pamphlet printed and published anonymously in 1660 and is lately attributed to Sir Edward Walker, the secretary to the king's War Council, who was in almost constant attendance on the king during the conflict.

The pamphlet is called 'Iter Carolinum, being a succinct relation of the necessitated marches, retreats, and the sufferings of His Majesty Charls the 1 from January 10, 1641 till the time of his death 1648'. The only known surviving copy is at the Henry E Huntington Library in San Marino, California. It contains a simple diary of dates and places, but states clearly that the king stayed at The White Hart.

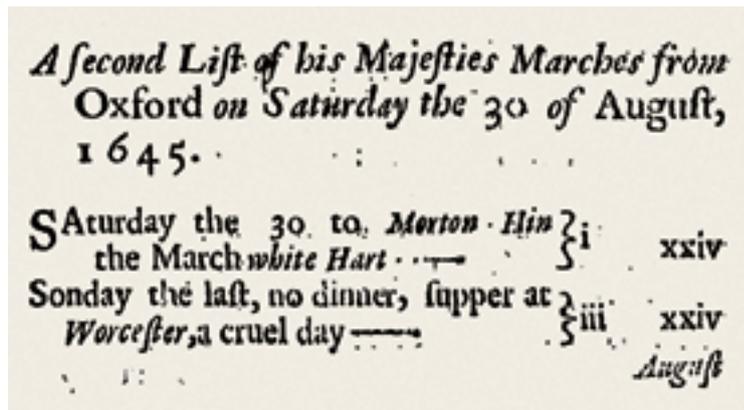
While the king and his entourage were settling themselves in at The White Hart, some 160 miles to the north, the Parliamentarians launched their surprise evening attack on Prince Rupert and his allies just outside York at the famous Battle of Marston Moor. The royalists were routed within a few hours.

Unaware of this disaster, Charles probably slept peacefully at The White Hart. The next day he and his army marched farther west to the safe town of Evesham. Waller predicted the king would turn north to meet Rupert. Despite his army being depleted by mutiny and desertion, Waller moved to be ahead of the king and lay in wait. However, after nine days' rest at Evesham the king did the unpredictable again, and marched his army southwards in pursuit of the Earl of Essex.

King Charles's second visit to The White Hart came on Saturday 30 August 1645, by which time defeat of the royalist cause was looking inevitable. The king's armies had been defeated at Naseby in Northamptonshire in June, and at Langport in Somerset in July, leaving most of England under Parliamentary control. In August the king was still on the move, marching his army from one crisis or rendezvous point to another. After just two days back at his base in Oxford, he set off again, this time to relieve a siege at Hereford.

He marched his men to Stow-on-the-Wold in a day, but once again the king and his entourage spent the night away from the men, up the road at The White Hart in Moreton-in-Marsh. The next day he travelled to the safe city of Worcester. After three nights' rest he pressed on to Hereford, only to find the siege already lifted because the Parliamentarian army had set off to attend a fight in Scotland. Eight months later, after more successive defeats, Charles was treacherously handed over to the Parliamentarian forces.

CHARLES I'S MARCHES THROUGH MORETON-IN-MARSH IN 1644 AND 1645



Section from page 23 of 'Iter Carolinum...' recording the king's night spent at The White Hart on Saturday 30 August 1645. The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

IMPROVED ROADS BRING PROSPERITY IN THE 1700s



Stable block date-stone.

"This was a time of significant improvements to the nation's road network..."

The earliest surviving property record of The White Hart Inn is a reference in 1714 in the will of its then owner, John Winslow.

It was written shortly before his death at the age of 76. He described himself as the innkeeper of The White Hart, which he bequeathed along with its bowling green, coaches and horses to his eldest son John. He also expressed the hope that his son would manage the inn with his mother, Ann, just as John senior had done, in his words: 'for many years past with good success.'

The widowed Ann Winslow died in 1727, aged 77, leaving her son John, 46, and his wife Hester, 33, to carry on. This was a time of significant improvements to the nation's road network through the establishment of properly maintained toll roads, known as turnpikes. The road passing through Moreton-in-Marsh between Worcester and London was made a turnpike in 1731, which must have increased the carriage traffic passing The White Hart. Apparently in response to growing trade, John and Hester Winslow created a new entrance for carriages and coaches at the eastern end of the Oxford Street side of the inn.

A date-stone on a stable adjoining this new entrance is inscribed 'WIH 1737,' which requires a little interpretation. In this period it was usual to place the surname initial above those of the forename initials of a husband and wife. The capital letter shape 'I' could represent either 'I' or 'J'. In this case the inscription clearly commemorated John and Hester Winslow.

John Winslow died aged 56 in the same year as the date-stone on the stable-block. He left all his property in Moreton-in-Marsh, including The White Hart, to his son Thomas, who was an ordained priest. Thomas let the inn to a tenant innkeeper, who from at least 1757 was John Rogers.

The Fosse Way passing the High-Street frontage of The White Hart was made a turnpike in 1755, no doubt increasing further the traffic through the town. Records show that the bowling-green at The White Hart was still part of the inn as late as 1760, but by then its days must have been numbered. The sport had ceased to be so fashionable, and John Rogers probably argued with his landlord that the land would be better used for more stabling, carriage houses, and other buildings related to expanding the inn as a centre for public transport.

Following the death of Thomas Winslow in 1766, the inn passed to his widow, Ann, who the following year remarried and became Ann Lloyd.

HOW COMPETITION BROKE INNKEEPER JOHN ROGERS

A coach service called the Worcester Fly was launched in 1762, to run between Worcester and London, with the intention of completing the journey in one day during the summer, and in the winter over two days with an overnight stop at Oxford.

Throughout the year, there would almost certainly have been a change of horses at Moreton-in-Marsh. It isn't known which inn provided the service, although The White Hart was ideally located for it, especially for the coach coming from Oxford.

However, it appears that the main hire-trade for Moreton-in-Marsh inns at this time was in the provision of horses, carriages and drivers, which they made available to the nobility, gentry, and anyone else who could afford it. The inns were the equivalent of modern-day car-rental and taxi firms rolled into one. Carriages known as post-chaises were hired out with postilion drivers, and could carry passengers on long journeys by a system of relays from one inn to another, transferring to a fresh post-chaise, horses and driver at each stage.

This trade was sometimes aggressively competitive. In 1774, a group of four innkeepers located at different towns along the Moreton-in-Marsh stretch of the Worcester-Oxford road placed an advertisement in the Oxford Journal accusing three of their competitors along the route, including John Rogers at The White Hart, of forming a cartel that restricted clients to changing horses and post chaises at no inns other than each other's. The complainants wished it to be known that their inns operated no such restrictions.

In the following edition, Rogers and his associates, at Chipping Norton and Broadway, refuted the allegation as 'an absolute falsehood.' But the complainants retaliated by next publishing details of three recent incidents, with dates and names of the people concerned, in which customers had been denied the proper service. It was the finish of John Rogers, who the following year was reported in the press as a bankrupt 'late of The White Hart, Moreton-in-Marsh.'

"The inns were the equivalent of modern-day car-rental and taxi firms rolled into one."



High Street frontage of The White Hart rebuilt in 1782 with Georgian windows and a lowered archway.

DATE-STONE COMMEMORATES FACELIFT AND REFURBISHMENT

By 1781 the state of the economy in Moreton-in-Marsh must have encouraged the owner of The White Hart, Ann Lloyd, to invest in improvements. A new tenant was sought, to take effect from the spring of 1782 by which time it seems that significant building work was expected to be complete.

Since the development of the entrance to the inn's yard from Oxford-Street, the archway through from the High Street had become less important, and potentially redundant. So it seems the opportunity was taken to reduce its height, which would improve the internal layout of the inn by permitting the construction of a level connection between the first-floor rooms either side of it.

The reduced archway would be too low for a coach to pass through, but might still allow the passage of some horses and carriages. Exposed beams holding up the new, lower ceiling of the arch have been dated to the 1700s. Reducing the height of the arch had an obvious effect on the façade of the building, which accordingly seems to have been completely rebuilt in the style of the period.

The work was commemorated by a date-stone placed high above the arch. The now-weathered and deteriorating inscription reads 'T RACHLEI FACIT 1782'. The mason who made it seems to have lacked care. The strange word RACHLEI was perhaps intended to represent the local surname Rackley, which might have been the name of the builder.

The 'L' in the name appears to have been missed at the first attempt and is inscribed faintly as a small insertion above and between the 'H' and the 'E'. The spelling was possibly an attempt to Latinize the name to harmonise with the next word 'facit' – meaning 'builds this,' more usually expressed on date-stones as 'fecit' – 'built this'. The numbers one and two in the date are reduced in size, which looks to be a stylistic device.



Date-stone inscribed 'T RACHLEI FACIT 1782'.

"... completely rebuilt in the style of the period."

THE COMING OF THE ROYAL MAIL COACHES



An early illustration of one of the new Royal Mail coaches introduced in 1785.

The private dining room on the right of the main entrance to The White Hart retains wall panelling that was probably installed at around the time of the inn's 1782 facelift.

The general refit was timely because in 1785 came the introduction of a national network of Royal Mail coaches, and it was sensationally good fortune for Moreton-in-Marsh that one of the first routes put into operation was between Worcester and London. Towns on the routes of Royal Mail coaches gained instant kudos for their fast postal communications and implicit good roads, which made them especially attractive centres for business development.

It might have seemed to Ann Lloyd that this innovation had significantly increased the value of The White Hart and, since it was newly rebuilt and refurbished, it was the perfect time to cash-in. She sold it in 1786, bringing to an end 80 or more years of ownership by the Winslow family.

The new owner was Matthew Harwood, who took on the running of it himself, although only for about four years. A press advertisement of 1787 reveals that he operated a cock-fighting pit, presumably erected in the garden of the inn. The advertised day-long match between 'the Gentlemen of Worcestershire and the Gentlemen of Gloucestershire' offered prizes of two guineas a battle and 50 guineas for 'the odd battle'.

In 1790, Matthew Harwood sold The White Hart to one William Leadbeter. He and his descendants would be owners and sometimes owner-managers of the inn for the next 70 years.



Georgian wall panelling in the private dining room.



The White Hart Royal bar.

A NEW KING ARRIVES AT THE INN – AND BOOM TIME FOR THE TOWN

In 1848, a relatively short-term tenant innkeeper at The White Hart, Mark Rose, was declared bankrupt. The then owner, Enoch Smith of Evesham, was a member of the fourth generation of his family to own the inn since the time of William Leadbeter.

He let the business to Robert King, 36, and his wife Elizabeth, 42, who were to become extremely influential in determining the fortunes of the inn over the following 30 years.

Business boomed in Moreton-in-Marsh from 1853 when the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway opened its line with a station in the town. Local business and community leaders were quick to explore ways of gaining maximum advantage. At a meeting at The White Hart, the radical decision was taken to increase the frequency of the town's livestock market from twice a year to monthly, and to increase the opening hours of the weekly corn market, in its new purpose-built exchange building, in order to attract more traders from farther afield.

The livestock market was held in the High Street, where a vibrant thrice-yearly cheese market was also soon established. The new Corn Exchange was just two doors away from The White Hart, so these and many other related developments all brought increased trade for the inn.

"Local business and community leaders were quick to explore ways of gaining maximum advantage."



The first-floor assembly room showing the remnant of the higher roof-line of the previous three-storey building.

DANCING UNTIL DAWN IN THE VICTORIAN ASSEMBLY ROOM

Enoch Smith, owner of The White Hart, died in 1859, after which the inn was put on the market. The sale details show that it had a first-floor sitting room, nine bedrooms, a commercial room, carriage parlour, large dining room, a market room and parlour with three chambers over, a bar parlour and a bar.

The outbuildings included coach houses and stabling for 70 horses, a granary and a piggery. There were 'carriage entrances from the two principal streets'.

The inn was sold early in 1860. It isn't clear who bought it, although possibly it was the now-long-established tenant, Robert King. He continued running The White Hart throughout the 1860s, and for most of the 1870s, during which time he certainly established a reputation in the town as a leading businessman. The new owner, whoever it was, wasted no time in spending money on a major improvement.

A press report of April 1861 described a concert by the town's choral society that was held in 'the new and spacious assembly room which has recently been added to the White Hart Hotel.' The report informed readers that 'two very handsome glass chandeliers, lighted by gas, imparted a very pleasing and cheerful effect to the room', and that the event 'was patronised by a numerous and fashionable company.'

This high-ceilinged, first-floor room remains in continuous use today. It seems to have been a replacement for the top two floors of a three-story wing behind the main High Street building. The assembly-room roof line is clearly lower than its predecessor, and the low-ceilinged ground-floor room seems to be much older than the assembly room above it. Reports indicate that at fashionable balls in the late 1800s the ground-floor room was used to serve dinner to the revellers, who would then move upstairs for music and dancing, which typically continued until 4am.



The assembly room now serves many different functions, including as a meeting room.

"...two very handsome glass chandeliers, lighted by gas, imparted a very pleasing and cheerful effect to the room."

PROMOTING THE STORY OF CHARLES I AND THE WHITE HART



One of the bedrooms at The White Hart Royal.

"...visitors frequently included well-educated people pursuing an increasingly popular interest in history..."

The railways brought a new breed of tourists to country districts, and the railway companies were quick to exploit the trend.

For example, at Whitsuntide in 1863 the Great Western Railway Company ran a special holiday train from Paddington to Worcester, with tickets allowing passengers to return from any station on the line, including Moreton-in-Marsh, on any day over the holiday week.

Such visitors brought good trade for the country inns, which in addition to letting rooms and selling food and drink could also make good incomes from visitors wanting to hire horses and post-chaises to tour the area. Such visitors frequently included well-educated people pursuing an increasingly popular interest in history and antiquarianism. Against this background, it was probably innkeeper Robert King who was the first to attempt to gain serious marketing advantage from promoting the White Hart's association with Charles I.

We know that it was in December 1863 when a reader of 'Notes and Queries,' a quarterly magazine dedicated to the collection of snippets of interest to do with English language, literature, genealogy and history, visited The White Hart and was sufficiently enthused to report his experience to the magazine. In the edition published on Boxing Day he reported that he had stayed in the room reputed to be the one used by Charles I more than 200 years earlier, and that on the wall was a simple notice that read:

When friends were few and dangers near
King Charles found rest and safety here.
King Charles 1st
Slept at this Inn on his way
To Evesham, Tuesday July 2
1644

The visitor, who came from Dartford in Kent, reported that the notice was written on a card that was: 'yellow with age, and torn around the edges, but has since been carefully mounted, and is now preserved by glass and a gilt frame. The ink is faded by time and the handwriting is in that hard style so fashionable in years gone by.'

Today the best room in the oldest part of the hotel is still promoted as the Charles I Room, and the notice, almost certainly the one described in 1863, now hangs in the entrance lobby for all visitors to see. The card and the frame fit the description in Notes and Queries, although contrary to the opinion of the correspondent of that time, the handwriting seems to be in a style consistent with that of the mid-1800s, and not an earlier period. It was probably written by Robert King. It is interesting to observe that the phrase 'in his way' has been edited in blue ink to read 'on his way', which corresponds to the wording reported in Notes and Queries.



Commemoration of Charles I's visit, first reported in 1863.

HOW ROBERT KING MADE THE WHITE HART 'ROYAL'



Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein.
Half-plate glass negative by Alexander Bassano.
© National Portrait Gallery.

By the 1860s Robert and Elizabeth King had established such a reputation for the quality of their hospitality at The White Hart that on one occasion they earned important royal patronage. In November 1866 a local fox hunt was hosted by a French royal duke, the Duc d'Aumale, who lived at Woodnorton near Evesham.

Attending the hunt were his brother, Prince de Joinville, and his nephew, Duc de Chartres, their wives, and the most senior guests of the day, the German Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein with his wife, Princess Helena, who was a daughter of Queen Victoria. Newspapers reported that after the hunt, the royal party took lunch at The White Hart before Prince and Princess Christian and their attendants caught the train back to Windsor.

No doubt recognising that royal association was always good for trade, it seems to have been Robert King who later acquired the carved and painted coat of arms of Queen Victoria, which today is still mounted above the main entrance of the hotel. On the front of the plinth is the legend DOMINE SALVAM FAC REGINAM – God Save the Queen. Its presence is peculiar. Normally, such royal insignia can be displayed only by holders of a Royal Warrant of Appointment, which as a matter of policy is not awarded to 'places of refreshment'.

A very brief history of The White Hart Royal published in 1947 recorded that the coat of arms was acquired 'as a curiosity' from the estate of a local tentmaker who was said to have had government contracts. On further investigation, the story is well founded.



Coat of arms of Queen Victoria – apparently erected in 1878.

There was a renowned manufacturer of tents and ropes owned by Benjamin Hodgetts and trading in High Street, Moreton-in-Marsh. Hodgetts was the inventor of a patented single-sheet canvas for protecting haystacks from rain damage, which if used on the queen's farms could have earned a royal warrant. Sometime during the first three months of 1878 Hodgetts died, aged 68, and then within a few weeks, on 2 April, his son and heir Ephraim William Hodgetts died, aged 39, while on a passenger ship to Australia.

It cannot be a coincidence that from December of the same year The White Hart started being referred to in the press as The White Hart Royal, the name that has applied ever since. Robert King must have bought the coat of arms from the Hodgetts family estate, clearly with the intention of using it to promote the inn's genuine royal associations and to add value to the business. And perhaps tongue-in-cheek, he considered his own surname as part of the royal association.

SWEPT UP IN A MISSION OF SOBRIETY AND HERITAGE



The White Hart Royal Hotel pictured in the 1920s, probably soon after its acquisition by Trust Houses Ltd.

The later years of the 1800s saw a period of great expansion by regional brewers who leveraged their wealth through multiple mergers and acquisitions. One such was Flower and Sons of Stratford-on-Avon, which expanded outwards from its base to acquire competitor breweries and their inns, as well as individual licensed premises, which in 1888 included The White Hart Royal.

But in 1907 Flower and Sons hit a financial crisis. It was forced to cut its losses by selling assets, including The White Hart Royal, which it sold to the sitting tenant John Brown, then aged 67. Twelve years later, in 1919, he was still running the hotel, and probably continued doing so until it was put on the market in 1923, a year before his death at the age of 83. Either then or shortly afterwards the inn was bought by a unique and innovative company in the hospitality trade – Trust Houses Ltd.

This was a company formed out of a sobriety movement started by a Liberal politician, Albert Grey, the 4th Earl Grey (1851 – 1917). In 1901 he set up a national association of county-based Public House Trust Companies tasked to take over former coaching inns; many of which, through the loss of their traditional trade, had degenerated into poor-quality drinking houses. The plan was to install managers who were briefed and rewarded to reinvigorate revenue from food and lodging, and to reduce beer sales.

The most successful was the Hertfordshire trust, which quickly expanded to become the Home Counties trust, and then in 1919 was reconstituted as Trust Houses Ltd with the objective to extend its mission throughout Britain. Its continued success was helped by the rapid growth in motor-car ownership, which expanded mobility and the tourism trade. By the early 1920s, when Trust Houses bought The White Hart Royal, it had more than 150 hotels, and went on to become one of the nation's largest and most successful hotel chains, reaching a peak of 222 hotels by 1939.

Trust Houses invested at The White Hart Royal, and did so with great respect for the history of the building. It might be said that Trust Houses was the first hotel chain to recognise the importance of preserving the heritage of its properties. A refurbishment in 1928 – 9 exposed a section of original wattle-and-daub wall construction, which was preserved and can now be seen in the oldest part of the hotel.

At around this time, the Tudor fireplace and ceiling beams in the bar/lounge were also exposed and preserved. And when the archway leading from High Street was enclosed to make a new entrance hall, the cobbled carriageway was preserved and left uncovered, so that it remains today as a particularly unusual historical feature. It was also during the ownership of Trust Houses that two Georgian town houses adjoining the hotel in High Street were acquired and converted, extending the ground-floor lounge area and increasing the number of bedrooms to 23.

A commercial directory for Gloucestershire published in 1935 listed The White Hart Royal as boasting 'electric light, catering and garage'.

In 1970 Trust Houses merged with Forte Holdings to become Trust Houses Forte, later renamed Trusthouse Forte (THF). In the 1990s, The White Hart Royal was sold by THF to an independent chain called the Old English Pub Company, later to become part of the brewing company Greene King. In 2007 the hotel was deluged during the widespread flooding of Moreton-in-Marsh, after which it was acquired by the independent Coaching Inn Group, and restored to its former glory.



Preserved cobbled passageway.

SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

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