

St Albans Museums: ‘Talking Buildings’ project, 2016	
Building:	The Tudor Tavern & The George, George Street
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<p>This research was undertaken by volunteers and is not an exhaustive history of the building but captures what intrigued them during the project.</p> <p>If you have any memories you’d like to share, or any queries about the research, please do let us know: museum@stalbans.gov.uk</p>	

The building which is currently home to the Thai Square restaurant, on George Street near the corner with Verulam Street, is one of the oldest in St Albans.

It can be found near the top (eastern end) of George Street (numbers 26-28). There were originally two different inns occupying this space, one called The Swan and the other The George.

The oldest part, dating from around 1400, fronts on to Verulam Road. It has a long history as an inn and then a hotel, from the 15th century right up to 1932. Since then it has been a pub and a restaurant of various types and is still fondly known by the name of the Tudor Tavern by many local people. The north side of George Street used to be full of inns and hostelries including the White Horse, The Bear (also known as The Bull), The Tabard (later on – The Antelope) and The Valiant Trooper (also known as The White Bear).

Around the 1600s, The Swan became The Kings Head until c1790. It then became houses with shops and gardens in the 1800s and as Chris Saunders notes, was “used for a variety of functions; cash stores, tallow chandler and candle factory, oilman”. From 1906 Mr Mayle, an antique dealer and his wife took over part of the building and some locals still call it “Mayle’s Corner”.

In the 1960s it was taken into council ownership to ensure it was preserved and always open to the public. It is now again privately owned and has become a Thai restaurant, but on the condition that it continues to allow public access.

The George was “one of the most noted inns” of St Albans in the 19C and evidence suggests that it was well-known for several centuries. The street was known as Church Street originally, but the inn eventually gave its name to the street.

A licence to celebrate low mass was granted by the then Abbot in 1484 to the proprietor, for the convenience of “great men and others” lodging at the inn.

The George issued its own trade tokens when it was owned by Henry Gladman in 1666, and it ran its own coach daily to Smithfield in London and back in the early 1800s. It must have maintained a good reputation throughout the 19th century, as a case brought against its licensees, Edward and Charles Fountaine, in 1873, for allowing drunkenness on the premises, was dismissed partly because the business had had no prior issues.

There was an inn on this site known as the “George on the Hupe” (Hoop) as early as 1401, when it belonged to the Nunnery of St Marys, Sopwell. Its full name seems to have been the George and Dragon, as also represented on the Museum’s half-penny trade token of the inn from 1666. The cellars of the building are very old and include an arched passageway said to run across the street towards the Abbey.

The property was rented in 1446 by John Duke of Exeter, the Lord High Admiral of England, for 6 shillings. From a deed held at the British Museum dated 4 February 1509, we know that Thomas, the Abbot of St Albans, leased “to Wm Potter and Alice his wife a tenement called the George on the Hope in Chirche-Street, St Albans”.

Off the yard of The George was a Market Room for straw-plait makers to gather to sell their wares.

From being recognised as a popular stop-off for commercial travellers in 1815 (Shaw, “History of Verulam”, cited in Freeman), business had declined by the early 20th century to such an extent that the inn closed as a hotel in 1932.

Sources

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- “A County of Small Towns”, ed Slater and Goose, University of Hertfordshire Press 2007
- British History Online, “The City of St Albans”
- “A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 2”, Victoria County History 1908
- Chris Saunders’ (former Archaeologist at St Albans Museums) website: www.salbani.co.uk