

Lincolnshire Inns revisited ...

The White Hart Spalding

by Ian Faulds



Left: The frontage seen on market day.

YOU might not guess its age from the fashionable Regency exterior, but the White Hart at Spalding, like so many other English inns, has a history spanning the centuries. Right back to 1377, in fact, the year of Richard II's coronation. And with the accession of the new king what better than to take his device as the inn sign

As is often the case, it is difficult to separate fact from romance. Tradition has it that the inn started life as the priory guest house, and that when Chaucer visited Spalding he stayed there. Who knows? There is, perhaps, a little more truth in the claim that Mary, Queen of Scots, stayed in the Crown Room on her way to Fotheringhay Castle. There is at least an ancient carved beam in this room, which remains the sign of an important chamber . . .

This is not all that remains of the Tudor period, however, as there is a wealth of carved and moulded timberwork in the inn—which somehow survived a disastrous fire in 1714. After which most of the building had to be reconstructed, of course.

Whatever the real truth of the past—and it will always hold some mystifying secrets—it can truthfully be said that the inn has remained an important Spalding institution since the first stone was laid. One particular instance of this importance can be seen after the Civil War, when Robert Rishton, one of Cromwell's "Ironsides" who had become landlord, decided to issue his own trade tokens. These appeared in 1666, with a hart on one side and a rampant lion on the other. The issue of tokens was due to lack of small change at the time, and the halfpennies and farthings produced soon became unofficial coins in the town, guaranteed by Rishton.

Lord Torrington in his travels described it as a "good inn", and it was certainly popular for meetings and official functions. In 1806 the annual meeting of the "Spalding Association for the Prosecution of all kinds of Felons within the parish . ." was held here, an important 'club' in its day. And, for quite a different purpose, "His Majesty's Commissioners for Redemption and Sale of the Land Tax" entertained themselves lavishly "for the purpose of contracting with such persons as may

be desirous of redeeming Land Tax charged on estates in the divisions of Kesteven and Holland."

In the heyday of the coaching age upwards of a dozen coaches called each day—at all times of the day and night! As can be seen from the following extract from White's 1842 Directory:—

"Mails, to Grantham, Birmingham, &c., at ½ past 3 morning; to Boston, &c., ½ past 6 morning; to London, at ¼ past 7 night; and to Lynn, Norwich, & Yarmouth at 10 night."

A busy place it must have been, and, with a good imagination, you can still hear the rattle of coach wheels passing underneath the portico.

It is still a busy place today, but Market Day is a particularly interesting time for a visit. When, as Stella M. Bee put it,

"... russet-faced the healthy farmers quench their

With friends in tweeds, all beaming, jovial and

All talking scandal, beet, and crops and barley...
The air grows thick with smoke from pipe and sweet
cigar.

The tavern reeks as beer froths spilling on the bar. Beneath the timbered beams of black well-seasoned

Men join in laughter at the rustic, ribald joke."

I called in one Market Day a short while ago and had the good fortune to meet an old gentleman with a sixty years' memory of the inn, where his father was the Boots. He started work in the fields at an early age, and can well remember taking his first 'shilling' at a Mayday Hiring at the inn. "Membership of a union was important," he reminisced, as he told me of one year when local farmers got together at the White Hart and agreed on a common policy of paying 6d less per acre of harvest than the previous year. "Hard times, you don't know what they are!" I think I would have to agree.

Opposite page: A corner of the lounge with some of the old timbering.

