

Forever In Our Hearts – Forever In Our Heritage

A History of the Ancient Angel & Royal circa 1203

Some say that the old Angel has more historical interest than many of our Stately Homes in the United Kingdom. Widely regarded and fondly known as the oldest surviving English Inn, the main façade of the building that stands today was built approximately 600 years ago. The site then however had already been an Inn for 200 years and was built as a hostel for the chivalrous Brotherhood of the Knights Templar. It was then that the beautifully carved building caught the eye of King John “he of Magna Carta fame” who decided it would make a suitable location for a visit of his Royal Court in 1213.

An Angel was a common Medieval Sign that reflected the early connection between religious establishments and a travellers hostel. The Inn was extended in the mid 14th Century and again in the 15th Century

There then followed many royal visits and the next appears to have been by Edward III and his Queen “Philippa” in the 14th Century. Evidence of this visit can still be seen today where over the original archway rests the gold emblem angel holding the King’s Crown, which surmounted at the time as a tribute to this Royal Patronage.

The next recorded visit by royalty is possibly the most famous for it was at the Angel in 1483 that Richard III held court in the Chambre de’ Roi or the King’s Room Restaurant as it is known today. For it was here in this room that he dispatched a letter to his Great Chancellor bidding for the Great Seal to proclaim the treachery of his cousin the Duke of Buckingham whereupon his death warrant was duly signed. The original letter is now in the British Museum but copies are on display adjacent to the Richard III lounge and the King’s Room Restaurant.

Charles I made use of the King’s Room during his visit to the Inn in 1633 and his arch enemy Oliver Cromwell also stayed at the Angel after his successful battle near Grantham in 1643.

The King’s Room Restaurant is very much how it would have looked in those days with its stone walls and open fire. In the far left hand corner is a small spiral staircase that presumably led up to a lookout turret so that Royal and other dignitaries of the day could be sighted arriving in the town. In the room there are also three oriel windows with elaborate carved stone panelling, which is rarely seen today in a building of the Angel & Royal’s size.

The hotels two bars, the Falcon and Angel both have magnificent medieval fireplaces. The one in our famous Angel Bar “a renowned watering hole for many years” was not discovered until 1947 when workmen removing plaster uncovered one small fireplace. That then followed on to another and another, which eventually led to the massive fireplace that can be seen today measuring more than 9ft in width and 6ft in height. Within this impressive stone mantle, holes can clearly be seen today where the tools of the trade were used for grand Spit Roasts. Our ancient cellars and foundations are reputed to go back even further to the 9th Century and are rumoured to be linked by tunnels to both St Wulframs Church and the Town’s Market Square.

Due to the prime position on the Great North Way “formerly the Ermine Roman Way” the Angel slowly developed to accommodate ever-increasing numbers of Wagons and Stagecoaches. It was this that most certainly gave the Inn in the last few hundred years its characteristic layout, with its very long courtyard, old stables and entrances to the front and rear “after all you couldn’t reverse a coach and horses”. Hundreds of coaches would stop during the week the York, Edinburgh and Aberdeen Royal Mail, the Royal Charlotte of Edinburgh, the York Highflier and the York and Leeds Post were among the very famous coaches, which used the Angel Inn. In 1800 six Inns were listed in Grantham together with 21 Alehouses but the Angel Inn was regarded as the best hostel always serving the finest ale, food and having the warmest of welcomes from its highly respected landlord.

Georgian and Victorian licensing hours were long, 18 hours a day, 4am to 10pm seven days a week closed only during Divine Service, Christmas Day and Good Friday. At the Angel however they were permitted to remain open as long as they liked until every bed was filled. In 1707 Michael Solomon the then landlord died but left a legacy of 40 shillings a year to pay for a sermon to be preached against the evils of drunkenness on every Mayor – making Sunday. During the coaching period Inns like the Angel and the George at Stamford enjoyed great prosperity, which sadly declined with the coming of the Railways. The Angel Inn was sadly no exception.

Up until the middle of the 1800’s the hotel was still classed as an Inn being fondly known simply as The Angel. Despite this fact no less than seven King’s of England and various other members of Royalty had already patronised the Inn, which included George IV. It wasn’t however until 1866 and a visit to Grantham by the then Prince of Wales which lent to the property getting the second part of it’s name. It was universally agreed that the visit by the eldest son of Queen Victoria and heir to the throne Edward VII should be commemorated by the incorporation of “Royal” in the Inn’s name; thus The Angel & Royal came into being and which it is known today throughout the world. It was not until the early 1920’s that the word Inn was dropped and the building became a hotel.

And as a certain Mr.Pigot remarked in 1828 “Where in Grantham, if not all of England, is there anything more beautiful than the Angel Inn”

After the last war the hotel was purchased by Trust House Hotels later to become Trust House Forte and remained in their hands up until a few years ago since when there has been a succession of owners including several brewery companies. In May 2002 the Angel & Royal was purchased by a local consortia of business professionals whose intention it is to bring this historic and much loved property back to its former glory and to retain its wonderful character that so many have come to enjoy over the last 800 years.

I love everything that is old, the old angel, old manners, old friends, old times old books, old wines. Oliver Goldsmith 1764