



Oldest Pubs in Britain

From dark-age alehouses to medieval coaching inns

18 pubs researched · 6 claim to be the oldest · 2 currently closed

Reprobates Intelligence Division · May 2026

IMPORTANT NOTE ON "OLDEST"

No pub in Britain has iron-clad documentation going back more than about 600 years. The pubs claiming "560 AD" or "905 AD" rely on legend, not records. What we can verify is when a building was constructed, when the name first appears in documents, or when a licence was granted. The table below separates claimed dates (what the pub will tell you) from verified dates (what the records prove).

● THE TITLE FIGHT

Six pubs claim to be Britain's oldest. Here's how they stack up.

The Porch House · Stow-on-the-Wold, Gloucestershire · Open

Claimed 947 AD · Verified: Carbon-dated timbers to 947 AD · Guinness Book of Records certified · Grade II listed

The strongest claim in Britain. Authenticated by Guinness. Formerly the Royalist Hotel. 16th-century stone fireplace with "witch marks" to ward off evil. Former coaching inn on the Fosse Way, now a luxury hotel and restaurant. Carbon dating is scientific — but it's the building that dates to 947, not a continuous licence.

The Old Ferry Boat Inn · St Ives, Cambridgeshire · Open

Claimed 560 AD · Verified: Domesday Book 1086; current building 17th century · Grade II · Greene King

Legend says alcohol has been served since 560 AD. Mentioned in the Domesday Book (1086). Haunted by Juliet Tewsley, who drowned herself after being jilted on Good Friday. The 560 AD claim is legend — but it's served ale for over a millennium.

The Bingley Arms · Bardsey, West Yorkshire · Open

Claimed 905 AD · Verified: Legend only; current building 18th century · Oldest surviving pub claim

Claims to be Britain's oldest surviving pub — dating to before England had its first King. Legend says ale was served to Catholic priests hiding from persecution (905-953 AD). The current building is 18th-century.

Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem · Nottingham · Open

Claimed 1189 AD · Verified: Current building ~1650; name first recorded 1799 (was "The Pilgrim" in 1751) · Grade II

The most famous "oldest pub" in Britain — and Nottingham has three competing claims. Caves beneath Castle Rock were reputedly a brewhouse from 1067. But the building is mid-17th century and the name dates from 1799. Richard the Lionheart had nothing to do with it. Historians dispute this claim.

Royal Standard of England · Beaconsfield · Open

Claimed ~900 AD · Verified: Domesday Book 1086 as "The Ship" · Grade II · Independent free house

Claims to be "the oldest Free House in England." Domesday Book mentions a building on the site (1086). Civil War royal connection — Charles II allegedly sheltered here. Legend says a secret tunnel to the church for smuggling Catholic priests.

Ye Olde Fighting Cocks · St Albans, Hertfordshire · 🔥 CLOSED

Claimed 793 AD · Verified: Building historians say ~1100 at earliest · Burned down February 2022 · NOT OPEN

Once the most famous "oldest pub" claim in Britain. The building burned down in February 2022 and has not reopened as of 2026. Even before that, historians disputed the 793 AD date. Not a contender for a visit.

● THE 12TH CENTURY (1100-1199)

The Mermaid Inn · Rye, East Sussex · ✅ Open (Hotel)

1156 AD · Original construction 1156, rebuilt 1420 · Smugglers' inn · Secret tunnels

The epitome of a smugglers' inn. Cellars built in Norman times with secret passageways. Originally 1156, rebuilt in 1420. The Hawkhurst Gang used it in the 1730s. Five half-timbered buildings connected. A genuinely medieval building, now a hotel.

The Lamb Inn · Eastbourne, East Sussex · ✅ Open

1180 AD · Next to Norman church of St Mary's · Secret passage · Crypt cellar · Original well

Dated to the 12th century. Next to the Norman church. Secret passage, gargoyles, crypt cellar, huge original fireplace. The well still exists.

● THE 13TH CENTURY (1200-1299)

Angel & Royal Hotel · Grantham, Lincolnshire · ✅ Open

1203 AD · Great North Road coaching inn · King Edward VI stayed 1552 · Hotel & restaurant

One of England's oldest inns on the Great North Road (London to York). Welcoming travellers since 1203. King Edward VI stayed here in 1552. "Royal" from a visit by Prince of Wales in 1866.

The Old Bell Hotel · Malmesbury, Wiltshire · ✅ Open (Hotel)

1220 AD · England's oldest purpose-built hotel · Monk guest house for Malmesbury Abbey · 4-star

England's oldest purpose-built hotel — built as a guest house for visiting monks of Malmesbury Abbey (7th century foundation). Adjacent to the 12th-century abbey. Grey Lady ghost. Backed by strong architectural evidence.

The George Hotel · Stamford, Lincolnshire · ✅ Open

~1000 years · Medieval origins · Abbots of Croyland · London-York coaching route · Chapel remains

On the site of a medieval inn for at least a thousand years. Owned by the Abbots of Croyland. Original gateways, ancient passageways, remains of a chapel. Important stop on the London to York coaching route.

The Bear Inn · Oxford · ✅ Open

1242 AD · Oxford's oldest pub · C.S. Lewis & J.R.R. Tolkien drank here · Student/don pub

Oxford's oldest pub, founded in 1242. Still frequented by students and dons. C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien are said to have drunk here. Low-beamed and unpretentious.

● THE 14TH CENTURY (1300-1399)

The George Inn · Norton St Philip, Somerset · ✅ Open

Licence from 1397 · Samuel Pepys passed through 1668 · Monmouth's HQ 1685 · Bloody Assizes court · Grade I

Extensively documented. Licence records from 1397. Pepys wrote about it. Duke of Monmouth's headquarters during his rebellion in 1685. Judge Jeffreys used it as a courtroom during the Bloody Assizes. Twelve people taken from here and executed.

The Crown Inn · Chiddingfold, Surrey · Open

1383 · Pilgrimage trail (Winchester to Canterbury) · King Edward VI stayed 1552 · 640+ years

Built as a resting place on the Winchester to Canterbury pilgrimage trail. Edward VI stayed overnight in 1552. Wealden crown post roof, stained glass, medieval fireplaces.

Ye Olde Salutation Inn · Nottingham · Open

13th century building · Competing "oldest" claim with the Trip · Caves under Castle Rock · Nottingham

Nottingham's other "oldest pub" contender. The building genuinely claims 13th-century origins. The three competing Nottingham pubs argue endlessly. This one is genuinely ancient and atmospheric.

The Skirrid Mountain Inn · Monmouthshire, Wales · Open

11th century · Claimed oldest in Wales · Bloody Assizes connection · Hangman's beam still visible

Claimed to be the oldest pub in Wales, dating from the 11th century. The oak beam from which Judge Jeffreys hanged people is still inside. Now a pub-restaurant in the Welsh mountains.

● QUICK REFERENCE

Pub	Claimed Date	Verified Date	Location	Open?	Strength
The Porch House	947 AD	Carbon dated 947	Stow-on-the-Wold	 Open	★★★★ Strong
Old Ferry Boat Inn	560 AD	Domesday 1086; bldg 17th c.	St Ives, Cambs	 Open	★★★☆☆ Plausible legend
Bingley Arms	905 AD	Legend only; bldg 18th c.	Bardsey, W Yorks	 Open	★★☆☆☆ Legend
Trip to Jerusalem	1189 AD	Bldg ~1650; name 1799	Nottingham	 Open	★★☆☆☆ Misleading
Royal Standard	~900 AD	Domesday 1086	Beaconsfield	 Open	★★★☆☆ Solid
Fighting Cocks	793 AD	Burned 2022	St Albans	 Closed	N/A
Mermaid Inn	1156 AD	Original 1156, rebuilt 1420	Rye, E Sussex	 Open	★★★★ Authentic medieval
Lamb Inn	1180 AD	Building ~1180	Eastbourne	 Open	★★★☆☆ Verified
Angel & Royal	1203 AD	First recorded 1203	Grantham	 Open	★★★★ Documented
Old Bell Hotel	1220 AD	Purpose-built 1220	Malmesbury	 Open	★★★★ Oldest purpose-built hotel
George Hotel Stamford	~1000 years	Site 1000+ years	Stamford	 Open	★★★☆☆ Solid medieval
Salutation Inn	13th c.	13th c. building	Nottingham	 Open	★★★☆☆ Verified
Crown Inn	1383	Guests welcomed 1383+	Chiddingfold, Surrey	 Open	★★★★ Documented
George Inn Norton	Licence 1397	Pepys 1668; Monmouth 1685	Norton St Philip	 Open	★★★★ Records verified
Skirrid Mountain Inn	11th c.	Medieval building	Monmouthshire, Wales	 Open	★★★☆☆ Solid medieval
Bear Inn, Oxford	1242	First recorded 1242	Oxford	 Open	★★★★ Documented

INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT

The Porch House has the strongest claim with carbon-dated timbers to 947 AD and Guinness certification. The Old Ferry Boat Inn has the most romantic claim (560 AD) and is genuinely Domesday-era. Ye Olde Trip to Jerusalem is the most famous but also the most misleading — "1189" is pure marketing. Ye Olde Fighting Cocks burned down in 2022 and is not a contender. For the Reprobates: if the trip is in the Cotswolds, The Porch House is easy to visit. If in Nottingham, go to all three competing pubs (Trip, Salutation, Bell) and decide for yourself.