

Old Stone Signs of London.



THOUGH the predictions of John Dryden were not always fortunate, one stanza in the "Annus Mirabilis," 1666, which refers to the future of London City, may here be appropriately quoted:—

"More great than human now and more August,
New deified she from her fires does rise:
Her widening streets on new foundations trust,
And, opening, into larger parts she flies."

It may be observed that Augusta was the Roman name for London.

Now of the old stone signs of London yet extant, one or two only bear date anterior to the Great Fire. Many of those which still remain, fixed either on the outside walls or within the houses they originally marked, are undated, but their age may be guessed with a tolerable degree of accuracy. It is also known that the custom of denoting houses by carved stone signs built into the outer walls did not come into general use until the rebuilding of the city subsequent to the year 1666.

The inconvenience of the old swinging signs, which blocked the daylight, and which, by their creaking noises, made day and night alike hideous, had long been felt—nay, more, their danger to passers-by, when wind and decay had caused a downfall, had been not a few times painfully apparent. Hence the Act of Charles II., which forbade swinging sign-boards, was both wise and salutary. The sign-boards, however, died hard, and prints as late as the middle of the eighteenth century show the streets full of them. But signs had their use in those days of unnumbered streets, and it was not until the numbering of the houses was enforced that the quaint, historic,

and, in some cases, even highly artistic, landmarks vanished.

As years have rolled by, the stone signs themselves, built though they were into the walls of the houses, have in a great measure disappeared. Some are luckily preserved in the Guildhall Library Museum, others are in private hands, many have been carted away as rubbish during rebuilding, and only a few now remain *in situ*. It is with these few that this paper is now concerned, and of which illustrations are given.

The use of the curious sign known as the "Boy and Pannier," in Panyer-alley, is threefold. It was a street sign, a trade sign, and also, it would seem, a landmark. Stow, writing in 1598, mentions a street sign there, probably the upper portion only of the present sign. He writes, ". . . Is another passage out of Pater Noster row, and is called, of such a sign, Panyar Alley, which

cometh out into the north over against St. Martins Lane." Along this alley the bakers' boys were wont to sit, with their baskets or panniers of bread exposed for sale, the sale of loaves at the bakers' shops for some reasons being prohibited by law. On the lower slab there yet remains a barely legible inscription, which in modern English runs thus:—

When you have sought the
city round,
Yet still this is the highest
ground.
August 26, 1688.

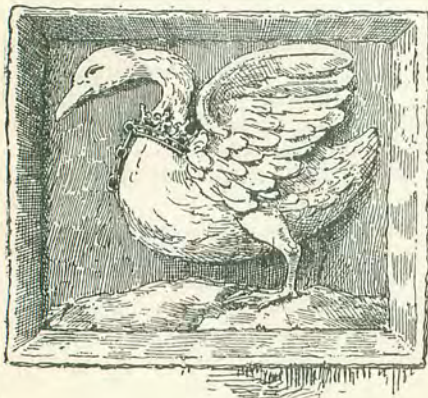
Cheapside and its tributaries are, as times go, rather rich in stone signs. On the external wall of No. 37 may be seen a well carved swan with collar and chain.

This is a sign of heraldic origin without doubt; it was, in fact, one of the badges of Henry IV., and was also heraldically one of the charges of Buckingham, Gloster, and others. Hitherto, however, efforts to trace the exact



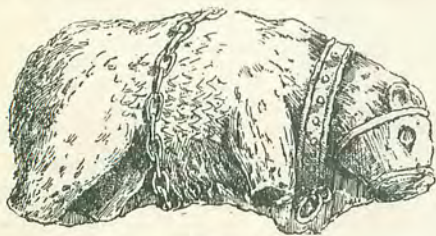
BOY AND PANVER.

history of this sign have been without avail. Far different is it with the White Bear, now to be seen within the house of business of Messrs. Gow, No. 47, Cheapside. This most interesting sign was discovered while making alterations as lately as 1882. The house itself stands at the corner of Soper's-lane (modern designation, Queen-street), and was once the shop of the far-famed



THE SWAN.

merchant, Sir Baptist Hicks, Kt., subsequently Viscount Campden. Baptist Hicks was the successful son of a wealthy father, and succeeded to what was in those days a most thriving silk mercer's business. His career is remarkable in more ways than one, for though a favourite at Court, immensely wealthy and knighted, he was the first London merchant who after knighthood took the resolution to still continue in business.



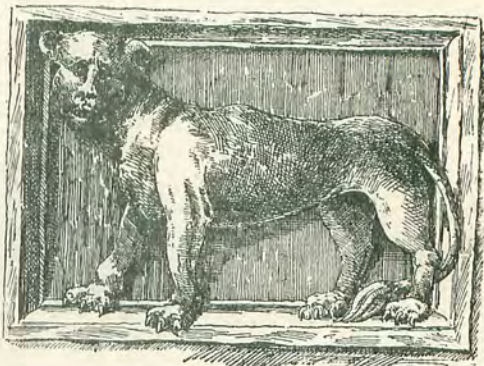
WHITE BEAR.

It is also worthy of notice that the stone figure of the bear faces in the opposite direction to all other heraldic signs now standing in London. At No. 28, Budge-row, will be found one of the best preserved of all the London signs, "The Leopard" (otherwise Lizard or Lazarde). This is the crest of the Worshipful Company of Skinners, and as Budge-row took its name

from the skin of newly-born lamb, which was termed Budge, the origin of this sign can be in no way a matter of doubt. The Skinners' Hall, too, was close by, and quite early in the fourteenth century it may be noted that enactments were in force against the wearing of "cloth furred with Budge or Wool" by persons (women) of inferior rank.

Lower Thames-street, known in the time of Stow as Stock Fishmonger-street, still possesses two very good examples of signs: one, the "Bear," with its collar and chain, carved in very high relief, and surmounted by initials and date (1670).

On the borders of Islington and Clerkenwell there are a group of signs which belong to houses celebrated in past days. The first is the "Old Red Lion." Here there are two carved shields, one of which



THE LEOPARD.

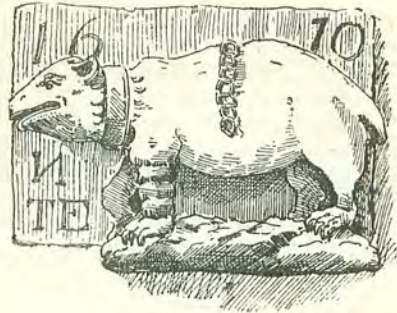
only is antique—*i.e.*, that on the north gable. This house has memories and traditions both literary and artistic. Within its walls Tom Paine wrote the "Rights of Man." This is, however, a questionable honour. Here Hogarth was wont to stay, and has even introduced its gables into one of his prints—"Evening." The house, too, was the haunt at times of Thomson, Goldsmith, and Johnson.

Another sign is the "Pelican," of which there is an example in Aldermanbury. The fabulous story of the pelican "vulning" (*i.e.*, wounding) its breast to feed its young endured for ages, and even as late as the reign of George I., at Peckham Fair, there was advertised to be on view "A pelican that suckles her young with her heart's blood, from Egypt." In the same district as the "Pelican," at the corner of Addle-street, E.C., may be seen yet another "Bear"—how popular as sign:



THE BEAR.

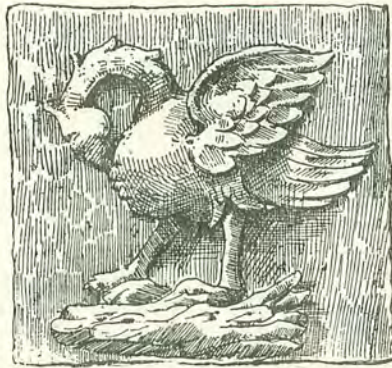
and how enduring these bears seem! This carving is dated 1670 (not 1610), and bears initials N.T.E. The N., which is the surname, is reversed; the T. and the E. standing in all probability, as was customary, for the Christian names of the builder and his wife. The "Elephant and Castle," irreverently called the "Pig and Pepper-box," in Belle Sauvage-yard, is the crest of the Cutlers'



BEAR AND CHAIN.

Company, to whom the house was left in 1568 by John Craythorne. The "Belle Sauvage Inn," over the origin of whose name and sign so much antiquarian ink has been spilt, vanished years ago. This hostelry was memorable among other things

for being opposite the spot at which the rebel Wyat rested on the occasion of his unsuccessful attempt to penetrate Ludgate. It was also a celebrated stopping-place for the northern carriers. In Belle Sauvage-yard for a time dwelt Grinling Gibbons, and there he carved, according to Walpole, "a plot of flowers which shook surprisingly with the motion of the coaches that passed by."

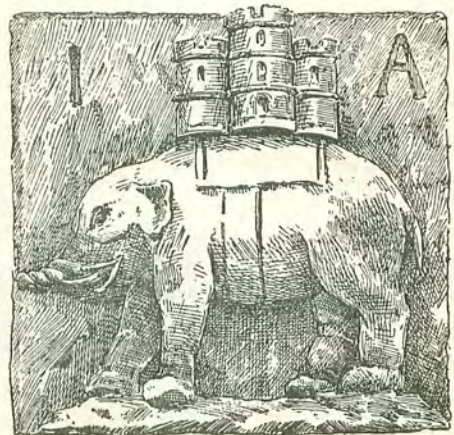


THE PELICAN.

Two or three outlying stone signs remain now to be mentioned. One is the



THE OLD RED LION.



THE ELEPHANT AND CASTLE.

"Cock and Serpents," at No. 16, Church-lane, Chelsea. This sign, evidently religious in its origin, is very remarkable, both in its design and also from its date, 1652. It does not appear to have any history, though the road in which it is to be found teems with memories of not a few of England's worthies. Another, the sign of the "Dog and Duck," now built into the garden wall of Bethlem

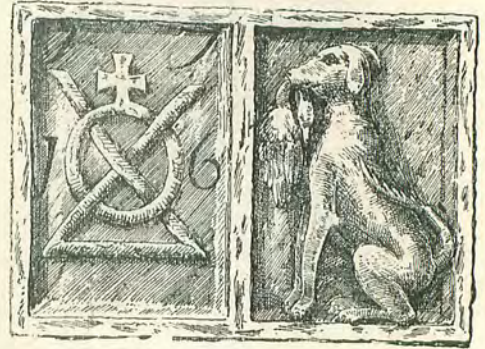
the corner of Leather-lane, Hatton Garden. There appear to be doubts whether the present sign is the original, but as one branch of sign lore deals with signs appro-



COCK AND SERPENTS.

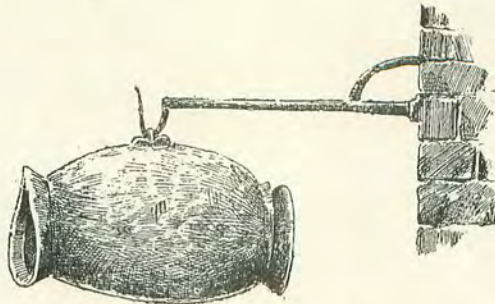
Hospital in Southwark, is important from the fact that it records the precise sport (duck hunting) which was the attraction of the house, and also because on the same stone, and dated 1716, we find the arms of the Borough and Southwark—a conjunction of which the history of signboards offers no other example.

One illustration is given of a sign which is not stone, *i.e.*, the "Leather Bottle," at



DOG AND DUCK.

priate to places, it may be well to mention this one, which is certainly of respectable antiquity, as an example. Space is wanting for more than mere mention of the "Marygold" of Messrs. Child's, the "Golden Bottle" of Messrs. Hoare's, and the three quaint iron squirrels of Messrs. Gosling's. Nor can the traditions of the ancient "Cock" Tavern in Fleet-street, with its carved wooden sign (possibly the work of Gibbons), be here related. The writer, however, may perhaps be permitted in conclusion to acknowledge with gratitude his indebtedness to the only standard book on the subject, and also to kind assistance rendered to him by many with whom he has come in contact while tramping the now modern streets of our historic metropolis in search of its ancient signs.



THE LEATHER BOTTLE.