



THE HARROW HILL TRUST

Caring for the heritage of the Hill and its future

KINGS HEAD HOTEL GANTRY CONSERVATION PROJECT 2013

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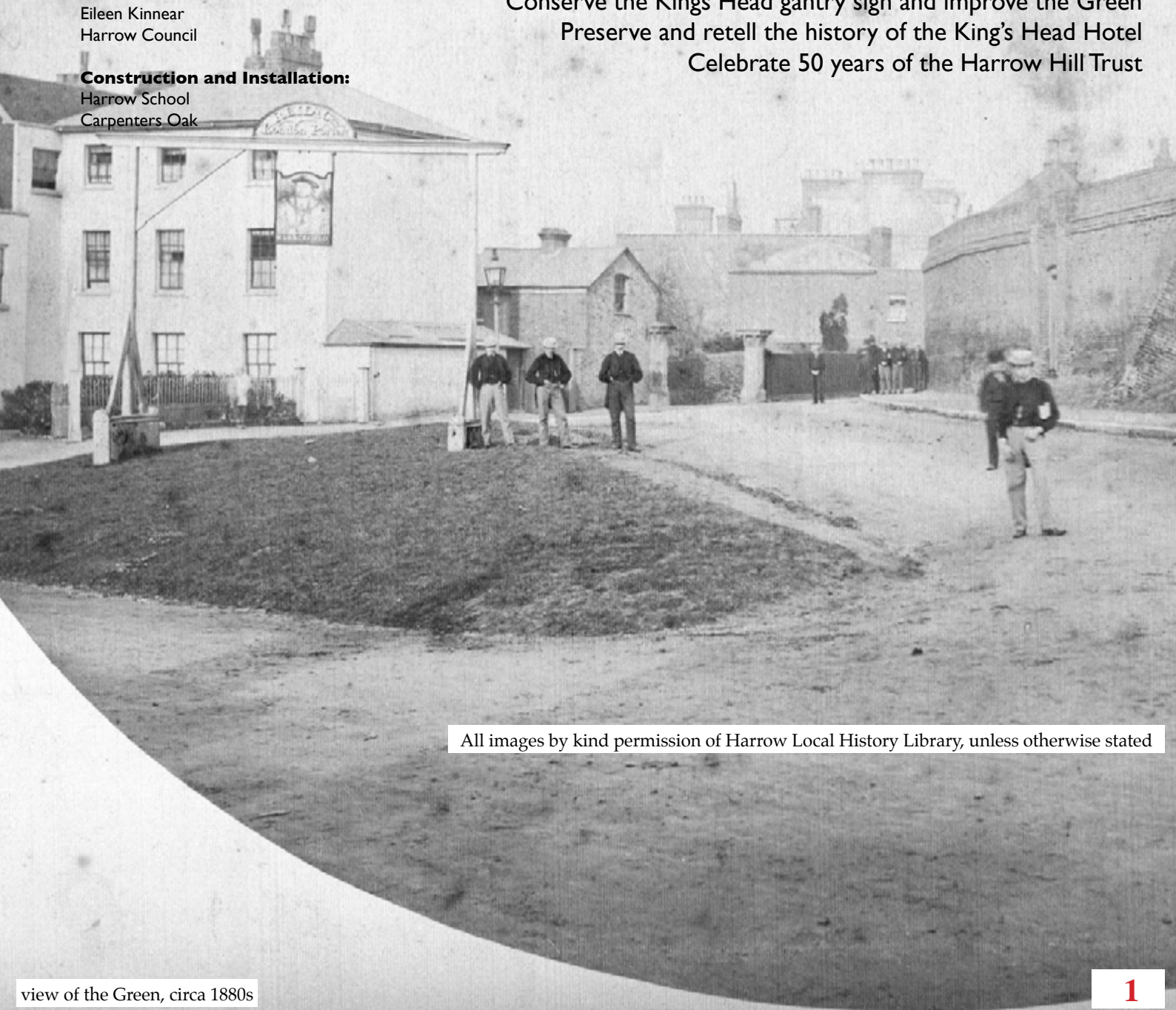
With support from:

Stephen Woodward
Ann Gate
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Harrow Council

Construction and Installation:

Harrow School
Carpenters Oak

Conserve the Kings Head gantry sign and improve the Green
Preserve and retell the history of the King's Head Hotel
Celebrate 50 years of the Harrow Hill Trust



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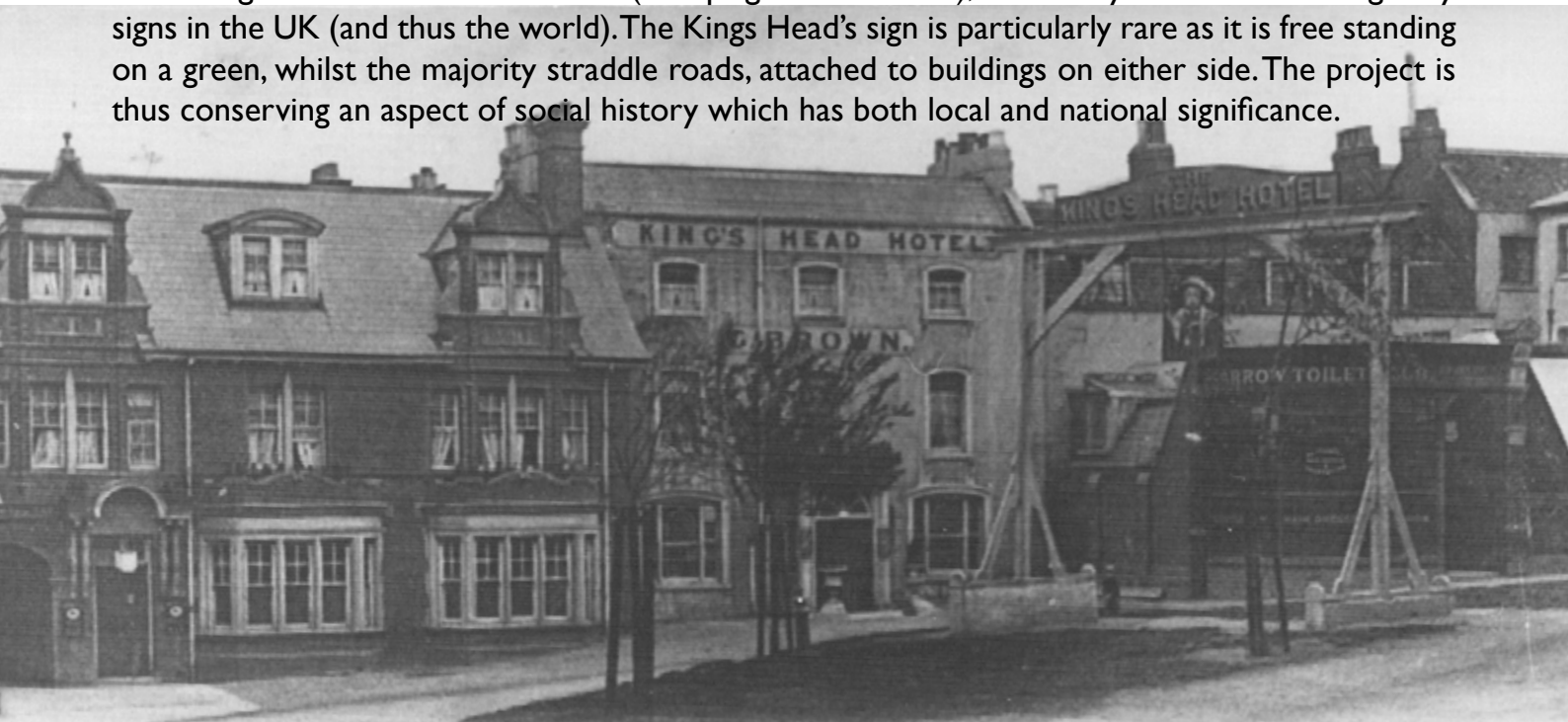
BACKGROUND

At the heart of Harrow on the Hill Conservation Area lies its village green, surrounded on all sides by a variety of local and nationally listed buildings. Many of these are the remnants of Harrow's 19th century town centre - before Harrow expanded dramatically and its centre moved off the Hill. The oldest building by several centuries is the Kings Head Hotel whose gantry sign is the centrepiece of the Green.

According to its facade, there has been an inn or hotel on this site since 1535 and local legend claims that it was built on the site of Henry VIII's hunting lodge. The Hotel was the centre of social and political activity in Harrow for several centuries, and thrived up until the 1970's. In the 1980's a change of management led to its rapid decline and closure, from which it never recovered. The building was saved from destruction by its eventual conversion to private apartments in 2001.

The ownership of the gantry sign was overlooked by this development, leaving it to fall into disrepair. In 2009, the Harrow Hill Trust identified it as being in need of urgent attention. They began a project to conserve the gantry sign as a way of celebrating its 50 years, and also to retell and preserve the history of the King's Head Hotel before its significant former life slipped out of living memory.

According to Historians at CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale), there may be as few as 10 gantry signs in the UK (and thus the world). The Kings Head's sign is particularly rare as it is free standing on a green, whilst the majority straddle roads, attached to buildings on either side. The project is thus conserving an aspect of social history which has both local and national significance.



King's Head Green and Hotel

Harrow-on-the-Hill



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THE GANTRY PROJECT

Research into Harrow's archives showed that the present dilapidated gantry sign was erected as recently as the 1980's, and that it was only the latest in a series of structures dating back to at least the late 18th Century. Along side it were the remains of the Victorian gantry, with evidence of its brick foundation plinths and attached timber planks.

The Trust (in agreement with Harrow's other conservation partners) decided that this rotting 1980's sign was of poor design and construction, with little aesthetic or historic merit; and that the project should be to replace it with a historically appropriate version. The design settled upon by the Harrow Hill Trust is a combination of the historical and practical. It is based closely on the earliest photographic records, capturing the brick plinths and overall structure. However it is extrapolated back in time to the earliest illustration for its simple contours and lack of decoration, which make the structure more resilient to the weather.

After 3 years of very slow progress, establishing the ownership of the Green and gantry and thereby the legality of the replacement project, it was finally given planning and conservation consent in late 2012, allowing the construction phase to quickly move to completion in Spring 2013. A collaboration between the Harrow Hill Trust, Harrow Council, Harrow School, Kenneth Reed and Associates and the Harrow Heritage Trust, the project serves to continue the tradition of updating the gantry to reflect the times.

The Victorian foundations had subsided and were too weak to be re-incorporated within the new gantry, and were removed. Harrow School volunteered its works department to remove the remains and build the new brick foundations. On 4 March 2013, the Kids Committee of the Harrow Hill Trust buried a time capsule containing profiles and pictures of the participants, Trust newsletters, and some special items from their schools, photographs and these pages. Carpenters Oak, a Heritage Oak specialist company, which had been involved in the rebuilding of Windsor Castle following the fire, made and installed the new structure on time. Carpenters Oak donated 39 oak saplings to plant around the Hill as part of their sustainability commitment to replace the oaks used in the new gantry.





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ARCHEOLOGY

In 2011 Hendon & District Archaeological Society were invited to conduct an archaeological dig on the Green, to look for evidence of previous structures, to date the remains, and look for any other artifacts associated with the site.

The foundations of the old remains were excavated, and based on the style of brick used, they were dated to the second half of the 19th Century. On one side, the foundations were built around a large square posthole, indicating the location of an earlier Gantry sign. The posthole was filled with pitch - an historic waterproofing technique; rot was clearly a problem, which explains the Victorian improvement using brick foundations.

A goat tooth was found; local elders can still recall that a goat was kept tethered on the Green. A number of clay pipe bowls and stem fragments were found; pipes were commonly sold in public houses, and frequently had their own mottos embossed on them. An elegant Victorian painted glass button was uncovered and some pottery dated between 1650 and 1800 was found. Victorian Slate pencils and a chalk marble show that the green was a popular haunt for school children. The oldest find was a sea urchin fossil dated to the Eocene Epoch (between 56 to 48 million years ago), which is now in the Headstone Manor museum. Also found was the decommissioned gas pipe which connected the two gaslights on the green.



clay pipes



goat tooth



slate pencils and chalk marble



sea urchin



excavated foundations of the gantry sign, and the gas pipe



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THE GANTRY SIGN

Inn signs date from Roman Times, but it was King Richard I who decreed in 1193 that all Inns must have signs. He said that 'Whosoever shall brew ale in the town with the intention of selling it must hang out a sign; otherwise he shall forfeit his ale'. From then on Inns and signs became inseparable.

The term gantry describes a structure which uses a horizontal beam to support signage - most commonly seen these days on our motorways. Gallows is also a prefix used to describe such signs, more often than not in historical contexts, and especially associated with public houses. The colourful phrase draws a comparison between the swinging sign and those unfortunate criminals sentenced to capital punishment. Evidently, some signs were actually put to this use, but not at the King's Head - although there is reference to a whipping post on the Green.

Archive images reveal that several gantry structures have existed on this spot over the years. The sign has been regularly updated, in keeping with the styles of the age and also reflecting the fortunes of the hotel: the oldest depiction is the painting 'Entrance to Harrow' by John Inigo Richards (now hanging in Harrow School's Speech Room Gallery) - a simple, rustic design. The sign achieved the peak of style and sophistication with its Victorian iteration - its substantial brick foundations, bright painted finish, and decorative moldings. A bold but inauthentic mock Tudor version is shown in postcards from the 1960s. It reflects a place left behind by modern life, looking to the past. The dilapidated gantry sign that sparked the project was, according to local sources, erected by the then Landlord following the great storm of 1987. It was a pale imitation of any of any of the structures that went before it.



The Centre of Harrow, by T Brandard, 1793



The gantry, circa 1900



The gantry, circa 1960



The "rotten" gantry, 2009



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HARROW AND THE KINGS HEAD HOTEL

The earliest recorded settlement on the Hill is St Mary's Church, sited at its highest point; it is mentioned in the Domesday book of 1086, but is likely to have been built on the site of an earlier Christian and pagan places of worship; Harrow comes from the Anglo Saxon word Hergae, meaning 'heathen shrine'.

Founded in 1572 by Royal Charter, the first building of Harrow School was situated within 100 yards of the Church, although subsequent extensions to the School have spread across the hilltop. By the mid 18th Century, a town proper had emerged around these important institutions, with weekly markets and annual fairs held on church field running behind West Street to Bessborough Road.

The Kings Head Hotel was built further South along the backbone of the Hill. The existing facade bears the date 1535 (within the reign of Henry VIII) although again there is no documentary evidence that it is truly that old. The first mention of the Kings Head Hotel is in the St Mary's Vestry Minute Book of 1706, and the first licensee listed is dated 1719. The original building burned down and was rebuilt in 1750.





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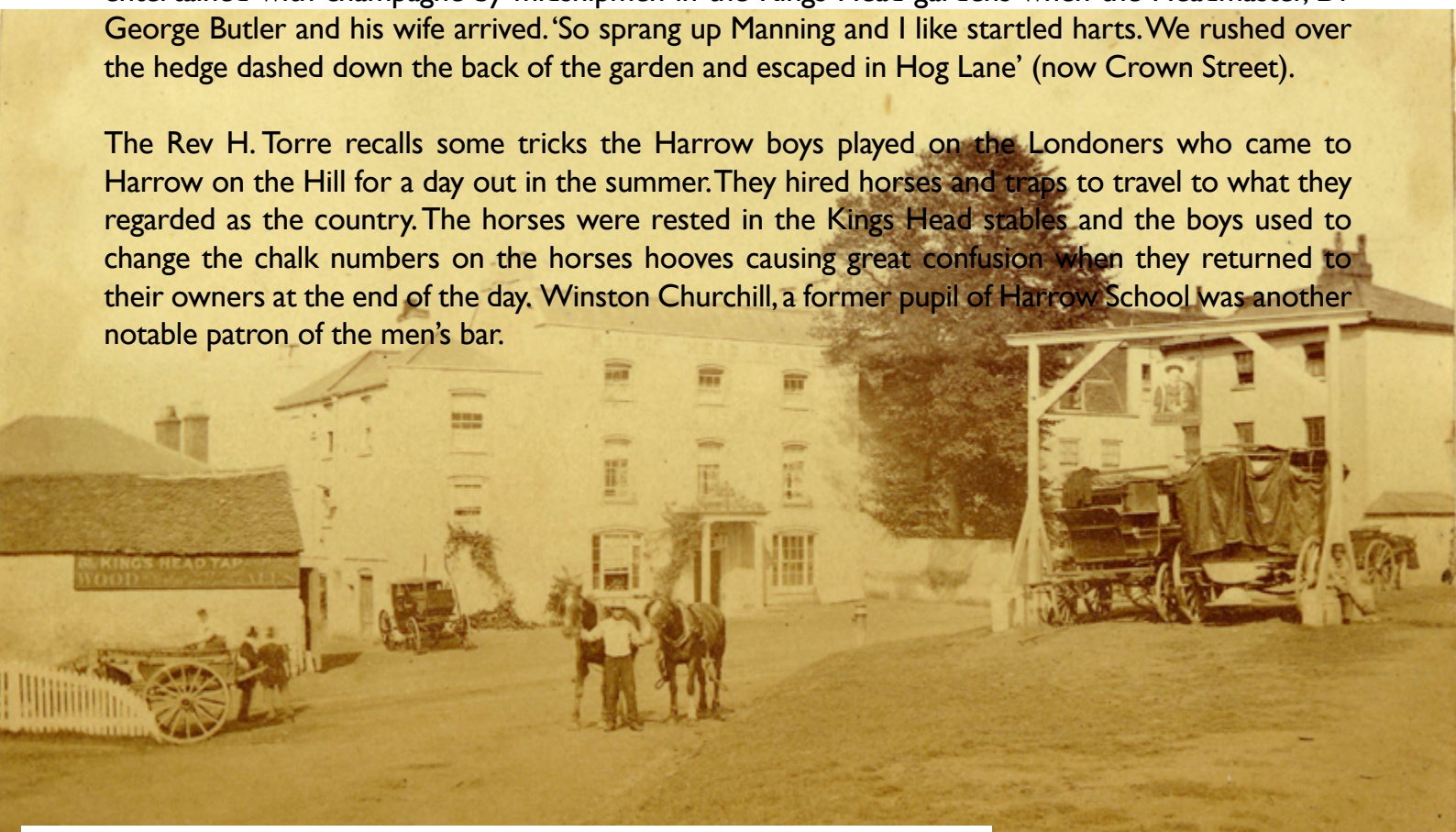
The name of the Kings Head Hotel appears to refer to King Henry VIII, whose portrait has adorned the King's Head sign since at least 1770. Evidence of a link to Henry extends as far as records that he took ownership of the Manor of Harrow from Archbishop Cranmer, only to sell it to Sir Edward North a few months later. Local legend claims that Henry VIII had a shooting lodge on the site of the Kings Head, however this has not been substantiated.

As part of the Royal Charter for Harrow School, John Lyon set up a trust for the purpose of maintaining various local roads, including the main route to London - the Harrow Road. The Kings Head had extensive stables, and was no doubt a very important transport hub until after the arrival of the railways in the 19th Century.

Being the Hill's other main establishment, Harrow School's history intertwines with that of the King's Head. In 1771, following the early death of the school's previous Head, Benjamin Heath was unanimously elected as a replacement by the governors. As a former Eton Master, Heath's appointment was deeply unpopular with the boys, whose favoured candidate, the old Harrovian (but under qualified) Samuel Parr, was passed over. Several boys, including the future Marquis of Wellesley - elder brother of the great Duke of Wellington, proceeded to violently protest by removing Heath's carriage from the King's Head's yard to the 6th form ground and utterly destroying it.

Charles Wordsworth, later Bishop of St Albans, recalls how he and fellow pupil Manning were being entertained with champagne by midshipmen in the Kings Head gardens when the Headmaster, Dr George Butler and his wife arrived. 'So sprang up Manning and I like startled harts. We rushed over the hedge dashed down the back of the garden and escaped in Hog Lane' (now Crown Street).

The Rev H. Torre recalls some tricks the Harrow boys played on the Londoners who came to Harrow on the Hill for a day out in the summer. They hired horses and traps to travel to what they regarded as the country. The horses were rested in the Kings Head stables and the boys used to change the chalk numbers on the horses hooves causing great confusion when they returned to their owners at the end of the day. Winston Churchill, a former pupil of Harrow School was another notable patron of the men's bar.



The Kings Head circa 1860s. Reproduced by kind permission of the keepers and Governors of Harrow School



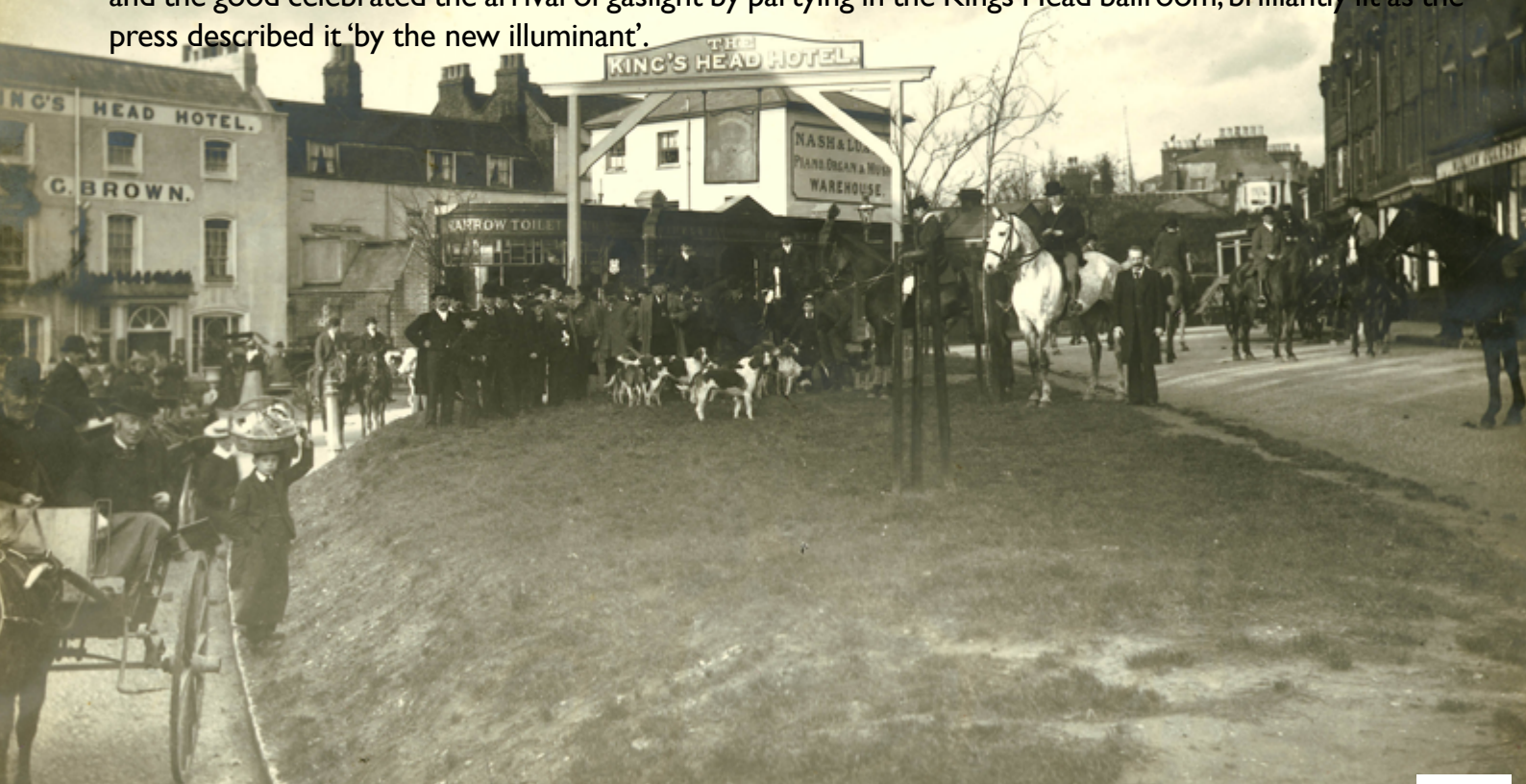
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The Kings Head has had a colourful history including being a haven for robbers. The Old Bailey records show that in 1792 John Mann, having stolen buttons from his employer William Fenn sought haven there. When trying to escape both Mann and Fenn fell into a dung heap. Following this, two highwaymen, Robert Simpson and Robert Roberts were captured with pistols at the Kings Head in Harrow and subsequently hanged in 1795 at Tyburn.

During the 19th Century, the Kings Head became the foremost social and political venue in the town, as a Vestry where people met to discuss matters of importance to the community. William Winkley was Clerk to the Vestry in the early 1800s and it is recorded that in 1821 he made a speech on behalf of a Tory candidate from the top of the Kings Head bus which ran twice daily to London and back. It was here also that Marion Hewlett ran a branch of the Band of Mercy, an organisation that looked after horses and donkeys, a forerunner of the RSPCA. Young people attended her meetings which she saw as an opportunity for social and educational activities. She subsequently began Art classes and these activities were the forerunner of the Harrow Technology College established in the later years of the 19th Century.

As Harrow developed and expanded, it did so along the ridge of the hill towards and around the King's Head. This development inevitably lacked much in the way of strategic planning, resulting in overcrowding, with its associated health issues. There were outbreaks of cholera in 1847 and 1848, which led to the setting up of a public health enquiry in 1849; evidence from local residents was heard at the Kings Head by the General Board of Health. There were several reports about the sewage from one household contaminating the fresh water supply of a neighbour further down the slope. A few years later the great and the good celebrated the arrival of gaslight by partying in the Kings Head ballroom, brilliantly lit as the press described it 'by the new illuminant'.





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In 1850 there were nearly 100 tradesmen listed in Smith's handbook - the School was a good source of revenue for hat makers and haircutters! With the King's Head established as a social and political centre, the Green became the commercial centre of the town. The London County Bank was built in 1883, the Fire Station in 1888, making use of the horses stabled at the King's Head. The impressive building occupied by Incanto was built as a Post Office, which operated there until 1914, when it was relocated to Greenhill. The building now occupied by Cafe Cafe began life as a public hall, which in turn became a cinema named the Cosy. The Council Office, squeezed in between the Fire Station and Bank in 1914, was used by Harrow Council until the 1980's.

In 1881 the Kings Head was chosen as the new venue for the Harrow Masonic Lodge, relocating here from the Railway Hotel in order to provide "more convenient premises in order to promote the welfare of the Lodge and at the same time obtain better accommodation for the Brethren". The Lodge met at the King's Head until 1936, apart from the period between 1915 (when the hotel was requisitioned for war purposes) and 1922. In 1936 the lodge relocated again to Rest Hotel, Kenton due to "a number of small incidents at the King's Head ending with a dispute over the use of the car park."

In July 1899, having taken tea at the Kings Head, engineer Edwin Sewell and Major Richer drove down Grove hill and into history as the first people to die in a car accident. Their Daimler Wagonette, under test for regular use by the Army and Navy Store, suffered the collapsed of its rear wheel and collided with a brick wall. In 1924 there appeared a 10 mph sign!

According to its visitors book in use between 1894 and 1934 the King's head was patronised by a number of historic figures, such as [Ignacy Jan] Paderewski, George Grossmith, Lord Kitchener, George V and Queen Mary, George Robey, Bruce Bairnsfather plus numerous sporting teams, including the England football squad in 1934. It is believed to have been a tradition for the FA cup finalists to stay at The Kings Head, before traveling the short distance to Wembley on the day of the match.

post office and shops on the high street next to the green



Newspaper clipping showing the local Fire Brigade's demonstration on the Green in July 1893



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King George V visited the Hill in 1912, the cause of much celebration. He stayed at the King's Head, and attended Harrow school to inspect a Guard of Honour.

The Metropolitan line extension from Baker Street to Harrow was completed in 1880, and to mark the occasion there was a buffet lunch for 250 guests at the Kings Head. Horse drawn carriages would meet the train to take people up to the Hill. Despite being called "Harrow on the Hill", the station is logically (in engineering terms) situated on the plains below the Hill, in the then adjacent village of Greenhill. Sandwiched between the Metropolitan line to the south and the Midland Railway line to the North, Greenhill underwent rapid development during the 20th century to become the thriving commercial centre for the whole Borough.

In the midst of this boom, partly due to its natural topography, but also by the efforts of Harrow School to create a green-belt around it, the Hill escaped both the positive and negative effects of economic growth. It was preserved as a unique living historical and architectural artifact, but it also became isolated from the commercial lifeblood of the wider community. The establishment of



The high Street decorated for the visit by King George V in 1912



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Greenhill as Harrow town centre lead directly to the decline of the Hill and its green as a commercial centre. It is ironic that the feature that inspired its original settlement - its dramatic contours - aided its decline, abetted by the railway.

The King's Head shared this commercial decline. From its heyday at the turn of the last century, by the 1960's it had become a rather unglamorous drinking men's pub. It had notoriety as having one of the last men only bars in the country, which was taken over one evening by topless female protesters (although it's possible that this was a cynical publicity stunt!). Its last infamous landlord drove the business into decline; he lost his license and rather than sell the pub, he closed it and turned into a B&B for asylum seekers, which itself closed a few years later. Despite its sad end, local residents have fond memories of the lovely gardens, the watered down beer and the sense of history. They still reminisce about courting, wedding receptions, wakes and general celebrations of life at the Kings Head.

Despite its tribulations, the Green has always remained at the heart of the community. It forms the centre piece of the Conservation Area's core shopping district which has enjoyed several regeneration projects. On the Green itself, the Harrow Hill Trust installed a bench in memory of local historian Don Walter's wife, Sheila, which has proved to be a well used amenity. The Green is also the venue for a time honoured tradition of carol singing, which takes place on the last Sunday in advent around the Christmas tree, enjoyed by many residents, young and old.



The gardens of the Kings Head



The dining room in the Kings Head



A lounge in the Kings Head



A bar in the Kings Head



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PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL.

To the Editor of Punch.



SIR,

May 6th, 1844.

Under any other circumstance than the one I am about to allude to, I would not for a moment condescend to address you ; but my connexion with a young lady (in fact, the object of my affections), renders it imperative that I should take notice of a piece of rudeness which certain persons was guilty of on Monday the 6th inst. On the day mentioned, business, or rather—(for why should I mince matters)—pleasure called me to Arrow-on-the-Hill. In the company of her to whom I have already given my ear, and ope to give my and, I dined at the King's Head, intending after dinner to enjoy, with my cigar and my brandy and water, that delightful conversation which can only grow out of the union of 2 soles, I mean, of course, love. Mary Ann and me retired from the dinner-table to the beautiful gardens adjacent to the house, and seated on a rustic bench, enjoying the beauties of nature, we were almost as appy as two engaged ones could be, when we was—were, I mean—disturbed by shouts of laughter coming from a certain party. I was induced to think (and Mary Ann thought so too), that we were the subjects of their idle merriment. We were confirmed in our opinion when we saw a individual take out a sketch-book and commence (as I suppose) taking off our heads. Now, sir, what there could be so amusing in us we cannot see ; but perhaps what the poet BYRON observes,

" He jests at scars, who never felt
The pangs that wait, that wait on love,"

will explain it. In conclusion, let me inform you, sir, that in my opinion fun is one thing, and that jesting with the finest feelings of our nature is another, and am, sir, &c.,

Islington.

AUGUSTUS BANGS.

[Can the above have reference to the preceding sketch, which has been forwarded to us anonymously ?—*Ed. of Punch.*]