

What's in a name? The George & Vulture, City of London

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In Charles Dickens's first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, he mentions a tavern called The George & Vulture at least 15 times and describes it in his novel as "very good, old fashioned and comfortable" (Dickens 1837). As he lived nearby in rented rooms at Holborn when he began writing this novel, Dickens knew the area well and frequently drank there himself. Intrigued by the reference to a vulture I set out to see if it still existed and if I could discover how it got its name.

Walking along Lombard Street in the historic City of London you come across a narrow, dark alley called Castle Court. On one corner of this court is a small restaurant that is open only at lunch time during the week. It has an old style lamp above it saying 'George & Vulture' and a sign with a very strange two-headed bird (see photos). The menu includes traditional fare such as steak and kidney pie, roast beef and Welsh

rarebit and is aimed at providing lunch for City workers at this revered 'chop house'. It has also been the home of the City Pickwick Club for many years and is the venue for the Christmas Day Dickens family gathering (Wikipedia 2015). Peering through the windows you can see a dark wooden interior further suggesting it harks back to a bygone era that Dickens would probably recognise. So, having established that a premises called George & Vulture exists the next question was where did the name come from?

Other than a drawing of a vulture-like bird on a notice near the door (see photo) there was nothing visible to show the connection so the next step was an internet search. This revealed there has been an inn on this site called The George since the 12th century and that the building had been destroyed and rebuilt several times including after the Great Fire in 1666 (Wikipedia 2015). This

much seems well-established but the origin of the reference to a vulture is more mysterious with at least two explanations.



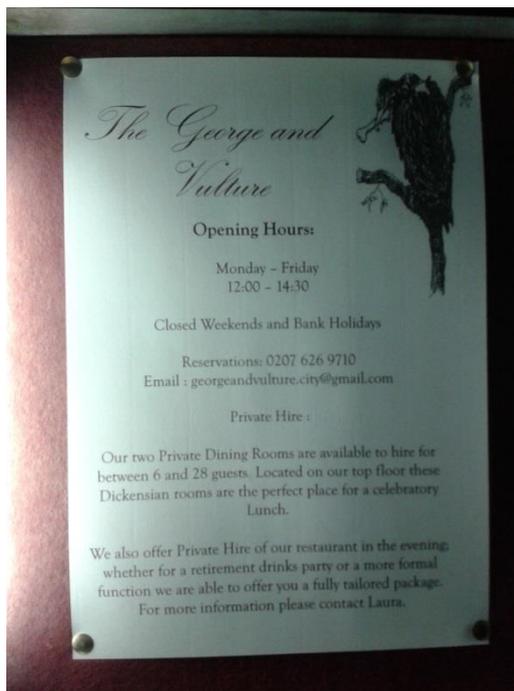
One suggests that after the Great Fire rebuild, “the landlord agreed to lease part of it to a local wine merchant who had lost his own shop. The only hiccup was his sign – a live vulture which he promptly tethered above the entrance to the George. Its squawking and flapping so alarmed customers that the leaseholder decided to absorb the name ‘vulture’ and after years of captivity, release the beast into the sky” (Green 2012).

The other explanation supposes the “name comes from a vicious parrot belonging to an early landlord. The parrot was nicknamed The Vulture by those customers unfortunate to be attacked” (Pulley 2006). So was there really a vulture involved in the name? We will probably never know but if you are in London and want to see a unique place with literary connections the George & Vulture is well worth a visit.



Acknowledgments.

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References

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