Designators in Inn-Sign Names in Medieval and Renaissance England

By Juliana de Luna, Siren Herald (Julia Smith)

This is based on a collection of citations of over 4000 sign names in medieval, Renaissance, and early modern England; they date from the 13th century to 1650. Some of these names are taverns, others are named houses of various sorts: some single-family dwellings, others boarding houses. However, all have heraldic sign-style names or religious/story based sign names. There are many other types of house-names as well, often derived from the name of the owner or a specific feature (Leadenporch, for example). However, these are not treated here. Analysis of the sign name is a work in progress.

The earliest houses with names are attested around 1300; Lillywhite has a few citations before 1300, but other sources give the first citations shortly after 1300. Bynames that appear to be derived from sign names date to the mid-13th century, like Rob’ de la belle 1222 or Emma Attegreyhon 1240.

The most common pattern is no designator at all. However, a variety of words and structures are used.

**Inn:**

the X+Inn: First appears 1454

le Georges Inne 1454 Cox
hospicium vocatum le George Inne 1501 Cox
le Whytehorse Inne 1543 Gairdner & Brodie
the White Harte Inn 1571 Cox
the Redlyon Inn 1638 Dale
the George Inne 1649 Cox
the Kings head-Inne 1649 Cox

X+Inn: First appears 1605

Star Inn 1605 Cox
Spurre Inn 1607 Crisp

Inn of the X: First appears 1540

the Inne of the Crowne 1540 Cox
Inne of the Swanne 1541 Gairdner and Brodie

Inn at the X: First appears 1638

The Great Inn at the Bell 1638 Dale
the Inn at the Bell 1638 Dale
Inn called the X: First appears 1440

- an Inne called the herte and pe Swanne 1440 MED s.v. Swan
- inn called The Crayne 1527 Cox
- I messuage or inn called the three Cupps 1579 Fry vol 3
- the Inn called the Castle 1580 Fry vol 3
- I messuage or inn called le Crowne 1589 Fry vol 3
- the message or inn called the Beare 1590 Fry vol 3
- I message, tenement, or inn, called le Crossekeyes 1601 Fry vol 3
- Inn called the Lyon 1601 Cox
- an Inne... called... the fawcon 1604 Cox

**Tavern:**

the X+Tavern: First appears 1543

- le Whyte Horse taverne 1543 Gairdner and Brodie
- the Rose taverne 1560 Nichols (Machyn)
- the Roose Tavern 1579 Fry vol 3
- the Rose Tavern 1579 Fry vol 3
- The Greyhound Tavern 1638 Dale
- the Mermayd Tavern 1638 Dale
- the Nag's Head Tavern 1638 Dale
- the Starre Tavern 1638 Dale
- the Sun Tavern 1638 Dale
- the Sun Tavern 1638 Dale
- the Bull Taverne 1644 Cox

X+Tavern: First appears 1636

- Croffe Taverne neere Charing Croffe 1636 Taylor Travels

Tavern at the X: First appears 1357

- La Taverne atte Goot 1357 MED s.v. got
- Le Taverne atte Belle 1380-1 MED s.v. belle
- le Taverne atte belle 1380 Sharpe, vol 2

Tavern called the X: First appears 1514

- the tavern called le Bell 1514 Fry vol 3
- my great messuage or tavern called the Bisshoppshead 1582 Fry vol 3
- the tenement or wine tavern commonly called the Popesheade 1583 Fry vol 3
- the gt. Taverne called the King's head 1638 Dale

**Brewhouse:**
the X+Brewhouse: First appears 1638
The Peacock Brewhouse  1638  Dale
The Sunne Brewhouse  1638  Dale
The Bolt and Tun Brewhouse  1638  Dale
The Crown Brewhouse  1638  Dale

Brewhouse called the X: First appears 1509
I large messuage or brewhouse or hospice called the Whitebeer  1509  Fry vol 3
I brew-house called le Belle  1537  Fry vol 3
brewhouse and garden called le Bell  1537  Fry vol 3
a brewhouse called the Redd Lyonn  1580  Fry vol 3
I messuage or brewhouse commonly called the Hartes Horne  1583  Fry vol 3
I messuage or brewhouse called le White Harte  1589  Fry vol 3
that messuage and brewhouse called le Flower de Luce  1591  Fry vol 3
the brewhouse called the Three Kings  1597  Fry vol 3

House:
the X House: First appears c. 1382
j tenementum… vocatum le Herynghows.  c. 1382  MED s.v. hering

X House: First appears 1497
Horne howse  1497  Cox
Circittes [surcoats] Howse  1564  Lillywhite

House called the X: First appears 1556
house called the Bell and Cheker  1579  Fry vol 3
[my] house called the Maydenhed  1580  Fry vol 3
said house called le Flowere de Luce  1592  Fry vol 3
my house called the Three Cranes  1598  Fry vol 3
the howse called the Talbott  1626  Cox
The House called the Rames head  1638  Dale

House called X: There is a single example that omits the article, in 1556-8
a house called Sargyantes Heade  1556-8  Cox

Hostel(rie): This rarely used term first appears shortly before 1400
hostell callid the Bulhed  1425 Burford
This gentil hostelrye That highte the Tabard  1387-95  MED s.v. belle
The White Lion a common hosterie  1530 Lillywhite

Messuage:
Messuage called the X: First appears 1403
A messuage called 'the belle on the hoop' 1403  MED s.v. belle
mess' voc' le Hynd [messuage vocat] 1509 Cox
I large messuage or brewhouse or hospice called the Whitebeer 1509  Fry vol 3
the... messuage and garden called le Bell 1537  Fry vol 3
the messuage called the three Cuppes 1579  Fry vol 3
I messuage called the Boores Heade 1581  Fry vol 3
I messuage called the Bishops Hed 1582  Fry vol 3
the messuage called le Blewe Bore 1591  Fry vol 3
the messuage called the Cock 1594  Fry vol 3
the capital messuage called the George 1596  Fry vol 3
the messuage called the Green Dragon 1598  Fry vol 3
the messuage called the Crowne 1601  Fry vol. 3

Messuage called X: First appears 1594
There is a single example without the article.
the messuage called Redd Lyon 1594  Fry vol. 3

Tenement:

Tenement called the X: First appears 1451-2
the tenement... called the harpe. 1451-2  MED s.v. harpe
Unum tenementum...vocatum Le Belle on the Hope 1455  MED s.v. belle
my tenement... called The Cardinall Hatt 1579  Fry vol 3
a tenement called the Redd Cocks 1582  Fry vol 3
a tenement called the Fry vol. 3enge Panne 1582  Fry vol 3
the tenement called the Maydenheade 1582  Fry vol 3
I tenement called the White Hart 1583  Fry vol 3
the tenement or wine tavern commonly called the Popesheade 1583  Fry vol 3
a tenement there called le Rose 1588  Fry vol 3
the tenement called the Bull 1590  Fry vol 3
my tenement called the Fawcon 1593  Fry vol. 3

Tenement X: There is a single example of this form; it first appears 1397.
Tenement Pope 1397  MED s.v. pope

Selde is an early term that falls out of use not long after 1400.
la selde coronata 1384  Keene & Harding
Crownselde 1395  Keene & Harding

Hospitium [of the] X: Latinized Hospitium and related terms take a variety of structures. Some give the sign-name in the Latin genitive, others using vernacular; they first appear 1428
De hospitio de le Suanne 1428  MED s.v. Swan
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hospitium cum signo Sancti Georgii</td>
<td>1455</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicium de le Saresyn hede</td>
<td>1461-3</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospicio de Boryshede</td>
<td>1471-2</td>
<td>MED s.v. bore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospic'm de la Hert</td>
<td>1476</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inter hospium Arietis</td>
<td>1488</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospitium de le Hert</td>
<td>1492</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicio le horne</td>
<td>c.1515</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicium albe leonis</td>
<td>1512</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicio leoun</td>
<td>c. 1515 Cox</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hospitium called the X forms:** These take vernacular sign names; they first appear in the 1430s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In nouo hospicio ... vocata le Crone</td>
<td>1431-4</td>
<td>MED s.v. coroune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicii vulgariter Belle nucupati</td>
<td>1443</td>
<td>MED s.v. belle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospicium ... vocatum ..le Belle on the hope</td>
<td>1453</td>
<td>MED s.v. belle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tenementum sive hospicium ... vocatum Savagesynne, alias vocatum le Belle on the hope</td>
<td>1453</td>
<td>MED s.v. savage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicio quod vocatur George</td>
<td>1458</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicio quod vocatur Bell</td>
<td>1458</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De hospicio nuncupato le Crown</td>
<td>1474-5</td>
<td>MED s.v. coroune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>messuage sive hospicum vocat le Unicorn</td>
<td>1547-53</td>
<td>Rendle &amp; Norman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in hospicio vocatum le Sterre</td>
<td>1497</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospicium vocatum le George Inne</td>
<td>1501</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospice vocat' the Georgh [sic]</td>
<td>1540</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospic' voc' Le George</td>
<td>1550</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Designator + Sign:** First appear 1430-1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sign</th>
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<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the messuage called the Signe of the Blew Boor and now called the Bolte and the Tunne</td>
<td>1581</td>
<td>Fry vol 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the great messuage called the Sign of the Hand</td>
<td>1582</td>
<td>Fry vol 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the messuage and garden called the sign of the Bell and now called the sign of the Firye Ball</td>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Fry vol 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I messuage called le sign of the White Bell</td>
<td>1593</td>
<td>Fry vol 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I messuage called &quot;le signe of the greene dragon&quot;</td>
<td>1598</td>
<td>Fry vol 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my messuage or brewhouse called the sign of the Flower de Luce</td>
<td>1591</td>
<td>Fry vol 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my house called the sign of the Sonne</td>
<td>1601</td>
<td>Fry vol 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in nouum hospicium ubi corona est signum</td>
<td>1430-1</td>
<td>MED s.v. coroune</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hospitium cum signo Sancti Georgii</td>
<td>1455</td>
<td>Cox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**On the Hoop:** One early form related to sign is X on the hoop; it first appears in 1323 (with the first non-Lillywhite citation dated to 1369). It is also sometimes used, as sign is, with other designators:
George on the Hoope 1369 Cox
la Bel on the Hop 1380 Sharpe, vol 2
[the] Aungell on the hope 1385 MED s.v. flour-de-lice
le castell on the hope 1389 Sharpe, vol 2
la Bole on the hope 1390 Keene & Harding
le Cristofre on the hoop 1405 Sharpe, vol 2
Tabard on the hope 1411 Cox
Seynt Andrewescros on the hoop 1405 Sharpe, vol 2
le Caterine on the hoop 1434 Sharpe, vol 2
Seynt Andrewescros on the hoop 1405 Sharpe, vol 2
le Belle and le Chekyr on the hoop 1478 Sharpe, vol 2
le Brewhous atte Cok on the hoop 1450 Sharpe, vol 2
[a hostelry called] The Belle on the Hope 1387 MED s.v. belle
A messuage called 'the belle on the hoop' 1403 MED s.v. belle
that messuage called The Harp on the Hoop 1583 Fry vol 3
[His tenement called] le Cok in the houpe 1348 MED s.v. hop
le Maydyn in the hop 1413 Sharpe, vol 2
le Peye super le hoop 1368 Sharpe, vol 2
le Cony super le hoop 1455 Sharpe, vol 2
le molyn sur le hop a.1424 MED s.v hop
[The brewhouse at] le Hood sur le Hoop 1384 MED s.v hop
le Got atte hope 1363 Keene & Harding
le Castel atte hoop 1363 Sharpe, vol 2

Lack of Articles: Most inn names derived from signs include an article, but there are a few vernacular (or partially vernacular) forms with a designator and without an article.

the messuage called Redd Lyon 1594 Fry vol. 3
signe of three Conies 1603 Kingsford (Stow)
the signe of three Cuppis 1540 Cox
a house called Sargyantes Heade 1556-8 Cox
Hospicio de Boryshed 1471-2 MED s.v.bore
hospicio leoun c. 1515 Cox
hospicii vulgariter Belle nucupati 1443 MED s.v. belle
hospicio quod vocatur George 1458 Cox
hospicio quod vocatur Bell 1458 Cox
Sources:


Gairdner, James, and R. H. Brodie (editors), *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, London: His Majesties Stationers Office,

Keene, D.J. and Vanessa Harding, *Historical gazetteer of London before the Great Fire: Cheapside; parishes of All Hallows Honey Lane, St Martin Pomary, St Mary le Bow, St Mary Colechurch and St Pancras Soper Lane*, London: Centre for Metropolitan History, 1987.


Middle English Dictionary (MED), online document (derived from the print MED, 2001, University of Michigan Press) [http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/)

