

# Fame, Food & Feathers - at an English Ostrich

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The Ostrich is still England's oldest Inn and nothing can change that. Built originally in 1106 by Milo Crispin as a guest-house for Abingdon Abbey it lays on the Bath Road in Colnbrook village not far from Windsor Castle and less than an hour from the West End.

Before we go on to the 'Fame, Food & Feathers' we should try and establish it's name. After all to our knowledge Ostriches hadn't been introduced to British culture 1000 years ago. Please let me know if you have a local pub in your county by the name of the Hippo & Giraffe for example? Or the Wildebeests Head?

Most people couldn't read or write in the 12th Century. Eton College

just a few miles down the road only opened in a small way 500 years later than the Ostrich opened its doors.

Travellers and the rather static population in this period of English history used pictures or images to identify places. We also used rivers, brooks, woodland and landmarks to find our way around. A Red Lion is a popular name/symbol as a choice for older pubs - there aren't of course any red lions to my knowledge. Although some of us may have thought we'd seen one or two on New Year's Eve.

The Ostrich was probably named after a more common English bird, poultry or game that we hunted and ate - much of the surrounding area was wild woodland and forested such

as the Great Park. In which case the wooden board that hung over the Bath Road from the Inn was a fattened black and white 'native' - perhaps the **Black Crow** and maybe later the **Turkey & Trimmings**. It certainly didn't open as the *Struthio Camelus Camelus* (Latin name ref. ENCYCLOPAEDIA Britannica)

Our Ostrich is in fact derived from the name Oostrbridge or Eastbridge. Although it is interesting to learn that from a search of ancestry websites there were people in the 1800's with the surname Ostrich and there is also an Ostrich Fern - which as you may guess does look like an Ostrich feather. The feathers of course have been used in military uniform particularly in headgear.

## FAME

Shortly after the guest house opened it's doors it became a secular inn under a Saxon name Aegelward, but it achieved real notoriety some years later when the then landlord, John Jarman and his wife were convicted of the murder of Thomas Cole, a Reading clothier which is where some say the brook running through the village got its name - the Colnbrook, known today as Colnbrook.

The murder weapon in this case was a bed built on a trapdoor above the kitchen ; at the touch of a lever, the trap fell, the bed tilted and the sleeping victim was shot down into a vat of boiling water. His possessions were then stolen and it was given out

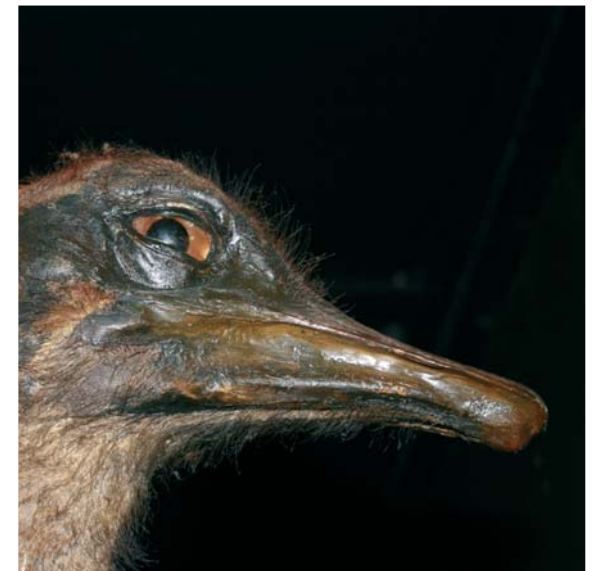
that the victim had decamped without paying his bill.

When I visited the beautifully refurbished restaurant Sam and Sue showed me a miniature version of the original 'death-bed' housed in a small glass box by the warm inglenook fireplace.

When the law caught up with the Jarmans they confessed to 60 murders.

I asked Susan Quayle what they did with the bodies. To the best of her knowledge she had been told that they were thrown into the brook (with the unknown name). I didn't dare suggest the idea that perhaps some of the remains went into humble pie.

What's certain is that the inn was a



**Main image:**  
How many beams & windows can your spot?

**Right:**  
The Infamous Bedroom Trapdoor depicted in glass

An Ostrich inside the Ostrich

well known stop off place for those with some wealth. Indeed its standards remain high today without the accommodation options !

(Some references from: The David & Charles Book of **Historic English Inns** by Ted Bruning & Keith Paulin "our vote goes to the Ostrich as the oldest inn")

Today the Ostrich has been given new feathers and plumage. It had become somewhat ruffled in it's interior and the new owners have invested heavily to maintain the integrity and structure of the building with improvements to the kitchens, décor, function rooms, car park and outdoor seating.

It has a homely feeling to it with burning log fires, stone and wood ➡



**Main image:**  
The restaurant  
not far from the  
Colnbrook stream

**Inset:**  
Fine preserved  
timber at it's best

flooring and stripped back beams and hidden alcoves and a hidden well that acts like a sunken chimney, venting cool air from invisible fissures.

Under an old parish agreement the Ostrich still gives a home to the Colnbrook village 19th Century fire engine that was pulled by cart horses. Still painted in the familiar bright red colour with burnished gold trimmings, cart wheels and a type of water churn on top. Water could be retrieved from the brook depending on the location of the fire.

The restaurant also houses the village clock often referred to as the Market Clock as it was mounted on the face of the grocery store at the only point where the 'town' still diverges into 3 different directions.

Currently there is a planning application under dispute and discussion to move the clock and fire truck into a more prominent area on the grounds of the Ostrich so that the current space can be used to expand for residential use.

Whilst writing this piece of history, pictures of Keith Floyd the eccentric cook kept resurfacing in my head - he was in Africa at the time trying to make an omelette with Ostrich eggs in front of 100 or so of their 'mums'. They didn't take too kindly to his culinary efforts and attacked him, the camera crew and wardens. Floyd

swore a lot and had to finally give up the show.

You can be assured that no Ostriches have been hurt or used in the restaurant here at the Ostrich Inn. Bon appetite.