HOW DID HISTORIANS FIND ENGLAND'S OLDEST PUB?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Many English pubs claim to be more than 1,000 years old, but a new investigation says most of these claims are based on weak evidence or modern advertising. A buildings archaeologist working for Historic England used documents, building evidence and tree-ring dating to compare the claims. The strongest candidate is the George Inn in Norton St Philip, Somerset. Its wooden beams suggest that the building was constructed in the late 14th century, and it has been used as an inn since about 1430. Tree-ring dating works because the age of a tree can be calculated by counting its rings. Medieval carpenters usually cut timber while it was still fresh and built with it soon afterwards, so the age of the wood gives a good estimate for when a building was made. The investigation also found that no pubs are actually mentioned in the Domesday Book, despite claims made by several famous inns.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

This story shows why historians need evidence rather than exciting stories. A date printed on a postcard or repeated in a tourist advertisement is not the same as proof. Buildings, documents and tree rings can test popular legends and sometimes replace a famous claim with a much more believable answer.

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

"What makes evidence about an old building trustworthy?"

Source: The Guardian

https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2026/oct/23/oldest-pubs-inns-historic-england-archaeologist