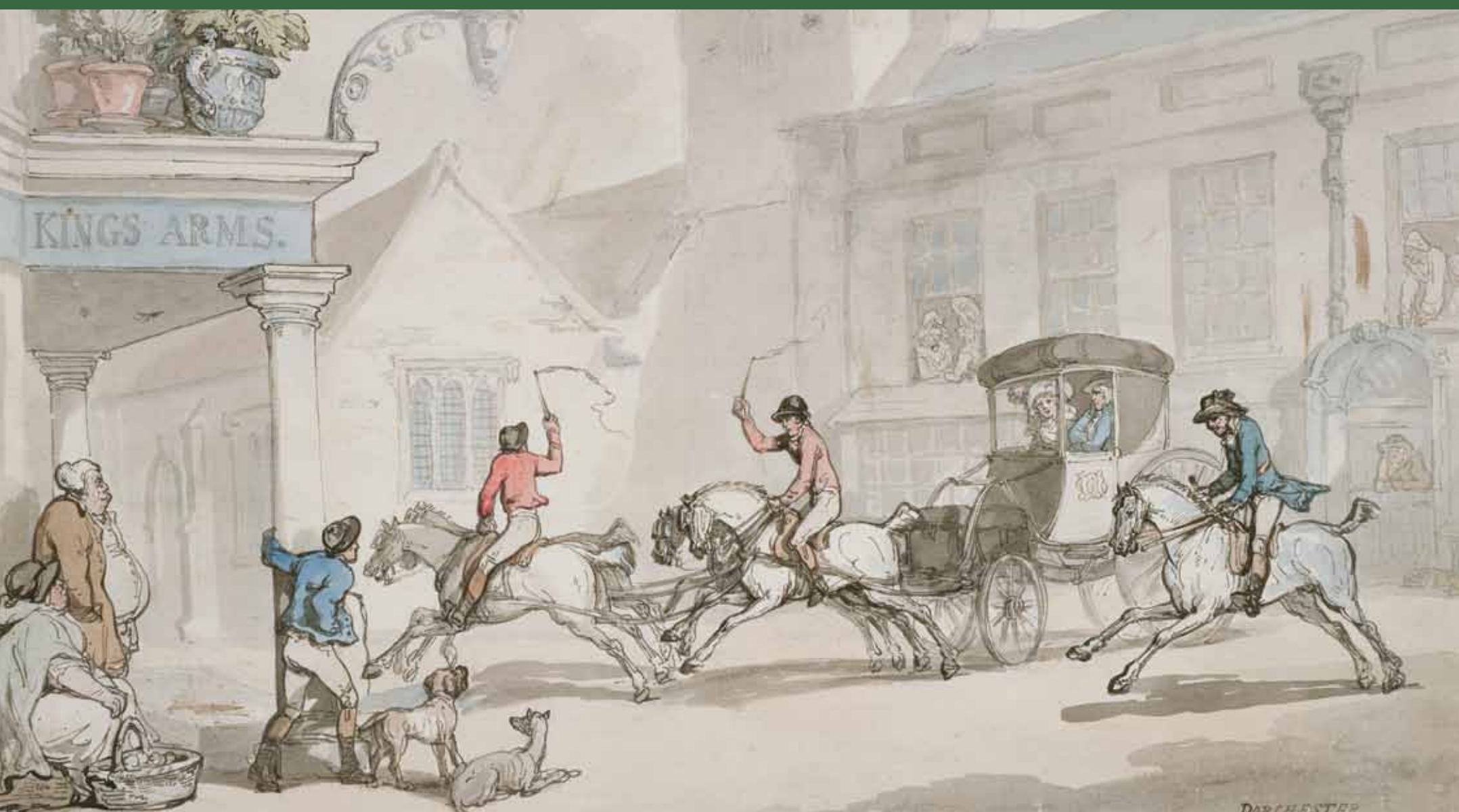


The King's Arms



The King's Arms was one of the main coaching inns in Dorchester. Coaches and carriers also left from the Antelope, the Greyhound and the White Hart. This engraving by Thomas Rowlandson shows a fashionable carriage arriving at the King's Arms while locals look on. The drawing also shows the church that existed before the present All Saints Church was built.



Looking down High East Street in 1922. The King's Arms became a hotel that catered for early tourists arriving by car to explore Thomas Hardy's Wessex, with the help of Herman Lea's guidebooks published in 1913.



The Dorchester Dormouse trail



The side entrance is now for cars. What used to drive through here? Why are there round posts on each side?

“The building ... was the chief hotel in Casterbridge - namely, the King's Arms. A spacious bow-window projected into the street over the main portico, and from the open sashes came the babble of voices, the jingle of glasses, and the drawing of corks. The blinds, moreover, being left unclosed, the whole interior of this room could be surveyed....

‘Why,’ said the old man, “tis a great public dinner of the gentle-people and such like leading folk - wi’ the Mayor in the chair. As we plainer fellows bain’t invited, they leave the winder-shutters open that we may get jist a sense o’t out here... That’s Mr Henchard, the Mayor, at the end of the table, a facing ye; and that’s the Council men right and left...”

Thomas Hardy The Mayor of Casterbridge, 1886.

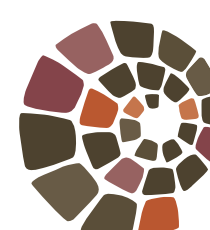
Thomas Hardy’s tale of Michael Henchard, an agricultural worker who, while drunk, sells his wife at a fair, is set in Dorchester. (Casterbridge was Hardy’s name for the town.) In the story Henchard vows not to touch alcohol again, and after many years becomes rich, respected and Mayor of the town. In the scene at the King’s Arms he is at the height of his career. Then his wife and daughter turn up....

Hardy used many real Dorset buildings and places in his novels, although he sometimes moved them about. The King’s Arms was always central to Casterbridge and Dorchester. It is a fine, mainly Georgian building, which had a new frontage and the bow windows added in the 19th century. There are many handsome bow windows in Dorchester from about the same date. The inn is said to have had the first electric lights and private telephone line in Dorchester.

Channon’s Carriage and Motor Works, 1905. Just down the road was Channon’s motor works. In the 19th century Channons built and repaired carriages. In 1905 Ernest Channon designed and built the first car in Dorset. Undeterred by the lack of success of their cars, the Channons also built their own biplane, which they launched off Maiden Castle.



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