

What is the Coat and Badge?

Sam Green 2023

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The [*Coat and Badge*](#) is the name of a rowing race which occurs annually on the River Thames. The “Coat” refers to the jacket (or coat) which the winner is presented with, having a metal badge attached. In this article, I will explain the key terms relating to this event, and also try to explain why it matters.



“Coat and Badge” is also the name of this legendary pub on The Thames.

Historical Background

The race, famously, has a claim to being the longest continuously-held event in sporting history. (It goes back to 1715.) But is it? After all, the Olympics is rather established. But that is every four years; Doggett’s Coat and Badge has been *continuously* held. And the Boat Race (Oxford and Cambridge) is a relatively recent fad, starting in 1856.

The race is organised by the **Worshipful Company of Fishmongers**. Now, what on earth is that? It is a livery company.

A *livery company* is an association of people who are all interested in one craft, or profession. The word “livery” is used to refer to some sort of identifying design. Specifically, it refers to insignia, or emblems, that a person places on something they own or sell. Nowadays, you’ll hear people talk about the livery which an airline decorates their aeroplanes with or the livery on train carriages. But traditionally, “livery” referred to the uniform of a servant: it’s traced to the French *livrée* (literally “handed over”).

These associations of people were called livery companies because they used uniforms (ceremonial dress) to distinguish themselves. Admittedly, then, the designation “livery company” is somewhat arbitrary — these people don’t *sell* things called liveries, they are not the only people in the world to wear liveries or use liveries. Rather,

the term is a historical one that has stuck. The liveries they might wear are shown below:



Queen Elizabeth II surrounded by Royal Watermen, drawn from the **Watermen's and Lightermen's Company** [Kavanagh 2023]

They are “worshipful” because they used to be religious. Many of the religious requirements are now lost. In the Middle Ages, the “freedom of the city” could be obtained only through an apprenticeship. Livery companies could control conditions of employment and regulate goods.

We are [told](#) that:

Most of the companies have now lost control over their trades;

but the Fishmongers still possess powers of search and inspection in Billingsgate fish market,

the Goldsmiths continue to “hallmark” gold and silver,

and the Gunmakers still “proof” small arms.



Fishmongers Hall

The Worshipful Company of Fishmongers is based at Fishmongers Hall. (See where all the companies are based in [this list](#).) This building sits at one end of London Bridge. In the image above, you can see the six pillars and a blank frieze above.

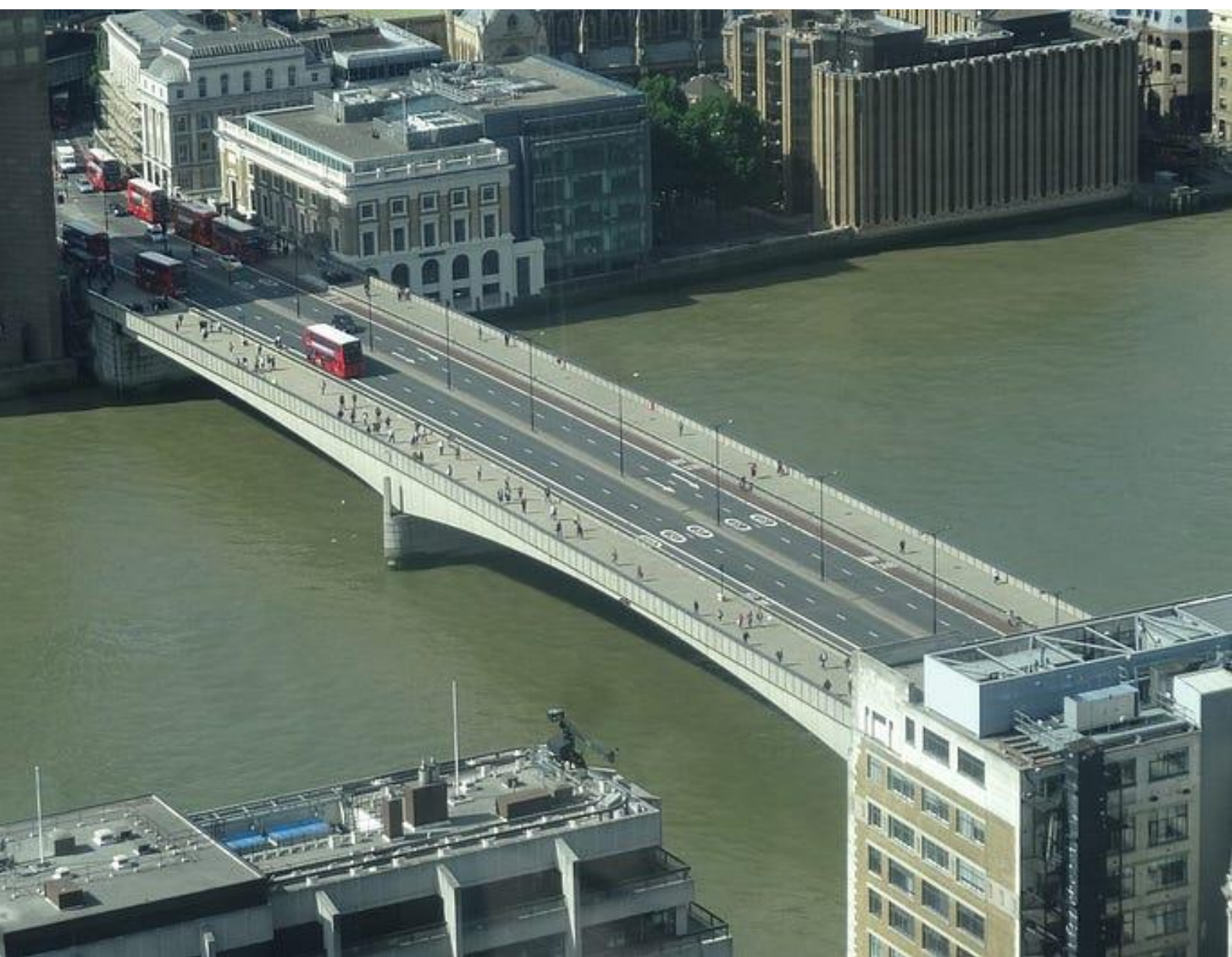


The blank frieze above Fishmonger's Hall

Fishmonger's Hall is opposite Adelaide House, which was the first building in the UK to have ventilation on every floor.



Adelaide House, which is in the Art Deco style. Notice Fishmongers Hall in the left of the image.



London Bridge. The building which has a white wall at the bottom, to the right of where the bridge meets land, is called Glazier's Hall. This is the only livery hall south of the Thames.

Spot Minerva House in the image above. Minerva House was originally home to Grindlays Bank. They were the bankers to the British Army in India. The yellow brick building has very narrow, vertical windows. It was completed in 1983.



Minerva House. She would have been so proud.

What do the people at Fishmongers Hall care about? The website of the Fishmongers Company states that they are interested in “upholding the standards in the trading of fish and shellfish”.



Glazier's Hall. Look how shiny those windows are.

The narrow and vertical windows of Minerva House are a striking contrast to the horizontal bands that make 33 Central recognizable.



This building has horizontal bands. It is called **33 Central**.

From some angles, 33 Central looks like a cyborg stack of Pringles.

The Fishmongers Company count themselves as part of the “Great Twelve”, alongside the Grocer’s Company, the Draper’s Company (dealing in wool and cloth), the Goldsmith’s Company, and the Merchant Taylor’s Company.



Minerva House is to the right of Glaziers Hall. The picture is perhaps taken from Adelaide House.

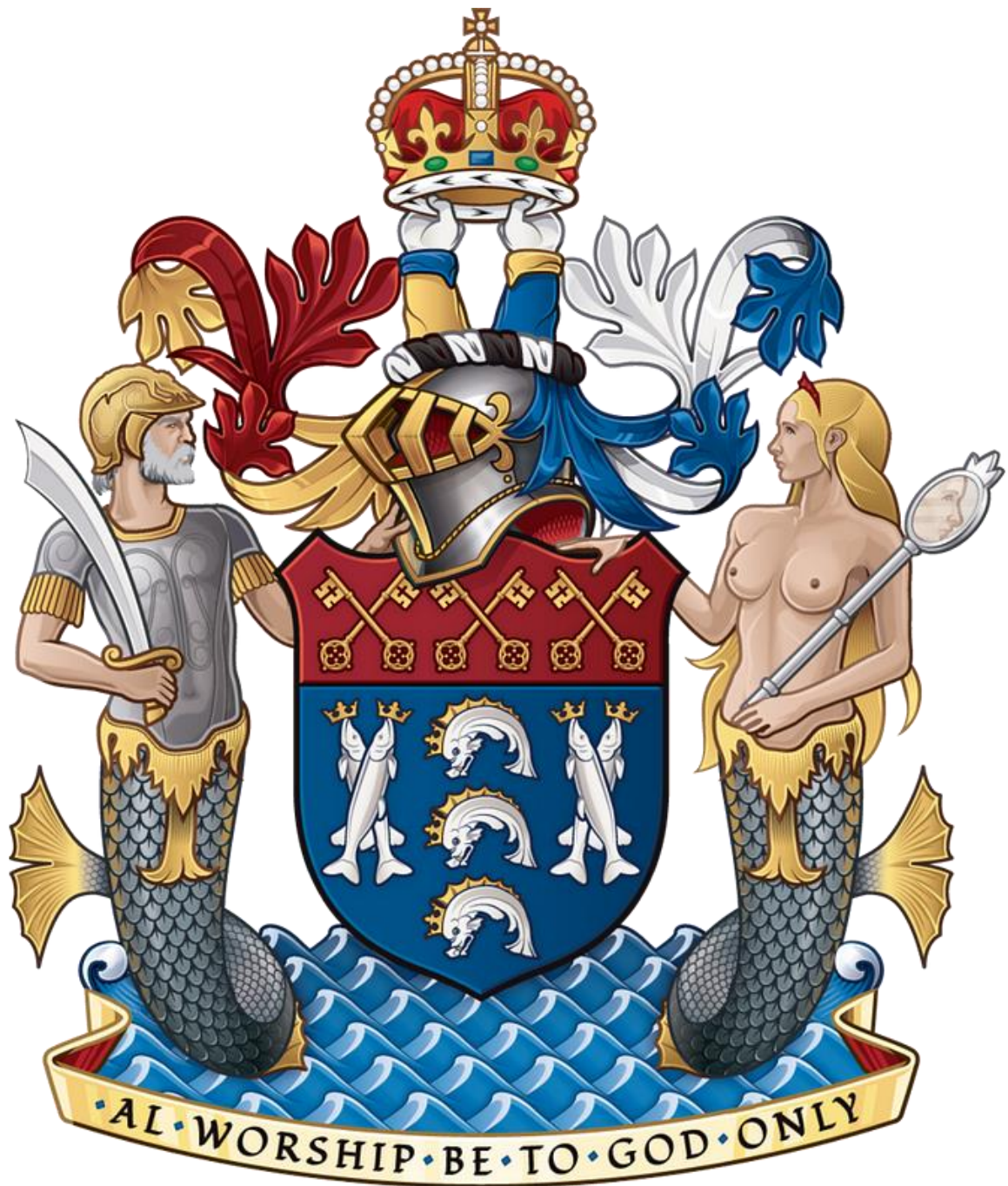
The Fishmonger's Company run the [Discover Seafood](#) website, a brilliant interactive portal that connects you to the seafood that is in-season now.



The Frieze of Fishmongers Hall with 33 Central visible in the background.

They established the Master Fishmonger Standard, a professional certification scheme. To achieve the first certification, you must be actively employed as a fishmonger, have your Food Safety

Qualification (Level 2) and have at least two years of seafood industry experience. The highest certification is an **MFS Master Fishmonger**. If you achieve this, you are an advanced fishmonger. You have at least 10 years of seafood industry experience, own your own fishmonger business — and you have excelled in the “Professional Discussion” and “Practical Observation” portion of the assessment.



The
FISHMONGERS'
Company

It is the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers which organize the *Coat Badge*.



Credit: this image is from rowingblazers.com, which produces the blazers for the current race.

The red tunic is the “coat” of *Coat and Badge*. Why is there a horse on the badge? This is the White Horse of Hanover, and the emblem was brought over by George of Hanover.

George was born in 1660. He started ruling England in 1714, but didn’t enjoy it. He could not speak English very well, as depicted in [this](#) Horrible Histories skit, and often travelled back to Germany. George I was reserved at social events and was not popular with the people. He was thought to have locked away his wife. In general, he was dismissed as being too German and, for example, [thought](#) to have had a succession of mistresses. One mistress was very fat and one thin — they were known as “Elephant and Castle”.

George I may have been more than this, though. Many historians in the 1800s (the century after his existence) relied on a man called [John Hervey](#) (1696–1743). Hervey was loyal to Walpole (George’s prime minister) but may have been quite sympathetic to removing the Hanover kings. Historians of the 1800s (Walter Scott, Thackeray, Lord Mahon) then relied on this biased account. G.K. Chesterton may have further introduced anti-German sentiment and anti-Protestant sentiment into his account in the early 1900s.

Plumb (1956) points out that George could easily communicate with his ministers in French. He was a good, loyal friend, travelling to them to play cards. He gave shelter to the philosopher Voltaire (over in Europe) and allowed criticism of his reign. He was deeply

interested in matters of state. He secured his succession, ensuring the Hanover House, and Parliament, ruled with stability.

His mother explains that George I “took things to heart, that he felt deeply and sincerely and was more sensitive than he cared to show.” His reserved nature in public resulted in mockery and accusations of low intelligence. This reaction from the British public is somewhat typical, seen in the way Oxbridge dons laugh at the Lutheran Kant because of his regular and timetabled life, and the mockery of Theresa May for seeming to be wooden in spontaneous interactions with the public.

George died in 1727 (thirteen years into his reign), the year Isaac Newton died. He was travelling in Germany in his carriage when he had a stroke. He was taken to a palace of a relative and died a couple of days later.



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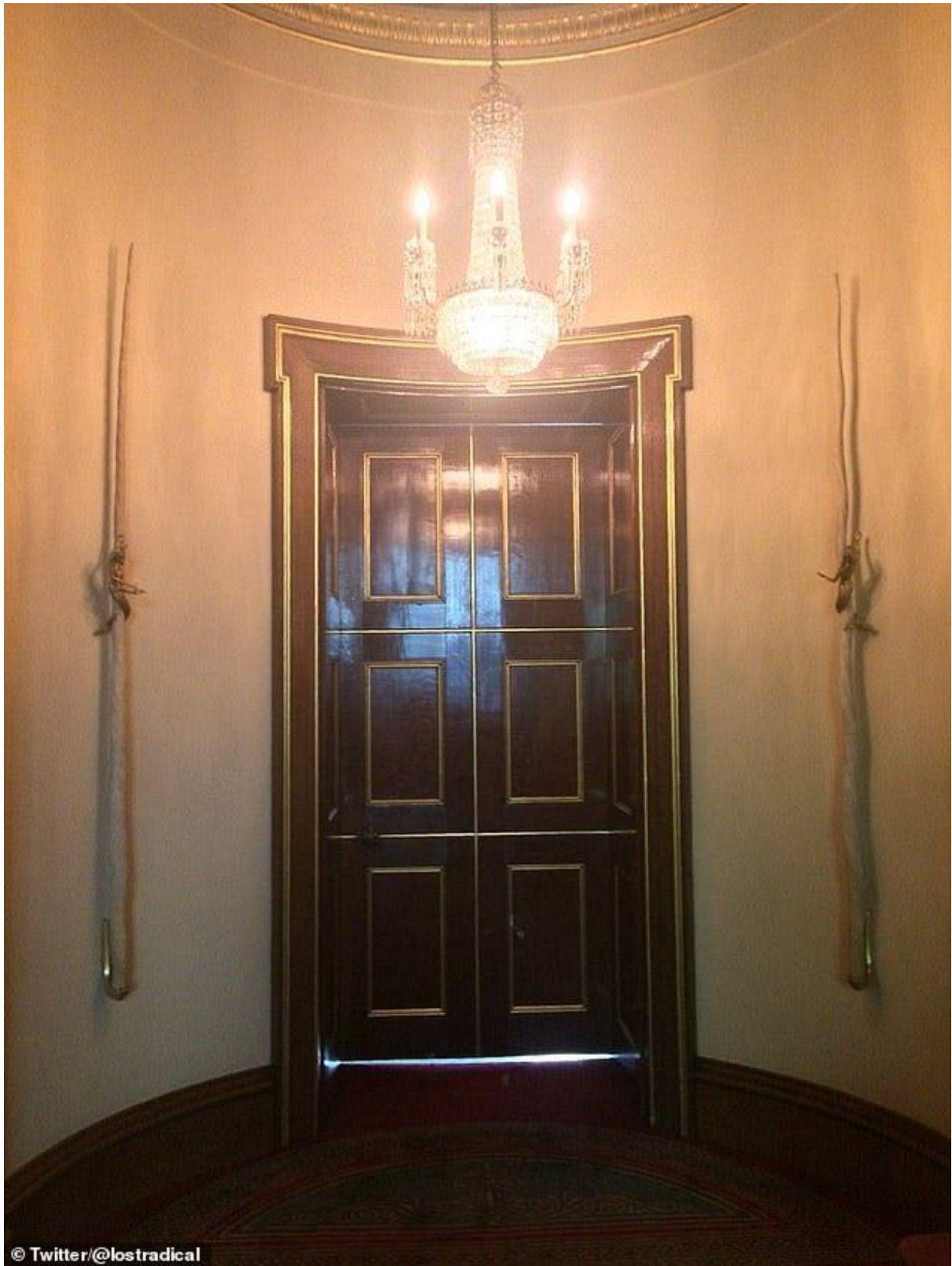
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II
FROM THE PAINTING BY PIETRO ANSGONI

Annigoni's portrait of Queen Elizabeth II

Fishmonger's Hall contains lots of interesting items. It contains a portrait of Elizabeth II by Annigoni. It idealizes the Queen, who is in front of a pastoral background. The Times (1972) reported that the portrait was "romantized" and "chocolate boxy". It does not focus on the reality of the queen, but rather the idea of a monarch. Well, the public loved it. So did Her Majesty.

Elizabeth II [pardoned](#) an inmate in 2020, a year before her death. The man was Steven Gallant, who carried out an act of immense bravery. When an attacker was roaming around London Bridge, Gallant grabbed one of the Narwahl Tusks that adorns the walls of Fishmonger's Hall. Darryn Frost, a civil servant, handed Gallant the tusk in order to confront the attacker.

It occurred in November 2019 when a rehabilitation conference was being held in Fishmonger's Hall. Boris Johnson [said](#) that the perpetrators of this attack would be "hunted down". Only two years earlier, Theresa May had [declared](#) "enough is enough" after a 2017 London Bridge attack. Both attacks occurred while election campaigning was underway. May lost the Tory majority in 2017 and Boris won a landslide in Dec 2019.



© Twitter/@lostradical

Narwhal Tusks hang on the wall of Fishmonger's Hall.

Thomas Doggett

Now the slightly bizarre part. For some reason, an actor called Thomas Doggett decided to fund the *Coat and Badge* every year. To me, this needs some explanation.



Thomas Doggett

Thomas Doggett set up the Coat and Badge race in 1715, which is a year after George I's ascension to the throne. Note that George was

King of Great Britain ***and Ireland***. Today in 2023 we talk of the UK, which, in full, is:

the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern *Ireland*.

The biggest chunk of that mass of land (that is, Ireland) sadly left in 1922, leaving Northern Ireland. But there was a point in time when we had the United Kingdom of Great Britain *and Ireland*.

In the Acts of Union 1800, the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland were united. Now, why did this occur?

Let's *sketch* an answer. Just ten years earlier (1789) the [French Revolution](#) occurred. Certain values vividly emerged on the scene — liberty, fraternity, equality, democracy. [The Enlightenment](#) had flourished. This involved the belief that rational inquiry comes first and foremost, and people should be equal despite their religion. In Ireland we have Roman Catholics and Protestants in conflict. So, the Enlightenment is starting to make it seem... increasingly unjustifiable for one religious denomination to subdue another.

[Pitt the Younger](#) (lil' Pitt as I call him) was the Prime Minister in London, and wanted to avoid Ireland gaining its own parliament. Ireland would become a base for England's enemies. Catholics in Ireland were fed up; in 1792, Tone and Fitzgerald formed the "United Irishment". They wanted Irishmen — whether Catholic or Protestant — to unite against the Anglican rule. Lil Pitt tried to help things with the Catholic Relief Act of 1793, but his King (George III)

was reluctant to offer any concessions to Catholics. Ultimately, the 1800 Act of Union

became a liability rather than an asset. Peers holding Irish estates opposed concessions to Roman Catholics, as did the King, because of vested interests and religious bigotry.

The threat to the status quo and potential violence together with patriotic zeal against Catholics stopped full [Catholic Emancipation](#) and ended all Pitt's intended reforms.

— [Marjie Bloy](#)

The point is that it was 1800 when the Kingdom of Britain united with the Kingdom of Ireland. It was unstable from the beginning and lasted until 1922.

Anyhow, the Coat and Badge was set up in honour of King George I. The badge which is won has the horse of Hanover on it.

Who was this man? What was his contribution to acting? Why did he set up a boat race? I have so many questions at this point. Doggett performed at Drury Lane Theatre. This is in Covent Garden. Doggett was part of a triplet, alongside **Colley Cibber** and Robert Wilks. Drury Lane theatre — strictly “The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane” — has been rebuilt many times.



Colley Cibber has a bust at the National Portrait Gallery. According to some he was an extremely bad actor.

There have been different troupes of actors which have been in control here. A passage from the website states:

The history of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane spans over 350 years and 4 different buildings.

The first was ordered by King Charles II and opened in 1663 (named the Theatre Royal, Bridges Street). It burnt down in 1672.

The second theatre (now titled the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane) was built in 1674. It hosted a vast number of productions during its 117-year run, including The Merchant of Venice (which introduced a naturalistic style of acting), The School for Scandal (1777, its world premiere), and Robinson Crusoe.

The acting troupe of 1710 (Cibber, Wilks, and Doggett) found themselves the primary object of ridicule in Alexander Pope's satirical epic the Dunciad.

I'm guessing that the strange word *Dunciad* is a mixture of "dunce" and "Iliad", the epic poem starring Odysseus.

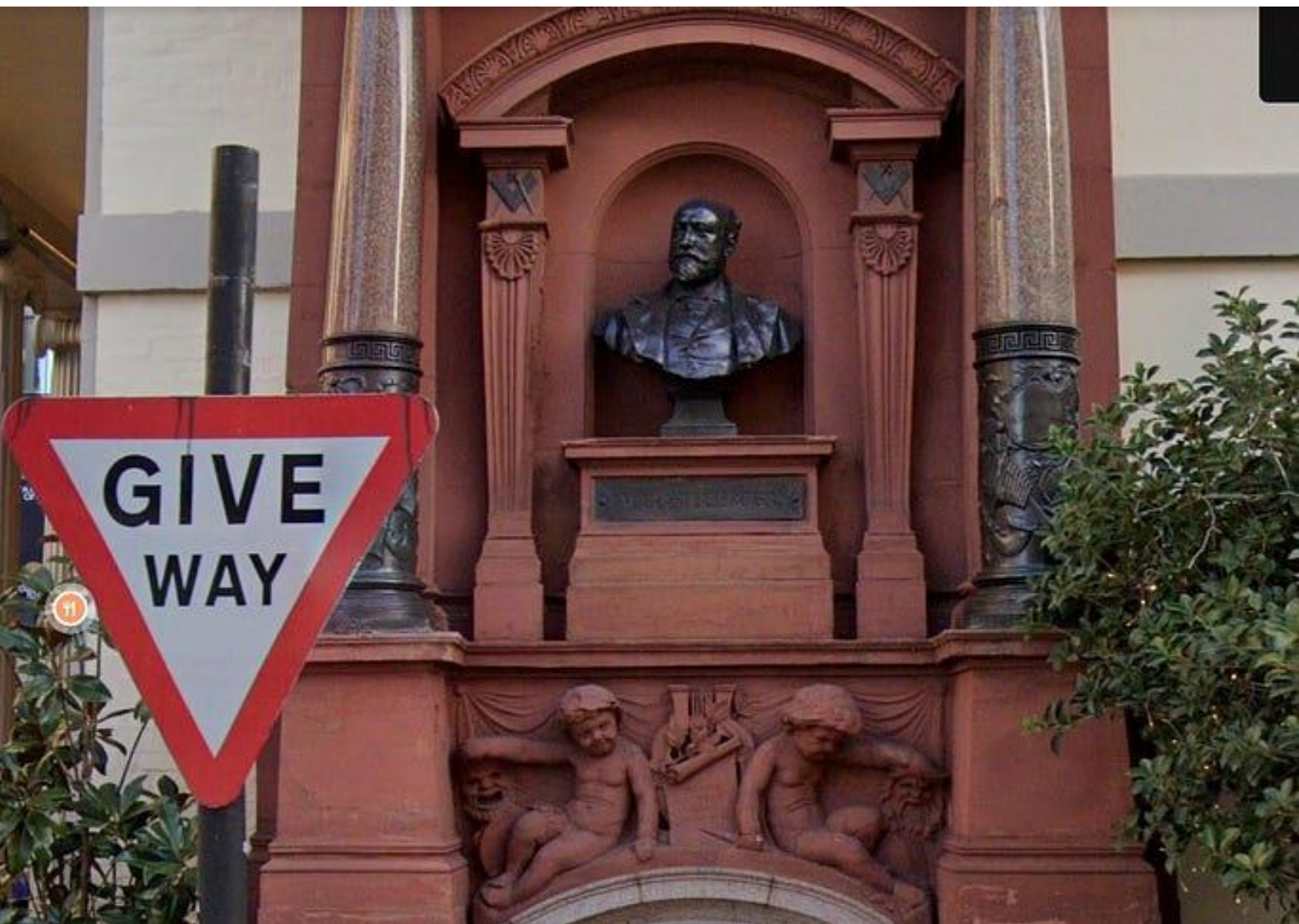


The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane

Alexander Pope mocked Doggett and his triplet in his work *Dunciad*. What is the *Dunciad* all about? A goddess called Dulness takes over Great Britain. The central character in the book is called Lewis Theobald.



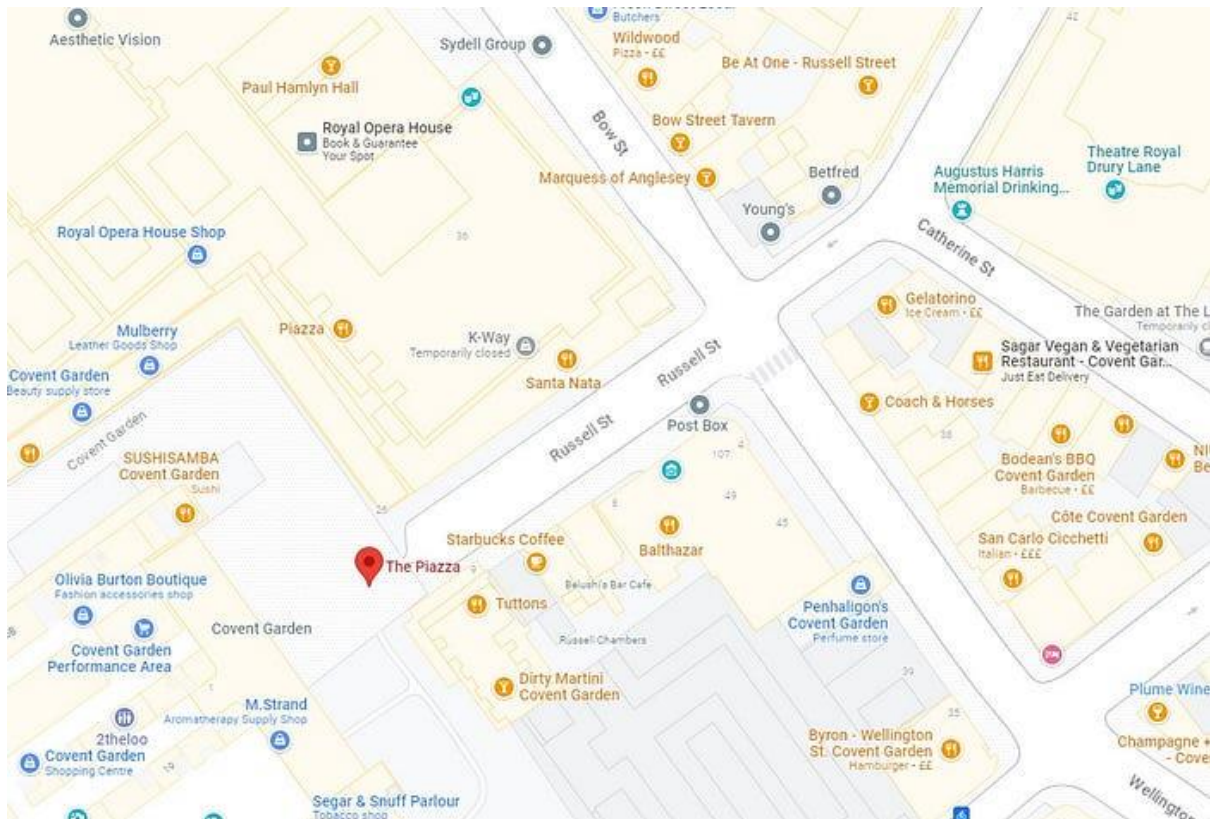
The same aspect of the building but with significantly more shrubbery in this image.



The bust of Augustus Harris is on Catherine Street



Just check out that line of pillars. It extends down **Russell Street**.



Russell Street leads onto the Piazza (and the main open square of Covent Garden)

Alexander Pope is complaining that writing in Britain has become dull and boring. Pope is a Roman Catholic. Remember that King George I was a Protestant — specifically a Lutheran.

George I comes to the throne in 1714. The first volume of the *Dunciad* emerges in 1728 (the year after the death of George I). Notice how the coat won in the Coat and Badge looks crimson, or perhaps orange, the colour of the Whig Party and Protestantism.



Alexander Pope

One passage from *Dunciad* states:

Books and the Man I sing, the first who brings

The Smithfield Muses to the Ear of Kings

Smithfield was the site of the Bartholomew Fair, where the poets would be. “The Man” is Elkanah Settle, the writer for the Fair. So, Pope has in his sights a poet called Settle. Pope wants to blame this man for “bringing pantomime, farce, and monster shows to the royal theatres” as a Wikipedia author puts it.



Bartholomew Fair in 1808

Another passage describes Colley Cibber deciding what profession to go into:

Hold — to the Minister I more incline

To serve his cause, O Queen! is serving thine

The “Minister” here is Robert Walpole, the first Prime Minister and the man who worked with George I. The “Queen” is probably

Caroline of Ansbach (wife of George II). In *Dunciad*, Pope is a savage.

The broad picture is clear. We have the Irishman Thomas Doggett, who wants to pay tribute to the Protestant King George I, by setting up the *Coat and Badge*. King George I works with the Whigs (whose colour is orange). The first Prime Minister Robert Walpole is a Whig.

The poet Alexander Pope is no fan of the Whigs. In fact Alexander Pope was good friends with Jonathan Swift, Thomas Parnell and Arbuthnot, who were **Tories**. We can see why Alexander Pope attacks Thomas Doggett in the *Dunciad*. Doggett supports the Protestant King and the Whigs.

Alexander Pope was so scathing in the *Dunciad* that [apparently](#) some people threatened to physically assault him. He chose to walk with a great Dane (called Bounce) and carry pistols in his pockets.



Alexander Pope's dog was called Bounce

The Origins of the Race

[This](http://doggettsrace.org.uk) website (doggettsrace.org.uk) states that:

On a stormy night, he was rowed to his house by a newly licensed waterman.

This waterman had skills that caught the attention of Doggett, who then set rules for the race based on his experience.

[This](#) blogpost (2015) tells us who the competitors are in that year.

Glossary

There is a little bit of key terminology to get to grips with if you want to become a fan of rowing races.

Sculler — somebody who practises sculling.

[Sculling](#) — a form of rowing which involves using two oars to propel a boat through the water (other forms of rowing include sweep rowing and stern sculling).

Waterman — rower who carries passengers.

Lighterman — rower who carries cargo.

Regatta - Italian term used for a boat race. Typically, it is an amateur race, but one that is structured and with many formalities and rules. The best example is the Henley Royal Regatta, which is held on the Thames every year.

Flotilla — From the Spanish “flota” which means “fleet”. This refers to a group of boats. The term is often used generally, to refer to a large number of anything.

Freeman — this is the term used for members of the livery companies. “It remains necessary to this day for all liverymen to be freemen of the City”

The Importance of the Race

It is important to realise that this event is more than a superficial display, for, say, the benefit of tourists. (Frankly, most tourists are not aware of this race.) It has a long history. Some of the winners go on to compete in British Rowing. Family pride can be at stake in losing the race.

For those who compete, they must adjust their whole way of life to devote themselves for the race. A competitor might work for City Cruises or Thames Clippers.



A competitor might work for City Cruises or Thames Clippers

They must sustain their full time job while they train for the race. Let's suppose they want to "row the course" (do a full run through of the race). You will need to begin rowing at 05:30 in the morning, so as to avoid the other boats. Then, once you are finished, you will work your normal job, completing a 12-hour shift.

Not just anybody can compete in the race. You must have completed your waterman's apprenticeship.



Claire Burran, the first female competitor, competing in 1992 [Credit: Thames Festival Trust]

The 2023 Race

This occurred on Wednesday 13th July 2023. The wayer took place at 11:30 am.

The winner achieved a time of 32 minutes and 10 seconds.

Riess Ballard won the 2023 Doggett's Coat and Badge Wager. The event was preceded by a *Coronation to Coronation* pageant, featuring some of the winners since 1953.

The three scullers, all representing Poplar, Blackwall & District Rowing club, were:

- Riess Ballard, the 2023 winner, wore black on the day.

- Emily Hickman, the first female competitor in over twenty years, wore light blue to race.
- Mathew Brookes, who wore red on the day.

Emily Hickman was the third woman to take part in the race (ever).

Bobby Prentice set a record time in 1973, of about 23 minutes.



Robert Prentice. Image from [Koch 2018]

Recent Winners

If these people come into the pub, I will give you a pint or two on the house (if I can...).



James Berry won the 2020 race — which obviously didn't occur in 2020 owing to Covid-19



Max Carter-Miller won the 2021 race



George Gilbert won the 2022 race



Riess Ballard (centre) won the 2023 race



You can make out the golden badges on the front. They bear the Horse of Hanover. The unusual concrete exterior embodies the non-traditional and outlandish character of Doggett's plays. Pope would have hated it. It is perfect.

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Pubs And Bars

History

River Thames

London