**SUN TAVERN**

The **Sun Tavern** was a victualing house on the east side of **New Fish Street**, just north of **London Bridge** between lower **Thames Street** and **Little Eastcheap**. Settled just under **St. Magnus’ monument and yard**, the tavern sat on the boundary between **Bridge Within Ward** and **Billingsgate Ward**. A small sign with an orb and a dot, the common marker of the symbol for the sun in this period, hung out into the street to mark its location (Digges).

The tavern may have been able to accommodate groups easily, as it was frequently used for meetings. 1491–1492 church records indicate a bill “payd for a dyner whan Master parson with othere” members of the **St. Mary at Hill** “paryszhe were with hym at the sonn” (Littlehales 170–182). The same church’s record indicate an unpaid bill to the tavern in 1537 (Littlehales 376–380). It seemed to have been a regular place for playhouse landlord **Philip Henslowe**, members of the **Lord Admiral’s Men**, and playwrights including **Ben Jonson**. In the poem “An ode to him [Ben Jonson],” **Robert Herrick** implied the regularity of convivial composition in tavern spaces:

> Ah Ben!
> Say how, or when
> Shall we thy Guests
> Meet at those Lyrick Feasts,
> Made at the Sun, ¹
> The Dog, the triple Tunne?
> Where we such clusters had,
> As made us nobly wild, not mad;
> And yet each Verse of thine
> Out-did the meate, out-did the frolick wine.

*(Herrick 342)*

Henslowe’s accounts corroborate such activities. In March 1598, Henslowe lent the Admiral’s Men five shillings “for to spend at the Readynge of that booke,” in reference to “Famous Wars of Henry I and the Prince of Wales” just purchased from Dulwich College MS VII f45r. © David Cooper with kind permission of the Governors of Dulwich College. http://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/images/MSS-7/045r.html

Henry Chettle, Thomas Dekker, and Michael Drayton “at the Sonne in new fyshstreate” (Henslowe; “Famous Wars”). In addition to the table reading of the newly purchased play, either on the same day or later that month the company bought a play called “Earl Godwin and His Three Sons” from Drayton, Dekker, Chettle, and Robert Wilson, at which time Henslowe provided additional funds “at the tavarn in fyshstreate for good cheare” (Henslowe; “Earl Godwin and His Three Sons, Parts 1 and 2”).

Other literary allusions suggest the site was closely affiliated with the playhouse industry (Cerasano). In Thomas Middleton’s play, No Wit/Help Like a Woman’s, Master Weatherwise exclaims “the Sun’s in New Fishstreet” after a pageant of the signs of the zodiac (Middleton 2.1). The clown, Peccadill, threads puns about going to the sun to get “dry”—a euphemism for sobriety—throughout the play. Allusions to the Bull and Bear garden in the same scene reinforce a connection between the Southwark entertainment venues and the Sun Tavern (Middleton 2.1).

The play Wit of a Woman builds a similar series of puns when Bragardo sends his page out “to buy a sugar loafe: and goe you to the Sunne, and fetch me a gallon of Ipocras” (Wit of a Woman). This toponym likely refers to the Sun tavern in New Fish Street, as Sugar Loaf Alley and Sugar Baker’s Yard were also nearby.

There were four taverns using the name of the Sun in this period, although the only one marked with a sign on the Agas map is that in New Fish Street. The water-poet John Taylor mentions other sites in Aldersgate and Cripplesgate (also mentioned by Stow) to complain about their relative expense:
I haue fared better at three Sunnes many times before now, in Aldersgate-street, Criquegate, and new Fish-street; but here is the oddes, at those Sunnes they will come vpon a man with a Tauerne bill as sharp cutting as a Taylers Bill of Items. (Taylor 125)

Wenceslaus Hollar’s comparative survey of the site implies that it did not survive the great fire of 1666 (Hollar). A 1746 map of the city suggests that the site may have been reborn as “The Star Inn” (Rocque 26).


**NOTES**

1. We cannot verify that this toponym refers to Sun Tavern. Sugden’s _Topographical Dictionary to the Works of Shakespeare and His Fellow Dramatists_ identifies the mention of _Sun Tavern_ with both the _Sun Tavern_ on New Fish Street and a “Sun Tavern” on Ludgate Street. See Sugden’s entries for _Dog_ (Sugden 153) and _Sun_ (Sugden 492). (LS)

**REFERENCES**

_Agas, Ralph_. _Civitas Londinum_. 1560. [See more information about this map.]


_Digges, Leonard_. A _Prognostication Euerlasting of Ryght Good Effecte_. London: Thomas Gemini, 1556. Remediated by Folger Shakespeare Library. STC 6861. [The facsimile image is available on the Folger website:]

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