

The Redemption of the Slaughtered Lamb

The Slaughtered Lamb Pub in Greenwich Village was my favorite bar at the start of the decade. It was an English pub with a considerable selection of beers right on Seventh Avenue. To spend an afternoon or an evening there furthering one's beer education and watching the world's most interesting people parade by was time well spent. I spent a good deal of time well. I had come to the conclusion that the bar had fallen from grace, though.

The Slaughtered Lamb is one of New York's "horror bars," which are a set of theme restaurants without the restaurant. The meta-theme is Victorian horror: the Slaughtered Lamb trades on werewolves, Jekyll & Hyde pretends to be an 1890's adventurers' club, and Jack the Ripper needs no explanation.

In the early 90's the Lamb still had the charm of the English pub that it structurally resembles but hadn't been fully converted into a Disneyland bar. Its location attracted an interesting clientele, and often the best people watching was at the bar.

After I stopped working summers at Bell Labs in 1992 or so, I didn't get there very frequently, but I saw the place often enough to see its growing commercialization. The place I once respected for its classy beer menu began serving Jello shots and displaying garish werewolf mannequins. The last gasp was the specialty martini menu.

I'm a nostalgic guy, though, and on my recent trip to New York I stopped in to finish the night with a pint there. It was pretty late by the time we got there, we being myself and a friend too foolish to talk me out of the nightcap, and we had the place largely, but not entirely to ourselves. I'm thankful my friend was there, though, because no one would have believed just me.

There were two fellows at the end of the bar, and we struck up a conversation. I go to bars for conversation; I can drink beer at home. These guys were a delight. An Irishman and a Scotsman with thick competing accents, and gregarious as all hell. You know you're in a fine bar conversation when you've got a Scot speculating on which side of "your Civil War" he would have joined up on.

So the beer and the *ahem* conversation are flowing pretty thickly, when a kid appears at the bar next to me. He wasn't really that young, but he was baby-faced. He looked all of 16 or 17, and of course the bartender proofed him. This had the effect of derailing whatever rant we were on at the time, maybe differences in Scots and American slang, and focusing our boisterous friends on the newcomer.

They promptly produced authentic looking British police badges and IDs and began shaking the kid down for proof of age. I don't know where they got them. For all I know, they're real cops. I do know that judging from the kid's reaction, he thought they looked pretty good.

I don't remember the whole exchange, in fact I almost certainly didn't hear it all, whooping with laughter as I was. The phrases "on special detachment with the NYPD" and "it'll go hard with you in prison" do stick in my memory though. It turns out that the kid's from London and the shakedown from familiar authorities, drunk as they were, shook him up quite a bit. The verbal flogging we gave him about his name probably didn't help much, either.

Eventually Gareth, the Londoner, joined us and commenced singing with the alleged cops. Bar singing is something Americans don't do properly. Belting out a wobbly version of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, fun as it is, doesn't compare with real drinking songs. Don't even talk to me about Karaoke. These guys knew several, and were bad enough that I would have joined in if I knew the words.

I won't even try to describe that impromptu scatological skit that the Irishman staged ridiculing the defecation styles of the British armed forces.

The point is that I was wrong about the Slaughtered Lamb. Any bar that can attract these guys is not too far gone. Even if you *can* get some awful fruit martini there.