**THE COFFEE HOUSES OF OLD LONDON**

The two most picturesque chapters in the history of coffee have to do with the period of the old London and Paris coffee houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Much of the poetry and romance of coffee centers around this time.[[1]](#endnote-1)

"The history of coffee houses," says D'Israeli, "ere the invention of clubs, was that of the manners, the morals and the politics of a people." And so the history of the London coffee houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is indeed the history of the manners and customs of the English people of that period.[[2]](#endnote-2)

*The First London Coffee House*

"The first coffee house in London," says John Aubrey (1626–97), the English antiquary and folklorist, "was in St. Michael's Alley, in Cornhill, opposite to the church, which was set up by one ... Bowman (coachman to Mr. Hodges, a Turkey merchant, who putt him upon it) in or about the year 1652. 'Twas about four years before any other was set up, and that was by Mr. Farr. Jonathan Paynter, over-against to St. Michael's Church, was the first apprentice to the trade, viz., to Bowman.”

Another account, for which we are indebted to William Oldys (1696–1761), the bibliographer, relates that Mr. Edwards, a London merchant, acquired the coffee habit in Turkey, and brought home with him from Ragusa, in Dalmatia, Pasqua Rosée, an Armenian or Greek youth, who prepared the beverage for him. "But the novelty thereof," says Oldys, "drawing too much company to him, he allowed the said servant with another of his son-in-law to set up the first coffee house in London at St. Michael's Alley, in Cornhill."

From this it would appear that Pasqua Rosée had as partner in this enterprise, the Bowman, who, according to Aubrey, was coachman to Mr. Hodges, the son-in-law of Mr. Edwards, and a fellow merchant traveler.

Oldys tells us that Rosée and Bowman soon separated. John Timbs (1801–1875), another English antiquary, says they quarreled, Rosée keeping the house, and his[Pg 54] partner Bowman obtaining leave to pitch a tent and to sell the drink in St. Michael's churchyard.

Still another version of this historic incident is to be found in *Houghton's Collection*, 1698. It reads:

It appears that a Mr. Daniel Edwards, an English merchant of Smyrna, brought with him to this country a Greek of the name of Pasqua, in 1652, who made his coffee; this Mr. Edwards married one Alderman Hodges's daughter, who lived in Walbrook, and set up Pasqua for a coffee man in a shed in the churchyard in St. Michael, Cornhill, which is now a scrivener's brave-house, when, having great custom, the ale-sellers petitioned the Lord Mayor against him as being no freeman. This made Alderman Hodges join his coachman, Bowman, who was free, as Pasqua's partner; but Pasqua, for some misdemeanor, was forced to run the country, and Bowman, by his trade and a contribution of 1000 sixpences, turned the shed to a house. Bowman's apprentices were first, John Painter, then Humphry, from whose wife I had this account.

This account makes it appear that Edwards was Hodges' son-in-law. Whatever the relationship, most authorities agree that Pasqua Rosée was the first to sell coffee publicly, whether in a tent or shed, in London in or about the year 1652. His original shop-bill, or handbill, the first advertisement for coffee, is in the British Museum, and from it the accompanying photograph was made for this work. It sets forth in direct fashion: "The Vertue of the *COFFEE* Drink First publiquely made and sold in England, by *Pasqua Rosée* ... in St. *Michaels Alley* in *Cornhill* ... at the Signe of his own Head."

H.R. Fox Bourne (about 1870) is alone in an altogether different version of this historic event. He says:

"In 1652 Sir Nicholas Crispe, a Levant merchant, opened in London the first coffee house known in England, the beverage being prepared by a Greek girl brought over for the work."

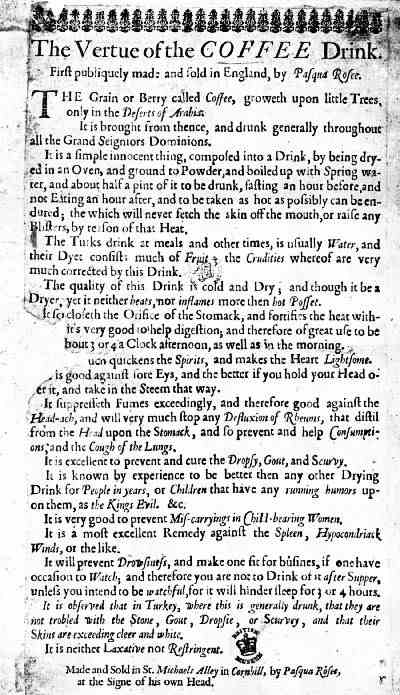
There is nothing to substantiate this story; the preponderance of evidence is in support of the Edwards-Rosée version.

Such then was the advent of the coffee house in London, which introduced to English-speaking people the drink of democracy. Oddly enough, coffee and the Commonwealth came in together. The English coffee house, like its French contemporary, was the home of liberty.

Eventually Pasqua Rosée disappeared, some say to open a coffee house on the Continent, in Holland or Germany. Bowman, having married Alderman Hodges's cook, and having also prevailed upon about a thousand of his customers to lend him sixpence apiece, converted his tent into a substantial house, and eventually took an apprentice to the trade.

Concerning London's second coffee-house keeper, James Farr, proprietor of the Rainbow, who had as his most distinguished visitor Sir Henry Blount, Edward Hatton says:

I find it recorded that one James Farr, a barber, who kept the coffee-house which is now the Rainbow, by the Inner Temple Gate (one of the first in England), was in the year 1657, prosecuted by the inquest of St Dunstan's in the West, for making and selling a sort of liquor called coffe, as a great nuisance and prejudice to the neighborhood, etc., and who would then have thought London would ever have had near three thousand such nuisances, and that coffee would have been, as now, so much drank by the best of quality and physicians?



FIRST ADVERTISEMENT FOR COFFEE—1652

Handbill used by Pasqua Rosée, who opened the first coffee house in London From the original in the British Museum

Hatton evidently attributed Fair's nuisance to the coffee itself, whereas the presentment clearly shows it was in Farr's chimney and not in the coffee.

Mention has already been made that Sir Henry Blount was spoken of as "the father of English coffee houses" and his claim to this distinction would seem to be a valid one, for his strong personality "stamped itself upon the system." His favorite motto, "*Loquendum est cum vulgo, sentiendum cum sapientibus*" (the crowd may talk about it; the wise decide it), says Robinson, "expresses well their colloquial purpose, and was natural enough on the lips of one whose experience had been world wide." Aubrey says of Sir Henry Blount, "He is now neer or altogether eighty yeares, his intellectuals good still and body pretty strong."

Women played a not inconspicuous part in establishing businesses for the sale of the coffee drink in England, although the coffee houses were not for both sexes, as in other European countries. The London City *Quaeries* for 1660 makes mention of "a she-coffee merchant." Mary Stringar ran a coffee house in Little Trinity Lane in 1669; Anne Blunt was mistress of one of the Turk's-Head houses in Cannon Street in 1672. Mary Long was the widow of William Long, and her initials, together with those of her husband, appear on a token issued from the Rose tavern in Bridge Street, Covent Garden. Mary Long's token from the "Rose coffee house by the playhouse" in Covent Garden is shown among the group of coffee-house keepers' tokens herein illustrated.

1. 1. 1 Ukers, All About Coffee, p 232.

   [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Ukers, p 233 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)