

Soho. stories

There can be very few place names, anywhere in the world, which have been derived from an exclamation, but "Soho!" was once a hunting cry, first recorded in the fifteenth century; "Sohoe, ye hare ys founde!" And there can be very few place names which have carried with them such a wealth of metaphor for the people who haven't lived there, and of metaphor which has changed its associations so frequently and so radically.

During the sixteenth century Soho meant the thrill of the chase whilst out hunting in the open fields which bordered London to its west. During the seventeenth century it meant living in the enviably elegant houses being built for the Restoration aristocracy. And then, during the eighteenth, the metaphor acquired an ambiguity, implying ease of access both to the salons of the political and artistic glitterati, and also to smart bordellos and gambling dens exuding an illegitimate allure.

Text from 'An Introduction to Soho' by Antony Hurst.



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Teresa Cornelys

Impresario and femme fatale



Teresa Cornelys turned 18th century Soho into the centre of London's night life.

A soprano, impresario and femme fatale, she arrived in Soho in 1759, without a penny to her name. Born in Venice in 1723, she had sung her way across Europe, captivating princes and leaving a trail of debts behind her. Now she set out to conquer London.

Carlisle House, once the home of Edward Howard, the second Earl of Carlisle, was a run-down mansion on the corner of Soho Square and Sutton Street. Within a year Mrs Cornelys had transformed it into the most glamorous and successful nightclub of all time.

For sixteen years her lavish concerts, assemblies and masquerade balls dominated the social lives of the British aristocracy. They were frequented by kings, dukes and princes, politicians, artists and writers.



<http://www.mosoho.org.uk/Casanova.html>



The Macaroni, a real character at the masquerade

When the Venetian adventurer Giacomo Casanova visited London in 1764, Carlisle House was his first port of call. He and Mrs Cornelys were childhood sweethearts, and he was the father of her young daughter, Sophia. He attended a ball at Carlisle House and declared it was magnificent.

A brilliant self-publicist, Mrs Cornelys earned herself the nickname of "The Empress of Magnificent Taste and Pleasure" and became an international celebrity. Her extravagance was legendary. At a cost of 10,000 guineas she built a ballroom to rival the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall Palace. She hired composers Carl Abel and



Remarkable characters at Mrs Cornelys's masquerade



Preparing for the ball

Johann Christian Bach to organise her concerts. Her Chinoiserie-style furniture was made by Thomas Chippendale, and she hosted banquets for a thousand guests at a time.

Never good with money, Mrs Cornelys was declared bankrupt in 1772. Carlisle House, the scene of so many splendid parties and racy masked balls, was eventually pulled down and replaced by St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church.

Text by Judith Summers, author of "The Empress Of Pleasure"

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<http://www.westminster.gov.uk/services/libraries/archives/>*

