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## Transcript: The Canterbury Tales: The Tabard Inn & Innkeeper

<https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-canterbury-tales-the-tabard-inn-innkeeper.html>

This lesson explains the Tabard Inn's significance as one of the settings in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. We'll also examine the role of its innkeeper, Harry Bailly.

### The Tabard Inn

At the beginning of *The Canterbury Tales*, the pilgrims gather in Southwark, England at the Tabard Inn before they embark on their \_\_\_\_\_, or journey to a religiously significant place. The characters are traveling to Canterbury Cathedral to see the shrine of Thomas Becket. According to Google Maps, this journey of about 60 miles would have taken about 20 hours to complete on foot.

The Tabard Inn is a real inn that existed in the 14th and 15th centuries in England. Southwark was a suburb of London, and it was common for pubs and inns outside of the city limits to have fewer rules and restrictions, so the Tabard Inn may have had unsavory characters visit such as thieves, drunks, and prostitutes. However, it was also on many pilgrimage routes, so devout Christians may have passed through as well. Chaucer probably chose this inn as the setting for the beginning of the pilgrimage because it was a place where people of diverse backgrounds would cross paths and really was on many pilgrimage routes.

The Tabard Inn burned down because of a fire in 1669 and was rebuilt as the Talbot Inn. The Talbot Inn no longer exists, but visitors can still see the ground on which the Tabard and Talbot Inns stood in Southwark, which is now part of London proper.

### Harry Bailly, The Innkeeper

\_\_\_\_\_, the innkeeper of the Tabard Inn, plays several important roles in the General Prologue, where Chaucer introduces the characters, the reason they are all together, and the premise of the storytelling contest.

Harry Bailly, as the host of the pilgrims, is a uniting force among these very different people as well as between the reader and the characters. He represents a sort of "everyman" with an occupation, social class, and values that would have been familiar and common to readers.

It's Harry Bailly's idea to have a storytelling contest, which is the entire premise of *The Canterbury Tales*. As a way of entertaining themselves, he challenges the pilgrims to each tell two stories on the way to the cathedral and two on the way back. The pilgrim who tells the best story will be awarded a dinner (paid for by the others) when they return to the inn.

Bailly makes himself the master of ceremonies of the event and decides he will be the judge. He even decides to join the pilgrimage in order to be the guide and story judge, although we never get to see a final scene of him judging and awarding the winner because Chaucer left *The Canterbury Tales* unfinished.

## Lesson Summary

All right, let's now take a moment or two to review. Chaucer based the beginning of *The Canterbury Tales* on Southwark's real Tabard Inn that existed in the 14th century. It was a realistic choice because many people on \_\_\_\_\_, or journeys to religiously significant places, stopped there, and it was a place where people of many social classes and backgrounds might have met. The innkeeper at the Tabard Inn, \_\_\_\_\_, plays an important part in *The Canterbury Tales* because he unifies the pilgrims by hosting them at the inn and challenging them to the storytelling contest. This becomes the premise for the tales themselves.