

A HISTORY OF THE *THREE CUPS*, HARWICH, ESSEX

PART FOUR – CLOSURE AND SALE

In the previous three issues of the *Newsletter* I have outlined the history of the *Three Cups*, Harwich, Essex using as my guide an article published in *Essex Countryside* magazine in 1969 written by Winifred Cooper, now deceased but formerly a mainstay of The Harwich Society. (Image of *Three Cups* shown here © The Harwich Society.)



At the conclusion of Part Three in the spring *Newsletter* I had quoted Winifred as stating

In spite of many ups and downs, and the appearance and disappearance of numerous other inns, the Three Cups continues to offer hospitality to the traveller, although in a changed form to meet modern demands.

But of course a lot could have happened from the late Sixties until

now and it did; the *Three Cups* ceasing to trade in October 1995 presumably not being able, after all, to ‘meet modern demands’. In this penultimate Part of the story I reconstruct the final years of the *Three Cups* as a public house.

Although the *Three Cups* was never included in the national CAMRA *Good Beer Guide* it was featured more locally in the 8th *Essex Beer Guide* (a localised version of the *GBG*) published circa 1995 in which it was described as an

Ancient Inn reputedly visited by Queen Isabella in 1326 and by Nelson & Lady Hamilton in later times...

There’s that tryst theory *again*.

The *Three Cups* had clearly changed with the times. According to the *Guide* a disco was being held on four evenings a week (Thursday-Sunday) and a ‘Happy Hour’ daily from 7 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sadly for those CAMRA members thinking of seeking out decent beer in Harwich at this particular establishment the *Guide* warned ‘Real ale not always available.’

When the much-enlarged 9th *Essex Beer Guide* was published circa 1996 the entry for the *Three Cups* was much-reduced including only the name of the pub, its address and phone number, followed by the blunt statement ‘Pubmaster – Pub closed.’ When exactly the pub was taken over by the Pubmaster chain is not clear. (Can anyone help with this?)



Intriguingly, a photograph published in the *Harwich and Manningtree Standard* (hereinafter

called the ‘*Standard*’) in May 1997 of the *Three Cups* boarded up and ‘For Sale’ by Christie & Co., bore a sign reading ‘Free House’.

In May 1997 the *East Anglian Daily Times* [EADT] reported that the Ipswich office of Christie’s, the auctioneers, had sold the long lease of ‘the historic 14th Century, Grade II listed freehouse known as the *Three Cups*’, reputed to have been ‘frequented by kings and queens of old’ for ‘in excess of £100,000’ (which equates to approximately £173,000 today). (The *Three Cups* had been granted listed status on 20th June 1972, full details of which can be found at www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk.)

The EADT also gave a brief description of the *Three Cups* at that time:

It includes a public bar, lounge bar, pool room, six double bedrooms, private lounge, two kitchens, two bathrooms, cellars and car park.

Talking to the *Standard* in May 1997 Robert Mellamphy, of Ipswich agents Christie & Co, said that he could not shed any light on who was the new owner of the pub. However, he did reveal that “*They are still assessing whether they will use it as a private house*” adding

“Work will probably start fairly soon as they have already asked architects to prepare drawings as they hope to put the building back to how it was. Some upstairs rooms have been partitioned and the idea is to restore it to its former glory.”

Mr. Mellamphy also told the *Standard* that the pub was sold on behalf of the bank which repossessed it in February 1996.



Interestingly, at the time of closure, the pub sign that drew such positive comments from Winifred Cooper (see Part 3) no longer hung on the wall above the front door of the *Three Cups*. The ‘new’ sign (shown left) depicted, none other than Lord Nelson, Lady Hamilton and Queen Isabella.

And so, after centuries of serving the residents of and visitors to Harwich including numerous members of the landed gentry, not to mention the more

numerous ne’er do wells, the life of the *Three Cups*, as a pub, finally drew to a close. It never ever opened again for business.

Appropriately, as mentioned in a previous issue, The Harwich Society did place a plaque on the wall to emphasise the role played by the *Three Cups* in the life of this special Essex town. Thankfully the building remains but in private hands and has been thus for over two decades.

In what I *promise* will be the final Part of my story of this historic Essex pub, I will feature a report of my forthcoming visit to the *Three Cups* which follows receipt of a personal invitation from the current owner. Part 5 will also include additional, important information I have found or received since the completion of the previous four parts plus errata and, finally, a list of sources.

And then, that *should* be that...

Patrick Chaplin