

THE MURDUCK NET

&

Family Histories

of people who have used the surname MURDUCK through the ages

The 'Cocke and Coache Inn', Chelmsford, Essex, England, 1470-1897

The “Cocke and Coache Inn”, later just the “Cocke Inn”, and still later, the “Cock Inn”¹, was in operation in Chelmsford from around 1470 until at least 1777². The ‘Cock Inn’, with its barns, stables, yards, and gardens was located on the east side of the High Street, Chelmsford, abutting the old Moulsham Bridge. For many years the Inn's Keepers played leading governance and commercial roles in the Parish of St. Mary's, Chelmsford.

In 1897, John Gosling described the main structure as having had a "somewhat unpretentious exterior, with no attractive appearance whatever". But he went on to note that it was one of "the most conspicuous houses to be seen" by travellers as they arrived from London. He felt certain that the building's "leaden casements and projecting sign could not fail to be observed by strangers and others" alike. The establishment's vehicular entrance was by the side of the river, next to the first tri-arched wooden bridge that was thrown across the Cann River. The side of the building which faced the river, one of its ‘fronts’, was, according to Gosling, "plainly visible for some distance when coming down Moulsham Street".

Gosling declared that "an extraordinary quantity of massive oak beams and joists" had been used in the building's construction, some of which measured a foot square. Beyond its lathed and plastered areas, the Inn apparently boasted an "oak panelled hall, and likewise rooms on the ground floor, substantial staircases, spacious landings leading to several capacious rooms, and sleeping apartments, also almost endless closeting and store-room accommodations, with extensive cellaring, running under the adjoining house". It was clearly, wrote Gosling, built as a Tavern to afford excellent accommodation to travellers in general, and the public in particular".

The building apparently ceased to be an inn some time around 1747, although it appears to have continued in operation as a pub or tavern. About that time, Gosling reports that "a brick parapet was carried up and the whole exterior plastered with stucco", "excepting the end wall of red bricks" (which he termed ‘a more recent addition’).

The building's interior upper landing (referred to by Gosling as 'the top of the building') apparently exhibited Tudor style balustrades surrounding the staircase. He noted a filled in window in one of the back rooms adjoining the landing, and suggested that the closure had been effected "to avoid the window duty impost of former days".

Records of Licenses produced for Alehouse Keepers at the 'Cock Inn' are notably absent from Essex County Recognizances Registers created after 1777³, so it would seem that the building may have ceased functioning as a tavern under the name 'Cock Inn' about that time.

Around 1800 the main building was apparently converted to two tenements which abutted the stone Moulsham Bridge in Chelmsford – Nos. 48 and 49, High Street. Gosling stated in 1897 that members of the Moss family had been owners of the property and occupiers of the premises for many recent years, and that "the late Mr. James Moss succeeded his father in carrying on the old-established building business".

Then, in 1897, possibly just shortly after Mr. James Moss died, the main building was demolished. It was the fact of demolition that prompted John Gosling to record what he knew of the building and its history, which, he wrote, "to some may prove to be interesting". The main Inn building was apparently torn down so that a larger building could be built for the Wesleyan Methodists of the town, to replace their chapel which was then in Springfield Road.

Gosling suggested that some structures situated in the old Inn's yard – "workshops and shedding, now falling to decay in the spacious yard at the rear, were no doubt once some of the stabling utilised when this was an inn".

To give some idea of the extent of ground the building and premises covered, Gosling noted that there was 57 feet frontage and about 125 feet depth to a backwater known as 'the gullet'. The garden, approached by a small bridge over the latter, measured an additional 68 feet by 92.

Currently Known 'Cock Inn' Innkeepers & Alehouse Keepers:

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| Richard Potto or Putto, | ratepayer, 1557; occasionally 'warden', St. Mary's; died in Chelmsford, 5 January 1559. |
| 'Goodman' Brown, | from around 1560 to at least 1562; supported & promoted annual parish 'Passion Playe'. |
| Widow Alestan, | paid 2d rent in 1591, including barns, stables, yards and gardens. ⁴ |
| Nicholas Sutton, | also churchwarden, St. Mary's, 1607. |
| John Marryon, | for several years, ending 1776. |
| John Murduck, | Alehouse Keeper, Licensee 1777; Sureties held by Thomas Hull & Henry Sweeting ⁵ |

The items immediately below have been suggested as works that might contain some detail about the 'Cock Inn' and/or some of its Inn Keepers and Alehouse Keepers:

“General Index of Personal Names, from 1500”; Essex Record Office (ERO),
Chelmsford, Essex County, England; 3" x 5" cards;
Microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah in 1971, see LDS Film 541452.

"The Sleepers and the Shadows"; Hilda Grieve;
History of Chelmsford series, Volume 1; Essex Record Office, 1988.

No photographs or other illustrations of the edifices which made up the Inn complex are known to exist today.

If anyone knows of the existence of maps, photos or drawings which show the 'Cock Inn' from any vantage point; has an additional fact or two about the Inn from any time period or context; learns about other Innkeepers or Licencees; knows of a published or unpublished work which presents broader information about the Inn or any activities there; or simply wants to ask a question about the 'Cock Inn', please contact the author of this note

Thank you.

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Sources:

¹ Gosling, John, "The Cock Inn", Chelmsford - a Famous Old Hostelry"; *The Essex Review*; 1897, Volume 6, pp 165-170. Hereafter Gosling.

² Personal correspondence; Janet Smith, Principal Archivist (Public Services), Essex County Council Archives, Essex Record Office, P O Box 11, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex, England, CM1 1LX; 27 February 1992. Hereafter: Correspondence, Smith.

³ Correspondence, Smith, op cit.

⁴ Personal correspondence; Mrs. Wendy Stubbings, Chelmsford; 5 February 1993.

⁵ Register of Recognizances; 1777; Essex Record Office: Q/RLv 31