

The Pubs of Sutton Coldfield Town Centre in 1908

© Paul Harrison - October 2025

Background

I'd read the name the Emmanuel College Arms whilst perusing the articles on the Sutton Coldfield Local History Group website and wondered where it was. Whilst looking into this, I also discovered an interesting article regarding the proposed closure of the Emmanuel College Arms from the Sutton Coldfield News dating from March 14th 1908, in which all of the public houses open in Sutton Coldfield town centre at that time were listed.

The Emmanuel College Arms and its competitors in 1908

In the early part of the 20th century, the pub was in decline. It had been through multiple licensees in only a few years and had the fewest customers of all Sutton's pubs. Furthermore, its rooms were undersized, not meeting the minimum of 9 feet required by borough building bye-laws, plus it was deemed difficult to police as the rear of the building was not enclosed and the premises weren't self contained.

One of the reasons given during the Brewster Sessions of the day for wanting to close the pub was that there were plenty of other public houses nearby and, along with the above issues, the Emmanuel College Arms was argued to be redundant. The abovementioned article listed the following pubs along with their distance from the Emmanuel College Arms; "The Royal Oak was 44 yards away, the Gate 75 yards, Old Sun Inn 83 yards, Museum 153, Three Tuns 160, Royal Hotel 214, Old Dog 218, Railway Inn 226, Station Hotel 258, Kings Arms 498 and the Cup 695. Within a radius of 300 yards there were 234 houses, a population of 1170, 10 public houses and four "off" licenses (*sic*). The full licences were equivalent to 1 in every 117 persons." In addition, though not included in the above list, The Duke Inn was around 775 yards away.

This list of pubs struck me as being very interesting as some of them will be well known to residents of Sutton who have probably patronised these establishments, however, some of the pubs even locals may never have heard of nor knew existed. So where were the above mentioned pubs? Do they still exist and if so in what form or are they long gone? I decided to plot the pubs mentioned above on a contemporary map (overleaf). The closest I could find with sufficient detail dated from 1913 and so I've pointed out where the pubs were and detailed their current status later in this document.

In addition to the aforementioned pubs, during this research I discovered that at least three other pubs were in operation nearby in the 1800's, all of which had closed by the early 1900's.

Too many pubs in Sutton Coldfield?

It was not the first time that the issue of the then small town of Sutton Coldfield having numerous pubs in close proximity had been raised. B.M Hilton (1987) identified the concentration of public houses and beer houses within a half-mile radius of Sutton Coldfield town centre as being the scene of arrest for the majority of drink related charges recorded in the Sutton Coldfield Petty Sessions of 1879 - 1880.¹

In the Walsall Free Press and General Advertiser of March 3rd 1894, it was reported how an application to extend the premises of the Railway Tavern in Station Street was objected to by the proprietor of the Station Hotel. Presumably, the fact that these two establishments were almost directly opposite each other gave cause for concern that trade would be lost if the direct competitor gained greater capacity for custom. The Station owner argued that, "There were at present too many public houses in Sutton Coldfield, and the publicans had as much as they could do to pay their way" and that the Railway Tavern, "was sufficiently large for the district and under the circumstances no further drinking facilities were required". After some argument, it was decided that there was sufficient accommodation in the house and the neighbourhood as it stood and the application was dismissed.

In Stephen Roberts' book "The Public Houses of Sutton Coldfield", he wrote that the number of licensed premises in Sutton Coldfield hardly varied from 1888 to 1913 and, "That the number of public houses did not increase lay with the reluctance of the magistrates to approve new applications: they believed that there were already enough places to go drinking in Sutton."

However, the case of the Emmanuel College Arms appears to have been the first time (at least locally) that this argument was used, in part, as a reason to refuse an existing pub its licence and to effect its shutting down.

The fate of the Emmanuel College Arms

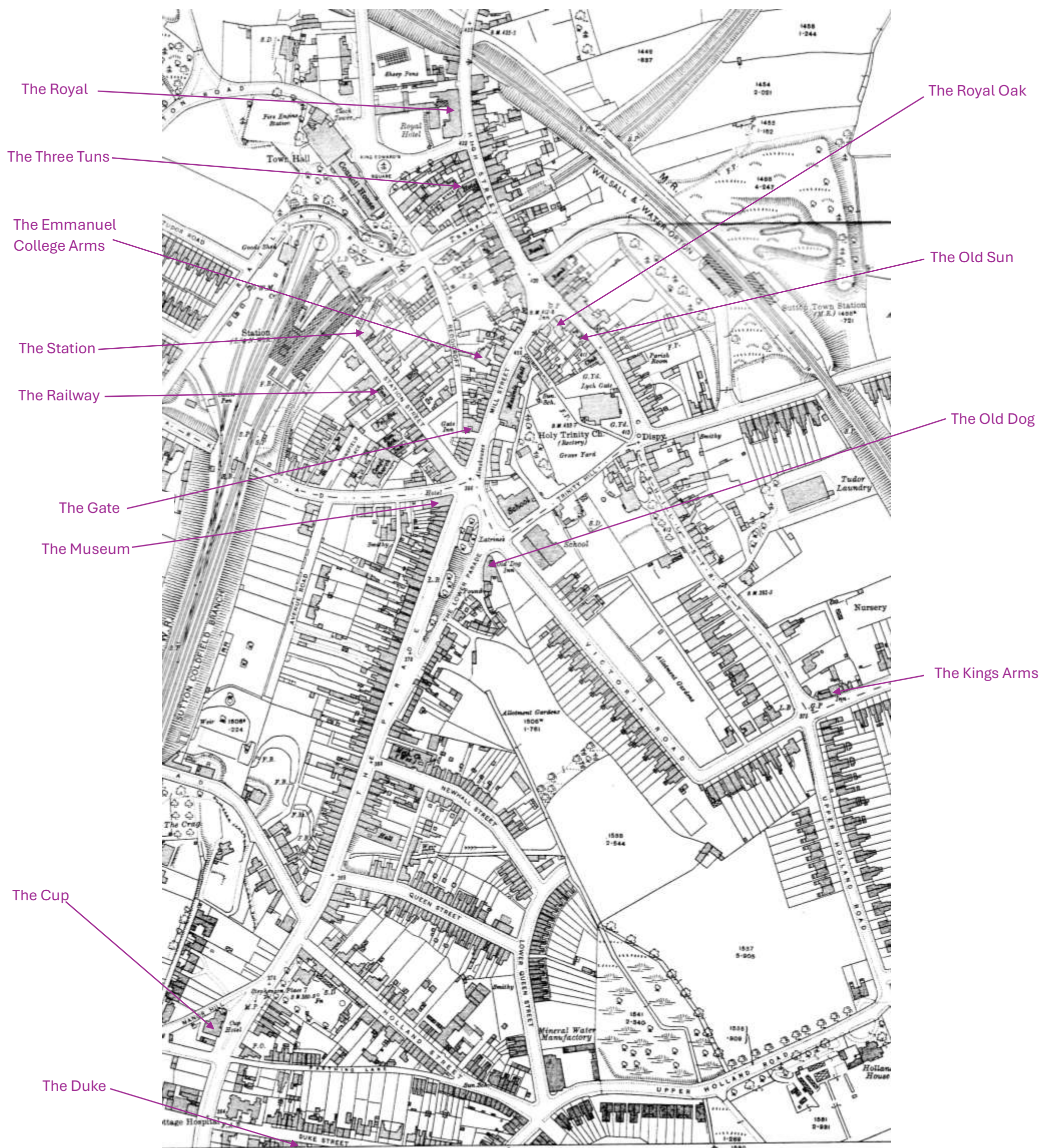
Built in the 18th century, its rooms were deemed too small and by 1908 it was described as dilapidated and underutilised. The pub had been determined as unsuitable in 1907 and, by 1908, conditions at the rear of the building had deteriorated further (as reported in the Birmingham Daily Mail on February 11th 1908). Ultimately the Emmanuel College Arms was demolished later in 1908. According to the Lichfield Mercury dated February 12th 1909, the pub's licence was surrendered in favour of a "Beer "off" licence at Erdington".

An article in the The Lichfield Mercury dated August 27th 1909 reported that, "The Sutton Coldfield Post Office premises have long been inadequate for the growing needs of that rapidly developing district. Some months ago the Postmaster General entered into arrangement for the erection of a new and more commodious building on the site of the old Emmanuel College Arms Inn, Mill Street". The article then described the proposed buildings features and stated, "It is anticipated that the premises will be ready for occupation at Christmastide."

An interesting feature of the present Brewster Sessions was the decision of the Licensing Committee to put back till the adjourned sessions in March the license of the Emmanuel College Arms, Mill Street, on the ground of redundancy. This is the first time such a thing has been done in the borough, but we venture to think the wisdom of the action of the magistrates is hardly likely to be questioned. Within three minutes' walk of the house named there are, in different directions, no less than ten other licensed houses, and these should surely be equal to the task of meeting all legitimate requirements.

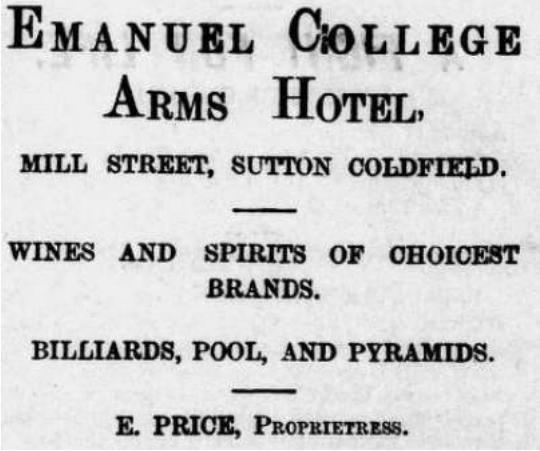
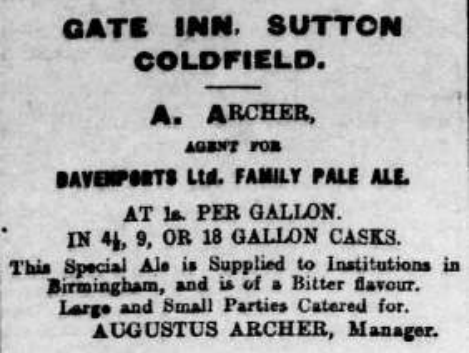
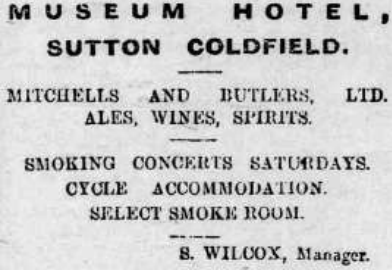
Sutton Coldfield News, February 16th 1907

¹ <https://sclhrg.org.uk/research/research-tools/2693-drink-and-the-mid-victorians.html?highlight=WyJkcmluaylsInZpY3RvcmlhbnMiXQ==>



Extract from the OS 25 Inch England and Wales series map of Warwickshire IV.15. Revised: 1913, Published: 1914. From the NLS website. Note that the new Post Office built in 1909 was not yet shown on this map. The original Post Office building, labelled G.P.O was shown a few doors up from the site of the Emmanuel College Arms.

Status of the above public houses and their status at the time of writing (October 2025).

Pub Name	Location	Status as of October 2025	Contemporary Advert
Emmanuel College Arms	Mill Street	Demolished in 1908 and a new Post Office was built on the site in 1909. The façade of which has been retained following subsequent redevelopment and now houses a dental surgery. ^{2,3}	 From the Sutton Coldfield News, February 9th 1901
Royal Oak Hotel	Mill Street	Demolished around 1937/38 to make way for Vesey Gardens. ^{4,5} In 1935 the Borough Council decided that the block of houses bounded by Mill Street, Coleshill Street and Church Hill had become a tumbledown eyesore. The property was purchased and demolished and Vesey Gardens laid out on the site. ⁶	 From the Sutton Coldfield News, January 4th 1908
The Gate Inn	Mill Street	Extant and in use as a pub.	 From the Sutton Coldfield News, January 4th 1908
Old Sun Inn	Coleshill Street	Demolished in 1938 to make way for Vesey Gardens. ⁷ In 1935 the Borough Council decided that the block of houses bounded by Mill Street, Coleshill Street and Church Hill had become a tumbledown eyesore. The property was purchased and demolished and Vesey Gardens laid out on the site. ⁸	 From the Sutton Coldfield & Erdington Mercury, August 11th 1888
The Museum Hotel	Parade	Demolished in the early 1970's as part of the Gracechurch Centre development.	 From the Sutton Coldfield News, December 15th 1906

² <https://sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/108-articles-281-320/1703-emmanuel-college-arms-283.html?highlight=WyJ0aGUiLCJvbGQilCJzdW4iXQ==>

³ <https://sclhr.org.uk/serendipity/remembering-stephen-roberts/3220-held-in-high-regard.html>

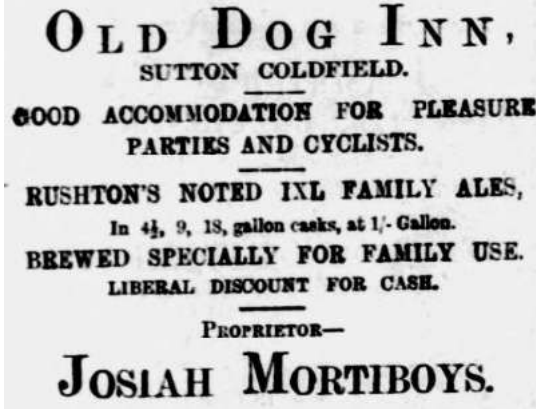
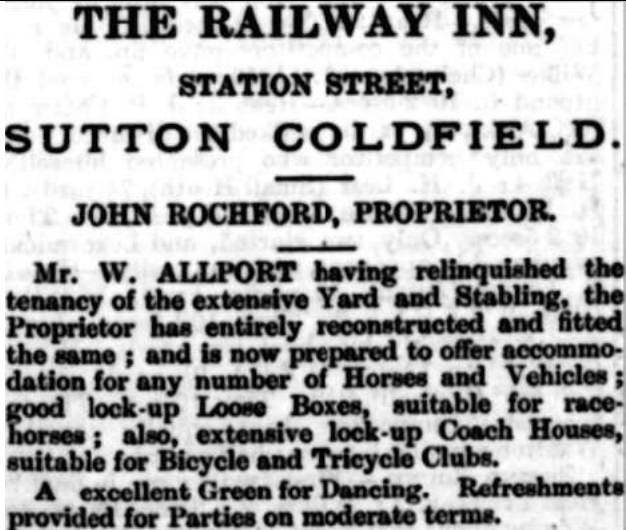
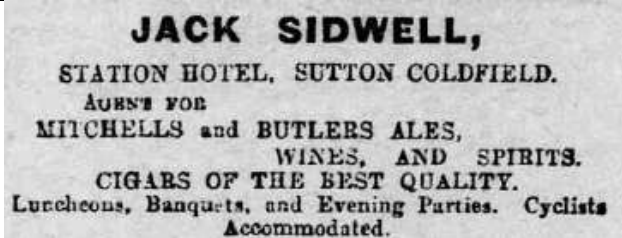
⁴ <https://sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/106-articles-201-240/2076-royal-oak-1880-amp-1920-204.html?highlight=WyJyb3lhbCIsIm9hayJd>

⁵ <https://sclhr.org.uk/serendipity/remembering-stephen-roberts/3240-pub-had-colourful-past.html?highlight=WyJ0aGUiLCJvbGQilCJk2ciXQ==>

⁶ <https://sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/111-articles-401-440/1834-mill-st-2-437.html?highlight=WyJ2ZXNleSIsImdhcmRlbnMiXQ==>

⁷ <https://sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/104-articles-121-160/2015-old-sun-138.html?highlight=WyJ0aGUiLCJvbGQilCJzdW4iXQ==>

⁸ <https://sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/111-articles-401-440/1834-mill-st-2-437.html?highlight=WyJ2ZXNleSIsImdhcmRlbnMiXQ==>

Pub Name	Location	Status as of October 2025	Contemporary Advert
Three Tuns Hotel	High Street	Extant and in use as a pub.	 <i>From the Sutton Coldfield News, January 4th 1908</i>
The Royal Hotel	High Street	Formerly known as the Swan Hotel. Extant and in use as a pub/restaurant/hotel.	 <i>From the Sutton Coldfield News, April 11th 1908</i>
Old Dog Inn	Lower Parade	Originally known as The Talbot, by 1914 it was deemed that The Old Dog needed rebuilding, and it was subsequently demolished and entirely rebuilt. That pub was known as The Dog and later, The Knot. It subsequently became a nightclub variously called R.Bs/Rosies/Reflex but was demolished in 2020 with a view to building flats on the site. ^{9,10}	 <i>From the Sutton Coldfield News, February 9th 1901</i>
Railway Inn	Station Street (Formerly known as Hackett Street)	Demolished in 1971 and the site is now used as a car park. ¹¹	 <i>From the Birmingham Suburban Times, June 19th 1886</i>
Station Hotel	Station Street (Formerly known as Hackett Street)	Extant and in use as a pub.	 <i>From the Sutton Coldfield News, December 15th 1906</i>
The Kings Arms	Coleshill Street	Extant and in use as a pub ¹² . The original Kings Arms building was demolished, and a new pub was constructed in its place in 1935.	 <i>From the Sutton Coldfield News, December 14th 1901</i>

⁹ <https://sclhrg.org.uk/history-spot/123-articles-441-480/2161-lower-parade-2-447.html?highlight=WyJ0aGUiLCJvbGQilCJkb2ciXQ==>

¹⁰ <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/demolition-starts-much-loved-landmark-17828084>

¹¹ <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/17MWCUan6U/?>

¹² <https://sclhrg.org.uk/history-spot/105-articles-161-200/2032-kings-arms-175.html?highlight=WyJ0aGUiLCJraW5ncyIsImFybXMiXQ==>

Pub Name	Location	Status as of October 2025	Contemporary Advert																				
The Cup	Birmingham Road	The Cup ceased trading in 2008, however the building remains and has since been used as pub/restaurant named The Brewhouse and now Ash ¹³ . The present building dates from 1901, but it is on the site of a much older pub which was originally known as The Golden Cup. ¹⁴	ASK FOR HOLDER'S FAMOUS BOTTLED ALES, NOW IN SPLENDID CONDITION. PRICES. <table><tr><td colspan="3"></td><td>Large Bottles.</td></tr><tr><td>"FAMOUS"</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>2s. 6d. per doz.</td></tr><tr><td>"BITTER BEER"</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>2s. 11d. „</td></tr><tr><td colspan="4">AND</td></tr><tr><td>B. D. A. (no sediment)</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>2s. 6d. „</td></tr></table> AGENT— J. P. ELLERY, CUP INN, MANEY. <i>From the Sutton Coldfield News, June 13th 1903</i>				Large Bottles.	"FAMOUS"	-	-	2s. 6d. per doz.	"BITTER BEER"	-	-	2s. 11d. „	AND				B. D. A. (no sediment)	-	-	2s. 6d. „
			Large Bottles.																				
"FAMOUS"	-	-	2s. 6d. per doz.																				
"BITTER BEER"	-	-	2s. 11d. „																				
AND																							
B. D. A. (no sediment)	-	-	2s. 6d. „																				
The Duke Inn	Duke Street	Extant and in use as a pub.	R. A. O. B. JOHN HARRISON. THE DUKE INN, DUKE STREET, SUTTON COLDFIELD, 50 YARDS OFF MAIN ROAD, MANEY. GOOD ACCOMMODATION FOR PARTIES OF ALL DESCRIPTION, CYCLISTS, Etc. DINNERS AND TEAS PROVIDED. ALES, WINES, SPIRITS, AND CIGARS (All of Good Quality). Late of Queen's Head, Farm Street, Birmingham. Headquarters of Sutton Coldfield Football Club. <i>From the Sutton Coldfield News, February 9th 1901</i>																				

General References - Websites

- <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> - Contemporary newspaper articles and advertisements about the pubs
- <https://maps.nls.uk/view/115632588> - Historic mapping of Sutton Coldfield
- <https://sclhrq.org.uk/history-spot.html> - Historic details of Sutton pubs from the archive of the late Roger Lea's History Spot articles, first published in the Sutton Observer local newspaper
- <https://sclhrq.org.uk/serendipity/remembering-stephen-roberts.html> - Historic details of Sutton pubs from the archive of the late Stephen Roberts
- <https://sclhrq.org.uk/research/research-tools/2504-sutton-coldfield-trades-directories.html> - Local trade directory from 1908

General References - Books

- Drink and the Mid Victorians. A study of drunkenness in Sutton Coldfield 1871-1881 by B.M. Hilton. Published for Sutton Coldfield Library. Reference: QSH 41.9 (1987)
- The Public Houses of Sutton Coldfield 1800-1914 by Stephen Roberts. Published by APS Books (2002)

¹³ <https://sclhrq.org.uk/history-spot/111-articles-401-440/1818-cup-2-414.html?highlight=WyJ0aGUiLCJjdXAiXQ==>

¹⁴ <https://sclhrq.org.uk/history-spot/101-articles-1-40/1871-golden-cup-13.html?highlight=WyJ0aGUiLCJjdXAiLCJpbm4iXQ==>