Myth 1: Ralph Harwood invented porter as a substitute for three-threads

No he didn't, and no it wasn't.

In 1802 one of the most influential articles in the history of beer was published. It appeared in a guidebook called *The Picture of London*, written by John Feltham, and the myths and inaccuracies Feltham recorded about the birth of porter, then by far the most popular drink in London, have been repeated continuously ever since, frequently in almost identical sentences to the ones Feltham used.

It was Feltham who first linked porter to an attempt to replicate a beer called three-threads, which he said consisted of a third of ale, a third of beer and a third of "twopenny" (strong pale ale); Feltham claimed that about 1730 "a brewer by the name of Harwood conceived the idea of making a liquor which should partake of the united flavours of ale, beer and twopenny. He did so and called it Entire or Entire-butt, meaning that it was served entirely from one cask; and as it was a very hearty nourishing liquor it was very suitable for porters and other working people. Hence it obtained the name porter."

No previous writer in the 80-plus years since porter had first appeared had ever said the drink was an attempt to imitate another, mixed beer. Nor, apart from one brief attempt in 1788, almost 70 years after the event, had anyone before claimed Harwood of Shoreditch as the inventor of porter. You might think that, with a beer that became famous around the world, and brought fortunes to families including the Whitbreads, the Barclays and Perkinses, the Trumans, Hanburys and Buxtons and the Guinnesses, if the story about Harwood and three-threads were true, someone else might have written it down before Feltham.

There **was** a drink called three-threads, which is mentioned in a rhyming "good pub guide" of around 1718 called the *Vade Mecum for Malt-Worms* (a malt-worm being a slang expression for a beer drinker), but there is no contemporary evidence to show that it was made by mixing beers from three casks, that porter was a replacement for it, or that Ralph Harwood, who was indeed a brewer, in Shoreditch, East London, invented it.

None of this bothered later writers, who copied out Feltham's story without attempting to do any investigation into the veracity of his claims. The *Penny Magazine* for March 1841, for example, contains an almost identical account of porter's origins to Feltham's 38 years earlier, while Richard Valpy French, in *Nineteen Centuries of Drink in England*, published in 1884, offered an easily-recognisable paraphrase of Feltham in his passage about the birth of porter. Another 25 years on, in 1909, and Frederick Hackwood's *Inns, Ales and Drinking Customs of Old England* was still using whole sentences originally written by Feltham in his own account of the arrival of porter a century before (though Hackwood was wildly wrong with the year porter first arrived, suggesting it was "about 1750")

A different version of the start of porter was given by a brewer called John Tuck, author of the *Private Brewer's Guide to the Art of Brewing Ale and Porter*, published 1822, Tuck said that around the time of Queen Anne, early in the 18th century, London's brewers. who sold a "heavy and glutinous" brown beer, started to come under pressure from the brewers of paler beers, which were popular with the country gentry now buying themselves houses in the capital. About 1720., Tuck said, London's brewers brought out an "improved" brown beer "started, well hopped, into butts, and … kept a considerable time to grow mellow." This, he said was the "intire butt beer" that caught on with the working, or portering classes, and became known as porter. No Harwood – no three-threads.