

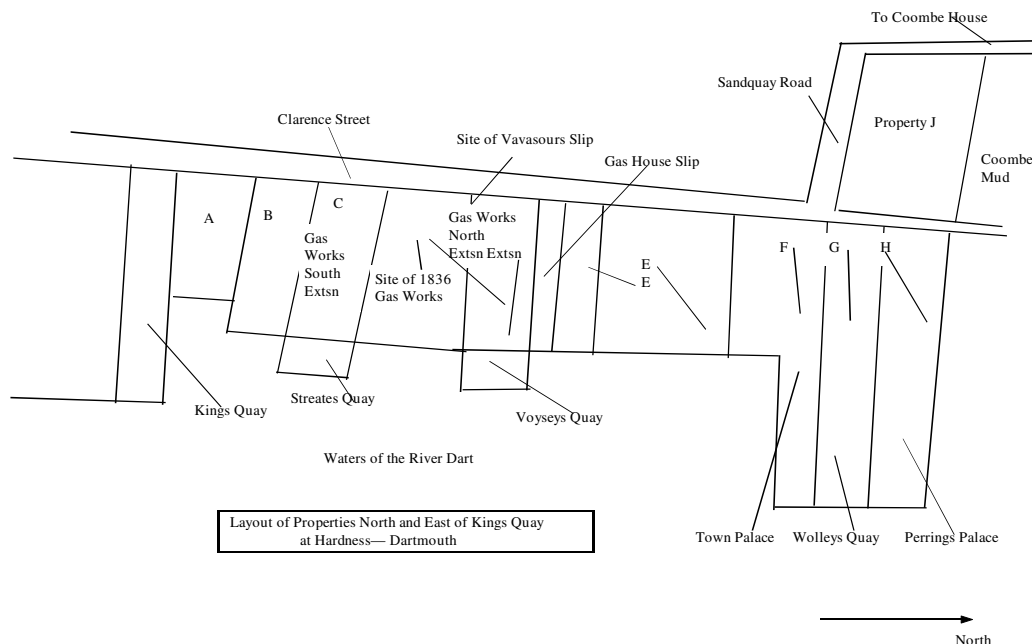
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**The Waterside Properties at Hardness**  
**from Kings Quay to Coombe Mud**

by

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The area, which forms the subject of this paper, comprised the lower part of the ‘ness’ or cape of Hardness. As such the properties began at Kings Quay, faced south, then east and finally north by when they lay along the side of the bay known as Coombe Mud. Behind them lay the extension of the street called Clarence Street and in front of them the harbour. For convenience the series of properties have been designated alphabetically. Thus, as shown on the diagram below, the property adjacent to Kings Quay is listed as property ‘A’.



The waterside area west of Kings Quay was undeveloped waste land until shortly before the outbreak of the English Civil War. By this time there is evidence that greater traffic was being generated by people and goods passing along the top of the mill dam from Clifton-Dartmouth to Hardness and vice versa. The earliest traffic would have been of pedestrians passing between the two communities, but more latterly in the period it seems to have involved wheeled traffic, suggesting the commercial transport of goods<sup>1</sup>.

The increasing use of wheeled vehicles, even if they were only carts, began to damage the drawbridges spanning the mill race and the mill gullet, both of which had to be repaired by the lessee of the Town Mills at the north end of the mill dam or Fosse, now Foss Street. John Roope, the lessee in question, brought a law suit in 1619 by which he claimed that the public had no right of way across the dam. He lost the action and the public right of way was thereafter established. No longer did persons travelling between the two communities have to walk around the Millpond to go from Clifton-Dartmouth to Hardness and back. The judgement in the court case must have spurred development in the Hardness area<sup>2</sup>. We are not concerned with the warehouses and gasworks properties situated there but with the shipyards and quays that were located here.

The shipyards west of Kings Quay had been established from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards and had reached that place by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. To the east of Kings Quay there had been selected development, as in the case of Shapleigh's Gift since about 1600. The commercial area of Dartmouth remained located along and to the east of Lower Street. in Clifton, Dartmouth. The catalyst for expansion into the waste land beyond Kings Quay seems to have been the trade with Newfoundland, both in trade goods and off-shore fishing, from about 1580 onwards<sup>3</sup>. As we have noted above, the cross traffic between Hardness and Clifton-Dartmouth was considerable by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Amongst the properties in this stretch of waterfront were 3 shipyards, Properties F, G, H, and the block of property to the west of them.

We now come to the history of Shapleigh's Gift. This property (F) was waste land when a lease, No.68 (in old Latin lease book) was granted on 20/9/1609 to John Shapleigh, shipowner of Dartmouth, for 80 years at an annual rent of 12d. (£0.05p.) The property became known as Town Palace, and, after the death of John Shapleigh, was also known as Shapleigh's Gift, and was mentioned in his will dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 1627. The will contained a bequest of a piece of land in size, 180 ft in length and 30 ft wide lying on the north of the quay there and with power to extend the quay there by 30 ft. The property was described as lying between the land of Emanuel Wooley to the north and Samuel Thomas to the south. The water of the Dart was to the East and the street from Coombe (Clarence Street) to the town on the West. In his will John Shapleigh, shipowner, asked the Corporation to give his son, John, a shipbuilder, a lease of the property for 99 years at an annual rent of 4d. (£0.02p.) Shapleigh also gave the Corporation £100 to be given to a decayed shipowner for one year plus 16d (£0.07p.) for legal expense in connection with the bond. If the bequest was not used by the Corporation of Dartmouth it was to be used by the Corporation of Totnes.

On 14/12/1633 the sum of £100 was paid out to the Corporation from the will of John Shapleigh *plus £8 for the use of the £100. and the Corporation are to give £6 for clothes to the poor.* This sum was paid out on 29/3/1638. and on 2/5/1638 another £8 was distributed and again in 1640. On 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1665 the property consisting of a tenement, Palace, cellars and curtilage then in the possession of Edward Spurway, was finally transferred to Ambrose Mudd and the other trustees of the borough property; they paying £160 to discharge legacy and arrears.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1666 the property was made over to John Ley of Totnes who agreed to pay £6 per annum in perpetuity to the poor of Dartmouth. This transfer was in accord with the provisions of the will of John Shapleigh. In 1668 the lands were to be transferred to Emanuel Wooley, but the deal did not proceed. In St. Saviours Church there is a tablet recording the gift and reciting that the interest amounting to £6 is to be paid to any decayed shipowners. It appears that before 1694 the Corporation paid the £100 to the Shapleigh's and took over the Gift entire.

In 1707 a lease for 79 years of Shapleigh's Gift was granted to John Harris at a rent of £2 p.a. It is not stated that any fine or consideration was paid. In 1768, presumably after the death of John Harris, the property was acquired by John Seale on a lease of 79 years and allocated as the site of the new workhouse of the parish of Townstall. In the event a workhouse was not built and the chapel of St. Claire at the junction of Browns Hill and Clarence Hill was utilised instead. Tenants during the period of the Seale lease were named as a Mr. Jackson and a Mr. Henry Land<sup>5</sup>.

The property was leased, by lease 461 on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1800 to John Gibbs, shipbuilder for 79 years at a rent of £2 and a fine or consideration of £40. John Gibbs surrendered the 1768 lease of John Seale. By then the property was described as consisting of two dwelling houses, curtilage, yard and palace. The boundaries were stated to be on the north-the land of the Holdsworth family leased from Corporation in the possession of George Wooley, on the south by the land of John Seale then of Andrew Pinson. To the east was the water of the Dart and on the west the way to the Church at Townstal (or Clarence Street). These are the same boundaries as in the 1627 will of John Shapleigh

John Gibbs died in March 1822 and by his will made 15/2/1822 he left his property to his 4 sons:

William Gibbs died 26/1/1832  
Michael Gibbs died ?/4/1832  
George Gibbs died 15/9/1837  
Allan Gibbs died 9/6/1838

His grandson was also known as John Gibbs

Shipbuilding continued on Shapleigh's Gift, which became known as Clarence Yard, until the 1860's. John Gibbs and his sons occupied and built in this yard until 1813 when John Gibbs and Alan Gibbs took a 21 year lease at Sandquay. After the death of John Gibbs the Sandquay lease was extended to 1837 by John Gibbs II and George Gibbs, meanwhile the Clarence Yard was rented or leased to William Henry Nichols, shipbuilder, who was in possession as a tenant from 1832 or earlier and until his death in 1844<sup>6</sup>

Between 1844 and 1850 the yard was occupied by William Adams Couch who built some of the 'share' ships commissioned by George Moffatt. One of these was the brigantine '*Marianne*' 142 tons. She was first owned by John Lamzed and then by Godyear & Co. From 1850 until 1855 it was occupied by Mr. Alford before he followed Wm Paige into Barnes Key yard at Kingswear. In 1855 William Adams Couch was building in the yard and in 1858, after the failure of William Kelly at Sandquay, his foreman, George Philip formed a

partnership in July 1861 known as Couch and Philip. According to the historian of Philip & Son, Rodney Tucker, this partnership constructed several vessels for the Newfoundland trade, but Rodney Tucker refers to the firm as Couch & Phillips. This is an error of fact, because there was no such firm. It is probable that the vessels which were built by William Kelly and George Philip in the period 1854-1861 and attributed to Couch & Philip in Clarence Yard were actually built at Sandquay qv. In September 1865 George Philip went into business on his own at Sandquay and the partnership was dissolved. Mr. Couch retired shortly after, in 1867 and offered the yard for sale in 1870.. Typical of the ships built by Couch & Philip at Clarence Yard was a schooner of 150 tons nnm, dimensions 90'x 22'x 12' depth of hold<sup>7</sup>.

In 1879 the Gibbs' lease fell in hand to the Charity Trustees who then let Shapleighs Gift, then described as consisting of dwelling houses, sheds and buildings at Coombe, together with use of passage forming entrance to property from Clarence Street to J. P. Tolman, ships chandler and river boat owner, for 7 years. At some time early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the long quay forming an extension to the northern half of the property as well as the whole of the properties of Woolleys Quay and Perrings Palace were abandoned and some 1000 sq. yards of reclaimed land abandoned [50 feet long x 180 feet wide}. The abandoned property was almost certainly built in the first quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and pre-dated the building of the New Ground which replaced it.

Also covered by the same lease was a plot of waste ground at Hardness heretofore in the possession of George Wooley and since of the late Arthur Holdsworth. The boundaries were given as on the east the slip mentioned above and to the west a street while on the north was the harbour. The boundary to the south was another Street leading to Dartmouth. The mention of the two streets places the parcel of land to the west of the slip running north south behind Woolleys Quay and Perrings Palace, the last two properties in the string east of Kings Quay. The next properties are re-aligned with their front facing northerly. The slip on the east which ran behind Perrings Palace, was as noted, an extension of Clarence Street. In 1808 and until much later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the portion of road leading to the Sandquay Road, the street to the south ran between walls and was duplicated by a further less well-defined way that ran on a 45 deg. line north of the walled road<sup>8</sup>.

In mid-19<sup>th</sup> century the wharf or quay here, within the boundary of the erstwhile Perrings Palace and Woolleys Quay property, was known as the House & Steam Coal wharf which was operated by Charles Vincent, steward to Sir Henry Paul Seale. Besides supplying coal to merchants who hawked domestic coal around the Dartmouth area, bunker coal was supplied to early steamships which tied-up at the wharf for supplies. From 1854 until the end of 1855 the coal business was owned by Capt. John Moody of Goole who then sold the coaling business to Wm. Ashford jnr, a timber merchant. In July 1856 the property was owned by Moody and Cooper as an engineering works. Cooper was the practical engineer and John Moody the seamen. In November 1856 when the works opened, one of their first tasks was to lengthen a river steamboat the '*Mary*'  $\frac{3}{4}$  owned by John Moody and  $\frac{1}{4}$  owned by Charles Seale-Hayne.. The composite-hulled '*Mary*' had been plying for trade on the River Dart between Totnes and Dartmouth since 1854 and she was taken into the works in February 1857 in order to be lengthened by 12 ft. This was the first case of iron shipbuilding in Dartmouth. The work was completed by the 28<sup>th</sup> June 1857 when the '*Mary*' was

relaunched. One week later she had completed trials and was chartered to the South Devon Railway Co. and plied between Exmouth and Starcross.

In 1858 Capt. Moody returned to Goole and the engineering works were put up for sale in Aug. 1859. The works were described as large and commodious with covered sawpit, buildings and dwelling house in addition to the workshops. It was stated that one large vessel or two small ones could be built simultaneously with tonnage of 150-300 tons. The Dartmouth Steam Packet Co. bought the works although Charles Seale-Hayne was, as a large shareholder in the Company and the lessee, the effective owner of the whole business, works and land.

One interesting discrepancy concerns the east-west length of the 3 properties, F, G, H, Town Palace, Woolleys Quay and Perrings Palace. On an updated plan of 1833 the length is shown to be 175 ft or greater, for the property plan bleeds off at this point, while on another copy the property has a finite length of 130 ft. This is in broad agreement with the harbour chart of 1852/3 and the Town Plan of 1886. Was the one copy of the 1833 plan in error and later corrected? If so why was the length made both greater and smaller? Long experience suggests that the citizens of Dartmouth would not give up so much land that had been won back from the river unless the walls of extended quays were too costly to maintain when the draught of vessels lying alongside the quays would no longer permit them so to do. With no useful function to perform the quays would then have been abandoned. The quay function was usurped by the building of the New Ground from 1671 onwards<sup>9</sup>.

For the property south of Coombe Mud there is an early lease, dating circa 1635, granted for a term of 80 years to Robert Plumleigh. This lease would expire in 1715, but as there is no trace of any renewal before 1749 it is probable that Robert Plumleigh renewed his lease at the time of the General Re-lease of 1655 or in 1668, another popular date, which action he took in respect of other properties he leased in Dartmouth. As a result of taking such action in 1668 no renewal would be due before 1748. On 27/4/1749 John Pomeroy was granted a lease for 79 years to run until 1828. For this lease he paid a consideration of £10, but the rent due is not stated. John Pomeroy died before the lease term expired and the lease passed into the hands of Arthur Holdsworth, father of Henry Holdsworth who built thereon dwellings, Bonded Cellars, lofts, slips and which possessed a beach which under the wording of the lease extended to the Boundstone adjacent to Coombe Quay, which Quay was late of John Seale. The size of the plot was 300 ft x 80 ft. The length quoted encompasses the land from the corner of the Sandquay Road eastwards to the extension of Clarence Street past Perrings Palace. In the north-south direction there has been subsequent reclamation and 2 walled building slipways fronted the beach area by 1833, increasing the average width of the plot, albeit irregularly, to 130 ft.

Minor shipbuilding took place here at Coombe at intervals down to the 1870's, but only vessels of shallow draught could be launched on account of the water being so shallow even at high tide. Many ships were beached here and left to rot. The remains of the last of these were buried when the whole of Coombe Mud was enclosed by the North Embankment Extension and the area behind it filled-in during the inter-war years and renamed Coronation Park in 1937. During the Second World War the Park was used as a maintenance base for

military vehicles stationed in the area, afterwards reverting to its original purpose as a leisure area.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A. Property Titles

#### Title to Property 'F'.

From Charity Commission Report of 1821, earliest leases were dated 20/9/1609 for a term of 80 years followed by another lease in 1707, and then a lease for 79 years from 1768.

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.461 dated 23/9/1800. Subsequently the property fell in hand to the Charity Commission and was let on short term leases.

#### Title to Property 'G'.

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.44 dated 29/9/1655

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.73 dated 24/11/1666

DRO SM 2034 Lease 220 , and 221, dated 1724 are a continuance and extend the lease term until 1804.

DRO SM 2034 Lease No, 370 dated 25/9/1793

DRO SM 2034 Lease No. 662 dated 14/10/1835

#### Title to Property 'H'

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.71 dated 8/7/1655

DRO SM2034 Lease No.220/221 dated 1724

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.458 dated 29/9/1808

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.659 dated 14/10/1835

#### Title to Property 'J'.

DRO DD ? An old lease, in Latin, to Robert Plumleigh dated 1635 for 80 years and subsequently extended by him about 1668.

DRO SM 2034 Lease No. ? dated 27/4/1749

DRO SM 2934 Lease No.457 dated 29/9/1808

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.566 dated 25/5/1822

DRO SM 2034 Lease No.761 dated 7/5/1858

### APPENDIX 'B' Notes and References

1. There were severe limitations on wheeled traffic in Dartmouth before 1825. The only goods carriage into the town from north, south and west was by pack horse or by persons on horse-back. After 1825 carriages could reach and enter the town from the west via the New, now Victoria, Road. Access by wheeled traffic from the north of Hardness did not improve until the road from Sandquay to Coombe was opened in 1832 when the Floating Bridge came into service; even so it was a bad road. It was rumoured that Queen Victoria's coach lost a wheel here. Access from the south had to wait until 1855 when the road from Torcross was made.
2. *Dartmouth and its Neighbours*, E.R. Freeman Phillimore Press, Chichester, 1990.
3. *Fishing and the Commercial World of Early Stuart Dartmouth*, Todd Gray, in *Tudor & Early Devon* (ed), T Gray, M Rowe and A Erskine, (Exeter)
4. This could be due to an appreciation of property values or of development on site or an increase in the cost of living
5. Charity Commission Reports 1821, T. Besley, Exeter, 1826
6. Ibid Ref.12

7. Files of the *Dartmouth Chronicle* for 1865, In the possession of the author.
8. Ibid Ref. 13
9. DRO DD 63410 and 63616