

A Short History of Shirehampton

by Ethel Thomas, Author Local Historian and Publisher

To the north-west of the City of Bristol in England, about six miles distant, on the banks of the River Avon, lies the Parish of Shirehampton. Nowadays considered a mere residential suburb of that great City, but in truth Shirehampton has had a long history in her own right, and was first mentioned in the ninth Century as being included in the Kingdom of Mercia.

The Parish of Shirehampton originally formed part of the large and ancient Parish of Westbury-on-Trym, when it was considered a Hamlet. In 1844 Shirehampton became a separate and independent Parish, and the Elizabethan Chapel-of-Ease of St Mary became the Parish Church. The newly formed Parish also included Avonmouth, until 1917 when Avonmouth was made a separate Parish.



King's Weston House

Since Elizabethan times Shirehampton has belonged to the King's Weston Estates, until 1935 when at the death of the last Squire, Philip Napier Miles, the Estates had to be broken up and sold to pay Death Duties. The Squires lived at King's Weston House, designed by John Vanburgh.

In the 18th Century Shirehampton became famous for its beauty spots, and attracted visitors from far and wide, who came to enjoy the wonderful views to be seen from here, especially those from Penpole Point, where the views of the River Severn and the Welsh Hills are still a joy to behold. On this account the area was mentioned by Jane Austen in her 'Northanger Abbey'.



Shirehampton Park

At this time the Hamlet grew into a Village, when numerous rich merchants and ship owners moved here to live, and made it a fashionable aristocratic place. Many of their large splendid houses, alas, disappeared during the 1930's for road widening purposes.



With the coming of the Railway (1865) and opening of the Docks at neighbouring Avonmouth (1877 and 1908) people moved into the Parish attracted by the new found employment, and from thence there was a gradual and drastic change in the Parish scene. Hitherto having been an agricultural Parish and part of the unspoilt rural England, which disappeared never to return. An even greater change came about following the First World War when Shirehampton was chosen a site to house hundreds of new Council houses in Bristol's slum clearance schemes. Shirehampton now finds itself an urban area with all the noise and traffic which towns bring with them.

The climate is very mild on account of the Gulf Stream flowing into the River Avon.

For detailed history see *Shirehampton Story* by Ethel Thomas. ISBN 0 9507477 1 8. *War Story* tells the history of the war in Avonmouth and Shirehampton.

