

# History of the George Inn

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by Ralph Hack

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On the north west-side of Shirehampton Green stood the 'George' probably re-built about 1760, and named after the accession of the new King George III in the October.

The only road to the village was from the outer Kingsweston park, a rough narrow road with cart ruts and pot holes filled up from time to time by villagers supervised by the Vestry waywarden. But by 1756 Britain was at war with France, the Seven years War 1756-1763 to meet the needs of the emergency, the old road was made a turnpike. With a good road surface, travel was easier and more comfortable which led to increased traffic. It also improved the approach to Kingsweston house where the Southwell family lived. At the Green Lamplighters Hall from where there were good views to Pill across the river, the Hungroad moorings and the mouth of the Avon. With the river only navigable at certain times, the turnpike was used by a number of merchants who had interests in ships in the roadsteads and other trades; people involved in their provisioning as well as fitting out with ropes, sail cloth and other needs. For here, in the war emergency there was considerable activity. The other part of the turnpike divided the Green to run on through the village street and on down to the Common in the flat marshland to the Gibbet post.



The Old George Inn

The 'George' Inn sign suspended from wrought-iron work was a welcome sight to travellers. At times the narrow frontage was busy with arrivals and departures of coaches, farm carts and with horses tethered to the hitching posts outside. Often there were shouts of drovers taking animals through the village who would leave them to a boy with a dog who watered them at the pond

below the village green, whilst they went in the tavern. On market days, great lumbering broad-wheeled carriers; carts were pulled by a team of eight horses led by a man with a long whip & on such conveyances the poor of the district rode with their produce to the Bristol markets. Ann Chadwell had the 'George' until February 1769 when she left to take over as landlady of the Old Passage House (Now built new by Mr Swetman) called Lamplighters Hall.

In 1770 the George was the property of Captain Bishop, until 1775 when it belonged to Thomas Saunders who with his wife Ann ran the inn and tavern. Accommodation was available in the inn, & the tavern was for those who only called in for food and drink. One may picture Thomas, his hair tied back with a ribbon, wearing a shirt with wide sleeves, waistcoat, knee breeches over white socks and buckled shoes. At times wearing a long white apron.

In the summer months, the district was a popular venue, particularly for the gentry who came in their private carriages from Clifton, Hotwells and as far away as Bath. Kingsweston House at this time was the seat of Lord deClifford who owned much of the land in the district. When he and other members of the family were away a select number of visitors were allowed to visit the house to see the great collection of paintings, the gardens and the menagerie. They could then go out to the tall Lodge or Belvedere at Pen Pole, the hill above Shirehampton village where they could take tea and from where there were extensive views, for it was said, there are some of the most beautiful prospects imaginable, at the mouth of the Avon, King Road, the Denny Island, with ships at anchor and under sail.

Having seen Kingsweston and Pen Pole the visitors could then descend to the picturesque village of Shirehampton, embowered amidst orchards and elms. Over the years they arrived in a variety of horse drawn carriages, barouches, curricles, phaetons and gigs, some with coachmen and servants in livery, and others rode in on horse back. On arrival at the forecourt of the George they were helped down by servants and greeted by the innkeeper with a bow, for they were wealthy customers. The men well dressed in shirts of fine linen with neck cloths and ruffles at the wrist, embroidered waistcoats, long skirt coats, with large buttons and turned back cuffs, knee breeches, white socks and buckled shoes. Hair was in short wigs or tied back. Depending on the weather, some wearing three-cornered-hats, cloaks, swords and riding boots. Their women wore long flowing dresses off the shoulders with elaborate hairstyles. If they planned to stay a night or two, the inn servants after a greeting by forelock or cap touching unloaded the luggage and followed them into the inn.

## The Parlour

On entering through the main door, mine host the innkeeper would show them into the parlour where orders were given for food and drink, or if they were special visitors, into a private room. The parlour was also frequented by yeomen and the large tenant farmers of the Kingsweston estate, often known by their labourers as 'the masters'. As the best room, it would have been well furnished with mats, chairs and a long table with a cloth. On one side of the room would be a large fireplace with a mantelpiece on which there were ornaments, and either side of the fireplace were settles. On the walls, were candlestick holders, prints, a cupboard and a dresser for china ware. Here the visitors brought news from afar and heard news of the district. With coats removed, a servant attended to their needs. A popular dinner at this time was the 'Roast beef of Old England' with vegetables, followed by plum pudding washed down with the choicest wines.

## Bed Chambers

Those staying overnight were escorted upstairs to a bed chamber followed by a servant with the luggage. The floorboards were covered with a carpet, four-poster bed, a chair or two, wash-hand stand and a night commode. Also fireplace, a warming-pan on the wall, a few prints, curtains at the window from where there was a fine view of the village green below. A chamber-maid brought up the hot water for washing and attended to the fire. Other rooms were more basic, some of them up in the attics contained several small beds shared by other travellers.

## The Tap Room

The social centre for the 'labouring poor' as they were called was frequented by agricultural labourers, blacksmiths, wheel-wrights, carpenters, coachmen, drovers, sail-makers, seafarers, pedlars and others from different walks of life. Often crowded, this was a plain room with a table or two, a settle and a fireplace. On the floor sawdust and spittoons. There may also have been a large cartwheel suspended from a wooden beam in the ceiling. It was turned on its side, and on the rim at intervals where the spokes joined were candles which were lit at night. A common feature of inns at this time. Their dress was plain in contrast to the gentry in the other room, some were in wide sleeved shirts, neck cloths, plain waistcoats, short jackets and large belts. Knee breeches were worn with socks and stout boots, and some were wearing smocks and gaiters, the common farming attire. Their hair was cut short or tied back. Broad rimmed hats were common to take the rain off in their out door work. Here beer was drawn from 'the wood' in large barrels on a stand and served in pewter tankards. Casks of rum, brandy, gin and other spirits were available. After long hours of work, some of their hard-earned money was spent in drink with bread and cheese. Often a room was filled with a tobacco haze from the long clay pipes some of them smoked. A place of fireside talk and 'when the drink was in' strong language, raucous laughter and at times arguments usually about the news brought by travellers. It was by word of mouth for very few could read. Their women in bed gowns which they wore working in the fields.

## Kitchen and Cellar

The kitchen had a large open fireplace that seldom went out, where meat was roasted on a spit and a long table where the food was prepared. Also cupboards for vegetables, plates, racks for cutlery and barrels of salt meat. Water for washing and cooking was drawn from the well outside. There was a large cellar from where barrels of beer, casks of brandy and other spirits were hauled up. At the north-east corner, the coolest part of the building, was the dairy where meat was hung from hooks from wooden beams. They may also have had an icehouse.

## Stabling and Brewing

On the west-side was extensive premises. There was 'ye brewhouse' where the beer and cider was made. Hops were obtained from the Hop Yard field which adjoined Bradley field to the south of the village. Barley and oats came from nearby fields. The apples for cider making probably came from across the road at 'Southwells new house' known later as Walton house, to the rear of which was a large pleasure garden and orchard running back to Church Lane, Pembroke Road. Storerooms for the harness, hay and corn were looked after by the ostler also hitching posts, water troughs and manure heaps. At times also the activity of changing horses, feeding and watering. Over the way was John Wilding's blacksmith shop if a horse had thrown a shoe. There were also coal and wood stores.

## War News

There would have been much talk particularly about another war that had broken out in 1775 when the English settlers in the American colony declared their independence. Britain then declared war on France because of her alliance with the rebellious colonists, Spain in turn declared war on Britain. At the George the visitors heard the news from Pill where an effigy of Washington had been made with a halter around the neck and this was carried through the village where it was tarred and feathered and was set fire, much to the enjoyment of the locals. This conflict again resulted in considerable activity in the roadsteads of Hung Road and King Road with privateers and men-of-war fitting out. There was often 'a warm press' with press gangs combing the district to force men to crew ships. Some innkeepers were crimps paid by the impress service to give customers strong drink and then to send for the press gang. Ships arrived with news of engagements, sometimes enemy ships were brought in as prizes. Captain

Shaw who commanded the 'Lion' of 44 guns and 168 men in December 1778 engaged a French man of War 'L' Orient' of 74 guns and 800 men in the Bay of Biscay. After two hours close engagement the enemy lost 137 killed and 244 wounded. The 'Lion' arrived back in Kingroad in a shattered condition with 22 killed and 19 wounded. For his exploits Shaw was to be known as the 'bold privateer'.

## Stage Coach

In 1782 a stage coach service was started from the 'Bush' inn at Corn Street. It ran out to Westbury, Henbury, Kingsweston and Shirehampton every Tuesday, Friday and Saturday at 8 a.m. The coach returned to Bristol at twelve o'clock. It was used by passengers who could afford it, for coach travel was expensive. A coach had a top covered with black leather with four windows and a basket at the rear for luggage and was pulled usually by a team of four horses. The passengers who travelled inside paid more than those who rode outside on the top. When the coach arrived the travellers brought news from as far away as London. This coach service was good business for the 'George' and 'Lamplighters Hall' particularly for passengers bound for ships in the roadsteads. If the ship was not ready they could stay at one of the inns. News reached the 'George' by way of the coach of a peace settlement in September 1783 which was followed by celebrations.

## The Squire's Marriage

There would have been much talk at the George of Lord de Clifford's marriage to Mary Bourke, daughter of Joseph Bourke, 3rd Earl of Mayo in County Galway. In February 1789 they were married in Dublin. As the local squire, he brought his bride home to Kingsweston in the June to a great homecoming greeted by his mother, sisters, brother, local gentry, household staff, estate workers and tenants. Captain Shaw who had distinguished himself in the late war was now Haven Master of Hung Road where he rented the old Shiplinn near the Hung Road slipway which he called 'Liberty Hall'. As a good tenant of Lord de Clifford and to celebrate the occasion of his marriage he had cannons from the platform in front of his riverside home, drawn by horses through the Hung Road land past the Green and up the hill to Kingsweston house. It was a great event that brought people out of their homes and the George to follow horses and cannons to Kingsweston. In front of the mansion, Shaw has his men fire a salute of welcome to the newly weds, and on the hill nearby he had a display of colours flown from flagpoles.

## Beating the Bounds

The perambulation of the parish boundary, was at one time an annual event which usually took place on Ascension Day and was sometimes called Bounds Day. Shirehampton tything, along with Stoke Bishop, was part of Westbury Parish at this time. From Westbury Church it took three days to walk over the three tythings to inspect the boundaries. The Shirehampton walk took most of a day starting from Lamplighters and following the river up to the Powder house through the Cliff wood across the outer Kingsweston park and down to the Commons in the marshland. Then along, after the sea bank, on the Severn to King Road. From there along by the river to Lamplighters Hall and up to the George. At the end of the day dinner was served in the parlour. The Chapel Warden, Edward Russell, was to record, May 1790 - to paid Thomas Saunders (Landlord) for Procession dinner £19-15-1.

## Poor Relief

It was also the meeting place for the Chapel Warden, the Overseer of the Poor and other members of the Vestry, particularly during the 1780s-1790s, who had drawn up a list of the village poor. They then distributed the 'Aide Money' as it was called. It was the duty of the Overseer to collect the Poor Rate from people who could afford to pay. At this time each parish or tything was responsible for the care of its own poor.

## Public Auctions

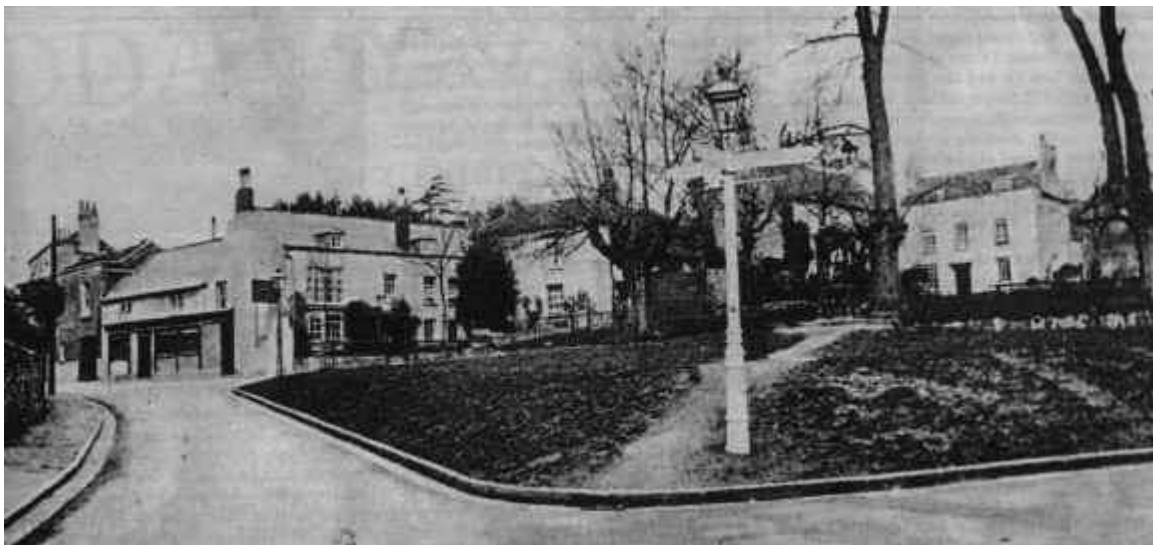
St Peter's Hospital, often known as the Guardians of the Poor or the Mint, had an estate at Shirehampton. When the leases ran out in February 1790 an auction was held at the George for new leases to run for fourteen years.

This included several closes of arable and rich meadow in tenures of Mr Edward Russell, Mr Edward Painter, Thomas Hill, and Mr John Hopkins. It was a crowded room with some of the Guardians present, their lawyer and members of the public. The Guardians made an annual inspection of their estate once a year, followed by dinner at the Inn.

## The Hundred Court

The Hundred Court of Henbury also met here. Below the village lay the Common in the marshland on which villagers at certain times of the year could put their livestock to graze. Sometimes they overstocked by putting out too many animals and so were fined by the Hundred Court. They could appoint various officers such as the tythingman, haywarden and drivers of the Common. A jury was appointed and fines were imposed for various offences.

In October 1778, William Legg a carpenter, had a 'Saw-pit', a shed and a quantity of timber on the Batch; close to the George. It was found to be 'very dangerous' to horse and foot passengers. His saw-pit would have been some six feet deep by about five feet wide and some eight feet long. A driver with horses would drag the trunk of a tree in from a nearby wood.



*Shirehampton Village Green showing the old 'George Inn'*

At the saw pit it was pulled over the pit to be sawed up into planks or beams for use in houses, ship repairs, and mooring posts on the river bank. The saw-pit was worked by two men, one above on the top of the trunk the other underneath in the pit. With a cross-cut saw they worked with backward and forward strokes. An arduous task. William Legg was ordered by the Court to fill in the saw pit and remove the pile of timber. Legg lived close by in the Georgian property on the south side of the Green, Keswick House. In 1805 'The Jurors' presented the Churchwardens of the Tything of Shirehampton with Notice for not repairing the Stocks. The same to be put into repair within one month after Notice under penalty of £5.





*Keswick House, South Side of Village Green*

## Trustees of the Bristol Turnpikes

The Trustees of the Bristol Turnpikes held their meetings here after inspecting stretches of road, along with milestones and gates. The money for making the turnpike road was obtained from local landowners and when completed people using the road had to pay a toll which many, particularly the poor, resented. Many of the trustees would have remembered the turnpike riots of 1749.

By November 1761, the commissioners had received thirty pounds towards widening and amending the road from Lamplighters Hall and the village of Shirehampton towards Kingsweston. A further sum of ten guineas was paid by the Society of Merchants in September 1762 towards completing the road from Shirehampton to Pill Passage, and also to Thomas Lavender blacksmith for repairing turnpikes.

The turnpike or toll road from Durdham Down to Shirehampton was inspected in 1818 along with the Eastern and Western lodge gates at each end of the outer Kingsweston Park. At the bottom of Park Hill the farm outbuildings and a stable were taken down to widen the turnpike. From the village the road ran on down to the Passage Way where land was taken from Mr Onion's Inn, Lamplighters Hall, for more widening. A decision was also taken for the Henbury road to be made a turnpike. After business at the George making recommendations and examining accounts, the trustees concluded their meeting with a good dinner.

## The Society Of Merchant Venturers

The Hall Committee as it was called who, with the Bristol Common Council, were responsible for the movement of ships in and out of the river. They inspected the mooring roadsteads of Kingroad and Hungroad and the pilots; boats at Pill. From time to time new pilots were appointed, others were disciplined for 'being in drink' whilst handling a vessel in the river. This information was reported to the Committee by the Haven Master. After the inspection they repaired to an inn for a dinner which was sometimes the George; Lamplighters Hall, in Hung Road or the Lamb and Flag; or the Kingsweston Inn.

Another war War broke out again with Britain's arch enemy Revolutionary France in 1793. There was once again considerable activity in the Kingroad and Hungroad moorings with ships fitting out and the impressment service active for manning ships. In 1797, there was a threat to invasion by the enemy and the Royal Bucks Regiment marched through the village to the riverside for embarkation on transports from Pill to Tenby to defend the coastline there.

An end to hostilities came in 1802 and after a brief peace, war broke out again in 1803. With Napoleon master of Europe there was another real threat of invasion. Because of the emergency many local men enlisted in the Westbury Parish Volunteer force. Those who frequented the

George had heard and even helped to erect the flagstaffs on the hills and light the beacons to alert people of a French landing. At Rivers Mouth, many locals helped build the battery as part of the defence system.

As the war dragged on, French prisoners of war held at Stapleton prison were repatriated. Under guard, they made a long procession to cartel ships in Hung Road. Many were in a wretched condition too ill to walk and rode in carts with their few belongings, others walked by the side. A sad sight as they made their way down through the park and village green watched by villagers.

## Owners And Landlords

Thomas Saunders advertised his property in 1806 giving details of dinners available along with good stabling, prime hay and corn. He retired in 1810 due to ill health after being at the George for 36 years. It was advertised to be sold at the George Inn by auction together with all the household furniture, plate, collection of caricative prints by Bunbury and brewing utensils. His departure was followed in the June by John Collins, late cook to Lord de Clifford who has this day taken and entered upon the above well-known and long established inn lately occupied by Mr Thomas Saunders. The George was later the property of Moses Kilminster, farmer, who lived at Bradley House at the west-end of the village. From here, he could supply meat, vegetables, apples and cider for the tables at the inn. He appointed one Richard Thomas to run the inn and to improve trade he advertised in May 1813, "An ordinary meal every Sunday at 2s (10p) per head. Patrons who may honour him will be assured that his chief study will be to provide them with the choicest Wines and Spirits on moderate terms".

## The Benefit Society

In June 1813, the Shirehampton Benefit Society was formed at the George Inn. Membership to this Society was restricted to 130 members of good moral character, whose trade and profession was not considered dangerous to health. The age of members was not to exceed thirty-two years. They had to be in good health at the time of admission and whose average earnings had to be at least ten shillings a week. Anyone who wished to become a Member had to be proposed on a Quarterly Night and produce a certificate from the Surgeon of the Society stating his health. If accepted by the Society he was admitted on paying half a guinea and within one year from his admission pay a further sum of two shillings. The Society met at the Inn on 12 Mondays in the year from Michaelmas to Lady Day between seven and nine in the evening, each member to pay to the fund the sum of 5s 6d out of which he was allowed 6d to spend. In return, the member was entitled to the following:

"Any member who by sickness or any other infirmity shall require the benefit of the Society shall at his own expense, give notice in writing (signed by the surgeon of the Society, if any) to the landlord. That two stewards shall each visit the sick member if within three miles of the club house at least once a week during the time such member receives pay from the funds. The landlord to have a good fire in the winter season, or be fined one shilling for any such neglect".

## The Peace

The locals heard of Napoleon's invasion of Russia although news took some weeks to reach the village usually by stage-coach. Then later was heard news of Napoleon's defeat by the Russians and of his army's retreat across Russia in the winter of 1812. Many heard the saying, "On Russia's plains the tyrant's cause was lost, defeated there by General Frost". There followed Napoleon's defeat in March 1814 and his exile to Elba which led to a great celebration. Outside of the George some 400 villagers were regaled with a plentiful supply of roast and boiled beef, mutton, veal and pork, forty four large plum puddings and several barrels of beer and cider, the tables surrounded with the emblems of honour. In letters a yard long covered with flowers were the names of our great and good old king, with our faithful allies, and our immortal Wellington. A Maypole had been erected fifty feet high covered with laurels and garlands of flowers with

colours displayed of different nations from houses and trees. The American flag reversed under all tarred and feathered. The Worcester militia band played. Napoleon returned from his exile for his 'Hundred days' during which time he rallied his old soldiers. However, in June 1815 he was defeated at Waterloo. The long war was at least over and there was again great celebrations. In June 1815 landlord Thomas again advertised. The George Inn in the beautiful village of Shirehampton - comfortable style of well aired beds, a good larder. Ladies and gentlemen about to embark for Ireland may be supplied with sea stock at the shortest notice.

## The Catlin-Baron Families

A family who played an important part in running the George were the Catlins. Up at Kingsweston lived Thomas Catlin and his wife Lydia, who occupied a tied cottage in the narrow Kingsweston lane. Thomas was head groom to Lord de Clifford of Kingsweston House, having been in his service many years. It was but a short walk for him up to the Kingsweston stable block where he could supervise his men cleaning out stables, feeding and grooming horses, polishing coaches and seeing horses harnessed and put to coaches when required. He also had to oversee the blacksmith's quarters in the same building. When called upon by a messenger from the house he would then arrange for a coach and four in hand to await on Lord and Lady de Clifford or their relations at the main entrance of Kingsweston House. Lord de Clifford when in London had made the acquaintance of Prince Esterhazy who was Austrian ambassador to the Court of St James. Esterhazy visited him at his Kingsweston seat. The war was now over and Napoleon had been exiled to St Helena. In his retinue Esterhazy had a chef, Francois Baron, who had served in the French army at the battle of Waterloo. It was during this time that Baron made the acquaintance of the Catlins. He met their daughter Ann, whom he married in May 1822 at St Georges Church, Hannover Square, London. Ann's mother Lydia was present along with two members of the Embassy staff.

## The Cottage near the George

The couple returned to Kingsweston to live with Ann's parents in the cottage and Francois for a time was employed as a chef at Kingsweston. A son was born to them in 1824 who was called Francois. Shortly after this, Francois and Ann Baron with their boy Francois took a cottage on the north side of Shirehampton Green near to the George Inn where two more children were born to them. As the boy Francois grew older, he heard from his father about the military campaigns of Napoleon, and on the wall over the mantelpiece there was a portrait of Bonaparte. Francois was a lively boy who attended the local dame school where lessons were taught by a cobbler and his wife. For their tuition the children brought cakes, pies or a dozen eggs. He was also interested in nature and did water colours of the local scene.

## Village Characters

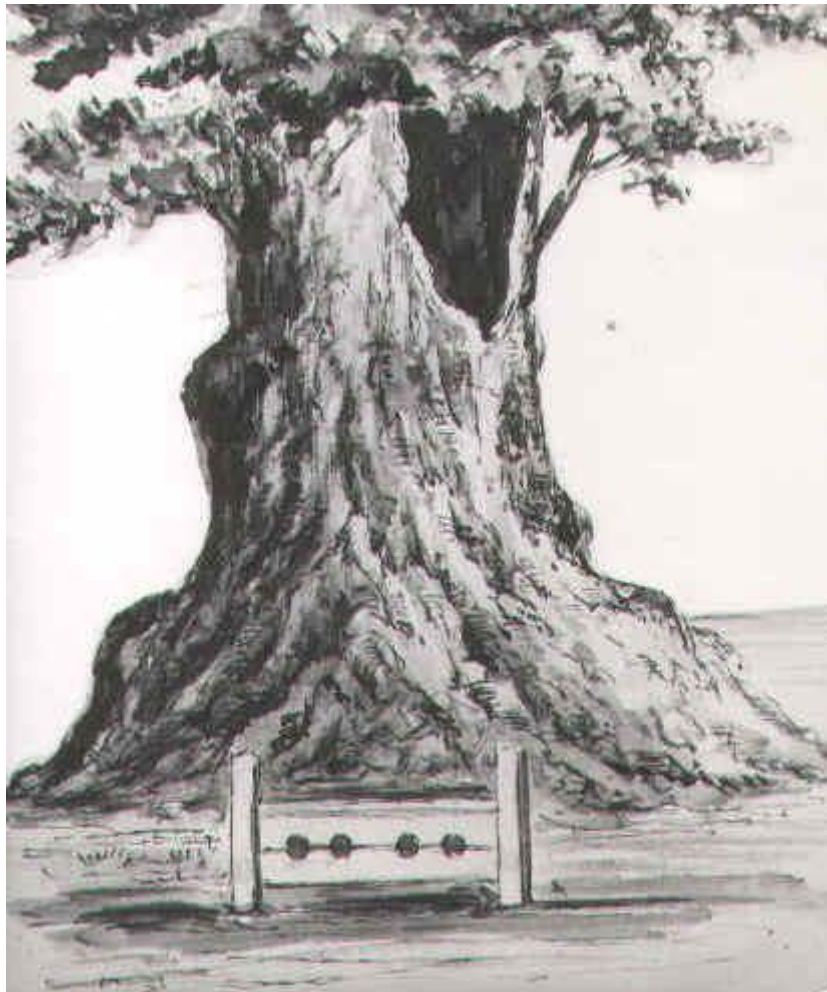
At this time the George was still owned by Moses Kilminster and run by Thomas Catlin junior and his wife Ann. Living close to the George the boy Francois Baron could go in and see his uncle and aunt where he got to know the regulars. Many years later he recalled the scene, The masters sat in the parlour and discussed all the affairs of the neighbourhood and national concerns (as far as they knew them), as literature was scant and newspapers were very dear. Fashion had now changed, they wore shirts with neck cloths, long jackets with high collars and long drainpipe trousers called pantaloons.

The men sat in the tap room and were supplied with drink as they called for it by the ostler, who was a stalwart fellow who used coolly to pick up those who could neither sit or stand, throw them over his shoulder and deposit them in one of the stables on the straw till they regained sufficient sense to try to reach home. There was one frequenter of the George, who was a terror to the villagers, who let him have his own way, but with strangers he loved to pick a quarrel or dare them to fight. He was seen (though but of medium height) to knock down men much bigger than



himself as if they were ninepins. The contests took place in an adjacent field, whither the combatants were accompanied by the drunks from the inn.

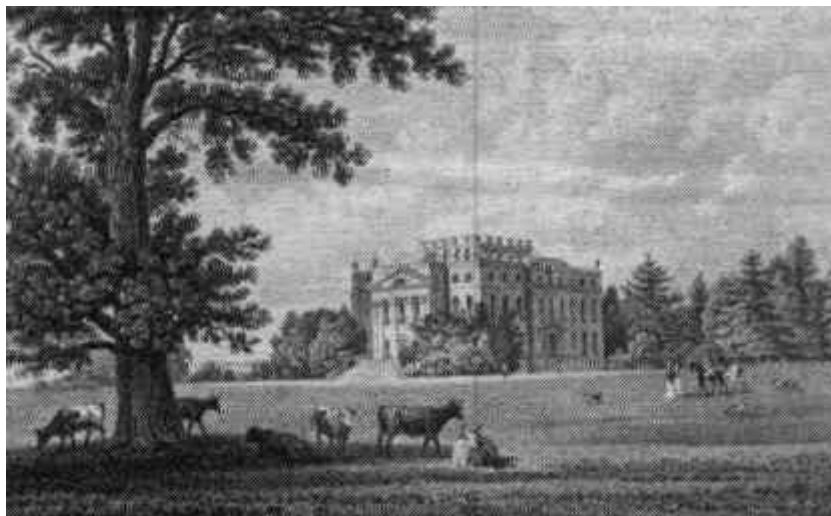
## The Stocks Tree



*The Stocks Tree*

On the east-end of the village green grew the 'Stocks Tree' an old elm of great age. At the foot of the tree stood the village stocks where persons for small offences were confined, some for drunkenness, brawling, damaging property and other offences. The Petty Constable, who at this time was appointed by the Vestry, confined wrong doers in the stocks where they experienced some discomfort with their legs and arms secured. If well known trouble-makers, they were sometimes exposed to the jeers of passers by and the rough jokes of boys who pelted them with rotten fruit.

## Kingsweston House



*Kingsweston House*

When Francois Baron was about seven, he went with his mother to see her friend the housekeeper at Kingsweston House. On one such occasion, Francois was allowed to roam the passages on the ground floor where he caught sight of a rope by which the big bell at the top of the house was rung. It was tolled when the de Cliffords were at home, if out riding or walking in the gardens telling them it was time for luncheon or dinner. If the bell was sounded when the de Cliffords were away it meant something was wrong and would bring gardeners, stablemen and domestics out to see what had happened.

The boy seized the rope and tugged it swinging up and down. Francois' mother after seeing her friend went down, collected him, and on their way out crossing, the courtyard saw men running towards the house one with a pitchfork alarmed at hearing the bell. Francois kept quiet and with his mother went home.

## Bonfire Night

Bonfire night was an exciting time for the villagers particularly for those in the George;. The Old Stocks tree had some ten feet from the ground a vast hollow; where wood for the bonfire was stored for the 5th of November which was a great village occasion with many villagers attending. The farmers had to watch their palings and hurdles carefully, for unscrupulous marauders were numerous;. When the Bristol riots took place in the October of 1831 many villagers on the Green could see the flames of Queen Square reddening the night sky. As a result, the traditional bonfire on the green was prohibited for fear large gatherings of people might cause more rioting and the powder from the magazine on the Horseshoe bend was removed to a secret place by the Severn for fear of rioters.

## Lord de Clifford

In September 1832 Lord de Clifford who was in his sixty fifth year died at Brighton and his remains were brought back to his country seat for internment in Henbury Church, Francois, a boy of eight, with his parents and other villagers saw the funeral cortege pass through the outer Kingsweston Park. The horse with its nodding plumes, the board of feathers, the Earl's coronet borne on a velvet cushion, the long line of carriages with friends and domestics was the grandest sight he had ever seen.

Francois Baron's grandparents, Thomas and Lydia Catlin, heard much about the demise of Lord de Clifford and would also have been present at Kingsweston and Henbury Church along with

other estate retainers. Lord de Clifford died without issue and his widow, along with other relations and trustees, decided the estate should be sold. The house was cleared, apart from the great collection of paintings, and what furniture and effects the relations did not want were to be sold by auction. In March the following year, the Catlins and other members of the household moved furniture, china and other effects to the Kingsweston Inn where the auctions took place. There was now much speculation particularly among the local gentry, tenant farmers, gardeners, carpenters, grooms and others in tied cottages about what was to happen to the estate.

## The Catlins at the George

In his will, the late Lord de Clifford left Thomas Catlin Senior, who had been in his service forty five years, an annuity of £40 and his wife Lydia £20. In 1833 Thomas Catlin Senior and his son Thomas Junior bought the old George Inn at Shirehampton from Moses Kilminster for £1,300. Thomas Junior was now 32 and his wife Ann, 27 who as owners were to run the place. They were assisted by one male and two female servants. His parents, Thomas and Lydia, lived on at the cottage in Kingsweston. Thomas was a familiar figure riding on horseback through the park to see his son and his wife at the George. Lydia on one occasion walking over in the dark in her long cloak finding the way with her lantern was confronted by a man who came out of the trees near the milestone who said to her in a demanding voice, "Your money or your life!" To which she replied boldly, "Money I have none and my life would not be much good to you". Whereupon he made off. It was about this time, that an itinerant artist visited Shirehampton where the Catlins had their portraits drawn - at the time when there was no photography. Thomas and Lydia were now in their early seventies.

After much speculation about the estate, news reached the inn that it had been purchased by Philip J. Miles of Leigh Court, Abbots Leigh, for two hundred and ten thousand pounds. Old Thomas Catlin and his wife Lydia stayed on at the cottage in Kingsweston and as long as he was able he continued as Head Groom. Lydia died in 1840 the following year her husband Thomas. After the service in Henbury Church, probably attended by their son Thomas and his wife Ann, their mortal remains were interred in the churchyard where a stone was erected to their memory.

## Horse-Omnibus

The regular coach service which for some years had run from the Bush in Corn Street stopped in 1844. The Great Western Railway had been built and opened in 1841 and it was easier and faster for people to travel from London to Bristol by train instead of coach. The old coaching inn at the Bush was sold and became the property of a Building Society. At Shirehampton where there was no rail link a horse omnibus service was started in 1844 which ran from the George twice a day.

## May Time

In the lane leading off from the green known, in later years as Park Road, was the place where villagers erected the Maypole near to the blacksmith Robert Edbrooks shop, a methodist who had a small chapel in his yard, and it rendered the 1st May a gala day and had a pleasing appearance when surrounded by the merry children and the ribbon decked dancers. The old Benefit Society formed in 1813 now had an anniversary walk on the second Tuesday in May. Members dressed in blue with brass buttons sporting blue rosettes in their hats and carrying brass headed staves decorated with blue ribbon, some with large banners with religious and temperance inscriptions.

They met at the inn at half past nine when the roll was called, then, led by a brass band they called on the minister who lived opposite in the Terrace and after walking through the village they proceeded to the Church for divine service. When the Reverend Arthur Mansfield, a low churchman was vicar, he preached from the chancel step in his Geneva gown rather than wear the Popish rags. After the service, the members marched back to the inn for dinner. By this time

the Catlins had built a Club Room over the old stables. It was a great occasion. On the north side of the village green a large booth was erected, the sides of planks and the roof covered with sail cloth, inside stalls were set up and there were swings for village children.

From the old inn banners were hung out from an upper window.

## The Great Gale

A great talking point in the George was the weather, particularly after a severe storm. For in the November of 1859 there came what was called a hurricane which lasted seven minutes leaving a trail of destruction as it crossed over Shirehampton and Kingsweston. It happened at 6.40 a.m. on a Sunday morning. Houses partially unroofed with the magnificent avenue of elms from the Turnpike Road to Penpole Point almost destroyed, only a few of the trees remain standing. In Kingsweston Park also a great number of trees were torn up. The scene is worth going many miles to witness. Scores of fine elms are down, sometimes six or more in a row. At the George the bailiff would have brought the news with the company giving details of damage to their homes. The well known Old Stocks tree fell in the great storm.

## The Hunt Dinner

Another event was the presence of Squire P. W. S. Miles of Kingsweston and other members of the local gentry on their annual coursing and fox hunting day which was largely attended. It was always of interest to the villagers, particularly the children, as the hunt came down through the village and fields of Shirehampton. In the February of 1860 it was noted, Out of 29 runs only six kills, hares very fleet and wild. The day's sport ended with a dinner in the Club Room at the George inn put on by Mrs Catlin.

## A Railway

Thomas Catlin the innkeeper died in 1855 his remains interred in Shirehampton churchyard, Ann his wife carried on at the George, business increased, for by 1864 work had started on building the Bristol Port and Pier Railway from the Clifton Suspension Bridge to a pier on Shirehampton wharf at Rivers Mouth. Such an undertaking brought in a considerable labour force who spent some of their earnings at the inn. In February 1865, the steam engine for the Port and Pier Railway arrived. It was pulled through the village by a team of 30 horses to the great excitement of local people. The railway was opened in March 1865. Ann Catlin had died this year and the George which the Catlins had for over thirty years was sold in 1866. In the passage of time it became the property of Georges Brewery.

## Sources:

Mrs V. M. Brown for plan of the old George.

Her father, Mr F. W. Gainsford had the George in the 1920-1930s.

The late Densmore Walker for extracts from the Baron Diary including watercolours.

The late Miss E. Collins for the Catlin pictures.

Bristol Newspapers, Courtesy Bristol Reference Library.

Ralph A. Hack