

GLOUCESTER QUAY 1780-1820

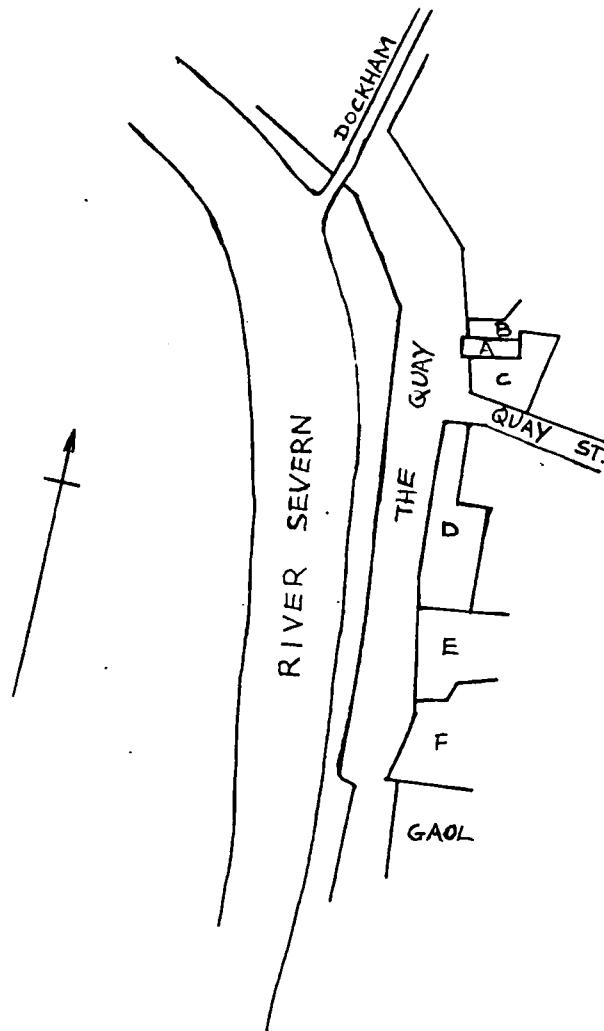
by Hugh Conway-Jones

The Quay by the River Severn at Gloucester used to be a busy place, with piles of merchandise waiting to be loaded into boats or transferred to the nearby warehouses. Occasionally, sea-going ships came up to the Quay bringing wines and spirits from the Continent, but most of the boats were trows or barges trading up the river as far as Shrewsbury or down the river to Bristol and South Wales. Most carriers worked to fairly fixed routes, and at each regular port of call, they either had their own warehouse or a local wharfinger acting as their agent. These wharfingers helped to arrange cargoes and provided any temporary storage that might be required. They also often stocked coal and building materials etc., and usually kept a good supply of seasoned timber for making barrels which were used for many of the general cargoes.

In the 1790s there were five trows operating between Gloucester and Bristol once a fortnight on the spring tides (1). Four of them belonged to Wakefield and Co. who operated from the old glasshouse yard north of the Quay, and one was run by William Smith. There were also weekly boats to Tewkesbury and Upton, to Worcester, Stourport and Bewdley, and to Bridgenorth and Shrewsbury (where there was an overland link to Chester and the North) (2). By 1802, Smith had become the chief carrier to Bristol, and Leonard Dark had started running boats to Swansea (3). The principal wharfingers were John Lewis, Charles Parker and George Harmer, and their properties will be referred to below.

The Quay itself and much of the adjoining land belonged to the Corporation, and some indication of the various properties and their occupiers can be obtained from the lease books and the Chamberlains' accounts preserved in the Gloucestershire Record Office (4). The only old building still surviving is the Custom House (A), and by 1800 this was nearing the end of its original use. In 1724, the City Council had been told that the Custom House Office needed rebuilding, and they agreed that the upper floors could be extended forward on pillars "for the more commodious re-edifying and building the said Custom House and making the offices therein more useful" (5). In fact, only the upper floors were occupied by the customs officers, the ground floor being used as a storehouse. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the storehouse was leased by John Pitt, a big landowner who became the Collector of Customs and later a Member of Parliament for the city. A lease in 1794 refers also to a dwelling house and this may have been the building in the court behind the storehouse. In 1799, Pitt bought the freehold. With the general increase in trade at this period, the customs officers found their accommodation rather cramped, and within a few years they had moved to larger premises in St. Mary's Square.

Just to the north of the Custom House was a small piece of city land (B) that was usually leased to the owners of the adjacent freehold premises. At the end of the eighteenth century, it was leased to Thomas Rudge, but was probably occupied by the Harmer family who were wharfingers (6). Certainly George Harmer was the tenant in 1808, although William Kendall had taken over the lease by 1810. Harmer and Kendall were in partnership for a short time, and they were among the first to advertise Forest of Dean coal that had been brought down to the river on the Bullo Pill tramroad (7). Kendall continued to occupy the premises for many years and became one of the main wharfingers on the Quay.



To the south of the Custom House and on the corner of Quay Street was the Star (C), one of the many public houses in the area. The adjacent property in Quay Street was the Duke, across the road was the Three Kings and there were several other public houses further up Quay Street. No doubt they were a welcome sight to the cold and thirsty boatmen who braved wind and tide to bring the trows up from Bristol and South Wales. Also in Quay Street was the coal yard of Charles Parker.

Along the Quay to the south of Quay Street, there was a row of properties all leased as a group during the eighteenth century (D). When they were leased to John Ready in 1791, they were described as three tenements, a storehouse and three lofts one over the other. One of the buildings had a projecting porch at the front, and another had a garden at the back containing a storehouse. The total frontage was nearly sixty-six yards, and a footway in front was described as being formerly twenty inches above the Quay with railings. In 1805, the group was split up and leased as four separate properties. The northern one was occupied by Robert Dadd pattenmaker, for a few years and then became the Mermaid public house. The next was a warehouse and large yard which was leased to William Price, timber merchant. The next became the Ship, where the present public house of that name now stands, and the southernmost property of the group was a large warehouse. This was leased to John Saunders, a soapboiler, but may

have been used as a bonded store for the wines and spirits being imported from the Continent.

Further south along the Quay was another group of properties that were usually leased as a block (E). When they were leased to Samuel Lysons in 1799, they were described as a messuage, a large storehouse, several small storehouses etc. and a yard. They were probably occupied by John Lewis, a wharfinger who had certainly taken over the lease a few years later. He built up an extensive business forwarding goods to all parts of the country via the river and canal carriers. When he died, his wife carried on the business and advertised that stocks of coal, alabaster, fire bricks, tiles and coopers' timber were available for sale (8). Mary Lewis went bankrupt in 1813, but it seems that the business was continued by one of her family for a few years. Around 1820, however, the frontage of the property was rebuilt and a covered gateway was formed through to the new gas works yard behind.

The next property to the south (F) was outside the city boundary in the precincts of the old castle, and because of this, it had its own right of wharfage. It was probably leased by John Walker from 1803, and when he bought the freehold in 1816, it was described as a messuage with outbuildings, warehouses, storehouse and yard. Walker's main business was as a wharfinger, and after the failure of the Lewis family next door, it appears that he took over much of their trade. For a few years he also ran boats to South Wales in partnership with James Charter.

The Quay continued to be a busy place during the early nineteenth century. The building of tramroads down to the river at Lydney and Bullo Pill allowed Forest of Dean coal to be landed at the Quay at a competitive price, and a similar tramroad between Gloucester and Cheltenham had a branch running along the Quay. The number of boats using the river increased, and some carriers built up extensive fleets. The development of the docks just to the south of the Quay did offer some competition, but there was enough traffic to keep both busy. In the middle of the century, however, the coming of the railways started to take the traffic off the river, and the importance of Gloucester Quay declined.

References

1. Universal British Directory 1791-8, Gloucester City Library, Glos. Collection 0 12.1.
2. The Gloucester Guide (1792)
3. The Gloucester New Guide (1802)
4. Leases / conveyances for the properties identified on the map can be found in the Glos. R.O. as follows:
 - A. GBR 1412/1526 p.132.
GBR 1908B p.40.
 - B. D3117/4569
GBR 1414/1528 p.80.
 - D. GBR 1412/1526 p.152, p.514, p.536, p.545, p.549.
 - E. GBR 1412/1526 p.296, p.301, p.305.
GBR 1413/1527 p.57, p.71, p.79.
 - F. DC/F2.
5. Glos. R.O. GBR B3/9 f.167.
6. Gloucester Journal 3 Jan. 1780 and The Gloucester New Guide.

7. Gloucester Journal 1 Oct. 1810.
8. Gloucester Journal 15 Jan. 1810.