

China House Yard: (pre 1792 to 1905)

On the eastern shore of Sutton Pool at Coxside SX485544

Edward M. Sibrell ? - until his death prior to July 1792

William & John Shilston – pre 1817 to 1833 bankruptcy

John & William Hole Shilston ? to 1905 (Gill 'Plymouth a New History)

The name 'China House' is assumed to have arisen from association with Cookworthy's china manufacture on or near the site, but what is certain is that a large and stoutly built building on this site has attracted a number of uses, over the years down to the present use as a restaurant and public house and, for part of the period, it was a shipbuilding yard.

Two advertisements placed by Edward Sibrell's executors in the Western Flying-Post of 2 July 1792 for persons indebted to the estate to come forward and for the sale of vessels, timber, tools and 'a fine Milch Cow in her prime', fail to reveal any details of his yard, but from the following it would seem, by that date, to have been the China House Yard.

In the key to Simpson's plan of Sutton Pool of 1786, it is referred to as a 'Store House & Timber Yard', but by 1799 it was already in use as a shipwright's yard and was advertised to let with other property (including Furneaux's Yard at Catdown – [see Hills Yard Catdown](#)) in the Exeter Flying Post of 7 November 1799:

"... Likewise to be LET, for a Term of 3, 5, or 7 Years, all that Spacious Yard, known by the Name of the CHINA HOUSE, at Cox-side, Plymouth, about 107 by 120 Feet, with a Store-house, and a double Tier of Lofts over, of about 105 Feet in Length, and 21 Feet in Breadth, lately in Possession of Mr. Edward M. Sibrell, and used as a Shipwright's Yard, and now in the Possession of the Proprietor, is very desirably situated for the said Business, or any Mercantile Trade, being bounded on the South and West Sides by Sutton Pool ...

For selling the said Lands, letting the Houses &c., aforesaid, a public Survey will be held by J. Wheeler, at Mr. Morris's, the King's Arms, Plymouth, on Wednesday the 13th Day of November next, by Five o'Clock in the Evening.

Separate Plans of each of the Premises may be seen ..."

A lease of two, apparently adjoining lots, then in the possession of William Shilston, was advertised for sale in the Plymouth & Dock Telegraph of Saturday, 12 July 1817. This additional land helps to explain how the Shilstons were able to operate successfully from what otherwise appears to be a rather cramped location. The sale itself was held at a rather inauspicious moment, as the preceding advert in the same column is for the sale of the Stock in Trade of David Banks on his bankruptcy.

“SHIPWRIGHT’S YARD,

Plymouth

—o—o—

TO BE LET, for a term of fourteen years, from Christmas day next, by PUBLIC AUCTION, at the Navy Tavern, in Southside-street, on Monday the 4th day of August next, at six o'clock in the evening,

LOT I.

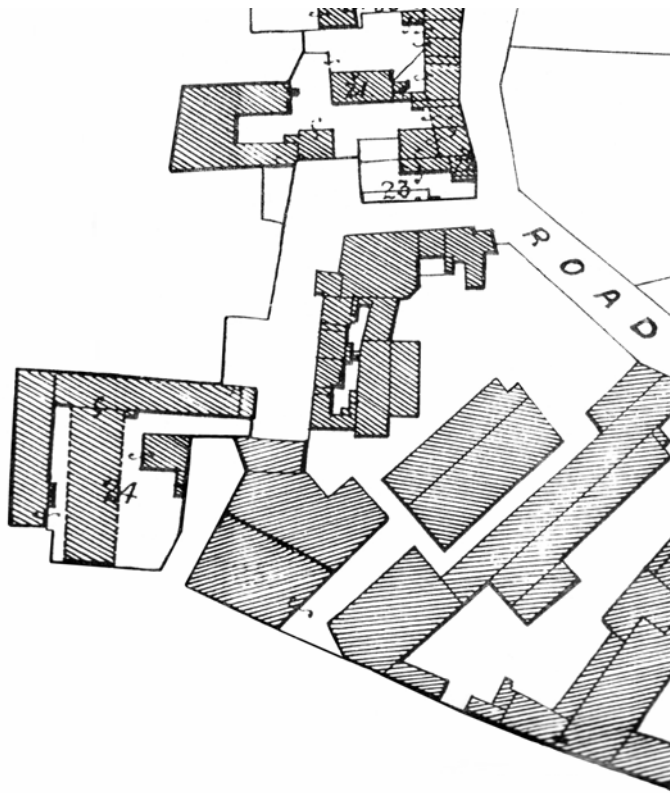
All that spacious and convenient SHIPWRIGHT'S YARD, with the several storehouses, sheds, and other buildings therein, being 90 feet in breadth, and 175 feet in length, adjoining the harbour of Sutton Pool, and situate in Jory-street, near Jory's almshouses.

Together with a good dwelling-house adjoining the yard, situate in Jory-street; now in the occupation of Mr. William Shilston, whose term therein will expire at Christmas next.

LOT II.

Also to be let for a term of fourteen years, all that capacious MAST POND, situate at Coxside, being part of Sutton Pool; containing in length 180 feet, and in breadth 90 feet; also in the possession of Mr. William Shilston, as tenant thereof until Christmas next.

For viewing the same apply to the Harbour Master, (Mr. WILLIAM FROST,) at the Sutton Pool Office, Navy Tavern;



Jory Street referred to in the advert is the row of buildings fronting into Sutton Road, to the north of parcel number 23 on the plan opposite.

The extract opposite, taken from the plan to a Conveyance of Sutton Harbour and adjoining land made between His Royal Highness Albert Edward Prince of Wales and The Sutton Harbour Improvement Company dated 17 March 1891 shows the yard at a late date, but the layout is essentially similar to that shown over 100 years earlier on the Simpson map of 1786, apart from the addition of a second building (that partly overwritten with the number 24).

The yard was advertised to let with other lots in the Plymouth & Plymouth Dock Weekly Journal of 17 April 1823:

**“WAREHOUSES,
SHIPWRIGHT’S YARD,
FREE PUBLIC HOUSE, &c.**

BOROUGH OF PLYMOUTH

TO BE LET BY PUBLIC AUCTION, at the NAVY TAVERN, in SOUTHSIDE STREET, Plymouth, on FRIDAY, the 25th day of April instant, for such terms and on such conditions as shall be then produced at Twelve at noon,

LOT 1st, - All that DWELLING-HOUSE, long used as a PUBLIC-HOUSE, and known by the sign of the POTTER’S ARMS, in Jory Street with the extensive Courtlage and Outhouses therein, situate behind the said House, communicating with the Harbour of Sutton Pool, with immediate possession, as the same is now unoccupied.

Also, all those extensive Warehouses commonly known by the name of the CHINA-HOUSE, near Coxside, viz.

LOT 2nd, - All that SHIPWRIGHT’S YARD, Sheds, large Cellar, and Two Lofts, with a good Dwelling-House, small Garden adjoining, with a very convenient Beach for cleaning any ships or vessels, containing in length 140 feet, and in breadth 130 feet; now in the occupation of Messrs. John and William Shilston, as tenants thereof until Michaelmas day next.”

An important addition to the facilities of the yard was made on 25 August 1858 with the launch of a floating dock reported in the Plymouth Devonport & Stonehouse Herald of Saturday, 28 August 1858:

“FLOATING DOCK IN SUTTON HARBOUR. — On Wednesday evening Mr. Shilston shipbuilder of China House-yard, in Sutton Pool, launched his floating dry dock — the first dock of this description in the West of England, though they are common, having been in use for many years in the northern ports, where they have been found to answer admirably. The vessel - if the term may be applied to the huge affair - which has been several months in building, is 150 feet in length, 40 feet wide, draws only about 10 inches of water and will take within its capacious area a vessel from 7 to 800 tons burthen. Nothing could be finer than the launch; immediately the dog shores were removed this leviathan started and gently gliding off the ways, the massive body was soon afloat. After a little delay it was taken round to its moorings - a snug place, forming a portion of the Marrow-bone slip. The mode of using the dock, we

understand, is as follows:- The dock, when required, will be taken from its moorings, or bed, into another portion of the pool, where the water is deeper, and when the tide leaves it the gates will be left open. The dock will then fill and remain in its sunken position; the ship intended to be docked will, on the tide rising, be floated into it, and as the water recedes, will be carefully placed on the cradle or blocks fixed within the dock, and properly shored, at low water the gates of the dock will be secured, and as the tide rises the dock containing the ship will float, and it will then be towed to its moorings. The undocking, when the necessary repairs are accomplished, will be just as easy a task."

The dock was used for the first time on Saturday 9th October, when a schooner and smack were docked together. The draft of the dock was only increased by 4 to 6 inches (Plymouth Devonport & Stonehouse Herald, 16 October 1858).

Lloyd's Register of 1887 contains a list of facilities available for a large number of ports, including Plymouth and it would appear that this dock was still in existence at that date, for Lloyd's shows "Mr. Shilston's floating dry dock length 144 feet breadth 37 feet" among the few dock and slip facilities available at Plymouth.