

Plank House



Plank House and River Gate are now two houses, but until the 1950s were a single property. The house, the oldest part of which dates from the 17th century, is a Grade II Listed Building.

In 1845 Plank House was advertised for sale by Richard Scrase Saxby, who had filed for bankruptcy the previous year. An auction sale notice of the contents

indicates a house suitable for occupation by a country gentleman. Soon afterwards Plank House came into the possession of Thomas Parkes Lilly (1827-1902), who became the proprietor of the Wardour, Tisbury, and Chilmark Stone company. Thomas Lilly was also a designer of buildings, and the Gillingham Grammar School (1875) is known to be of his work.

In the 1900s Plank House belonged to Henry Calcroft Wyld of the Freame, Light, and Wyld legal practice. During World War I he lent the house to the Red Cross, for use as an Auxiliary Hospital, one of four in the Shaftesbury Division (the others were at Station Road, and at Mere and Shaftesbury). It took patients from military hospitals in Wiltshire and at Bournemouth. Some patients were accommodated on revolving huts and open-air shelters in the garden. A blue plaque on the house erected by the Gillingham Local History Society commemorates the role played by the hospital in the treatment of war wounded between 1914 and 1919.



In June 1917 exceptionally heavy rain was followed by a dam collapse and heavy flooding along the River Stour. The river level around the Wyke Street bridge rose rapidly and all nearby buildings were flooded. At Plank House patients downstairs and in the shelters were saved only through the determination of a small group of staff and

patients.

Right: The Red Cross Hospital at Plank House in 1917. Sister Mary Farnfield with a nurse and a patient. A revolving summerhouse was used as an overspill ward.



In the inter-war years Plank House was occupied by the Misses Stewart (Charlotte, Eleanor, Albinia). They became well known for their community and charitable work: in 1928 Charlotte Stewart was involved in collections of clothing for distressed miners in South Wales, and in 1939 for collecting prams for child evacuees.

In 1954 the property was divided, with the west wing becoming a separate property known as River Gate. In 1989 Plank House lost much of its frontage to the new Le Neubourg Way relief road.

Below: Wyke Street around 1960. The viewpoint for the picture would now be the middle of the road junction of Wyke Street and Le Neubourg Way. The building on the right is Plank House, which at that time had a larger frontage to Wyke Street.

