

## Letter from Nelson Frederick to his father Nelson Wellington

Bristol  
25-4-18

My dear Pater,

You will possibly be surprised at the above address, but I am over on 30 days special sick leave so thought I would come down here and investigate your family matters. The Doctors said I had to spend some days in a seaside port, so I can kill two birds with one stone. Well, to cut a long story short, let me say that I have traced the family, and you have just missed a chance of a nice old estate. In the first place you will be surprised to hear that your proper name is WILLINGTON not WELLINGTON. The family vault in Shirehampton <sup>1</sup> churchyard shows quite distinctly that the name is Willington, and this is confirmed by the oldest surviving relative you possess - Mrs John Willington 20 Co-operation Road Greenbank Bristol, who is your Aunt by marriage. She married John Willington your father's brother, and as far as I can see, your father's proper christian name should be Charles, not Nelson. He and his brother Arthur (poor old uncle Tom) belonged to a family of 7 brothers whose names were John, Edward, William, Stephen, Tyrus, Charles and Arthur. The two last went to Australia, owing to the former getting into a scrape which incidentally coincided with



the time the estate went smash. The estate consisted of the Powder House Shirehampton, <sup>2</sup> Manor House, and Lamplighters Hotel. <sup>3</sup> These had been in the family for generations, and a lot of money was made out of the Powder House (left). When your Grandfather died, the boys went on the loose a bit, with the result that in less than no time all the property had been drunk or gambled away, and about this time Charles and Arthur decided that a change would do them good, particularly as the former had got mixed up with "a lady of high degree". Mrs John told me that there has always been a Willington in the family for generations who was a well known drinker and she says it was a matter of heredity with the boys. Her hubby was just as

bad as the rest but managed to knock off in time, and live to a good old age - he died about 8 years ago. I am sending you his photo and if it is not the living image of your father - well I'm no judge. I've marked the photos with numbers and they are as follows:-

- 1 Mr and Mrs John Willington
- 2 Mr and Mrs Arthur Willington (Son)
- 3 Mr and Mrs Ted Willington (Son)
- 4 May Willington (Ted's daughter)

I am sending them direct to Ida enclosed in a parcel of books etc, and she will re-post them on to you. There is also a book of views of Bristol to come to you - it will be in the same parcel. I could not get any views of Shirehampton whilst down there, but a friend I stayed with at Portishead is gathering some post cards for me and when these come along I shall see that you get them. I am off to Tunbridge Wells to-morrow and will post this from there, as it will get a mail boat fro London there. After spending a few days with Mr and Mrs Waters at Tunbridge Wells, I am going on to Cains College <sup>4</sup> Cambridge to meet all my old instructor friends at the staff college. Shirehampton is a lovely little place, and the old powder house and Lamplighters are still going strong. The manor House is now called "Wellington House" <sup>5</sup> after the family, and it breaks your heart to see such a dear old home gone out of the family into some one else's hands. Referring to the name again, I find that everyone still calls the family Wellington and this is shown as such in all official records and public documents, strange to say. Mrs John told me that just before she was married her father-in-law told her that she must see that the name WILLINGTON was engraved on her lines as this was the correct family name, in spite of the fact that they were always known as and called Wellington. There can be no mistake about it, as the W's were the only family of that name ever resident in Shirehampton. You will now be faced with the problem of changing your name. Personally, I think it is better to leave it at present as there is nothing to be gained by a change now. On the other hand, if anything happened to restore the family fortunes, you would be compelled to change it to obtain official recognition in a court of law, as you would be well up amongst any family claimants for any benefits. It's a matter you can talk over with Mater and decide. The village has about 5,000 people, and lies close to the famous Avonmouth docks, on the Avon River, on the right side going downstream. It is about 7 miles from the sea. The

<sup>1</sup> Shirehampton is not recorded in an on-line Victoria County History of Gloucestershire

<sup>2</sup> Built 1775-6 grade II listed building - ships discharged their powder before progressing to the docks.

<sup>3</sup> A pub known locally as The Lamp and the location of the Pill rowed ferry across the River Avon until 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Gonville and Caius

<sup>5</sup> Now a modernised Grade II listed building, Bristol BS11 9XA - see also endnote

Lamplighters Hotel is on the River front, and is a neat two-storied brick house run by a man named Peacock. "Wellington House" faces it at right angles (Right: Lamplighters Hotel as Nelson may have seen it.)



Mr John Howes, a retired master butcher who told me he has lived in Shirehampton (in the same house) for over 50 years, knows the whole family very well, and when I told him my name, he replied by stating he would pick me as a Willington a mile off. When I first saw Mrs John, she made no enquiries, but simply told me to "take my hat off" and then added "You're a Willington - and you come from Australia - I've been expecting something like this for the last 30 years". She is a very stately old lady, but very frail, and is just ending her days peace with her son-in-law. I think she has a little money of her own, but the sons have not done much for themselves, except the Canadian. All the rest are in the boot trade in Bristol. Of course, they are all in the Army now (Gloster Regt.).

Another thing she told me was that your Uncle Edward was in the 1st Life Guards, and soldiered all his life. She says all your Uncles were over 6ft (Edwards 6'7") and were known all over Bristol as a fine big family physically. When I told her I was the smallest Willington she was not at all surprised and said they were always big men. She could tell me very little about her husbands sisters - as far as I can recollect there were two, but they were married young and drifted out of her life very quickly. I think I have told you all now. They want you to send over a copy of your father's photo for identification - the old lady will then be able to say definitely which one it is. So send it over to me and I will forward it on. I'm afraid I cannot tell you any more just now, as I have exhausted all the news. I'm feeling pretty fit since I came over, but the last few days my chest lungs and throat have been playing strange tricks with me, and I'm inclined to think the gas is having a final flutter. If it doesn't improve I shall have to see a specialist in London. The doctors at the front told me my heart and lungs would not be permanently affected, so I am at a loss to know just why I can't get back to normal health just now. It will all come right in time, I guess.

Give my love to Mater and the girls and accept same yourself. I hope you are all well and in good nick. Lyle has been wounded in the arm by a machine gun, but wrote to tell me he is doing well. I heard from outside sources he is going to get a Military Cross. I hope it comes off.

Don't worry about me these days as I am jogging along pretty fairly and so far have had more than my share of good luck. Cheery ok Pater.

Your loving son  
Nel.

Editors notes:

Letter from Nelson Frederick Wellington to Nelson Wellington. Written in Bristol, England in 1918 during the WWI. The description of his grandfather as Charles, the brother of John Willington (Mrs John's husband) is incorrect.

<http://www.dalmura.com.au/genealogy/Willington/letter.htm> (Accessed 17 May 2017)

WELLINGTON HOUSE, 107, STATION ROAD,  
SHIREHAMPTON, BRISTOL, BS11 9XA

An elegant and sympathetically restored early 19th century Grade II listed period house. Located in a popular position close to the River Avon, the sailing club and within easy reach of Shirehampton village.

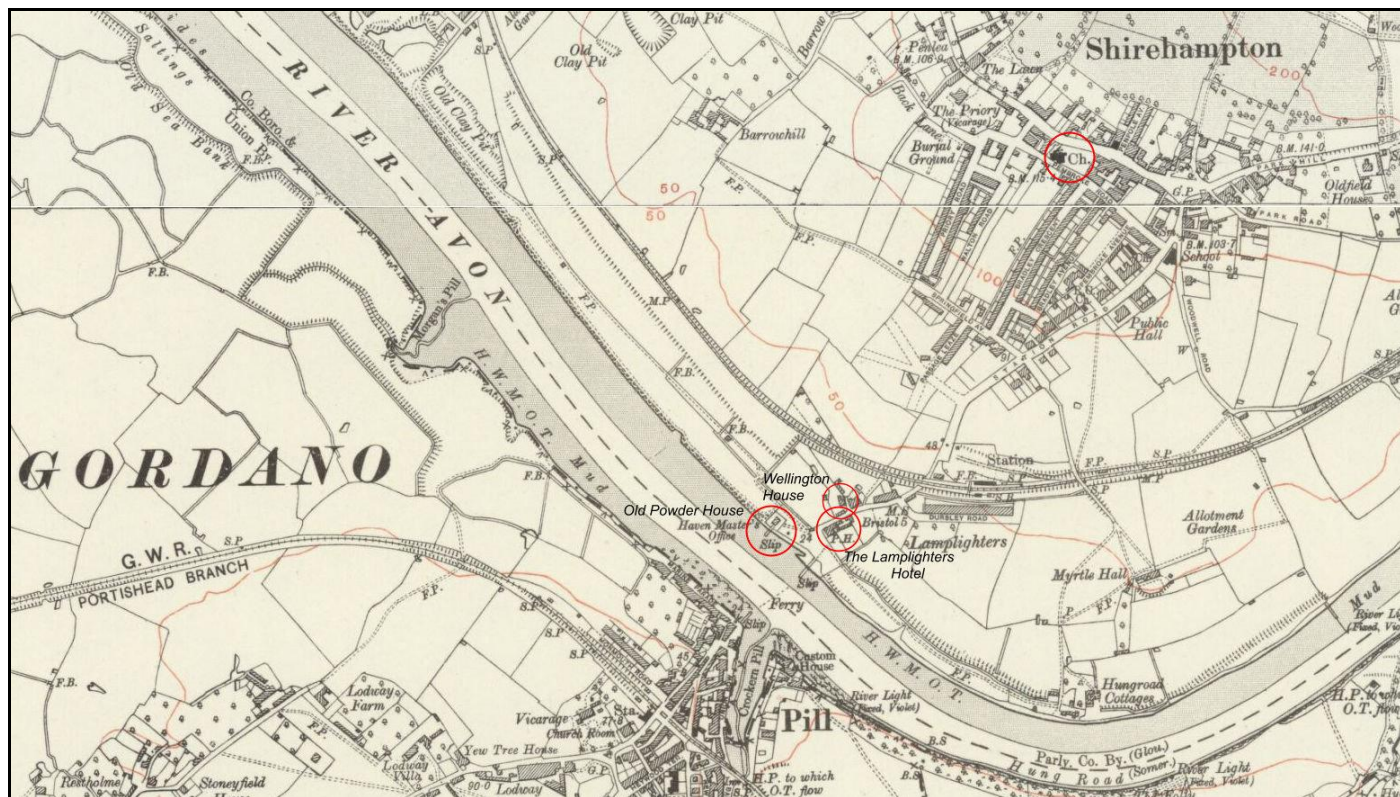
A rare opportunity to acquire a truly individual character home providing generous living accommodation. A two storey attached stable block provides an exciting opportunity and scope for additional living quarters or home office/workshop if so required. Tastefully presented accommodation which has skilfully blended the character and charm of the original building with all the comfort of modern day living. Numerous classic period details include sash windows, stripped floors and working fireplaces. The property comprises: Ground Floor: entrance hall, cloakroom/wc, drawing room, sitting room, dining room, contemporary styled kitchen with a beamed and vaulted ceiling, utility room and rear lobby. First floor: central landing, master bedroom with en-suite bathroom, bedroom 2 and family bathroom/wc. Second floor: central landing, 4 further bedrooms and bathroom/wc.

There are well stocked and maintained ornamental gardens with a large south facing terrace all enclosed by high walls and fencing. Double gates to the side of the property provide access to a gravelled drive with additional parking located via the secondary drive to the rear. A lower ground floor within the main house provides useful storage.

Source: Richard Harding Estate Agents 08/12/2013

See also

<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-380608-wellington-house-and-attached-stables> (Accessed 17 May 2017)



The parish of Shirehampton from a 1920 OS 6" map surveyed in 1912, showing the location of buildings mentioned in the letter.