

Masters in the British Southern Whale Fishery

Over the 85 years of the British Southern Whale Fishery over 1000 men served as Master on a British south seas whaleship. At least 60 lost their lives or died whilst in command. Initially, the majority of Master's came from Nantucket - close to 100 of them. Some arrived directly from Nantucket, others via Dartmouth in Nova Scotia. Many Masters had long careers and were highly successful. Some even went on to share ownership or own their own whaleships, a development encouraged by some owners, who allowed their whaling captains to invest in the success of their own voyages.

Thomas BLYTH (1764-1839)

Thomas Blyth was born on 14 October 1764. He married Isabella Foster in Stepney, London, in 1793, and the couple had at least five children. Blyth went to sea at an early age and later became an experienced sea captain in the south seas trade. He commanded at least three vessels - the *Lively*, *British Tar* and *Cornwall* - on whaling voyages between 1790 and 1805.

He was a bold and enterprising mariner during wartime, and while in command of *Cornwall* in 1799 - and armed with a Letter of Marque - his vessel and another British whaler, the *Kingston*, captured a Spanish trading vessel, the *Nostra Senora de Bethlehem*, off the coast of Peru and sent the ship to New South Wales with a prize crew, where its cargo of grain and other food supplies alleviated a shortage of provisions in Sydney.

Blyth retired from the sea around 1810 and became a prominent shipowner with at least 17 vessels, most involved in whaling and sealing. He died at Limehouse, London, in 1839. [MH]

Sources:

Ships employed in the South Sea whale fishery from Britain: 1775-1815 – J. Clayton and C.A. Clayton (2014)

Thomas Blyth's 1835 letter of encouragement to the whale ship owners in New South Wales, in The Great Circle, 17 (1) 1995, 39-48 – Mark Howard

William Darby BRIND (1794–1850)

William Darby Brind was born in England, the eldest child of William Brind and his wife, Elizabeth. According to family information he was born in 1794. He was baptised on 28 July 1794 at St Philip's parish, Birmingham. He went to sea on whaling ships at an early age.

Between 1819 and 1843 Brind commanded a succession of whaling ships for London owners: the *Cumberland*; the *Asp*; the *Emily*; the *Toward Castle* for two voyages; and the *Narwhal* for two voyages. During his second cruise in command of the *Narwhal* Brind relinquished command of the vessel in New Zealand in what appears to have been a pre-determined arrangement with the owners, Green, Wigrams & Green. No log-books or journals of the seven voyages have survived, but other captains recorded sightings of Brind's ships, noting whale catches made and assistance given at sea and in port. He was evidently held in high regard. Early charts of the Pacific Ocean show Brind Rock (L'Espérance Rock) in the Kermadec Islands and an island in the Gilbert Islands (Kiribati) that were once named after him. He came to New Zealand in his first command, the *Cumberland*, arriving in the Bay of Islands on 20 March 1820, and returned regularly.

Long periods spent on shore at the Bay of Islands repairing and provisioning their ships brought the whalers in contact with Maori and the missionaries. He carried mercantile goods for trade on his long voyages, including arms which he supplied to the Ngati Manu leader Pomare I in the 1820s in return for his protection. A daughter of Pomare accompanied Brind to sea on the *Emily* in the 1820s

and lived with him for a time at Matauwhi Bay, which was known for many years as Brind's Bay. This liaison continued at least until Pomare's death in 1826. After Pomare's death there were shifts in tribal power at the Bay of Islands. Brind allied himself with Rewa (Manu), a chief of Ngai Tawake of Nga Puhi. From 1828 he lived with Rewa's daughter, Moewaka. Their daughter was baptised Eliza Isabella Brind by Octavius Hadfield in October 1839.

Brind also had an English wife. On 19 December 1835 he had married Eliza Anne Snoswell, at Gravesend, Kent. It is likely Eliza Brind accompanied Brind on his last whaling voyage as she was living in New Zealand by September 1839 at Matauwhi Bay. She and Brind had at least five children. Three sons and two daughters were baptised in New Zealand.

In the 1830s Brind purchased several areas of land in the Bay of Islands from Rewa and his brothers. These included 440 acres at Matauwhi Bay (bordered by what is now known as Brind Road), 4 acres adjacent to Matauwhi Bay, and 30 acres at Tapeka. Brind claim to have purchased the island of Urupukapuka was later disputed. He also claimed 300 acres 'at the River Thames'. By 1827 Brind had built a kauri house in European style at Matauwhi Bay. It was replaced in 1836 by a more substantial house. He suffered from ill health in the 1840s and this brought about a decline in his financial situation. In 1845 he lost his house and other buildings, which were over-run by Kawiti's forces while he was away in Sydney. His wife and family were evacuated to Auckland, where a son was born. In 1847 he mortgaged his land at Matauwhi Bay. He died at the Bay of Islands in 1850, probably on 15 October. Eliza Brind and her surviving children went to England, probably late in 1851. In 1874 she returned to New Zealand, joining a son and a daughter who had earlier settled in Nelson. She died in Nelson on 7 August 1885. [JC-NZ]

Sources:

[William Darby Brind in Te Ara \(the Encyclopedia of New Zealand\)](#) – Jocelyn Chisholm

[William Darby Brind - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia](#)

[Silhouette image of William Darby Brind](#)

William Tolley BROOKES (1791-1874)

William Tolley Brookes was a successful seaman in South Sea whaling. He was Master on at least five voyages – three voyages for the Bennetts' - the first in command of the *Indispensible* 1821-1824; and then the *Recovery* 1824-1827 and 1828 to 1831. He then undertook voyages for Green, Wigrams & Green in command of the *Matilda*, 1832 to 1836, and then the *Active*, 1838-1842. Journals survive for the second voyage of the *Recovery*; the *Matilda*; and, the *Active*. The logs show that Tolley Brookes preferred the western route via Cape Horn when sailing to the Pacific, an unusual route for British whalers during the years in which he commanded. The voyage of the *Matilda* is also unusual in that it records a rare instance of a 'blackfish or killer' injuring one of the crew.

Tolley Brookes owned a fine collection of scrimshaw items. Much of the scrimshaw, the journals and two miniatures portraying William Tolley Brookes are in the collection of the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich. [DC]

Sources:

[A Trade so Uncontrollably Uncertain: A study of the English Southern Whale Fishery from 1815 to 1860](#) - MA Thesis (1996) – Dale Chatwin

[William Tolley Brookes portrait at the National Maritime Museum](#)

William BUCKLE (1787-1850)

One of the longest careers in the British Southern Whale Fishery William Buckle is first listed as a harpooner working for the firm of Mathers in a Crew List for the *Charlton's* 1803 voyage. He appears

to have stayed with the firm of Mathers for at least four voyages and was probably 1st Mate on the *Cyrus* on its 1808 and 1810 cruises.

In the official [Registers of Shipping](#) Buckle is twice listed as commander of the *Cyrus*. On 27 July 1810 the *Cyrus* was endorsed to him, and again on 24 July 1812. But in neither circumstance did he take the vessel to sea. This practice of endorsing vessels to 'port' masters appears to have been a regular practice in the British Southern Whale Fishery. Bennett's and Green, Wigrams & Green also regularly endorsed vessels to masters who did not end up taking the vessel to sea. The reason for the practice is unknown.

Buckle finally secured command of the Daniel Bennett vessel, the *Indispensible*. Perhaps he had become frustrated with Mathers. His then had a long career with for Bennett's taking out the *Indispensible* (twice), the *Arab*, the *Royal George* (three times) and in what he appears to have been his last command ended his career when he handed over command of the *Daniel IV* in late 1827 or 1828 and remained in the Sandwich Islands with his Hawaiian wife. The *Daniel IV* was destroyed by fire on the return home near Tahiti with at least 2000 barrels of oil on board.

Buckle appears to have preferred the western route around Cape Horn and his first voyages were surprisingly quick which suggests he was a rather successful master. He quickly developed a liking for the Sandwich Islands and in 1825 at Lahaina when in command of the *Daniel IV* there was considerable tension with the missionary William Richards over the influence of the missionaries on interaction between the locals and the whalers. Tensions escalated, and Buckle refused a request to control his crew.

Buckle married a high ranking Hawaiian woman, Leoki, in 1825 or 1826. On 5 February 1826, William Wahinepio Buckle was born to Buckle and Leoki (apparently born at sea.). Buckle's son was granted British citizenship. Buckle died in 1850 in Hawaii, some two years after the death of his wife. Some Buckle descendants are buried in the Honolulu Catholic Cemetery on King Street. [DC]

Sources:

[BSWF voyage database](#)

[Buckle, Wahinepio and Leoki](#)

William BUSHELL (1810–1854)

William Bushell was born in London in 1810. On 26 March 1833 he married Jane Beddine Leith (also born 1810) at St. George-in-the East Church, Shadwell, London. They had two children, the first believed to have been a son who died young, and the second Rosaline, born on 15th May 1840. Census records for 1851 show Jane Bushell, aged 40, wife of a 'Mariner', residing at 375 Albert Square, London. Rosaline married Richard Male Westley 'a farmer' from Cambridgeshire who was the nephew of John Male, third mate on the whaleship *William Nicol* on its 1851-1855 voyage. Nothing is known for certain about William Bushell's family but it is believed he was related (possibly a brother or maybe a cousin) to two other whaling ship Masters named Bushell.

William Bushell's known voyages as Master of a whaling ship were the *Lady Amherst* 1836-1839 and 1839-1843; and the *William Nicol* 1843-1847; 1847-1849; and 1851 until his death at sea on 9 November 1854. The vessel returned to London in 1855. William Bushell's will being granted probate 20 October 1855.

A painting (attributed to the Tudgay family, c. 1850) of the vessel *William Nicol* 'outward bound off Ramsgate harbour' departing on a whaling voyage is in the collection of Museum of London Docklands. [JP]

Edward DAVID (c1788-1831)

Edward David joined the Royal navy as an apprentice seaman and was trained as a gunner, in which capacity he saw active service on one or more British warships during the Napoleonic Wars. When the conflict ended he was around twenty-seven years of age and like thousands of other former naval personnel was thrust into civilian life and forced to find employment as best he could. He probably spent the next six years in the merchant marine on vessels sailing out of London. He may have been a ship's officer by 19 August 1818 when he married twenty-year-old Caroline Brittle at St Giles Cripplegate in London. His first command came several years later when he was appointed master of *Spring* (149 tons), a small whaling vessel owned by Richard Mount of London.

The *Spring* departed the Thames on 13 January 1821 and sailed south and cruised off the western coast of Africa where she took around 40 tuns of whale oil and 150 sealskins. The crew became troublesome after the vessel ran low on provisions and the cruise had to be cut short. She was on the last leg of the voyage home, and approaching the English Channel, when she was caught in a storm and sought shelter in Ilfracomb Harbour on the coast of Devon. On 21 December 1821, and before she could leave harbour, another winter storm caused the anchor of a nearby vessel to puncture her hull and *Spring* quickly sank.

Captain David's next command was another whaler, the *Mary* (308 tons), also owned by Richard Mount. *Mary* departed London in April 1822 and returned more than three years later on 29 October 1825. During the cruise, Captain David again had crew troubles and the vessel sustained serious damage during a gale and she had to go to Manila for repairs. Her cargo on return consisted of 430 casks of oil and one of ambergris.

His next command was the *Sarah and Elizabeth* (256 tons), a south sea whaler owned by Thomas Sturge of London. She departed 2 February 1826 and returned on 26 August 1828 with 403 casks of whale oil and 254 sealskins. During the cruise she cruised in the Pacific and off the western coast of North and South America. Captain David again had crew trouble and some of his men deserted, while he allowed others to leave the vessel at ports of call on the coast of South America.

The fourth and last vessel was the *Nelson* (264 tons), also owned by the Quaker shipowner, Thomas Sturge. She departed 10 October 1828 and cruised for whales in the Pacific Ocean. The *Nelson* had to call at Sydney in 4 March 1831 for repairs. She was delayed four months in New South Wales and her cargo of 112 tuns of sperm whale oil was shipped from there to London on a trading vessel. *Nelson* sailed from Sydney on 13 July 1831, and Captain David died at sea off the coast of New Zealand on 28 December 1831 and was buried ashore. The *Nelson* never returned to Britain, becoming instead an Australian whaler based in Sydney. [MH]

Sources:

Captain Edward David, South Sea whaler – Mark Howard (forthcoming)

Robert JARMAN (1811 – 1889)

Robert Jarman was born on 14 May 1811 at Bungay in Suffolk, the third child and first son of Robert Barnett Jarman and Harriet Jarman (née Smith). In 1815 the family moved to Beccles, a neighbouring town, where his father set up a printing business. Here Robert was educated and grew to manhood. In June 1831, aged 20, he sailed on the South Sea whaler *Japan*, John May, owned by Bennett & Co., London. Although her destination was recorded as Timor, in reality she cruised the grounds off Java, Celebes, Moluccas, Japan, Kingsmills, (then forced to Sydney to re-fit), the Fijis, Rotumah and French Rock, before sailing for home from the Bay of Islands, New Zealand, arriving in August 1834 with 2400 barrels, a full ship.

Robert's shipboard diary of that voyage was edited and published by his father in 1838, titled *Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in the "Japan,"* employed in the Sperm Whale Fishery under the Command of John May. A second, annotated edition was published in Melbourne by Edition Renard in 2009.

Four months later he again shipped on the *Japan*, under William Edward Hill, destination 'Timor', returning in August 1837 with 550 casks and 4 tanks of sperm oil. On his next voyage Robert commanded the *Kent*, Bennett & Co., (August 1841 to October 1844) to 'Timor' returning in October 1844 with 500 casks of oil. His next command was the *Favourite*, owned by Wilson, Cook & Bignell, (February 1845 to December 1848), destination 'North of Celebes', returning with a disappointing 1400 barrels.

Several months later, on 15 February 1849, Robert married Ellen Harriet Crickmay. Their first child was born while he was at sea on his subsequent and final voyage in command of the *Kent*, Wilson & Co. (May 1849 to September 1852), destination 'Timor', returning with 296 casks. By then British involvement in the South Seas fishery was virtually at an end. Robert retired and set about resurrecting his father's failed printing business. He was successful and expanded his commercial activities as a collector of rates and taxes, stamp distributor and insurance agent. Between 1853 and 1865 his wife Ellen bore him ten more children, including a set of twins, and was only 43 years of age when she died on 3 March 1867. In 1875 Robert married Elizabeth Rix Simpson, but they had no children. He remained active in the Beccles community until his mid-sixties, when in poor health he passed the printing business to one of his younger sons. Robert Jarman died at Beccles on 4 April 1889 aged 77, leaving a personal estate worth £3,188 7s 7d. [Robert Wareneke]

Sources:

Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in the "Japan," employed in the Sperm Whale Fishery under the Command of John May. An annotated edition edited by Robert M. Warneke was published in Melbourne by Edition Renard in 2009.

John JARMAN (1813 – 1890)

The second son of Robert and Harriet Jarman, was born on 3 June 1813, at Bungay, Suffolk and baptised on 28 September. Two years after his brother Robert's return from his first voyage on the *Japan* (1831-1834), John, aged 23, followed his example and signed on another Bennett & Co. whaler, the *Diana*, Thomas Heriot. She departed London in April 1836, returning in June 1838 with 500 casks of sperm oil from a cruise that included Lombok, Timor and a visit to the Bay of Islands, New Zealand. Five months later he sailed again under Heriot in the *Recovery*, destination 'Timor', returning in May 1843 with only 440 casks of oil. A year later he departed on the vessel *Kingsdown* under F. Simmons, Wilson & Co. (very likely as a senior officer), destination 'Cochin, Mali', returning in October 1846 with 450 casks and 4 tanks of oil. On his final voyage (August 1847-November 1850) he was in command of the *Griffin*, Wilson & Co., destination not recorded but probably to some of the grounds that he had visited previously. The *Griffin* was out for well over 3 years, John's longest voyage, but she returned with only 320 casks of oil. He had fared little better than his brother on the *Kent*, which returned two years later with only 296 casks, having been out for a similar period.

In 1851 John was in lodgings at Beccles, but there is no further record of his activities until his marriage on 29 March 1855, aged 42, to Edwina Waller, aged 28, at the Church of St Dunstan in the West, London. By 1861 John was in business as a Licensed Victualler and continued in this trade for the rest of his working life. That year he and Edwina were living with two daughters aged 4 and 8 months in Jewry Street London, a short walk from the Thames. By 1871 they had removed to Peckham, on the south side of the Thames and had a third daughter, then aged 7. Edwina's death early in 1874 was registered at Stepney, across the river from Peckham. In 1881 John and his three

daughters were living in the 'Ship Afloat' public house at 52 Lower Thames Street. At a date unknown John Jarman was moved from there to the Lunatic Asylum, Friern Barnet, Middlesex, where he died on 28 March 1890 aged 76, leaving at a personal estate worth £507 12s 3d. [Robert Warneke]

Sources:

Journal of a Voyage to the South Seas in the "*Japan*," employed in the Sperm Whale Fishery under the Command of John May. An annotated edition edited by Robert M. Warneke was published in Melbourne by Edition Renard in 2009.

William LISLE (1792 -1870)

William Lisle, one of the longest serving as well as most successful masters in the BSWF, was born in 1792 in a small fishing village on the Northumbrian coast. Like his brothers are known to have done, he probably went to sea still a boy; but unlike them, fishing and piloting in ships near to the coast, William sought employment on South Seas-bound whaling ships. In the early 1820s he changed from the *Monmouth*, owned by Christopher Nockles, to the *Mary*, one of the ships in the fleet of the London merchants, Messrs. Enderby & Co.

Lisle must have made quite an impression with his new employers, as just after his returning from his first journey with them, and still only thirty-two years old, he was given command of their newest ship, the *Lady Amherst*. Lisle hastily married a daughter of the Rotherhithe shipwright William Williams, and sailed off.

Over the course of the next nine years, the three voyages of the *Lady Amherst* brought back an unusual amount of sperm oil, and its captain a great reputation; in his absence, however, William Lisle's wife succumbed to the cholera epidemic, prompting him to marry her younger sister Lois Elizabeth Williams.

By 1833 the Enderby's commissioned shipbuilder Thomas White in Cowes, Isle of Wight, to build a new, state-of-the-art whaler, with its timbers treated with a new preservation chemical. In the intervening time, Lisle was asked to take over command (from Captain John Biscoe, who resigned shortly before sailing) of an Antarctic expedition. Financially supported by the government and accompanied by a Royal Navy lieutenant, the vessels *Hopeful* and *Rose* were despatched on a journey of discovery. Half a year later at 60 degrees south, though, New Year's Day 1834 saw the expedition brought to a standstill when pack ice crushed the *Rose*. All hands were saved, but with two crews aboard one small ship, the expedition was abandoned.

In Cowes, meanwhile work on the Enderby's new flagship was well underway. In August 1834 she was launched and christened the *Samuel Enderby*. William Lisle was given command of the 'Sammy', as the ship was known to her crew, on her first two whaling cruises to the Pacific. For her third journey Lisle's former mate on the *Lady Amherst*, Thomas William Wilson, took over. Lisle took her out one last time in 1843. On his return the Enderby's commemorated Lisle's remarkable career with a pamphlet titled "Six Voyages of Captain William Lisle".

Though Charles Enderby asked him if he would accompany him to the new Southern Whale Fishery Company colony at the Auckland Islands, Lisle instead chose to retire from his whaling days, remarking in a letter to his sister that he felt too old. He moved his family away from London and relocated to the north of England. His earnings were invested in ships and in coals, in a succession of newly built houses, and in the careers of his sons.

William Lisle died in 1870, in sight of the sea off Northumberland. [KW]

Sources:

[British Southern Whale Fishery Database](#)

Six Voyages of Captain William Lisle (in the collection of the Royal Geographic Society)

William Mattinson (1779 - 1845)

A long career in the British Southern Whale Fishery, most of the time working for the firm of Birnie. Mattinson is first recorded being issued with an Admiralty Protection in June 1803 and as 2nd Mate and Harpooner in the crew list of the *Bellona*. In 1804 he was first mate on the *William Fennings* with the vessel returning mid-July 1807. There is then a gap of around 18 months before he took command of the *Spring Grove* in late 1808. It is possible that he commanded the *Spring Grove* on two voyages though only one is known. A son, William Mattinson Junior, was born in 1811. It is possible the boy was born at sea.

After returning on the *Spring Grove* in late 1811 Mattinson took command of the Birnie owned *Venus* in early February 1812. He took the *Venus* out two more times before being given command of the *Foxhound*, another Birnie vessel, in 1820. He sailed in command of the *Foxhound* on two voyages for Birnie before taking command of another Birnie vessel, the *Elizabeth*, in 1824.

Mattinson commanded the *Elizabeth* on three voyages including a voyage which returned with 3000 barrels of sperm oil in 1827. His last voyage in command of the *Elizabeth* commenced in November 1831 via Cape Horn, across to Timor and then to Hobart where he arrived in late December 1832 with 500 barrels of sperm oil.

At Hobart Mattinson relinquished command of the *Elizabeth* to Charles Black in what appears to have been a pre-planned event. On this last voyage Mattinson was accompanied by his wife Rebecca (nee Barton), his son William Mattinson and three daughters, Sophia, Gertrude and Eliza.

Hobart Muster Lists record Mattinson handing over command to Charles Black who departed Hobart 12 February 1833 returning on 30 October 1833. William Mattinson's son accompanied the *Elizabeth* on this voyage to the whaling grounds near Rotumah before it returned to Hobart in late October 1833 where Mattinson placed notices in the local newspapers cautioning local shopowners against credit being granted to the crew of the *Elizabeth*. Black was replaced as commander of the *Elizabeth* sometime after the vessel returned to Hobart and it is likely Mattinson would have played a role in replacing him.

At least two of Mattinson's daughters married in Hobart. Sophia Mattinson married John Lee Archer (Van Diemen's Land, Engineer and Colonial Architect) on Tuesday 3 September 1833 and Eliza Mattinson married Henry Miller (of the Tasmanian Audit Office) in Hobart on 11 November 1834. Both daughters had many children. It appears that Mattinson did not retire from the sea as he made a number of voyages after this date, mostly trading, but there may have been some Colonial whaling voyages. William Mattinson died in Melbourne on 24 August 1845.

It appears that William Mattinson's son returned on the *Elizabeth* to London as he was on the whaleship *Sarah & Elizabeth* of Hull when it was relocated from London to South Australia in 1836. Whether he sailed as a member of the crew or as a passenger is unknown. William Mattinson Junior, who had been born in 1811 and after arriving on the *Elizabeth* resided in South Australia where he died in 1865.

William Mattinson appears to have been tremendously successful as a whaling master bringing home one of the largest cargoes ever brought into London. Throughout his career as a whaling master Mattinson appears to have spent little more than 3 or 4 months ashore between voyages yet managed to sire at least three daughters and a son. Consequently, it is very likely that he was accompanied by his wife on at least a number of his voyages. [DC]

Sources:

[William Mattinson Genealogy](#)
[BSWF Voyage Database](#)

Thomas MELVILL (1758-1814)

Thomas Melvill was born at North Leith, Scotland, on 10 October 1758. He married Janet Melvin in London on 21 October 1780, and they were to have two children. Thomas went to sea about 1771, and was to remain a mariner for almost thirty years. He was a master mariner by 1785 and went on to command seven vessels to the South Seas. These were *Shark* (1785-1786), *Phoenix* (1786-1788) *New Hope* (1788-1789), *Friendship* (1789-1790), *Britannia* (1791-1793) *Speedy* (1793-1796) and *Tobago* (1797-1799).

On 23 March 1791, Captain Melvill left London as master of *Britannia*, one of eleven vessels that made up the Third Fleet carrying convict settlers sent to Australia. On arrival, Governor Phillip wanted to hire the vessel to take a party to establish a settlement on Norfolk Island, and he then planned to purchase *Britannia* for use by the colony. But when Captain Melvill told of seeing large numbers of sperm whales off the coast, and expressed his intention of giving this new whaling ground a trial, the governor abandoned his plans for the vessel and made boats available to land the prisoners so *Britannia* could quickly be on her way. *Britannia* was the first vessel to return to Sydney after taking whales offshore and to mark the occasion Governor Phillip presented Captain Melvill with a silver cup that was later inscribed as follows.

"The gift of his Excellency, Arthur Phillips [sic] Esq. Captain-General and Governor-in-chief of his majesty's Territory of New South Wales and its Dependencies, to Thomas Melvill, Commander of the *Britannia*, for killing a Spermaceti Whale on the 26th October 1791. Being the first of its kind taken on this coast since the Colony was established."

His next voyage was again to Australia, this time in command of the *Speedy*, chartered as a store ship with much needed supplies, arriving Sydney on 8 June 1794. Before again whaling offshore, he is supposed to have purchased a 90-acre farm near Parramatta on 28 July 1794. Captain Melville may have considered settling in Australia, and his daughter, Jennett, and her husband, George William Evans (1780-1852) later did so.

In February 1800, Captain Melville and his family left London for South Africa, arriving at Cape Town in May of that year. With several thousand pounds of capital at his command, he tried his hand at farming. Around 1807, he went into business as a ship's chandler in partnership with a man named Johnston, in Strand St, Cape Town. He also planned a small-scale return to whaling off the coast. He purchased a 30-ton schooner he intended to operate in partnership with several other retired mariners, but the venture was abandoned when his partners withdrew from the project. Captain Melville died 15 March 1814, leaving an estate valued at 1,106 Rix dollars. [MH]

Sources:

Family register of the Melvill's family ... - J. M. Marquard (Cape Town, 1977)

A manuscript account written by the surgeon aboard the *Britannia* and *Speedy* (1791-1796) is held by the SLNSW as DL MSQ36

Captain Thomas Melvill - Geni.com

Laban RUSSELL (1780 -)

Born in Nantucket 5 October 1780 he sailed out of Dartmouth, Nova Scotia; Milford Haven, and then London. He married Mary Ann Hayden (born 21 February 1784 and died in 1855) in Nantucket on 27 July 1802. They had at least four children Mary Ann (born 10 May 1803); William (probably born in 1804 in Nantucket and who first went to sea with his father on the *Hydra* aged 12 in 1817); Laban Junior born on 21 February 1811 who 'married out west' and another son Charles F. who was probably born in the UK). Their daughter, Mary Ann, married Forman Marshall Mount, a captain in

the Nantucket fleet, sometime in the early 1820s as they had four children before Mount died in 1827 in Rye, New York. The daughter later remarried to someone named Jewitt.

Russell commanded two very successful voyages out of Milford Haven between 1811 and 1816 in the Charles. He didn't move straight to London when the Milford Haven trade folded in 1815 but instead took out the Hydra from Plymouth in 1817. Post the Napoleonic Wars Plymouth sent out a couple of vessels as the trade was recognised to be bountiful. William, their oldest son was on board the Hydra aged 12. The Hydra had a hard voyage being held captive by the Spanish in Callao (representations were made to the Spanish government in Madrid) but brought home a rich cargo of 1670 barrels of sperm (71 whales) and 334 barrels of elephant oil taken on the Californian coast. His wife was on board when the vessel docked in 1820 suggesting Laban Russell stopped at Nantucket on the return voyage.

Laban Russell then took command of the Birnie whaleship Emily departing London on 8 September 1820. It is probable that William accompanied him on this voyage and that Laban's wife Mary and youngest son Charles remained in London. The vessel sailed to Timor and the Moluccas and was quite successful though Russell had to put down a mutiny at Ternate with the assistance of the British authorities there. A number of men were killed or wounded. The vessel arrived back in London with 270 tons of oil in 500 casks and a few months later Laban Russell found himself arraigned on charges of murder related to the events of the mutiny. Brief evidence was heard and it was apparent that Russell had acted in defence of the vessel and the charges were dismissed.

In early 1823 Laban Russell sailed in the Emily again this time accompanied by his wife and eldest son William and youngest son Charles. An extensive record of the events of the voyage to Timor and Indonesia exist recorded by his wife [in the collection of the Nantucket Historical Association]. It is interesting that Russell was voyaging to Indonesian waters as the master of a British whaleship at a time when Nantucket whalers and vessels were venturing around Cape Horn and then north. Clearly Russell was operating to instruction of the vessel's owners.

In mid-August 1825 the Emily returned to London with 560 casks, another excellent cargo, and it appears that Laban Russell retired from the sea and probably on hearing of the death of his son-in-law the family moved to Rye, New York to assist his daughter with her four children. A portrait of Laban Russell is in the collection of the Nantucket Historical Association. [DC]

Sources:

[Portrait of Laban Russell](#)

[Hayden Papers](#)

[Letters and Journal of Mary \(Hayden\) Russell](#)

[Log of the Hydra](#)

[Whales and Destiny – Edouard Stackpole \(1972\) p. 366-70](#)

[Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820-1920 – Joan Druett \(2001\)](#)

George STARK (1799–1839)

George Stark was born in London on 17th February 1799. One of four children to Alexander and Susannah Stark. He married Susan Glasscock (born 1800 of Downham Market, Norfolk) on 7th January 1828 at Shoreditch, London. They had two children, George Neagus Stark christened 21st October 1828, Downham Market, Norfolk and William Isaac Stark born 18th February 1836, St Pancras, London. Susan Stark died on 24th February 1838 at Downham Market aged 29 years not long before George Stark assumed his first command. A death notice in the Norfolk Chronicle and Bury and Norfolk Post (March 1838) records her death and her husband George as Mate on the whaling ship *George Home*.

George Stark is recorded, aged 37, in the role of first mate undertaking a whaling voyage to the south seas in December 1835 returning in June 1837, on the *George Home* commanded by Alexander Distant and owned by T. Sturge of London. Following the death of his wife in early 1838 Stark took command of the schooner *Diana*, also belonging to T. Sturge, on a voyage to the Isle of Desolation (Kerguelen).

Stark died on the Isle of Desolation on the 4th January 1839 and is presumed buried on the island. A record of probate lists George Stark's death as *intestate* and having died in 'foreign parts' and notes the ship *George Home*. The surviving children were raised by the Glasscock family in Downham Market, Norfolk. [RS]

Thomas Reed STAVERS (1798-1867)

Thomas Reed Stavers was born September 19, 1798, in Deptford, Kent. He was the sixth of seven children born to Captain William Stavers (1765-1816) and Margareth Crowther (1765-1803). Stavers first went to sea in 1811 serving as a boy. In his Journal he fails to identify the vessel which was part of a convey to the Davis Straits whaling grounds. He next shipped on the *Mary Ann* as a boy on a whaling cruise to the south seas and Australia in 1812.

After sailing as a crewman on the merchantman *Concord* and then rising to the position of boatsteerer on board the *Mary Ann* on a voyage to the Greenland fishery, he sailed as a boatsteerer on the south seas whaleship *Perseverance* under the command of his father to the Brazil Banks in 1816. Early in the cruise his father was killed by a whale – the young son having to pull the body from the sea. The *Perseverance* returned from its voyage in the summer of 1818.

Whaling was a tradition in the Stavers family. Thomas Reed Stavers followed his father and three of four brothers to become the master of a whaling vessel. His uncle and a cousin were also masters of whaling vessels. William Stavers, Thomas' father, was imprisoned twice when his ships were captured. The first in 1803 when the *Perseverance* was taken by a French privateer and the following in 1813 when Captain David Porter of the U.S. frigate *Essex* took Stavers' command, the *Seringapatam*, in the Galapagos islands. Two of Thomas Reed's brothers were also taken prisoner in the action.

Stavers is generally identified with the whaleship *Tuscan* which he commanded from 1824 until 1836. Prior to commanding the ship, he sailed as the *Tuscan's* first mate in 1821. His brother, Francis Stavers, being the ship's commander. Part of this voyage is documented in Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet's *Journal of voyages and travels ...* (London, 1831, 3 volumes). The *Tuscan's* owners (Alexander and George Birnie) had arranged for these two men and an additional three missionary couples to be carried to the Society Islands (Tahiti).

In his journal Stavers regularly writes of the difficulties faced when commanding a south seas whaling vessel in the 1820's and 1830's. His ship was old, leaky and often needing repair. Political unrest in Chile during their war of independence caused Stavers a lengthy detention, loss of his ship's papers and the theft of needed stores from his ship. Unreliable officers, drunken surgeons and mutinous crew members were recurring problems. But generally, Thomas Reed Stavers was regularly able to obtain sufficient oil to make voyages that would be considered successful at the time.

Stavers' last voyage in command of the *Tuscan* was documented by ship surgeon, Frederick Debell Bennett, in his whaling classic [Narrative of a whaling voyage round the globe, from the year 1833 to 1836](#).

Under Stavers the *Tuscan* was a frequent visitor to the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) and the islands of Tahiti and Raiatea in the Society Islands (French Polynesia). Three of Stavers' four brothers were also masters of ships. Over the years he met John R. Stavers, master of the *Offley* and Francis Stavers, commander of the *Partridge* on Pacific whaling grounds or at the Sandwich Islands. He also met his third brother, Peter Mellish Stavers, commanding the *Zephyr*, in East Indian waters. This brother eventually retired from whaling and became engaged in merchant shipping in the Australian, Indian and Chinese trade.

Thomas Beale, in his [The natural history of the sperm whale](#) relates the story of a Captain Stavers, who, while commander of the English whaleship *Coquette*, was murdered in Guam by its Governor. This Stavers was John Stavers, a nephew of Thomas Reed's father, William Stavers. John Stavers had spent more than ten years as a prisoner of war in France, having been captured with his uncle William Stavers, master of the *Perseverance*, in 1803. In 1816 he was indicted and found guilty "for having committed different assaults (nine in number) on Thomas Benjamin Gibson, a boy on board" the whaleship *Thames* of which Stavers was master. As a consequence of the boy dying of his injuries, Stavers was fined as well as sentenced to one year in Newgate prison.

After Thomas Reed left the *Tuscan* in 1836, he made one final whaling cruise in the brig *Onyx*, a vessel in which he and his brother had acquired an interest from the Birnie's.

Following the voyage of the *Onyx*, Stavers, with his wife Francis (Fanny), settled in Java in the Dutch East Indies. William Stavers, the oldest of the five brothers, was established there and encouraged Thomas Reed to join him. In 1840-41 William Stavers was made a knight of the Netherlands when he was awarded the Order of William for his services in the Java War (Diponegoro War) of 1825-1830. In Java, Thomas Reed held a number of positions over the next thirty years – blacksmith, engineer, sugar mill operator, and agent for shipping concerns. The Stavers had five children of which one, a daughter, died as a child. The surviving four received their schooling in England before joining their parents in Java.

In his final years, Thomas Reed Stavers suffered from blindness. In 1865 he and his wife made their final departure from Java and returned to England. Thomas Reed Stavers died at New Cross, Kent, on February 6, 1867. [TT]

Sources:

[The natural history of the sperm whale ... Thomas Beale \(London - 1839\)](#)

[Narrative of a whaling voyage round the globe from the year 1833 to 1836 -- Frederick Debell Bennett \(London – 1840\)](#)

[Journal of Thomas Reed Stavers -- Thomas Reed Stavers](#)

Samuel SWAIN (1799–1842)

Samuel Swain, was born on 5th October 1799, the fourth child and third son of the five children of James and Rebecca Swain of Nantucket. Samuel's father was engaged in whaling out of Nantucket and fought in the 1812 war against the British. The family seem to have been Quakers up to this time as it is recorded that James was one of many who were disowned by the Society for going to sea in an armed vessel.

Samuel followed his father into whaling on a Nantucket vessel, a Seaman's Protection Certificate being granted to him at Nantucket on 2nd August 1815. Sometime between 1815 and the early 1820s Samuel left Nantucket for England in company with an older cousin, William Swain. In London, Samuel shipped out on the whale ship *Indian*, commanded by his cousin. Samuel also served as mate under a Captain Garbutt but the dates and name of the vessel are unknown.

Swain went on to command the Enderby whaleship the *Indian* and made two voyages to the Pacific – 1826-1828 and 1828-1831. In the short break between the *Indian's* arrival in January 1831 and his departure as master of the *Vigilant* in October 1831, Samuel Swain began a family. On 20th April 1831, he married Louise Flowers Fulcher of Deptford, at St. Pauls Church, Deptford. They had five children; Louisa Baker born in 1832 and not seen by her father until 1835; Samuel Fulcher born 1836; James born 1838; Thomas born 1840 and Edward Plant born in 1841 just one month before his father's last departure for the Southern Whale Fisheries as commander of the *Bermondsey*.

Swain's next command after his marriage as the Green, Wigrams & Green whaleship *Vigilant* (1831-35). The *Vigilant* made a double voyage transshipping its cargo of oil at Sydney in 1833. A log and journal of the voyage survive as well as a miniature of Samuel Swain.

Not much is known of the next few years of Captain Swain's life, though it is almost certain that he retired from the sea. Three very successful voyages such as he had made would certainly have made him a reasonably wealthy man, able to live off his investments. Yet drafts of letters dating from March 1841 reveal that the year was one of considerable financial distress for Samuel Swain and his family. The letters mention the loss of a considerable amount of money invested in an American bank and Swain petitions an old whaling friend in Sydney, Captain Robert Duke, for the return of £2,000 he had advanced him. Apparently the financial situation did not improve and Swain was forced to seek another whaling command in 1841 after having been retired from the sea since 1835.

In October 1841, Captain Samuel Swain left London in command of the *Bermondsey*. The voyage did not go well. In late February 1842 the ship was forced to put into Sydney due to the 'disorderly nature of her crew', with only 50 barrels of sperm oil on board. What occurred over the next three months is unclear, but Swain was probably engaged in re-establishing control over his crew, trying to communicate with Robert Duke and shipping new hands. On 25 May 1842 the *Bermondsey* sailed for the whale fishery, but within six weeks put back into Sydney with Captain Swain gravely ill. The [Sydney Gazette](#) for Tuesday 12 July 1842 records, 'The *Bermondsey*, whaler, returned to port on Saturday last owing to the illness of the Captain, whom, we are sorry to state, expired on the same evening. His complaint was consumption'. Captain Samuel Swain died aged 43 years of age in Sydney Harbour on Saturday, 9 July 1842. His funeral was held on the jetty, Macquarie Place, on 11 July 1842. In England he left a widow and five young children with no financial support. [DC]

Sources:

[Vigilant Journal - Litt B. Thesis - Dale Chatwin \(1987\)](#)

William SWAIN (1777-1870)

At least two William Swain's, both born in Nantucket, commanded British whaleships and both worked at some time of their career for Enderby & Sons. Consequently, there has at some time been confusion about their careers.

The first William Swain was born in 1777 and is recorded as going to sea at 12 years of age and moving to England following a voyage to the Netherlands. Most of his career appears to have occurred in the later part of the 1700s and in the early 1800s. Known commands include the *Atlantic* and the *Cumberland*. He was not commander of the *Sarah & Elizabeth* when Thomas Beale

sailed on the vessel in the early 1830s as is often recorded and he had probably already returned to the United States. He died on 10 March 1870 in Auburn, New York. [DC]

Sources:

[A Trade so Uncontrollably Uncertain: A study of the English Southern Whale Fishery from 1815 to 1860](#) - MA Thesis (1996) – Dale Chatwin

[Whales and destiny](#) – E. A. Stackpole (1972)

WILLIAM SWAIN (1795-1844)

The second William Swain was born in 1795 - his age is recorded on the *Matilda* crew list when he sailed in command in 1836 as 40 years. His previous command is recorded as the *Sarah & Elizabeth*. Swain moved from Nantucket to England soon after the end of the War of 1812 in company with his cousin Samuel Swain in order to take up employment with Enderby and Sons. It appears that he started his career as mate on the *Indian* on its 1817-1819 voyage as records indicate that the Master named Sullivan died during the voyage and that William Swain took command. He was certainly in command when the vessel was at Sydney in August and September 1818.

Swain's next commands, if any remain unknown, but by 1830 he was in command of the Enderby whaleship the *Sarah and Elizabeth*. The later part of this voyage is described by Thomas Beale in his whaling classic, *The Natural History of the Sperm Whale*. Beale transferred to Swain's ship, the *Sarah & Elizabeth*, from the whaler *Kent*, at the Bonin Islands on 1 June 1832, having become sickened by the master of the *Kent's* treatment of his crew. In the book Beale warmly praises the abilities of Swain both as a captain and whaler. William Swain's last English command was the Green, Wigrams & Green whaleship *Matilda*. When the vessel called at the Bay of Islands in February 1840 William Swain and his wife removed from the ship and left the first mate in command [the crew list for the *Matilda* records the master as having deserted].

Perhaps Swain intended to settle in New Zealand at the Bay of Islands because he and his English wife purchased land there. They remained there until early late April 1844 when he shipped as mate on the American whaleship *Christopher Mitchell*. Less than four weeks later, on 19 May 1844, he was taken out of his boat and drowned. Swain's wife stayed at the Bay of Islands with their children until an uprising saw all her property destroyed. Mrs Swain then sailed for Nantucket aboard the *Monticello*, arriving in mid-July 1845, 'a stranger among strangers, and far from the scenes of her birth-place and home'. [DC / TT]

Sources:

[A Trade so Uncontrollably Uncertain: A study of the English Southern Whale Fishery from 1815 to 1860](#) - MA Thesis (1996) – Dale Chatwin

[Whales and destiny: the rivalry between America, France and Britain for control of the Southern Whale Fishery 1785-1825](#) – E. A. Stackpole (1972)

[Nantucket Inquirer](#) – 17 July 1845

Michael Underwood (1788 – 18??) and Eliza Underwood (1795 – 18??)

Born in East Grinstead, Sussex, and baptized on June 15, 1788, Michael Underwood was first given Protection papers at the age of eighteen, as one of the crew of the *Eliza*, Captain R. Alexander, departing from Deal, Kent, on February 13, 1807, for a voyage to the South Pacific. He was a boatsteerer, which implies that this voyage was his second. The *Eliza* returned April 1809, with a Captain Garbutt in command, the original master Alexander having died.

In September 1809 Underwood was off again, shipping as a harpooner on the *Echo*, Captain Henry Rowe. After returning home in October 1811, he disappeared from the records for some years. Obviously, he had been promoted to third or fourth officer of some ship, which means that he did

not warrant a Protection. He might even have been pressed onto some man of war. Finally, however, in September 1819, Underwood's name was recorded again—not once, but twice.

On the first of that month, he was married. According to the town records of Lewes, Sussex, Michael Underwood, of the Parish of St. John under the Castle, "mariner, bachelor, aged 21 and upwards" (he was thirty-one), married "Elizabeth Hook of St. John under the Castle, Lewes, spinster, aged 24 and upwards." Elizabeth's age was indeed twenty-four, for she had celebrated her birthday the previous week. Born on August 24, 1795, in Lewes, Sussex, she was the daughter of Timothy Hook, who was an ostler at the White Hart Hotel, a picturesque posting inn founded in 1723 and still in business today, on the corner of the High Street and St. Mary's Lane in Lewes.

A mere twenty-seven days after his marriage, Michael Underwood was recorded in Gravesend, preparing his new command, the *Amelia Wilson*, for a voyage to South Seas. In October, both ship and captain were in Portsmouth, and after that neither ship nor captain was heard of again until Underwood was reported at Ambon on the island of Ceram (in what is now Indonesia), in January 1821. His surgeon had been busy, for six men had been attacked and gravely wounded by a Malay who had run amok about the decks of the *Greenwich*, which was in company with the *Amelia Wilson* at the time. In December 1821 Underwood arrived back in England. Three months later, he was off again, again in command of the *Amelia Wilson*, departing from Deal, Kent, on March 14th, not returning until September, 1824. Eight weeks after that, he departed again, still in command of the *Amelia Wilson*, on an even longer voyage arriving home in September 1827. He had been married exactly eight years and been in England just six months of that time.

On his next voyage in the *Kingsdown* departing May 1829 Michael Underwood was accompanied by his wife. It is a little surprising that Eliza had not accompanied Underwood on any of his earlier voyages as wife-carrying was socially acceptable as it was in most other sailing trades. Indeed, it was quite common for the wives of south seamen captains to accompany their husbands. Eliza records that a friend, Mrs. Lyme Harris of the *Royalist*, was one of several other seafaring wives who were in the same seas at the time that she was in the *Kingsdown*. But voyages were definitely hazardous, and it was certainly not unknown for seafaring wives to abruptly find themselves widows, stranded and alone in far-off seas and shores. This would have been a most alarming prospect, and good reason to stay at home, though Dr. John Coulter records that the widow of south sea master Buckle extracted herself from such a dilemma by setting up a tavern in Tahiti.

Eliza Underwood's journal for the voyage of the *Kingsdown* is in the collection of the Dixon Library in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (DL MSQ 366). It is in a logbook, 12" x 10", soft cover which had been stored folded lengthwise and in a damaged condition. Quite apart from this, it is difficult to decipher. Not only is the script wild to the point of complete illegibility, but the diary was written on such poor quality paper that the gritty black ink has blotted and bled. As well a lot of it is missing. The diary is the only survivor of a set of at least four with the others. While Eliza, the diarist, refers often to the voyage out and early events, the detailed entries cover just the year 1831, months that were spent entirely in the waters around the Celebes Islands, Timor, and Ternate, all in modern Indonesia.

The first eight pages are a miscellany of poems, anecdotes, a play, thoughts on the grave of an English seaman, and a long complaint about loneliness. The next three pages have a play of Eliza's own composition, headed, "Trial of Eliza Underwood in the month of Feb. 1830, for certain Crimes and Misdemeanors Committed on the Ship *Kingsdown* on the High Seas in defiance of the authority of his Sovereign Majesty the King," the "King" being Captain Underwood, always referred to as "Mr U".

Daily entries begin Saturday June 4 1831. Most are long and cover several pages detailing events on board and on shore, the health of the crew, whaling, and Eliza's frequent disputes with her husband. The last entry, dated September 24, 1831, was written during the night at a fraught moment when the ship was drifting on shore in the Lesser Sunda Islands in a place considered to be frequented by

pirates. It ends: "I hope I shall close my next book with a more pleasing reflection, surely I shall for the next will close in London, but yet I have much to dread." The *Kingsdown* arrived back in London in April 1832, with 2,300 barrels of oil. There is no record of Michael or Eliza Underwood going on voyage again. [JD]

Sources:

[Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820-1920](#) – Joan Druett (2001)

[Rough Medicine: Surgeons at sea in the age of sail](#) – Joan Druett (2013)

[The Amelia Wilson on the South Sea Fishery under the command of Michael Underwood by William John Huggins](#)

Joseph Whiteus (17?? – 1838?)

The family name Whiteus / Whitteus can be found in Nantucket land records at the end of the 1700s but for the life of his career in the BSWF, Joseph Whiteus' name was either anglicised to Whitehouse or misspelled as Whitens!

Joseph is first recorded in the BSWF as first mate on Daniel Bennett's whaleship *Lively* in 1803, and in 1804 he assumed command of the vessel. He took the vessel out again in 1806, and was wrecked on Mermaid Reef, on the north-west of Australia in the first half of 1808. Whiteus and the crew were rescued, probably by *Ranger*, another Bennett vessel, as Whiteus, the crew, and oil from the *Lively* appear to have been landed in London in late 1808 via the *Ranger*. Whiteus however took hardly any time to recover as he then took *Ranger* out on her next voyage in late February 1809.

Whiteus commanded at least four more voyages on Bennett vessels with his last vessel appearing to be the *Daniel* on a voyage between September 1819 and January 1821. All of his voyages apart from the wreck of *Lively* appear to have been successful.

Joseph married twice, the first time to Betsey Stokes. It appears that a daughter from this marriage, named Jane, married a Bennett whaling captain name John May. In 1814, as a widower, Joseph remarried Sophia Charlotte Bennett, a widow, and possibly a relative of his employer. Joseph also knew Frederick Coffin, of *Syren* fame, as correspondence between them and a painting of Joseph's wife, Sophia, were sold at auction in the UK in 2010. Joseph Whiteus died in either late 1838 or early 1839. His Will reveals him to be a very wealthy man able to provide for his family including leaving property in Nantucket to his sister Elizabeth Perkins. [DC]

Coffin Whippey (1763-1856)

Coffin Whippey was born on Nantucket September 30, 1763, the son of whaling Captain James Whippey and Susanna Coffin. In 1787, he married Lucinda Gardner, the daughter of William and Phebe Gardner. The same year, Gardner and his newly married daughter Lucinda purchased land where he and his son-in-law built a double house, allowing Lucinda to be close to her family while Coffin Whippey was away on prolonged whaling voyages.

Whippey's early voyages remain undiscovered, but being part of the whaling community of Nantucket, he no doubt had the opportunity to sail with friends and family as he learned his trade. He sailed as mate for his brother James on *Canton* in 1789.

In all, Coffin Whippey made twelve identified voyages as Master: a number from Dunkirk as part of the rival French whaling trade to the BSWF; then a voyage on the *Fox* from New Bedford; and in the first decade of the 1800s at least one in the BSWF on the *Grand Sachem* out of Milford Haven.

Whippey is one of the few Nantucket born masters known to have returned to Nantucket as he served his community as State Representative to Congress in 1811-12, but preference, or perhaps hard times, saw him back at sea as he commanded the *William and Nancy* from Nantucket on three voyages in the period 1815-18. [JL]