

## **Owners in the British Southern Whale Fishery**

Over the 85 years of the British Southern Whale Fishery some 300 families or individuals owned south sea whaleships. Initially, the trade was driven forward by two groups, American owners engaged in the trade as a consequence of their loyalty to Britain in preference to support for the American revolutionary cause and secondly, a group of London based owners who had previously been involved in the trade as importers of oil or oil products. A consequence of the war and its aftermath was that the American owners never exerted the sort of political and trade influence that the London based owners were able to elicit in support of the trade but the influence of the Americans, particularly as many Nantucket whalemens commanded British whaleships should not be underestimated.

### **American shipowners engaging in the British Southern Whale Fishery**

Three American families, the Rotches, Starbucks and Folgers engaged directly in the British Fishery after the War of American Independence disrupted their successful businesses in the southern whale fishery from New England. They were from the Island of Nantucket, inter-related by marriage and members of the Society of Friends, known as Quakers, who sought to maintain their prosperity in the whale fishery by sheer determination and passive perseverance. Although their initiatives were encouraged initially, as the British industry grew they were seen first as a challenge and then a threat to that branch of the southern whale fishery.

### **The Rotch Family (1775 to 1840)**

The Rotches traded with several British merchants shipping whale oil, bone and candles to London before the American War of Independence and kept up their involvement with the British Southern Whale Fishery in various ways from 1775 until 1840.

William Rotch Senior (1734-1828), his brother Francis Rotch (1755-1822) and William's son Ben Rotch (1764-1839) were the key players. The Rotch whaling business was based originally in Nantucket and then transferred to New Bedford, Massachusetts. They had long-standing links with the Enderbys, Champion and Dickason and George Hayley in London, who purchased oil and other whale products from them; companies who were to become leaders in the setting up of a southern fishery from Britain in the mid-1770s. These links were to be maintained by the Rotches in different ways.

The Rotches had at least twenty-one ships employed in the BSWF at various times between 1775 and 1840, ten owned individually or jointly by William Snr. and Jnr. and Francis Rotch and at least eleven by Ben Rotch based initially in Milford in south-west Wales and later in London. Six others which were originally part of the Falklands Fleet sailed from London after 1775.

William Senior managed the family business and negotiated with both the British and French governments to establish bases from which to operate in their countries. He was unsuccessful initially in Britain, so his son Ben moved to Dunkirk in France in 1788 from where he sent whaling vessels to the southern oceans. After the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1794 Ben relocated with his family to London and in 1800 joined his 'cousin' Starbuck in Milford Haven. He sent his ships, which were registered in Britain, to the Southern Fishery and also trans-shipped oil brought to Milford from New Bedford to avoid paying the tariff on foreign oil. In 1814 Ben Rotch was bankrupted when Thomas

Dickason failed to sell his stockpiled oil before the market collapsed with the downfall of Napoleon. He returned to London to sort out his affairs and was involved with the Fishery until his death in 1839.

Francis Rotch was a part-owner of the Dartmouth, which was involved in the Boston Tea Party and which had sailed for London in 1774, filled with sperm oil consigned to Champion and Dickason. He was one of the instigators of the Falklands Fleet in partnership with Aaron Lopez and Leonard Jarvis, and was always anxious to maintain the links between American and British whaling interests (Bullard 1947 pp.53-55). They devised a plan to circumvent the restrictions placed on their ships, both by the British government and the Revolutionary Congress of America, which forbade the export and import of goods to and from Nantucket in the months preceding the outbreak of war. It involved establishing a base at Port Egmont in the Falkland Islands from which to operate their business under the British flag and thus market their whale oil directly in London.

In 1777 after the failure of the Falklands Fleet initiative, Francis went to London as chief clerk to George Hayley and became an influential figure in the company, working closely with Hayley until 1781 when Hayley died. He then worked with Hayley's widow, Mary, until 1784-5 before returning to America. In the latter years, the business was often involved in trans-shipping oil from American ships in the Falkland Islands. [Jane Clayton]

Sources:

The Rotches – J. M. Bullard (1947)

Shipowners investing in the British South Sea Whale Fishery: 1775-1815 – J. Clayton and C.A. Clayton (2016)

[Quaker, Whaler, Coward, Spy! - William Rotch and the Age of Revolutions](#) – S. Crabtree (2016)

Ships employed in the South Seas Trade 1775-1859, Volume 2 – A. G. E. Jones (1991)

The House of Rotch: Massachusetts whaling merchants 1734-1828 – J. L. McDevitt (1986)

The Sea Hunters: the New England whalemens during two centuries 1635-1835 – E. A. Stackpole (1953)

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

### **The Starbucks and Folgers (1785 to 181?)**

The Starbuck and Folger families were whaling merchants from Nantucket, who in 1785-86 relocated first to Dartmouth Nova Scotia to gain support from Britain as colonial whalers and then in 1792 moved to Milford Haven in south-west Wales where they contributed to the development of the Southern Whale Fishery from Britain.

They had ten ships employed in the south seas out of Milford between 1792 and 1809 and appear to have operated as a joint enterprise sharing the investment in whaling voyages, although records show Daniel Starbuck to be the main 'shipowner' with at least six vessels. The ships often returned to Milford and then re-shipped their cargoes of oil and bone into smaller craft to be taken round the coast to the London market. These whaling merchants also trans-shipped cargoes of oil from New England moving it on to London and other cities in Europe.

The leading members of the group were Samuel Starbuck Senior (1727-1803), Daniel Starbuck (1751 - 1818), Samuel Starbuck Junior (1762-1829) and Timothy Folger (1732-1814). Folger's wife kept a diary which gives details relating to their whaling activities and records her husband 'cutting bone' whilst she 'wipd' candles up until 1810, Samuel [Jnr.] as a 'ships' agent' in 1809 and as a partner in the first bank opened in the town and visits by several ships' masters on their return from the south seas. Samuel also opened the first 'bakehouse' to supply ships' biscuits and bread. Daniel obtained the first contract to supply oil for a local lighthouse in 1799 and his son Gayer who established the town brewery was also employed by his 'Uncle [Ben] Rotch' in the whale fishery.

Some of the colonists appear to have diversified their activities, some of the ships were sold to London merchants and although several of the ships' captains and their families moved to London or returned to New England, the majority of the members of the Starbuck and Folger families remained in Milford. It is ironic that more than a hundred and fifty years later Milford was to experience a second oil age with the building of a vast oil terminal and petroleum refinery plant on the 'Haven' as its vast harbor is known. [Jane Clayton]

Sources:

Shipowners investing in the British South Sea Whale Fishery: 1775-1815 – J. Clayton and C.A. Clayton (2016)

The development of a Southern Whale Fishery from Britain between 1775 and 1815. Unpublished PhD Thesis – J. Clayton (2002)

A Quaker Odyssey: The migration of Quaker whalers from Nantucket, Massachusetts to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and Milford Haven, Wales. The Canadian Quaker History Journal, 71: 1-21 (2006) – M. B. Follini

The Story of Milford Haven – K. McKay (1992)

The Story of Milford - J. Rees F Rees (1957)

The Sea Hunters: the New England whalemens during two centuries 1635-1835 – E. A. Stackpole (1953)

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

The Builders of Milford - F. Thomas (1952)

## **British shipowners engaged in the British Southern Whale Fishery**

### **Daniel Bennett & Sons. (1786 – 1844)**

#### **Daniel Bennett (1760–1826)**

Throughout the 18th and early 19th century, London was the leading port in Britain for Southern Whaling, and Bennett & Co. were one of its principal operators. Of the 300 owners in the British southern whaling and sealing trades during this period, Bennett & Co. were one of the few that lasted more than twenty years and they were the largest. The trade was based at Wapping, Limehouse and Rotherhithe, on both sides of the River Thames, many ship-owners regarding the risky South Seas trade as one part of their overall business activities.

Daniel Bennett was one of seven children born to Thomas Bennett (c.1725–1800) and his wife Elizabeth (née) Chambers (c.1727–). He began his working life following in the footsteps of his father, a brazier at Wapping, where many trades connected with shipbuilding, boat building and the entrepôt trades were located, close to the Port of London. By 1781, aged 21 years, Daniel had established his own business as 'Ironmonger & Brazier' at 242 Wapping, near Execution Dock. Daniel was related to the Bennett family of Wiltshire, where his grandfather (Daniel) was a prominent gentleman farmer, holding Leasehold Estates and owning various properties in Westport, Malmesbury and the surrounding areas. A small monetary bequest Daniel received on the death of his grandfather in 1778 may have contributed to the large fee demanded for starting a business in a highly capitalized trade in London.

As a skilled tradesman whose work was connected to shipping, Daniel Bennett clearly saw that ownership of a few vessels could help to extend his business and provide market security. Within six years, in 1786, he was able to purchase his first ship, the ship-rigged, 150-ton *Lively*, built during 1777 in America. *Lively* sailed for the Southern Fishery under Captain Barnett and returned in 1787 with a full cargo. Adding a second vessel, the *Active*, to his fleet, Bennett operated with only two ships for a number of years. By investing his profits back into the business he was able to purchase more vessels and increased his tonnage substantially. Bennett's operating fleet in 1796 numbered fifteen vessels, with an aggregate tonnage of 1 354 tons, making him the 'leading owner' in the South Seas trade. As his wealth increased, Bennett changed the description of his main occupation in London directories and documents from 'brazier' to 'ship owner' and 'merchant'.

Unlike his main competitor in the whaling trade, Samuel Enderby, the political promoter of whaling, Daniel Bennett has been described as a 'low profile operator', paying little attention to 'fame, political influence or the activities of the Royal Geographical Society'—which was keen to promote new discoveries made by whaling masters, among them Bennett's employees Captains Robert Rhodes, George Powell and Peter Kemp. This characterization perhaps explains his success in the business, and the reason why little information about the firm and its operational management survives.

In 18th-century England, for those who did not farm, there was the equivalent need to acquire a craft practice or trade to earn a living, seek opportunities for advancement and achieve prosperity. Creating strategic alliances or 'networks of opportunity' was an important part of business strategy. In the City of London, coffee shops were important centres of social and business activity. Merchants, underwriters and those associated with shipping would frequent those in the vicinity of the Royal Exchange (the headquarters of Lloyd's from 1774) and the Thames where relevant news was exchanged and marine business including ship auctions and marine insurance was transacted. Such meeting places would have allowed Daniel Bennett to keep up to date with shipping news and gossip, create new acquaintances and establish useful business contacts.

An advantage of Bennett's trade as an ironmonger and brazier was that it enabled him to keep his ships seaworthy and in better condition than Enderby. He extended the life of his older vessels by strengthening them with new iron beams or coppering the hulls to protect the timber from teredo (ship-worm) infestation. Well aware of the risks involved in coppering iron-fastened ships he carried out his own experiments over more than ten years, advising the Admiralty of his methods and results in a letter dated 21 September 1808 from his home in 'Vanburgh Fields, Blackheath'.

By 1801, Bennett's fleet was three times the size of Enderby's, and he managed to keep them regularly employed, departure and arrival dates indicating a rapid turn-around, for which Bennett was noted. With a reliable income he was able to re-invest his profits in land-based assets to increase his 'social overhead capital' (i.e. 'fixed capital'). About 1802, he purchased the Oil Wharf by the King's Mill, Rotherhithe, at the entrance to the Grand Surrey Canal, and for more than 40 years had warehouses, cooperage sheds, a house, cottage and gardens nearby. As the oil trade expanded, so his business

flourished. Operations were maintained at both Wapping and Rotherhithe, and he moved his home to one of the best residential districts of Blackheath—a location where a concentration of shipping interest in the Pacific existed. This network provided Bennett with a financial opportunity to access eastern Australian waters for whaling, and the East India trade, by transporting convicts to Botany Bay.

Bennett was a cautious purchaser of ships, preferring to invest in cheap prizes rather than risk expensive new vessels in speculative ventures. Indeed, he only commissioned the construction of one new vessel throughout his career. Fractional ownership of ships declined with the advent of marine insurance and Bennett preferred to maintain sole management of his fleet, using 'sleeping partners' only where there was a strategic need to raise extra capital and spread the risk of a voyage, or be involved in trades that could assist in the operational management of his vessels, such as ship's chandlers, grocers and so on. Bennett's part sale of the *Hillsborough* in 1802 to Sir Charles Price, a merchant, Lord Mayor of London and politician, and the former naval vessel *Recovery* to Charles Price & Co., all influential and wealthy City gentlemen, were notable examples. An American vessel purchased in 1815 was renamed *Sir Charles Price*, clearly an acknowledgment of his benefactor. The *Morning Star*, purchased in 1813, also had a third owner (or partner) who was not a family member. In this instance it was John Clark Spence, Bennett's Manager of his Rotherhithe operations, and a long-serving master of several of his ships including the *Duke of Portland*, chartered to carry convicts to New South Wales in 1807. As a sole owner, Daniel Bennett would have had independent control over the management and operation of his fleet, and decisions concerning his enterprise.

During his whaling career, Bennett was fortunate to have lost very few of his ships at sea. One notable loss was that of a second whaler named *Lively*, a 240-ton French prize purchased in 1798. Remains of a shipwreck discovered in the early 1980s on Mermaid Reef in the Rowley Shoals, about 160 nautical miles off the coast of North-West Australia, were investigated and identified by maritime archaeologists from the Western Australian Museum, Fremantle, as being Bennett's *Lively* (Stanbury 2015). Exactly how the ship met its demise, and members of the crew—at least the Captain, Joseph Whitehouse (or Whiteus)—made it safely back to London is yet to be conclusively determined.

Daniel and his first wife Elizabeth (née Ball) (b. Abt. 1756 d. 24 Nov. 1815) had two children: a daughter Sarah (b. Abt. 1779 d. 1858) who married John Goodwin (b. Abt. 1773 d. 1810) in December 1801 in Greenwich and had a daughter, Sarah, who married the Reverend Maximilian Geneste, the first incumbent of Holy Trinity Church, Cowes; and, a son William (b. 7 July 1788 d. 18 Jan. 1844) who married Marianna (née Dunkin) (b. 19 Mar. 1795 d. 24 Feb. 1840) in September 1817 and had six children.

William joined his father in the ship-owning business about 1811, the firm trading as Daniel Bennett & Son. Gradually, Daniel Snr. took a less active role and moved to Faringdon House, Berkshire, in 1818 to become a 'country gentleman'. Two years later he married Ann Elizabeth Boughton (b. 1780 d. 26 July 1838) of Bath. Memorial plaques for Daniel Bennett and his two wives, William's wife Marianna and two of their children are in the High Wycombe Parish Church, Berkshire, where William was also laid to rest. Memorials to other Bennett family members are in the All Saints Church, Faringdon, formerly part of the Faringdon House Estate. Three whaling try-pots made by the firm of Johnson & Son, Old Gravel Lane, Wapping, located just a short distance from Daniel Bennett's brazier's business, remain in the garden of one of the former estate houses on Radcot Road, Faringdon.

Daniel Bennett was a dynamic and successful businessman and ship-owner. He accumulated wealth through his whaling and other ship-owning activities in London, management of hereditary properties in Wiltshire, and new investments in Berkshire, West Cowes (Isle of Wight) and New Windsor. On his death, in 1826, aged 66, the major parts of his estate were inherited by his son William Bennett and daughter Sarah Goodwin, with bequests to his widow, other family members, servants and associates. [Myra Stanbury]

A painting dated 1820 of Daniel Bennett Esq. of Faringdon House (Artist unknown) is held by Faringdon Town Council. On permanent loan to Faringdon Library since 28 June 2011.

NOTE: No genealogical information has been found to date for either Mary or Hester Bennett, Daniel Bennett's younger sisters, being the only persons other than a sister/s of his first wife Elizabeth Ball and/or second wife Ann Elizabeth Boughton who could have produced 'nieces or nephews' being the progeny of a person with the surname Wardell, as mentioned in his Will of 1820. It is most likely that Daniel was a 'proxy uncle' to children of a Wardell business associate.

### **William Bennett (1790–1844)**

During William's partnership with his father they owned at least 50 ships, trading as Daniel Bennett & Son, or later, after his father's move to Faringdon House, as variants of William & Daniel Bennett, William Bennett, Blackheath & Daniel Bennett, Faringdon, William & Daniel Bennett, Rotherhithe merchants, indicating that Daniel maintained a financial and active interest in the business, even though 'retired'. William Bennett, as executor of his father's will, purchased his father's share in the jointly owned vessels and continued to manage the ship-owning and Rotherhithe businesses with the help of his second and third sons, William (1826–1848) and John Dunkin Bennett (1830–1851). Like his father before him, William changed his main occupation in the London directories from 'merchant', 'ship owner', to 'South Seas ship owner', the latter being located at 294 Rotherhithe. From 1836, some of the older ships were replaced and others used until they had to be sold or broken up.

William inherited the Blackheath and Rotherhithe estates, a house at West Cowes and Faringdon House, and was influential and acknowledged in local affairs. He was appointed High Sheriff of Berkshire in 1836, and his three sons, Daniel (1823–1887), William and John Dunkin were appointed as Land Tax Commissioners for Berkshire the same year. In 1838, William was presented with a gold vase and cover decorated with the Bennett arms and crest, mask heads of cattle and other relief ornamentation in recognition of his contribution to the success of the Faringdon Monthly Cattle Market. At the presentation, the Chairman described him as: 'A gentleman whose modest, unassuming deportment commanded the respect of all, while his feelings were ever alive to assist the poor, needy and afflicted...'

At the time of William's death in 1844 the firm had only five ships that were sold to other owners in the trade. To what extent William's eldest son, Daniel, was involved in the whaling business is unclear, although they are listed as owners of many of the later vessels. Daniel inherited Faringdon House and lived there with his wife Mary Elizabeth (née Corbett) and only daughter, Marianna Katherine Bennett. He was listed in the 1861 census as a 'magistrate and landed proprietor'. Faringdon House remained in the family until 1919 when Marianna died unmarried. [Myra Stanbury]

### References

Politics, Patronage and Profit: A Case Study of Three 18th Century London Merchants. Dissertation submitted towards the MA in Maritime History, University of Greenwich Cozens, K.J. (2005)

[Faringdon Community Website, Faringdon History Society](#)

[Voyages to South Georgia, 1795–1820. British Antarctic Survey Bulletin 32: 15–22.](#) Jones, A. G. E. Viewed Ships employed in the South Seas Trade 1775-1861 – A. G. E. Jones (1986)

The Mermaid Atoll Shipwreck—A Mysterious 19th-century Loss. Australian Centre of Excellence for Maritime Archaeology Special Publication No. 18, Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology Special Publication No. 17, Stanbury, M (2015)

The growth of specialization in English shipowning, 1750–1850. *Economic History Review*, 46. 4: 702–722 (1993) - Simon Ville

### **BLYTH & SONS (1810-1832?)**

Thomas Blyth (1764-1839) 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 he later became an experienced sea captain in the south seas trade commanding at least three vessels - the *Lively*, *British Tar* and *Cornwall* - on seven or eight 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 and around 1810 he established a business in London. Thomas Blyth & Co was a partnership between Blyth, John Hullett and Charles Widder. It was located at Fore St, Limehouse, where the partners traded as ship chandlers, wharfingers, sail makers and dealers. The partnership was dissolved by mutual consent on 1 July 1814, and Blyth later took some of his sons into the business, which was then renamed as Thomas Blyth & Sons.

Thomas Blyth also became a prominent shipowner with at least 17 vessels, most of them involved in whaling and sealing. These vessels made around 26 voyages to the South Seas between 1798 and 1832. Not all of his vessels completed their voyages and returned to London. For instance, the *Dubuc* was condemned as unseaworthy at Hobart, Tasmania, in June 1809.

Thomas Blyth & Sons gradually withdrew from whaling and shifted attention to other more profitable ventures. This included investments in Mauritius where the firm seems to have had more sugar plantations on the island than any other British merchant house in the 1830s. The firm's leading position on the island saw James Blyth become a founder of the Mauritius Commercial Bank in 1838.

Thomas Blyth the elder died at Limehouse, London, in 1839. His son James Blyth (1801-1873), who was a partner in the business, left an estate worth £250,000 on his death in 1873. The firm continued to operate for many more years more, experiencing regular changes in focus and name along the way. The last name change took place in 1972.

A house flag for Thomas Blyth & Sons is held by the National Maritime Museum, London.

<http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/1060.html> [Mark Howard]

Sources:

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

Legacies of British slave ownership; Colonial slavery and the formation of Victorian Britain - Catherine Hall *et al* (2014)

Slaving and slavery in the Indian Ocean – Deryck Scarr (1998)

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

## Camden, Calvert & King

Camden, Calvert & King are not usually regarded as whaling entrepreneurs. Their involvement in the African and Botany Bay trades has been well documented, but they were amongst the earliest entrants into the southern whale industry at the end of the American War of Independence and the Pacific whale fishery shortly thereafter.

They dispatched the *Camden* to the Brazils in the summer of 1783 under Andrew Swain, who had commanded whalers in the Greenland fishery several times. She returned to the southern whale fishery under Swain the following year, and sailed to Greenland under Thomas Harrison in 1787.

They sent the *Hunter* south in June 1784 under James Brown and again the following year, although she was lost on the Brazilian coast in early 1786. As soon as he returned home, Brown took the *Spy* to the southern fishery – she had probably been employed in the slave trade prior to this (it is not clear because they had several ships of the same name).

The *Spy* returned the following year under a Nantucket whaling master, Timothy Wyer, which turned out to be one of the most successful voyages of the year. She was to return to the southern whale fishery at least six more times, under the command of another Nantucketer, William Fitch.

The first European whaler to sail into the Pacific was the *Prince of Wales*, owned by James Mather. She had been part of Australia's First Fleet and returned across the Pacific, but she was not fitted out for whaling. The first British whaler to fish the Pacific was Samuel Enderby's *Emelia*, which sailed from England in August 1788, and it was her return in 1790 which opened up the Pacific to whaling.

Anthony Calvert and Thomas King had offered the *Spy* to the government in September 1789, to carry female convicts to New South Wales as part of Australia's Second Fleet. She was rejected by the Navy Board, but it seems likely that Calvert and King were proposing to send a whaler into the Pacific before the *Emelia* had returned home.

There were five whalers with Australia's Third Fleet, contracted through Camden, Calvert & King. Two of these were owned by the firm – the *Mary Ann*, which had a relatively successful voyage, and the *Matilda*, which was lost on an atoll to the south of Tahiti.

That was the end of their involvement in the whale trade, although they had also sent the *Sally* to Greenland in 1786, under one of the Weatherheads, possibly Matthew, who commanded the *Matilda* on the Third Fleet, and they may have sent the *William* there in 1778. [Gary L. Sturgess and Ken Cozens]

Sources:

[John Jackson and his uncle, Captain Thomas King, 1748-1824](#) [Accessed 22 May 2015]

Politics, Patronage and Profit: a case study of three eighteenth century London merchants. Unpublished MA Thesis - K. Cozens (2005)

Global enterprise in the eighteenth century: Anthony Calvert of the Crescent, London 1777-1808. The Mariner's Mirror, vol. 99, no. 2: 171-195 (2013) - G. A. Sturgess and K. Cozens



## **Champion and Dickason (1775-1811)**

The Champion family played an important role in the founding of the South Sea Whale Fishery from Britain. They had been trading in whale oil and candles for several years prior to the War of American Independence and are often cited as one of the 'memorialists' who lobbied parliament in support of the British Southern Whale Fishery to aid its early development. Champions owned 18 ship in the southern fishery between 1775 and 1811. One of these vessels, the Lord Hawkesbury in 1790, brought home the first parcel of ambergris found by a British whaler.

Alexander Champion Snr. (b.c1725-d.1795) was the founder of the firm and had joined Samuel Storke in 1742 in his business, which had significant trading links with America. After Storke died, Champion set up a partnership with Thomas Dickason in 1764. In 1769, they were supplying the Navy Board with turpentine, pitch and South Carolina hemp and they may have been financially involved with whaling in Nantucket as early as 1771. Alexander Snr. also worked with George Hayley & Co. in association with Francis Rotch of New Bedford, importing oil into Britain from the American colonies before the War of American Independence. The relationship with the firm of Hayley & Co. continued after Hayley's death and his widow left her "affairs in the hands of Alexander Champion Jnr." in 1784. Alexander Snr. married twice and had six sons, two of whom joined the business, and a daughter.

Alexander Champion Jnr. (b.1751-d.1809) and Benjamin Champion (b.1753-d.1817), also referred to in the records as Champion Brothers, Champions and Champion & Co., were oil merchants in the City of London. Alexander Jnr. was a London alderman and a director of both the Bank of England, where he became the Governor, and the London Dock Company. He married Ann Platt about 1774. Champion died in Battersea in 1809 aged 57 years and was buried in Bromley, Kent.

Richard Champion of Bristol (b.1743-d.1791). One source records that in 1769 Champion and Dickason were supplying the Navy Board with turpentine, pitch and South Carolina hemp, and in 1783 [ship's] masts "when Richard Champion was tendering for cordage". They go on to say "...the connection between the various businesses was not clear". That also seems to be true of the familial ties, as no definite relationship has been conclusively traced, to date, between Richard in Bristol and the London Champions. If this is the same Richard Champion who was involved in the porcelain trade, then he owned several ships but none have been identified as south sea whalers. Richard married into an American family from South Carolina, moved there in 1784, and died seven years later. But, if as A. G. E. Jones suggests, "... the Champions had too many other profitable activities to take anything but an incidental interest in the whale fishery" it remains difficult to resolve the question.

Thomas Dickason (b.c1729 - d.c1813) was an insurance agent, one-time President of Lloyd's of London, and purchased whale oil from America, in conjunction with the Champions, for many years before the War of Independence. He worked in partnership with Champions from 1764, but it has not been possible to identify the extent of ownership, wholly or in part, of any whaling vessels. He was an agent for William Rotch Snr., shipping cargoes of oil and candles from New England to London both before and after the War of American Independence. In 1786, Rotch insured his vessels whaling out of Nantucket and Dunkirk with Dickason and kept funds with him for his contacts to draw on in London. When the Rotches consolidated their business in New Bedford in 1794, Dickason continued as their London agent. Dickason died at the age of 84 in Enfield, Middlesex. [Jane Clayton]

Sources:

Alexander Champion to Lord Hawkesbury, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1791; PRO, BT 6/95, p.187

Shipowners investing in the British South Sea Whale Fishery: 1775-1815 - Clayton J. and C.A. Clayton (2016)

Ships employed in the South Seas Trade 1775-1859, Volume 2 – A. G. E. Jones (1991)

[Commerce of Rhode Island 1726-1800 Vol II 1775-1800: 195-196](#). Massachusetts Historical Society (1914) [Accessed June 2014]

William Rotch Snr. to Samuel Rodman, 18<sup>th</sup> February 1792; Rotch Collection, Old Dartmouth Historical Association, New Bedford

### **GUILLAUME & CO. (1785-1807)**

Guillaume & Co. were shipbuilders and oil merchants of Southampton and Church Row, Limehouse Bridge whose descendents were from France. They owned eleven ships employed in the Fishery between 1785 and 1807 and appear to have had links with Curling & Co. as three of these ships were previously owned by Curling and three others were bought from them.

Thomas Guillaume (b.1741-d.1818), son of Peter Guillaume, was born in Southampton and married Martha Deall there in 1767, when he was described as a 'marnar [mariner] from Redriffe [the old name for Rotherhithe] in London'. In the 1787 London Trade Directory, he is described as a shipbuilder of Limehouse Bridge where he owned several 'messuages' [dwelling houses with gardens], warehouses and wharves on the south and south-east side of the 'New Cut' at Limehouse. In 1794, he was sub-letting the naval store warehouse at Stone Stairs, Ratcliff to the East India Company. When he retired he went to live at Botley House, Botley in Hampshire where he died. [Jane Clayton]

Sources:

[Bruce Blanchard's Family History Scrapbook: Guillaume Research Notes](#) [Accessed July 2015]

Shipowners investing in the British South Sea Whale Fishery: 1775-1815 - Clayton J. and C.A. Clayton (2016)

Ships employed in the South Seas Trade 1775-1859, Volume 3 – A. G. E. Jones & D. Chatwin (1991)

### **Mellish Family (1794 to 1834)**

Records show that the Mellish family were involved in the whaling trade for at least 75 years commencing with an interest in the northern trade in the 1760s. Later, members of the family owned interests in a shipyard and were victuallers to the Navy in addition to holding whaling interests. Their vessels made at least 100 voyages to the southern whale fishery.

Known members of the family were: Peter Mellish Snr (c.1726–1777); Peter Mellish Jnr (1749–1803); Joseph Mellish (1753–1789); William Mellish (1763–1834); Robert Mellish (1775–1844); and, James Mellish (1776– 18??)

Peter Jnr and William appear to have been the major players with Peter initially leading their activities. The size of their south seas whaling fleet in 1802 extended to six whaleships valued at £54,000. On the

death of Peter in 1803 William took over the business until the early 1830s. William married Margaret Bradshaw in 1805 and had two daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret. During the American War of 1812 William Mellish lost two whaleships to the *USS Essex*, the *Seringapatam* and *Sir Andrew Hammond*, though both were later re-taken.

Until the 1830s William Mellish continued to deploy roughly equal number of vessels (usually older vessels) in both the northern and southern fishery though his involvement in the victualling trade appears to have ended sometime during the 1820s, probably as a result of peace time reductions to the Navy. In the early 1820s Mellish's maintained his involvement in the southern fishery with five whaleships in constant deployment with the loss of one of his ships in June 1824, but this loss does not appear to have deterred him.

Interestingly, Mellish chose not to replace his loss with an existing vessel and instead commissioned three new whaling vessels from the Blackwall Yard owned by Green & Wigram. Two of these, the *Thames* and *Sir James Cockburn*, sailed for Mellish but the third vessel, the *Narwhal*, remained with the Green, Wigrams & Green partnership due to Mellish's death in 1834. The last Mellish northern whaleship to sail from London was the *Margaret*, in 1834. Three Mellish vessels, the *Perseverance* (18), *Seringapatam* (16) and *Sir Andrew Hammond* (10) were some of the longest serving vessels in the British south seas fleet.

On 18 February 1833 William Mellish was shot at and wounded in the neck by a former master of one of his vessels, the *Partridge*, Captain Noah Pease Folger. Court records show that there had been a dispute over an account and that Folger was dissatisfied with Mellish not providing a testimonial to the captain's character. A trial found Folger insane [The Times 19 February & 16 April 1833]. Whether the attempt on Mellish shortened his life is unknown but William Mellish was dead within a year and the Mellish family interest in whaling ceased.

Following his death a trustee was appointed by the Courts to wind up Mellish's business operations. The detailed record left by the trustee reveals that by 1834 William Mellish's only major business interests were his whaleships. Apart from some minor property interests, £100,000 in bank stock and a significant share-holding in the East India Dock Company, no wider business interests in shipping or any other trade are recorded. Perhaps, Mellish had already transferred these interests to his heirs prior to his death; but, given the wealth that he was believed to possess at the time of his death - newspapers variously reported him as worth between £2 and £3 million [Gentleman's Magazine (1834), p. 339.] - the limited size of his final estate is surprising. [Jane Clayton / Dale Chatwin]

Sources:

Shipowners investing in the South Sea Whale Fishery from Britain: 1775 to 1815 – Jane M. and Charles A. Clayton (2016)

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

Mellish manuscript [National Maritime Museum MS 88/083 - Uncatalogued]

Ships Employed in the South Seas Trade volume 2 – A G E Jones (1991)

**Richard MOUNT (1785-1832)**

Richard Mount (1755-1832) was a London ironmonger, anchor-smith and brazier. He married twice and is believed to have fathered twenty-two children, all but two of which appear to have been sons and who, as they grew up, may have provided him with a ready-made work force for in his foundry and workshop at Wapping. He was in partnership with John Thurston by 1777, and then, from 1782, with Charles Johnson, till their agreement was dissolved by mutual consent in 1799. Mount seems to have become a shipowner for the first time in 1785.

The purchase of shares in large commercial sailing vessels had become a popular form of investment in Britain by the end of the 18th century. Modern financial institutions had yet to develop and there were few other investment opportunities available, particularly for the small investor. Vessel ownership was usually divided into sixty-four shares, with each share a separate unit of value that could be sold, traded or given to another individual without reference to the other part owners.

Most part owners were silent partners, with major decisions made by the principal or managing owner. He would find crews, organise maintenance and repairs, take out insurance and arrange cargoes. Sometimes called "the ship's husband," he would own a number of shares in the vessel and often had some kind of maritime background. For carrying out these tasks - either in person, or via an agent - he received a commission or lump sum payment, in addition to his share in any profits as one of the part owners. Although open to all, shipping investors tended to be people already connected with the maritime trades. Master mariners, shipping merchants, shipwrights, wharfingers, ship chandlers, sail makers, mast and block makers, coopers, lightermen, shipping agents, anchor smiths and others in associated trades often bought shares in one or more vessels. It could be a lucrative way to invest surplus capital and their shipping connections gave them insights into the industry and allowed them to identify well-managed vessels in profitable trades.

Mount had become a shipowner by 1785. He went on to be the principal owner of at least nineteen vessels between 1785 and 1832, with up to eight ships at any one time. They ranged in size from the *Spring* (150t) up to the *Aguilar* (455t). His vessels all seem to have been based in London with most of them engaged in long distance voyages to destinations that included the West Indies, the Cape of Good Hope, Quebec, Malta, Constantinople, Haiti, Smyrna, Australia and the South Seas. The cargoes they carried ranged from sugar and timber, to livestock and passengers.

Three of his vessels were involved in the South Sea trade - *General Elliot*, *Spring* and *Mary* - and these ships made six whaling voyages for him between 1785 and 1821. The *General Elliot* made three voyages before being lost at sea about 1789. Thirty years then passed before he sent another whaler to sea and this vessel, *Spring*, was also lost, sinking during a storm in December 1821. His last whaler, *Mary* completed two voyages for him between 1822 and 1825. Like his first two whalers, she seems to have made relatively poor voyages and probably him money. [Mark Howard]

Sources:

Shipowners investing in the South Sea Whale Fishery from Britain: 1775 to 1815 – Jane M. and Charles A. Clayton (2016)

*Ancestry.com*

### **ST. BARBE (1784-1805)**

John St Barbe (1741-1816) was born in Southampton. He joined the Navy as a young man, and was appointed Lieutenant in 1761. While he did not serve again, he retained his status as a naval officer. St Barbe married Ann Manbey in 1766 and they had two children, John and Caroline, before she died in

1771. He then married Margaret Galbraith 1772 and they had ten children. He owned nine ships employed in the South Sea Whale Fishery between 1784 and 1805.

St. Barbe was a 'hoytaker' or inspector of chartered ships for the Victualling Board during the War of American Independence, as well as being a shipping contractor. It is likely that he left the Victualling Office because he had become the subject of controversy and faced the probability of parliamentary censure. It is also possible that St Barbe resigned with the end of the War of American Independence, which limited his opportunities to make money from that office.

St Barbe's engagement in private trade was scarcely a secret. From 1779 to 1781, John St Barbe was listed in London business directories as a merchant and in 1783 as an agent and broker. In 1782, he apparently went into business with two shipbuilders, Taylor and Young, who had been based in Rotherhithe since 1768 and he seems to have gone into partnership with William Bignell, his brother-in-law, and John Green, with whom he was a ships' husband and insurance broker. However, his personal commercial interests, in the whaling, convict and slave trades came to dominate. In 1790, together with Samuel Enderby Jnr., he proposed to the Home Office that transported convicts could be sent out to Australia in whaling vessels, as part of the protected 'Third Fleet'. He was a 'Name' at Lloyd's of London and, as a promoter of the Red Book from 1798 to 1816, was closely associated with the rebels, who were shipowners rather than insurers, promoting this alternative register. In 1792, he led the London merchants in their challenge to a plan supporting a settlement of foreign whalers at Milford Haven in south-west Wales.

St Barbe lived at Blackheath from 1792 until his death in 1816 and directed that his funeral expenses be limited, as far as possible, to £100. Much of the detailed information about St Barbe has been generously shared by Gary Sturgess who provided an unpublished case study of his activities. [Jane Clayton]

Sources:

[Merchant Genealogies: mysteries of genealogy between London and Sydney, Australia from 1786](#) [Accessed 6 January 2015]

[Merchant Networks: The Blackheath Connection](#) [Accessed 8 March 2014]

Shipowners investing in the South Sea Whale Fishery from Britain: 1775 to 1815 – Jane M. and Charles A. Clayton (2016)

[18<sup>th</sup> century church wardens; James Manbey \(warden 1754\)](#) [Accessed August 2014]

### **Wigram & Green families (1794 to 1802 and 1829 to 1853)**

The whaling interests of the Wigram and Green families covered two distinct phases. The first phase involved Robert Wigram only. The second phase involved two of his younger sons, Money and Henry Loftus Wigram, and members of the Green family (George Green and his eldest son Richard Green) in a partnership that as well as going whaling built whaleships via its ownership of the Blackwall Ship Yard.

Robert Wigram (1734-1830) trained as a surgeon but became a shipowner in the late 1780s. Between 1794 and 1802 he outfitted at least five whaleships. How successful these voyages were is unknown but the master of one of his vessels was James Shields, who some ten years earlier, had taken the first British whaleship round Cape Horn. This practice of employing the most experienced and successful

masters was also a characteristic of the Wigram and Green partnership. Robert Wigram married twice and had 23 children.

Via a number of investments both the Wigram and Green families they came to share ownership of the Blackwall Yard by the mid-1820s when the Yard commenced building new whaleships for the trade. Over the next ten years they built the *Thames* and *Sir James Cockburn* for William Mellish and then the *Harpooner*, *Vigilant*, *Eleanor*, *Narwhal* and *Active* for themselves. The whaling vessels were always owned by the firm in common, reflecting the significant risks involved in such a trade. Shipbuilding and whaling were the main business activities of Green, Wigrams & Green as it was known from 1829 until the partnership was dissolved in 1843. General shipowning was the business of the individual partners.

Communications from the commander of the *Vigilant* back to the firm in 1832 suggest that Richard Green managed the whaling activities of the firm. The firm was also characterised by its selection of the most successful and experienced masters to captain their whaleships including Robert Pockley, William Tolley Brookes, William Darby Brind, Samuel Swain and William Swain of *Sarah & Elizabeth* fame made famous in Thomas Beale's 'The Natural History of the Sperm Whale'.

In 1836 George Green's third son, Frederick, was placed in business as a shipping broker. From then until the dissolution of the partnership in 1843, F. Green & Co. undertook the loading and brokerage of both the Green family's and Green, Wigram & Green's ships, including the whaling fleet. The formation of F. Green & Co. may explain why Green, Wigram & Green ships and separately owned Green and Wigram vessels disappear from 'Lloyds Register of Shipping' at about this time; the partners appearing to have taken all risk of loss upon themselves. When the partnership dissolved in 1842 the Green's continued in the whaling trade till 1853 though at a reduced level. [Dale Chatwin]

Sources:

Shipowners investing in the South Sea Whale Fishery from Britain: 1775 to 1815 – Jane M. and Charles A. Clayton (2016)

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

[The Blackwall Yard - Wikipedia](#)

[Sir Robert Wigram - Wikipedia](#)