

St. Hildeburgh's *Dispatch*



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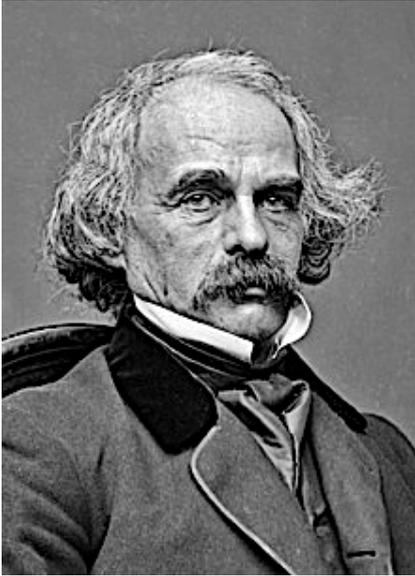
20th July 2020

A fortnightly on-line paper to entertain all during the coronavirus pandemic

Nathaniel Hawthorne *and his favourite* *English Companion*

In 1853, at the age of forty-nine and at the height of his literary career, Nathaniel Hawthorne accepted the post of U.S. consul at Liverpool ; a position that led to him residing at Rock Ferry. It would be seven years before Hawthorne and his family returned to the United States, most of those years were spent in England. During that period Hawthorne only really forged close friendships with two Englishmen : Francis Bennoch (1812-1890), a London poet and businessman whom he met at Rock Park ; and Henry Arthur Bright (1830-1884), a Liverpool shipowner, literary critic, and author. It is Hawthorne's friendship with Henry Bright – his closest English companion – that we will examine here.

Nathaniel Hawthorne used his influence in Washington to secure what he hoped would be a lucrative post in a country he had always wanted to visit – England. He was descended from English-born Puritans and there was a strong British influence on his life. His own wish to see the country was only one of three motivations for seeking a consular posting. He hoped that he could make his family financially secure, and he hoped that European travel (for he visited France and Italy too) would widen and improve the education of his children. So, in 1853, by which time he had written almost all of his best-



known fiction including *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), he accepted the post of U.S. consul in Liverpool, then one of the busiest and most significant ports in the world, second only to London.

Born at Salem, Massachusetts, in 1804, his ancestor, John Hathorne, was the only judge of the infamous Witch Trials who did not regret his actions. In 1842 Hawthorne married Sophia Peabody, a writer, painter and illustrator. From this union they had a son, Julian, and two daughters, Una and Rose. It was left to Sophia, in 1853, to travel to Boston in order to look over the various Atlantic passenger ships and she selected the Liverpool-registered *Niagara*, a Cunarder due to sail from Boston on the 6th July 1853. Hawthorne, his wife, three children, and William Ticknor, Hawthorne's friend and business manager, duly settled into

their cabins after weeks of frantic preparations and packing. As the paddle-steamer cleared the wharf in Boston, a long gun-salute accompanied her departure from the harbour, their report attended by the terrified clucking of the brood of hens stowed up in the bows and the pitiful mooing of the cow that would supply their milk during their long passage across the Atlantic.

The *Niagara* had 140 passengers on-board, 16 of whom disembarked at Halifax, Nova Scotia, where a further 17 embarked for Liverpool. Hawthorne considered the vessel's master, Captain Leitch, to be a skilful seaman and an intelligent and genial host ; every inch of what he expected a British sailor to be. Hawthorne was a shy and retiring man, happy to leave social intercourse to Sophia who had a friendly and engaging personality in complete contrast to her husband. Hawthorne, therefore, despite the crowded staterooms and busy open decks, confined his conversation to a handful of fellow passengers including a shipowner, an architect, and a Boston bookseller.



After a delightful voyage over a calm ocean, the *Niagara* made her way up the Mersey and the Hawthorne's were dismayed at their first sighting of Liverpool, enveloped in heavy mist and rain. Unaccustomed to urban life, the dozens of smoke-belching chimneys, the rain-sodden quays, and the bustle of grey figures appeared dreary and forbidding. Hawthorn, who quickly came to detest consular work, was to later describe Liverpool to Henry Bright as "this black and miserable hole". It was 6 am when the steamer was safely tied-up in dock. The Hawthornes were ushered quickly and with a friendly smile, through Customs and on by taxi to the Waterloo Hotel on the corner of Ranelagh Street and Bold Street. Here they remained for ten days before moving to Mrs. Blodget's boarding house by which time Ticknor had taken the train to London. A few years earlier, Herman Melville had viewed Liverpool, with its dire poverty, through romantic eyes, but the Hawthorne family were shocked by the contrast of wealth generated by commerce and trade, with the horrifying paucity of "dock-wall beggars". It was from the former – the wealthy suburbs of Liverpool whose social life Sophia came to

Portrait top left : Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864).
Portrait middle right : Sophia Hawthorne (1809-1871).

regard with envy and delight, whence came Henry Arthur Bright, who had already met Nathaniel Hawthorne at his home in Concord during Bright's tour of the United States in 1852. Henry Bright's father owned the shipping firm of Gibbs, Bright & Company, whose ship, the *Royal Charter*, was to meet such a tragic end off the coast of Anglesey in 1859, almost within reach of her home port after a long voyage from Australia. Her loss led to eventual bankruptcy for her owners.



Henry Bright was born into a wealthy banking, shipowning and Unitarian Liverpool family. He married Mary Elizabeth Thompson, daughter of Samuel H. Thompson of Thingwall, West Derby. Henry Bright built his home, Ashfield, nearby. He was noted for his charitable work, particularly against the abuses suffered by merchant seamen at that time, and through Hawthorne, he was able to examine the ruthless reputation of Yankee mates who treated their crews, both American and English, harshly. Bright's heart was not in shipping but in literary pursuits. He amassed a huge library of books, autographs and manuscripts, was a member of the Philobiblon Society and the Roxburghe Club and wrote numerous books and articles and even indulged in verse. His most successful book was undoubtedly *A Year in a Lancashire Garden* (Liverpool, 1875, limited to 50 copies, with a second, London edition of 1879 which met with a wide audience. A

new edition was published in 1989 under the title *A Year in a Victorian Garden*). Written in a nonbotanical style, it is based on the annual cycle of his own garden at Ashfield. It was Bright who threw open doors for Hawthorne among Liverpool's elite mercantile class and would introduce Sophia into their elaborate and warm drawing-rooms.

Mrs. Blodget, wife of a former resident of Gibraltar, ran a famous establishment at 133, Duke Street, frequented almost entirely by American sea captains and shipping men with business in Liverpool. She was renowned for setting an excellent table and for extending a warm Liverpool welcome, making her establishment feel more like a family home than a boarding house. After dinner, men would exchange stories over cigars and port in one room, while the ladies conversed in another. From here, Hawthorne set out across town to take over responsibility at the U.S. Consulate in Washington Buildings, a gloomy set of offices on the corner of Brunswick Street and the Goree Piazza, within a stone's throw of the docks, including Princes Dock where many of the Yankee packets berthed. Hawthorne was not well-suited to the work which he found dull, tiresome and demanding. He was immediately enveloped in a world of protests and declarations from American seamen and passengers ; having to care for stranded American vessels ; and settling estates for citizens of his country who had died in England. His business concerns, he quickly discovered, left little time for writing or literary pursuits. At the end of his four years in office, he was to tell Ticknor, "I have received, and been civil to, at least 10,000 visitors since I came to England ; and I never wish to be civil to anybody again."

Some relief was forthcoming in the form of Henry Bright, whose first impression of New Englanders in general, and Nathaniel Hawthorne in particular when they first met in the States, was not favourable, although his opinions changed as time went on and

Above : Photograph of Henry Arthur Bright (1830-1884)

he grew to like and admire both. When Hawthorne reached Liverpool in July 1853, Bright had just begun to work in his father's shipping office. He had left Trinity College, Cambridge, shortly before going to America but being a Unitarian, he was not eligible to receive a degree being a dissenter from the Church of England. Five years later, with his cousin James Heywood, a Liverpool banker, they became the first Nonconformists to be granted degrees from Cambridge. Working in a shipping office was not to Bright's taste, his interests, as we have seen, lay elsewhere, and he was starting to write articles for periodicals. At Trinity, his piece entitled *Characteristic Differences of Ancient and Modern Civilization*, had earned him the university's English Essay Prize, and his first significant pamphlet concerned his observations on the abolition question in America, born out of his tour. The friendship between Hawthorne and Bright, the seed of which had been sewn the year before in Concord, grew and blossomed slowly in England owing to Hawthorne's shyness and Bright's hesitation to interfere where perhaps he would not be welcome. Bright's approach, therefore, was to try and be helpful on practical matters and to wait for Hawthorne's response. This way, their friendship and mutual respect grew, and Bright began to realize that his American friend felt socially ill-at-ease among the wealthy class of Liverpool with whom his professional position compelled him to mingle, if only on its edges. It was Henry Bright who suggested that the Hawthornes consider leafy Rock Ferry as a place to set up home. He knew that Nathaniel liked Wirral and that he was anxious to separate consular business from family life. What better curtain than the Mersey to form the partition ? Besides, living 'over the water' meant fewer social engagements which Hawthorne tried to avoid like the plague if at all possible.

On 6th August 1853 the Hawthornes moved out from Mrs. Blodget's boarding house and took temporary accommodation in the Royal Rock Hotel in Rock Ferry where they remained for almost a month until a suitable house could be found. Rock Ferry in those days was called a "watering place", with quick and safe access to Liverpool aboard steam ferries. Liverpool merchants had built fine houses in Rock Ferry and it was promoted as a bathing resort. The Royal Rock Hotel faced the ferry pier and was surrounded by pleasant flowering gardens, lawns and shrubberies, and an extensive pleasure garden nearby with arbours, flowers, trees and broad gravel paths on which to promenade. At the hotel, the family occupied several bedrooms and a large parlour with a bay window from which the Hawthornes watched the busy river scene with its regular ferries weaving in and out of lofty cargo-laden square-riggers, Atlantic paddle-steamers owned by Cunard Line, Collins Line, etc., numerous flats and coastal vessels, and the Gibbs, Bright & Company's *Great Britain* preparing to set sail on her first voyage to Australia. Brunel's historic ship is now preserved in Bristol. Henry Bright, to the delight of the Hawthorne children, gave the family a tour of what was then the largest vessel in the world. Nathaniel, a lover of books, was impressed with the small but well-selected library, and Sophia reflected on the hazards the 450 passengers would undergo on such a long voyage to the other side of the world. From the hotel the Hawthornes also embarked in a carriage that had been sent by the owner of Poulton Hall, as he had kindly invited the family to his home, built in 1653, about three miles from Rock Ferry. Although the owner was away in Guernsey at the time, the Hawthornes were able to wander at will.

On the 1st September, the Hawthornes finally moved into a home of their own – their only real home while living in England – at 26 Rock Park. The house was demolished during the 1970s to make way for the New Ferry by-pass (A41). Rock Park was close to the waterfront and No. 26 was a semi-detached gray stucco house, fashioned in a castellated style with grounds in perfect order and surrounded by thick hedges. Sophia

was delighted and wrote to her father back in America, describing its “lawn and garden with rare roses and fuchsias, and carnations and many other flowers and a few fruit trees, and a strawberry bed.” The house was only a four-minute walk to their former hotel and to the ferry, so even Nathaniel, never easy to please, could not complain of any inconvenience. He was, however, concerned about the expense of maintaining such a residence, especially as his predecessor had not set himself up in a house of his own. But then, as Hawthorne was quick to point out, he was single and childless. He defended his position further when writing to Ticknor, saying : “No consul can live as a gentleman in English society, and carry on the official business on those terms” – meaning the way the former Consul had lived. Hawthorne was also conscious of his status as a successful author, and his acquaintance was sought as much on that account as for his professional position. Sophia busied herself supervising the household and educating their children. It was 1856 before the family could afford to hire a governess. Una went over to Liverpool twice a week to take music lessons and Sophia had to accompany her, and later, Una took dancing lessons in Birkenhead too. Sophia supplemented the lessons in arithmetic, geographical science, and a little Latin, with teaching her children about shells and flowers. Exercise and outdoor activities were most important, and she was concerned for her children’s health given the Mersey’s foggy and damp atmosphere. The fog (probably smog) often confined the family indoors.

One of the main attractions of Rock Ferry to Nathaniel Hawthorne was the ability to avoid social life in Liverpool as much as possible. He favoured quiet evenings at home with his family and a good book, rather than endless dinner parties and receptions. They attended chapel in Liverpool, but in fair weather the rest of Sunday was spent in walks to Bebington, Eastham, and other charming rural Cheshire villages on the peninsula, and they much enjoyed a visit to Chester to see its ancient cathedral. Hawthorne turned down as many invitations as possible, but some could not be avoided, and he was grateful to Henry Bright for opening doors to Liverpool’s wealthy and influential merchants and shipowners, with whom it was sometimes necessary to talk business and to make contacts. One such example was a dinner party with a dozen other guests at the home of John Aiken, a wealthy Liverpool merchant, where he met Colonel and Major Burns, sons of the Scottish poet. After dinner the pair entertained the men with some of their father’s songs. Hawthorne later told Ticknor that the brothers liked him partly because of “the affection which I showed for the whisky-bottle.” Hawthorne was fond of a drink, as were his Liverpool colleagues, but he was impressed that no one was the worse for drink that evening despite the way it flowed. The party lasted from six to midnight, but a storm blew up and it was thought wise for Hawthorne to stay the night rather than risk the Mersey crossing. Hawthorne was also obliged to attend dinners given by the Mayor at the Town Hall where they warmly toasted their American celebrity and Hawthorne was expected to reply, his shyness making this a difficult task for him. He turned down an invitation to Greenbank, the home of William Rathbone, on the grounds of his wife feeling poorly, and there was genuine concern around this time over a persistent cough Julian had developed from the foggy atmosphere of their location near the river. Sophia, when she could attend dinner, was impressed by the lavish dresses of the ladies, by the elegant and rich furnishings of their homes, and by the abundance of fare upon their tables. It was also good to leave the busy town to visit these ‘mercantile palaces’ on the outskirts of Liverpool. The Hawthornes were taken by Bright to visit his uncle, John Pemberton Heywood, owner of Liverpool’s Heywood’s Bank, who lived in style at Norris Green, and on to Bright’s own home in West Derby where they felt most relaxed and where Nathaniel could enjoy Bright’s magnificent library, and Sophia his peaceful garden that seemed a

million miles away from smoky, grimy, Liverpool. The night fogs on the Mersey had deprived the Hawthornes of the opportunity of meeting Elizabeth Gaskell who was attending the silver wedding anniversary of James Martineau and his wife at their home in Prince's Park. Martineau was a celebrated Unitarian minister in Liverpool where hundreds flocked to hear him preach. Henry Bright did, however, arrange for the Hawthornes to meet Harriet Martineau, James's famous literary sister, who had travelled down from Ambleside to visit her brother. Hawthorne wrote of their meeting in his notebook. "She is a large, robust (one might almost say bouncing) elderly woman, very coarse of aspect, and plainly dressed ; but withal, so kind, cheerful, and intelligent a face, that she is pleasanter to look at than most beauties. Her hair is of a decided gray ; and she does not shrink from calling herself an old woman. She is the most continual talker I ever heard ; it is really like the babbling of a brook ; and very lively and sensible too..."

In 1855 the Hawthornes rented out Rock Park and travelled around England and visited Lisbon. They returned in 1856 by which time the lease of their Wirral home had expired and they moved into accommodation in Southport. Further travels around England and Scotland followed, with a long but not always successful interlude in Italy (1858-9), before it was time for the family to return to the United States. In March 1860, after saying farewell to Francis Bennoch in London, they came back to Liverpool staying again at Mrs. Blodget's from where they would board ship for Boston. Hawthorne felt "a sharp pain" in saying goodbye to Henry Bright. They would never meet again although they remained in correspondence for as long as possible. On the 16th June the family boarded the Cunard steamer *Europa* and the next day Hawthorne caught his last glimpse of England. Years later his son, Julian, was to write that from the moment of their departure from Liverpool, his father had leaned upon the ship's rail, looking "backwards towards the old home that he loved and would never see again."

Nathaniel Hawthorne's final years were to be dramatic ones as they were soon enveloped in the American Civil War. He travelled with Ticknor to Washington where he met Abraham Lincoln and other notable personalities. While on a tour of the White Mountains in 1864, Hawthorne died in his sleep, and was buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, Concord, Massachusetts. Sophia and Una eventually returned to England, a country they had both fallen in love with, and there, in time, they died and were buried in Kensal Green, their remains later being brought back to America and laid to rest near Hawthorne. Sophia had passed away (while nearby church bells were ringing) in 1871 from typhoid pneumonia aggravated by the English climate. Una died in 1877. She had become engaged to an American whom she had met in New York, but when he died of tuberculosis, she lost all interest in life and simply faded away. Julian and Rose both became writers like their father. Julian died in San Francisco in 1934. Rose became a Roman Catholic in 1891 along with her husband. After he began to abuse her, however, they divorced, and Rose founded a religious order of nuns. Her charity work was such that after her death in 1926 she was canonized by Rome.

Henry Bright developed pulmonary disease and spent some months in southern France and a winter in Bournemouth. He returned to his Liverpool home, Ashfield, where he died on the 5th May 1884 and was buried in the churchyard of St. John's, Knotty Ash. He was only fifty-four years old. Sadly, he did not live long enough to see Julian Hawthorne's biography of his father ; a man for whom Bright had done so much to make his years on the banks of the Mersey as comfortable and amenable as possible.

Liverpool Quiz

How well do you know the city over the water ?

Test your knowledge with these ten questions.

(Answers will be found on pages 21 & 22).



- {1} The first steamship to enter the Mersey was “*The Elizabeth*” in 1815. Where was she built ?**
- {2} Which Liverpool park has an oak tree believed to be a thousand years old ?**
- {3} Who was Molly Bushell ?**
- {4} What historical deed did Humfraye Brooke, a 16th century Liverpool mariner, perform ?**
- {5} Who were the “Liverpool Blues” – nothing to do with Everton Football Club !**
- {6} What was the purpose of the Everton Beacon ?**
- {7} Who was the famous explorer to sail from Liverpool in 1858 aboard *H.M.S. Pearl* ?**
- {8} What year was Liverpool’s first newspaper printed ?**
- {9} In 1898 a world-famous medical institution was established in Liverpool, founded by Sir Alfred Jones. Name the institution.**
- {10} Sweeting Street runs between Castle Street and Dale Street. What was its original name ? A clue is to be found in its shape !**

Daring Robbery in the Dingle in 1816

It is difficult to visualize today, but during the 19th century before the southern line of docks had reached its full extent, and before the oil refinery had been built near to where the famous Herculaneum Pottery once stood, the Dingle was considered to be one of the most attractive spots around Liverpool. The land, including beautiful Knott's Hole, was purchased by Rev. John Yates (1755-1826) minister of the Unitarian chapel in Paradise Street. In the course of time he divided up his land in order to provide homes for his sons. His second son, John Ashton Yates (1781-1863) was allocated an excellent piece of land with a good frontage to the river. He did not, however, build a family home there, as about this time he married and went to live in London. In consequence he sold the land to John Cropper who eventually built a good house on it and lived there to a good old age, the property then going to his son, John Wakefield Cropper, whose widow, a daughter of Dr. Arnold of Rugby, lived there till her death in 1911. However, before John Ashton Yates sold his land, he built a small house – a kind of entrance lodge – the scene of a notorious robbery in 1816. Here are two accounts of this event, the first better known as it appeared in a popular Victorian book ; the second less well known as it was written by a family member and printed for private circulation only. The first version is taken from *Recollections of Old Liverpool, by a Nonagenarian* (Liverpool : 1863). The second is taken from *My Recollections. A Fragment*. By Mary Elizabeth Bright (London : 1927).

I



“In the year 1816, in consequence of the high price of provisions, as mentioned in a former chapter, ¹ many persons rendered desperate by their wants, formed themselves into gangs of robbers, and committed many daring acts of depredation. Travellers were constantly stopped, ill-treated, and robbed on the roads in the vicinity of the town ; and scarcely a day passed, without intelligence arriving of some house in the outskirts being attacked and plundered. To such an extent was this carried, that people commenced forming themselves into associations for their mutual protection. In Toxteth Park, this was especially the case, as several very serious robberies had been reported in that neighbourhood. It must be remembered that at that time Toxteth Park was but thinly populated. There were only a few good houses in it, occupied by highly respectable families, for the salubrious air of “the Park,” and the beautiful views of the river from many parts of it, gave it attractions to those who could live out of town. It was, amongst other things, proposed, I recollect, to have as protection, large and sonorous bells put up on the tops of houses, so that on the least alarm of thieves, the bells might be rung to arouse the neighbours. Such precautions will be laughed at now-a-days, but something was necessary to be done at that time, when policemen were unknown, and personal protection was by no means much regarded. It was no uncommon circumstance for persons who had occasion to go out at night, to carry a brace of pistols with them ;

but whether they would have had courage to use them or not, I cannot say, but the fact of having such things at hand, were crumbs of comfort to timid people. ...

The extent to which robbery was committed in Liverpool, at this period, may be judged by the following circumstances, which many may still remember. On the particulars being made public, people were completely terrified at the state to which things had arrived, and several families living in the suburbs seriously thought of returning to reside in the town again.

About the month of August 1816, an old woman was seen prowling constantly about the vicinity of Mr. J. A. Yates's house, in Toxteth Park. She made a great many inquiries about the members of that gentleman's family, whether there were menservants in the house, and whether a dog was kept. In fact, she made herself fully acquainted with Mr. Yates' domestic arrangements. This was thought nothing of at the time, but the old crone's curiosity was recalled to mind after the event took place, which I shall briefly mention.

On the night of Friday, 16th August 1816, about ten o'clock, [see Note 4] six men wearing masks, and armed with pistols, might have been seen approaching Mr. Yates' house. Two of them took their position outside as sentinels to give alarm to their companions, if necessary. The other four approached the back of the premises and entered the house. Passing through the scullery they went into the kitchen, where they found a servant-maid and a footman. Threatening them with instant death if they gave any alarm, one of the four remained in the kitchen to watch the girl, while the other three compelled the footman to show them over the house. Proceeding up stairs, they encountered Mr. J. B. Yates² who was on a visit to Mr. J. A. Yates. On seeing the men approach, he inquired their business, when one of them aimed a blow at him, which, however, fortunately missed its mark, and only inflicted a slight wound on Mr. Yates's mouth. They then ordered Mr. Yates to give up his money, which he did, fearing further violence. Driving him before them, they next entered a room, in which Mrs. J. B. Yates was sitting. They compelled her also to give up her money, watch, and the jewellery she wore. While this was going on, Mr. J. A. Yates arrived from Liverpool, and was seized by the two rascals stationed outside. They demanded his money, putting pistols to his head. Mr. Yates, however, with a good deal of nerve, rushed past the fellows, threw his watch away, and seized hold of the handle of the door-bell which he rung with considerable force. The men, however, again seized him, and told him his ringing would be of no use, as there were fellows inside who could overmaster any effort of his. But the ringing of the doorbell had seriously alarmed the party within, who were then robbing Mrs. Yates, as just mentioned. Snatching up whatever they could, which was portable and seemed of value, the fellows rushed downstairs ordering the footman to open the hall-door. This he did and availed himself of the opportunity of making his escape. He ran across the fields and speedily gave an alarm, but too late to be of any service ; for, when assistance arrived, the thieves had decamped, taking with them about £14 in money, and a quantity of valuable plate and jewellery. The man left in the kitchen had contrived to secure the stock of plate. Four of the robbers were captured in September following, and committed to take their trial at Lancaster, where they were found guilty and sentenced to death. They were hung in October following, and it is a rather curious circumstance that the very week these men suffered the extreme penalty of the law for their misdeeds, a daring burglary was committed one night at the mill near Mr. Yates' house, when five sacks of flour were stolen, put into a boat in waiting by the mill dam, and successfully carried off."

II

“In the year 1816 ... my grandfather and grandmother, with their eldest child, my mother – Elizabeth Thompson – occupied the house, having come there for change of air from Parliament Street, where they lived. I think the best account of it is contained in a letter from Miss Yates, part of which I will quote here ; there is also a full account of the robbery in a book called *Reminiscences of a Nonagenarian*, [sic] published in 1893, [sic] I think.

Extract from the letter written by Anna Maria Yates to her brother, James Yates,³ giving an account of the robbery at the Dingle :-

‘September 20th, 1816.

It is exactly this day month that four men, about nine o’clock⁴ in the evening, entered Ashton’s kitchen, and after securing old Sarah Burgess and little Ibby’s nurse,⁵ one man remaining there and holding a pistol over the head of the latter, three of them, desiring the footman to show the way, proceeded upstairs. Joseph, hearing a disturbance, went out of the parlour to see what was the matter, and was saluted by a blow from a cudgel, which he, parrying, received only a slight one on his lip, which swelled a little. They then proceeded to rifle his pockets, all the time holding a pistol over his head. And then they went to Margaret,⁶ who was sitting by Ibby,⁷ who was asleep all the time, and emptied hers, but did not in any other way behave rudely towards her. She showed the most heroic composure all the time, and even took hold of the arm of one of the robbers, entreating him not to hurt her husband or child. They demanded the keys, which Joseph said was impossible for him to give, he not being master of the house and not knowing where they were, but adding they were at liberty to force open any place.

Accordingly they burst open one of the cabinets, but were much disappointed on seeing nothing but large folios of prints ; these, however, they made Joseph take out, to see whether there was anything behind. They then went into the other room and opened the little drawers, in one of which they laid hold with great avidity on what they probably supposed to be a little casket of jewels, but were much surprised to see, instead of glittering stones, Mr. Shepherd’s austere countenance staring them in the face.⁸ They were busily employed in these drawers when the doorbell rang, on which, rather alarmed, they asked who was there. Joseph answering, said it was his brother returning home. They desired him to open the door, not understanding the latch themselves. Joseph, fearing they might use Ashton roughly, went very slowly towards it, on which they ordered the footman to do it, who immediately complied, and took the opportunity of making his escape and giving the alarm. Meanwhile, two men on the outside had taken Ashton to a little distance and were rifling his pockets.

When the robbers perceived that the footman had escaped, they were exceedingly exasperated, and called out for the two other men to come up, but only one appeared. After threatening Joseph in a very alarming manner for some time, they thought it advisable to save their own lives, and immediately decamped.

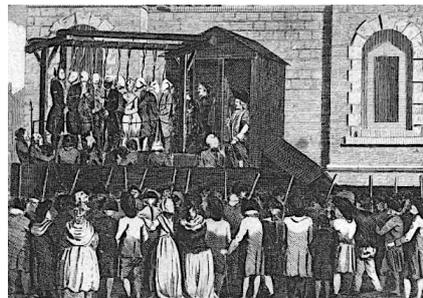
We, at Dingle Head, were during an hour in a most anxious state of suspense, for the footman, calling here for a horse to go to Mr. Bellis’s,⁹ we only heard that there were

six men in Ashton's lodge, on which my father, Pemberton, ¹⁰ and our men-servants immediately set off to their rescue, leaving my mother, Maria, Mr. Belsham, and Mr. Broadbent ¹¹ in the parlour, and only women servants in the kitchen.

My father found the robbers gone, but remained to comfort Margaret, who felt much more after it was over than at the time, particularly the next day.

Mr. Bellis and his friends were unsuccessful in their attempts to catch the robbers, but about a fortnight after, by Millar, the police officer's ingenuity and watchfulness, ¹² five were taken to the Exchange, one of whom turned King's Evidence, of the name of Osborne, who was led to do so from a fear of his own life, his companions being greatly exasperated with him for allowing Ashton to ring the bell, and also owing to a quarrel about the division of the spoil, which only amounted to eleven or twelve pounds. Osborne gave a whole history of the plot and told Ashton he might think himself very well off, for they had strict orders from the leader to throw him down and disable him if he made the least resistance.

The robbers returned to the shore and went to a public house in Strand Street, where they divided their booty. Osborne owned that it was not from want, but that robbing was their trade. At the trial the men seemed quite unconcerned, and even laughed two or three times. They were sentenced, three to death, and one to transportation, ¹³ but have a respite of three weeks. Osborne is quite at large, and nods at Ashton as familiarly as if he were an old friend ...' ”



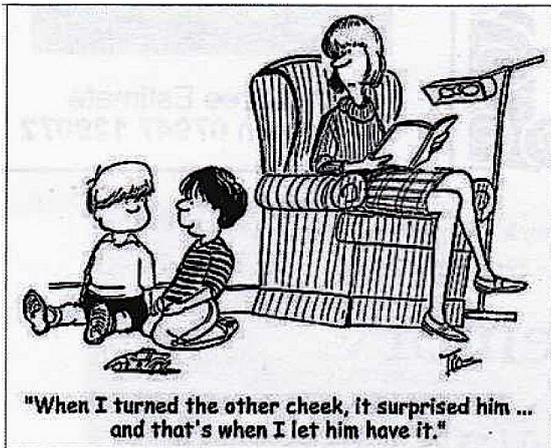
NOTES

- ¹ With the ending of the long Napoleonic Wars after the Battle of Waterloo, property prices depreciated in value, food prices soared, thousands of soldiers and sailors were discharged into unemployment or half-pay, and there was considerable distress all over the country, especially among the poorer classes. On the whole, to their credit, despite the picture painted here, the working classes of Liverpool exhibited remarkable patience and forbearance. The Dock trustees employed as many as they could at 2/- a day ; a large loan was raised to provide unlimited employment ; and churches and chapels preached to the better-off to dig into their pockets to help the poor.
- ² Joseph Brooks Yates (1780-1855), merchant and antiquary, brother of John Ashton Yates. J. B. Yates was a prominent Liverpool reformer in favour of civil liberties and democratic rights. He was also an ardent supporter of the town's literary and scientific institutions and was a founder member of the Liverpool Literary & Philosophical Society and a founder of the Southern Hospital.

- 3 The author of this book is Mary Elizabeth Bright (1837-1925). Anna Maria Yates (1787-1866) was one of two of her maiden great-aunts. She was the elder daughter of the Reverend John Yates and was in William Roscoe's circle of friends. The Rev. James Yates, her brother, and the author's great-uncle, was the fourth son of John Yates and like his father he was a Unitarian minister and accomplished scholar.
- 4 The 'Nonagenarian' says 10 o'clock and gives the date as Friday 16th August, but Miss Yates should know best and times it an hour earlier and on Tuesday 20th August.
- 5 The nurse is not mentioned in the first account.
- 6 Margaret – Mrs. Joseph Brookes Yates, née Taylor.
- 7 Ibbby – the family pet name for Elizabeth Yates, the author's mother, and the eldest daughter of Joseph Brookes Yates.
- 8 Mr. Shepherd – William Shepherd (1768-1847), politician, abolitionist, poet, and dissenting minister at Gateacre ; a friend of Roscoe, Rathbone, and William Hazlitt. He taught each of the sons of the Rev. John Yates.
- 9 Mr. Bellis – there were two neighbours of that name living in Toxteth High Park at the time, possibly in the same house : Abraham Bellis, an overseer and victualler ; and John Bellis, owner of a Coffee House in Toxteth Park.
- 10 Pemberton – there were about a dozen men of that name living in Liverpool in 1816 – possibly William Pemberton, shipbroker, living at 16 Hill Street, Toxteth Park, which ran down (and still does) to Brunswick Dock. (The dock did not open until 1832 but the street existed in 1816 with Upper Hill Street being developed about ten years later).
- 11 Mr. Belsham & Mr. Broadbent – these gentlemen have not been identified and may have been visitors and guests of the Reverend John Yates. There is no one of the name of 'Belsham' living in Liverpool at that time ; and only two by the name 'Broadbent' : George Broadbent, a stonemason of Walton Breck ; and Joseph Broadbent, stonemason and victualler living off Dale Street. Both are probably unlikely candidates.
- 12 Millar – in fact spelt Miller : John Miller, Superintendent of Police, living at 36, Union Street. Contrary to what the 'Nonagenarian' says in his book, and although Peel's first proper force was not established until 1829, Liverpool was not without its crime prevention forces. There was the Night Watch, the Corporation Constabulary, and the Dock Police. However, none of these forces was known for its effective or efficient reputation. There were 21 police officers, 3 assistant constables and a beadle serving under John Miller in 1816. This was the extent of the Corporation Constabulary.
- 13 Again, more accurate than the 'Nonagenarian' who has four of the robbers hung. In fact, as stated here, three were hung, one transported to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania), one turned King's Evidence, and one escaped justice.

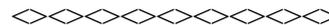


Laughter ~ the best medicine



BISHOP'S MOVE !

A pompous prelate visiting a rural parish to preach at Evensong, was less than pleased to see only half-a-dozen or so in the congregation. "Didn't you tell them I was coming ?" he asked the vicar. "No my Lord," came the reply, "and I don't know who did !"



A vicar of a rural parish was driving back to his vicarage one night after a PCC meeting. It was dark and he was feeling tired. As he rounded a bend on a country lane, he suddenly saw a cyclist right in front of him. He slammed on the brakes and hauled the steering wheel over to the right. The cyclist, shocked by a car missing him by inches, swerved to the left and ended up in a ditch. The vicar jumped out of his car to check that the cyclist was alright. The cyclist picked himself up, dusted himself down, and declared that he was unhurt. However, it was too dark to examine the condition of the bike. The vicar promised to pay for any damage and handed the cyclist his visiting card. When the cyclist arrived home and took out the card, he was somewhat perturbed to read : *'Sorry to have missed you. I will try again tomorrow.'*



Private Eye



Allergy in a Country Churchyard
Private Eye



DRAKE'S DRUM

By Henry Newbolt



Sir Henry Newbolt (1862-1938) began his working life studying law, but in his thirties, he began a career in literature and rose to become one of the best-loved English poets of the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras. Renowned for his inspiring and patriotic poems, none more so than *Drake's Drum*, this poem made its first appearance in a collection of Newbolt's verse published in 1897 under the title *Admirals All*. The poem relates to the great Elizabethan sailor, Sir Francis Drake, and the drum used on-board his ship to summon his men to 'action stations'. Drake died during a raid on Spanish possessions in the Caribbean, and his drum was brought home and hung in Buckland Abbey, about twenty miles inland from Plymouth, and it can still be seen there today.

Legend has it that if this drum is beaten when his country is in danger, then Drake will return to defend dear Old England once again. It is also said that the drum will beat itself at moments of national emergency and crisis. There is a story dating back to the First World War when the Royal Navy was escorting the surrendered German High Seas Fleet into Scapa Flow, that the victory roll was heard below decks aboard the battleship *Royal Oak*. The captain and his officers made a detailed search of the ship in order to discover where the sound was coming from but could not locate the source. Only when the ship came to anchor with the enemy fleet lying under British guns did the ghostly drumbeat cease. The whisper went around the Lower Deck that Drake had returned to his rest !

The drum is also said to have been heard as Napoleon entered Plymouth aboard the *Bellerophon* following his surrender to the Royal Navy on the coast of France after his defeat at Waterloo in 1815. It was said to have been heard again on the outbreak of war in 1914, and at the time of Dunkirk in 1940. This is very much in the tradition of King Arthur and his Knights arising from Avalon ; and Lord Nelson coming down off his column in Trafalgar Square when their country needs its warriors once again.

Let us now enjoy Newbolt's epic lines

Drake he's in his hammock an' a thousand mile away,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below ?)
Slung atween the round shot in Nombre Dios Bay,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.
Yarnder lumes the island, yarnder lie the ships,
Wi' sailor lads a-dancin' heel-an'-toe,
An' the shore-lights flashin', an' the night-tide dashin'
He sees et arl so plainly as he saw et long ago.

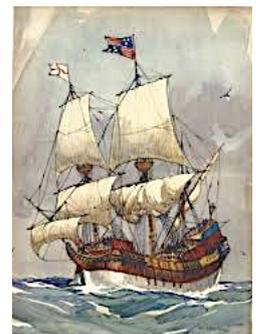
Drake he was a Devon man, an' ruled the Devon seas,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below ?),
Rovin' tho' his death fell, he went wi' heart at ease,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe,
"Take my drum to England, hang et by the shore,
Strike et when your powder's runnin' low;
If the Dons sight Devon, I'll quit the port o' Heaven,
An' drum them up the Channel as we drummed them long ago."

Drake he's in his hammock till the great Armadas come,
(Capten, art tha sleepin' there below ?),
Slung atween the round shot, listenin' for the drum,
An' dreamin' arl the time o' Plymouth Hoe.
Call him on the deep sea, call him up the Sound,
Call him when ye sail to meet the foe ;
Where the old trade's plyin' an' the old flag flyin',
They shall find him, ware an' wakin', as they found him long ago.



Slung atween the round shot in Nombre Dios Bay : Nombre de Dios, on the coast of Panama, is where Drake's body was lowered over the side in 1596, sewn into his hammock with a cannon ball at his feet for ballast.

Yarnder lumes the island : St. Nicholas' Island in Plymouth Sound in Elizabethan times, now called Drake Island.



Leasowe Man

The Story of Wirral's Oldest Skeleton

In a recent quiz (*Dispatch* No. 8) we had a question regarding the skeleton found on Leasowe shore during the 19th century. Readers might like to know a little more of its history.

In 1864 whilst carrying out repairs to Leasowe's storm-battered embankment, workmen made a remarkable discovery when they unearthed the skeleton of a man embedded under a layer of peat. The owner of nearby Leasowe Castle, Lt.Gen. the Hon. Sir Edward Cust donated the remains to the Royal College of Surgeons. For more than a hundred years the skeleton was thought to be prehistoric, dating back as early as 2000 years BC. However, up-to-date methods of radiocarbon tests show him to have been alive somewhere between 1600 and 1900 years ago, so this man was living on our peninsula during the Roman occupation.

Scientific analysis has further revealed the man to have been about 40 years of age at the time of his death, and that he was around 5 feet 6 inches tall (1.7m). A study of his bones show that he was physically fit and active and, more surprisingly, that he ate very little fish despite his close proximity to the sea. Today, the skeleton is kept in London's Natural History Museum. In recent years, a computer-generated image has been created by archaeological and forensic specialists at Liverpool's John Moores University's Face Laboratory, showing what the man might have looked like, although his hair and eye colouring have had to be left to guesswork.



Museum of Liverpool/John Moore's University

During the year of discovery, 1864, Sir Edward Cust, upon whose shoreline the “Pre-Historic Man of Cheshire” was found, read a paper to the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, in which he gives a little more detail about the discovery. After setting out to disprove that the remain could have been deposited there in more recent times : “...since the sandhill which existed there was nearly 100 feet in height and, within my own memory, was as much as three or four hundred yards removed from the tide. No casualty from shipwreck, nor other act of violence, could, by possibility, have stowed away a victim in such a place ; and moreover it must have been prior to the formation of these hills, of which there is no extant historic record, that this most ancient inhabitant of our land here laid down his earthly tabernacle.” – Sir Edward goes on to describe the discovery of the bones :

“...a navvy, preparing for his work as the tide receded, saw amid the black peat a white substance which he thought to be a broken basin, but on removing it with his hands, proved to be a human skull. He immediately carried it to his ganger, who had the rest of the bones carefully removed for safety to a neighbouring building. The body was observed to lie by compass E. and W. ; and, when first exhumed, the bones were very white but, shortly after exposure to the air, they became dark and inky. The whole district about Leasowe Castle is sand based upon three or four feet of peat soil, which itself rests upon blue silt or clay. The skeleton was placed below the peat and upon the blue clay. The late rapid inroads of the sea have destroyed the sand-hills, but, when these are washed away, the peat deposit is exposed, just as it is found inland in form, substance and thickness ; and, until very recently, great masses of peat soil with the remains of trees in them have existed down to the lowest low water mark.

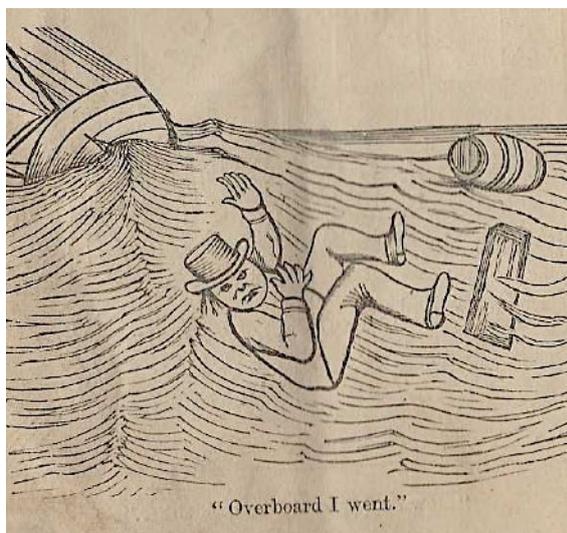
The bones were carefully collected ; but it is possible that some may have been washed away before they could be removed. They consisted of a skull with all the teeth but one, in excellent condition ; the humerus and pelvis complete and proving the subject to have possessed great strength ; both arm-bones and one leg-bone complete, but the finger and toe bones having, for the most part, perished ; the left shin bone was also broken half way down ; the vertebræ and ribs were incomplete.”

Sir Edward goes on to describe his deposit of the remains in London and their careful examination by the most eminent osteologists of the Victorian era.

It should be pointed out that in a appendix to the above paper, Henry Ecroyed Smith (1823-1889), a botanist and the first curator of the Liverpool Museum, protested in the strongest terms against Sir Edward Cust’s claim

that the skeleton was found *beneath* the forest-bog, stating instead that it was discovered several feet *above* the soil : “The only peat beneath which it lay is a stratum only a few inches thick composed of a residuum of a comparatively recent marsh – not of the ancient wooded forest.” In his defence, in the same appendix, Sir Edward supports his claim with the evidence of three eye-witnesses to the discovery : Thomas Wilson, the labourer who found the bones ; Thomas Jones, Superintendent of the Leasowe Embankment to whom Wilson called upon after making his discovery ; and John Shergold, gardener at Leasowe Castle who hurried to the scene. They all supported Sir Edward’s assertion ; the gardener, for example, stating : “I proceeded to the spot where they were found, near the centre of the large sandhill, and I think that when first discovered it must have lain, by my observation, more than three feet below the ordinary surface of the peat – that the sea had come over the spot since the body was found, but that the bed on which it lay exposed was composed of blue silt : although there was a mixture of sand, silt and peat lying all about it, I have no hesitation in stating that there must have been at least three feet of peat above the site where it lay.”

In the same year that Sir Edward’s paper was published, 1865, a 16-page anonymous pamphlet was printed in Liverpool by C. Tinling in Castle Street, entitled *Ye Legend of ye Pre-Historic Manne, found at Leasowe, Cheshire, January, 1864*. Illustrated with crude cuts by the author, an account of the discovery, and of how the author concludes that the skeleton came to be at Leasowe, is told in humorous verse. The skeleton expresses his annoyance at being disturbed and his displeasure with both Cust and Smith.



The poet has the skeleton declare that he is not “prehistoric” at all, but that in rather more recent times he was a mate in a Bangor brig carrying a cargo of coals and Welsh slate when, in a storm, he fell overboard off the Burbo Bank and ended up “On Wirral’s peaty shore.” A second edition was published two years later in 1867, with additional verses and illustrations, swelling its bulk to 19 pages. This edition met with a much wider audience as it was sent forth by J.

Russell Smith in London ; James Cornish in Liverpool ; Minshull & Hughes in Chester ; E. Ward in Birkenhead ; and Abel Heywood & Son in Manchester. There are copies of both editions in the British Library. Catherine W. Reilly in her useful *Mid-Victorian Poetry 1860-1879 ; an Annotated Bibliography* (2000), identifies the poet as “C. Rogers” (Charles

Rogers, 1825-1890 perhaps ?? He was the son of a Scottish minister and a writer of verse among other things, so he would fit the bill). The poem was read by Colin Dilnot at a gathering in New Brighton in September 2014. A couple of verses will suffice to demonstrate its merit or otherwise :

I most devoutly wish to know
How good Sir E——d C——
Would like to have his bones pack'd up,
And in a parcel thrust ;
Be pitch'd about from rear to *van*,
By porters great and small,
With label on, Keep this side up,"
Address'd to "Surgeons' Hall."

Tho' I can't say that I am pleased
With you, oh ! Ecroyd S——h,
I'll let you in the secret of
My calling, kin, and kith.
Tho' you tried hard to collar me
For halls of William Brown, *
To case me up with crocodiles,
A show to all the town.

*William Brown Street, Liverpool, home of the Liverpool Museum.

We will conclude with an interesting extract taken from Sir Edward Cust's paper read before the HSLC in 1864, describing the finds on the coast of Wirral :

"The entire Hundred of Wirral was an ancient forest until the reign of Edward III ; and remains of oak, pine and yew may still be traced along its shore, as well as upon the opposite coast of Lancashire. This great submarine forest is continually yielding to the rude shocks of ocean the skulls and horn of extinct and recent animals and many fine balks of timber fit for the upholsterer's use. The library at Leasowe Castle is fitted up with this oak, partly black and part only discoloured, but perfectly close and sound. Stumps of trees still stand where they were at first rooted, at about a mile distant from the place of the skeleton's grave. An almost perfect skull of *Bos Primigenius* ¹ was found not far removed from it. Many antlers and skulls, with their branching horns attached, of *Cervus Elphas* ² occur and specimens of the defences of the prickets of the same species may be seen with the above in the staircase hall of the Castle. The skull of *Bos Longifrons* ³ has been

found in the adjoining Estuary called Wallasey Pool, together with other remains ; these have been seen and lectured on by Professor Owen and they are therefore well known through the medium of books. It has been stated in the “Transactions” of the Liverpool Institution that a gentleman resident in Birkenhead had constructed an almost entire skeleton of a horse of small size, equalling a Shetland pony in height, from remains made from the



ancient forest bed at Leasowe, but that gentleman is dead and the work of his hands scattered and lost. The bones of the ox, pig, deer and dog and the pectoral bones of a *Silurus* ⁴ are stated by the same lecturer (Mr. Hine) to have been taken from the peat or from the natural soil below it on the Leasowe shore. I

am not aware, however, that a discovery has ever occurred of any memorial of primæval man’s industry, either in stone or metal, in pottery or implements of war or the chase, in any portion of this extensive forest.”

- 1 Extinct species of large wild cattle.
- 2 One of the largest species of Red Deer.
- 3 The first domesticated cattle.
- 4 Catfish or Sheatfish.

Winston Churchill’s thoughts on the Victorians.

“How these Victorians busied themselves and contended about minor things ! What long, brilliant, impassioned letters they wrote about refined personal and political issues of which the modern Juggernaut takes no account ! They never had to face, as we have done, and still do, the possibility of national ruin. Their main foundations were never shaken. They dwelt in an age of British splendour and unchallenged leadership. The art of government was exercised within a limited sphere. World-revolution, mortal defeat, national subjugation, chaotic degeneration, or even national bankruptcy, had not laid steel claws upon their sedate, serene, complacent life.” *Great Contemporaries*. (21 essays published in 1937 and chiefly written between 1928 and 1931).

Answers to the quiz questions on page 7.

- {1} **“The Elizabeth” of 1815 was built on the Clyde and was used as a ferry between Liverpool and Runcorn.**
- {2} **The ‘Allerton Oak’ is thought to be around a 1,000 years-old and is to be found in Calderstones Park. The oldest oak tree in North-West England, it is said to pre-date the Norman Conquest of 1066. It is also said that a medieval Hundred Court sat beneath its branches.**
- {3} **Molly Bushell was the original maker of Everton Toffee and she had her toffee shop in Everton village in the mid-18th century. A rival, Mother Noblett, invented Everton Mints.**
- {4} **Liverpool mariner, Humfraye Brooke, sailing to the Canaries in 1588, discovered the Spanish Armada off the shores of Spain. He turned about and returned to England to warn Drake at Plymouth.**
- {5} **In the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, a Liverpool ship brought news that the Young Pretender had landed in Scotland and was marching south. This was before the intelligence had reached London. Fearing an attack on Liverpool, its citizens raised a regiment 700 strong known as the ‘Liverpool Blues’ owing to the colour of their uniforms. They set about defending the town by destroying Warrington bridge over the Mersey, digging ditches and mounting cannon. In the event the Jacobites avoided Liverpool although a number were executed on Gallows Hill (between London Road and Islington).**
- {6} **Everton Beacon was erected c.1220 by Randolph Blunderville, Earl of Chester, and could be seen from his castle at Beeston. It was used for about 600 years to guide shipping into the Mersey & Dee. Rebuilt c.1550, it blew down in 1803. It stood on ground now occupied by St. George’s Church (foundation stone laid 1813), and on the spot where Prince Rupert pitched his camp for the Siege of Liverpool in 1644.**
- {7} **Dr. David Livingstone sailed in the *Pearl* from Liverpool on the 10th March 1858 to sail up and explore the Zambezi. He reached the mouth of that river on the 14th May.**
- {8} **Liverpool’s first newspaper, *The Courant*, first appeared in 1712. Liverpool’s first book was printed in the same year.**

- {9} **Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine was founded by shipowner Sir Alfred Jones. With Liverpool being a major port and extensive links with the West African trade for example, the numbers of patients – seamen and those they came in contact with – entering hospital had soared. The LSTM did much to relieve the POWs returning from Japanese camps in the Far East at the close of the last war.**
- {10} **Sweeting Street was named after Alderman Thomas Sweeting, Mayor of Liverpool in 1698. It is the only remaining street in the city entered at both ends through a covered archway. It was originally called Elbow Lane owing to its shape.**



On a headstone at Holy Trinity :

Catherine Hallgath is my name
England is my nation.
Here it is my dwelling place,
and Heaven my expectation.
But I am dead, and in my grave
my bones are laid to rot ;
Oh, cultivate that little flower
that cries forget me not.



Editor's Endnote :

As things begin to return to a “new kind of normal”, the business of the *Dispatches* is almost done and, hopefully, has served its purpose. This is the penultimate issue. No. 10 will be the final issue.

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