

SHORT NOTE

JOSEPH PARRY, ARTIST: DATES AND ORIGINS

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All the literature that refers to Joseph Parry, sometimes known as 'Old Parry, The Father of Art in Manchester', gives the year of his birth as 1744. The text which often accompanies the date information is usually based on the two-column entry for Joseph that was written for the *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* during the last decade of the nineteenth century and published around 1895. It is my contention that this source is incorrect and that Joseph Parry was actually born in 1756.

The *DNB* article is tentative about the date of death given for another member of Joseph's family, his son James, suggesting that the facilities for researching the dates accurately several decades after the event were poor or that the researcher was unable to confirm them. Much of the article seems to have come from personal recollections of a great-grandson, which casts further doubt on their accuracy. In preparing the article for the *DNB* the author, Albert Nicholson, entered into a fair amount of correspondence in the *Manchester City News* between 1891 and 1895.¹ In the edition of 15 December 1894 he stated that he was having 'considerable difficulty' in arriving at the facts. In the edition of 29 December of the same year a note signed by 'Orleston' quoted from the catalogue of paintings at Peel Park, October 1893, in which the birth date of 1744 was mentioned. This seems to be the source of this date. A much earlier article in July 1891 by Frederick Lawrence Tavare using much the same wording, gave Joseph's dates of death and his move to Manchester but did not mention his date of

birth. These various articles are the closest I have been able to get to finding the source of the date 1744. I have not been able to discover any explanation as to why this date has been selected. However, I am able to offer some substantiation of Joseph Parry's background as the son of a Liverpool pilot. I have been unable to find a record of birth of a Joseph Parry in Liverpool in 1744. Indeed the name is rare enough in that locality for the 1756 entry to be the *earliest* one I have found in the IGI, 1988 edition, and the parish records held at the Liverpool City Record Office.²

Nicholson, in his *DNB* article, stated that Joseph was the son of a master pilot of Liverpool who was owner of a pilot boat called Old No. 5. In practice the Liverpool pilot boats were not numbered until the first Liverpool Pilotage Act came into operation in 1766. The master of boat No. 5 in 1771 was Robert Stewart. The master of boat No. 6 was Benjamin Parry.³ This information is corroborated by Gore's Street Directory for Liverpool from 1767 to 1781, where Benjamin Parry was listed as a pilot, usually as 'Parry' but sometimes as 'Perry'. However, the street address given for both names is the same. Benjamin is the only Parry/Perry listed in Gore's as a pilot for several years.⁴ Between 1754 and 1773 Benjamin registered the birth of eleven children at St Nicholas's church, Liverpool.⁵ The mother is not named. Joseph was the second of these, Benjamin's second son, born on 6 May 1756. For the first of nine of his children Benjamin's surname is given consistently in the parish record as 'Perry'; For the last two entries in 1772 and 1773 the handwriting of the cleric or clerk making the entries is different and 'Parry' is recorded. Benjamin's profession as a pilot is recorded across the change of spelling, leaving little doubt that the same person is being referred to. His address at Strand Street is given later as Stranza Street (which did not exist), suggesting that the misspellings were at source a phonetic problem.

The *DNB* records Joseph Parry as having died in 1826, which, if he was born in 1744, would make him 82 years of age at death. *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette*, in the edition of 20 May 1826, confirms the date of death, stating:

On 11th Inst. Mr. Joseph Parry, artist of this town, aged 70 years. He endured a long and painful indisposition with Christian fortitude and resignation – As an artist his powers were extreme – he painted Portrait, Landscape, History and Domestic scenes – in the latter his pictures possess extraordinary merit.

From the description given, there can be no doubt that the same Joseph Parry is being referred to. The age at death corresponds with the parish register entry for Joseph, son of Benjamin Parry, born in Liverpool in May 1756.

Joseph married Esther Dunbovand on 26 January 1777⁶ and she bore him eight children of whom at least three died in infancy. Joseph's fifth son, William,⁷ offers further corroboration of his father's background amongst the Liverpool pilots as suggested by the *DNB*. William Parry, master pilot of Liverpool, was baptized at St Ann's, Manchester, on 18 August 1790 and died in Liverpool on 20 September 1838 aged 47. This is the only William Parry I have been able to find from IGI and local parish records who was born in, or even close to, the right year and had the right background to become the master pilot William Parry. The other two Liverpool-born contenders were William Parry, the son of a gardener, who lived inland, and William Rowland Parry, son of a corn merchant, who was killed on active service at the age of 21. Most of the apprentices who entered the pilot service around that time were 'petitioned' and 'recommended' to the Pilot Management Committee by their kith and kin. As three of Benjamin Parry's other children all appear to have entered the pilot service the opportunity for an 'unartistic' cousin to do the same thing speaks for itself. It seems likely that William was sent back from Manchester to one of his uncles in Liverpool to learn the family trade.

NOTES

- 1 M.C.L., microfilm copies of the *Manchester City News* and *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette*. As a local notable, Joseph Parry is also afforded a separate index entry in this library, where much of the published information about him is cross-indexed.
- 2 The IGI (International Genealogical Index) edition used for this

- research, held by the Central Public Library, Reading, Berkshire, was issued in 1988.
- 3 C. Rees, *History of the Liverpool Pilotage Service* (Liverpool, 1949), pp. 16, 198, 199.
 - 4 Liv. R.O., *Gore's Street and Trade Directory of Liverpool*. Only one Benjamin Parry/Perry is listed for the years in question and the information given corresponds well with that found in the parish records for St Nicholas's church, Liverpool.
 - 5 Liv. R.O., 283 NIC: the baptisms, and in some cases the birth dates, of all of Benjamin Parry/Perry's children are to be found in the parish records of St Nicholas's church, Liverpool. In the case of Joseph Parry the entry is on p. 56 of the early register, under reference 283 NIC. He was born on 6 May 1756 and baptized on 7 June of the same year. This was prior to the inauguration of Liverpool pilotage service and the father's occupation at that time was recorded as custom house officer.
 - 6 The record of the marriage of Joseph Parry, painter, to Esther Dunbovand is entry number 86 in the register of St Paul's church, St Paul's Square, Liverpool, the original of which can be seen at Liv. R.O.
 - 7 The children of Joseph and Esther Parry so far identified from the IGI 1988 edition are Thomas Donbovand (1779), William Liptrot (1781), Ann (1783), Joseph (1785), Joseph (1787), William (1790), David (1793) and James (1795). The baptism of William Parry is recorded in the parish register of St Ann's church, Manchester, volume 1736-1808, which can be seen on microfilm at M.C.L.