

FOUR LIVERPOOL CLIPPERS.

By F. C. Beazley, F.S.A.

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THIS article is derived largely from notes made twenty or thirty years ago and the writer regrets that as their sources were not noted he is unable to make the proper acknowledgements; he is indebted to his brother Mr. J. H. Beazley for much information.

When the writer many years ago used to cross the Mersey in the ferry steamers, the estuary was full of sailing ships at anchor; others in charge of tugs were setting out on their long voyages, others again were making their anchorage, while the long line of docks was a forest of masts and rigging. Those days are gone, so much so that the departure of a sailing ship for foreign parts is an event calling for notice in the public press. Thus *The Liverpool Daily Post and Mercury* of 9 March, 1923, contained an illustration of a "windjammer," the *Mountbanks*, a full rigged ship, leaving Morpeth dock on a voyage to Australia, with the note—"This is the first sailing vessel to leave the Mersey on a foreign voyage for the last eighteen months." Tramp steamers and floating hotels have now taken the place of the white winged ships; those, however, who regret these changes may console themselves with the reflection that, as the late war showed, the courage, hardihood and resourcefulness of our sailors, whether in the Royal Navy or mercantile marine service, remain undiminished. It is curious, under the circumstances above mentioned, that no organized effort is made by the authorities of a great port

to preserve in a public gallery pictures of representative vessels of different periods ere it is too late, more especially as our American cousins, I am informed, are eagerly buying them for their museums. Even our Society, with the exception of Mr. Arkle's paper on the *Red Jacket* in vol. lxvii, has done nothing to record the feats of bygone "skippers" and ships of which as a maritime nation we should be proud. To modern ideas these vessels were not large, averaging less than 1000 tons, and doubtless their crews would have been surprised had they encountered the s.s. *Majestic* of 56,550 tons upon the high seas; not more so, however, than would the mediæval Liverpool sailors have been had they gazed upon a "clipper" under a cloud of canvas, sailing at a speed carrying her to China in 103 days, for in 1565 Liverpool boasted only 12 ships, the largest of which, a leviathan called *The Eagle*, was of 40 tons, while the smallest was only of 6 tons.¹ The swimming bath on the Cunard s.s. *Aquitania*, 33ft. by 15ft. by 6ft., would float some of the smallest of such vessels.

There was a period between the years 1840 and 1850 when it looked very much indeed as if we were going to yield our long enjoyed sovereignty of the seas to the Americans.² The Baltimore clippers bade fair to out-rival the ships of this country, and the Stars and Stripes were fast growing familiar colours in lands which heretofore had been accustomed to behold nothing but British bunting. Our American neighbours were introducing a new form of building into their yards, and the ships which they despatched from Boston to China in 1845 were quite unlike anything that had ever gone to sea before; low hulled, bold of beam; lines sharp as a yacht's, loftily sparred, and of heavy tonnage as the average burthen then went. To these vessels they gave the name

¹ Cf. Irvine's *Village Life in West Kirby* (1895), p. 20.

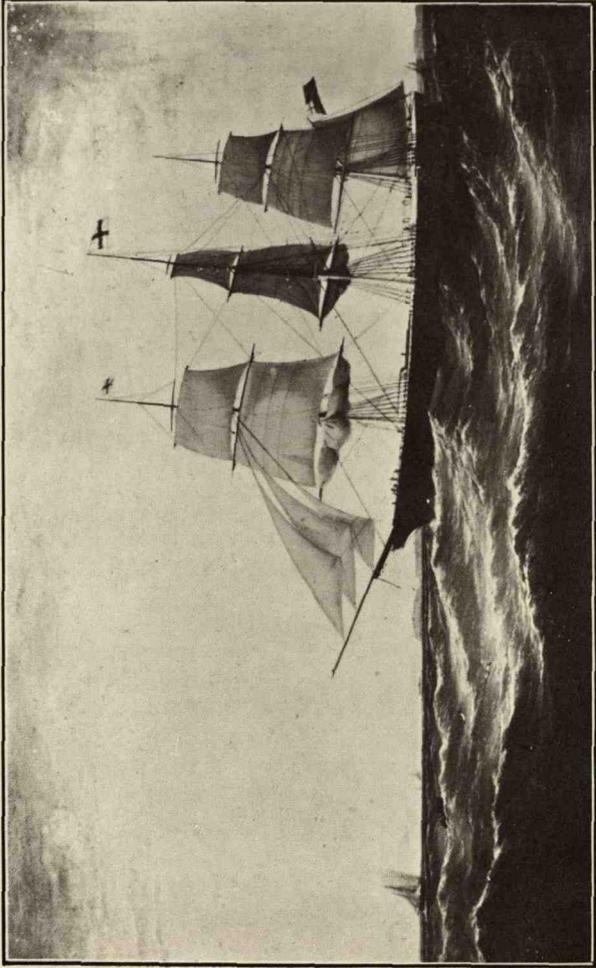
² Cf. Lindsay's *History of Merchant Shipping*, iii, 290.

“clippers.” Very soon the Thames and the Mersey were crowded with the graceful vessels of the Chesapeake, and owners in this country viewed with apprehension the steady ascendancy which the Americans were gaining over them.

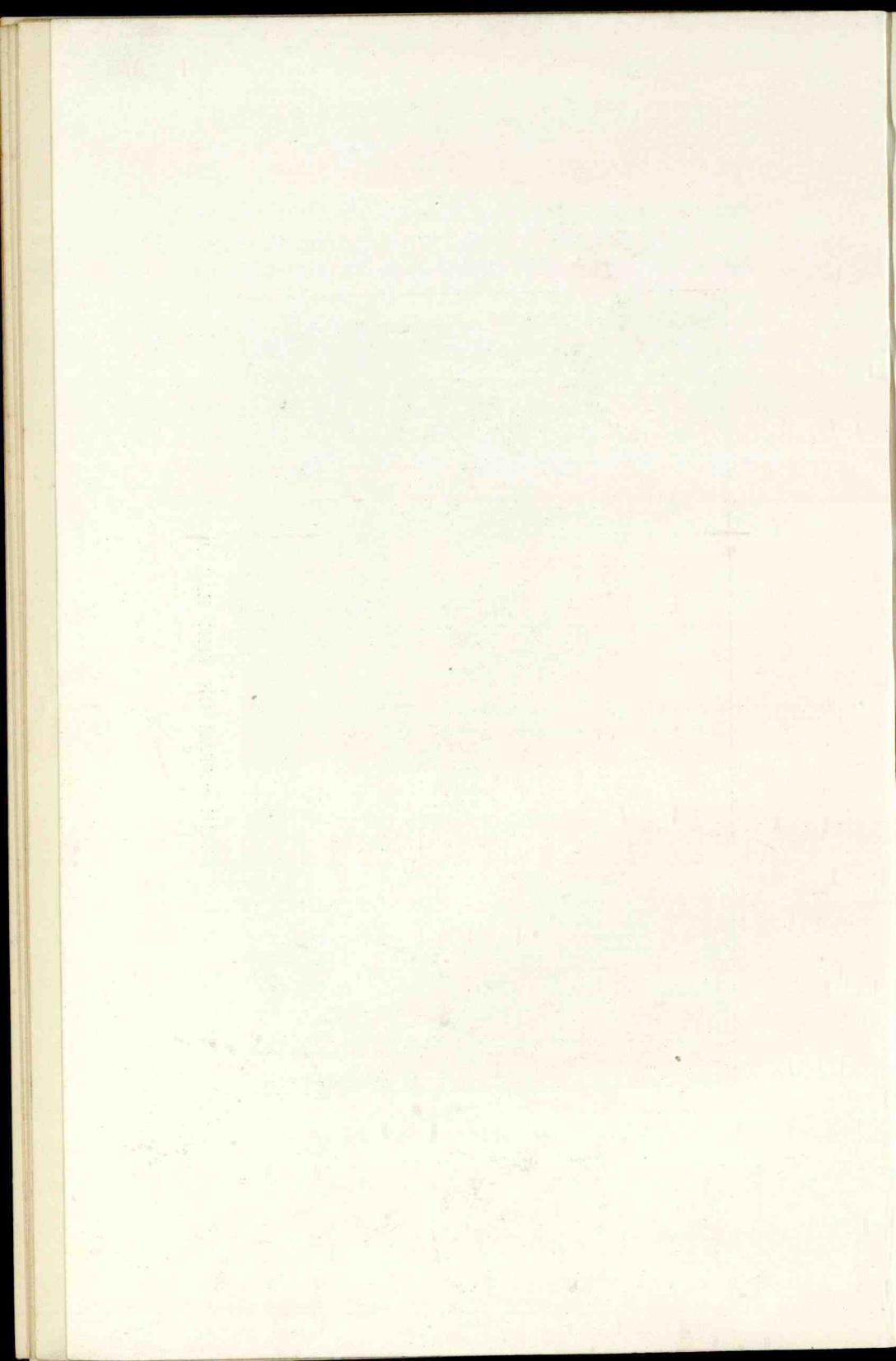
In 1850, however, Mr. Richard Green of London took up the fight, and presently the English clippers drove the Americans from the sea. These clippers, built for the tea and Australian trades, were a fleet of which this maritime nation justly had reason to be proud. Seldom rising to a burthen of above 1,000 tons, they were the most beautiful and symmetrical models that ever floated; rigged to a loftiness that would stunt the leviathans of the present day, they burst through the surges under the soaring heights of their flying kites.

The late Mr. James Beazley of Liverpool took his part in this international shipping battle, purchasing or giving builders in this country orders for vessels of the utmost speed, amongst which were the *Star of the East*, *Robin Hood*, *Jessie Beazley*, *Balmoral*, *Constance*, *Miles Barton*, *Vision*, and others. A description of the first-named, from, I believe, a contemporary newspaper, is as follows:—

The beautiful clipper *Star of the East*, launched in the early part of this year (1853) at St. John's, New Brunswick, was built by the celebrated firm of William and R. Wright, who constructed the famous clippers *Constance* and *Miles Barton*, and other vessels well known in the Australian trade. She made her first voyage across the Atlantic against strong north-east winds, under twenty days, beating by several days two of the crack St. John ships. Her arrival at Liverpool caused the greatest sensation in nautical circles; and as she lay in the river for two days after her arrival, she was the centre of attraction to every eye, and the general conclusion on all hands was that her equal had never before been seen on the Mersey. The symmetry of her appearance made the true size very doubtful, and it was only on close inspection that anyone could believe she was a ship of 1,219 tons, instead of 700. Most people took her for a yacht, from the exquisite proportions of her hull and spars, and much surprise was manifested by many when



THE "STAR OF THE EAST."



they were informed that she was a veritable merchantman, with a cargo of deals on board. She was almost immediately purchased by Mr. James Beazley of Liverpool, and as promptly engaged by Messrs. Millers and Thompson to run in their Golden Line of Australian Packets. She was purchased for £16,000, the largest sum ever paid for a colonial ship.

A brief description of her hull and fittings will be interesting. Although extremely sharp fore and aft, she has great beam, which makes her the most comfortable vessel in a sea-way. The principal dimensions of her hull are as follows:—Length of keel 206 ft., over all 237 ft., beam 40 ft. 10 ins., depth of hold 22 ft., register 1,219 tons, depth of keel and kelson through and through 8ft. 8 ins. (17 in. sided). The truss-work forward is most substantial from the keel up, for the support of the sharp bow, which is ornamented with a full length female figure-head, richly gilt. She is copper-fastened throughout. Her stern is elliptical, and with the quarters, ornamented by a neat design in gilt scroll-work, the "Star" being conspicuous, and in which two circular windows are ingeniously and prettily introduced as part of the pattern. Her deck arrangements are very compact, and the houses include galleys, hospital, two forecastles for the seamen etc., the ship's "people" being well cared for. She has a long poop-house aft, with passages on either side, and containing two saloons. The fore one is 44 ft. long and is chastely ornamented in white and gilt panelling. There are ten state rooms here, fitted with every convenience. The after-cabin is 30 feet long and contains four state-rooms. This apartment is superbly finished with panelings and pilasters of mahogany, satinwood, and rosewood. A rich carpet, handsome mirrors, and chairs, tables and lounging sofas give the chief saloon an air of ease and comfort equal to a drawing room on shore. Her 'tween decks are particularly deserving of notice, and must merit approval whenever looked at. Her external appearance is very graceful, and her model is curious and well worthy of mention, being very sharp at both ends, and yet so flat on the floor as not to require any ballast in launching. Go where she will, she must command the attention of all beholders.

Wallace¹ refers to her as follows:—

The finest New Brunswick ship of the year 1853 and for a good many years before and after that date, was the *Star of the East*, 1219 tons Local authorities declare she was the most

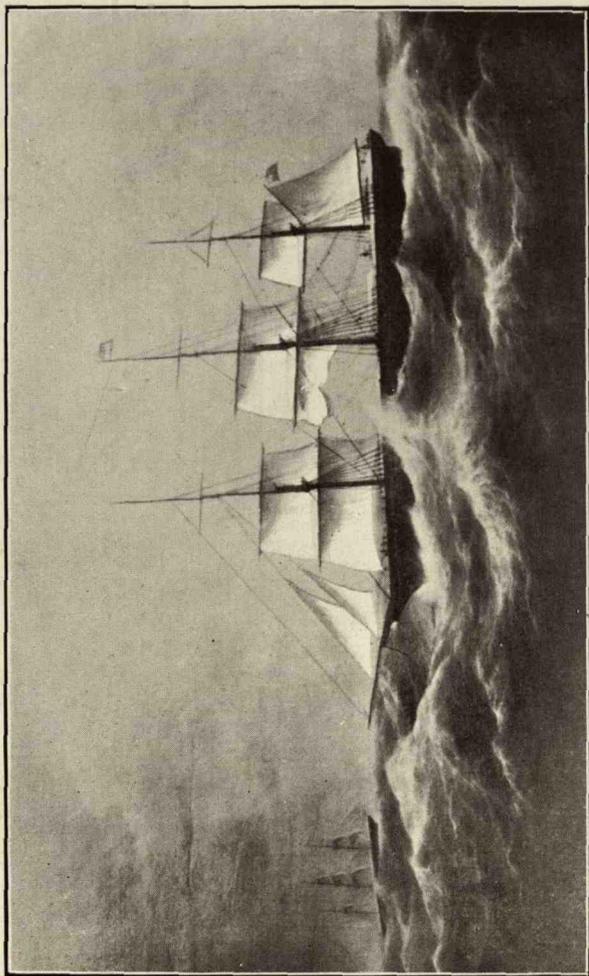
¹ *Wooden Ships and Iron Men*, by F. W. Wallace, pp. 62-3.

costly clipper ship ever built in St. John yards James Beazley bought her and she cost him £22,683 when ready for sea. Under the command of Captain Christian she went out to Melbourne in 76 days.

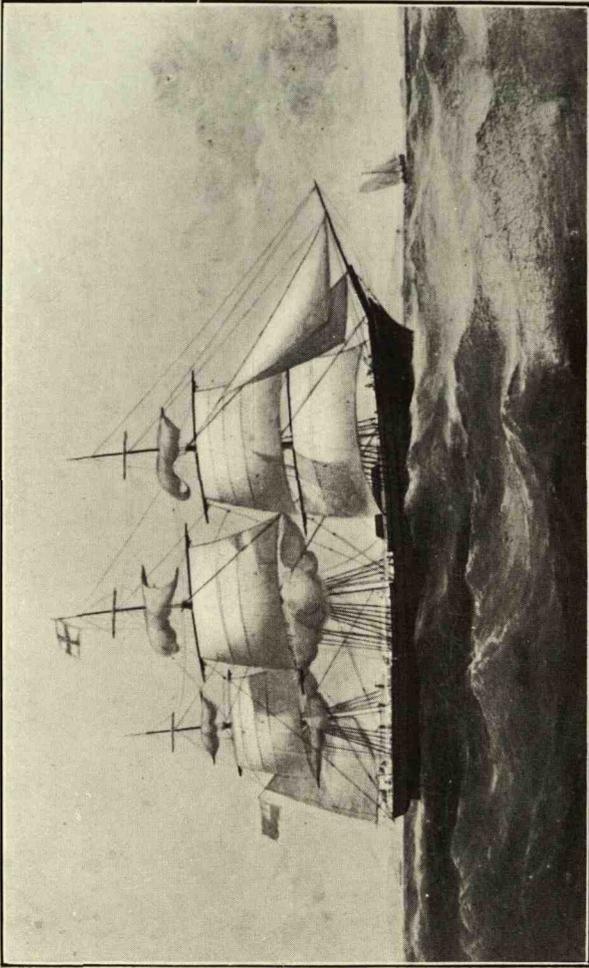
The *Star of the East* was classed A1, 7 years., and was commanded by Captain W. Christian, and she made the round voyage, Liverpool, Melbourne, Sydney, Shanghai, Liverpool in 9 months 27 days; from Shanghai 104 days. She was wrecked in Storing Bay, South Africa, close to the *Miles Barton*.

The *Vision*, of 563 tons register, was built in 1854 by Hall of Aberdeen, dimensions 170ft. by 27ft. 6ins. by 18ft. 2ins., classed A1, 7 years. Commanded by Captain A. Douglas she made her first voyage, Liverpool, Hong Kong, Whampoa and Liverpool in 7 months and 13 days. On her second voyage from Foochow she raced the *Cairngorm* from Canton, and though that vessel was the faster in company, she succeeded in beating her, arriving in Liverpool 36 hours before the *Cairngorm* reached London. On both these voyages she won the premium of £1 per ton then given for the fastest vessel home, in addition to a freight of £6. Two years later the *Robin Hood*, of 852 tons register, was also built by Hall of Aberdeen, dimensions 204ft. by 35ft. 1in. by 21ft., classed A1, 13 years. She was commanded successively by Captains George Cobb and J. Darlington, and made passages from Foochow to London in 116, 100 and 102 days, her best passage out being 103 days. On her first voyage out she ran 1200 nautical miles in 4 consecutive days and performed the same feat on a passage home. On one occasion she covered 364 nautical miles (419 miles) in 24 hours, or 34 nautical miles more than the *Thermopylæ*'s record¹ for the same period. Lindsay says "the *Thermopylæ* and *Sir Lancelot* were the fastest ships that have ever traversed the ocean." This *Robin Hood* must not be

¹ Lindsay's *History of Merchant Shipping*, iii, 417n., 614.



THE "ROBIN HOOD."



THE "MERRIE ENGLAND."

confused with the vessel of the same name built and owned in America. The vessel met her end by a collision in the English Channel in 1864.

The *Friar Tuck*, of 662 tons register, was another vessel of Hall's building in 1857. Her dimensions are unknown; she was classed A1, 8 years, and was commanded by Captain Fordyce. The only passage recorded was made in 1863—127 days Shanghai to London. She may be seen passing the *Robin Hood* in our illustration. The *Merrie England*, of 1045 tons, was built in 1856 at Waterford and classed A1, 10 years; her dimensions were 20ft. 5in., by 35ft. 9in., by 21ft. 9in. She was commanded by Captain William Kelly and was intended for the Australian trade. A model of the hull of the *Vision*, and pictures of the *Constance* and the *Star of the East*, the last two by S. Walters, were exhibited at the Historical Exhibition of Liverpool Antiquities in 1907.¹

All the above vessels, and all owned by Mr. Beazley up to 1860, were built mostly of oak, hackmatack, birch and pine, and were sheathed with felt and yellow metal, excepting one which was zinc sheathed. Some had iron bolts and others were copper fastened.

Another of Mr. Beazley's ships was the *Roodee*, of 1036 tons, dimensions 197ft., by 32ft. 6in., by 22ft. 3in., built of iron by the Roodee Iron Shipbuilding Co., Chester, and employed in the India trade. While she had no special records placed to her credit, she is notable as having been launched, probably sideways, on the river Dee and also for what is probably one of the most extraordinary occurrences in the annals of British shipping; she was scuttled, on fire, at Manilla in 12 fathoms of water and sold for 70 dollars, and four years later was thrown up by an earthquake into two or three fathoms, when her cargo was found to be little damaged.

¹ See the Catalogue edited by Henry E. Rensberg, Section C. arranged by Charles Livingstone.

Mr. Beazley's flag, heraldically described, was argent, a cross quarter voided gules, in the centre point the letter B, sable.

The paintings of the *Robin Hood*, *Merrie England* and possibly of some of the other vessels are signed "Saml. Walters." He was probably the best painter of ships of the period, but finds no place in the *Dictionary of National Biography* or Bryan's *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*, (edition 1905). Graves's *Dictionary of Artists*, however, tells us that he was a Liverpool artist, 1834-1880, who made a specialty of sea pieces and exhibited fourteen pictures at the Royal Academy besides others elsewhere. Contemporaneously there was another artist, G. S. Walters, also of Liverpool, a painter of landscapes.