



LIVERPOOL WARE PUNCH BOWL, 1780. (Exterior.)



LIVERPOOL WARE PUNCH BOWL, 1780. (Interior.)

AN OLD LIVERPOOL CAPTAIN AND HIS SHIP

By A. H. Arkle

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SOME years ago I became the possessor of an old Liverpool punch bowl, which will, I think, serve as a peg on which to hang some interesting reminiscences of early Liverpool.

The bowl is, as you will see, one of the typical Liverpool manufacture—that is, with a crude representation of a very old-fashioned-looking vessel, coloured, on the inside, with an inscription as follows: “Success to the *Hero*, Capt. Daniel Wilcox, 1780.” On the outside are various scenes of a maritime character in Sadler’s printing.

The late owner, a gentleman then living, I think, at Waterloo, had had it for some years, and pasted a note on the bottom outside, showing that he had verified for himself the facts, viz. that there really had been a vessel called the *Hero*, commanded by Captain Wilcox, and that she did sail from Liverpool for Africa in March 1780, the very year of the presentation of the article to the Captain.

I have been able to discover some further particulars both of the ship and her Captain, which may prove somewhat interesting to those—and there must be many such—who like to learn everything they can connected with old Liverpool.

First, as regards the ship. I have made inquiries from Lloyd’s Registry Office, London,

and they were able to inform me that the Society's Records show that the ship *Hero*, Captain D. Wilcox, was of 400 tons, built in France in 1775, and that her owner in 1780 was a Mr. S. Shaw. They were not able to say the port of registry nor the owner's address, but there is little doubt the S. Shaw was the firm of S. Shaw & Co., at that time carrying on business in Liverpool. It appears to me quite possible that this S. Shaw may have been the founder of the eminent firm of potters. Picton tells us that the firm was founded early in the eighteenth century, and that Samuel Shaw died in 1775; the name may quite well have been retained for some years after his death.

From the fact of the *Hero* being built in France, I think we may conclude that she was originally a French privateer captured by the British and turned into an English one. She carried sixteen guns. All that we know of her history afterwards is told us by Mr. Gower Williams in his "History of the Privateers," from which I take the following paragraph (pp. 266, 267):—

"Early in 1780 the *Hero*, Captain Wilcox, bound for Guinea, was taken by the French and retaken within a league of Cherbourg by H.M.S. *Champion*. On the 1st May the *Hero* was again taken sixteen leagues south of Cork by a French privateer, and again retaken from the enemy. Once more the *Hero* essayed to reach Africa, only to fall a prey to the combined fleets of France and Spain, who sent her to Cadiz." I can find no further record of the vessel.

The Captain's name first appears as the master of the vessel *Liverpool*, owned by the same firm, being mentioned in Appendix IV. of the "History of Privateers" already referred to, this appendix being a list of the privateers engaged during the years 1775 to 1783.

Captain Wilcox, after the loss of his ship, evidently reached home safely; at least his name appears in the Directory of 1781 as living at 40 Hurst Street, off Mersey Street, and he did what many of his calling were not able to do, especially at this stormy time in our history, namely, died in his bed. In the records, preserved by the Corporation, of the gravestones removed from St. Peter's Churchyard, when it was a few years ago converted into a garden, there are the following inscriptions of the Captain and his wife, who long survived him:—

“Here lieth the body of Captain Daniel Wilcox, who departed this life 4th June 1789, in y^e 59th year of his age. Also, here lieth the body of Mary, the wife of Captain Daniel Wilcox, who departed this life 5th Jan. 1802, aged 59 years. Universally lamented by all her friends and acquaintances, she bore her afflictions with the greatest fortitude; she was an affectionate wife, a tender mother, a dutiful child. Charitable to the distressed and a sincere friend.”

They are in the same grave as John Button and his wife.

Captain Wilcox's will was registered at Chester on the 9th June 1789 by his widow, John Swainston, and ——— Brockelbank.

Here I should like to tell a story about the Captain which has only recently reached me from a descendant which throws some light upon the slave trade.

On one of his voyages the Captain jumped overboard and saved the life of one of the slaves who had fallen into the sea. The man showed such gratitude that he was made the Captain's personal attendant, and always waited on his master. On one occasion, when on a voyage from the West Coast of Africa to America, the Captain and his

officers, including the doctor, were at dinner, when the negro servant dropped something behind his master, and, as he stooped to pick it up, he whispered, "Massa! no drink. Massa! no drink." At first Captain Wilcox could not understand what the man meant, but he took no apparent notice of the warning, for he realised that such was what the slave intended, but he closely watched every movement of the slave during the rest of the meal, and from something he did he gathered that the doctor had something to do with it. When the usual toast was proposed, Captain Wilcox got up from his seat, and, lifting his glass as though he were about to drink, suddenly held it out to the doctor, saying, "Let us change glasses, doctor." The doctor declined, and his manner was such that it confirmed the Captain's suspicions. Taking a pistol from his pocket, he held out his glass to the doctor, saying, "You either drink the contents of this glass or I will shoot you." The sequel, without giving any detail, is that in the end the doctor drank the contents, preferring to die by the poison he had mixed for the Captain. He died a few minutes after, confessing to a plot to seize the vessel after killing the Captain and one of the officers.

As my informant says, the length of a voyage in those days, sometimes extending even to three years, perhaps justified Captain Wilcox's conduct. The slave was given his freedom.

The Captain married, on the 24th July 1765, Mary Robinson, described as a widow, which is, I think, a mistake, since I find she was the daughter of Benjamin and Hester Robinson, of Liverpool, and at the time of her marriage does not appear to have been more than twenty-two years of age.

Hester Robinson, above mentioned, was the daughter of John and Mary Button. This John Button is mentioned in Stonehouse's "Streets of

Liverpool," where the author says, "Button St., off Whitechapel, called after Mr. Button, who was, previous to his death, 18th Nov. 1785, the oldest Burgess in Liverpool. He lived during six monarchs' reigns, being born in that of James II."

I am not prepared to guarantee the strict accuracy of this statement. The inscription on his tombstone in St. Peter's Churchyard said that he died on the 13th November 1785 in the ninety-fifth year of his age, which, I think, would barely carry him back to James II., though very nearly.

In connection with this John Button there is one rather interesting incident, viz. he told his great-grandson, also a Daniel Wilcox (son of the Captain), and he passed the story on to John Button Wilcox, his son, who told the story to his grandson, the writer of this paper, that he, John Button, had been present at the opening of St. Peter's Church, and had been on that occasion on the top of the tower, and from there at that time it was almost possible to count all the houses in Liverpool. That was in 1704, thus making a link between the John Button born in or about James II.'s reign and the writer in Edward VII.'s reign, a period of over two hundred years, during which time Liverpool has risen from a large village to be the second city of the Empire.

Perhaps the strangest coincidence occurs in connection with the bowl itself. The writer, some years ago, happening to go into Branch & Leete's sale-rooms, was astonished to find this bowl there prepared for an auction. Needless to say the writer secured it, and thus it returns to the descendant of the first owner after a gap of somewhere about one hundred and twenty years.

Experts may, perhaps, be able to say in what particular pottery it was manufactured, but I may hazard a guess that if the owner of the *Hero* was

a member of the Shaw family of potters, then possibly this bowl may have been one of their manufacture. They were the makers of the celebrated "Golden Lion" bowl, now in the Liverpool Museum.

I have nothing more to say. No doubt many other members have particulars connected with their ancestry just as interesting if search were made. My excuse for troubling you with these particulars must be the great interest I take in anything connected with the good old town of which we are all so proud.

May I just add that I append a copy of the will of John Button, as it may be useful in giving particulars of various inhabitants of Liverpool at the date on which it was made, viz. 17th February 1768.

*Extracted from the District Registry of the Probate Division of His Majesty's High Court of Justice at Chester.*¹

In the name of God Amen I John Button of Liverpool in the County of Lancaster Bricklayer being of a sound and disposing mind and memory do make and ordain this my last Will and Testament (setting aside or making void and of none effect all former Wills made by me in manner and form following that is to say Imprimis I Will that all my just debts and funeral charges be paid and discharged by my Executor hereinafter named Item I give and bequeath unto my son in law Benjamin Robinson and his wife Esther after my decease all the profitts or rents arising from two houses in Mersey Street in Liverpool now in the occupation of my son in law Benjamin Robinson and his daughter Mary Willcox and likewise all the profitts or rents arising from six houses in Frog Lane and Rainfords Garden now in the occupation of Thomas Green Thomas Gill Thomas Penny Thomas Taylor Catharine Aspinwell and Edward Burn all which profitts and rents shall my son in law Benjamin Robinson or his wife Esther receive and make use of for their own use or convenience during their natural lives Nevertheless it shall be so provided that neither Benjamin Robinson or his wife Esther shall have it in their power jointly or separately to sell or dispose of their right of reversion in the profitts or rents aforesaid Item at or

¹ Non-Official.

after the decease of my son in law Benjamin Robinson and his wife Esther I do give and demise unto Daniel Robinson Sail-maker son of Benjamin Robinson and his heirs the two houses in Mersey Street with their appurtenances now in the occupation of Benjamin Robinson and his daughter Mary Willcox Item at or after the decease of my son in law Benjamin Robinson and his wife Esther I give and demise unto Mary Willcox daughter of Benjamin Robinson and her heirs Six houses in Frog Lane and Rainfords Garden now in the occupation of Thomas Green Thomas Gill Thomas Penny Thomas Taylor Catharine Aspinwell and Edward Burne Item if Daniel Robinson son of Benjamin Robinson and Esther Robinson dies without lawfull issue that then the two houses in Mersey Street bequeathed him as before mentioned shall descend to Mary Willcox and the lawfull heirs of her body Item if Mary Willcox daughter of Benjamin and Esther Robinson dies without lawfull issue that then the six houses in Frogg Lane and Rainfords Garden bequeathed her as before mentioned shall descend to Daniel Robinson and the lawfull heirs of his body Item whatever cash bills notes household goods I may have by me at my death excepting wearing apparel wou'd have them valued by an appraiser and distributed equally amongst these after mentioned persons that is my son in law Benjamin Robinson his wife Esther Robinson Benjamin Robinson son Daniel Robinson and Benjamin Robinson's daughter Mary Willcox Item I give to my brother Nathan Button all my wearing apparel Lastly I do make and constitute Mr. Joseph Brooks and Mr. James Brooks of Liverpool —¹ and Testament dated this seventeenth day of February in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and sixty eight.

— John Button (L.S.) —

Signed sealed and published by the said John Button in the presence of us who have here subscribed our names as Witnesses — Robert Oddie, junr. — Samuel Wood Ellen Donbavand —.

Administration with the Will annexed was granted by the Consistory Court of Chester on the 8th day of December 1785 — to Esther Robinson, widow, daughter John Swarbrick Berry Bridge All of Liverpool — The executors above having renounced Probate —.

Since the above was written I have received, through the courtesy of the Town Clerk, the history of Button Street and the property mentioned in the above will in that street.

¹ Original defaced.

BUTTON STREET

23rd January 1722.—Lease granted of a piece of land and two messuages having a frontage of 8 yards to Frog Lane (White-chapel) of a depth along the north side of Button Street of 27 yards.

Term 3 lives of 21 years. The lives were—the Lessee John Button, Mary his wife and Esther his daughter.

5th August 1747.—Above Lease renewed to same. Description—2 houses and several cottages.

Lives—Lessee, Mary daughter of Benjⁿ. Robinson and Esther wife of s^d Benjⁿ. R.

This Street was evidently formed about the time the Pool was filled up and Frog Lane formed on the site. It is only now about 20 yards in length, and was in all probability merely a passage, at this time, from Frog Lane to Rainford's Gardens immediately in the rear. It was customary, especially in this neighbourhood, to name the streets after the owners or lessees of abutting lands, and that this was done in the case of Button Street seems conclusive.

In 1802 part of the above Lease was sold (Rev^{on}) to W^m. Rathbone.

In 1803 other part sold to W^m. Gregson.

The remainder expired, and the name of Button is not again recorded.