

THE OPENING OF THE FIRST LIVERPOOL DOCK, 1715.

OWING to loss of the early dock records at Liverpool, local historians are compelled to rely upon very slender evidence as to the date of the opening of the first dock, and a search of the files of contemporary newspapers at the British Museum and other important libraries, extending over the past two years, has failed to produce any reliable reference to this event, so important in local annals. A review of such evidences as exist, however, may not be here out of place.

The facts concerning the planning of the dock, the preliminary survey, and the obtaining of an Act of Parliament, in 1708, to carry the project through, have all been competently recorded in the late Henry Peet's *Memoir of Thomas Steers*, published in Vol. 82 of these *Transactions* (1930). Primary evidence of the progress of its construction is negligible. In a book of sermons, entitled *Zebulun's Blessing*, by the Rev. C. Basnett, a Liverpool dissenting minister, published at Lancaster in 1714, there is a preface dated Liverpool, 21 August, 1713, the last paragraph of which reads:—

I am a hearty *Wellwisher* to the *Trade and Peace and Prosperity* of the *Town*; I wish it all the *Advantages* that any can promise from the *Dock* when finish'd. May that ever be a *defence* to your *Shipping* and never appear against any as a *Monument* either of *Stupidity* or *Ingratitude*. But the *Way* to make it, or any-thing else, a real *Blessing* and to Secure *them*, is to *serve* God, and to be at *Peace* amongst *your selves*.

Nicholas Blundell, in his *Diary*, has an entry dated 13 December, 1714: "I went to Leverp: and as I was going I saw a Bote coming in Shoar with ye Keel upwards, I told Sr Tho: Johnson of it. *As I was viewing ye Dock* I met Mr. Blund: and I think young Mr. Willis, they desir'd my interest to vote for Parleament-Men." It is to the Diarist that the historian is indebted for, at least, some indication as to the date of opening of the dock, for an entry dated 31 August, 1715, reads: I went to Liverp: and saw the Mulbury, the Batchlor and the Robert all in ye Dock, they came in this Morning and were *ye first ships as ever went into it*; the Mulbury was ye first. I breakfasted at Mr. Owens, he went with me to a Smithy at ye lower end of Red-Cross-Street where I saw an Ox Rosting." The next most proximate reference to

the dock is an application (transcribed in E. H. Rideout's *The Old Custom House, Liverpool*) from Sir Thomas Johnson to the Commissioners of Customs, mentioned in their letter of 3 September, 1715, to the Collector at Liverpool, for liberty to discharge in the new dock a vessel recently arrived from Norway with a cargo of deals.

Peet, however, in his memoir of Thomas Steers, cites having seen, in the muniment room at Gisborough Hall, a contemporary document which clearly stated that the ship *Marlborough* entered the dock on 8 June, 1715. Some credence might be placed upon this date of 8th June, since the early Liverpool directories, while obviously erroneously mentioning the year as 1699, include the following item in the "Annals" of the town: "1669. The Old Dock made; the ship *Mulbery* the first vessel entered, 8th June." This appears in the Directory of 1818, and is reiterated in later years.

A subsequent reference to the Old Dock is also contained in the following paragraph in *Gore's Advertiser* of 16 October, 1788: "The *Two Sisters*, Capt. Hugh Dunnan, which trades between this port and Strangford, is now in the King's Dock. She was the first built in the last century (?), with a Pilot on board she led the fleet into Carrickfergus Bay when King William landed in Ireland. *She was the first vessel which entered the Old Dock* the beginning of the present century and was one of the first which entered the King's Dock." Picton (*Memorials of Liverpool*), in referring to the opening of the King's Dock on 3 October, 1788, mentions the *THREE Sisters*, brigantine, 36 tons, as being the first vessel to enter that dock, and as having been, a century before, one of the fleet which raised the siege of Londonderry, carrying troops from Whitehaven, but he makes no mention of her having entered the Old Dock in 1715. Brooke, in his *Liverpool from 1775 to 1800*, names this vessel as the *Portaferry*, and she is so named by Troughton in his *History of Liverpool*. Troughton, however, makes direct reference (p. 176) to the opening of the first dock: "The ship *Marlborough*, but others say the *Lion*, was the first vessel that entered the dock, an event which could not fail to have given a new impetus to the commercial mind; for at this time there was only one square rigged vessel belonging to the port."

Thus, there is a conflict of evidence as to the name of the first ship to enter the dock. Shipping records of that period are very meagre, but the following entry appears in the Calendar of State Papers, Treasury Books :—

1690. At Whitehaven port.

*Lyon* of Liverpool, 70 tons, 5 men.

which suggests the *Lion* mentioned by Troughton and may have been the vessel which piloted King William's fleet into Carrickfergus Bay in 1689 and survived under the name of *Two Sisters*, *Three Sisters*, or *Portaferry*, to enter the King's Dock in 1788.

The *Mulbury* or *Mulberry*, of which Bryan Blundell was master or owner in 1699, is mentioned in the *Norris Papers* down to 1707, but Blundell, in 1713, was commander of the *Cleveland*, and exhaustive search has failed to confirm existence of any ship named *Mulberry* in 1715. This name probably was the phonetic spelling of MARLBOROUGH, although several *Mulberrys* and *Marlboroughs* are to be found among the ships registered at Liverpool between 1740 and 1756. Bearing in mind that the Dock Act (8 Anne, Cap. 25) stipulated that the dock should be used by Her Majesty's ships of war, is it possible that Liverpool was honoured by the visit of a warship for the opening of this first dock, an event of undoubted national as well as local importance? At that period, according to Admiralty records, H.M.S. *Marlborough*, a second rate, 680 men, 96 guns, was serving "at home", and if she did visit the Mersey she would appear as an immense vessel to Liverpolitans, accustomed to seeing only their own brigantines, snows and ships, which ranged from about 20 tons to 200 tons at most. That there was a ship of outstanding dimensions in the dock during the first few days of its use is confirmed by the following entry in Blundell's Diary: "1715. Sept. 8. My wife went to Leverp: . . . She saw ye *Great Ship* and severall others in ye Dock." The Diarist would never have used this description for a small vessel of the *Mulberry* type.

Further research, therefore, is necessary before the historian may confidently fix the date on which the dock was opened or name the first ship to enter it.

ARTHUR C. WARDLE.