

LOG BOOK OF HMS WARSPITE



UQ HISTORIAN MARION DIAMOND EXAMINES THE DIARY AND CORRESPONDENCE OF A ROYAL NAVY SURGEON FROM THE 1840s.

Thomas Graham – a letter to his sister Catherine

You mentioned in one of your letters that Dr. Barker had cultivated a moustache to please a young lady. We have no such inducement here, yet all our upper lips are ornamented by that foreign appendix.

The Capt. in conversation with the Consul General was recommended to wear them as a protection during the warm weather for the lips, so he gave leave to all hands to do as they pleased so long as we were on this coast. And nearly every one who could get them has them. Fancy how black I look about the muzzle and how very engaging!!!!, however they all disappear on our nearing Malta.

At present they only afford subject for amusement.¹

Thomas Graham – Log book entry

'Fine warm day. Bar 30-12. Ther 70 in the shade. Almost a calm. The Austrian Brig sailed - Two shocks of an earthquake this morning at daylight, it threw down one house on shore ... The Capt is thinking of allowing the officers to wear moustaches while on the coast, at the Consul General's recommendation, he says they are a great protection to the lips during the warm weather - if he does allow them I will come out with a bouncing pair in a very short time just to see how they feel, and look on my phiz

Showery and strong breeze from N.W. which disappeared about sunset - order about the moustache came out, and successive peals of laughter ring along the lower deck when the word was proceed. Now we are all striving who to have the finest pair in the shortest time. Painting ship.²



Top:
HMS Warspite 1827.
From an engraving by
H. Moses

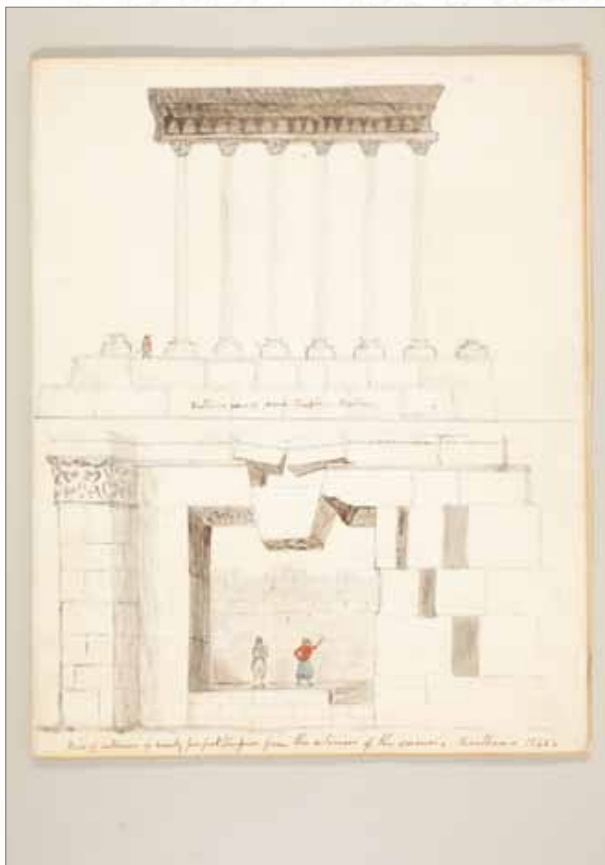
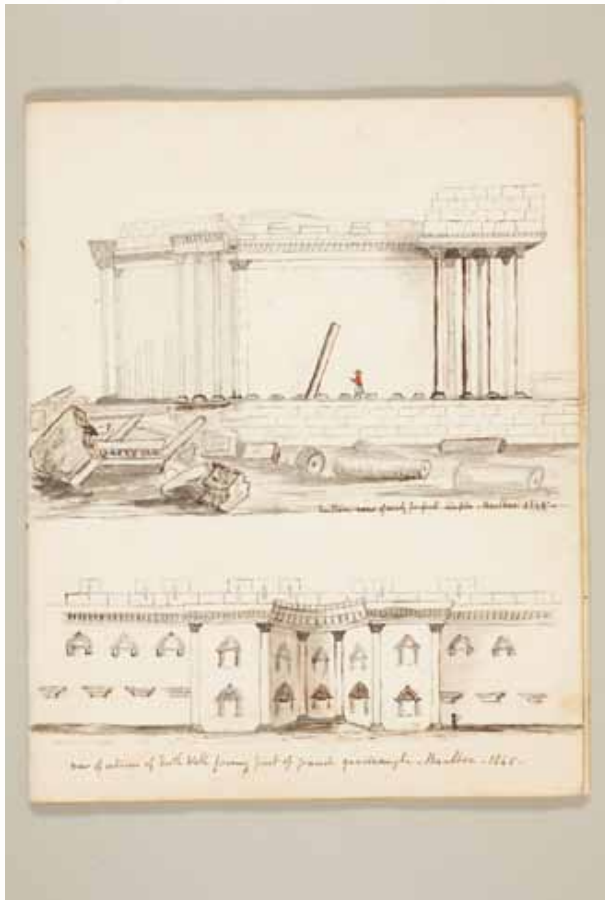
Below:
Portrait of Royal Navy
Surgeon Thomas
Graham from the
1840s

Thomas Graham was an assistant surgeon, and eventually surgeon, in the Royal Navy from 1841 until his early death of fever at the age of thirty-two in 1850. During his years at sea, he kept a diary. The surviving volume, which covers two voyages on board HMS *Warspite*, to the West Indies and New York in 1843, and part of a voyage in the eastern Mediterranean during 1845, is now held in the Fryer Library. The Wellcome Library for the History of Medicine holds later volumes, as well as a large, but incomplete, collection of his letters.

Matching up these separate collections represents a minor triumph of the Internet. In March 2004, Fryer Library uploaded details of the 1843-5 diary to the national bibliographic database as part of a retrospective cataloguing project for its single item manuscripts, with the following note on the catalogue record: 'Writer unidentified but appears to be a doctor or ship's surgeon.' Within days of this information appearing in Libraries Australia, Fryer Library was contacted by a retired philatelist, John Beagle, now of Canberra, who

thought he recognised the diary as the work of Thomas Graham, whose letters he had handled professionally, and whose history he was now researching. Comparison of the handwriting confirmed the identification. Fryer now has copies of all Graham's known papers, making it possible to compare accounts of events in the diary with descriptions of the same events in his letters, and to see how both topics and perspective were coloured by the different purposes for which he wrote. A diary has no audience, and is written only to please, or for the convenience of, its author; a letter must serve the needs of both writer and recipient. Different conventions apply, as the quotations above illustrate: a diary reports a series of quotidian events, often with no particular priority, but in a letter, the writer needs to engage his reader, often by finding common ground between them.

Feb 1st 1845. A. K. S. Manuscript at Smyrna. at 6 AM. weighed and read
 with Am. S. Fomicelle in company. morning for London. Bay in view in
 at 9 AM. out boat launch and launch assisted by water. At 10.15



Graham had several correspondents, but most of the letters that survive were his regular communications (once a fortnight when possible), with his sister Catherine, the postmistress at Ecclefechan, in Dumfriesshire, where Graham was born. Catherine was twenty years his senior, and following the death of their parents, she had brought him up. Each letter he wrote to her contains the news of the day, descriptions of the places he has been, chatty accounts of any social gatherings or tourist expeditions, and responses to her reports on family, friends and servants. No doubt he censored some of his activities from his sister's (and his diary's) gaze, but in general, Thomas Graham treated her in his correspondence as his intellectual equal, and his respect and affection are very evident.

In the first part of the diary held by Fryer, Graham recorded marine observations between January 1843 and February 1844, covering the voyages from Jamaica to Havana to New York, New York to Portsmouth, a long refit at Spithead, then on to Lisbon and into the Mediterranean. HMS *Warspite* arrived in Malta at the end of January 1844, where this part of the diary ends.

The emphasis in this section of the diary is on recording – phase of the moon, wind speed and direction, temperature and weather conditions – though in the final right hand column Graham occasionally makes more general observations, brief word pictures that give the diary its charm. For this period though, Graham's letters to Catherine are far richer. He complained about high prices in Jamaica that were, he had been told, a consequence of the emancipation of the slaves. 'And certainly they are now the laziest set of rascals I ever met'.³

In late October, *Warspite* sailed for Portugal, en route to the Mediterranean. In Lisbon, the senior surgeon cut himself while conducting a postmortem on a man who had died of erysipelas, caught the acute *Streptococcus* infection himself, and died. Graham was appointed acting surgeon, but only until a replacement arrived in Malta at the beginning of February.⁴

With his arrival in Malta, the first section of brief diary entries ends halfway through the volume. Graham probably kept another (now lost) diary during the rest of 1844, but from his few surviving letters to Catherine this year, we can follow *Warspite's* voyages between the British outposts of Malta and Gibraltar, showing the flag along the North African coast, and observing signs of the growing conflict between France and Morocco. In July, *Warspite* was present when the French, under the Prince de Joinville, attacked Tangiers, and seized the island of Mogador (now Essaouira). Graham recorded the events critically, and in considerable detail, in his letters to his sister, especially the activities of the French naval vessel *Belle Poule*. On 21 August 1844, *The Times* published three letters 'From A Naval Officer', and 'From Another Officer' (x2), on HMS *Warspite*, Bay of Tangiers, criticising the French actions. The publication of these letters caused 'a considerable row' on board, according to Graham, with the Captain asking each officer in turn 'if he was the author. Some declined answering. Others said no. But so many declined that he cannot ascertain who wrote them. 'Eventually the parson confessed, but the other whistleblowers were never identified'.⁵

In February 1845, Graham turned over his unfilled journal, and began writing from the other end until he reached the pre-ruled columns he had made two years earlier. He was still assistant surgeon, awaiting a promotion that eluded him, and increasingly

fretful with this extended tour of duty in the Mediterranean, but he was developing as a diarist. During 1845, the entries in the diary now located in Fryer become richer and fuller, and closer in style to those of the letters he still wrote regularly, if a little less frequently, to his sister back at home. He recorded his life aboard HMS *Warspite*, mainly at anchor off the coast of Beirut, with short cruises up and down the Levantine coast to Smyrna, Jaffa and Sidon.

During the 1840s, Britain was at peace in the Mediterranean and relations with the Ottoman Empire were relatively good, so the British squadron had little to do but show the flag, though more personal tensions between France and Britain tended to flare, especially when the *Belle Poule* arrived and was anchored nearby.⁶ Beirut was a small town in the process of becoming an important port city; Graham regularly noted the coming and going of Turkish and Austrian steamers travelling between Smyrna, Constantinople and Alexandria. He also recorded the arrival of other warships – French, Prussian, American and Turkish – and the ceremonial recognition of each other's fetes and festivals, however grudgingly. So for instance on 29 July he noted somewhat sourly, 'Dressed ship with French Ensign &c and saluted at noon "three days of glorious memory" – barricades, &c'. Two days later, he recorded:

1st. August – Turkish frigate dressed with flag, saluted &c and we hoisted the ensigns with the Turkish at the Main, and saluted and were followed by the French corvette – this was in honor of a Mahommedan festival. Curious to see Christians honouring superstitious rites – ay! Especially when we did not salute on the anniversary of the coronation of our own Queen (much to the astonishment of the French) – a bumper to-day to the memory of Nelson it being the anniversary of the Battle of the Nile.⁷

These ceremonial occasions relieved the tedium of what had become a very long and uneventful posting. Perhaps because of this general ennui, *Warspite* was an unhappy ship. Graham clearly disliked Captain Wallis, and suggests in his diary that many officers were jealous of the First Lieutenant, Mr. Drury, who had the Captain's favour. In June, while they were 'watering', a barge capsized in the surf and six men were drowned. 'Capt in a great flurry but trying to get it off Mr. D's shoulders on Mr. Halletts.'⁸ More shockingly, early on 10 August, Graham was called to the Ship's Master's room to find that, under threat of court martial for drunkenness, Mr. Chaffers 'had committed suicide by cutting his throat with a razor which was found on the floor – the large

vessels of right side were completely cut through, the carotid of the left cut into'.⁹

In his letters to Catherine, Graham expanded on his antipathy for Wallis, whom he considered a poor and timid sailor, but he made no mention in the letters of more distressing topics such as Chaffers' suicide, and spent relatively little time on the shipboard politics that dominate the diary. For a modern reader – as, no doubt, for Catherine – the most interesting stories come from when he went ashore. Although he found Beirut itself a place of 'dirty crowded streets', beyond were 'cherry and plum trees in full blossom', as well as well as many wonders – even 'a fine young panther, a noble animal' chained in the Pasha's Court[yard].¹⁰

Tourism was in its infancy when Graham wrote, but he and his companions were classically educated, and eager to visit classical sites. While at Salamis he refreshed his 'memory with another sight of the ruins of Athens'¹¹ and the highlight of his time in Lebanon was a journey with several companions on horseback to see the ruined temples of Baalbek, which he sketched in his diary.¹²

Warspite finally left Beirut on 24 December 1845, and reached England in April 1846. 'The Captain and I parted the very best of friends', Graham told his sister. 'He has given me an excellent certificate and promises to speak well of me at the Admiralty, saying that he will do his utmost to obtain my promotion'.¹³ However it was not to be. The Captain's support apparently proved lukewarm at best, for no promotion followed. Graham continued as an assistant surgeon in the Royal Navy, serving on the store ship HMS *Madagascar* in Ireland during the famine, and then on HMS *Apollo* on a voyage to China. He was finally promoted to surgeon only weeks before he died of malaria in China in 1850 at the age of thirty-two.

REFERENCES

1. Thomas Graham to his sister, Catherine Graham, on HMS *Warspite*, Beirut, 8 March 1845, in John Beagle Papers, 1830-1851, Fryer Library UQFL443.
2. Thomas Graham, Log book of HMS *Warspite*, 1843-1845, Fryer Library, F431, 21 and 22 February 1845.
3. Thomas Graham to Catherine Graham, 16 February 1843.
4. Thomas Graham to Catherine Graham, 19 and 23 December 1843, 14 February 1844.
5. Thomas Graham to Catherine Graham, 9 September 1844.
6. See, e.g., Thomas Graham to Catherine Graham, 12 September 1845; Thomas Graham, Log book, 30 November 1845.
7. Thomas Graham, Log book, 29 July 1845 and 1 August 1845.
8. *Ibid*, 22 June 1845.
9. *Ibid*, 10 August 1845.
10. *Ibid*, 2 and 4 March 1845.
11. Thomas Graham to Catherine Graham, 24 November 1844.
12. Thomas Graham to Catherine Graham, 8 March 1845; Thomas Graham, Log book, 10 to 19 March 1845.
13. Thomas Graham to Catherine Graham, 23 April 1846.

Opposite page:

Top: Southern view of temple and view of the interior of the north wall forming part of the gran quadrangle, Baalbec, 1845, Log Book of the HMS *Warspite*, F431

Bottom: Southern view of the grand temple and view of the entrance from the interior of the grand temple, Baalbec, 1845, Log Book of the HMS *Warspite*, F431

FURTHER READING:

1. BEJ Goodyer, 'An assistant ship surgeon's account of cholera at sea', in *Journal of Public Health* 2008, v. 30, no. 3, pp. 332-8.
2. BEJ Goodyer, The diary of an assistant ship surgeon: an account of cholera in the context of the sanitary revolution, Diploma In the History of Medicine, Worshipful Society of Apothecaries, 2004.
3. Dr Thomas Graham Website, maintained by John Beagle, <http://www.cenart.net/thomasgraham/index.htm> viewed 29 October 2010.